Acknowledgements

With heartfelt thanks to my committee and friends in the Anthropology Department at the University of Minnesota, who have been instrumental in the fruition of this endeavor.

William O. Beeman  My advisor, who made, and makes things happen. Your arrival at the Anthropology Department was a serendipitous pearl in my string of Iranian-related bonds. The combined pure-applied anthropological approach you brought to the Department has been indispensable in expanding opportunities for “non-traditional” anthropology students. Your support in this capacity is remarkable. Hail to your creative spirit!

David Valentine  Amazing “cheerleader-chair,” whose inquiries, e-mails, concerns, support, and follow-up helped me to keep my head together as well as atop my body. Three cheers!

David Lipset  A solid rock in the river’s endless flow. Your persistent, unspoken confidence in me has provided an essential backdrop since I embarked on this journey.

Iraj Bashiri  Willing “outsider,” who served as a critical “insider” and eye in the reading of my dissertation.

Support Staff  With appreciation for help in tying up the loose ends, and
lending an ear when stress levels were at a peak: Marge, Terri, Marjorie, Kara, Nicole, the student workers, and others whom I have missed inadvertently.

My “Anthro-Peeps”
For embracing, rather than alienating, the “grandmother” in their midst. Through many a happy hours and TA grumblings, your friendship and moral support have been essential to seeing me through this process.

Family and Friends
For your patience and understanding during this seemingly unending, long strange trip with “Sergio.” And to my “extra parents,” Robert J. and Beatrice Diamond Miller (of blessed memory), who in anthropological fashion, adopted me as their “extra daughter.” Bob and Bea, you are missed, but your inspiration lives on in this thesis.
Dedication

To my Iranian friends and family for their loyalty, laughter, hospitality, and trust. In solidarity, I am hopeful that Americans can (re)learn to embrace Iranians. Through the eyes of innocence, my niece Katja (of blessed memory) (1999-2004) once posed a profound question: “Aunt Tracy, am I Iranian?” Katja heard me talk about my Iranian friends, and she loved to eat *chelo kebab* from the Caspian Bistro when I visited her in the hospital. Katja, yes, when we imagine ourselves as “others,” we approximate a more humane world.
Abstract

Early research on Iranians in the global diaspora has demonstrated specific contexts in which Iranians express transnational identity. Much of this research presents and configures “the community” as a harmonious whole through narrow frames of reference, such as ethnic institutions, economic enclaves, majority-minority assessment based on discrimination and prejudice, and inter-generational and gender change. This study addresses the Twin Cities’ Iranian community as a dynamic, dispersed body of relationships and interactions characterized by an institutional fission-fusion pattern with consequences for ethnic group consciousness and individual identification with and expression of Iranianness. I employ a national and gender identity approach to underscore how Iran’s vacillating political history has crafted modern Iranian men and women, first, in alignment with the West, and then along Islamic ideals. Community, consequently, expands and contracts according to global, micro-macro occurrences. A waning sense of identity incites a centripetal “fusion phase” of institutional life, uniting Iranians through the public celebration of pre-Islamic heritage, privately with extended family, and attempts to teach Persian, a critical tool to navigate the complexities of communication in a hierarchal culture. Paradoxically, the “fusion phase” presents obstacles in intra-cultural interaction, leading to a “fission effect.” Fissioning eludes national camaraderie and community involvement as individuals assess each other’s location in the social hierarchy. The analysis of these identity patterns has been explained using transnational approaches with an emphasis on associations forged in power-vying activities aimed to displace authority and reconfigure national narratives.
This dissertation explores these social dynamics in the context of the centripetal fusion and centrifugal fission pattern to explain how Twin Cities’ Iranians cultivate community, despite geographic dispersal, through a shared, intimate micro-history forged in a portable ideology that displaces monolithic assumptions of tradition, identity, and belonging.

**Keywords:** Transnational identity, Gender, Diasporic Iranians, Community, Immigration, Assimilation
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................... i
Dedications ........................................................................................................ ii
Abstract ........................................................................................................... iv

Chapter I .......................................................................................................... 1
Chapter II ......................................................................................................... 64
Chapter III ....................................................................................................... 190
Chapter IV ....................................................................................................... 262
Chapter V ......................................................................................................... 307
Chapter VI ....................................................................................................... 448
Chapter VII ..................................................................................................... 492
Bibliography .................................................................................................... 509
Endnotes .......................................................................................................... 541
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Research Problem, Question, and Objectives

The Iranian community in the “Land of Ten-Thousand Lakes” (Minnesota’s moniker) is characterized by an institutional fission-fusion pattern with consequences for ethnic group consciousness and the individual’s identification with and expression of Iranianness. The “fusion phase” of institutional life unites Iranians in the celebration of pre-Islamic (Zoroastrian) heritage in the public context of community gatherings, private familial-friendship settings, and educational attempts to teach Persian, a critical tool to navigate the complexities of communication within a hierarchal culture. Paradoxically, in the “fusion phase” of institutional life, obstacles manifest when engaging with other Iranians, including but not limited to: political infighting, criticism, self-interest, gossip, suspicion, and differences relative to one’s position within the hierarchy (e.g., class, education, time of arrival). The pursuit of “making community,” therefore, incites a “fission effect” that repels individuals from community involvement. Fissioning is intensified by a geographically diffuse settlement pattern in familial-friendship “proximate pockets” located in wealthy suburban and exurban areas. Furthermore, centrifugal forces of discrimination and prejudice vis-à-vis interaction with Minnesotans impede identification with and presentation of national identity in the American public sphere, and raise questions of belonging. The ebb and flow of involvement in community life and covert prejudice intersect with one’s personal assessment of and identification
with Iranianness to reveal an unyielding yet slippery grasp of essential inheritances, particularly a command of Persian, celebration of Zoroastrian heritage, and performance of *ta’arof* or ritual courtesies. “Assimilation” is a strategy of translation, whereby favored features of American culture are performed successfully in the public sphere, while the preservation of Iranian cultural attributes is selectively, but steadfastly, celebrated in the private sphere. Through translation, the “assimilationist” interrogates and contests “authentic” culture, and thereby enunciates difference by integrating past with present. Rather than an inclination to fake it, “assimilation” is an approach to command control of inter- and intra-relations in the public sphere by exemplifying an ethos of integrity that contradicts the host society’s negative assessment of Iranians as well as competes within the hierarchy of native niceties and finesses. The ongoing host-native and native-native public sphere interactions formulates an ambivalent “third space” (Bhabha 1994, 1996; Rutherford 1990) within which alternative structures of received wisdom generate new positions, displace histories, restructure authority, and alter political initiatives. The negotiation of demands, wills, and meanings by the “assimilationist” redefines codes of meaning and systems of authority around which community gathers. Community then, is a symbolic ingathering of ephemerally-related individuals whose willed relations represent a need to define themselves relative to each other, but in contrast to “the others” from whom they have fissioned. The purpose of community assumes the “assimilationist’s” need to not only better the argument of representative authority, but “out do” those who make the claims.
Within the context of the centrifugal and centripetal forces that establishes the fission-fusion pattern, the question I pursue is: Despite the propensity for institutional dissolution, how and why do Iranians in the Twin Cities persevere in the creation of community? In addressing my research question, several claims are presented. Firstly, I contend that while the inheritance of a traditional upbringing in an extended family network enmeshes individuals within a rigid, authoritative structure (i.e., patriarchal and/or parental “interference” in matchmaking, marriage, migration decisions, public sphere chaperoning, etc.), the ideo-spatial structures of tradition versus modernity and private versus public life orient Iranians to assess irreconcilable differences along their maternal and paternal lineages. Appraisal of “sides” is modeled for children in order to rationalize ambiguity along one’s parent’s lineages (e.g., pro-Shah versus pro-Revolution, religious versus anti-religious). The convoluted but malleable snare of “blood” includes not only extended family, but friendship, fictive kin, neighborhood networks in order to sustain a thick web of dependencies of trust and safety, wherein priorities of recreation guarantee healthy childhood development. Within this structure, parents act as “the disciplinarians,” and oversee the daily regiment (e.g., meal preparation, homework completion, limited television), while grandparents, the “boundary pushovers,” loosen controls when grandchildren visit. This structures a “panopticon of play” in which lateral (i.e., affines) and longitudinal (i.e., consanguineal) kin are located in adjacent flats in apartment complexes and/or neighborhood dwellings, and ensure children’s freedom to navigate an extended “private sphere.” Transnationally, the primacy of family is structured similarly, wherein familial-friendship assemblages
settle in geographic proximity. In so doing, the expression of and identification with heritage in the private sphere solidifies their need and desire to constitute a group in order to not only belong, but establish a foothold in the American immigrant landscape.

Secondly, I make the case that identification with Iranianness and community in the transnational context is subject to and reconfigured by centrifugal and centripetal forces that inspire a repertoire of strategies to navigate host-native public sphere interactions. Centrifugal influences are discernible as temporal-spatial and political impediments that inhibit intra-community cultural practices and preservation. For instance, regardless of transnational time-space compression, time of departure and age impact identity, which may suspend Iranians in “limbo land” (Shayda), wherein they desire national camaraderie and community involvement. However, centripetal pulls toward community incite ebbing phenomena. Interactions at community events or private parties, for example, disclose internal ideological differences that lead to “burnout.” Detachment, therefore, configures “the Twin Cities’ Iranian community” as a disjointed collection of micro-coalescences. Further, Americans’ ignorance of the Middle East generates centrifugal pressure from the host society. While assuming the role of teacher, comedian, and/or political activist to alter or assuage prejudice and discrimination, Iranians grow weary of explaining their cultural origins. Discrimination inclines Iranians to identify with “being a good human,” which paradoxically eschews national and cultural attachment. Besides one’s familial-friendship networks in the U.S., kin confluences are a key centripetal force (e.g., transnational kinship flows in the form of visits to and from Iran, Skype chats, refugee migrations, fiancé flows). As they
recharge cultural “synapses,” unity is refreshed, reframing individual’s relationship to cultural frameworks and community differently. Conversely, one’s waning command of Farsi relative to the visitor may cause stress, shame, even embarrassment. Although the oscillation of interactions within host and native communities creates assorted centrifugal and centripetal effects on identity, they are tackled as opportunities for personal growth. Against odds, strategizing to maintain a semblance of Iranianness transpires through a reinscribed personal history informed by a humanistic concept of personhood.

Thirdly, I argue that a continuity of attachment to Iranianness is attributable to an appreciation of the pragmatics of bi- and multi-cultural living acquired vis-à-vis diametric viewpoints in familial lessons. These lessons privilege evaluating the benefits and detriments of native and host identity markers for their adaptive and expressive utility in the preservation identity. Adaptive expression entails relinquishing ethnic markers regarded as conspicuously “foreign” or “alien” (e.g., hijab, Muslim holidays), and accentuating mutable, “non-threatening” meanings and symbols. As Iranians confronted the improbable return to Iran, they “unpacked their suitcases” reluctantly. Although indecision and alienation for do-ragheh (two-veined) Iranians (Darvalan 1996) exists, a creative compromise between the “tasteful” rudiments of native and adoptive cultural repertoires, personal histories, and experiences of discrimination are reassembled into “portable ideologies” (Adelkhah 2000; Sullivan 2001) that meld “traditional” Iranian values with relevant markers of their modern, adoptive culture. Portable ideologies reflect the “assimilationist” stance by serving the “outside Iranian,” who incorporates “good” cultural markers (e.g., food, gift-giving at Christmas, the arts, music, pre-Islamic
holidays, American democratic ideals) to present publically for their value of positivity, happiness, and morality. At the same time, the “inside Iranian” prioritizes Persian traditions, culture, and identity tied to language, Zoroastrian fragments, *ta’arof*, and gastronomy, which are steadfastly celebrated in the company of close intimates in the private sphere. Pragmatically, childhood lessons are tapped to orient second-generation children to be what they choose to be, provided they do so within the confines of the law and precepts of that tradition. While Thernstrom et al. (1980) note that Iranians demonstrate a “desire and ability to assimilate rapidly,” this desire more closely aligns with what I have termed “assimilation,” which is neither a melting nor a pretense. Rather, it represents the tools of belonging that are repacked into an idiosyncratic, syncretic survival kit to ensure success as productive citizens, to weigh and balance alternative structures of authority, and to establish self-identity.

*Transfixed on Tehran: An Evolving Entrée into the “Land of Ten-Thousand Iranian Communities”*

On Thursday, when the militias paraded a blindfolded hostage in front of television cameras, Arledge wanted a special. ... That night, November 8, 1979, after the late local news, at 11:30 P.M. Eastern Time, Frank Reynolds, serving as anchor, hosted what nearly everyone at ABC figured would be the first and last late-night report on the crisis: *America Held Hostage*. (Koppel and Gibson, 1996, p. 8)
To establish your role as an anthropologist takes time … honesty, patience, tolerance, fairness, and good humor. (Langness and Frank, 1995, p.39)

In the summer of 1979, as a recent high school graduate living in a rural Minnesota town, I was transfixed by the events unfolding in Tehran. Global interconnectivity, a “relatively new phenomenon … [of] satellites [hurtling images] from one part of the globe [to] … another point on earth … in less than a second” was technological magic (Koppel and Gibson 1996:xiii). Ted Koppel’s nascent program Nightline fueled American anger, but also aroused curiosity (ibid.:9). Nightline became my obsessive evening ritual, “like attending a seminar on Iran” (ibid.:11-12). In a curious twist of technological innovations, Iranians and Americans became intertwined anew via Khomeini’s lectures-on-cassette, smuggled out of France to Iran, which incited revolutionary fervor, and the satellite, the vehicle that transmitted the revolution and “hostage crisis” into Americans’ homes. As the hostage crisis ensued, producers delved into other topics on Iran, including: Sunni versus Shia Muslims; fundamentalism; hostages and their families; the Shah’s ailments and exile; geography; Carter’s foreign policies; mullahs; et cetera (ibid.:12). Nightline, “an intercontinental salon,” brought together “opposing forces in the American living [rec] room” (ibid.:14). In time, media referred facetiously to Nightline as “‘the show brought to you by the Ayatollah Khomeini’” (ibid.:44). In time, media referred facetiously to Nightline as “‘the show brought to you by the Ayatollah Khomeini’” (ibid.:44). The Christian Science Monitor
dubbed *Nightline* “‘a quiet revolution in late-night network news [that] … erupted while most of the nation slept … or watched Johnny Carson’” (ibid.:41).

The revolution, being “held hostage” by *Nightline*, and a string of serendipitous encounters with Iranians ever since, kindled my lifelong interest in Iran and connection to the Iranian people. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, my encounters with Iranians in the Twin Cities evolved into multiple layers of affiliation, eventually disclosing the fission-fusion pattern of involvement in various associative groupings. I cultivated friendships and fictive kin, not coincidentally, in educational institutions. I met my “apical ancestor” at the University of Minnesota (UMN) in the late 1980s, while pursuing Middle Eastern studies. His roles as gatekeeper and (original) key consultant linked me with several “fusion communities,” including the: “Art Affinity”; “UMN Students”; the “Persian I,” associated with the Historical and Cultural Association of Iran (HCAI), which local Iranians call the “Farsi School”; the “Noruz Advisory Board” (NAB); and “Persian II,” affiliated with the Tarbiat Persian Institute (TPI), a Bahá'í organization.

**Art Affinity Community**

My original friendship network (students from the UMN) dates to the late 1980s. Those affiliated experienced alienation, because of class differences and an inability to return to Iran following the revolution. We predicated our bond on mutual interest in Iranian artistic expression. The Caspian Bistro, and nascent Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival (currently named), sponsored Iranian film festivals and musicians (e.g., Mohammad Reza Lotfi), and functioned as brief Iranian interludes and getaways.
Gatherings and conversations uncovered impromptu recitation of Sufi poets. Sufi poetry, and its implication of counter-processes, was employed to tackle negative memories of the revolution and constraints upon return. In the course of our dialogic exchanges, poetry resuscitated collective memory of and continuity with Iran’s ancient past, and served as a multi-purpose, didactic tool to: re-create national identity in the service of self-identity; define alternative *modus operandi* to incite action; construct a counter-memory to heal the trauma of exile and confront hybrid subjectivity; assemble a semblance of community, collective identity, and memory relative to the Iranian diaspora; and compose nostalgic “cushions” to bear the decorum required in public Iranian interaction. Following Appadurai (1997) and Steedly (1993), imagination as practice transforms public space, whereby stories and poems of trauma and loss become objects of reflexive encounters through which simultaneous identification is mirrored and a new subjectivity formed. Poetry recitation and storytelling created a framework of nostalgia (Stewart 1988). As insertions in conversation, they transpired cultural practices for future translation of events, feelings, thoughts, moral codes, and/or experiences. In so doing, we carved out a safe space to express sadness and grief, which Lotfalian (1996) and Naficy (1993) cite as central elements of Iranian subjectivity and psychology. In connecting with the audience, the storyteller reinvigorates and heals distressed social memory. There are no life history interviews from this community.

University of Minnesota (UMN) Student Community
My involvement in a UMN Student Community occurred from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. This community included first-, 1.5, and second-generation undergraduate and graduate students, some of whom were involved in the Persian Student Organization of Minnesota (PSOM), structured around patterned fusions wherein students took turns hosting parties (that entailed) food, laughter, gossip, drinking, and always dancing. Its demise indicates Iranian migration patterns upon graduation from university. Within this network, approximately twelve of eighteen graduates left Minnesota (careers include engineer, inventor, psychotherapist, dentist, neurosurgeon, optometrist, computer programmer, architect, Persian calligrapher, potter, professor, entertainment publicist, graphic designer) to go abroad (e.g., Norway, Germany, Iran) or to large urban areas (e.g., Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., Dallas, Houston) for employment, marriage, and/or family reunification. The few who remained married people whom they were dating from that period, and planted familial roots in Minnesota.

Persian School I and II Communities

For approximately three years in the late 1990s, I attended Persian classes at what local Iranians call the “Farsi School” (defunct), which was affiliated with the Historical and Cultural Association of Iran (HCAI), a defunct cultural association. In the early 2000s, at the Tarbiat Persian Institute (TPI) (defunct), located in a Bahá’í temple in Minneapolis. From my involvement, two networks developed including: the “Persian I Community,” with parents whose children were in Persian classes, and the “Persian II Community,” encompassing Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í Iranian parents, their children, and American
adults. Both schools celebrated Iranian holidays (primarily *Noruz*), and had an annual graduation parties for the Persian “graduates.” Another attempt to revitalize Farsi classes at the UMN (late 2000s) attracted primarily “heritage Iranians” (a name given by a 1.5 generation friend) (Woodward 2009), but met its end due to lack of funding. Augsburg College currently offers online Persian classes, and incorrectly claims (on its website) to be “the first post-secondary school in the Twin Cities to offer Farsi” (emphasis added). Involvement in Persian-related institutions opened access to gendered and religious aspects of Iranian life (i.e., families, women, Bahá’ís).

Noruz Advisory Board (NAB) Community

The “Persian I Community” evolved into the “Noruz Advisory Board (NAB) Community” community. My initial gatekeeper introduced me to Fatemeh, an Iranian American mother, whose sons attended the “Farsi School,” although she severed her ties with the “official” spokespersons at the HCAI, because she deemed their cultural messages and programming to be irrelevant for her American Iranian children (e.g., performance of Iran’s pre-revolutionary national anthem, stories related to *Takht-e Jamshid*). Fatemeh countered this by pitching a one-day, annual celebration of an *American*-Iranian interpretation of *Noruz* to a program director at the Minnesota Children’s Museum (MCM). The NAB was composed of 1.5 generation Iranians (many came to the U.S. during their teens). My involvement as a board member culminated in my Master’s thesis (Zank 2004). For approximately five years (late 1990s and early 2000s), we held monthly meetings to strategize a positive portrait of *Noruz* (Iranian New
Year) in the American public sphere. This association matured into sisterhood with Fatemeh, and “adoption” into her family. As an adoptee, I have celebrated and mourned the true spirit and spark of Iranian family life in the private sphere, including graduation parties, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, and memorial gatherings for deceased family members.

Educational Institutions Cluster

The likelihood of meeting Iranians in educational institutions is not accidental, since Iranian students had one of the highest acceptance rates of foreign students prior to the revolution (Jones 1984). Within this cluster, I met several individuals who had some association with education: two ESL students whom I met through a good friend who taught English to Iranians in the immediate post-revolutionary period, one anthropology student from a community college at which I taught, one member of PSOM working in an administrative position at the UMN, and a tech expert at a state university where I taught anthropology. As can be surmised, the majority of my life history interviewees were affiliated with an educational institution in some manner.

Throughout my decades of formal and informal research, fits and spurts of involvement in public sphere, and art-related events, I have established a continuity of presence and familiarity among the multiple layers of the community. Fusion patterns occur intermittently, and community is rekindled evanescently in various contexts: Iranian film screenings, dialogues, and art installations (Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival, The Walker Art Center); Iranian-owned restaurants (Caspian
Bistro, Atlas, Downtowner Woodfire Grill); symposiums and conferences (defunct) (Insights—Iranian Art and Life, Critique Conference); plays (The Conference of the Birds at Pangea World Theater); comedy (Maz Jobrani’s Axis of Evil Comedy Tour, and his own shows at the UMN and Varsity Theater); and PSOM events.

Life History Interviews

Life history interviewees provide the bulk of data in this research study; I recruited interviewees through my affiliation with and involvement in these institutions. The pattern of institutional instability and disintegration to which Thernstrom et al. (1980) attributed to a “prior lack of experience and trust in institutional forms” (524) became obvious through the course of these experiences. Interviewees’ explanations as to why this pattern of disintegration occurs are more varied: gossip and “back stabbing”; class differences; “getting burned” by insincere people; burning out; infighting; power struggles; parents withdraw their volunteer services when their children reach the age at which Persian classes are not offered; lack of time to commit; absence of a critical mass of participants; conflict with weekend schedules; and/or lack of financial support. The annual PSOM Noruz celebration, and more recently Shab-e Yalda, are the mainstay events that bring Iranians together as a community, and function like a high school reunion. Nonetheless, the students cannot escape criticism by community members (e.g., first-generation Iranians deem them “not really Iranian,” being disorganized). While politics of representation begin to play out within such frameworks of authority, and may incite fission patterns, the staying power of PSOM, both as the organized body of the
annual Noruz celebration, and more recently Shab-e Yalda, is a testament to the desire to contribute and belong to some affiliation within Iranian heritage.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework informing this study integrates three fields of inquiry to address how macro-processes of difference and power are reflected in and acted out through the micro-responses collected in life histories that demonstrate the absolute priority of kinship as the vehicle through which the state forms and genders nationhood, as the fulcrum of migration decisions, and as the safeguard against which one’s vanishing identity is reinvigorated. The first field of inquiry incorporates historical and political literature in order to argue the importance of the backdrop of macro-processes of modernization in Iran, and how they were implicated in Iran’s location in the global political economy vis-à-vis the West, and its consequent impact on the Islamic Revolution and pursuant micro-processes of national identity, gender, and family. Secondly, literature on migration and transnational identity attend to the intersection between macro-processes of global economic development and micro-processes of reconciling dilemmas of self in modernity, and its relationship to meanings of authenticity, hybridity, and creating a home away from Home. Finally, ethnological investigations on how Iranians in North America, Western Europe, and Scandinavia compare and contrast the (re)construction of transnational self and gender identity within the milieu of cultural change and continuity with respect to macro-processes, such as national immigration laws and international implications of the nation state, and micro-
processes focusing on choices relative to cultural identity, for example, helps flesh out why and how Iranians interrogate and utilize their history and experiences to differentiate the “scattered hegemonies” of the Iranian diaspora.

Gender and National Iranian Identity

... just as we begin to ask ourselves whether kinship as we know it is disappearing under pressures of modern life, we are informed that many of these changes are more a question of form than indicators of a complete transformation. How long the values which determine the institution of kinship will be sustained and serve a purpose or resist change remains open to question. (Shahshahani and Tremayne, 2007, p.vi)

The politics of reproduction are intimately intertwined with global and international processes, with implications for kinship, gender relations, class, and race, and the perpetuation of social inequalities (Stone 2005). In the capitalist global economy, for example, neopatriarchal states align nationhood with family, and appropriate intimacy and the private sphere as a tactical diversion. The state may distract the public’s attention from socio-economic problems (Moghadam 1993), exploit women’s “invisible” labor for development (Agarwal 1988; Mies 1988; Moallem 1991; Sittirak 1998), and/or execute social control (Kandiyoti 1991, 1996; Keddie 1991; Meriwether and Tucker 1999; Paidar 1995). Because kinship constitutes the socioeconomic structure of so-called “primitive
societies’” and indeed all societies, anthropologists have delineated its relationship to economic, political, and social structures of difference and power since the inception of the discipline (Graburn 1971). “Kinship is conventionally defined as relationships between persons based on descent or marriage” (Stone 2005:5). Societies vary in terms of the extent to which these structures and kinship connections are interconnected. In general, kinship functions to determine rights and obligations, and it “is this aspect of kinship that gives it social force” (ibid.). Kinship also relates to ideologies of human relationships, “cultural ideas about how humans are created and the nature and meaning of their biological and moral connections with other,” which reflect differing ideas of procreation (ibid.:5-6). Germane to this study, residence patterns symbolize “the physical closeness of people related by descent has a lot to do with the strength of the ties between them” (ibid.:15). As with descent groups, solidity of group identity is stronger with localized versus dispersed residence patterns, and the factors of descent and residence patterns is what gives “the texture of life in communities” (ibid.:15-16).

Kinship studies have made a resurgence with feminist anthropology, which contextualized gender identity in the framework of kinship (di Leonardo 1991; Moore 1987; Reiter 1975; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). Rather than present an exhaustive account of anthropological approaches to kinship, what Shahshahani and Tremayne (2007) call “the well-trodden ground of classical-style anthropological studies” (v), my goal is to imbricate the structural and affective aspects of kinship within national and gendered identity in the contemporary transnational context. Fluidity, mutability, and agency organize alternative structures of affinity that persist as “underlying deeply rooted
values and practices, albeit disguised in varying degrees” (ibid.). Relatives and kin

groups persist as “the prime bearers and decision-makers in supporting and preserving the
family and its values,” and explain how migration has stretched and fortified family

networks globally (ibid.). Given the changing nature of kinship, residence, and

reproduction within this context, the approach to describe kinship as process examines

relations “as processural, as established or maintained over time through various actions”
(Stone 2005:21).

While Western scholars increasingly compare particularities of Western and

Muslim women’s lives (Sherif-Trask 2006:234), practice theory (Bourdieu 1984; Ortner

1984) stresses how individual agents restructure or destabilize institutions, rather than

being incapacitated by them. The embodiment (habitus) of love in the Middle East

entwines matrimonial strategies and the social uses of family and kinship (Bourdieu

1990), which erect the pillars of economic, political, and cultural institutions (Bates and


is “a form of amor fati”; that is, “to love is always to some extent to love in someone else

another way of fulfilling one’s own social destiny” (Bourdieu 1990:71). In the Middle

East, women are “symbols and repositories of religious, national, and cultural identity,”

and crucial to the nation-state’s modernization of tradition (Eickelman 2002). The

restoration of “traditional Islamic” order is predicated on a “rhetoric around the

‘appropriate’ place and roles of women,” who are envisioned as “the repository of

‘traditional’ values” (Sherif-Trask 2006:243). Circulated via media and mosque, women
contribute as caretakers and raise a generation of modest, obedient, and deferent Muslims, which is lauded as “the most fundamental task in society” (ibid.).

The practice theory approach situates the vantage point in order to examine patterns of meaning as symbolic reactions to economic and political macro-processes, and locate women’s “invisibility” and “secondary status” within cultural practices and structural determinants (Nashat and Tucker 1999). Inequalities, disempowerment, and domination are minimized by “the concrete actions of social agents [to] become the point through which symbolic and material-economic inequalities influence each other” (Knauft 1996:107). Positioning female agents at the nexus of structure-agency and symbolic-material forces are uncovered in how women employ a rational choice model to maximize the well-being of the family (Nashat 1999). The “patriarchal bargain” allows women to maneuver through societal constraints (Kandiyoti 1991). Women may engage in “gender performances” to unearth alliances, gather information, and influence political decisions (Brettell and DeBerjeois 2004; Friedl 1991; Meriwether and Tucker 1999). By subtly interrogating and changing Islamic gender rules within female-dominated spheres, women demonstrate “accommodating resistances” (Heglund 1999; Johnson-Odim and Strobel 1999). In attempts to democratize civic spaces (Badran 2005; Moghadam and Sadiqi 2006), women’s voices are more likely to be heard.

In order to present “typologies” of Iranian, Muslim, and Middle Eastern families that defy claims of a uniform experience, theories should situate micro-processes (e.g., individual’s social location, a family’s idiosyncratic situation, household dynamics) within macro-environments (e.g., socioeconomics, history, geography, colonization,
integration in the global economy) (Sherif-Trask 2006:233-234). Ignoring the specificities implicated in macro-structural environments perpetuates presumptions of “family as the agent of women’s suppression,” women as devalued prisoners of the private-domestic sphere who are exempt from the public sphere participation (Rosaldo 1974), and women as exotic and passive (Johnson-Odim and Strobel 1999; Moallem 1991).

Attributing truths too quickly, theories on the family are deficient and inapplicable in a cross-cultural analysis (Smith 2006:20). Theorizing about Middle Eastern families is a relatively unexplored topicii, perpetuating images of a monolithic structure: the male-dominated-breadwinner-authority and female-submissive-homemakeriii model (Sherif-Trask 2006:231-232). Critiques of this model point to phenomena that all societies share: Western families can be “traditional”; globalization and urbanization have introduced “women in the labor force, rising divorce rates, and technology”; and capitalism modernizes Muslim families by prioritizing individualism to family control (ibid.:233).

Turning to the specific case of Iran, the state infused gender discourse in its macro-structural thrust to modernize and transform its global image of “backwardness” (Mozaffari 2005; Sanasarian 2000). Love of nation, as metaphorical love of a woman, required protecting “her” wholesomeness from penetration by the foreign, Western Other. Woman’s “nature” became the currency of control, and man’s “nature” the guardian of her actions (Amin 2002; Schayegh 2006, 2009). Buttressed by a popular scientific discourse, informed by Social Darwinism, and disseminated in the educational
curriculum (Amanat 1993; Kashani-Sabet 1999), modern Iranianness hinged upon protecting “Persian purity” through a racialized, Aryan identity (Asgharzadeh 2007; Vaziri 1993). For Iran’s elite at the helm of the modernization project, improving women’s status through constitutional amendments and parliamentary changes was a primary enterprise (Afary 1992; Amin 2002; Kashani-Sabet 1999; Milani 1992; Mozaffari 2005; Vaziri 1993).

The Shah’s White Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution introduced extensive social change that reengineered national identity and citizenry discourses through emancipation and gender equality, in the case of the former, reinvigoration of patriarchy, and in the later case (Moghadam 1999). Through Shari’a, post-revolutionary Iran inculcated an Islamic love of nation that dramatically altered gender roles, practices, and institutions (De Groot 1996). Although family and marriage became politicized conduits to eradicate society’s ills and rescue the nation state from the ills of “Westoxification” (Afshar 1998; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Esfandiari 1997; Hoodfar 1994; Keddie 1991; Najmabadi 2005), ambivalent loopholes precluded full integration of the Islamic government’s ideology (Moghadam 1993). Loopholes allowed women to interpret their “proper” role for themselves (Hoodfar 1994). For instance, Paidar (1996) shows how Iranian women and mothers who supported the revolution redefined their gendered positions independently and indigenously (Paidar 1996). Women, as unofficial, legal scholars, challenged the courts, which purported Shari’a law to be clear cut (Afshar 1998; Mir-Hosseini 1999). In sex-segregated settings, women empower themselves through subtle protest, such as telling cynical jokes about
hegemonic clerics are protected in private (Heglund 1999). Finally, women declare themselves as anti-Western revolutionaries by donning the veil (Milani 1992). Despite initial constraints and setbacks of the revolution, Iranian women teased out hidden prospects to educate and express themselves (Amin 2002; Schayegh 2006).

Transnationally, as distance expands and contracts, global families struggle with modifications that arise through globalization (Smith 2006:20), such as modern life and the continuity of core values (e.g., “traditional,” extended families) (ibid.:3). For Iranian families, socio-cultural changes amplify men’s inflexibility and marginalization as a result of: role reversal, a “crisis of patriarchy,” divorce, sexual freedom (Ahmadi 2003; Darvishpour 2002; Moghissi 1999), and loss of authority (Ansari 1991; Mahdi 1997). While the majority of my respondents referenced their family of orientation as “traditional Iv,” similar to Haas’ (2006) definition, Iranian families and households in the transnational context become transitional or egalitarian. Employment and social policies transform household division of labor into a shared endeavor (ibid.:355-356).

Extended family links are critical to the construction of emotional and economic support networks tapped by Iranian transnationals, especially because they facilitate and retain Iranian fusion patterns in the host society. Transnational engagement and marriage, for example, perpetuate endogamy through matchmaking, conducted by go-betweens (e.g., mothers, fathers, hired matchmakers, friends), matrimonial want ads, Internet dating, marriage services, and/or magazines (Ingoldsby 2006:137). Similar to Iranian immigrants, Indian immigrants in Canada spurn love marriages, preferring to utilize parents, a mediator, and/or return to India, while remaining open to Western
practices (e.g., vetoing an unappealing match) (ibid.:138). In this study, some interviewees arranged marriage transnationally, and procured a fiancé visa, although propinquity played a decisive role.

For Iranian students, the university functioned as a default mating pool, where the prevalence of Iranian students increased the likelihood of meeting a spouse. As travel restrictions slacken, fiancés travel to Iran, where a “traditional” wedding takes place. Civil marriages in the U.S. and “traditional” weddings in Iran create families of procreation in proximity to families of orientation (i.e., a laterally situated household configuration in which parents, grandparents, aunts, and/or uncles purchase homes or condominiums adjacently), a pattern carried over from Iran. Extended family members travel from Iran to stay for an indeterminate period of time; a configuration that increases individual and social stresses, while offering psychological and economic support (ibid.:144). Extended families experience interpersonal conflict more than nuclear families, especially squabbles between in-laws “over issues of household duties and power structure” (ibid.).

Global Migration and Transnational Identity

The economic and political reaches of globalization responsible for global migration envelop migrants in loss, status change, and reformulated meaning as they confront novel roles, practices, and institutions. Migration, as a transnational phenomenon, is a social process implicated in the economic, political, demographic, and cultural dimensions of globalization (Brettell and Hollifield 2008). Although anthropologists (and historians)
trace the interchange of global trade, technology, and religion to prehistory (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002), contemporary migration differs in simultaneity and speed (Portes 1999; Vertovec 1999). Robertson’s (1992) “global field” model envisions four points of interface to theorize the intersection between the macro-forces of “globalization from above” and micro-practices existing at the level of “globalization from below”:

- nationally constituted societies;
- the international system of societies;
- individuals;
- and humankind.

These forces serve as a complex feedback loop of interactive comparison, differentiating forces, and reflexivity that counter stable, traditional tropes. Robertson’s (2003) theory foregrounds the debates within “the world of particular traditions,” and how the ensuing discourse presents “both inward-looking and outward-looking aspects” of those traditions (307).

The international system of societies is a historical outgrowth of the global capitalist economy and profit accumulation pursued and administered by the hegemonic European core (Wallerstein 2000). In the pursuit of interests (i.e., well-being, “the Good Life”), the core consolidated its power through territorial claims to expand trade and the marketplace (Bamyeh 1993), diversify labor and products, and fortify state control in the semi-peripheral and peripheral zones (Wallerstein 1974). The historical transformation from “mini-system” (complete division of labor, single cultural framework), to “world system” (single division of labor, multiple cultural frameworks) (Wallerstein 2000), to dominance of multinational corporations (MNCs), is fundamental to elucidating the global economic infrastructure, transnational processes, and migration (Massey et al. 2006; Portes 2004b; Vertovec 1999).
Informed by modernization theory, neoclassical economists argue that nonindustrial societies, once free of the yoke of tradition, will emulate European standards of rationality, capitalist markets, mass production, and commodity worship (Peet and Hartwick 1999). “Progress,” the calculated outcome, advances through five stages of development, culminating in mass high consumption (Rostow 1965). In this approach, migration is explained using cost-benefit analysis, whereby migrants attempt to maximize income and minimize risk (Massey et al. 2004; Portes 2004b). Market force logic purportedly “predicts” which migrant is selected, based on individual ability, skill, and motive on the supply side, and political constraints (i.e., visas, immigration) on the demand side (Chiswick 2008).

Alternatively, the new economics of migration approach considers the role of decision-making regarding migration relative to family and household, although anthropologists critique the narrow foci on several levels: positive-negative economic inputs essentialize migrant experience; the lack of contradictions captured by ethnography; and their failure to explain how economic development challenges national sovereignty and promotes differently translated meanings (Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Kearney 1995; Mahler 1998; Sassen 2002; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999). For example, South Asian migrant labor in the United Arab Emirates impels a state-sponsored, fabricated national identity. Marchal (2005) and Al-Rasheed (2005) have demonstrated how the construction of “indigenous,” Arab authenticity resists creolization and summons up a nostalgic, Orientalist Arabia. Accordingly, economic action is rooted in cultural values, and is not mutually exclusive from socio-cultural arenas, as put forth in
market force logic arguments (Gudeman 2001; Brettell and Hollifield 2008; Polanyi 1957 [1944]).

*Nationally constituted societies* (Robertson 1992) are situated at the intersection of globalization processes and individual lives. Since the nineteenth century, the nation-state epitomizes the *form* of globalization (Nederveen Pieterse 2004). Nations conform to a “model of being” that rests on a principle of legitimacy according to a standardized structure, logic, and social role to ensure global coordination and representative authority (Bamyeh 1993). Paradoxically, national identities are nourished by spiritual, ideological, intellectual, and cultural distinctions that impede standardization. Firstly, nationhood is a *manufactured* identity, based on selective, arbitrary cultural artifacts, and distributed through print-capitalism to produce imagined belonging (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Second, the myth of Oneness is performed through short-term memory, and contests representative authority and legitimacy through individuated retellings (Bhabha 1984, 1990; Rutherford 1990). Finally, despite increased freedom of movement, migration between nation-states is regulated through the determination and demonization of insiders versus outsiders (Messina and Lahav 2006; Nederveen Pieterse 2004). Identity politics envision an essentialist approach to national identity, and thereby destabilize prospects of multiplicity, pluralism, “ethnic enclaves,” and diversity (Knauft 1996:258-261).

Though identity politics challenge pluralism, transnational phenomena take root in project-specific, power-vying activities with potential to displace authority and reconfigure national narratives (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Brettell
Unbounded, interpenetrating local responses defy claims of the holistic, abstract, and universal effects of globalization in multiple ways (Kearney 1995; Pasha and Samatar 1999). For example, reconfiguring “‘traditional’ relations of power and privilege” (Mahler 1998) differentiates interactivities and forms through various centers of power relative to local time, relations, and contexts (Inderpal and Caplan 1994; Kearney 1995; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999). Further, non-ethnic, reflexive communities serve as counterpoints of belonging and power sharing (Glick-Schiller 2005; Kennedy and Roudometof 2002). Additionally, creolized global flows and cosmopolitanisms (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 2002) and interactive identities form through networks or projects that consist of “relatively coherent bundles of ideas and practices as realized in particular times and places,” and entail “collaboration, misunderstanding, opposition, and dialogue” (Tsing 2002:472-473).

Diasporas differ from transnational communities in that they are autonomous communities bounded by a common consciousness and a mythical return to a Homeland (Agnew 2004; Kearney 1999). Jews, Armenians, and Greeks exemplify “ideal types” or “victim diasporas” (Kokof et al. 2004). Victim identity politics are problematic in that they reinforce “boundaries based on singular features of identity, accept a hegemonic ideology, lead to a separate but equal status, and create a cycle of dependency” (Knauf 1996:258-259). Memory, the “lifeblood” of diasporic experiences (Vertovec 1997), hybridizes identity by attaching imagination to symbolic anchors that feed loss and nostalgia (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 2002). Diasporas sedentarize and separate through
“demographic thickness” (Kokof et al. 2004; Safran 2004), segregation, occupational difference, and endogamy (van Amersfoort and Doomernik 2002). Clifford (1994) argues that groups are “more or less diasporic” in that they “wax and wane in diasporanism, depending on changing possibilities … in their host countries and transnationally” (306).

Predicated on distinctiveness, the diaspora paradigm contrasts with the early Chicago School assimilationist paradigm, which attended to the lack of integration of immigrants and its psychic effects (Park 1924; Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Pedraza-Bailey 2004). For immigrants, the acculturation process entails an assessment of identificatory decisions (assimilation, pluralism, seccession, etc.) in order to relieve feelings of powerlessness and negative experiences as a minority (Dothan 1987; Rinder 1970). Gordon (1964) focuses on cultural-behavioral and socio-structural micro-processes of homeland socialization against macro-processes of state regulation of movement in order to elaborate typologies of immigrant experience. Gans (2004), for example, differentiates between “east-west” and “north-south” versus “new” and “old” trajectories, whereas Foner (2005) views the differential impact of race, ethnicity, and gender in transnational, trans-city, and temporal dimensions as creating alternative types. Clark (1998) examines how circumstances of landing (e.g., urban versus suburban) and achievement rates, relative to immigrants’ socioeconomic capital and skills (e.g., Asians, Middle Easterners), impacts the workability of the “California cauldron,” Jacoby (2004) considers the influence of country of origin on preparedness to enter the post-industrial knowledge economy and middle class. Contemporary immigration theory adopts
transnational approaches (Portes 2004a), emphasizing comparative inquiry in order to assess different degrees of absorption relative to structural driving forces rather than adaptation issues (Pedraza-Bailey 2004; Schmitter Heisler 2008).

Delineating Diasporas: Iranian Transnational Identity

Though the Iranian American assimilation process has been similar to that of other immigrant communities in the United States, it has faced unique challenges, primarily, the result of ongoing tensions between the United States and Iran. As a matter of fact, the legacy of Iranian American immigration is intimately tied to the pre- and post-revolutionary political relationship between the governments of the two countries, with key events in Iranian history impacting both the numbers and profiles of Iranian immigrants admitted to the United States, as well as their ability to assimilate. (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans, 2014, p. 1)

As the epigraph published by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) (2014) highlights, Iranian American assimilation patterns share similarities to other immigrants, but differ in the two primary macro-structural processes of the United States’ implication in the Shah’s White Revolution (prior to 1979) and Ayatollah Khomeini’s
Islamic Revolution (post-1979), which precipitated contemporary global Iranian migration (Bozorgmehr 1998). While the PAAIA’s claims that Iranian historical events significantly impact “both the numbers and profiles of Iranian immigrants admitted to the United States,” the claim that this impacts “their ability to assimilate” contradicts both my own and other scholars’ findings. In fact, as I have argued, Iranians in the Twin Cities (and those documented in other studies cited in this dissertation), present themselves as consummate immigrants in their ability to live under the public sphere radar, prioritize private sphere national identity, and contribute to the American immigrant landscape.

While the Shah “played straight” within the international system of societies, following the model of the hegemonic European core, Iran remained a semi-peripheral economy in the world system. Khomeini’s Islamic Republic directly challenged this hegemony, and thereby upended the structure, logic, and social roles that coordinated activities between the West and Iran. Effectively, the global rules of authority were rewritten, justifying the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran (Fathi 1991a). Within the international system of societies, categorizing Iranian transnationals as either “exile,” “immigrant,” “transnational,” or “refugee” complicates the individuals’ distinctiveness relative to dispersal, time of migration, state of mind, ethnicity, religion, and political inclination. The implication of U.S.-Iranian macro-processes ground the differences in community typologies through micro-interactional dynamics, which in turn impacts evolutionary processes that transpire into the similarities and differences of a community. While it is safe to assume that the majority of Iranian communities in the U.S. began as a
collection of individuals, due to U.S.-Iranian relations and push-pull migration factors of student migration, education, economic development, and family decisions, the dynamics of Iranian communities has benefitted from macro-structural immigration policies.

The evolution of Iranian communities throughout the United States occurred as a result of three waves of migration: pre-revolutionary (1957-1977), revolutionary (circa 1982), and post-revolutionary (1979-present) (Mobasher 2004). The pre-revolutionary period consisted of visitors, exiles, and students and their family members (Modarres 1998). Bozorgmehr (1998) categorizes Iranians who left for education as business or settlement immigrants. When the revolution broke, Iranian students were one of the largest number of foreign student populations as well as the majority of Iranians in the United States (Jones 1984). Pursuit of education explains the Iranian presence in urban areas where universities are located (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1991; Modarres 1998; Nassehy-Benham 1991).

The PAAIA’s alternative breakdown of migration waves differs from scholars’ categories. The modernization period (1950-1979), embedded in Iranian-U.S. relations, was predicated on economic (oil revenues) and military support, industrialization, development, and foreign investment (ibid.:2-4). Members of Iran’s expanding middle class, who represent this pattern, came to the U.S. for higher education because of Iran’s inability to service such needs as well as the eagerness of American universities to attract Iranian students, who “unintentionally became the basis for the cultural, economic and social networks that would enable large-scale immigration in the years that followed” (ibid.:4). Ansari’s (1992) study of 105 Iranian professionals on the East Coast (1972 to
1974) reflects this wave. Following Park’s marginal man concept, his subjects experienced dual marginality. The polarities of heritage-modernity, patriarchy-resistance, and public image management-private intimacies exemplify Iranian “cultural baggage,” which incline individuals toward self-sufficiency, privacy, “an extreme form of individualism,” “personal interest,” and lack of “personal commitment to others” (ibid.:74). Given this predilection, Ansari argues, Iranians “‘never become a group; the Iranian is born individualistic’” (ibid.:75). Non-group individualism encourages an “assimilating tendency … toward foreign cultures” (ibid.:40).

The second wave included Iran’s brain drain, which occurred between 1979 and 2001 (PAAIA 2014:5). It cites the revolution, Shari’a law, and the Iran-Iraq War “as catalysts for a mass exodus of much of Iran’s established middle class” (and the tenth highest migration of refugees in the world in 1988) (ibid.). Believing the events in Iran would quickly revert to the pre-revolution normal, many intended to return (ibid.). The post-revolutionary wave, consisting of exiles and refugees, was the most heterogeneous and complex (Jones 1984; Mahdavi 2006; Mobasher 2004). Exiles differ in temporal and economic circumstances (Bozorgmehr 1998) in that they experience the host society through media-fed nostalgia (e.g., poetry, film, television) and sustain a dream of ultimate return (Fathi 1991b; Naficy 1993). Iranian refugees, on the other hand, encompass a complex fusion of traits in several ways they possess atypical identity markers (e.g., outspokenness, highly educated, women traveling alone), are religiously, politically, and ethnically diverse, they lack support granted to other refugees, and are subjects to inordinate discrimination and religious persecution (Bauer 1991; Jones 1984;
Kamalkhani 1988; Moghadam 1993; PAAIA 2014). Whether they followed “official”
refugee channels, Bauer (1991, 2000) categorizes her subjects as refugees, since the
revolution and the Islamic Republic affected Iranians similarly in terms of adaptation,
inability to return, and/or fear. Fathi (1991b), on the other hand, delineates two refugee
types: “anticipatory refugees” leave before a situation deteriorates, while “acute
refugees” are forced out by political change or armies, and produce “vintages” based on
the members’ “distinct background, character, and political color” at the time of
departure (11).

Residence patterns in the host country indicate the inability or unwillingness to
return to Iran, resignation of permanent settlement, professionalism, education, urban
living, and family reunification (Mahdavi 2006; Modarres 1998). Because economic
institutions (e.g., restaurants, grocery stores, Persian carpet shops) are predecessors of
other institutions, they act as quasi-cultural brokers that reinforce a non-spatialized,
community consciousness articulated through nationality, “fellow citizenry,” cultural
continuity, healthy competition, job creation, and economic advancement (Mobasher
2004). Demographic concentrations support an “ethnic ownership economy,” but may
signify racism, discrimination, and/or structural, economic, and technological changes
within the host society (Dallalfar 1989; Moallem 1991). Given this, ethnic separateness
may not be inevitable, although Modarres (1998) discovered that Iranians in Washington,
D.C. are more economically integrated into the host society than other U. S. Iranian
communities.
Ethnic associations establish “globalization from below” evidence of the accumulation and settlement of immigrants. These institutions buffer against discrimination and help navigate host culture, while sustaining social cliques, endogamy, and occupational similarity (Ansari 1992; Dallalfar 1996; Gilanshah 1986; Hoffman 1990; Mahdi 1998; Mobasher 2004; Moghissi 2001; Naficy 1993). The fact that many of these studies take place relative to Iranian institutional life abroad (e.g., economic enclaves, ethnic associations, community activism, government policies on immigration and asylum) indicates the difficulty to enter into the private sphere and collect data from Iranian subjects. Sanadjian’s (1995) study on Iranians in Germany is one of few articles to mention Iranian private sphere dynamics, wherein narratives of loss are shared and binary opposite constructions of Germans are aired (22). Yet, while institutions have a fusion effect, Ghorashi’s (2009:82) study of Iranians and Holland and Sanadjian’s (1995:30-32) study of Iranians in Germany both reference Iran’s political history, the individualistic nature of migration, and suspicion as factors that inhibit community cohesiveness.

Chao (1995) differentiates between traditional associations, emphasizing “old country” values and “non-forgetting,” from modernist associations, valuing universality, inclusion, and transnational culture. In a study of twelve ethnic associations in Washington, D.C., Biparva (1994) examined traditional and modern cultural features to understand how they function to: preserve culture, restructure the Iranian government, and foster unity over problem-solving and humanitarian concerns. Due to “outlived purposes, unrealistic aspirations, replacement by other groups, and/or difficulty in
member recruitment” (ibid.:393), Iranian ethnic associations have ephemeral lives. A result of this is that traditional institutions (i.e., family, education) compete for identity construction and preservation (Mahdi 1998). Persian language preservation and instruction are strategic factors to reinvigorate threatened heritage, take an anti-assimilationist position, and translate foreign cultural ideals in the reconfiguration of self (Chaichian 1997).

Religious organizations, as variants of ethnic associations, encourage social interaction and instill traditional values (Biparva 1994). Feher (1998) discovered how mission statements evolve as community needs change. Iranian Jews in Los Angeles are insular and lack affinity with “Anglo-Saxon” Jews, but capitulated to the pressure of Iranian-American alliances in order to cultivate children’s tricultural identity (i.e., Jewish-Iranian-Americans). The mission of the International Judea Foundation (IJF/SIAMAK), originally to accommodate Iranian Jews in escape, settlement, integration, and religious worship, altered to accommodate youth in Los Angeles. Their best-of-both-worlds approach proved successful by not alienating youth, providing a “second home,” and extending the concept of family to protect them from the outside world and total assimilation. Kamalkhani’s (1988) study of Iranians and Norwegian Bahá’ís in Norway shows how shared faith may not supersede cultural differences. While Bahá’ís are ideologically and bureaucratically interconnected at the local, national, and international levels (Beyer 2006; Cole 1998), Iranians’ and Norwegians’ histories preclude unity. In spite of everything, Bahá’í Iranians benefitted more than Shi’a in
Norway due to their persecuted minority status (e.g., the government favored them for loans).

Iranians in Western Europe and Scandinavia reveal how immigration and refugee policies and nationalist discourse impacts the transnational experience as one of flux and uncertainty, and provide a contrast to American “melting pot” and “salad bowl” ideologies, which presume to allow for the absorption of immigrants. The studies focus more on Iranian refugees and asylum seekers who are denied full integration due to ideologies of Western cultural dominance, cultural racism, and nationalist discourse focused on “the Islamic threat” (Ghorashi 2009; Ghorashi et al. 2009; Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997; Kosar 1997; Sanadjian 1995). These factors, coupled with a less institutionalized family reunification policy, create a pillarization and economic “proletarianization” effect for Iranians in Western Europe and Scandinavia. Moreover, the pattern of prejudice and discrimination against Iranians plays out in economic institutions as well as through government policies, impacting whether and how Iranians are processed (i.e., as refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants), accepted, and absorbed by the host societies.

In modernity, *individuals* within the “global field” model may experience crises-prone experiences, uncertainty, and anxiety, which “threaten the very core of self-identity,” as Giddens (1991:185) proposes. Other individuals may embrace modernity as a transformative experience “of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish,” in Berman’s (1998:15) conception. Berman, following modernist philosophers (Marx 1956, 1963; Nietzsche 2006), purports ambiguity as a well of imaginable opportunity for modern identity, rather than an
incapacitating experience, as Foucault’s (1972, 1976, 1979) powerful discourses and
disciplines and Weber’s (1976) iron cage entail. For example, the singular pursuit of
individual freedom in democratic society creates a “violence of normalization,” which
alleges rationality, morality, and self-realization, but suppresses ambiguities that arise
around artifice, unreason, and arbitrariness (Connolly 1987:9). Connolly proposes an
“ontology of discordance” to circumvent a singular discourse of freedom that demands a
“willed convention of tradition unreflectively followed or behavior disconnected from
will” (ibid.:5). Embracing the “ambiguities lodged in modern ideals of self, politics, and
social life” cultivates awareness of “the ‘other’ in the self,” and introduces porosity and
“otherness” in the institutional order (ibid.:xi). Normalization marginalizes “new sectors
of the population or newly defined sectors of the self” (ibid.:9), while discordance
“allows a place for the pursuit of personal and common identity” (ibid.:11). Following
Durkheim and Mauss, Rapport and Overing (2007) forefront ambiguity in symbolic
systems of classification and social practices as “both/and” phenomena by which
individuals negotiate culture and social life as a “muddling through” process (100).
Through “methodological eclecticism,” voices appear as conversation “between different
systems of sense-making, different universes of discourse” (ibid.:279-280). The
“mythical present” unfolds through simultaneity in diversely “constructed world-views
and identities … [to produce] contradictory cognitions [that] give onto a plurality of
social worlds at any one time” (Rapport 1997:671).

For individuals, the extremes of modernity present several dilemmas of self-
identity relative to migration, acculturative stress, and weakened traditional authority and
institutions that provided the assurances and affirmations of traditional cultural values and social institutions. Inevitable acquisition of do-ragheh (two veined) identity (Darvalan 1996) introduces a preponderance of adjunct meanings that impart indecision as well as possibility. Alienation, whether experienced through intra- or inter-community interaction, while disorienting, affords distance to author a “portable ideology” (Adelkhah 2000; Sullivan 2001) or “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens 1991) in order to confront and reconcile these dilemmas. By attending to the quotidian choices, practices, and performances of actors’ responses to time-honored conventions (Bourdieu 1984, 1990), we can appreciate how the “third space,” where ambivalence manifests, history is displaced, authority restructured, and power dislocated, reveals novel articulations (Bhabha 1984, 1994, Rutherford 1990; de Certeau 1984). Individuals evaluate the utilitarian value of ancient “artifacts” of Iranianness against the practicalities of “borrowed” American features that facilitate “assimilation” as a strategy to navigate the host society. Claims of an authentic, authoritative tradition disavow the possibilities that arise in the ambiguous space of hybrid identity. Iranian immigrants incorporate instrumental and behavioral intercultural learning strategies to negotiate the hybrid space of cultural adaptation within the host society. Hoffman’s (1990) study of Iranian professionals and youth in California stressed approaches to learning, and the integration of “positive” rather than “negative” American cultural values. The self, as dual-culture mediator, experiences little conflict in “becoming American,” since intercultural learning does not threaten the meaning, value, and identity of the Iranian self (although outliers existed)vi.
Migration, a profound experience of social change, instills a “crisis of fragmentation” (Berry 1980; Durkheim 1965, 1984; Westen 1985) that may be alleviated by confronting the metaphysical loss of home (Berger et al. 1974), and reconfiguring one’s metaphorical roots, identity, and notions of “territory” (Malkki 2001:52). Reestablishing “home” is influenced by the nature of self and a willingness to commit (Magat 1999) in that home is “a meaning system or a viable, indispensable source of identity” (119). For example, immigrants who envision past, present, and future as indistinct, sustain a dialectical, mythologized notion of “Home” (i.e., pining for the “old world”), while individuals who deemphasize national ties reconstruct “home” in the present (i.e., managing in the “new world”) (ibid.). Mythologizing “Home” perpetuates “culture as being,” while “culture as action” reflects “social behavior and the inner realm of value, affect, and identity” in accordance with changing circumstances (Hoffman 1990). Culture as action “transliterates” tradition, memory, and history through improvisation, confronting essentialist claims of privilege, purity, and authenticity (Babcock 1993; Bruner 1993; Holland et al. 1998).

Iranians in “The Land of Ten-Thousand Lakes”

Forty years ago today, Time magazine gave Minnesota what may rank as the most welcome shot of free publicity this or any other state has ever received. The cover of the magazine’s Aug. 13, 1973, edition featured a photograph of a beaming Gov. Wendell Anderson holding up a not particularly impressive
northern pike. The accompanying headline, “The Good Life in Minnesota,” summed up the tone of the story inside. Its central theme: At a time when inflation, Watergate, and the long slog in Vietnam were draining America’s already shallow reservoir of optimism, Minnesota stood out as a “state that works,” a state worth emulating. The article struck a chord. Time’s Minnesota issue sold better than all but three of its cover stories that year. … The image of Anderson and his fish assumed iconic status. (Kenney 2013)

Minneapolis doesn’t benefit from a proximity to other rich cities and their intermingling of commerce. Instead, it’s so far from other major metros that it’s a singular magnet for regional talent. … No other large American city has adopted a plan like Minneapolis’s to sprinkle business taxes across a region in order to keep the poorest areas from falling too far behind. (Thompson, 2015, p. 2-4)


Former Iranian students who made the “decision” to stay in Minnesota, established the roots of the local community through the expansion of their families of orientation, by
virtue of immigration policies favoring family reunification, and families of procreation, through a strong preference for endogamy. Minnesota is a destination for education and/or employment, due to its attributes of its mythical “good life,” lack of competition in commerce, and its approach to business taxes\textsuperscript{vii}. The state’s mythical reputation dates to a 1973 cover story in \textit{Time} magazine, which gave Minnesotans “a nice pat on the back” (Kenney 2013:4), and affirmed “that their state was in fact a special place” (ibid.:1). Minnesota’s “defining characteristics” include “its well-balanced economy, its well-mannered populace, its engaged corporate community, its thriving arts scene, [and] its wealth of natural resources,” which Governor Anderson reinforced through a “progressive consensus” and its “unusually civic-minded citizens who supported shared sacrifice ‘in return for good services and social benefits’” (ibid.:3). Minnesota’s mythical “good life” has reemerged as a “miracle” (Thompson 2015); a claim based on affordable homes, placement in the top ten “for highest college-graduation rate, highest median earnings, and lowest poverty rate, … [and] the highest employment rate for 18-to-34-year-olds in the country” (ibid.:2). As a hub of \textit{Fortune} 500 companies dating to the mid-1800s with Pillsbury and General Mills, medium to large companies have expanded and educated managers remain (ibid.:2-3)\textsuperscript{viii}.

Popularized through tourism, Hollywood, media, and Garrison Keillor’s radio program \textit{A Prairie Home Companion}, Minnesota’s reputation as a “well-mannered populace,” so-called “Minnesota Nice,” presents “Minnesota culture to the outside world” (Yuen 2012). Minnesotans’ mythical “niceness,” according to Jones (2009), trace to Aksel Sandemose’s novel about a fictional small town in the 1930s called Jante, ruled by
eleven Janteloven (Jante laws). In Jones’ perspective, three Janteloven—“Don’t think that you: are special, are good at anything, can teach us anything”⁶—are particularly Minnesotan, and play out culturally as “keeping up appearances,” “keeping up the social order,” and “keeping people in their place.” Provinciality is not a “state character,” but “Minnesotans hold themselves to a higher standard in just about everything,” including neighborliness (Yuen 2012).

“Outsiders,” however, experience “Minnesota Nice” as social impenetrability or “Minnesota Ice,” “a synonym for phoniness and passive aggression,” and an attribution for “all kinds of strange Minnesota phenomena” rooted in the state’s Scandinavian and German immigrant populations (Yuen 2012). A Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) broadcast series entitled, “The Outsiders: Is ‘Minnesota Nice’ to Newcomers?” chronicled stories of recent arrivals who found Minnesotans elusive, unreadable, and confusing (ibid.). Intriguingly, my interviewees’ comments aligned with the “outsiders” in Yuen’s (2012) report on many points, including: planned “get-togethers” that never materialize; being “loyal and neighborly,” while keeping “outsiders at a comfortable distance”; “making friends and finding a sense of community is daunting”; “transplants” forming their own community and sense of belonging, based on shared experiences as “outsiders” and being “international”; cliquey behavior attributed to elementary and junior high school friendships; and a lack of empathy for living alone in a new place.

Yuen offered U.S. Census Bureau figures as an explanation for Minnesotan’s insularity, which she attributes to their relationships with “homegrown residents” (i.e., approximately “seven of every 10 people in Minnesota were born in-state”)⁷. Immigrants
express “frustration with trying to penetrate their rigid social circles,” particularly people of color, who experience a gulf between their own cultural and Minnesotans’ lack of cultural knowledge (ibid.)\textsuperscript{xi}. Paradoxically, Minnesota’s liberal policy toward refugees\textsuperscript{xii} belies “transplants” the feeling of being wholly Minnesotan\textsuperscript{xiii}.

Minnesota also boasts the second-lowest rates of outward migration of college-educated people in the nation\textsuperscript{xiv}. “It bears out the old adage: ‘It’s really hard to get people to move to Minneapolis, and it’s impossible to get them to leave’” (Thompson 2015:3). However, this statistic does not apply to Iranians in Minnesota, as evidenced by the “UMN Student Community.” Of course, individuals who stayed behind constitute the roots of the small population of Iranian Minnesotans. Modarres’ (1998) research shows Iranian students migrate out of Midwestern states upon graduation to join family, friends, and/or to move to metropolitan areas (on par with Tehran) (42). In 2000, Iranians seeking residence in Minnesota was a mere sixty people, according to the INS (2002). In the category of “Place of Birth for the Foreign-born Population” in the State of Minnesota, the U.S. Census Bureau reports 1568 Iranians of which 1427 resided in the Twin Cities’ metropolitan area (2000). A recent estimation, under the headings “People Reporting Ancestry online” and “Place of Birth for the Foreign-born Population in the United States,” is provided by the the Minnesota State Demographic Center (2014), puts the population of Iranians in Minnesota at 1449 ($\text{http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk}$).

Population estimates for Iranians in the U.S. are disputed, in part due to the problematic categories of the U.S. Census Bureau, Immigration and Naturalization
Service (INS), and the *Iran Census Report*. The *Iran Census Report*, published by the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), estimates the Population of Iranian Descent in Minnesota to be 0.051% or 2500 (out of a total 4,919,479 Iranians) (Fata and Rafii 2003:11). Underestimation correlates with underreporting by Iranians, who categorize themselves as “White” or “some other race,” rather than specifying “Iranian” (ibid.:4-5). The *Iran Census Report* observes that the U.S. Census Bureau does not distinguish between different Middle Eastern ancestries. Middle Easterners (e.g., Arabs, Armenians, Israelis, Turks, Greeks) tend to be “politically active and influential ethnic groups” with competing agendas (ibid.:2-3). The Report argues that statistical accuracy is critical for “strength in numbers” in order to align Iranian Americans under a common agenda and foster democratic practices in the community as well as Iran (ibid.:10).

Although the community is relatively small, it has attracted some scholarly attention. Academic work on the Iranian diaspora in Minnesota is limited in descriptive and historical scope. A Minnesota Historical Society’s publication, *They Chose Minnesota* (Drenning Holmquist 1981; Miller 1981), dedicates only one paragraph to Iranian immigrants, and are contrasted with early Middle Eastern immigration patterns (particularly Lebanese-Syrian settlements). Gilanshah’s (1983) doctoral dissertation and a journal article (1990) chronicle the early settlement and activities of the nascent Iranian community in the Twin Cities, with predictions for its evolution as a full-fledged ethnic community supported by institutional life. My Master’s thesis addressed a “crisis of representation” relative to the creation and implementation of a *Noruz* program at the Minnesota Children’s Museum (Zank 2004). Significantly, an “informal visit” by Shah

Methodological Conundrums

*Participant Observation*

The rather recent anthropological gaze on Iran presents obstacles to a “traditional” anthropological methodology of immersed participant observation. In Iran, for political reasons, and transnationally, because Iranians consider themselves an unworthy, unlikely, inexplicable and/or an odd focus of study (Bromberger 2009; Hegland 2009; Nadjmabadi 2009). Upon learning of my study, Iranians quip about being “subjects.” For instance, at the Maz Jobrani comedy performance at the UMN, one male proclaimed: “I feel naked.” A common refrain when I have requested an interview is that their vanishing sense of Iranianness disqualifies them to be “authentic” spokespersons: “I have lived in the U.S. too long, and am not really Iranian,” “I left Iran when I was young,” “I consider myself more—fill-in-the-blank—than Iranian,” or “When you go back to Iran you realize the Iranians here are not even Iranian.” At almost every family gathering, one friend’s husband jokes: “How are the subjects performing, Tracy? You know there are ‘real’ subjects coming from Iran this year!” First-generation Iranians are cautiously critical about interviewing the PSOM students: “Why would you interview them? They aren’t Iranian!” Iranians also tend to assume that anthropologists study “exotic Others,” among
whom they do not categorize themselves, as evidenced by the question a son posed to his mother: “Why is Tracy studying Iranians, and not people in South America or Africa?” Finally, when expressing an interest to attend a Sufi center, one informant vehemently proclaimed their lack of authenticity: “They’re not Sufis! Everybody wants to be a fucking Sufi!” His criticism of Iranian Sufis in Minnesota relates to the fact that their wealth, materialism, and “packaging” of Sufism on the weekends contradict traditional Sufism and a lifestyle of self-deprivation.

Langness and Frank (1995) argue that establishing rapport with “more acculturated groups” is difficult compared to “non-literate groups” (36). By and large, my interviewees are in Minnesota as a result of recruitment by U.S. companies (e.g., Control Data doing business in pre-revolutionary Iran) or by word-of-mouth, extended family social networks related to educational pursuits. In both cases, U.S. family reunification immigration law (mainly left untouched by the 1986 reform and reaffirmed by the Immigration Act of 1990) enabled family members to expand their networks in the U.S. (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:15). The prevalence of advanced degrees among Iranian immigrants explains their bewilderment about being studied, as evidenced by conceptions of anthropologists as scholars who study “exotic Others” (i.e., Africans, South Americans).

My initial entrée into the Twin Cities’ Iranian community occurred through the benefit of sponsorship, which grants the “protection of friendship” and coaching lessons “in appropriate conduct and demeanor” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:60). My initial gatekeeper served in this role expertly, but a sponsor may eventually obstruct access to
other areas of interest, constrain independence, and/or reshape “the conduct and development of the research” (ibid.:75). In time, the lackadaisical attitude of my gatekeeper toward my research project, and rejection to be interviewed, demonstrated how this role “has the power to open up or block off access” (ibid.:64). Yet, there are many gates to a walled city, and other sentries are negotiable. Eventually, alternative sentries manifested, facilitating entrée into the scattered hegemonies of the local community: “the women’s world,” “the elite world,” “the student and academic world,” “the ethnic association world,” “the religious and non-religious world,” among others.

I endeavored to respect boundaries that govern social research and ethnographic practice, which Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) outline through five ethical considerations. Firstly, informed consent (ibid.:264-266) circumvents feelings of covertness, “analogous to infiltration by agents provocateurs or spies” [sic] (ibid.:264). Anthropologists are often in “danger of being seen as the agent of a foreign power, a spy, or an intelligence agent” (Langness and Frank 1995:39). A successful study of any group depends upon the ethnographer’s ability to act with “caution, diplomacy, perseverance, and patience, along with repeated displays of good faith” (ibid.:37). Some Iranians assume that I am either married to an Iranian or a spy. Given the discrimination that Bahá’ís suffer in Iran, they are acutely wary of inquiring strangers (although anxious to share the tenets of their faith).

Secondly, the ethnographer must remain sensitive to the line between privacy and gossip (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:264). For example, while public Iranian gatherings are informed by innumerable social graces, cordiality, and politeness, private
spaces uncover the artifice of the social mask as the gossip mill churns (e.g., elitism of a sponsor; pointing out education and class distinctions; criticizing an individual’s inarticulate or inaccurate public presentation). Though fascinating, gossip in a small community compromises privacy.

A third ethical issue involves the consideration of harm or anxiety caused by an ethnographer’s research (ibid.:269). In order to protect their identities, interviewees gave themselves a pseudonym. Their reactions to this varied from amusement (choosing “old-fashioned,” rural names), to irreverence (pulling out “Bob” and laughing), lack of concern (prompting the anthropologist to find a name), and political (choosing the name of Neda, a martyr of the 2009 Iranian election protests). Individuals’ name choices correlated with the presence or absence of hyphenated identity; that is, choice of “American” names (e.g., Bob, Meredith, Nate, Rose) was more common with those who had been in the U.S. longer.

Fourthly, reciprocity mitigates the feeling of exploitation. For example, researchers may provide services or monetary compensation, empower subjects through consultation during the research process, and/or study the powerful rather than powerless (ibid.). In my own experience, I have vouched for an individual who applied for a green card, supported children’s soccer tournaments, represented the “Iran booth” at a multicultural fair, among others.

Finally, the consequences for future research entails dealing with “the negative reaction of people to research and its findings” (ibid.:275). Though the ethnographer’s first goal is to collect data and produce knowledge, he or she should take “account of his
or her goals, the situation in which the research is being carried out, and the values and interests of the people involved” (ibid.:285), which entails judging the legitimacy and validity of a set of data. Expectations of the ethnographer’s expertise impacts credibility, and is challenged by an Iranian propensity, as noted by interviewees, to give advice, be self-proclaimed experts, and criticize representative accounts of “the community.” In fact, Iranians have warned and *pity* me when learning that I was studying the local community.

Because ethnographic practice is “replete with the unexpected” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:23), anthropologists who enter “the field” in an open manner must remain sensitive to “a surprising fact or set of facts” (ibid.:26) and “chance encounters or personal experiences” (ibid.:28). Participant observation at community-wide events paradoxically draws attention to my preference, as an ethnographer, to blend in. Mimicking quintessential Iranian behaviors displaces the anthropologist from observer to uncategorized “Other.” Being able to utter key Persian phrases with little or no accent, sipping tea through a sugar cube lodged in the mouth, requesting a foodstuff considered an acquired taste (e.g., *sumac*, *torshi*, etc.), referring to someone by their Persian rather than American name and pronouncing it accurately, knowing the meaning of the symbols and rituals of *Noruz*, and proficiently dance “Persian-style” while doing *beshkan* (a distinctly Iranian way of snapping fingers), all raise the question of whether I am Iranian, followed by a debate as to whether I could “pass.” This interplay contradicts Iranians’ love of the mimicry of camouflage.
Similar to other Iranian communities, the nascent Twin Cities’ Iranian community consists of a majority of students, and the UMN serves as a quasi-clearinghouse for Iranian cultural events (e.g., Persian Film Night, Persian Culture Day, Shab-e Yalda, Noruz). Gilanshah’s (1983) appendices provide early documentation of student-organized activities as well as semi-celebrities. Announcements were hand-written, some in Persian only, and indicate the “half-hazard” approach (Bob) of Iranian student functions at that time. Today, PSOM remains a viable, visible presence among Twin Cities’ Iranians, despite questions of authenticity and organizational acumen. According to a former PSOM president, national identity relative to the hyphen has implications for occupying offices, sitting on the board, and representational authority. As an Iranian-American, he discussed rifts over the appointment of spokespersons, leaders, and program content. Iranian-Americans view themselves as more qualified in light of decisions made by American-Iranians, who suggested airing President Obama’s Noruz speech prior to dinner, but which Iranian-Americans deemed irrelevant. The ongoing tussle relative to the hyphen demonstrate how a stream of newly arrived students from Iran can displace American-Iranians as leaders and program advisors in what is effectively and American-Iranian institution. While PSOM and their related activities act as a significant centripetal presence around which an idea of Iranianness is celebrated, centrifugal forces continue to act on community cohesion.

Because Iranian immigrants represent the middle-, upper-middle, and upper-classes, settlement patterns are scattered throughout the Twin Cities in wealthy, recent developments in the suburbs and exurbs. While Iranians tend to cluster in familial
“proximate pockets,” similar to the pattern in Iran, this dispersed settlement pattern hinders ritual rhythms. American institutional life (e.g., neighborhood activity, employment, the school system) constrains the celebration of Iranian holidays and sustainability of exclusive Iranian institutions. While Noruz is universally celebrated, the thirteen-day ritual condenses into a weekend, a family vacation, and/or on a day when schedules coincide. Furthermore, not all rituals translate in the new context (e.g., one respondent’s neighbors called the Fire Department when they saw their Iranian neighbors jumping over a bonfire in their backyard in March on Chahar Shanbe Souri), and may drop out of the celebration cycle. The prevalence of Christian holidays, especially Christmas, also consumes children’s curiosity and parents’ inability to “shut if off.”

Over time, my participation in both private and public sphere activities, including Iranian and American holidays (Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving), weddings, funerals, graduation parties, and community events, has transformed my strangeness into familiarity and aided in establishing connections throughout the community. Iranian events are carefully orchestrated gatherings guided by impression management and the negotiation and construction of “different selves,” which necessitates “keeping up appearances.” The field researcher’s appearance, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:84), is a critical feature “in shaping relationships with people in the field” (ibid.), and an absolute criterion of all Iranian gatherings.

*Life History Interviews*
Although most of which has not been an official period of participant observation, my long-term involvement in Twin Cities’ Iranian activities has established my presence. Throughout my decades of informal and formal research, the pattern of institutional disintegration and associated politics substantiated what Thernstrom et al. (1980) have attributed to diasporic Iranians, which is a “lack of experience and trust in institutional forms” (524). Furthermore, the demarcation between the public and private self presents an obstacle to the interview process and participant observation, since intimate thoughts and feelings are reserved for one’s innermost circle of family and friends. Given the history of government surveillance among Iranians, it took considerable time to establish trust. My involvement in these communities facilitated a snowball sampling method, by which I recruited eighteen individuals and conducted life history interviews, which constitute the bulk of data in this research study.

The interviewees’ accessibility and openness to being interviewed were key criteria (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:134). One problem with collecting a representative sample was the determination of “representative authority” in a diverse, diffuse community that lacks apparent borders; “systematic sampling requires the existence of relatively clear boundaries around the population, and the existence and availability of a full listing of its members” (ibid.:136-137). If “information” or “perspectives and discursive practices” provide the bulk of the data, then a representative sample is not essential, requiring the anthropologist “to target those people who have the knowledge desired and who may be willing to divulge it” (ibid.:137).
Life history interviews have the advantage of intersecting micro-processes of individual and familial migration patterns with macro-processes related to Iran’s position in the political economy. Following Marcus’ (1986) “strategically situated ethnography” (173), I endeavored to understand how micro-processes of migration, family decision-making, and the centripetal-centrifugal forces on identity and community life are both autonomous and constructed by macro-processes, such as U.S.-Iranian relations and the revolution. This method inquires: “Why precisely are you in this locale rather than another” (ibid.)? Marcus’ multi-sited method advocates that:

the ethnographer constructs the text around a strategically selected locale, treating the system as background, albeit without losing sight of the fact that it is integrally constitutive of cultural life within the bounded subject matter. The rhetorical and self-conscious emphasis on the strategic and purposeful situating of ethnography is an important move in such works, linking it to broader issues of political economy. (172)

Thus, why precisely did Iranians land in the Twin Cities, and not elsewhere? The life histories I conducted unearthed lineages of migration in the pursuit of education, with the intention to return to Iran and transform its infrastructure, economy, and global image. The rich picture that life histories paint of people’s understanding of self in the context of historical change was critical to understand how individual agency intertwined with the profound paradigmatic shift from the Shah’s White Revolution to Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution. Pre-revolutionary preference to attend American
universities and/or work at *Fortune* 500 companies are implicated in the “background system” of U.S.-Iranian relations.

Each interview lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes, and collecting them instilled emotions of dread, trepidation, and unease that accompany an investigation of private lives and painful memories. Creating a comfortable, conversational atmosphere set the tone between “standardized and reflexive interviewing” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:152), accomplished by reminiscing about my personal history and association with Iranians in the Twin Cities. Although I followed an interview schedule, questions were open-ended. In order to minimize my influence on what was said, I encouraged the interviewee to “talk at length in his or her own terms” (ibid.:129). Directive questioning tests hypotheses, while non-directive questioning provides “triggers that stimulate the interviewee into talking about a particular broad area” (ibid.:152). It is important “to make the question ‘lead’ in a direction opposite to that in which one expects the answer to lie, and thus avoid the danger of misleadingly confirming one’s expectations” (ibid.:155). Although I assured respondents that prevarication was permissible, even preferable, they apologized for “drifting off topic.”

Active listening fosters awareness of extraneous, albeit relevant, information. An unsolicited topic may become a nugget for future investigation, such as my initial gatekeeper’s compulsion to explicate the machinations of *ta’arof* as an essential Iranian cultural marker. Relinquishing control of the narratives privileges the interviewees’ truths, rather than the anthropologist’s theoretical construction (Clifford 1986, 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Cushman 1982). The goal of interpretive
anthropology is not ultimate answers “but to make available to us answers that others, guarding sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man [and woman] has said” (Geertz 1973:30).

The oral history method demands creative relinquishment, according to Geiger (1992), which entails “understanding rather than controlling the material or information generated … [and helps] conceptualize the interpretive task as one of opening rather than closure” (306, emphasis in original). Meaning dwells within silence; “in the silences and contradictions contained in a life story just as certainly as it lies in what is said. Memory in turn is construction of meaning” (ibid.:310).

Depending on the author, oral and life history are differentiated or conflated (Berg 2001; Giles-Vernick 2006; Payne and Payne 2004; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Yow 1994). Oral histories are ideal to: illuminate the particularities of specific events; reveal subjective ideas about the past and changing notions of self; and uncover how people “produce, evaluate, and transmit knowledge about the past” (Giles-Vernick 2006:86). Their advantage lies in the detailed picture they provide of people’s understanding of self in the context of historical change (ibid.:87). In this way, individual agency and structure are intertwined (Payne and Payne 2004:24).

Depending upon where Iranians are situated within their diverse, complex cultural matrix (i.e., consisting of class, religions, ethnicity, political position, etc.), life histories disclose the transformation of the individual’s identity from students to exile, refugee to “adopted kin,” “purebred” to “hybrid,” and the influence and role of family throughout this transition. For instance, the familial decision-making process takes into
consideration where and how children will obtain their education, whether sons should return to Iran to safeguard against military conscription, long-distance marriage counseling, among other key life decisions. The impact of political and economic changes on an individual’s immigration status requires families to negotiate how individuals maneuver their legality relative to marriage, traveling out of and back to the U.S., and gender role changes that arise in the transition from student visa holder, to green card holder, to citizen (i.e., if a husband cannot work legally, the wife becomes the breadwinner). Experiences of prejudice and discrimination reveal choices individuals make as to whether they confront or retreat in interactions with both host and native communities, and the impact of these experiences on self- and national-identity. Parental negotiations over gender and generational changes demonstrate their willingness to embrace children’s inevitable hybrid identity, and parental concerns of children’s success. In so doing, parents encourage learning the practicalities of adopted culture as a strategy not just to belong, but also establish “the Iranian immigrant” as an indispensable addition to the U.S. immigrant landscape.

Contribution of the Dissertation

Ethnographic research and life histories on Iranians in the Twin Cities advances anthropological knowledge relative to the intersection of local identities and global migration, expands the emergent body of work on the Iranian diaspora, and deconstructs monolithic portrayals of Iranian and Middle Eastern transnational identities. Academically, this investigation contributes to the literature on migration and
transnationalism through its emphasis on how and why migrants feel a persistent identification with national identity, despite centrifugal effects that threaten and thwart it. Furthermore, these centripetal forces are interconnected with a “dispersed settlement” pattern that does not threaten community cohesion. The research is applicable to multiple, diverse migrant communities in a variety of settlement situations. While Thernstrom et al. (1980) address an Iranian inability to forge a shared consciousness in the U.S., and the literature references this, it tends not to be the point of the investigation. Instead, researchers on Iranian migrants examine issues of adaptation, gender role and family structural changes, experiences of discrimination, ethnic economies, ethnic associations, and liminality, and take “the” or “a” community for granted. Attending to individuals’ perceptions of ethnic continuity and community cohesion within the context of the “dispersed settlement” pattern, the layers of “the community” manifests as an interlocking fusion of dissonances, rather than portraying a homogenous, unproblematic community. My objective is not to present the community as fractured or disassociated, but to underscore how situated responses and adaptations to local, transnational, and global pressures represent culture as a source of intense pride as well as frustration. This explains the “assimilationist” stance as a vacillating response to native-host community interactions (such as how discrimination alienates individuals from the host society, and draws them into intra-community camaraderie).

In a practical sense, this research extends the historical account of the Twin Cities’ Iranian American community. As my interviewees’ lives change, children grow, and new generations are charged with preserving and/or reconfiguring Iranian culture in
exile, their concerns, worries, hopes, and wonders about the future are documented.

“And just as feminist objectives validate and concern women centrally and fundamentally, so too it is unimaginable that a feminist methodology should not produce ideas that benefit women through the revelation of historical experience” (Geiger 1992:314). Conversations about personal histories may “change the ways their lives are interpreted, appreciated, and understood” as well as “complicate thinking on how and why the world is and is gendered in the various ways it is and why this matters” (315, emphasis in original). “Most importantly, it involves releasing multiple truths into the scholarly environment” (ibid., emphasis in original). Ethnography is a process of “forming communities and making conversations” (Gudeman and Rivera 1995:245).

Chapter Summaries

The Chapter II: Literature Review addresses how macro-processes, especially U.S.-Iranian global relations and economic development affect micro-processes, particularly familial decision-making relative to Iranian migration and settlement. In order to argue how these processes are complexly and intimately interlinked, the first field of inquiry takes into consideration Iranian historical and political literature, with a focus on the gendered dimensions of the modern Iranian nation during the Pahlavi era, which crafted Iranian masculinity and femininity in alignment with the West. Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution swung the Pahlavi pendulum from ghara'badegi (“Westoxification”) to Islamic tradition and Sharia law, and incorporated a contradictory model of gendered citizenry. Both regimes utilized the media, science, education, and law, with far-reaching
disciplinary effects, to manipulate the citizenry’s perceptions and practices of the benefits and detriments of modernity and tradition. Public sphere politics permeated private sphere lives, especially concerning gender roles, racial purity, and marriage and family.

In addressing how macro-developments are translated on a micro-level depends upon an individual’s identification with and practice of Iranian national identity, I utilize literature on “national character” studies and “essential elements of Iranianness” to establish how a proclivity to ambivalence is embedded in Iranian communication, literature, personality, and the public-private spheres. In the transnational context, the ambiguous inheritances of Iranianness translate into highly syncretic “portable ideologies” that configure “the community” into multiple micro-communities of camaraderie.

The second set of literature that I utilize to argue the differentiating processes of power and difference relate to the bearing of macro-forces of global migration on the micro-practices that construct transnational identity. Global migration is implicated in the world-system, the Western pursuit of “progress,” and economic development. While nation-states engineer a hegemonic notion of national identity, migration alters these discourses, especially through legislation and differentiation of acceptance and absorption of migrants. Historical changes (e.g., war, revolution, economic sanctions) modify the outlook on and flow of migrants, as U.S. immigration, diaspora, and transnational migration theories argue in terms of power vying, project-specific activities and associations that displace authority, reconfigure national identity, and challenge hierarchies of power.
U.S.-Iranian relations throughout the twentieth-century has transmuted Iranian immigrants from students to “diasporans,” “transnationals,” “refugees,” “exiles,” and “immigrants.” Given this historical relationship, the Literature Review addresses specific incidences of Iranian migration waves and settlement patterns in cross-cultural comparison. Here, I address how and why Iranian migration occurred relative to geopolitical macro-processes involving the U.S., Europe, Scandinavia, and Iran, and the pursuant effects on Iranian nationals. The Islamic Revolution introduced new tensions for Iranian transnationals. I examine differences and similarities related to the nascent Iranian diaspora, particularly how identity is informed by encounters with, questions of, and involvement in discrimination, prejudice, ethnic associations, economic enclaves, assimilation, pillarization, majority-minority relations, absorption, belonging, and gender change. These undercurrents sway Iranians’ identification with their adopted nations, micro-communities, individual identities, and familial life.

The final set of literature focuses on how macro-micro global dynamics influences individuals’ exploitation of the ambiguities of inherited and adopted national identities. This self-reflexive process entails reconciling dilemmas in modernity prior to constructing an individual “portable ideology” in order to establish a presence in the immigrant landscape. Within this literature, the key centrifugal and centripetal macro-processes informing public sphere identity include discourses and policies of the nation-state relative to race, ethnicity, Islam, immigrants, and refugees. Particularities of a nation-state’s history produce unique ideologies, as the “melting pot” in the U.S. and “pillarization” in Europe, which formulate Iranian communities differently. The former
case presents opportunities for Iranians to accept syncretic, adopted national identity, while preserving inherited aspects of identity. The latter case conceives Iranian immigrants as a “different,” separate pillar, which precludes total assimilation. Private sphere identity is shaped through the “traditional Iranian family,” which faces changes and challenges such as gender role reversal, the “crisis of patriarchy,” and intergenerational conflict. The literature, however, references how porosity in Iranian families incorporates change, while Iranian national identity persists through an appreciation of collectivism as an Iranian familial norm.

Chapter III: Methodology attends to how the conundrums of geographic dispersal, ethnic-religio diversity, and disintegration of institutional life in the Twin Cities have posed challenges for the study of and connection with “the Iranian community.” In this chapter, I discuss the significance of life history interviews as a method to resolve a scarcity of participant observation opportunities. Life history interviews provide the reasons Iranians migrated to and settled in the Twin Cities, especially relative to U.S.-Iranian relations and upbringing, extended family relations, married life, and education. Minnesota lends unique influences on Iranian transnational identity vis-à-vis the myth of “Minnesota Nice,” a diverse immigrant-refugee population, esteemed educational institutions, and multiple Fortune 500 companies (that actively recruited Iranians prior to the revolution).

Additionally, attention to the “problem of Iranian anthropology and anthropology of Iran” considers how unfamiliarity with the discipline informs their perceptions of themselves as a subject of study as well as the oddity of the interloping anthropologist. A
study of Iranians in the Twin Cities preceding and following the revolution, lends a historical window into the early student population, and establishment of a emerging community based on involvement in ethnic institutions. In concert with this history, I provide my informal historical involvement in the institutional life of museums, film festivals, and Persian language schools, biographies of my life history interviewees. My community immersion revealed the pattern of centripetal-centrifugal relationships relative to local Iranian institutions.

In Chapter IV: Lineage, Loyalty, Royalty, Revolution, I provide data from my life history interviews in order to demonstrate how the macro-processes of economic development have shaped micro-processes of extended family, leisure and play, decision-making relative to migration, and marriage “choices” and guidance. Respondents share how extended family instructs children in the navigation of the public sphere, while it deconstructs conflicting messages between public and private sphere ideologies and practices. Lessons taught regarding this dichotomy vacillate in order to normalize children’s upbringing vis-à-vis public sphere movement (such as the revolutionary guards policing mixed sex public interaction). Political tensions altered Iranian families, especially the post-revolutionary fissures it created along each individual’s extended patri- and matrilineages. This childhood inclines Iranians to assess multiple sides of an issue, and orients them to the possibilities within the ambiguity of historical inheritances.

Chapter V: The Ebb and Flow of Identity in Modern Waters, comprises the bulk of data that I have collected through life history interviews, my involvement in ethnic institutions (i.e., Persian language classes), and participant observation in the public
Iranian sphere (i.e., Noruz celebrations) and the private Iranian sphere (through “adoption” by an Iranian family). The chapter focuses on how both centrifugal and centripetal forces inspire a constant assessment of national and transnational identity. Centrifugal influences that impact identity include discrimination, prejudice, internal differences (e.g., ethnic diversity, class, politics, religion), and temporal-spatial distancing from Iran. Centripetal forces act in concert with centrifugal ones. As one’s the sense of Iranianness fades, individuals seek interaction with the Iranian community, which eventually discloses differences that would preclude interaction in Iran. These status differences revive memories of placement within the hierarchical structure of their inherited culture. Unwilling to “play the game,” Iranians draw back centripetally, into the private sphere, where extended family supplies the most persistent force on identity. These centrifugal-centripetal dynamics situate the Twin Cities Iranian community into multiple micro-coalitions based on historical connections from Iran, the university, religion, et cetera.

Finally, in Chapter VI: Repacking One’s Portable Ideology, relying on life history interviews, I address how Iranian transnationals seize identification with their inherited and adopted identities by exploiting both cultural repertoires for specific reasons in idiosyncratic contexts. Iranian transnationals occupy a third space where “assimilation” thrives through the translation of both their inherited and adopted cultural repertoires, lending a tendency to control representative authority, ownership, and presence in multiple spaces. Taking advantage of both identities in order to “assimilate,” Iranians neither assimilate nor retain a “pure,” “unadulterated” national identity. Rather, it is a
creative compromise among multiple identities in order to navigate the public American sphere, which allows them to *avoid* detection. In Minnesota, being “more Norwegian than Olaf himself” is a means to preserve a private Iranian self. In this way, the internal Iranian perpetuates Iranian values while exemplifying Americanisms.
The theoretical framework informing this study integrates three fields of inquiry to address how macro-processes of difference and power are reflected in and acted out through the micro-responses collected in life histories that demonstrate the priority of kinship as (1) the vehicle through which the state forms and genders nationhood, (2) the fulcrum of migration decisions, and (3) the safeguard against which one’s vanishing identity is reinvigorated. The first field of inquiry incorporates historical and political literature in order to argue the importance of the backdrop of macro-processes of modernization in Iran, and how these processes implicated in Iran’s in the global political economy vis-à-vis the West, and its consequent impact on the Islamic Revolution and pursuant micro-processes of national identity, gender, and family. Secondly, literature on migration and transnational identity attend to the intersection between macro-processes of global economic development and micro-processes of reconciling dilemmas of self in modernity, and its relationship to meanings of authenticity, hybridity, and creating a home away from Home. Finally, ethnological investigations regarding how Iranians in North America, Western Europe, and Scandinavia compare and contrast the (re)construction of transnational self and gender identity within the milieu of cultural change and continuity with respect to macro-processes (e.g., national immigration laws and international implications of the nation state), and micro-processes (e.g., choices relative to cultural identity), both of which flesh out why and how Iranians interrogate
and utilize their history and experiences to differentiate the “scattered hegemonies” of the Iranian diaspora.

**Iranian National and Gender Identity**

... just as we begin to ask ourselves whether kinship as we know it is disappearing under pressures of modern life, we are informed that many of these changes are more a question of form than indicators of a complete transformation. How long the values which determine the institution of kinship will be sustained and serve a purpose or resist change remains open to question. (Shahshahani and Tremayne 2007:vii)

The politics of reproduction are intimately intertwined with global and international processes, with implications for kinship, gender relations, class, and race, and the perpetuation of social inequalities (Stone 2005). In the capitalist global economy, for example, neopatriarchal states align nationhood with family, and appropriate intimacy and the private sphere as a tactical diversion. The state may distract the public’s attention from socio-economic problems (Moghadam 1993), exploit women’s “invisible” labor for development (Agarwal 1988; Mies 1988; Moallem 1991; Sittirak 1998), and/or execute social control (Kandiyoti 1991, 1996; Keddie 1991; Meriwether and Tucker 1999; Paidar 1995). Because kinship constitutes the socioeconomic structure of so-called “primitive societies” and indeed all societies, anthropologists have delineated its relationship to
economic, political, and social structures of difference and power since the inception of the discipline (Graburn 1971). “Kinship is conventionally defined as relationships between persons based on descent or marriage” (Stone 2005:5). Societies vary in terms of the extent to which these structures and kinship connections are interconnected. In general, kinship functions to determine rights and obligations, and it “is this aspect of kinship that gives it social force” (ibid.). Kinship also relates to ideologies of human relationships, “cultural ideas about how humans are created and the nature and meaning of their biological and moral connections with other,” which reflect differing ideas of procreation (ibid.:5-6). Germane to this study, residence patterns symbolize “the physical closeness of people related by descent has a lot to do with the strength of the ties between them” (ibid.:15). As with descent groups, solidity of group identity is stronger with localized versus dispersed residence patterns, and the factors of descent and residence patterns is what gives “the texture of life in communities” (ibid.:15-16).

Kinship studies have made a resurgence with feminist anthropology, which contextualized gender identity in the framework of kinship (di Leonardo 1991; Moore 1987; Reiter 1975; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). Rather than present an exhaustive account of anthropological approaches to kinship, what Shahshahani and Tremayne (2007) call “the well-trodden ground of classical-style anthropological studies” (v), my goal is to imbricate the structural and affective aspects of kinship within national and gendered identity in the contemporary transnational context. Fluidity, mutability, and agency organize alternative structures of affinity that persist as “underlying deeply rooted values and practices, albeit disguised in varying degrees” (ibid.). Relatives and kin
groups persist as “the prime bearers and decision-makers in supporting and preserving the family and its values,” and explain how migration has stretched and fortified family networks globally (ibid.). Given the changing nature of kinship, residence, and reproduction within this context, the approach to describe kinship as process examines relations “as processural, as established or maintained over time through various actions” (Stone 2005:21).

While Western scholars increasingly compare particularities of Western and Muslim women’s lives (Sherif-Trask 2006:234), practice theory (Bourdieu 1984; Ortner 1984) stresses how individual agents restructure or destabilize institutions, rather than being incapacitated by them. The embodiment (habitus) of love in the Middle East entwines matrimonial strategies and the social uses of kinship construct marriage as a matrix of tactics people master on a practical level; “a mastery acquired by experience of the game, and one which works outside conscious control and discourse” (Bourdieu 1990:61), which erect the pillars of economic, political, and cultural institutions (Bates and Rassam 2000; Eickelman 2002; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Sherif-Trask 2006). Love is “a form of amor fati”; that is, “to love is always to some extent to love in someone else another way of fulfilling one’s own social destiny” (Bourdieu 1990:71).

Bourdieu’s (1990) “patterns of meaning” show how “patterns of symbolic representations are generated in the everyday world of social experience, how they shape social practice, and how they are in turn modified by it” (215). Daily experiences and meanings reveal patterned reactions to and control of symbolic representations that are observable in behavior (ibid.:218). Marriage as:
habitus, as society written into the body, into the biological individual, enables the
infinite number of acts of the game—written into the game as possibilities and
objective demands—to be produced; the constraints and demands of the game,
although they are not restricted to a code of rules, impose themselves on those
people—and those people alone—who, because they have a feel for the game, a
feel, that is, for the immanent necessity of the game, are prepared to perceive
them and carry them out. (ibid.:63)

“The social game is regulated, it is the locus of certain regularities”; actions are
obedience to regularities (ibid.:64). “Matrimonial strategies are often the outcome of
power relationships within the domestic group and these relationships can be understood
only by appealing to the history of this group and in particular to the history of previous
marriages” (ibid.:69). This creates “gendered geographies of power,” which situate
agents within “power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic,
geographic, [and] kinship” factors (Pessar and Mahler 2001:6). These structures are
differentially negotiated based on personality (e.g., initiative) and cognition (e.g.,
imagination) (ibid.8).

In the Middle East, women are “symbols and repositories of religious, national,
and cultural identity,” and crucial to the nation-state’s modernization of tradition
(Eickelman 2002). The restoration of “traditional Islamic” order is predicated on a
“rhetoric around the ‘appropriate’ place and roles of women,” who are envisioned as “the
repository of ‘traditional’ values” (Sherif-Trask 2006:243). Circulated via media and
mosque, women contribute as caretakers and raise a generation of modest, obedient, and deferent Muslims, which is lauded as “the most fundamental task in society” (ibid.).

The practice theory approach situates the vantage point in order to examine patterns of meaning as symbolic reactions to economic and political macro-processes, and locate women’s “invisibility” and “secondary status” within cultural practices and structural determinants (Nashat and Tucker 1999). Inequalities, disempowerment, and domination are minimized by “the concrete actions of social agents [to] become the point through which symbolic and material-economic inequalities influence each other” (Knauft 1996:107). Positioning female agents at the nexus of structure-agency and symbolic-material forces are uncovered in how women employ a rational choice model to maximize the well-being of the family (Nashat 1999). The “patriarchal bargain” allows women to maneuver through societal constraints (Kandiyoti 1991). Women may engage in “gender performances” to unearth alliances, gather information, and influence political decisions (Brettell and DeBerjoeois 2004; Friedl 1991; Meriwether and Tucker 1999). By subtly interrogating and changing Islamic gender rules within female-dominated spheres, women demonstrate “accommodating resistances” (Heglund 1999; Johnson-Odim and Strobel 1999). In attempts to democratize civic spaces (Badran 2005; Moghadam and Sadiqi 2006), women’s voices are more likely to be heard.

In order to present “typologies” of Iranian, Muslim, and Middle Eastern families that defy claims of a uniform experience, theories should situate micro-processes (e.g., individual’s social location, a family’s idiosyncratic situation, household dynamics) within macro-environments (e.g., socioeconomics, history, geography, colonization,
integration in the global economy) (Sherif-Trask 2006:233-234). Ignoring the specificities implicated in macro-structural environments perpetuates presumptions of “family as the agent of women’s suppression,” women as devalued prisoners of the private-domestic sphere who are exempt from the public sphere participation (Rosaldo 1974), and women as exotic and passive (Johnson-Odim and Strobel 1999; Moallem 1991).

Theorizing about Middle Eastern families is a relatively unexplored topic, perpetuating images of a monolithic structure: the male-dominated-breadwinner-authority and female-submissive-homemaker model (Sherif-Trask 2006:231-232). Critiques of this model point to phenomena that all societies share: Western families can be “traditional”; globalization and urbanization have introduced “women in the labor force, rising divorce rates, and technology”; and capitalism modernizes Muslim families by prioritizing individualism to family control (ibid.:233). Attributing truths too quickly, theories on the family are deficient and inapplicable in a cross-cultural analysis (Smith 2006:20).

Tradition, for the Love of Nation: Modernization, for Global Relations

The Iranian concept of gharbzadegi ... translated as ‘Westoxication,’ ‘Westitis,’ ‘Euromania,’ and ‘Occidentosis,’ ... denotes an illness, a virus, a ‘plague from the West,’ a phenomenon of excessive Westernization that renders members of the community (usually those with a Western education) alienated
from their own culture. Through those members who are struck by the West, imperialism can penetrate the society and wreak havoc on the culture. It is believed that those members of the community most vulnerable to gharbzadegi are women. (Moghadam, 1993, p. 141)

Whereas before the revolution the state dictated everything related to politics and made Iranians feel like incomplete second-class Europeans, this regime crossed the boundaries into our innermost private spheres, setting laws and seeking to control (often by force) how we dress, eat, drink, engage in sexual behavior, think, and express ourselves. (Mozaffari, 2005, p. xxi)

Modernity has been, and continues to be a central epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical problematic of contemporary Iranian literature (and history). (Milani, 1992, p. 31)

As the epigraphs (above) express, the polarities of tradition and modernity have been central to Iran’s political, economic, and social history, and therefore establish the
framework of this chapter. Politically, the Pahlavi dynasties pushed modernization in Iran, which directly enmeshed Iran within the “global field” by adopting a Western notion of nation and Enlightenment ideals. Economically, the endeavor to modernize attributed progress to a Western development paradigm, involving Iran in the global political economy. Socially, citizenry contributed to Iran’s transition from a “backward” nation to one led by Western-educated “captains of industry” in the hope to alter Iran’s global image. History played out differently. The Islamic Revolution dramatically slowed Iran’s global progress, although migration kept apace in differing degrees. A transnational flow feeds diasporic Iranian communities, contributing to an amorphously defined structure and meaning of the transnational Iranian family, community, and self- and national identity.

Throughout the twentieth century, the swinging pendulum from gharbzadegi to tradition has informed Iran’s policies and fashioned its citizens. National identity became entangled in men’s and women’s roles and statuses within the institutions of family, marriage, and kinship. In the post-revolutionary period, Iran’s ideological gender shift centered on the Islamic Iranian family and “the woman question,” because women were viewed as the “most vulnerable to gharbzadegi” (Moghadam 1993). The gendered discourse that permeated modern Iranian nationhood heeded the need to protect Iran’s purity from “penetration” (i.e., foreign influence, Westernization), which was capable of wreaking havoc on culture (Mozaffari 2005:xxi). The media and literature translated citizen’s loyalty as a metaphorical tale of love: loyalty to the nation was assured through traditional, “arranged” marriage (i.e., attachment to nation) (Najmabadi 2005).
Compulsory education offered a concrete policy by which to implement Reza Shah’s modernization overhaul and thereby solidify this “love” (Schayegh 2009:30). After World War II, the social sciences emerged as a vehicle “for the scientific-intellectual discourse about modernization” (ibid.:14), and steered state agencies, policies, and research to achieve “high authoritarian modernism” (ibid.:15). Scientific analysis and sociocultural critique became “blurred genres: two interrelated ways of coming to terms with a rapidly changing society” (ibid.:16). Warning against the threat to Iranian identity, those educated about Iran’s supposed “backwardness, identity, and nationalism” (Mozaffari 2005:xvi-xvii) led a nativist writer’s movement in order to construct “a separate, self-sufficient ‘Iranian’ tradition that is ‘great’, ‘authentic’, and ‘old’” (Milani 1992:30).

A critical vehicle to transform the modern Iranian nation was literature, especially novels, advice booksxvi, and visual materials. The “modern” nation could only progress through the “hetero-socialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life” (ibid.:3)xvii in order to eradicate the discourse of the “backward” Qajar court, which attributed men’s honor (nāmas) and love of homeland to homoerotism (Najmabadi 2005:1)xviii. This literature associated love of country with European ideals; romantic, heterosexual love and morality depended upon male’s defense of female’s vulnerability to “alien designs, intrusions, and penetration” (ibid.:6-7). In the guise of “political and cultural critique,” metaphoric tales of tragic love (ibid.:156) warned of interludes with the “young girl” (i.e., constitutional reform) and exploitation by an opportunistic urbanite
(i.e., newly introduced constitutional ideals), who is victimized by the “mischievous Europeanized elite” (ibid.:369).

The “disciplinary effects” of such moral literature on a generation of Iranians “cannot be overestimated,” according to Najmabadi (2005:369). For example, a novel about traditional marriages versus doomed-to-fail love marriages\textsuperscript{xix} (\textit{The Morning After}) (ibid.:367), embroiled Iranians in a time-honored debate. Modernists pushed love marriage as “a central argument of modernity” (ibid.). Despite tragic endings\textsuperscript{xx}, these politico-cultural tales emphasized happiness, the end of autocracy, educational and legal reform, and gender and sexuality change (ibid.:368)\textsuperscript{xxi}. “How to” publications (\textit{Danesh, Iranshahr, ‘Alam-e Nesvan, Setareh-e Iran, Mehregan}) presented advice about “male guardianship and modern Iranian womanhood,” including issues regarding gender roles, cross-cultural meanings of womanhood; “scientific” writings weaving concepts of purity, nationalism, race, and independence relative to intermarriage; family relations; the ideal man; and companionate marriage (Amin 2002:117-134).

The disciplinary effects of these publications reverberate into contemporary marriages in Iran\textsuperscript{xxii}, where couples “construct gender and negotiate power within their culture, political structure, and Islamic values” (Moghadam et al. 2009:41)\textsuperscript{xxiii}. Maintaining peace to achieve equality was key rested upon the Islamic tenets of fairness and justice (ibid.:45). Women’s freedom of expression ensured contentment, although their role as peacemakers is thwarted by male dominance and power (ibid.:45-46). Respect, justice, mutuality, and valuing women’s work in the family reflected “a genuine valuing of family in the culture” (ibid.:51)\textsuperscript{xxiv}. 


The Iranian state infused gender discourse in its macro-structural thrust to modernize and transform its global image of “backwardness” (Mozaffari 2005; Sanasarian 2000). Love of nation, as metaphorical love of a woman, required protecting “her” wholesomeness from penetration by the foreign, Western Other. Woman’s “nature” became the currency of control, and man’s “nature” the guardian of her actions (Amin 2002; Schayegh 2006, 2009). Buttressed by a popular scientific discourse, informed by Social Darwinism, and disseminated in the educational curriculum (Amanat 1993; Kashani-Sabet 1999), modern Iranianness hinged upon protecting “Persian purity” through a racialized, Aryan identity (Asgharzadeh 2007; Vaziri 1993). For Iran’s elite at the helm of the modernization project, improving women’s status through constitutional amendments and parliamentary changes was a primary enterprise (Afary 1992; Amin 2002; Kashani-Sabet 1999; Milani 1992; Mozaffari 2005; Vaziri 1993).

Post-Revolutionary Reinvigoration of Tradition

The Shah’s White Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution introduced extensive social change that reengineered national identity and citizenry discourses through emancipation and gender equality, in the case of the former, reinvigoration of patriarchy, and in the later case (Moghadam 1999). Through Shari’a, post-revolutionary Iran inculcated an Islamic love of nation that dramatically altered gender roles, practices, and institutions (De Groot 1996). Although family and marriage became politicized conduits to eradicate society’s ills and rescue the nation state from the ills of “Westoxification” (Afshar 1998; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Esfandiari 1997;

Women, as unofficial, legal scholars, challenged the courts, which purported Shari’a law to be clear cut (Afshar 1998; Mir-Hosseini 1999). In sex-segregated settings, women empower themselves through subtle protest, such as telling cynical jokes about hegemonic clerics are protected in private (Heglund 1999). Finally, women declare themselves as anti-Western revolutionaries by donning the veil (Milani 1992). Despite initial constraints and setbacks of the revolution, Iranian women teased out hidden prospects to educate and express themselves (Amin 2002; Schayegh 2006).

Because family is the basic vehicle to mobilize and transform nationalism (Meriwether and Tucker 1999), Iranian women were especially vulnerable to macro-structural policies following the revolution. Through a “tragic intensity of coercion” in the private sphere (Shahidian 2002:263), the revival of patriarchy hinged upon the supposed erosion of religious values and familial roles, constructing family as sacred property and an economic unit (ibid.:75-76), and moving from secularism and science. The father’s and husband’s gender identity ensures the family’s well being (Mahdi 1999:61), while the mother’s and wife’s social identity is measured by her family’s “emotional, social, occupational, and spiritual goals” (62-64).

Islam permeated every aspect of life in the Islamic Republic, becoming the cultural framework informing ethics and norms. “Islam, both as a worldview and a basis for legislation, is … the Iranian way of thinking” (Ahmadi 2003:687). The implementation of Shari’a law had consequences in realms of public and private life, including education, civil rights, “morals police,” the economic repercussions of war on women and employment, political mobilization, traditional roles of the housewife and mother, and familial role reversal (Afshar 1998; Esfandiari 1997; Moghadam 1993:91). While shocking to middle- and upper-class women (who felt the changes more intensely), Islamist and secular feminist scholars address women’s empowerment with a focus on resistance strategies and reinterpretations of Islamic law (Afshar 1998; Hegland 1999; Mir-Hosseini 1999; Paidar 1996).

Conspicuous defiance of post-revolutionary policies jeopardizes women’s “strong connections to community, family, and religion” (Hegland 1999:187). Given this,
women employ encourages “accommodating resistances” (ibid.:178), such as attending
sex-segregated, public Islamic gatherings (ibid.:189-190), telling anticlerical jokes,
expressing cynicism (ibid.:184), and interpreting religious tradition personally
(ibid.:185). Problematic for the clerics and rulers, women found the “embedded
contradictions” in the interpretations of Islam and Shari’a empowering (Mir-Hosseini
1999:xiv). Ambivalence allowed women “to launch their women-centered interpretation
of appropriate gender roles” (Hoodfar 1994:11) and maneuver the “confines of the
Islamic system” (Moghadam 1993:200). The “gendered battleground between the forces
of traditionalism and modernism in Islam” played out in the interpretations of Qomi
cleric’s and Tehrani women’s interpretations of Shari’a (ibid.:4). For example, pro-
natalist policies during the Iran-Iraq War promoted having “babies for the nation”
(Johnson-Odim and Strobel 1999:xl), but when the population exploded, an amended
policy prioritized birth control and family planning. Despite the belief “that Islamist
ideology is the antithesis of modernity,” it became malleable “in response to political and
economic realities” (Hoodfar 1994:11).

Revolutionary authorities seized upon marriage as an instrument for “eradicating
social ills” (Hoodfar 1994:15), and overturning marriage reforms implemented during
Pahlavi rule. Asserting “success over the Pahlavi modernist ideology,” the
revolutionary authorities annulled the family code, allowed polygamy, lowered the legal
age of marriage to nine years old (ibid.), and legalized mut’a (colloquial for sigheh)
marriage (Haeri 1986; 1994), which allows a man to marry a woman “temporarily.”
While Islam recognizes that sexuality serves a human need, it causes social disruption,
and thereby requires constraint within “certain religiously approved boundaries” (ibid.:124). *Sigheh* permits movement through a highly sex-segregated society in that it illuminates the “ambivalences and ambiguities in the social structure … [by pledging] allegiance to the law, believed to be divinely inspired and unchanging, while improvising on its contents” (ibid.:148). Afshar’s (1998) findings contradict the class attitudinal differences related to *sigheh*; i.e., Westernized Iranian women chose *sigheh* to legalize sexual relations with lovers and safeguard against arrest (140).

Traditional gender implications in the transnational context manifest through marriage, wherein despite the prevalence of meeting one’s spouse occurs outside of traditional arrangements (e.g., at the university, conferences), social pressure and extended families still indicate “shared assumptions concerning the nature of the social order” (Eickelman 2002:158) and “underlying notions of personal identity and conceptions of social self” (ibid.:163). The “pressure points” of Iranian marriage, according to Kousha (2002), include traditional values of parental approval, blessings, and surveillance as well as modern preferences, such as choice in spouse. *Khastegari*, the initial stage of marriage, entails formal introductions (Hanassab 1993; Kousha 2002; Milani 1983). *Khastegari* functions “to protect male authority” and complete a “commercial transaction” (Hanassab 1993:15-16). A background inquiry occurs, wherein the future groom’s family “studies” the bride’s family, judging their “status, honor, physical appearance, and personality traits” (Hanassab 1993:19), although this is more common among traditional, working-class people (Kousha 2002:120). The two families meet in order to seek information on family background, economic standing and
job prospects of the future husband, place of residence, et cetera (Kousha 2002:236). Upper- and middle-class Iranians are ambivalent about arranged marriage, preferring personal mate choice and parental consent (Hanassab 1993:4). Mate “criteria are still generated by the community and by parents,” but spousal selection is increasingly based on nationality, class, and religion (ibid.:5). Modern families allow the prospective couple to meet, the man to be present, and the woman to reject a potential suitor (ibid.:20). Because parents guarantee emotional and financial support, their sanction of a love marriage is critical (Kousha 2002:119). Pointedly, post-revolutionary public sphere politics forbade interaction between non-related males and females, granting parents a bigger role “in the game of life and marriage for their children” (Kousha 2002:135).

Ambivalent Inheritances: The Essential Elements of Iranianness

The high value which is put on integrity and sincerity in Iran results in a profound dilemma, for sincerity escapes that effort at virtue in which one practices what one does not feel and thus gets on with life. Courage, forbearance, generosity—most virtues can coexist with ambivalence, but, as Kay Ka’us says, in his description of the darvish, “The essence of truth (rasti) is the negation of ambivalence (dawganagi).” The Iranian doubts the practicability of his own ideals, while at the same time feeling they are deeply present within him, so that he focuses on those areas
where sincerity may be practiced—in uncontrollable emotion and among his intimate family and friends—and yet even here he may be troubled by doubt. ... But in Iran, as throughout the developing world, Western education brings new dimensions of ambiguity and self-consciousness, and whole new roles for pretension and hypocrisy. Within traditional Iranian society, the dilemma we have been describing is resolved in the preservation of appropriate behavior within the circle of intimacy, and the projection of doubt about the intentions of those outside that circle. Thus, where there is a continuing social network, shared courtesy allows the individual to approximate some of the virtues of the perfect man, Hazrat-i ‘Ali. (Bateson et al., 1977, 273, original diacritics not reflected)

What I have termed the “assimilationist” Iranian merges with what Bateson et al. (1977) identify as an ambivalent dilemma between purity of intention (integrity, sincerity) among intimates and pretense of practice among strangers. The modern, Western-educated individual self-consciously demonstrates “new roles of pretension and hypocrisy,” whereas traditional behavior demands shared courtesy and presentation of “the virtues of the perfect man.” Maintaining involvement within “a continuing social network” (i.e., comprised of other Iranians), requires “the preservation of appropriate
behavior within the circle of intimacy, and the projection of doubt about the intentions of those outside that circle.” The ongoing interaction between insiders and outsiders and private and public proscribe the dilemma of practicing sincerity and integrity. In order to avoid the curse of doubt, the intimate circle tightens its control, while the external circle reserves mechanical emotion. The public sphere, where “one practices what does not feel and thus gets on with life,” girds the “assimilationist” veneer, a process that is calculated and therefore reminds individuals through “the projection of doubt about the intentions of those outside that [intimate] circle” (ibid.).

Bateson et al. (1977) emphasize the diversity of experiences, interconnections, and complementary (rather than differentiating) nature between societal themes and an individual’s idiosyncratic personality (261). For example, safayi batin engages “integrity and simplicity of action and motivation,” and lauds heroism and spirituality (ibid.:263).xv This contrasts with “the Persian tendency to expect the worst from unfamiliar persons and to assume the worst about those who have achieved wealth or status” (ibid.:262). Badbini (pessimism, cynicism) is applied to strangers (although familiarity may reverse this) (ibid.:262). Hazrat-i ‘Ali, the first Imam of Shi’ism, embodies the characteristics of the perfect, virtuous man (e.g., chivalrous and detached from the material world) (ibid.:263). Advancement and security are practiced through calculation, manipulation, and dissimulation, whereby zahir (exterior) conforms to batin (interior) to conceal integrity and attend to the practicalities of a situation (e.g., refraining from corruption while commenting on an associate who does) (ibid.:269).
In the post-revolutionary period, the shape of a modern sensibility is the pursuit of integrity as learned through how-to manuals in order to reinvent difference (Adelkhah 2000:2). From revolutionary zeal to reason, Iran crafted a vibrant, modern Islamic model (ibid.:xi)\textsuperscript{xxxvi} by institutionalizing Islam in concert with a modern lifestyle, which required an ethos to circumvent political and religious determinism (ibid.:xiv). The “man of integrity” (javânmand) ethos is inclined to “permanent improvisation” through a continuous assessment of public visibility and private respectability (ibid.:4). The javânmand ethos carves out public space in which personality and self are differentiated and mediated through science, writing, and the pursuit of knowledge. For example, the housewife fulfills her ejtemâ’i (social duty) by honing her cooking skills, and thereby strengthens her family, marriage, and intellectual and psychological well-being (ibid.:150). In this way, “micro-practices of self-reflexivity, on the individual level, are bringing in general transformations in Iranian society” (ibid.:156). Modern Iranian families are “nuclearizing,” and transforming traditional, intimate links (khodi) of family through the individualization of space (e.g., Western-style dining versus open kitchens) (ibid.:157). Women control their body and intellect by choosing resources and circumstances that suit their lifestyles (e.g., the aerobic instructor mom) (ibid.:162). Within the individualization of space, biopolitics are engaged competitively, which fortifies the public sphere through reason (ibid.:172-173).

Claims to a “national character” is not without its controversy (Banuazizi 1977:212). “National character” refers to behaviors that endure as a “constellation of psychological predispositions, motives, and values of members of a society (nation),” and
evolve through shared history, culture, and institutionalized patterns (ibid.:237). But Banuazizi critiques these representations as biased and lacking comparative data xxxvii. Rather, a “modal personality” focusing on a constellation of traits may be more productive (ibid.:239). However, Iran’s regional, linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity makes it “unlikely that a single psychological profile with universal applicability to all Persians could be constructed” (ibid.:238). Because national character studies over-generalize (Brown and Itzkowitz 1977:158), character should be construed through common experience, heritage, and destiny (ibid.:162).

While it may not be a “national character,” scholars allude to the prevalence of an inclination to ambiguity as a marker of Iranianness, in that they display a: “profound internal inconsistency” (Moghadam 1993), “love of ambiguity” (Mottahedeh 1985), “the complexities and paradoxes of Iranian cultural identity” (epitomized in the Shahnameh) (Hillmann 1990:13-15), elusiveness (Sciolino 2000), a “very Persian allegorical way of looking at an unexplainable world” (Majd 2008:18), and “the habit of living in ambiguity” (Bateson et al. 1977:271).

Western nations espouse a democratic ideal that paradoxically perpetuates a hegemonic, homogeneous notion of nation in which difference and “an active space for the minority” are disavowed (Ghorashi et al. 2009:8). “A democratic structure does not amount to much without a democratic culture, and a democratic culture is only feasible if it takes not the I but the other as its starting-point” (ibid.). The highly individualized ontology in late modernity, whereby the “‘public’ becomes colonized by the ‘private’,” inhibits empathy with the Other. Democratic discourse forefronts “societal
individualization,” which essentializes “difference on a group basis,” and ignores the tension that erupts in the encounter with difference (ibid:9). An “ontology of discordance” confronts the “violence in normalization” (Connolly 1987:5). The rationality and morality of democratic freedom presupposes an imposition to “make life more free”; that is, a “willed convention of tradition unreflectively followed or behavior disconnected from will” (ibid.). The process of balancing the opposition between the individual and community in the democratic state introduces ambiguity in participatory democracy (ibid.:4), and marginalizes “new sectors of the population or newly defined sectors of the self” (ibid.:9). The “precepts of rationality, morality, or self-realization” represent the social ontology of modern life, but as artificial, arbitrary concepts, they shroud “ambiguities inside democratic life” (ibid.). Connolly defines “‘social ontology’ … [as] a set of fundamental understandings about the relations of humans to themselves, to others, and to the world” (ibid.:9). Vigilance against obstructionists of “the violence in normalization,” who equate normalization with harmony, is necessary to “treat normalization as an ambiguous good to be qualified, countered, and politicized” (ibid.:16).

Ambiguity and contradiction incline individuals to simultaneity, which symbolic systems of classification are designed to avoid (Rapport and Overing 2007:93). Classification bans incoherent, arbitrary “misfits” (i.e., “dirt”) that pollute or disfigure order within the system (ibid.:94). Gluckman’s synthesis of Durkheim and Mauss with Marx underscores ambivalence in social systems as “fields of tension, cooperation and struggle” (ibid.:95) that manifest at the nexus of competing principles of social-structural
organizations, institutions, and individuals. Classificatory schema are replete with contradiction that are “not either/or but both/and” (ibid.:96). Reflexive anthropology proposes “artistic models and aesthetic evaluations (and not scientific assessments and rational judgments)” as tools to understand society and culture (ibid.:98). “In short, an appreciation of contradiction gives onto a modeling of human social life not as something coherent, but rather as a muddling through” (ibid.:100). This demands “methodological eclecticism” and a conversation “between different systems of sense-making, different universes of discourse” in which the researcher becomes “epistemologically ‘opportunistic’” (Rapport 1997:279-280).

Rapport’s study of Jewish immigrants in Israel provides an example of how a “heterodox (‘reflexive’) view” promotes the mythical nature of contradiction as a both/and “cognitive reality behind, as well as the creative source of, the everyday social reality of symbolic classifications of either/or” (654). Following Nietzsche’s appreciation of artistry as a critical locus of contradiction, Rapport (1997) emphasizes the “mythical and ubiquitous” in “the human symbolic division of the world” (653). Jewish immigrants in Israel “become Israeli” by emphasizing their “‘traditional’ ethnicity (German, Moroccan, Russian, American),” which requires “a remembrance and distillation of distinctive and distant diasporic pasts” (ibid.:661). One informant’s cognitive confrontation with the paradox of becoming more American in order to become Israeli (ibid.:662) transpired cultural identity into an identification with humankind (i.e., she did not “feel Jewish any more, just human,” although her Jewishness “is something in her”) (ibid.:663). Rapport’s informant’s contradictory constructions highlight “the
potentiality, the fecundity, the relief and the liberation accruing to her through cognitive practice” (ibid.:666), and demonstrate “how the mythic is lived in the present” (ibid.:670). The mythical present is construed as “an appreciation of how, simultaneously, individuals may live in a diversity of constructed world-views and identities, how their contradictory cognitions give onto a plurality of social worlds at any one time” (ibid.:671).

Banuazizi presents four “essential elements” of Iranian national identity that underscore this propensity toward ambivalence and paradox:

First is Iran’s “pre-Islamic legacy,” which spans more than a millennium from the Achaemenians to the Sasanian dynasty, the latter being defeated by the invading Arab armies. Second is Islam and Shi’ism in particular as the dominant religion for over 90 percent of Iranians and its “all-encompassing impact on every facet of Iranian culture and thought.” Third is a common bond, “fictive or real,” which has historically brought various ethnic groups under one social and cultural umbrella in their struggle to survive and cope with various despotic rulers and invading armies. The final element is the “Persian language” or Farsi which despite its dominating power over other ethnic tongues in Iran has nonetheless served as a “national language” in Iran. (Banuazizi cited in Chaichian 1997:613-614)

Transnationally, the “essential elements” are magnified or muted in various ways, and tapped contextually. These essential elements, therefore, have a significant impact on the
centripetal and centrifugal forces that intersect with an individual’s identification with Iranian national identity.

Iran’s pre-Islamic legacy

For many Iranians in exile, Iran’s pre-Islamic legacy is amplified and displaces Shi’ism. While some respondents identified Shi’a Islam, individuals reify certain foci, and thereby construct a highly personalized philosophy of their Iranian self (e.g., fasting during Ramadan but imbibing wine throughout the year). Noruz remains the “anchor” holiday in the Iranian transnational calendar.

During Pahlavi reign (1925-1979), the pre-Islamic legacy became infused in classroom curricula through Persian language and literature of Iran’s ancient heritage (Amanat 1993:13). The emphasis on secular and nationalist culture was at attempt to modernize Iranian nationalism through Persian symbols, and their association with Zoroastrianism and Persian kingdoms (Sansarian 2000:49). Territorial unity and closeness of experience was fostered through hubb-i vatan (love of homeland) in order to improve Iran’s global reputation (Kashani-Sabet 1999:203) (late nineteenth-early twentieth-centuries) considered a nation of lawless, corrupt citizens led by “lazy and dishonest” rulers (Thompson 1930:205).

Social reforms functioned to differentiate Iranians from Arabs, who were “blamed for imposing their religion on the ‘pure Persian race’, [and] destroying its superior culture” (Amanat 1993:12). “Arabism” instilled a pervasive acculturative force, and it incites disdain of Arabs among Iranians (Kelley 1993:262). Ideas of Iranian racial purity
permeated the school curriculum. For example, Social Darwinist theory in third-grade textbooks, presents the white race (including Iranians) as the pinnacle of civilization (Kashani-Sabet 1999:199). Science became the guiding framework during the reforms, and “[r]acial stereotypes were considered scientific ‘facts’.” Iranian nationalism had a “grossly biased racial tinge. Iran, the territory that accommodated the chosen race, became a privileged outpost for its blessed ‘white’ citizens. Only a pure race could populate the pristine soil of Iran, and Iranians were ‘scientifically’ shown to be that race” (ibid.).

Iran’s Shia sensibility

Although the Islamic Revolution initially appeared as a beacon of redemption from the oppression and paranoia that defined the twentieth century, its appeal faded as quickly as the sun set on the Shah’s reign. For Iranians identified by the Islamic authorities as religious or political dissidents, the revolution symbolized “uprootedness” from their treasured memories and homeland. Juxtaposed to the other “essential elements of Iranianness,” Shi’ism is a contradictory complement for Iranian transnationals, who ignore, vigorously rebuff or tweak Islam as a marker of identity. Self-identified, unaffiliated Muslims may avoid discussing religion publicly, while identifying with certain stories in the Qur’an (e.g., Jesus as a symbol of purity). Mahdi (1998) notes that the revolution “has made many Iranians hostile, suspicious, or indifferent toward religion” (88). In the absence of the authoritative structure provided by a religious institution, parents introduce secular identity and “culture more than religion in their
children’s socialization” (ibid.). In exile, Islam transpires into a civil religion whereby cultural (not theological) tenets are practiced (Chaichian 1997:619).

Shi’ism intersects with the “‘fictive or real’ common bond” of Iranianness through a “David and Goliath type” narrative, which Majd (2008) argues represents the Shi’a worldview; it is “suited to Persian sensibilities, formed as they have been by centuries of perceived injustices to their nation and to themselves” (251). The principle of justice in a tyrannical world undergirds the reenactment of historical events (ibid.:251-252). The “Shia sensibility” informs both Shi’a and non-Shi’a Iranians (ibid.:252), particularly through tragedy and grief (Good et al. 1985:387). “Tragedy, injustice, and martyrdom are central to Iranian political philosophy and historical experience”; dysphoria is regarded “as a normal, even valued, affect,” and is symbolically charged and observable in gatherings, poetry, and sermons that recount Hossein’s martyrdom (ibid.:384). During Moharram, the reenactment of the tragedy at Kerbala in the ta’aziyehxliii, a passion play commemorating the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet (the Third Imam Hossein) at the hands of the Ummayid Caliphate, exhibits this sensibility ideally through the ritualistic display of emotion (Good et al. 1985; Lotfalian 1996; Tamadonfar 1994). Symbolizing Iran’s political position as a minority in the Islamic world, the ritual draws upon “two paradoxical orientations: one activism and rebellion, and the other quietism and submission to authority” (Tamadonfar 1994:25).

Post-revolutionary performances have transformed from symbolic action and remembrance to political action and martyrdom. The expectation that ta’aziyeh participants emote sorrow and suffering through self-flagellation (Lotfalian 1996:44-45)
lends credence to Durkheim’s (1965) position that emotion ritually reintegrates the social order through shared mental states, close relations, and comfort (Good et al. 1985:447). An “appreciation for the tragic” (ibid.:388-389), exemplified by sadness, loss, melancholy, and depression, illuminates Iranian personhood and self, which are expressed “in religion, romance and passion, and in interpretations of history and social reality” (ibid.:385).

Iranian transnationals feel that “Moharram has been hideously distorted. The traditional Shi’ite interpretation of grief as a religious emotion and of society and history as the stage for forces of justice and unrighteousness is thus challenged to the core, leaving the exiles ambivalent about their religious heritage” (Good et al. 1985:388).

Without religion as the central value system of moral fortitude and solace, alternative sites develop for emotive expression that include: the media (Naficy 1993); memoirs, autobiographies, novels, and anthologies of Iranian writers and poets in translation; performance and museum exhibits, and film. Exilic Iranian literature developed into a source of expression for “Iranian students, intellectuals, and immigrants as they struggled to criticize the repression of their society and to express the conflicts between their cultural identity and their attraction to the West” (Good et al. 1985:390).

Iran’s “fictive or real” common bond
The “fictive or real’ common bond” forged throughout history is infused with ambiguity on multiple levels. The “common bond,” an amorphous, socio-cultural determinant around an enemy (i.e., despot, invader), has fostered a penchant for an assimilationist
strategy of survival (Chaichian 1997; Del Giudice). Persian became the *lingua franca* through the Pahlavi’s pursuit of modernization (i.e., via elite literature, education, etc.), effectively silencing Iran’s ethnic languages (Asgharzadeh 2007). Asgharzadeh’s critical examination of the modern Iranian nation, and its formative ideology around Persian ethnicity and language, and Orientalist and Aryanist discourses (2), presents language as central to “producing and maintaining the racist order in Iran” (ibid.:6)xliv. Retelling Iranian history through the Persians has subjugated “non-Aryan” groups, perpetuated conventional views of Iran’s history, and circumvented the articulation of Iran’s “multinational, multicultural, and multilingual character” (ibid.:2). Persians drew upon European discourse from the eighteenth- to twentieth-century to consolidate their hegemony, and informed Western historical writings about Persia through an excavation and reinterpretation from multiple sources: the Avesta, the Shahnameh, the Old Testament, and Herodotus’s *Histories*; Aryan, Aria, and ancient symbols (e.g., swastika); historical accounts of the “coercive role” of Iranian nation-state (since 1925) to reinforce the ideology, and strengthen its power over minorities; and literature to inculcate Persian as the “superior” language (ibid.:4-6). Language diversity is the number one marker of distinctiveness and difference in Iran (and is complicated by religious differences) (ibid.:14)xlvi. However, even today, the Islamic Republic emphasizes Shi’ism and Persian “as the two tenets of Iranians’ national identity,” which Asgharzadeh warns erodes recognition of Iran’s diversity (ibid.:13).

Although Persians constitute the majority ethnic group in Iran (Jones 1984), not all Iranians are Persian (i.e., ethnic groups include Afghan, Arab, Azerbaijani, Bakhtiari,
Baluchi, Kurd, Turkoman, Qashqa’i, etc.), and may not speak Persian as their mother tongue. Ethnicity in Iran associates with ethnic or “tribal” (e.g., Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Bakhtiaris, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomans, Qashqa-is) and religious differences (e.g., Armenians, Assyrians, Bahá’ís, Jews, Zoroastrians). For example, Mashadi Jews are named by location (i.e., Jews of Mashad) (Bozorgmehr 1998-17-18). Armenians have “neither Persian as a native language nor the core Islamic element of Persian culture” (Hillmann 1984:5). In the diaspora, internal ethnicity or “ethnic groups within an immigrant group” (Bozorgmehr 1998:17) fractures somewhat. For example, options to affiliate with American and Iranian co-religionists draw Bahá’í Iranians away from non-Bahá’í Iranians, but “ecumenical” Iranian groups (have and) do exist. However, Bozorgmehr notes that co-religionists tend to associate with each other rather than create secular, civil ties (ibid.:18).

Iran’s language: Persian, literature, and the principle of communication
Ambiguity is embedded in a “principle of communication” that requires indirectness; an intentional strategy to interpret meaning in a way that remains open for alternative meanings that arise in different contexts (Beeman 1986:24). Likening the principle to Humpty Dumpty in Alice’s looking glass, Iranians make “words mean exactly what they want them to mean” (ibid.:3). Plasticity lends prospects for individual practice and interpretation (Eickelman and Piscatori 2002), and directs strategies in one’s favor (Bateson et al. 1977; Beeman 1986; Good and Del-Vecchio Good 1985; Naficy 1993). This principle guides external relations, marked by the paradoxical tendency to accept
“realism (vaqi’bini), calculation (hisabgari), shrewdness (zirangi) as necessities in a complex social system, and yet being drawn at the same time to safā-yi batin” (Bateson et al. 1997:271).

At the level of self and society, ambiguity is situated within the knowledge that outside appearances (zaher) are separate from inner reality (baten) (Bateson et al. 1977; Beeman 1986; Good and Del-Vecchio Good 1985; Hoffman 1990). Baten reflects personal attitudes and emotion, and correlates to aendaerun (private familial intimacy), where free expression is allowed; zaher represents vulnerability in the external, public world, a realm of temptation and corruption (Beeman 1986:11). The external realm is negotiated through ta’arof (ritual courtesy); the luti individual practices ta’arof to the letter, while the darvishi rejects its pretense. For example, the host assures guests that “‘My house is your house’,” but guests never overstay their welcome (Bateson et al. 1977:270). Constraint is valued as a “double system of commitment and purity of intention,” and is not deemed hypocritical (ibid.). Calculation is inappropriate when expressing emotions in public, while in private not showing your emotions (e.g., during bereavement) would be suspicious (ibid.:270-271).

The uniformities and regularities of the “principle of communication” reveal “individual attitudinal, emotional and personality variation” (ibid.:27). The themes within this system (uncertainty/insecurity, cleverness/wiliness, authority/submission/autonomy, mistrust, emotionality, accounting procedures) are practiced between intimates and non-intimates, and those of equal and unequal status. Between non-intimates, “equal status implies no necessary communication whatsoever—thus,
autonomy,” and is interpreted by “Westerners that Iranians cannot work together in
groups, or that when set on a common task, those involved are continually vying for
status positions” (ibid.:37). National character analyses, in Beeman’s final analysis, must
reflect “systematic cultural accounts of the cultural accounting that native peoples
employ to adequately rationalize their own ongoing situation” (ibid.:42).

Literature, especially poetry, is an archetypal context that divulges the Iranian
love of ambiguity. Hillmann (1990) asserts that in “Persian speech, special importance is
given to style, allusiveness, word play, punning, and other sorts of embellishment” (76).
Turns of phrase and playfulness in public speaking, essay writing, hospitality rituals, and
public life may imply to an outsider that Iran is “an internally confused culture” and “that
almost as many Irans exist as there are Iranians” (ibid.:1). Persian poets (e.g., Ferdowsi,
Hafez, Khayyam, Farrokhzad) and authors are the mirrors “par excellence for Iranian
cultural tension, balance, and dipolarity” (ibid.:183), and unearth the tendency “to weigh,
balance, and oscillate between paired extremes or opposites, resulting in a palpable
ambivalence toward contrasting, even mutually exclusive goals, values, ideas, and ideals”
(ibid.:42). (e.g., protest-submission, ingenuousness-cleverness, faith-apostasy, endeavor-
nonchalance, determinism-free will) (ibid.:178).

The rend personality in Hafez’s Divan illustrates the myriad voices in Iranian
transnational literature and poetry. The rend personality is “a reckless individual
unconcerned with or unconstrained by prevailing mores” (Hillmann 1990:80). He or she
disregards his or her own personality, even where “propriety, formality, and approved
style count for so much” in the public sphere (ibid.:80-81). A rend individual behaves
“heroically anti-establishment” by discounting circumspectness relative to political concerns (ibid.). He or she is romantically individualistic in a nation where public individuality is accorded to “the only true individuals” (i.e., the monarch and his representatives). Finally, a rend personality is attracted to “its implicit ambiguity, the possibility that a religious spirit, perhaps a Gnostic intent, is behind it all” (ibid.:80-81).

Iranian exilic literature (e.g., autobiographies, memoirs, Sufi poetry in translation), is a testament to the manifestation of rend tendencies among Iranian transnationals, who reign the freedom of public identity to construct alternative truths of Iranianness, demystify “the Other,” and deconstruct stereotypes (Ardalan 2007; Asayesh 1999; Farmaian and Munker 1992; Guppy 1998; Karim and Khorrami 1999; Karim 2006; Khorrami and Vatanabadi 2000; Kousha 2002; Landinsky 2006; Milani 1992; Milani 1996; Moaveni 2005; Mozaffari 2005; Nafisi 2003; Naficy 1993; Satrapi 2003; Sullivan 2001; Wolpé 2007; Zanganeh 2006). Literature imparts “partial and limited immunity to fanaticism” (Oz 2006:62); “imagining the other is a moral imperative … [and a] secret pleasure” (90). For Iranian exiles in Los Angeles, poetry bypasses the painful memories of the revolution, and “provides the paradigmatic worldview and language of exile, embodying many journeys, returns, and unifications” (Naficy 1993:148). Poetry, the embodiment of Iranian culture, is practiced through daily recitation “of canonical, classical (and at times contemporary) poets” (ibid.). Exilic literature rewrites portrayals of vilification in the United States (Milani 1992), and Iranian diversity and humanity (Mozaffari 2005:2005)⁴⁴.
Because transnational kin flows are regularized (i.e., travel to Iran, to other states where family live, and relatives who travel to Minnesota) Iranian parents prioritize Persian instruction, conversation, and expression with children. The recitation of poetry at community-wide events (i.e., especially Shab-e Yalda) requires celebrants to enter into the milieu of meaning, but also to share its beauty and intricacies with visitors and elders who remain on the pulse of language. Iranian cultural and ethnic associations underscore Persian instruction as central to cultural expression, identity, and preservation (Biparva 1994; Hoffman 1990; Mahdi 1998; Mobasher 2004; Moghissi 2001). Three rationales disclose why Persian is critical within the context of American cultural acquisition: first, to assert cultural heritage; second, to express oneself against American adaptation; and third, to code-switch in order to employ culture and self within “an Iranian frame of reference” (Hoffman cited in Chaichian 1997: 618).

Creative approaches to reinvigorate fluency manifest on the Internet. Iranians play moshāreḥ (“being in company with poetry”), a game in which one person recites a line from a Persian poem, and the succeeding person recites the next line beginning with the last word or letter of the previous person (Barks 1995:246). Because poetry memorization and recitation was part of grade school curriculum in Iran, poetry pops up in daily conversation. In Iran, moshāreḥ used to be:

played on the radio on a weekly basis. [Now it is played] with several groups of friends on “the net.” One sends one [distich] out, [and] they are transliterated in Farsi, [which is] not easy. As part of school work, you had to memorize poems. Some people hated it. [We are] so much exposed to it. It’s eighty percent of our
literature. Lots of Iranians don’t get the musicality, [but that] doesn’t mean they
don’t know the stories behind it. The entire history of Iran is behind it [poetry].

(Zank 2004:24, emphasis in original)

Iranians unfamiliar with the complexities of Persian may lose the subtle rhythms
required to maneuver fluency. Immersion in the omnipresent English language
environment threatens the intricacies, prompting some parents to insist on a “Persian-only
policy” at home. Where ethnic associations exist, and Persian is part of the curriculum,
this provides an effective way to safeguard and “transmit traditional Iranian cultural
values to the children of immigrant families whose daily life in America is dominated by
another language” (Biparva 1994:389-390).

Ambivalence exists within these inheritances but also intersects with the
transnational experience, which incorporates new identities, especially as they are
impacted by a host of particularities relative to the individual’s trajectory of migration,
including: interactions in the host environment; time of arrival; ability to return to Iran;
proximity to family; engagement in or estrangement from the Iranian community;
involvement in religious institutions, ethnic organizations or networks that allow for the
celebration of Iranianness; and identification of “Persianness,” Iranianness or
“humanness.”

Global Migration and Transnational Identity

Mr. and Mrs. Innocent and their families paid dearly
in this century for just being there. Condemned by
history, as Marxists were fond of saying, perhaps
belonging to a wrong class, wrong ethnic group, wrong religion—what have you—they were and continue to be an unpleasant reminder of all the philosophical and nationalist utopias gone wrong (Simic 1999:120). … One of the great experiences of a city like New York was the exposure to so many other ways of life. The ideal of the times was, of course, the melting pot. … There is no school as good as the life that takes you one day from a Hungarian butcher on Second Avenue, to an Irish bar in Chelsea, an Italian coffee shop on Macdougal Street, and a jazz club off Sheridan Square in the company of a young women who hails from Texas. No wonder nationalists of all stripes hate cities. … The advantage of the melting pot is that it undermines tribalism. … The American identity is a strange concoction of cultures, but at its best it is a concoction prepared and cooked by each individual in his or her own kitchen. It ought not to come in a package with a label and a fake list of wholesome, all-natural ingredients. (Simic, 1999, p. 129-132)

Simic’s invocation of the melting pot ideal juxtaposes nationalities (i.e., Hungarian, Irish, Italian) with “Little Nations” (i.e., Little Italy) scattered throughout New York, which
paradoxically alludes to tribalism. Critiques of the “melting pot” ideology are long-standing, particularly in its erasure of difference. Problematically, this ideology has historically equated melting with assimilation to a hegemonic Euro-Western cultural framework. Further, Simic’s reference to “concoction” implies a variable, “unmelting” of national groups. A multitude of individually invented American identities defies the “fake list of wholesome, all-natural ingredients” bent on constructing “pliable” citizens. The notion of an individual national identity may be more accurately conceived as “individual conglomerates” of aspects of national identity.

The economic and political reaches of globalization responsible for global migration envelop migrants in loss, status change, and reformulated meaning as they confront novel roles, practices, and institutions. Migration, as a transnational phenomenon, is a social process implicated in the economic, political, demographic, and cultural dimensions of globalization (Brettell and Hollifield 2008). Although anthropologists (and historians) trace the interchange of global trade, technology, and religion to prehistory (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002), contemporary migration differs in simultaneity and speed (Portes 1999; Vertovec 1999).

Robertson’s (1992) “global field” model envisions four points of interface to theorize the intersection between the forces of “globalization from above” and “globalization from below,” which serve as a complex feedback loop of interactive comparison, differentiating forces, and reflexivity that counter stable, traditional tropes: *nationally constituted societies; individuals; the international system of societies; and humankind*. Robertson’s (2003) theory foregrounds the debates within “the world of
particular traditions,” and how the ensuing discourse presents “both inward-looking and outward-looking aspects” of those traditions (307).

Situated at the intersection of globalization processes and individual lives are *nationally constituted societies* (Robertson 1992); a historical outgrowth of the global capitalist economy and profit accumulation pursued and administered by the hegemonic European core (Wallerstein 2000). In the pursuit of interests (i.e., well-being, “the Good Life”), the core consolidated its power through territorial claims to expand trade and the marketplace (Bamyeh 1993), diversify labor and products, and fortify state control in the semi-peripheral and peripheral zones (Wallerstein 1974). The historical transformation from “mini-system” (complete division of labor, single cultural framework), to “world system” (single division of labor, multiple cultural frameworks) (Wallerstein 2000), to dominance of multinational corporations (MNCs), is fundamental to elucidating the global economic infrastructure, transnational processes, and migration (Massey et al. 2006; Portes 2004b; Vertovec 1999).

Informed by modernization theory, neoclassical economists argue that nonindustrial societies, once free of the yoke of tradition, will emulate European standards of rationality, capitalist markets, mass production, and commodity worship (Peet and Hartwick 1999). “Progress,” the calculated outcome, advances through five stages of development, culminating in mass high consumption (Rostow 1965). In this approach, migration is explained using cost-benefit analysis, whereby migrants attempt to maximize income and minimize risk (Massey et al. 2004; Portes 2004b). Market force logic, therefore, “predicts” which migrant is selected, based on individual ability, skill,
and motive on the supply side, and political constraints (i.e., visas, immigration) on the demand side (Chiswick 2008).

Alternatively, the new economics of migration approach considers the role of family and household decision-making in migration, although anthropologists critique the narrow foci on several levels: positive-negative economic inputs essentialize migrant experience; the lack of contradictions captured by ethnography; and their failure to explain how economic development challenges national sovereignty and promotes differently translated meanings (Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Kearney 1995; Mahler 1998; Sassen 2002; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999). For example, South Asian migrant labor in the United Arab Emirates impels a state-sponsored, fabricated national identity; Marchal (2005) and Al-Rasheed (2005) have demonstrated how the construction of “indigenous,” Arab authenticity resists creolization and summons up a nostalgic, Orientalist Arabia. Accordingly, economic action is rooted in cultural values, and not mutually exclusive from socio-cultural arenas, as market logic arguments predict (Gudeman 2001; Brettell and Hollifield 2008; Polanyi 1957 [1944]).

Since the nineteenth century, the nation-state epitomizes the form of globalization (Eriksen 2010; Nederveen Pieterse 2004). Nations conform to a “model of being” that rests on a principle of legitimacy according to a standardized structure, logic, and social role to ensure global coordination and representative authority (Bamyeh 1993). Paradoxically, national identities are nourished by spiritual, ideological, intellectual, and cultural distinctions that impede standardization: first, nationhood is a manufactured identity, based on selective, arbitrary cultural artifacts, and distributed through print-
capitalism to arouse imagined belonging (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983); second, the myth of Oneness is performed through short-term memory, and contests representative authority and legitimacy through individuated retellings (Bhabha 1984, 1990; 1994; Rutherford 1990); and third, despite increased freedom of movement, migration between nation-states is regulated through the determination (and demonization) of insiders versus outsiders (Messina and Lahav 2006; Nederveen Pieterse 2004). Identity politics can narrow definitions of national identity, and subsume prospects of multiplicity, pluralism, “ethnic enclaves,” and diversity in favor of an essentialist vision that disempowers minorities (Knauf 1996:258-261).

U.S. Immigration Theory

The history of immigration in the United States has been a key node of social science scholarship from its inception. Pedraza-Bailey’s (2004) “conceptual map” of key historical thoroughfares paves new byways to describe the immigrant experience. Mid-century approaches portrayed “the uprooted peasant bewildered and alienated in the New World, unable to reestablish the past,” while current reconceptualizations conceive “transplantation,” wherein immigrants see socio-cultural continuity in institutional life (92). Traditional approaches linked immigrant experience to the immigrants themselves (ibid.:97).

Chicago School sociologists established the foundation of American sociology through ethnicity, immigration, and urban studies, as articulated through a linear concept of assimilation (ibid.:92). Best exemplified in Glazer and Moynihan’s (1970) Beyond the
Melting Pot, it predicted economic and political mobility for New York City’s ethnic groups. Openness and equal opportunity in New York were proposed as guarantors of upward mobility (x-xi). Problematical for their thesis, Black poverty and lack of mobility persists (ibid.:x-xiii), which they attributed to political failure, the inability of intellectuals and media to accurately account for the situation (ibid.:xvi-xviii), and lack of Black mobilization to get out the vote (ibid.:xviii-xix). Their revised theory considered inequalities along the Northern-Southern axis; while the North divides along black-white lines, the South has a nuanced stratification of class, wealth, power, values, and occupation. New York City, a typical Northern model, is more “ethnic” than “Americanized.” Ethnicity offers an alternative (ibid.:xxxiii) interest group with which immigrants identify through past symbols and “the fate of their homelands” (ibid.:lxxxiii), and thereby reconfigure “original attributes” into “something new” (ibid.:13).v Family and community fortify ethnic attachments, functioning as “an extended family or tribe” (ibid.:18). Ethnic identity is perpetuated and served by social and political institutions (ibid.:310). Ethnicity, along with race, nation, class, and gender are the five fault-lines within the modern world system (Wallerstein 2000:xix).

Urbanization has shifted tribal and familial loyalties to a governmentally sanctioned identity (ibid.:5). Ethnic loyalties then shifted to the nation-state, functioning as pseudo-extended family and kinship roles that resocialize individuals and present “an outlet for political tensions” (ibid.:6-7).

Gordon (1964) addressed “the competing ideologies of assimilation that had taken root in American soil: Anglo-conformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism”
by distinguishing cultural behavioral (e.g., language, behavior, values) and social structural (e.g., institutions, social cliques, intermarriage) aspects of immigration (ibid.:93). The Chicago School explained the historical development of ethnic relations through “stages of interaction” based on “contact, competition, and accommodation culminating in eventual assimilation” (ibid.). By the 1960s, scholarly emphasis on the outcomes of the immigrant experience (e.g., acculturation, assimilation) waned, a shift influenced by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1924 (which curtailed European immigration), the “failure” of some groups to Anglicize, the civil rights movement, and ethnic distinctiveness (ibid.). In the post-1965 period, the focus shifted to the economic aspects of immigrants (i.e., ethnic enclaves).

Currently, immigration theory considers micro- and macro-processes as the framework for comparative inquiry of four waves of immigration, due to economic changes in American history in order to address differential incorporation of ethnic groups (Pedraza-Bailey 2004:96). The focus of the post-industrial, service-oriented fourth wave examines the global reshuffling of immigrants across nations, such as structural (rather than individual) variables in the global north and south (ibid.). Differences based on ethnicity, “race,” country of origin, circumstances of landing require further investigation (Gans 2004; Pedraza-Bailey 2004; Portes 2004a). For example, how might “Anglo constructions of race affect the adaptation of non-White immigrants of various socioeconomic levels,” and why some groups “whiten” more quickly than others (84).
Portes (2004a) examines the juncture between structural variables and under-researched areas (i.e., transnational communities, the second generation, households and gender, the state-system, and cross-national comparisons). Early immigration theories, Portes critiques, are stereotypical, superficial constructions of adaptation issues (e.g., language, culture, spatial patterns) that ignore the “structural forces driving immigration” (30). Immigrants strategize to control their lives in the context of social networks, norms, and households that represent micro-responses to macro-structural forces (31).

Clark (1998) challenges the workability of a “polyglot society” (2), proposing the “salad bowl” metaphor to address is pluralism, multiculturalism, and “becoming American” (e.g., Africans, Asians) (10). Clark’s “California cauldron” model comprises “local variations and different paths of achievement and assimilation for different groups of immigrants” (ibid.:15). Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants, for instance, are “making it” in great numbers (ibid.:16), which is attributed to skilled professionalism, human and financial capital, and small households with high per capita incomes (ibid.:190-191).

Foner’s (2005) comparative study of immigrants in New York to those in urban areas presents “an optimistic scenario about the future of intergroup relations for the nation” (184). Her comparative data draws on race, ethnicity, gender, and transnational links “across cities or regions within the United States, across nation-states, and across different periods of time” (ibid.:1). Comparatively, several themes emerge: “invisible” structures; temporal, cultural, and “city-bound assumptions”; applicability of taken-for-granted models and concepts; and the coalescence of disciplinary literatures (ibid.:4). For
example, the American national narrative relies on the power of collective memory, racial and popular myths, tales, ceremonies, education, and monuments to inform subjectivity rather than social cohesion (ibid.:206-207). Constructing myths around race promotes forgetfulness, re-remembering early European immigrant experiences, and fashioning a pantheon of idealized folk heroes “who worked hard, strove to become assimilated, pulled themselves up by their own Herculean efforts, and had strong family values and colorful roots” (ibid.:207). U.S. collective memory romanticizes the melting pot and America as a shelter for all (ibid.:209), undercuts racism, and erects “obstacles to equality and opportunity” (ibid.:215). Foner contrasts the U.S. model with Europe, where the immigrant society is reluctantly imagined (ibid.:210). Culture, rather than race, establishes the point of difference, since Nazi history has made race a taboo subject (ibid.:218). Acculturation and assimilation thwart cultural racism, although as long as race is “believed to be rooted in genes or biology,” racist attitudes persist (ibid.).

Diasporic Approaches to Migration

There is “much conceptual muddling” between the concepts of “transnationalism” and “diaspora,” according to Vertovec (1999:448). While Kennedy and Roudometof (2002) attribute this to a British-American academic distinction (i.e., transnationalism, in the U.S. is in vogue, while in Britain, diaspora refers to expats, refugees, and immigrants), Vertovec (1999) characterizes ethnic diasporas as precursors of transnational communities that have morphed into new “modes of social organization, mobility and communication” (449). Although decentered, a common consciousness refreshes
memories and desires, contributing to fluid cultural reproduction “described in terms of syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation and hybridity” (ibid.:451).

Kearney (1995) contends that the diaspora typology digresses from transnational typologies on the mythic idea of homeland and “hyperspaces” or unattached, local environments (553). While an “ideal diaspora” is a problematic notion, in Agnew’s estimation (2004), Jews, Armenians, and Greeks are attributed to autochthonous diasporas, based on dispersal, scattering, trauma, host-immigrant tension, community beyond boundaries, and a dream of return. Diasporas are differentiated by a “shared history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, and resistance” (ibid.:4). Although not all migration aligns with this primordial meaning (e.g., South Asians), diasporas are identified by three abiding themes: a scattered collective, regardless of ancestral origin or current residence; a social consciousness, based on a “sense of belonging or exclusion, their states of mind, and their sense of identity”; and a creolized mode of cultural production (ibid.:5). Victimhood endures around the diaspora typology, and is situated in identity politics, historical pressures, and local meanings (Kokof, Töloöyan, and Alfonso 2004). Simic (1999) warns against associating any “special status as a victim” to diasporans, since yesterday’s fascists and today’s religious extremists bear some responsibility for global flows of people (19).

Diasporic identity is constructed largely through ethnicity and an ideology of boundary, then reconstructed through particular localities and meanings. Memory, the lifeblood of the diasporic experience, binds individuals in multifarious, active ways whereby “meanings and interpretations … shift with time, place, and social context”
(Vertovec 1997:3). When mined from “alternative archives” (e.g., autobiography, journals, diaries, performance, music), meaning transcends the “struggle to construct a social and personal identity in a world in which subjectivity is both fragmented and fractured” (ibid.:7). Reinterpreting memory transforms the anonymity of collective stories and macro-histories so that recollection becomes “an active process by which meaning is created” (ibid.:8). Remembering differs from nostalgia; it is “a more radical and transformative activity” (ibid.:9). Memory, a celebration of fragments, is imbued with ambiguity, which unfolds unseen opportunities and purposes for the diasporan, who “often has a double consciousness, a privileged knowledge and perspective that is consonant with postmodernity and globalization. The dual or paradoxical nature of diasporic consciousness is one that is caught between ‘here’ and ‘there,’ or between those who share roots” (ibid.:14). Diasporic duality forms through new “attachments and sentiments [that] are experienced simultaneously with their involvement and participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political allegiances to their [new] homes” (ibid.). Alternatives may inspire, but individuals experiencing alienation may be plagued by a “longing to belong and to be ‘at home’,” posing a dilemma between living in a home and needing “to make it authentic and real” (ibid.:15).

While memory is an unmoored phenomenon, the process and presence of sedentarization delineates the idiosyncratic, peculiar differences among diasporic groups. Reckoning locality through this historical process unearths real and imagined realities, lived experiences, and relations, even as cross-border meanings, experiences, and relations persist (Kokof, Tölölyan, and Alfonso 2004:5). Safran (2004) emphasizes the
relationship between identity and sedentarization as a key difference of diasporas; the physical act of settlement retains identity presently, while metaphysical identity (based on memory, symbolism, survival, and mythical return) sustains distance and uniqueness from the hostland. “Demographic thickness” supports collective memory of homeland, sustains institutions, and upholds a diasporic ethic, culture, and ideology (ibid.:17-18). Segregation, occupational difference, and endogamy, for example, are crucial constituents that institutionalize the topographies of “modern diasporas,” according to Van Amersfoort and Doomernik (2002:64). In a study of marriage practices among first- and second-generation Turkish immigrants in Holland, Van Amersfoort and Doomernik found a preference for Dutch-born Turkish marriage partners due to economic reasons and cultural patterns (familial obligations and arranged marriage), which became difficult (although exogamy remains rare) (ibid.:65).

Kearney (1995) classifies refugees as “the first generations of diasporan communities” (559). Rupture precipitates “refugee transnationalism” (Nolin 2006:4), and is devoid of the celebration and “sexiness” of transnationalism (8). Nolin’s study of Guatemalans in Canada pursues a multi-sited, multi-method approach to differentiate refugee and immigrant processes, based on “rupture” and the aftermath of political violence, “suture,” and restructure of place through socio-political ties. Geographic proximity and community mitigate the trauma of forced exile and the feedback loop that occurs in transnational relations. Gender, as “a central organizing principle in migration” (ibid.:32), is significant to globalization and state policy, which “convey the continuities and contradictions of transnational place making and identity ... [such as] the gritty
details of isolation, ambiguity, loss of dignity, and constantly feeling ‘out-of-place’” (ibid.:9). The context of and reason for migration, journey, and settlement impact men and women differently (ibid.:32-33).

Transnational Migration Theory

Though identity politics challenges pluralism, transnational phenomena take root in project-specific, power-vying activities, with potential to displace authority and reconfigure national narratives (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Brettell and Hollifield 2008; Kennedy and Roudometof 2002; Messina and Lahav 2006). Glick-Schiller (2005) conceives transnational relationships as solidified ideologies and actions via transportable national associations that link “a dispersed population to a specific homeland and its political system” (164). Glick Schiller urges theorists to heed the analytical mantra: “all identity constructions can obscure the complexity of social relations because they are statements about relationships of unequal power” (ibid:167). Such unbounded, interpenetrating local responses defy claims of the holistic, abstract, and universal effects of globalization in multiple ways (Kearney 1995; Pasha and Samatar 1999): by reconfiguring “‘traditional’ relations of power and privilege” (Mahler 1998) through differentiating interactivities that form various centers of power relative to local time, relations, and contexts (Inderpal and Caplan 1994; Kearney 1995; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999); through non-ethnic, reflexive communities that function as counterpoints of belonging and power sharing (Glick-Schiller 2005; Kennedy and
Roudometof 2002); and as creolized global flows and cosmopolitanisms (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 2002).

The impact of the global capitalist economy on the flow of people and ideas and restructuring of cultural boundedness through the imagination cannot be understated (Gupta and Ferguson 2002:70). Persecuted religious communities, ethnic diasporas, and trade networks have always existed (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002:2). Transnational theorists link macro-structural and micro-level historical processes, tracing the interchange of trade, technologies, and religion from 5000 BCE (Nederveen Pieterse 2004:16), which diffused advancements in agriculture, military, math, literacy, science, and philosophy (25).

In this global, post-modern context, cultural production occurs through “a particular politics of difference” (Nederveen Pieterse 2004:42), based on three paradigms: “differentialism,” “convergence,” and “mixing.” Differentialism presumes an argument of power and representational authority by stressing a cosmology of purity and territorialization of culture through discourses of race, clashing civilizations, and ethnic cleansing (Nederveen Pieterse 2004:55). Iran’s modernization trajectory to infuse notions of the pure Aryan nation in the school curriculum (discussed above) exemplifies the approach of differentialism.

The model of convergence conceives multiple centers from which ideas of universalism, modernity, and global homogeneity emanate (e.g., McDonaldization) (ibid.). The Bahá’í faith represents a model of convergence in its universalistic tendencies. Through organizational structure, Beyer (2006) argues, religion is
“composed” and “performed” (12), accounting for its proliferation and “recursive presence” (ibid.:108). Although the Bahá’í faith has survived through organizational strategies (ibid.:109), gaining “world religion” legitimacy has lagged due to its lack of “deep historical myths of origin” (ibid.:257); exilic identity, which disavows an “authoritative and demographic centre of gravity” (ibid.:262); and a small demographic (ibid.:265). Its universalistic message is critical to “world religion recognition” (ibid.:263), facilitated by a global “administrative structure” in both intent and “actual extent … as the model of a future world government” (ibid.:264).

The “level of locality,” for Smith and Guarnizo (1998), is animated with opportunities for new meaning and identity, although they challenge the degree of imaginary space that makes this meaningful (6). Transnational practices are “a dynamic source of alternative cosmopolitanisms and contestation,” and therefore located in concrete specificities of time, place relations, and contexts (ibid.:11). Generational differences, assimilation pressures, and anti-immigrant sentiment, for instance, reformulate “structures of meaning” within households, networks, and communities (ibid.:20). Subjectivity as malleable resists and accommodates within multiple contexts, allowing for myriad expressions of identity and “made character” than might be expected within “social structural inequalities and power/knowledge venues” (ibid.:21).

Alternative sources of cohesion circumvent power struggles surrounding tradition (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002:1). Within these “units of belonging,” community members foster individual and group identity based on moral, expressive, and/or cognitive similarities. Boundaries become delineated differently, and community is
“constructed symbolically through an engagement with rituals, signs and meanings; they provide a container with which individual members negotiate meanings and construct and reconstruct different kinds of social relationships over time” (Cohen cited in Kennedy and Roudometof 2002:6).

Neither assimilation nor ethnic separatism are inevitable, since relationships are despatialized and individuals pursue a non-territorialized “homing desire” (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002:23). Social relationships are reconstructed according to similarity and community. Unity relies on various meanings and concerns relating to ethnicity and nationality, assimilated diaspora symbolists, lifestyle and meaning groups, social welfare and justice orientations, and professional groups (ibid.:24). These reflexive communities are actively generated, voluntary, symbolic, and limited. They supplant the “natural” allegiance of kinship, de-emphasize locality and social propinquity, inspire circumscription (ibid.:6), and create a communication system that leads to “understanding, security and common experiences” (ibid.:7). While openness is beneficial for individualization and freedom “from traditional structural constraints,” it threatens and compromises security (ibid.). “Transculturality” and “cultural ‘interpenetration’” (ibid.:10) inspire reflexive, complex associations, especially if reinforced by technology (ibid.:11).

“global ecumene” inhabited by creolized global flows and cosmopolitans; Bhabha’s (1994) “third space”; Appadurai’s (1997) “-scapes”; and Kearney’s (1996) disintegrated center-periphery model. The range of scripts and images circulated through migration and globalization exaggerates the fractured nature of identity. Hybridity reflects change, adaptation, and marginality with a spotlight on difference, which underscores concerns of symmetry and asymmetry relative to “voice, representation, and perspectives” (Vertovec 1997:12-13).

Scattered hegemonies, the implosion of multiple centers, and counter monolithic schema (e.g., Wallerstein’s world-systems model) emphasize “multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions” (Inderpal and Caplan 1994:18) in which the powerless deconstruct nationalistic, patriarchal, “hegemonic ‘borrowings’ … oppressive to women” (ibid.:24). Local power structures, formed through mobile capital and multiple subjectivities as a direct effect of Western imperialism, are not envisioned as a global-local, colonial-nationalist binary model devoid of agency (ibid.:11). Kearney’s (1996) disintegrated center-periphery model emphasizes “differences of class, power, and value that forge subaltern and dominant social niches of identity and agency” (468).

Appadurai (1997) theorizes a model of –scapes or global cultural flows (i.e., ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, ideo-) that are “deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors” (33). Their “nonisomorphic” nature and “sheer speed, scale, and volume” make them distinctive (ibid.:37). European colonialism initiated the “permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood” (ibid.:28), and reinforced national solidarity in Anderson’s
(1983) vision of imagined nations. As social practice, imagination is moored to agency, work, and possibility, and thereby denies cultural homogenization (Appadurai 1997:31). For example, local indigenization (e.g., the Indianization of Sri Lankans) may be more forceful than other global hegemonies (ibid.:32-33).

Hannerz’s (2002) “global ecumene” theorizes cultural interconnectedness as attributed to multiple centers and global cultural flows relative to historical global players (39). Although the center (i.e., the United States) has cultural influence, political and economic dominance is not guaranteed, since centers exist for different reasons (e.g., Qom in Iran) (ibid.). Agents on the “peripheries” filter knowledge in order to ward off cultural competition (ibid.). Nations and transnationals “traffic” culture, a process that “ignores, subverts and devalues rather [than] celebrates national boundaries” (ibid.:40). At the center, “assumptions about cultural purity and authenticity” (ibid.:41) compete. Whether there are benefits from cultural importation, change may remain an argument of destruction. Coexistence between transnational identity and some cultural essence is more realistic than abandoning the present for the past; a process that is largely a matter of personal use and interpretation (ibid.:42). Hannerz foresees transnational imports becoming indistinguishable from local meanings and forms (ibid.:43).

In Bhabha’s (1994) “third space” of hybridity, agency is anchored to cultural contestation and interrogation of narratives of difference that make claims to primordial, “authentic” culture (37). Culture as difference enunciates presence or “a time of cultural uncertainty, and … representational undecidability” (ibid.:35). Enunciation objectifies cultural signs and meanings through a translated “original” meaning in order for it to be
“simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum” (Rutherford 1990:210). The construction of meaning through imagination entails integrating past into present. Hybridity is a construction of traces of meanings, discourses, and ongoing identification “with and through another object [which] … is itself always ambivalent because of the intervention of that otherness” (ibid.:211). Not so much an admixture of two identities, hybridity “enables other positions to emerge[,] … displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (ibid.:210-211). Marked by relationships of power through a “negotiation of demands, of wills, of meanings” (Bhabha 1996:25), hybridity reconfigures boundaries into meaningful codes and systems of authority through cultural contestation and exchange (27).

Pasha and Samatar’s (1996) focus on Islamic piety exemplifies the alternatives and possibilities of the third space and hybridity in modernity (188). Islam’s universal message adopts local particularities of expression, creating fissures in Western hegemonic flows. Pious Muslims envisage modernity through “nonmaterialist dimensions of progress and their place in an ethical (Islamic) social formation” (ibid.:191). Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” is thereby displaced, and an East-West “intercivilizational encounter and dialogue” materializes (ibid.). Rather than a reaction to modernity and globalization, Pasha and Samatar argue that resurgent Islam pursues “renewal (tajdid) and affirmation” (ibid.:195). “Modernizing” piety prevents the pious from confinement in the “materialist cage” (ibid.:196). Pragmatic Islam, an alternative hybridity, urges a “dynamic interpretation” of Shari’a to honor “spiritual
intent above textual rigidity,” and to illustrate philosophical and historical accounts of intercultural communication in Islam (ibid.:199). Pragmatics entail Muslim-Other acceptance, and “balancing utility with responsibility and justice” (ibid.:200).

Transnational literature focuses on community connections, while place making addresses the solidification of unestablished community and “the individual as an active agent in transnational social relations” (Nolin 2006:15-16). Identity may be informed by community (rather than nationality), which is “the basic unit of analysis of cultural continuity and change” (ibid.:39). Nonetheless, the state polity, development, and violence reconceptualize the meaning of community (ibid.:41). Reassessing field sites shifts “from commitment to the local to a commitment to ‘social, cultural, and political location ’” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a cited in Nolin 2006:45). Local, as place, is differentiated from location and community, as state of mind (46).

Gupta and Ferguson (2002) interrogate the concept of space in anthropological literature, which neutralizes “cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization” (66), and ignores borderlands, differences, the sense of belonging for postcolonials, and the presumption that autonomous spaces conceal power (ibid.:66-67). The model of articulation considers the formation of a priori community connections out of space; by foregrounding “the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the processes whereby a space achieves a distinctive identity as a place” (ibid.:67). Identity is a product of interaction; refugees, migrants, and natives realize the absence of “a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture” (ibid.:69), leading to an idealized, fabricated quality attached to community and
“symbolic anchors” (i.e., mythical reunification with a “homeland”) (ibid.). Power structures articulate certain meanings more salient; for example, claiming “natural” connections between peoples and territories (ibid.:70), and maintaining lines of purity from the disempowered (ibid.:75). Home and family are sites of place making that rely on an “association of place with memory, loss, and nostalgia” (ibid.:71). The association between difference and place requires the exercise of power to maintain lines of purity from the disempowered, even though these lines are penetrable “through physical movement or … conceptual and political acts of reimagination” (ibid.:75).

Gans (2005) identifies the impact of macro-structural change (i.e., economy, polity, society) on micro-level adaptation (e.g., how Anglo attitudes, race, and ethnicity lead to scapegoating or valorization) as a “hole” in immigration research (85). The macro-structural backdrop of the simultaneity and speed of modern technology (Vertovec 1999:447), intercepts with micro-structural activities, occupations, and social contacts in spite of national boundaries (Portes et al. 1999:219). Telecommunication technologies do not, however, threaten homogeneity, as “each historically framed culture develops its own take on the new space of commonality” (Nederveen Pieterse 2004:54). Given that technological innovations can reorganize “space” dramatically, “we may expect mobility to become as salient as or more salient than sedentarism” (ibid.:116). Transnational elites, for example, harness technologies to communicate political ideas and values, creating microcosms of political, legal, and cultural communities informed by alternative vantage points (e.g., rural, urban, suburban) (Kearney 1995; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999). Mobility is embodied in the lives of transnationals, who represent the vanguard of
novel ideas of community and society (Portes et al. 1999:232) that simulate an “implosion of peripheries into centers” (Kearney 1995:550).

Delineating Diasporas: Iranian Transnational Identity

... relatively little attention as yet has been paid to the discourses that ethnographically immigrants actually use in making sense of their own lives, in comparing their own value systems with their new settings, or in forging philosophically resonant frames that draw on the genres, tropes, metaphors, imagery of both old and new cultural settings. ... These of course require mapping against different class and social strata, different geographic and urban ecologies. (Fischer and Abedi, 1990, p. 261)

In this section, it is my goal to attend to the growing body of ethnographic literature on the Iranian diaspora and transnational movement in order to address what Fischer and Abedi (1990) state is needed to give shape to the micro-level lives of Iranians. Indeed, how do Iranians make sense of their lives relative to the value systems of the host society? How do individuals forge “philosophically resonant frames that draw on the genres, tropes, metaphors, imagery of both old and new cultural settings” (ibid.:261)? The primary centripetal-centrifugal forces I address, which have implications for sense making and a reconfigured personal philosophy as follows. First, the circumstances
surrounding prejudice and discrimination relative to macro-processes, such as national
discourse on race, ethnicity, and Islam, particularly as they relate to immigration-refugee
policies. Second, the influence of ethnic enclaves and organizations on a persistent
identification with national identity, but which also give rise to a potential politics of
representation dynamic. Third, the shape of individual’s “portable ideologies” that are
constructed through a selective, syncretic process incorporating old and new genres,
tropes, metaphors, and imagery, and which represent the process of making meaning,
belonging, and wresting control of a corner of the American public sphere.

The Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979 was the prime dynamic that precipitated
contemporary global Iranian migration (Bozorgmehr 1998). Ayatollah Ruhollah
Khomeini’s Islamic Republic upended the structure, logic, and social roles that had
coordinated activities between Iran and the West. Effectively, global rules of authority
were rewritten, justifying the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran (Fathi 1991a).
Categorizing Iranian transnationals (e.g., “exile,” “immigrant,” “sojourner,”
“transnational,” “refugee”) is complex due to the distinctiveness of dispersal, time of
migration, state of mind, ethnicity, religion, and political inclination. However, it is safe
to assume that Iranian students who began to arrive in the 1960s and 1970s, established
the brick and mortar of Iranian communities.

The Iranian diaspora is a relatively recent phenomenon, and is intertwined with
Iran’s anxiety over modernity throughout the twentieth century, evidenced in national
discourse warning of the perils of Westernization versus the assurances of tradition
(Hillmann 1990:42). “The main aspect shared by the majority of the Iranian diaspora is
that their history of migration is quite recent and has mostly been caused by the Islamic revolution” (Ghorashi 2009:77). Economically, Iran’s full-scale adoption of Western hegemonic ideals of progress, modernization, and development intended to transform its global image within the international system of societies (Mozaffari 2005; Sanasarian 2000; Schayegh 2009), and was related to the West’s geopolitical interest in Iran’s oil reserves and its strategic location. Socio-politically, Iranian citizenry was subjected to a colonial-like discourse of biopower and reproduction (Schayegh 2006:110-111), implemented through a Western medicalizing strategy intended to address Iran’s quantitative and qualitative demographic problemlxiii. Culturally, pseudo-scientific ideas of racial hierarchies, eugenics, hygiene, and Social Darwinism, were infused in the educational curriculum, which molded generations of individuals to look Westward (Amanat 1993; Asgharzadeh 2007; Kashani-Sabet 1999; Kelley 1993; Vaziri 1993).

At the time of the revolution (1978-1979), an estimated 50,000 Iranian students were in the U.S. (Jones 1984:16). The revolution transformed Iranian students into reluctant and accidental immigrants and exiles, who commonly invoke the metaphor of keeping their suitcases packed in their closets. The “stuck students” are differentiated from political and socio-cultural migrants; the former began fleeing Iran in February 1979 and comprise “monarchists, Nationalists, communists, and the Iranian Mojahedin,” whereas the latter fled “out of fear over an uncertain future for their children and/or because of the morose atmosphere” (Moghadam 1993:21). Exiles (e.g., political refugees, lower class migrants) left after the revolution (Bozorgmehr (1998:6-7), whereas immigrants (e.g., higher class migrants who came for education, business or settlement)
arrived before the revolution (16). Religious and ethnic minorities*possess exilic status, although not all are officially recognized.

In an Issue Paper published by the U.S. Committee for Refugees, Jones (1984) contends that the Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq War impacted an estimated one to two million refugees, who had no intention to return to Iran based on the new government’s policies (1). Iranians are atypical refugees in that they are “not quiet, cooperative, and pliable, they are often assertive, demanding, and contentious, a behavior pattern that frequently has marked political overtones” (ibid.:2). Refugees were forced to flee through an expensive, risky, “‘underground railroad’, ” because escape via the airport impossible (ibid.:10).

Immigration policies of nation-states differ, complicating the flow and settlement of Iranian refugees. Pakistan and Turkey are transitional countries, through which an estimated 25,000 to 50,000 Iranian refugees have traveled and remain. Turkey does not recognize Iranians as refugees, thus treating them as transitory inhabitants (ibid.:13). Canada liberalized its immigration policy in 1983, accepting 2000 Iranian students who lost funding or whose passports were not renewed by the Iranian government (ibid.:15). Canada is sympathetic to Iran’s religious minorities (one-third of the refugees) (ibid.). West Germany requires refugees to be physically present in order to be processed for asylum (which takes three months to two years). At the time of writing, Germans were less welcoming of refugees due to economic and political tensions. Class differences among Iranians in the U.S. are more pronounced than in Turkey and Germany because of social mobility, wealth, and heterogeneity (Ghorashi 2009:77).
The three significant waves of Iranians include the: pre-revolutionary (1950-1977), revolutionary (1982), and post-revolutionary (1979-present) periods (Mobasher 2004:299). Iranian immigration to the United States dates to 1921, although numbers prior to the 1950s are negligible (approximately 1816 people) (ibid.). In post-1960s Iran, sociopolitical conditions (e.g., economic prosperity, expanding middle-class, competition in Iranian universities) transformed the West as “a viable alternative for higher education” (Modarres 1989:35).

In the pre-revolutionary period, Iranians were visitors, students and their relatives or exiles (Modarres 1989:31). Between 1960 and 1969, the influx of the nonimmigrant, student population (approximately 10,000 per year) expanded to 513,023 (nonimmigrants) and 37,567 (immigrants) in the 1970s (ibid.:32, 35). Between 1975 and 1993, approximately 224,456 Iranians settled in the U.S., with a preference for urban living. Iranians preferred English-speaking countries because of Iranian-Western relations and English education in Iran. Still, the National Iranian American Council’s “Iran Census Report” of 2003 details that the number of Iranians in the U.S. is small and scattered (Mahdavi 2006:237). California is home to one-half of all Iranians in the United States (by 1990), according to Modarres (1989).

The revolutionary and post-revolutionary waves (1981 to 1990, approximately 12,624 people per year) contributed to the diversity of Iranians in the U.S., based on political, familial, sociocultural, religious, and age differences (Mobasher 2004:299). By 1981, Iranian immigration to the U.S. peaked (Modarres 1989:37). Restrictions on Iranians departing in the 1980s and 1990s (Ghorashi 2009:76) benefitted smugglers,
whose exorbitant fees influenced either their or the U.N.’s determination of destination countries. Family reunification and economic migrants led to economic enclaves and regional concentrations during this period (Modarres 1989:31).

In 1990, the number of Iranian immigrants reached an “all-time high” (ibid.:37), although this is contested by the immigrant categories of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the U.S. Census Bureau. The INS counts immigrants and cities that Iranians enter, and the U.S. Census Bureau considers foreign-born status, ancestry, and internal migration (ibid.). Utilizing both sets of data pertaining to Iranian born immigrants (ibid.:39)

lxix, Modarres ascertained a dearth of Iranians in Midwestern states, and a preference for bi-coastal settlement. Between 1980 and 1990, Iranians joined family and friends living bi-coastally upon graduation from Midwestern and Southern colleges (ibid.:42). The second highest “regionally stable Iranian community in the U.S.” occurs along the Atlantic coast (from Washington, D.C. to Boston) (ibid.:39). Due to educational and professional opportunities, Washington, D.C. has a demographic of 16,000 Iranians, who have settled in new homes in suburban areas (between 1975 and 1993), making “less visible Iranian neighborhoods” (ibid.:47)

lx. Texas has the third concentration and other states (Virginia, Maryland, Illinois, Florida, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Washington, highest to lowest respectively) have the fourth highest concentration of Iranians (Mobasher 2004:300).

The Iranian government’s macro-structural education policies are statistically represented in U.S. Census Bureau data; Iranians rank “third in educational attainment, behind Asian Indians and Taiwanese” (Mahdavi 2006:238). The U.S. government
favored recruitment of Iranian students (who intended to return to Iran and contribute to the Shah’s trajectory of modernization), as their high acceptance rates attest (Jones 1984). Historically, France, West Germany, England attracted more Iranian students, although the U.S. has had a larger “share since the 1960s [and] has outnumbered other major Western countries” (Modarres 1996:35). In 1973, student populations in France (1,492) and England (871) peaked, but the U.S. population surpassed these numbers (9,623) (ibid.). Pursuit of education explains the Iranian presence in urban areas where universities are located (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1991; Modarres 1998; Nassehy-Benham 1991).

*Iranian Emigrants*, a publication by Books LLC (2010), attests to Iranians’ own interest in documenting the breadth of the Iranian diaspora. The unnamed editors link the hard copy to an “online version … [which] is part of Wikipedia” (v). Notably, the inability of the editors to agree on the content of the publication is noted in the Introduction: “After a long process of discussion, debate, and argument, articles gradually take on a neutral point of view reached through consensus” (vi). Although the publication lacks in-depth data, it references Iranian settlements globally, provides some bibliographic entries and references famous Iranians in the locations in questions: France, Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Iranian Americans, Iranian Australians, Iranian Canadians, Iranian citizens abroad, and Iranian Kuwaitis. Modarres (1996) claims that Iranians are one of “the most diverse ethnic geographies in the U.S.” (31), based on: religion (e.g., Armenian, Assyrian, Bahá’í, Jew, Shi’a Muslim, Sufi, Zoroastrian), ethnicity (e.g., Arab, Azerbaijani, Bakhtiari, Baluchi, Kurd, Persians,
Turkoman, Qashqa’i), language (Bozorgmehr 1998; Hillmann 1984; Hoffman 1990; Mahdavi 2006), all of which influence socio-political-economic divisions.

Strategies to circumvent discrimination and prejudice

Discrimination and prejudice continue to be a central feature of the Iranian and Middle Eastern transnational experience. Research on discrimination is a void in transnational literature, according to Portes (1999). While discrimination may forge common identity and economic alliances, it reminds immigrants that they are “in the country, but certainly not of it” (ibid.:465). Immigrants tend not to be from the elite class, which intensifies discriminatory rhetoric and characterizes immigrants as “fifth columns” (ibid.:473).

American ignorance of U.S.-Iranian and Middle Eastern historical relations exacerbates the problem. Pollack (2004) argues that, “the history of U.S.-Iranian relations is absolutely essential to appreciate the nature of the problems we currently confront” (xxi). The average American’s poor historical education, however, contrasts with Iranians’ intimate knowledge of U.S.-Iranian relations, which Pollack contends is “a constant stumbling block, made worse by the fact that what they [Iranians] know as history is, in most cases, a distorted concoction of their own nationalist, religious, and even Marxist zealots” (ibid.:xxii). The gulf of misunderstanding is assured in the confrontation between Americans’ lack of knowledge and Iranians’ “distorted concoction of history.”

The category of “Middle Eastern immigrant” complicates Portes’ (1999) position on discrimination in several ways: first, a high percentage of Middle Easterners are elite; second, there is a preference for endogamy; and third, their “entrepreneurial
"habitus" benefits cultural survival. The U.S. Census Bureau’s ambiguous categories and Iranian and Middle Eastern immigrants’ non-traditional immigrant status (Belsie 2002:66-68; Tehranian 2009) relates to several factors. First, most Iranians and Middle Easterners are endowed with extensive entrepreneurial, educational, and social network resources upon arrival (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:ix). Second, Iranians (and Middle Easterners) are the least segregated immigrants, and live in diverse communities (ibid.:15). Third, the classification as “white” confuses Middle Easterners and Americans alike (ibid.:xxi). Finally, they are categorized as Muslim, although not “all Muslims are Middle Eastern, and not all Middle Eastern Americans are Muslims” (ibid.:29). Middle Eastern immigrants are not associated with the “browning of America,” but experience discrimination (ibid.:xxii) based on a stereotypical Middle Eastern phenotype that impacts encounters in interpersonal and institutional settings (ibid.:63).

Political events incite discrimination, intensified by media portrayals of Muslims as an essentialized religious category, “dangerous outsiders” (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:12-13), terrorists lustful for violence, and oppress women (ibid.:41-53). While links between Islam and terrorism have historical roots, this “is neither unique to the region nor is it a universal trait” (ibid.:62). Racial profiling of “Muslim-looking” people (Mahdavi 2006:212) began with “the hostage crisis,” and is supported by a litany of incidences (ibid.:219-223). The U.S. government’s profiling policies disregard the statistical fact that “between 1984 and 1998, 95% of terrorist incidents in the United States—83 out of 87 incidents—were attributed to domestic groups” (ibid.:224). Americans regard “white terrorism” as a personality disorder (Marvasti and McKinney
2004:x), whereas Middle Eastern terrorists “come from a ‘culture’ that condones their behavior” (ibid.:79).

Marvasti and McKinney (2004) address strategies Middle Eastern Americans employ to confront discrimination (91). For example, using humor and teasing Americans when they mispronounce names (while some may Anglicize the Persian name choose a common “American name,” like Bob) (ibid.:93-94). In order to challenge stereotypes, Iranians educate friends and neighbors to avoid categorization, although they get tired of explaining their origins (ibid.). Others may assume the role of “cultural ambassador,” and challenge “the account-giver’s knowledge about the topic” (ibid.:95). Some simply confront ignorance directly, and correct an inaccurate portrayal (ibid.:96). “Passing” as another ethnicity or emphasizing one’s city rather than country of origin is a common practice (and was especially prevalent in the post-revolutionary period) (ibid.:97). Finally, the strategist may confound or embarrass the questioner by referring to oneself as Coptic rather than Egyptian, for example (ibid.:98). Iranians commonly manipulate American’s inability to distinguish between nationality (Iranian) and ethnicity (Persian) in order “to disassociate themselves from … negative images” associated with Iran (Mahdavi 1998:236).

Discrimination may divide host-guest interaction through economic enclaves (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997; Sanadjian 1995). Mobasher (2004) argues that an “ethnic ownership economy” develops as ethnic populations expand, especially in conjunction with structural, economic, and technological changes in society (ibid.:297). Migrants equipped with class (i.e., socio-economic inheritances) and ethnic resources (i.e., capital,
labor, customers, clients) are at an advantage in establishing businesses (ibid.:298). Proximity to one’s homeland, inexpensive flights, the Internet, and “niche advertising to color-coded identity politics” all contribute to and exacerbate economic and cultural insularity (Jacoby 2004:7).

Iranian communities in North America

Studies of Iranian Americans have expanded since Hoffman’s (1990) assertion that the “paucity of research on Iranians in the U.S. makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about the nature of this community” (279). However, the complexity of describing and theorizing about Iranian transnationals is a result of their diversity. Hoffman argues that, “Iranians constitute a significant yet relatively unrecognized cultural minority group in the U.S. … [who] are the least understood and least well-known of any U.S. ethnic minority” (279). Iranians are unique from other immigrant groups because they posses a high degree of social (and economic) capital, evident in the “high level of class resources among Iranians” (Mahdavi 2006:238).

Iranians in Canada, on other hand, according to the publication *Iranian Emigrants* (Books LLC 2010), are estimated to be 121,510 from the 2006 communities (of those Iranians who have completed a census), and communities are “found in Southern Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec … [and] the vast majority … live in the northern suburbs of Toronto … and in the municipalities of Vancouver” (35). Iranians interested in emigrating to or seeking asylum in Canada benefitted from the liberalization of the Canadian immigration policy in 1983 following the Iran-Iraq War. The Canadian
government welcomed approximately 2000 Iranians, “half of them students whose funding had been cancelled and whose passport renewals had been denied by the Iranian government” (Jones 1984:15). One-third of the refugees in Canada include religious minorities (e.g., Bahá’í, Jews, Armenian Christians), groups toward whom the government has been sympathetic. Iranians are also supported by the Iranian Ferdowsi Association of Canada, which determines the legitimacy of refugee status and guards against agents sent by Khomeini’s government (ibid.).

Studies on Iranians in North America tend to focus on ethnic institutions or economic enclaves, which may be attributed to their reticence to share their intimate lives with probing researchers. Institutional interactions present a relatively innocuous cultural focus, which tends toward cultural preservation, rather than intimate familial interactions. These public sphere observances of culture, however, can also uncover the politics of representation. Institutional life in the diaspora celebrates national identity as the default signifier of camaraderie. Community-supported institutions are more likely where a demographically critical mass exists and can sustain a self-servicing mission that symbolizes “social and cultural cohesion among Iranians” (Hoffman 1990:279). Iranians possess educational, entrepreneurial, and professional acumen that buffers discrimination through respect for skills, serves community needs through economic niches, and reinvigorates ethnic identity (Mahdavi 2006:238-239).

Whether a geographic concentration of Iranians exists, institutions are evidence that “social and cultural cohesion among Iranians is growing” (Hoffman 1990:279). Restaurants, carpet shops, and grocery stores are the economic predecessors of Iranian
communities, according to Mobasher (2004), and serve as the infrastructural nuclei of identity and interaction (301). Fischer and Abedi (1990) contend that restaurants and shopkeepers are crucial “to paint Iranian-American life … through the occupational translations in America” (263). Economic niches are public spaces that “recreate nostalgic cultural settings” (ibid.). Similar to many Iranian-owned restaurants in the Twin Cities, Iranian-owned restaurants in Houston non-Iranian food (i.e., fast food, pizza), but may serve Iranian food, although “one has to be in the know” (ibid.). Ritual courtesy is enacted through “the warmth of polite recognition or real friendship that created a familial ambiance quite different from the anonymity of an ordinary restaurant” (ibid.). In this way, Iranian clientele provides an air of authenticity against the backdrop of “home.”

Iranian shops symbolize Iranian identity and interaction (Kamalkhani 1998:117). “Persian carpet shops are perhaps the quintessential Persian locale” (Fischer and Abedi 1990:263). In Houston, carpet dealers had different styles, business strategies, and savvy, including: the family-run frugal baazaari from old merchant and industrialist families (ibid.); the kaasebi, who run an aggressive business “with borrowed capital, ostentatious big spending, … cultivation of an aristocratic style, … and aggressive gheychi kardan (cutting off competitors by opening shops on either side); and the owner whose “carpet shop is but one piece of a diversified set of investments” (ibid.:265). In Norway, the Persian carpet store is “a center for exchange of news about Norwegian society and other Iranians” (Kamalkhani 1998:117). The significance of carpets cannot be underestimated;
they are on par with gold, their “value often increases and it can ensure a family’s future economic security” (118).

Mobasher’s (2004) study of the Iranian ethnic economy in Dallas, Texas examined how technology and competition were vehicles to convey ethnicity, sustain a “nonspatial community” (300), fashion solidarity, compete healthily, and interact with co-ethnic businesses (e.g., job creation, economic advancement) (305). Technology generates a symbolic community that cuts across differences of age, profession, religion, and politics, encouraging shared conversation around “cultural, economic, and political news about Iran and Iranian immigrants” (ibid.:300). Dallas’ demographic supports a variety of events, services, and institutions (e.g., Iranian Yellow Pages, film screenings, Persian holidays, language classes, religious and professional organizations), which act as quasi-cultural brokers to promote and advertise happenings (ibid.:302). Among one’s co-ethnics, competition for Iranian and non-Iranian customers is friendly and healthy, while interethnic grocery merchants (i.e., Indian-owned) generate hostile competition by undercutting prices at Iranian stores. Gossiping about competitors attempts to “delegitimize and destroy the reputation of non-Iranian business owners” (ibid.:303). Claiming they lack the Iranian community’s welfare, stores tug at citizens’ heartstrings by advertising via Iranian media the value of community, healthy ingredients, and Iranian heritage (ibid.:302). Financial support and appeal to cultural identity has economic, cultural, and political implications that function to protect ethnic market economies, revitalize ethnic identity and consciousness, and secure advantage over other ethnic businesses (ibid.:306).
Dallalfar’s (1996) study of female Iranian entrepreneurs in Los Angeles, whose businesses are integral to the domestic sphere, presents how housewives reinvent identity through the private and public spheres. Following an ethnic-economy paradigm, Dallalfar traces the transformation of networks in small, family-operated businesses that were “culturally and symbolically tied to the customs, traditions, aptitudes, and values of the home society” (109). Utilizing the class structure, extended family, and friendship networks, women accumulate economic and social capital. Family-run businesses, according to Brettell and DeBerjeois (2004), allow women to “construct their own public domain with its own ladder of achievement,” while shouldering childcare duties and building socio-political capital for the next generation (325). For example, Korean women in Hawaii, work in family businesses out of necessity and respect for the traditional male head of household norm (ibid.).

While economic institutions support intra-community needs through ethnic revitalization, they have inter-community functions that can sustain the institution’s life in the event that intra-community political skirmishes arise and threaten institutional viability. Socio-cultural institutions (e.g., ethnic associations), on the other hand, serve intra-community needs almost exclusively. Ethnic associations are oriented toward traditional or modern pursuits: traditional approaches reinforce “old country” values and “non-forgetting,” while modern approaches value universalistic, inclusive, transnational culture, and acceptance of permanent settlement in the U.S. (Biparva 1994:373; Chao 1995). Ethnic associations function to aid assimilation, guard against discrimination and prejudice, and build bridges between immigrant and host societies. At the same time,
they may impede assimilation by minimizing contact with the host society, reinforcing social cliques, endogamy, and similarity in occupations and neighborhoods, and emphasizing specific rather than whole aspects of culture. Biparva (1994) defines ethnic associations as:

bodies that intend to satisfy diverse fundamental needs and complex values, i.e. cultural needs for an ethnocultural group. Individuals affiliate with such associations on the basis of homogeneous ethnic background, because of an interest in the culture or customs of their society of origin, or because they anticipate that these groups will satisfy some material and/or psychological needs. Ethnic organizations are characterized by dynamic structures and goals, reflecting influence from at least two frames of reference—the old and the new society.

(369)

Mahdi’s (1998) study of the discourse of twelve Iranian ethnic associations (e.g., by-laws, statements of purpose, constitutions), and Iranian newspapers, found that preserving Iranian identity was the rationale for involvement, although “approaches to Iranian national, cultural, or ethnic identity have been essentialist, static, monolithic, and idealistic” (ibid.:78-79). Iranian cultural associations serve to: enculturate children in Iranian traditions and teach Persian, help navigate American institutions and culture, express and preserve culture and ethnicity, and reinforce cultural cohesion, rhythms, and security (Ansari 1992; Biparva 1994; Dallalfar 1996; Gilanshah 1986; Hoffman 1990; Mahdi 1998; Mobasher 2004; Moghissi 2001; Naficy 1993). In Washington, D.C., these associations endeavored to preserve culture, restructure the Iranian government,
foster a unified sense of Iranianness, while being less concerned with “mutual assistance, problem-solving, and humanitarian concerns” (Biparva 1994:380-381).

As variations of ethnic associations, religious organizations encourage interaction with and continuity of cultural traditions among co-ethnics (Biparva 1994:372). Feher’s (1998) study of the institutional aspects of the International Judea Foundation (IJF/SIAMAK) (74) arose inadvertently, due to her inability to make entrée into an Iranian Jewish community in Los Angeles. Originally, IJF/SIAMAK functioned to accommodate Iranian Jews in matters of escape from Iran, settlement, integration, and religious worship (ibid.:76-77). But as emigration from Iran waned in the 1990s, the organization retooled its mission in order to reap relationships with American Jews, reassess “tricultural conflicted” identity (i.e., Iranian, Jewish, American), and preserve Judaism (ibid.:78). Feher discovered that Iranian Jews “had one eye on this country and the other on Iran,” and felt little affinity with American Jews with whom they did not share “Anglo-Saxon values,” English language skills, and European descent (ibid.:74). Perhaps more notably, insularity was intensified by “the high value placed on keeping difficulties and conflicts ‘in the family’” (ibid.:75).

Cultural activities stressed by IJF/SIAMAK entail a mélange of the best of Iran and North America (ibid.:80-81), although “juggling identities” creates conflict between the older generation, “in-betweens,” and American-born Iranians (ibid.:81). Other goals emphasize the need to: educate youth about Jewish identity and encourage them “to ‘come back to Judaism’”; increase the readership of Chashm Andaaz, a magazine addressing “critical issues facing teens”; and establish a “Second Home” for children,
which acts as “the extended family. … For those families where the father works sixteen hours a day and the mother is away at work … [a]unts and uncles will take charge” (ibid.:87-88, emphasis in original). Without this, Iranian Jews fear they will become “an ‘endangered species’” within thirty years (ibid.:89). Iranian Jews identify with faith first, which reinforces endogamy; “all respondents mentioned the importance of marrying Jews,” and Feher knew of no Iranian Jews married to non-Iranians (ibid.:84-85).

Mahdi (1998) argues that an absence of a central institutional authority transforms family, educational, and research institutions into competing institutions for the staying power of identity. Biparva (1994) found that identity preservation, unity, adaptation, and political socialization were not facilitated by national and traditional celebrations (391), political activities (e.g., promoting democracy in Iran) or ethnic associations (ibid.:392). Rather, ethnic organizations focused on tangential cultural preservation through Farsi conversation and inter-association cooperation (ibid.:391-392). Most importantly, cultural preservation is impacted by “Iranian traditional values on the family and other aspects of social life among Iranian community” (ibid.:392-393). Farsi fluency is critical to identity preservation for three reasons: to reinvigorate threatened heritage; to mark difference and anti-assimilation; and to translate foreign cultural ideals in the reformulation of self-identity (Chaichian 1997:618).

While inward-looking activities of ethnic associations impede assimilation, they also offer services that ease transition (e.g., schooling, traditional celebrations, published pamphlets in the native language) (Biparva 1994:372). Ideally, ethnic institutions “create consensus and balance different interests by providing both social integration and
opportunities which make it possible for immigrants to meet their special needs … [and] to express their ethnic identity” (ibid.:374). However, due to “outlived purposes, unrealistic aspirations, replacement by other groups, and/or difficulty in member recruitment,” their lives are ephemeral (ibid.:393).

Associations do not guarantee unity however. In fact, they may become a counterpoint of difference. Hoffman (1990) noted “a high level of social fragmentation and organizational instability among Iranians … with little overt evidence of strong community cohesion that spans religious and ethnic categories” (279). Diversity complicates the definition of “Iranian culture,” despite the fact that “there are certain dimensions of cultural identity that remain characteristic of those individuals who define themselves as ‘Iranian’” (ibid.:280). Bauer (2000) makes this same point, but examines public debate within organizations to provide clues to how Iranians forge exilic culture. She uncovered an increasing inclination to a “‘nationalized’ culture … dominated by the Persian language, permeated with Islamic connotations and images from the revolution, symbolized by women’s behavior and gender relations. Kermani, Armenian, and Kurdi … become Iranian in exile and women’s multiple identities become forged into the ‘Iranian woman’” (ibid.:187-188).

Small, dispersed communities, such as that in the Twin Cities, have a pattern of community fission and fusion based on people’s willingness and availability to invest time and money in some form of institutional life celebrating Iranian heritage. They have potential for friendship as well as problems if they recognize that what binds them in exile would be a source of distinction in Iran. Weakly formed (typically small)
communities may refuel identity through the marketplace (i.e., restaurants) or occasional community-wide gatherings at the major holidays. Where communities are large enough to support religious or ethnic constituencies, Iranians tend to segregate according to these interests and needs, what Bozorgmehr (1998) calls internal ethnicity (17).

Chaichian’s (1997) study of first generation (ages 18 and older), “professional loners” (621) in Iowa City, Iowa provides a comparison to Iranians in the Twin Cities, because of their relatively small demographics. Chaichian discloses the difficulties between sustaining identity in a small community and the lack of integration with the host community. While he found Iranians to be receptive to host culture and bilingualism, temporal distance from Iran instilled isolation and loneliness. Following a bicultural, pluralist paradigm, Chaichian examines the dialectical process of adjustment to host cultural values, and the balance they strike between a “healthier adjustment” and “complete assimilation” (ibid.:613). Sixty-one percent of his interviewees retained Iranian citizenship, were reluctant to become naturalized, and lingered in a “stage of ambivalence” (ibid.:617). First-generation Iranians experience conflict confronting an idealized but vanishing past, and an identity that is “tolerated but neither appreciated nor promoted” (ibid.:618). Identification with and expression of Iranianness hinged upon communicating in Persian, celebrating secular and religious holidays, comfort in being Iranian among non-Iranians, and liberal attitudes toward religion (ibid.:618-619). Identity preservation was primarily a middle- and upper-class matter, whereas the working class associated poverty and hardship with Iranianness (ibid.:619). Similar to Hoffman’s behavioral and instrumental learners in California, Chaichian found that
speaking English and celebrating Christmas did not threaten Iranian identity (ibid.:620). Christmas trees were put up, because they are beautiful, happy, and the children enjoy them; a religious-turned-secular holiday is enjoyed “without actually appreciating and internalizing their social and historical significance” (ibid.).

Chaichian admits to a tentative conclusion based on a non-representative sample (ibid.:624). In it, he offers six generalities regarding Iranians in the U.S. First, Iranians came in pursuit of education and/or to escape social, political, and economic problems. Second, they tend to be bilingual; they speak Persian at home and with co-ethnics. Third, American rituals and holidays are celebrated without impinging upon Iranianness. Fourth, many Iranians eschew the national marker “American,” preferring either Iranian or Iranian American. Fifth, friendships with Iranians and non-European occur more often than with European Americans. Finally, parents raise their children to demonstrate and appreciate Iranian values (ibid.). Nonetheless, isolation, depression, and loneliness were significant issues, relating to “subtle but pervasive forms of prejudice and discrimination,” “failure to blend,” introversion, and the “reserved nature of the Iranian social and cultural values that do not sanction professional counseling” (ibid.:624-625).

Assimilationist policies favor immigrants who enter the country at a higher rung on the economic ladder (i.e., with social capital such as education, specialized skills). In the U.S., the “‘ambivalent concept of the ‘nation-state’” and “national discourse [that] allows thick cultural differences within its thin notion of national identity” (Ghorashi 1990:80), articulates exilic identity and dislocation alongside national consciousness, nationalism, and belonging (78). Ambivalence allows the displaced to “claim their part
of the pie within the national discourse about Americanness,” especially ideals of inclusivity, freedom, and democracy (ibid.:79). Ghorashi describes American identity as “an umbrella that includes different particularities,” but is grounded in the fundamental value of success. Immigrants can remain culturally distinct and “be American” by contributing to the country’s progress (ibid.).

Iranian communities in Europe

Macro-level European and Scandinavian immigration policies offer a contrast to U.S. immigration policies, and an alternative view of the Iranian transnational experience. The thread that runs through these studies relate to a historical lack of a melting pot ideology that purportedly absorbs into assimilative homogeneity. These studies addressed the prevalence of refugees, and their transition through the asylum cycle. Because asylum policy in Western Europe tends to be more liberal, the focus on refugees is central. However, the liberal policy contrasts with an exclusionary nationalist discourse and cultural racism that leads to pillarization. Indigenous cultural discourse tends to be monolithic and essentialist, which obstructs the full integration of refugees and immigrants.

The flux and uncertainty of transnational connectedness in late modernity informs Ghorashi et al.’s (2009) examination of the migrant-majority nationalist discourse in Norway and the Netherlands. Claims of authenticity and autonomy are embedded in ideologies of cultural dominance, the Western ideal, and the “Islamic threat” (2). The historical, discursive, and “practical manifestations of culturalism” (i.e., cultural racism)
differ depending on that country’s specific discourse (ibid.). For example, since 2000, protectionist and exclusionary discourse in the Netherlands draws “on a homogenous, static, coherent, and rooted notion of culture,” whilst Muslim culture is presented as deviant, third “Islamic pillar” supposed antithetical to Protestantism and Catholicism (ibid.:3-4). Pillarization encourages and preserves migrant culture, denies autonomy, attends to cultural difference and ethnicity, and separates an individual “from his or her cultural category” (ibid.:4). “Paradoxically, this happened in an increasingly de-pillarized Netherlands … in which individual autonomy was seen as prevailing and protected” (ibid.:4). A focus on immigrant diversity and resistance strategies considers transnational positioning of migrants to challenge hegemonic taxonomies, and to forge and define a new identity “inspired by individual experiences in relation to structural forces” (ibid.:6). Individuals critique native habitus and essentialist culture and allow for “innovation and supplementation with new cultural elements” (ibid.:7). The process requires safekeeping and social recognition, which for Iranians in Norway, is difficult due to their negatively assessed social capital, and a potential “break with the very idea of Iranianness” (ibid.). The Norwegian welfare state guarantees all citizens the same rights, despite socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious differences, although minorities represent a new underclass (which is related to culture) (ibid.:5).

Ghorashi’s (2009) comparative study of Iranians and Iranian organizations in the Netherlands and Los Angeles revealed diametric positions relative to host society rhetoric (75). Drawing upon data compiled from an unspecified number of interviewees in the Netherlands, and data on Iranian organizations in Los Angeles. Whereas Iranians
in the Netherlands nurtured a nostalgic dialectic with Iran and the past and did not hyphenate identity (ibid.), Iranians in Los Angeles identified as hybrids who belonged (ibid.:77). Iranians in Holland are processed as political asylees, and their individual political story is vital to their acceptance (ibid.:82). Inter-Iranian interaction is hindered by the presence of the Iranian embassy in The Hague (“the ‘enemy’ was close”) and fear (due to political assassinations of Iranians in the 1980s) (ibid.). In the 1990s, a short-lived Iranian organization was formed to foster “cultural, social, and democratic activities” (ibid.). The community’s lack of cohesiveness is attributed to pillarization and Iran’s political history (ibid.). The Dutch historical lens of migrants and immigration as “guest workers” and asylum seekers, entails “temporariness” and denies full integration (ibid.:84). Cultural fundamentalism frames the immigrants’ socio-economic woes as obstacles; they must deny native culture and assimilate (ibid.), which is denied by the “thick construction of Dutchness” (ibid.:86).

Koser’s (1997) study of Iranians in Holland examined the migration of asylum seekers from Iran to Europe between 1992 and 1994 (595). Koser investigated three hypotheses were investigated relative to migrants’ social networks and decisions to migrate (ibid.:597). The distinction between Iranian refugees from labor migrants seeking asylum determines how social networks impact the “asylum cycle,” and influence reasons for and changing experiences of migration, choices of destination, and differential adaptation processes (592). The social networks approach integrates micro- and macro- perspectives to provide “a single framework for studying the variety of economic, social and political factors that are involved in the migration process”
Koser differentiates “realist” refugees, who reckon that political events and psychological suffering persist through the refugee experience, whereas “nominalist” refugees consider the category as “a social construction that masks empirical similarities between refugees and other immigrants” (e.g., structural positions relative to labor markets, immigration policies, racism) (ibid.:591). The “asylum seeker” category, nominalists argue, serves a political purpose of exclusion (i.e., of immigrants) (ibid.:592). Because Europe’s family reunification policy for asylum seekers is not fully institutionalized, Iranians in Holland use it as a reason for migration (ibid.:599-600).

Holland’s lenient asylum policy made it the final destination (ibid.:600-601), and family and friends in Europe and smugglers provided crucial information (ibid.:601). Social networks facilitate adaptation by providing short-term assistance (e.g., housing, employment advice), emotional support, information, financial assistance, and childcare (ibid.:602). Respondents with social networks undergo less dejection, depression, and mental health problems (ibid.:603). Koser concludes that similarities between asylum seekers and labor migrants converge on the exploitation of social networks during some phase of migration, which influenced migration selectivity, destination, and alternative functions other than housing or employment (ibid.:604).

Similar to majority-minority assessments in Ghorashi et al.’s and Koser’s studies of Iranians in the Netherlands, in which the increasing rootedness of Dutch identity frames Iranianness as transient and incapable of hybridity, Sanadjian’s (1995) study of Iranian exiles in Germany examines nationality-citizenship tensions within the context of pro-Nazi, anti-foreigner attacks (in the early to mid-1990s). Iranian exilic refusal to
identify as media-portrayed victims “avoided the implications of being found a foreigner” (ibid.:5), symbolized their expression of Germanness, and subverted “the very basis on which the category of Germanness was founded—the Other” (ibid.:6-7). The paradox of the invisible public Iranian, and Germans protesting the Other, divulged a German rather than German-foreigner problem (ibid.:6-8). Sanadjian’s study focused on the transgression of Iranians’ “intimate thresholds” and “a shared recognition by both sides of the significance of the boundaries violated” (ibid.:6). Media attention on Iranians’ claims that they are not “‘genuine’ refugees,” questions their legitimacy and impacts tolerance (ibid.:9-10). Still, some respondents trust in German social democracy and multicultural advocacy, best exemplified in the social market that allows for “‘possessive individualism’ … edified by property right” (ibid.:11). Exemplified by the case of a carpet dealer married to a German woman, he creates “Home” through his “Iranian niche,” comprised of Iranian musicians and poets who enact “rituals of Iranianness … within a nicely decorated large hall in his house” (ibid.:12). The “meal’s Iranian character” is celebrated in an ambiguous, hybrid space signified by the consumption of German beer, honoring food taboos (refraining from pork), and serving traditional lamb (ibid.). In a semi-private, tension-filled space, a “strictly formalized, gaze” persisted among guests, released through dancing (ibid.). Political avoidance stimulated a “joyful, hedonistic, and temporary celebration of home” (ibid.). As “metaphorical journeys back home,” the feasts (bazms and mihmanis) unified Iranians around “home as a spatially embodied ‘culture’,” rather than nostalgic interplay (ibid.:14). Paradoxically, the tension between the market and home translated into homesickness, revealed by a “spatially-
oriented ritualistic celebration of homelessness” (ibid.). Within the cosmopolitan space of Persian concerts presented for German and Iranian bourgeoisie, national distinction occurred through a politically neutral face of the “exotic” Iranian (ibid.:16) xciii. As “agents of a class whose site of cultural reproduction was the world system,” Iranian propriety was presented through dress and ritualistic posture, which demarcated the “threshold” and ambiguity of relationships (ibid.:16-17). Exilic Iranian presence among the German bourgeoisie becomes “indigenized” through “a contingent deployment of their class image” (ibid.:19) xciv.

In the private sphere, intimates share narratives of loss and views of Germans that reflect binary oppositions (e.g., warmth/coldness, dedication/selfishness) (ibid.:22) xcv. Unlike Turkish and Portuguese workers, inaccessibility of “home” for Iranians was compensated through property and the marketplace, wherein they inhabit “their middle-class position in its idealized western bourgeois space” (30), and forge “a sense of ‘community’” and institutional anchor (ibid.:31). Middle-class space links market, capital, and the bourgeois, which “constitutes a major source of status for Iranians” (ibid.:32). Significantly, proximity to other Iranians destabilizes this, since procuring status entails uncertainties that instill a “prevalent suspicion characterizing the experience of ‘community’ by Iranians in Germany” (ibid.).

Iranian communities in Scandinavia

Kamalkhani’s (1988) study of Iranian immigrants (i.e., long term migrants) and refugees (i.e., newcomers) (124) in Norway, traces three migratory patterns (1979-1980, 1980-
1984, and 1984-1986), which outnumbered the student population (22). The first wave consisted of Bahá’ís, businessmen, and “convenience marriages” (i.e., between Iranians and Norwegians who met in Iran through oil company connections or at English universities) (ibid.:18). This group eventually established roots in the 1970s, and consisted of: upper-, middle- or business-class educated urbanites, who spoke foreign languages, were financially stable, and identified with Europe lifeways and worldview (ibid.:59). Refugees arrived between 1983-1984 and 1985-1986 (30), and had less education, little experience abroad, were ethnic and religious minorities (ibid.:60-61), appeared healthy, and owned more possessions than other refugees (ibid.:127). The “refugee house” in Bergen (created for Vietnamese refugees), a clearinghouse to transition, make friends, and exchange information (ibid.:130), aided Bahá’ís (the majority of refugees) (ibid.:127) by offering Norwegian language courses, conducting medical exams, coaching for interviews with police and refugee authorities, and ensuring eligibility and evaluation of educational credentials (ibid.:128-129).

Norwegian Bahá’ís act ethically and morally Norwegian by welcoming Iranians and ushering in “a new and restricted socio-religious order … [with] a set of rights and duties” (66). Iranian Bahá’ís are instructed to behave properly, avoid pre-marital sex, be apolitical and self-sufficient, and acquire Norwegian and English fluency to “‘make oneself a unique Bahai’” (ibid.). Yet, differences between Iranian and Norwegian Bahá’ís remain in terms of communication and language, identification with Iran and Iranian culture, attitudes toward sex, the involvement of children in religion, and real or potential violence and death threats that Iranian Bahá’ís faced in Iran (ibid.:82-83).
Iranian Bahá’ís arrived in Norway in three waves. The first group arrived in the 1970s as “political refugees” (ibid.:31), established Bahá’í institutions, and “played the role of advisor, interpreter, sponsor, or spokesman for the Bahá’ís” (ibid.:57). The second group left Iran between 1977 and 1981, consisting of relatives of the first wave (political refugee status was granted in 1983) (ibid.:57-58). Students comprised this wave primarily, becoming the heart of the Bahá’í community, and assuming their predecessors’ roles as religious representatives and cultural liaisons (ibid.:58). The third, largest, and final wave began in 1981, when the Iranian government imposed its severest sanctions against Bahá’ís. This wave utilized connections with relatives in Norway to secure tourist visas. In time, they “applied for refugee status after arrival” (ibid.:31), but experienced a liminal phase of “illegality” (ibid.:32).

Bahá’í escape stories divulge the difficulties of flight, including political uncertainties in Iraq, geographic barriers of Turkish mountain passes, and Pakistani deserts and sexual harassment. The global Bahá’í community was instrumental in organizing and facilitating the transfer of Bahá’ís from refugee camps (e.g., a letter of support was required to prove Bahá’í affiliation) (ibid.:65). Because Bahá’ís were well connected, they did not require temporary refugee accommodations in Norway.

Feher’s (1998) study of an Iranian Jewish ethnic organization in Los Angeles bears similarities to the host-immigrant pressures in Kamalkhani’s (1988) research on Iranians in Norway in which, for Bahá’ís, faith did not supersede cultural difference. Internal ethnicity organized around the mahfel (a Bahá’í institution with nine elected representatives responsible for managing community concerns) (89). Private meetings of
mahfel members address economics, religion, and schooling, while ziafat meetings involve the community with expectations of involvement (ibid.:90). Elders are appointed as administrative and religious leaders, because of their “education, Norwegian language ability, knowledge of Bahá’í religious principles” (ibid.), and authority to impose sanctions (e.g., losing the right to vote in the mahfel) on community members who “violate the religious norms” (ibid.:91-93). In contrast, Shi’a Iranians lacked a religious institutional structure and kin network, which for Bahá’ís were sources of social information and status as a persecuted religious minority (ibid.:80-81).

Also in Scandinavia, Hosseini-Kaladjahi’s (1997) study of Iranian social, cultural, and economic integration in Sweden follows a Parsonian approach to argue that occupational degradation impedes economic integration when migrating from traditional to industrial societies (18). In terms of education and occupancy of white-collar jobs, Iranians in Sweden outrank native Swedes disproportionately (ibid.:35). However, the inability to replicate their status in Iran introduces “serious difficulties, as compared to the labour immigrants” (i.e., “proletarianization” upon arrival) (ibid.:37-38). Considering time invested, one’s educational and occupational assets transform into liabilities (ibid.:40). Unskilled Iranians who serve the community (e.g., Persian teachers, interpreters), and students who obtain their first jobs upon graduation (ibid.:70), tended not to experience degradation. Further, a Swedish university degree did not facilitate access to employment, which Hosseini-Kaladjahi attributes to discrimination by Swedish employers and disregard of Iranians’ job experience from Iran (ibid.:71). Iranians’ household income places them in the secondary segment of employment, self-
employment or service to the Iranian community, which explains their “remarkably inferior position” (ibid.:72).

Most Iranians in Sweden left Iran after the revolution, and are either radical or non-radical modernists, who are more likely to acculturate than traditionalists (ibid.:85-86). “The greater the contradiction between the cultural baggage and the new culture, the more difficult is the acculturation,” a conundrum influenced by gender, age, family, education, length of residence, prospects of remaining, contact with Iran, and association with Swedes (ibid.:86). Paradoxically, although traditional women had less exposure to modernization in Iran, their attitudes toward egalitarianism were more positive (ibid.:87-88). Furthermore, the traditional extended family negatively influences acculturation (ibid.:88). Hosseini-Kaladjahi concludes that the “life and destiny of an ethnic group are directly influenced by: 1) the size and composition of the group, 2) the social conditions current in the country of origin, 3) the social conditions current in the country of residence, and 4) the international movements and processes having an impact on the relations between countries (ibid.:156). In the first case, as the community expands, intermarriage becomes more prevalent, and marketplace opportunities open up. Secondly, Iranians remain in Sweden as political and cultural factors play out in Iran that prohibit returning. Thirdly, discrimination influences entrance into the Swedish labor market, and inhibits opportunities for Swedish-Iranian interaction (ibid.:156). Finally, transnational processes and uneven development and industrialization increases migration from developing to developed countries, which impacts adjustment, occupations,
education (e.g., Iranians lose their education credentials), and a negative assessment of
Iranians as coming from a less industrialized nation (ibid.:161).

Transnational Iranian family matters

For Iranians, family is the seat of emotional and economic support (Nassehi-Behnam
1985) and identity (Mahdi 1997:53-54). Gender roles, marriage, and parent-child
relationships are inevitably subject to the stresses and strains of the migratory experience.
The demands of work to support family and maintain an American lifestyle, separation
from family, and changing social networks are common challenges (Brettell and

Iranian Americans experience and respond to change in a number of ways.

Intergenerational conflict is significant for incorporation into the host society, because it
speaks to the complex institution of the family. Mahdi’s (1998) study of second-
generation Iranians in the United States raises concerns of authenticity and genuineness
relative to Iranian identity, posing the question of what besides one’s place of birth,
language, and cultural awareness makes them “distinctly Iranians” (77). Following
popular literature to determine the nature of public Iranian identity construction, Mahdi
studied the discourse of ethnic associations and Iranian newspapers to show how
“popular approaches to Iranian national, cultural, or ethnic identity have been essentialist,
static, monolithic, and idealistic. These approaches draw selectively on isolated instances
of national traditions, failing to contextualize these instances historically, spatially, or
conceptually” (ibid.:79). The propensity to homogenize Iranianness ignores aspects of
Iranian culture that may not “fit” into the carefully crafted image of “an” Iranian identity. This portrays Iranians as “an illusory harmonious community” and “complicates the transfer of culture to second-generation Iranians” (ibid.:79-80).

Second-generation and adolescent Iranians are in particular need of a “positive and coherent sense of identity that responds not only to their developmental needs but also to their roles as sons or daughters of Iranian immigrants” (ibid.:81). The median age was seventeen and biased toward people on a list of Iranian associations nation-wide. Most respondents based “their master identity, i.e., the identity that stands out in most situations,” on Iranianness (ibid.:83). Several factors influenced this identification: Persian fluency and speaking ability at home and in front of people, legal status (those without papers felt more Iranian), having Iranian friends, and attending Iranian events (ibid.:83-85). Notably, one-third of the respondents cited “the significance of ‘family’” as key markers of what it means to be Iranian (versus American) (ibid.:85).

In general, the acculturation process is fraught with problems. U.S.-Iranian historical relations complicate the relationship between self and other. Stereotypes of Iranians as terrorists and fanatics means that the respondents were “more conscious of their own identity,” which Mahdi argues strengthened “identity-preservation … [and] in-group solidarity” (ibid.:87). Mahdi worries that the American negativity toward Iranians “may result in a stigmatized and depreciated identity” (ibid.).

Iranian youth have difficulty reconciling certain values and practices associated with the tradition-modernity divide; opposing their parents’ wishes may lead to feelings of “betrayal, shame and ostracism” (ibid.:88-89). Conflict leads youth to draw “some
ideas from the stock of their parental culture. Their references to these cultural objects and symbols are selective, situational, interpretive, and often symbolic. They understand Iranian culture in their own terms, relating it when suitable and appropriating from it what is relevant and desirable for them” (ibid.:89). This “creative synthesis” occurs “in a cultural gray area where norms and values are blurred and structural controls are minimal” (ibid.:90). This leads to an Iranian cultural identity that is nostalgic, idealized, and imagined based on “selective, abstract, idealized and partially reinvented,” highly contested sources (e.g., poetry, language, socio-religious norms) (ibid.:90-91). “The ambiguity, arbitrariness, and imagined aspects of this ‘culture’ are not lost on the second generation. Here is how a respondent characterized Iranian culture: I really do not know who an Iranian is. To me Iranian probably means contradiction” (ibid.:91). Because of the difficulty in accessing parental values, norms, and symbols, youth create their own symbolic identity. Mixed messages that “‘home’ is here,” accompanied by expectations that they “give allegiance to the ‘home in the distance’” (ibid.:92), means that some “Iranian youths have shown an ambivalent sense of their heritage” (ibid.:93).

On a positive note, Iranian American families benefit from children’s autonomy, increased social involvement between parent and child, and more egalitarian treatment of sons and daughters (at least in terms of education and career choices). However, this is sometimes accompanied by parental vigilance (due to greater freedoms), increased parental responsibility (due to lack of networks), and women’s “role overload” (due to lack of time) (ibid.:72-73). This ambivalence relates to diminished patriarchal authority.
According to Mahdavi (2006), the “myth of return” keeps men in a liminal space: they hope for the fall of the Islamic regime but “have become accustomed to the lifestyle they lead in the U.S.” (239). “Iranian women less often entertain visions of returning to Iran, even in retirement, than do Iranian men, and are obliged to some extent to assimilate in the U.S. and develop a place for themselves in American society” (240). Paradoxically, “although Iranian men appear to be more acculturated than Iranian women, they cling to traditional values regarding the role of women, whereas women have more modern values on this issue” (Bozorgmehr 1998:22). Women experience a double bind: they are more subject to parental pressure, while being tempted by the new freedoms of American life (ibid.:23).

Besides the second generation, women are recipients of the chaos surrounding the “crisis of patriarchy” as they gain access to economic, educational, and personal expression opportunities (Darvishpour 2002:278; Mahdi 1997; Moghissi 1999). Movement from an authoritarian, adult-centric family structure to a child-centric structure is strikingly different for Iranian Americans (Mahdi 1997:71-72). As parental roles of traditional mother-daughter-domestic sphere and father-son-public sphere change, men’s role as the familial provider becomes tenuous (72).

Immigrants must inevitably sacrifice and adjust. Mahdi (1997) contends that family and gender role change, especially role reversal, are significant adjustments for Iranians “because they involve not only changes in the identity of behavior of individual immigrants but also in relationships with their intimates” (51). Social change upsets scripted roles that provide rules of engagement and normative behavior. The immigrant
experience accelerates “the pace and intensity of the change … making it difficult to respond without a great deal of individual hardship and cultural agonies” (ibid.:52). This requires reworking scripted roles within the American social fabric, which Mahdi notes is unexplored territory in Iranian transnational studies (ibid.:53).

Interestingly, immigration and transnationalism do not alter the centrality of family to the “social status of the individual and … the foundation of social life” (Mahdi 1997:54). Family is a refuge from the liminality of American life, and familial integrity and cohesiveness are fiercely guarded “against the forces of disintegration in the host society” (ibid.:54). American individualism is a strong force, because it contradicts unity and “the collectivistic tendencies present in the traditional Iranian family” (ibid.). Education, mobility, and urbanization are other influences. In general, social change impacts female status by decreasing men’s traditional role as provider, reversing roles, and syncretizing home and host cultural and social norms and values (ibid.:55-57).

Political, economic, ethnic, legalistic, and lifecycle factors of the host society serve to de-generalize “the Iranian family” (ibid.:57), despite the fact that there are different “normative, expressive, and behavioral differences between Iranian and American families” (ibid.:58).

Bauer’s (2000) study of politically-minded, Iranian “refugee” women in Canada and Germany stresses how they navigate self-identity relative to the expectations of “traditional” Iranian gender relations and roles within a climate of racism in the host societies. As community activists, they “reject the prevailing tendencies to idealize home culture” (184). Rather, they define place and space through involvement in and support
of women’s organizations to contest the restrictions “imposed on individual choices by those very social relations” (ibid.:181). Communal politics, cultural loss, family breakdown, and community representation influences their reassessment of gender roles (ibid.). Within this heated atmosphere, women find solace in both Iranian and host society associations “to provide greater leverage in balancing their own desires with those of the community” (ibid.). In general, immigrant women are upheld “as intercultural negotiators and as emblems of community status”; Iranian women carry the added burden of “the globalization of their sexualization as stereotyped Middle Eastern, Muslim women,” alienation due to politicization of Islam, and “the emotional intensity of cultural commitments to family, political ideals, and social relationships” (182).

Establishing community affirms belonging, but is reshaped with each wave of immigrants or refugees. Within this context, refugee women formulate a “‘transcultural’ gender identity” suitable for multiple audiences, which incorporates and balances “contrasting gender expectations and demands [in their] … commitments to community and their personal interests in opportunities for self-expression” (ibid.:184). In so doing, refugee women are prepared to confront gender inequality, racism, and “cultural fundamentalism,” and define the purpose of their social location (ibid.). Adaptive success, Bauer discovered, depends upon the ability to maneuver and weigh relationships “inside and outside the Iranian community” (ibid.:185).

Personality impacts how Iranian women are empowered by newfound freedoms (Mahdi 1997:61). However, women’s homemaker role has not diminished with autonomy and empowerment, even as some men increasingly contribute to household
chores (ibid.:61-62). One improvement is that women’s traditional roles are not assumed, expected or taken for granted (ibid.:64). Couples increasingly work toward complementarity and flexibility in gender roles (e.g., female finance trackers and male shoppers) (ibid.:65), which fortifies women’s self-esteem and skills. This exposes new avenues for identity formation, because “the type and nature of newly acquired roles by women are much more extensive than those acquired by men” (ibid.: 67). Iranian women seem to be more flexible and resilient in coping with change, which Moghissi (1999) attributes to women’s status as strangers in the husband’s family.

As women’s appreciation of egalitarian values grows, the home becomes a site of competition. Husbands, who left lucrative, secure jobs in Iran, need “to cope with the loss of their social status, employment, and authority” (Mahdi 1997:68). Men with lower socioeconomic status feel the loss of their authority more proportionately and are less enthusiastic about “change in their wives’ social behaviors and domestic roles” (ibid.). Competition may lead to divorce (ibid.:69). Bozorgmehr (1998) cites divorce as “a serious problem in the Iranian community,” and typically “initiated by Iranian women for reasons such as absence of love, incompatibility, mistreatment, and marrying too young” (22). Mahdi (1997) correlates divorce with:

- a stress caused by confusion about interpersonal norms and expectations,
- domestic arrangements and financial responsibilities, separation from family members in the homeland, a sense of loss of native culture and values, the pressures of adaptation to the new culture and environment, and the changes in gender and family roles, statuses, and identities. (69-70)
Divorce is a last option in Iranian-Islamic culture, especially where children are involved (ibid.:70). And although divorce has become more prevalent in Iran in the past decade, the “divorcee” is still stigmatized. Iranian American women experience less stigma and loss of status than their Iranian counterparts (ibid.:70-71).

Ahmadi’s (2003) study of Iranians in Sweden takes an intimate view on the changing outlook of sexuality and marriage in transitioning from “an extremely patriarchal … culture to a modern secularized society where a liberal view of sexuality prevails,” and egalitarian gender relations are the norm (685). Over time, Iranian Swedes experienced increasing individualism, which impacted their attitudes about personal decision-making and choice. Ahmadi’s study on changing sexual behavior and attitudes offers an alternative to an old world versus new world culture clash framework (ibid.:684).

The population in Ahmadi’s study consisted of secular Muslims. Enculturation into “the most basic norms and values of a particular religion” regulates and institutes worldview, and Islam is the framework through which many Iranians “make value judgments and practical decisions, classify … experiences, and establish relationships with … surroundings” (ibid.:686-687). A general lack of knowledge about sexual practices was the first pattern Ahmadi uncovered among both men and women. Premarital sexual relations were reported as uncommon, which translate as lack of exposure to sexual anatomy, expression, or one’s partner’s needs. For women, ignorance signaled feelings of anxiety, fear, shame, and disgust (ibid.:690-691). A lack of sexual
knowledge correlates with little or no experience of sexual contact, petting or intercourse prior to marriage (some men gained experience from prostitutes) (ibid.:692).

Between partners, dialogue about sex is virtually absent, but there is also a recognition that discomfort in discussing such topics teaches children the wrong values. A concern about discussing sex with children represents openness to Swedish sexual norms, due to the influences of media, friends, colleagues, and personal experience (ibid.:691). Parents with an openness to premarital sex were more likely to allow it for teenage children, although children needed to be close to adulthood, believe it was love-based, and potentially lead to marriage or a common-law relationship (ibid.:693). While Iranians remain separate from Swedes, they cannot ignore Swedish attitudes toward sexuality (ibid.:692). Premarital sex an accepted norm, and considered “a prerequisite for establishing a serious and durable partner relationship” (ibid.).

While, female Iranians were somewhat more open to exogamy, males maintained a strong preference for endogamy for three reasons: “to be able to express one’s inner feelings with ease, … [to share] a common social and historical memory and a common knowledge of cultural codes, … [and] lack of proficiency in the Swedish language” (ibid.:698). Without exception, all respondents noted that the key to a strong and healthy sexual relationship was love. Other important factors included: reciprocity, “interplay and mutuality, being sensitive to and having respect for one’s partner’s will and desire, and seeking equality” (ibid.:699). In Sweden, the criteria of virginity, so imperative in Iran, “was not a must for men or for women” (ibid.:694).
Iranian Swedes also shared an assimilationist propensity toward marriage, common-law marriage, and Living Apart Together relationships (LAT). In a LAT relationship, the couple lives separately “under marriage-like conditions” (ibid.:695). Legalizing a union and the acquisition of a marriage certificate was unimportant to many respondents. Since Swedes did not apply the word “whore” to unmarried women, divorce was easy to obtain, and women’s dependency on men was less prevalent (ibid.:696). Women preferred LAT relationships, although they put stake in a permanent union. The Iranian community and one’s social network still deemed “a relationship based on cohabitation or marriage as being more serious than one where the couple live apart” (ibid.:696-697). Social acceptance was significant to people because of a “desire to have their relationship regarded as legitimate and taken seriously by their social network, both in Sweden and Iran” (ibid.:697).

Ahmadi determined dialogue to be a significant factor in reworking concepts of sexuality, because it entails compromise rather than rigid interpretations of bodily symbols (such as virginity) (ibid.:699). “Within the traditional Islamic-Iranian discourse on virginity, body and symbol are intertwined to serve men’s power, interests, and privileges” (ibid.:700). Since Iranian women in Sweden see virginity as a matter of personal responsibility and not family honor, men’s exercise of control loses its grip. And, like their transnational complements in the U.S., individual freedoms coincide with the attenuation of male dominance. The repercussion of attitudinal changes transnationally (i.e., upon family members in Iran) is significant; “migration to Sweden might very well bring about changes in the way Iranian society views sexuality” (ibid.).
Ahmadi’s study revealed an abandoned appreciation for a collective self in favor of an individualized self through which to realize “one’s own desires, goals, and personal life-projects” (ibid.:700-701). Expression of sexual behavior (e.g., the importance of orgasm and intercourse) occurred in Swedish rather than Persian, which Ahmadi attributed to a parallel identity being formed alongside Iranian identity; “depending on which identity is the more instrumental, we act and behave differently … each language represents a different world, different roles, and maybe different views on life” (ibid.:701). Ahmadi concludes that there is a trajectory of egalitarianism, correlating views of sexuality, and a re-socialized sexuality (ibid.:702). “To see sexuality as a constructed reality leads to the recognition that the body is not an ahistoric element, nor are views of the body unchangeable” (ibid.:703).

Interrace marriage introduces an additional source of cultural change, and correlates with assimilation. The size of the community and the degree of heterogeneity plays a critical role in the absence or presence of intermarriage (Clark 1998:152-154). Ethnic heterogeneity increases one’s chance of intermingling and dating across ethnic lines, although intermarriage is more prevalent “between groups that are alike in culture and society” (ibid.:154). For example, due to religious norms, Clark found that Middle Easterners and South East Asians are two groups “least likely to marry outside their own group” (ibid.:155). Other concerns about intermarriage that Middle Eastern immigrants had, according to Bilgé (1996), included: preservation of boundary identities, value and behavioral disparities between couples and their children, and satisfaction with married life in the context of gender hierarchies (60).
For Iranians, the degree of intermarriage depends on religious norms, nationality, and class (Hanassab 1993:5). Doctoral dissertations and Master’s theses addressing Iranian intermarriage in the United States focus on several reoccurring themes: success rates; “culture clash”; adjustment; impact of social change; sources of conflict; and problem-solving strategies (Hanassab 1993; Mehdipour 1978; Milani 1983).

Milani’s (1983) psychological approach compares “marital adjustment of Iranian-American and Iranian-Iranian couples” (5). Milani’s methodology consisted of two interviews and 156 out of 2000 non-random questionnaires. Cultural difference is a common source of conflict in “mixed” marriages. Individuals attempt to get the most out of their investment in the relationship; that is, costs and benefits are measured to determine how love relates to “equality of exchange” (ibid.:10). Milani hypothesizes that Iranian-Iranian unions have less conflict, and therefore are happier and more stable than Iranian-American marriages. Typical marriage problems included concerns about “recreation, relationships with friends, table manners, philosophy of life, political ideology, and child-rearing” (ibid.:76). Milani concludes by rejecting the proposed hypotheses, finding religion to be the primary problem in intermarriage (ibid.:88). Greater exposure to American life lessened difficulties between spouses (ibid.:88-89). Happiness and low divorce rates were greater among “Westernized” Iranian men, who realized their fate was tied to the United States (ibid.:94).

Like Milani, Hanassab (1993) is concerned with the impact of assimilation on marriage. Comparing arranged marriage to intermarriage Hanassab considers “acculturation level, involvement in religion, premarital dating pattern and sex roles” as
determinative of spousal choice (9). Hanassab discovered adaptation to American culture to be higher for males than females, although there is a discrepancy between belief and practice. That is, although Iranian men appear more acculturated, they held “traditional” values concerning women. At the same time, Iranian women practiced traditional behavior but were open to modern beliefs concerning the role of women (ibid.:37). For example, citing Dallalfar’s (1989) research on Jewish and Muslim gendered attitudes toward dating and parental supervision, Hanassab found that mothers adapt arranged marriage practices by setting up meetings through kin networks and friendship circles. This reconfigures the khastegari tradition by resembling a dating service, whereby the interested parties are involved in the process of matchmaking (41-42).

In her research among Iranians in Norway, Kamalkhani (1988) found that transnational family relations and “inter-ethnic marriage” were complicated by the inability to help distant family members, expensive travel, visa restrictions, and the economic strain upon immigrants in the host country (118-119). Family members in Iran idealize life in Europe, expecting family members living abroad to be economically and academically better off, and therefore in a position to help (ibid.:122-123). The sense of disconnection between new choices and traditional, patriarchal Iranian society frustrates family expectations.

Iranian-Norwegian intermarriage creates a “distinctive family structure and culture,” since Iranians are “cut off from the Iranian community and apparently assimilated to Norwegian norms” (ibid.:94). As Iranians adjust to and accept Norwegian familial norms, they experience abandonment. This feeling is exacerbated by the
demographic ratio of Norwegians to Iranians, which makes it difficult for Iranians to find suitable marriage partners. Young Iranians marry other Iranians, despite difficulty in finding partners, because they apparently gain no advantages (i.e., residence permits) by marrying a Norwegian. Youth who desire to marry an Iranian abroad “consult their parents in Iran. Children take into consideration parental objections. The marriage may be postponed until the parents agree, and in this way the youths would express their personal respect for their parents in Iran” (ibid.:96).

Kamalkhani ascertained that intercultural marriage is not subject to the same social sanctions as intra-cultural marriage. For women, traditional sanctions impact their “marriage chances – for example ‘divorce’ (which is a stigmatized identity), ‘old age’ (which increases downward marriage) and ‘virginity’ (which defines family honour)” (ibid.:97). Because these sanctions determine a woman’s marriageability, it hinders her “opportunity for upward mobility through marriage with another Iranian” (ibid.).

Norwegian men are attracted to Iranian women as marriage partners, because they believe that the marriage will last and Iranian women are more inclined to maintain a traditional home (i.e., wife/mother stays at home) (ibid.). Inter-ethnic marriage benefits Iranian women by exempting them from Iranian social sanctions and the pressures associated with the couple’s husband’s relatives. According to Kamalkhani, it is advantageous because the “couple can live on their own without being criticised, or becoming the subject of gossip and conspiracy” (ibid.:98). This does not diminish the fact that the Iranian daughter-in-law may feel compelled to act out her “proper” role, as expected within traditional Iranian society (ibid.).
Of the eight inter-ethnic marriages in Bergen that Kamalkhani was aware of, four ended in divorce and one in suicide. She attributes this to the fact that the:

- marriage partner from the minority group has to adapt to the Norwegian culture – learning Norwegian, accepting Norwegian family norms, and raising the children to hold Norwegian values. Children … know little about Iranian culture and learn little or no Persian. Such a situation might be less evident in cases where the mother is Iranian and the father Norwegian since Iranian women often have closer contacts with their own families … relations [that] continue … after their marriages and increase the opportunity for bilingual children to improve their mother tongue and practice Iranian culture. (ibid.:103-104)

Norwegian spouses tended to brush off the need for Persian fluency, but Iranians discovered the unfortunate consequence of this as extended family members visited from Iran. Another source of tension in intermarriages relates to the Iranian husband’s self-expectation to assume social and economic responsibility for his family’s welfare. Norwegian women who want to work feel it is unfair because of the economic strain it places on the family (ibid.:104-105). One implication of this is that the Norwegian spouse steps in and dominates “in order to maintain family harmony and to avoid disturbances” (ibid.:105). The Iranian spouse becomes increasingly alienated, as Norwegian language and culture displaces Iranian culture and Persian in the home (ibid.).

Crafting a syncretic survival kit of belonging

Iranian culture increasingly is woven on a geographically situated loom, one beam end set in Iran
and one set abroad in America and Europe. Each end is itself a generative locus of différance, of identity, contributing new bits of warp and woof. (The result perhaps is not so much replicated carpet pairs like those woven on a traditional loom, but rather a carpet of subtly changing varied pattern, perhaps like a Shalamzar Bakhtiari carpet in which each square is different, or those Qashqa’i-Shirazi carpets in which new figures—radio, airplanes, cameras, trucks, televisions—are constantly being introduced onto the field.) In Iran, the polarities and juxtapositions of East and West, past and future, Iran and Islam, nationalism and cosmopolitanism generate one sort of cultural and sociopolitical space, arena or interweaving; in Europe and America, there is, in addition, a psychocultural space generated by the copresent, yet opposed, attitudes of exile and immigration. (Fischer and Abedi, 1990, p. 253-254)

The epigraph taken from Fischer and Abedi (1990) emphasizes Iranian culture as a phenomenon in flux. It implies an inability to reference Iranian culture apart from its relationship to the West. Seizing upon the archetypal metaphor of the Persian carpet as Iranian culture. The frame of the loom extends from Iran to the West. And the carpet
woven upon the loom—Iranian culture—represents a patchwork of polarities from each end of the loom. Taking this metaphor further, the loom represents *nationally constituted societies* in Robertson’s global field model, and its ends act as the *international system of societies*, which generate the locus of difference and identity. Within this framework, individuals reconcile the polarities and juxtapositions they inherit from Iranian heritage within the “psychocultural space generated by the copresent, yet opposed, attitudes of exile and immigration” (253-254).

Individuals exploit opportunities manifested in the ambivalent “third space” of nationhood, where history is displaced, authority is restructured, and power is dislocated (Bhabha 1984, 1994; Rutherford 1990). Quotidian choices, practices, and performances of individuals respond to time-honored conventions (Bourdieu 1984, 1990), and re-inscribe new meanings. Rather than an encroaching totality of control, as Foucault’s (1972, 1976, 1979) powerful discourses and disciplines predict, and Weber’s (1976) “iron cage” suggests, modernity is conceived as a transformative experience “of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (Berman 1998:15). Following Marx and Nietzsche, Berman appreciates the dialectical nature of modern history; “somewhere between the great absence and emptiness of values … [is] a remarkable abundance of possibilities” (ibid.:21). Their shared voice is distinctive in:

- its breathless pace, its vibrant energy, its imaginative richness, but also its fast and drastic shifts in tone and inflection, its readiness to turn on itself, to question and negate all that is said, to transform itself into a great range of harmonic or
dissonant voices, and to stretch itself beyond its capacities into an endlessly wider range, to express and grasp a world where everything is pregnant with is contrary and “all that is solid melts into air.” (ibid.:23)

Berman compares twentieth-century thinkers’ writings on modernity as flat and lacking imagination, whereas nineteenth-century thinkers were “simultaneous enthusiasts and enemies of modern life, wrestling inextricably with its ambiguities and contradictions; their self-ironies and inner tensions were a primary source of their creative power” (ibid.:24).

Hybrid

By the time I figured out what made an Iranian girl good
it was too late.
I had already been corrupted by America,
her loose hips and ungracious manner
had watered me down further.
I couldn’t even be called “Iranian-American”
I lacked the sensibility, the language,
the distaste for body hair
and the desire for a small nose.
It was too late … I’d already become something else
and couldn’t read the codes
one needs
to function
as an Iranian.
It was bad enough that I had four brothers
and a mother who wasn’t glamorous,
I had learned to curse and cared more
about grades than boys.
Occasionally, when I didn’t do what he wanted
my father reminded me
that I was too American …
a phrase that cut like a dagger
against the skin,
separated me out
and drove a wedge
between us
I could never quite figure out how much
was too American.
Did he mean, don’t disrespect your parents,
tell them everything,
don’t sleep with a boy
before marriage,
don’t give yourself too easily?
Did he mean that my American part
should not disobey his law?

It was too late.

Like all immigrant parents, he wants me to succeed,
to get an education, to be smart and beautiful
but not to forget
that I had to find a man.

“Women are like fruit trees,” he said, “they have to
bear children

or they’ll wither.”

When he put it like that,
all I wanted was to be
one of those hybrid
ornamental plums
whose blossoms are sweet and glorious
but fall to the ground
without ever bearing fruit.

Persis M. Kerim (Karim and Khorrami, 1999, p.108-109)

Kerim’s poem evokes the affective, acculturative, and kin pressures that “conformists”
and “rebels” confront as they tempt tradition, but are charged with being “too American”
and disobeying authority. Rebels, like outliers in Hoffman’s (1990) study, confront
authority—to be like “one of those hybrid ornamental plums … [that] fall to the ground
without ever bearing fruit”—by challenging the boundaries that govern the rules of ritual courtesy of private-public sphere interactions. Depending upon time of arrival, first, 1.5, and second-generation hybrid individuals ensnared in the habitus of *ta’aroof* and other ambiguous expectations of authority confront its nuances through opposition, shame, alienation, and denial of Amerianness (Beeman 1986:57; Mahdi 1998:89). Following Karim’s inquiry: “Did he mean that my American part should not obey his [father’s] law?”

While *do-ragheh* (two-veined), hybrid Iranians experience alienation from family or community, the experience does not necessarily incite psychic dissonance. A “fundamental Iranian cultural theme,” according to Hoffman (1990), accommodates a “disconnect” between public American practices and private Iranian beliefs and values (280). Outliers in Hoffman’s study did exist, and experienced positive or negative alienation; positively alienated individuals have “lost a firm sense of cultural belonging,” allowing the self to “‘become’ any culture,” unmoored from origin, ever changing, and relishing in cross-cultural experiences as a chance for growth, whereas negatively alienated individuals reject American behavior and social interaction in an attempt to “retain a firm and ‘pure’ Iranian identity” (ibid.:291-292). Although positively alienated individuals appreciated learning new things, they felt discontented about belonging, and had difficulties fixing a stable frame of cultural reference that would provide “meaning and structure in the process of self-transformation” (ibid.:293).

Fischer and Abedi (1990) differentiate exiles and migrants, whose experiences have varying effects on attitudes regarding belonging, authenticity, and identity; exiles
“feel themselves paralyzed or suspended in an unreal limbo or purgatory (barzakh) unable to move forward into a new life” (ibid.:255), migrants “move voluntarily and assimilate happily” (ibid.:254). The process of signifying Iran and Iranian habitations “are both ‘crazy’ hybridized spaces” imbued with concerns of authenticity and identity. Following Binder (1988), authenticity refers to being free to be what one already is, whereas identity involves “the freedom to be what one wants to be” (ibid.:255).

Hybridity inspires “optimistic cultural fusions … which may be the leading edge of the New World and world expansion of Persian culture, not unlike the exuberant Perso-Islamic release that occurred when the formation of New Persian in the tenth and eleventh centuries freed Islam from the constraints of Arabic” (ibid.:258).

Iranian self-identity, as revealed in many of my interviewees’ responses, and similar to the process of self-transformation described by Hoffman, tends toward a dialogical-dialectical approach of self and cultural interpenetration. In this approach, culture “is understood as a set of beliefs and norms historically evolved through social, political, economic, and religious forces maintained and transformed through human interaction” (Bandlamudi 1994:483). Bandlamudi’s cultural psychology approach focuses on “the cognizing, emoting, experiencing, and evaluating individual … as emerging from, operating within, and transacting with a complex set of social relations—an ongoing play between culturally defined realities and reality-defining selves” (ibid.:460). Individuals subjectively examine experiences in order to “define, redefine, dismiss, understand, experience, use, abuse, and talk about ‘culture’ and, in turn, define and construct ‘self’” (ibid.:461). Bandlamudi follows Bakhtin’s (1990) theory of
dialogism, which presents meaning as a construction of social interaction and located “‘in between’ the self and the other” (462), and as situated in a social milieu and historical moment (ibid.:463). Cultural anomalies and social struggle—“the centrifugal force that brings about transformation in the society”—are as critical as a shared social code (ibid.:464). Bandlamudi utilizes Bakhtin’s (1986) genre, “‘a way of looking’ at reality made up of utterances within which thematic content, style, and compositional structure are inevitably linked together” to explain her subjects’ narratives of “‘self within the cultural system’” in order to understand the way individuals situated “themselves in the cultural matrix and the ways and extents to which they differentiated from and integrated with the other” (ibid.:467-468). Subjects conceived and understood culture, identity, and ethnicity as dynamic influences on the formation of self-identity, the maintenance of cultural roots and adoption of broad cultural values, and the redefinition of self and culture through these processes (ibid.:468). Bandlamudi locates different conceptual categories of self as they proceed “from a state of relative globality and lack of differentiation to a state of increasing differentiation, articulation, and hierarchic integration (ibid.).

Giddens (1991) distinguishes self-identity from identity in that the former must be created, invented, and revised (52). The ambivalence of self-identity that accompanies migration may cause confusion and normlessness, but also translate inherited and adopted meanings in order to transform debilitation into exhilaration. Self-identity is “routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (ibid.). Traditional societies incorporate rites of passage to confront social change, while in modernity “the
altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change … [and] is built as part of a process of pioneering innovative social forms” (ibid.:33). Individuals who confront sources of change in the transition from tradition to modernity must reconcile “dilemmas of self” by authoring a self-reflexive project (ibid.:187-201) and confront “the looming threat of personal *meaninglessness*” (ibid.:201, emphasis in original). Giddens identifies these four dilemmas as: unification versus fragmentation, powerless versus appropriation, authority versus uncertainty, and personalized versus commodified experience.

In the first dilemma of unification versus fragmentation, “tendencies of dispersal vie with those promoting integration” (Giddens 1991:189). From pre-modern to post-traditional times, the trust of personal ties is challenged by copious options. The “diversifying of contexts of interaction … call for different forms of ‘appropriate’ behavior” (ibid.:190). The self must integrate alienating and fragmenting phenomena as well as confront novel contexts of interaction in which one “draws strength from being at home in varying contexts” (ibid.:190). Giddens cites “rigid traditionalism” and “authoritarian conformism” as potential pathologies in this dilemma.

While this dilemma fragments self, myriad opportunities inspire a newly integrated self. Iranian self-identity in the transnational context varies according to the individual’s judgment of the insignificance or suitability of inherited “essential elements” of national identity. Interactions in intra- and inter-community frameworks are guided by impression management in order to redirect negative stereotypes held by the host society, to bamboozle Americans about their identity, and assert “hyper-Iranianness” among
fellow Iranians (e.g., by “out ta’rofing” each other) in order to discredit encroaching Americanness. Image management practices are an effort to direct and control group interaction (Beeman 1986:56). In a Goffmanian style, the most adroit Iranians “impose on others the definition of a given situation that most suits their purposes,” while a Parsonian approach uses reflexivity to assess “the factors that an individual sees as encompassing him at the moment of action” (ibid.). Together, practices of interaction explain Iranian behavioral strategies that monitor social expectations, and conduct interaction in an individual’s favor in order to compel others to follow suit (ibid.).

Host society mediation is rife with prejudiced images of Iranians and Middle Easterners, which fragments identity. Immigrants consciously manage image by downplaying negative and accenting “appreciable” cultural symbols (Dothan 1987:88). Assimilationist accents shape subjectivity according to appreciable values and behaviors of the host society as a step toward belonging. Bi-cultural individuals “put on an act” in order to adjust in their adopted environment (Bandlamudi 1994:475). Interactions with Americans are guided by a constant need to “explain” themselves, due to American ignorance of U.S.-West-Iranian history, geography, and politics. Rather than having to provide in mini-history lesson in a conversation, Iranians choose silence or avoidance of intimate interaction with Americans.

Native community interaction fragments self-identity as the cultural rhythms fade. After long absences, return trips to Iran recall the need to assess and refine “appropriate behavior.” Iranian “natives” immediately locate the “visitor’s” bilocation by their speech patterns, tone of voice, dress, and inability to read the tacit rules of simple, daily tasks
(e.g., negotiating an unruly bread line). Implicit cultural understanding are “folk models” that propagate a “third knowing,” which is “intersubjectively shared by a social group,” and proceeds according to scripted knowledge that fortifies and is fortified by routinized, unconscious actions (Holland and Quinn 1987:113). Resurrecting dormant scripts reveals the rupture of exile, and becomes a compromise between the fragmentation of “native” self-identity and unification of memory shards, personal history, and acquired discourses of power and place. The “stranger” in Iran—American-Iranian or Iranian-American—is subjected to arbitrary authority wielded against the unassuming visitor.

Upon a period of alienation, reintegration in the local community may also highlight the unification-fragmentation dilemma. The space of liminality requires honing impression management skills as an attempt to unify self-identity. In the context of intercommunal gatherings, keen observations are made between the “lay” and “expert” Iranians in claims to the public representation of Iranian history, culture, politics, et cetera. If non-experts “misrepresent” these facets, they are subject to gossip, ridicule, corrections, suggestions for improvement, and/or provided with additional facts by self-appointed experts, which discourages certain individuals from presenting Iranian culture publicly. Whether the audience is made up of Iranian “experts,” “lay people” or interested Americans, a cultural representation blunder instills humiliation and embarrassment in a “non-expert,” and potentially sullies his or her reputation. Committing a public faux pas in the presentation of a fact, date, poor translation, et cetera reflects poorly on the individual and community as a whole. Iranians claim to be
embarrassed by non-credentialed, “unqualified” individuals who take the helm of public cultural representation.

The “assimilationist” stance is heavily influenced by the need to manage impressions publicly in order to control and define narrative content. The dilemma of unification versus fragmentation requires reconciliation of one’s native, cognitive environment and the “adjunct” acquisitions from the host society, such as knowledge of rules, savvy communication skills, and adroitness in cultural camouflage. Those who recognize the inability to camouflage culturally draw attention to outsidedness, which requires unification by drawing from experiences and memories of one’s native and adopted selves.

Giddens’ (1991) second dilemma, powerlessness versus appropriation, is characterized by a lack of control over “external agencies” that did not exist in traditional societies in which “the individual was substantially in control of many of the influences shaping his [sic] life” (e.g., the concept of alienation put forth by Marx) (191). Although Giddens does declare “the hold of tradition” in small-scale societies (e.g., kinship systems) as rigid, globalization introduces new connections that are accompanied by risk and lack of control (ibid.:192). Most notably, time-space “distanciation and the deskilling effects of abstract systems” introduce global connections and high risk, situating individuals in a context over which they have little control. Appropriation is at “the heart of the self” by which the individual attempts to gain control. Powerlessness, as a psychic experience, “relates to aims, projects or aspirations held by the individual, as well as to the composition of the phenomenal world” (ibid.:193), and arises in personal
relationships and global concerns. The individual oriented toward a “survivalist outlook carries connotations of appropriation as well as of powerlessness”; the person who survives in personal relationships does not abandon “autonomy over his or her life’s circumstances” (ibid.). The pathologies of this dilemma are feelings of engulfment—hard to surpass infringing forces—and omnipotence—a “fantasy state” of domination and “person as a puppeteer” (ibid.:193-194).

Multiple lifestyle choices provide opportunity as well as instill aimlessness and immobility. The quest to establish a sense of home and belonging is informed by majority-minority assessment; if the majority interprets the minority’s adoption of host culture negatively, it may be difficult to reconcile this dilemma. Appropriating relevant aspects of host and home cultures follows an improvisational approach to reconstruct self-identity. Immigrant cognition, behavior, and emotion incorporate five “identificatory decisions” (Rinder 1970) in the majority-minority dialectic: assimilation (integration or conformism), pluralism (accommodation or voluntary segregation), submission (self-hatred or forced segregation), militancy (aggression or contention), and secession (revitalization or avoidance). These decisions are governed in two main areas:

One is the minority group’s internal environment: morale, cultural heritage, economic power. These are factors which influence how much the minority group wants to keep or lose its distinct identity. The other area is the minority’s external environment: the degree of racial and cultural similarity to the dominant group, power relations between the groups, degree of acceptance by the dominant
group, and other factors which determine how much the dominant group want the minority to adopt their identity. (Dothan 1987:97)

Intense pride in ancient heritage and economic independence provides sources of strength for Iranian immigrants’ internal environment. In the external environment, prejudice, negative stereotypes, and discrimination impose power differentials and issues of acceptance between immigrant-host groups, while the degree of “racial” similarity between Iranians and Minnesotans continually imposes micro-distance and micro-power plays, the “assimilationist” Iranians manipulate their public identity by downplaying “racial” markers, and highlighting Minnesota cultural markers (“out-nicing” Minnesota Nicers). In so doing, Iranians direct the dominant group’s acceptance of them by being unlike the stereotype.

The identificatory decision of assimilation functions as a mechanism to “get by” in the public, external environment in order to preserve a semblance of one’s private Iranian self. Assimilation implies “a unilinear process of adaptation and adjustment” (Chaichian 1997:612) by which the majority pressures immigrants to engage in dominant culture beliefs and behavioral patterns and risk cultural distinctiveness (Dothan 1987:99). Assimilated immigrants are assumed to have established a feeling of home (Magat 1999:120-121). The process of assimilation “triggers some dynamics about social relations and familial relations that lead to a basic reorganization of one’s psyche” (Bandlamudi 1994:486). Reorganization requires a Bakhtinian “creative understanding” regarding culture wherein “individuals appreciate, understand, and critique various cultural systems,” although some individuals experience uprootedness, fragmentation,
and a divided self and “switch back and forth, enacting various cultural codes … to the point that life becomes … a ‘theatrical act’” (ibid.).

Iranian immigrants in this study, similar to Hoffman’s (1990) subjects, followed the creative understanding and cultural critique approaches. Rather than English proficiency or length of residence as influences in the assimilation process, the deciding factor tended to be “the unlikelihood of returning to Iran [and] … a desire and a need to ‘make the best of it’” in the U.S. (289-291). Iranians viewed intercultural learning as a positive necessity, especially the need to acquire knowledge that aided in adaptation. For example, “instrumental” knowledge and skills to navigate daily affairs entailed “very conscious eclectic adoption of behaviors thought to be advantageous to success” (ibid.:290).

Phenotype, accents, and the assessment of the “foreigner” by the “natives” all influence whether the host society accepts immigrants. Through the tools of communication, Iranians delicately balance their words in the performance of life. Iranians’ olive phenotypic features contrast starkly with white Scandinavian and German features of the Minnesota majority, which influence the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Finessing these dialectic encounters determines one’s ability to imagine home in their adopted nation either through a creative understanding or theatrical act. As international politics play out, and Americans’ bitterness over the revolution and its aftermath ensue, Iranians suffer disproportionately from a negative image, which is exacerbated by their assertive, demanding behavioral pattern, according to Jones (1984:19).
The identificatory decision of pluralism introduces a discrepancy between the dominant group’s ideal of equality and the minority’s experience of alienation (Dothan 1987:98). Pluralism allows for the acceptance of the ethnic identity of immigrants, while not requiring assimilation or Americanization (Chaichian 1997:612). Rather than assigning negativity to difference, immigrants embrace it in order to skirt shame.

Pride in culture boosts “confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity” (Giddens 1991:66). “Eclectic learners,” in Hoffman’s study (1990), took a pluralistic approach in their selective use of knowledge pertaining to American culture. “Survivalists,” a type of eclectic learner, “focused on the acquisition of detailed knowledge about the U.S.,” especially that which aided absorption (289). Survival strategies included advertising in an Iranian Yellow Pages and accessing cultural information (e.g., human rights) ibid.:290). Survivalists found that associating with ethnic organizations contributed to one’s knowledge bank in terms of leading a productive life in the U.S. (e.g., tax concerns, business endeavors, etc.). Ethnic associations, as “shock absorbers” between cultural conservation and deprivation, allow immigrants to resolve problems relative to immigration and approaching “Americanization” (Biparva 1994:370). Furthermore, they buffer discriminatory actions and prejudice, and thereby encourage the preservation and transmission of “old world culture, values, and characteristics to the next generations” (ibid.:372).

The third identificatory decision of submission is a response to the majority’s dismissal of the minority’s effort to “be like them” (Dothan 1997:98). The act, however, is never quite adequate, leading to lowered self-respect and self-hatred (ibid.). Responses
to majority-minority interactions influence individuals to mask differences and change physical and behavioral traits. Berry (1980) relates this decision to rejection, which results in self-imposed exile from the host society (13). Positive and negative alienation, identified by Hoffman (1990), shares parallels with the submission and rejection patterns of host-immigrant enculturation patterns.

The dilemma of powerlessness versus appropriation is continuous because identificatory decisions are not contextualized as progressive or mutually exclusive, but may be co- or nonexistent, and intermittently applied throughout the absorption process. Acceptance or rejection, inclusion or exclusion in the external, host environment requires immigrants to advance alternative interpretations in order to appropriate their individual niche, and determine belonging.

The third dilemma of reconciliation is authority versus uncertainty. Authority shatters into “an indefinite pluralism of expertise” (Giddens 1991:195). In pre-modern societies, tradition itself was the sacrosanct, single source of authority (ibid.:194). Traditional sources of authority—religion, kinship, community—are “directly relevant to the sustaining of trust” (ibid.), although a religious authority can espouse its mysteries as well as claim privileged access. The scattered hegemony of authorities creates doubt through the need to assess “the claims of rival authorities” (ibid.:195). Resolving this dilemma entails “a mixture of routine and commitment to a certain form of lifestyle, plus the vesting of trust in a given series of abstract systems. Yet this ‘compromise package’, under pressure, can begin to disintegrate” (ibid.:196). The pathology in this dilemma ranges from dogmatic authoritarianism to the immobilization of doubt and paranoia.
Prior to the revolution, the monarchy, patriarchy, and clergy represented the “deep-rooted authoritarian tradition” in Iran. Iranian society:

demands submission to the will of those who hold a position, higher than oneself.
The family, the cornerstone of the social structure, is ruled by the patriarch. The nation … glorified and suffered under the ancient Persian concept of authoritarian kingship attended by a rigid social hierarchy. In religion, authority figures to whom the faithful owe obedience are central to the theology of Shia Islam.

(Mackey 1998:93)

In the transnational context, while the family remains a cornerstone of life experience and one’s social world, religion is deemphasized as the voice of authority. Lacking this moral framework, the “compromise package” that Iranians seek is found in family, with additional authorities of democracy, civility, and humanity. Given the potential for broad interpretation of these structures of authoritative, hybrid identities and communities proliferate. Identification with and through the “other” constructs hybridity through interactive traces of meaning and discourse. This is an ambivalent process, according to Bhabha, “because of the intervention of that otherness” (Rutherford 1990:211). Rather than a combined form, hybridity entails the emergence of other stances and reinscription of boundaries. Power informs hybridity through the “negotiation of demands, of wills, of meanings” (Bhabha 1996:25). As boundaries are renegotiated, alternative systems of meaning manifest as individuals engage in “antagonistic exchange, in the search for authority, in cultural contestation and
translation” (ibid.:27). Representing “difference is therefore always a problem of authority” (Bhabha 1984:230).

In the third space, cultural meanings and symbols are articulated anew, having “no primordial unity or fixity,” which allows for reappropriation, retranslation, and rehistoricization (Bhabha 1994:37). Enunciating culture as difference establishes a presence, which is “a time of cultural uncertainty, and … signification or representational undecidability” (ibid.:35). In the process, “original” cultural signs and meanings become objectified, knowing they “can be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum” (Rutherford 1990:210).

Presencing introduces uncertainty and ambivalence as well as allowances for previously unarticulated alternative meanings. In the absence of a single authoritative voice representing Iranians in the Twin Cities, such as an ethnic association might function, the “pluralism of expertise” plays out in micro-communities and personal philosophies of self-identity that “challenge, reconfigure, and subvert traditional cultural affiliations,” and thereby rewrite difference in terms of what is desirable, feasible, and appropriate (Sullivan 2001:20). “The creative interpretations and transformations take place in a cultural gray area where norms and values are blurred and structural controls are minimal” (Mahdi 1998:89-90). Individual ideologies are written at the “moment of exile and dispossession,” and differentiate the diasporic state (Steedly 1993:174). Telling exilic stories inspires mutual subjectivity around exclusion and displacement, thus becoming “(sub)versions” of official narratives. Because (sub)versions are partisan, personal, and incomplete, they are considered illegitimate (ibid.:42). But Bhabha (1994)
submits that composing (sub)versions of subjectivity instigates authenticity (12), although this is problematic in that it reveals “the ambivalent perspective of the ‘outside-in’ ... where agency as narrative demands an ‘originality’ and mastery that seeks to be free of that which is already existing” (ibid.:13-15). The multiplicity of third spaces created through portable ideologies obscure representational authority, and celebrate a realm of difference to question claims of authenticity. Challenging essentialist narratives of Iranianness may obfuscate authority and lead to uncertainty, but the routinization of a lifestyle committed to the improvement of self and relationships within community is an appeal to reconcile the dilemma of authority versus uncertainty.

The final dilemma Giddens (1991) presents is personalized versus commodified experience in which the individual’s project of self is standardized through commodity capitalist markets, “with its ‘imperatives’ of continuous expansion, attacks tradition” (ibid.:196-197). The effects of capitalist markets are hyper-individualism, and the stress of individual rights and responsibilities, consumptive wants, ‘lifestyle’ sold through advertising, and “the project of the self as such may become heavily commodified. Not just lifestyles, but self-actualisation is packaged and distributed according to market criteria” (ibid.:198); “individuals actively discriminate among types of available information as well as interpreting it in their own terms” (ibid.:199). The pathologies of this dilemma include narcissism and excessive individuation, in which the person attempting “to be ‘different’ from all others has no chance of reflexivity developing a coherent self-identity” (ibid.:200). Giddens argues that the reflexive project of self is wrapped up in a game of life politics which “is a politics of self-actualisation in a
reflexively ordered environment, where that reflexivity links self and body to systems of global scope” (ibid.:214). Within this “game,” life decisions and choices are made to construct a narrative of self-identity relative to local and global change affecting social life (ibid.:215). “The more we reflexively ‘make ourselves’ as persons, the more the very category of what a ‘person’ or ‘human being’ is comes to the fore” (ibid.:217).

The proclivity to an individualistically-inclined, public assimilationist self, and a familial-tied, private Iranian self, is a tool to navigate the host society and one’s public face in the host society. Self-identity simultaneously masks and celebrates “otherness.” For do-ragheh (two-veined) Iranians, the pervasiveness of adjunct meanings to attach to self-identity is both disorienting as well as ripe with possibilities (Darvalan 1996). Autonomy or withdrawal from the community distances the author to pen a “portable ideology” of self-identity (Adelkhah 2000; Sullivan 2001), and will vary depending on gender, family, time, etc. Men, for instance, become less flexible and more marginalized as they face role reversal, a “crisis of patriarchy,” divorce, sexual freedom (Ahmadi 2003; Darvishpour 2002; Moghissi 1999), and loss of authority (Ansari 1992; Mahdi 1997). The transportability of ideologies of the public Iranian self, informed by discrimination and prejudice, are carefully crafted novellas of life experiences that span the continuum from rupture to revival. Accentuation or deemphasis of fragments of Iranian national “artifacts” entails reflexive improvisation in response to individual, inter-, and intra-community challenges and opportunities. Individuals judged as unauthoritative voices of cultural representation risk ridicule, gossip, and criticism, especially if one’s account
reveals inaccuracies and negative content or “embarrassment” to Iranian identity in a public forum, especially where Americans are present.

Belonging, therefore, entails being a good, civil, happy human person, a process involving: first, a reassessment of “there” via trips to Iran and/or involvement in the local community; second, the “pick and choose” method of constructing one’s “portable ideology; and third, establishing home as a self-reflexive mental state, and embracing select cultural aspects “here.” The space between evading or modifying traditional values and practicing inheritances, and adopting prospects of belonging are guided by the individual’s ability to incorporate personal and social change. Social change leads to anomie, an experience of troubled faith and suspension of the individual from collective judgment (Durkheim 1984:304-308). Similar to anomie, acculturative stress is “a transitional period of ‘crisis and fragmentation’” to which many immigrants are subjected (Westen 195:356). Following this, individuals may face deculturation wherein feelings of confusion, anxiety, alienation, and lost identity ensue (Berry 1980:13-15). As becoming “too American” encroaches, and individual inevitably becomes “watered down further,” and cannot “even be called ‘Iranian-American’,” and lacks “the sensibility, the language, the distaste for body hair,” the contradictions between tradition and modernity must be reconciled in order to reconstruct a narrative of self-transformation imbued with the new meanings and structures of the host culture.

Since traditional structures are threatened and give rise to uncertainty, such as a reconfiguration of family and collectivism, Iranians construct “synthetic meaning” from the inheritances of their dual identity (Mahdi 1999). “The first experience of these
families in migration is confusion and normlessness … traditional restrictions, combined with restrictions imposed by the new environment, compels these immigrants to develop a comfortable blueprint for their own identity” (ibid.:56). The economic and political reaches of globalization set in motion migration, and the migrants’ experiences of loss, status change, and reformulated meaning through the acquisition of novel roles, practices, and institutions.

As distance expands and contracts transnationally, global Middle Eastern families struggle with modifications that arise through globalization (Smith 2006:20), especially issues related to modern life and the continuity of core values (e.g., “traditional,” extended families) (ibid.:3). For Iranian families, socio-cultural changes amplify men’s inflexibility and marginalization as a result of: role reversal, a “crisis of patriarchy,” divorce, sexual freedom (Ahmadi 2003; Darvishpour 2002; Moghissi 1999), and loss of authority (Ansari 1991; Mahdi 1997). While the majority of my respondents referenced their family of orientation as “traditional,” similar to Haas’ (2006) definition, Iranian families and households in the transnational context become transitional or egalitarian. Employment and social policies transform household division of labor into a shared endeavor (ibid.:355-356).

Extended family links are critical to the construction of emotional and economic support networks tapped by Iranian transnationals, especially because they facilitate and retain Iranian fusion patterns in the host society. Transnational engagement and marriage, for example, perpetuate endogamy through matchmaking, conducted by go-betweens (e.g., mothers, fathers, hired matchmakers, friends), matrimonial want ads,
Internet dating, marriage services, and/or magazines (Ingoldsby 2006:137). Similar to Iranian immigrants, Indian immigrants in Canada spurn love marriages, preferring to utilize parents, a mediator, and/or return to India, while remaining open to Western practices (e.g., vetoing an unappealing match) (ibid.:138). In this study, some interviewees arranged marriage transnationally, and procured a fiancé visa, although propinquity played a decisive role.

For Iranian students, the university functioned as a default mating pool, where the prevalence of Iranian students increased the likelihood of meeting a spouse. As travel restrictions slacken, fiancés travel to Iran, where a “traditional” wedding takes place. Civil marriages in the U.S. and “traditional” weddings in Iran create families of procreation in proximity to families of orientation (i.e., a laterally situated household configuration in which parents, grandparents, aunts, and/or uncles purchase homes or condominiums adjacently), a pattern carried over from Iran. Extended family members travel from Iran to stay for an indeterminate period of time; a configuration that increases individual and social stresses, while offering psychological and economic support (ibid.:144). Extended families experience interpersonal conflict more than nuclear families, especially squabbles between in-laws “over issues of household duties and power structure” (ibid.).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Conundrums

Given Iranians location in higher socio-economic brackets, they settle in familial-friendship “proximate pockets” scattered throughout high-income urban and exurban areas (e.g., Eden Prairie, Woodbury, Edina, Minnetrista), mimicking extended family structures, co-religionist enclaves, and/or friendship networks from childhood and neighborhood loyalties carried over from Iran. Such pockets are “refreshed” by a small but steady stream of “newbies” who escape Iran, obtain green cards, and/or get married. Despite Marling’s claim to Minnesota’s “struggle to find its own image,” Minnesotans have increasingly constructed an identity around the myth of “Minnesota Nice,” that prides itself on friendliness but which “outsiders” interpret as cliquey and “Minnesota Ice” (Yuen 2012). This dialectical “identity crisis”—struggle in search of image—raises concerns of representative authority and lacks support of an institutional framework to disseminate the narrative. Despite the outsider’s construction of stereotypical homogeneity (Cohen 1985), diversity within communities complicates foci of representation. Iranian diversity, for example, is based on religion, class, ethnicity, circumstances of flight, gender, age, socio-economics, education, all of which become obfuscated against Minnesota’s diverse immigrants and refugees.

The methodological conundrums of geographic dispersal, diversity, and disintegration of institutions problematize “the formation of an ethnic group
Whereas demographically dense communities sustain ethnic identity via established institutions (e.g., economic enclaves, community centers, houses of worship), and potentially internal ethnicity, the pattern of institutional disintegration in the Twin Cities, perhaps more than anything, reflects the diverse individual interests, agendas, and dilemmas to secure an image. The dispersed, disconnected pockets are comprised of connections based on familial relations and/or old neighborhood associations from Iran.

Demands of interviewees’ professional life complicate the methodological predicament of dispersal in “the field” of urban sprawl. Tenacity and persistence of will have been a prerequisite in my research, especially in obtaining interviews. My interviewees are settled in wealthy, suburban and exurban areas in the Twin Cities, particularly where new residential development has increased to meet the expanding population. According to the “Trends in Land Use in the Twin Cities Region,” published by the Metropolitan Council (2011), these areas includes “the seven-county Twin Cities geographic area [which] is 1.9 million acres,” the largest percentage of which is dedicated to residential use (2). However, the economic downturn has affected a “reduction in the growth of land development [which] mirrors the Twin Cities region’s slowing population growth and record low levels of residential construction in the last half of the decade” (2-3). The net effect has been that suburbs “are readily growing and transitioning from undeveloped to developed” (4).

Based on my research, I can attest that Iranians overwhelmingly prefer these new areas, partially explained by educational attainment. Because a high percentage of
Iranians hold advanced degrees, and can afford to reside in new developments, highly sought-after, inner city locations (e.g., Edina). Small, familial clusters expand in these regions as family members (i.e., parents, children, grandchildren, siblings) purchase homes or condos in close proximity to each other. This familial settlement pattern is carried over from Iran, where extended families typically reside within the same building (as interviewees attested). The methodological fits and spurts convey a temporary exile within an Iranian world; a sojourn of the mind propelling researcher and interviewee into a personalized, memorial of revolution, flight, and settlement.

Life History Interviews

“All narrative is metaphor.” … What is this place [Minnesota] to you? What is your story here? Where do you get silenced and where do you have voice? Where are you an actor and where are you an observer? What’s the sense, finally, that you make out of this place—its water, its people, its past that is both glorious and shameful, its ability to be home and haven for some and painful outpost for others?

(Atkins, 2007, p. 266)

My pool of interviewees (also referred to as subjects, respondents, etc.) reflect a diachronic involvement within the community. While it may appear that my interviewees were “selected purely fortuitously,” which Langness and Frank (1995) note
is not an ideal approach to collecting life histories (44), my associations are linked to several contexts of involvement as described in the Introduction. Oral histories, as semistructured, qualitative interviews, entail preset questions and topics that are systematic yet allow for digression and probing (Berg 2001:70). Qualitative interviews facilitate rapport and conversation, present the interviewee’s “understanding, knowledge, and insights,” and hit the pulse of the interviewee’s emotions and experiences (Rubin and Rubin 1995:6). The researcher’s goal is to uncover “shared understandings, taken-for-granted rules of behavior and standards of value, and mutual expectations,” as well as learned experiences passed through the generations (6). Semi-structured or directed interviews have a particular focus that the interviewer directs if prevarication occurs. This approach is more useful in “the later stages of taking a life history, as it is wise to encourage spontaneity at first … [which] enables you to learn what the subjects themselves regard as important … [and how they] conceptualize and think about their own lives” (48). Langness and Frank (1995) provide a deep historical account of the predicaments and benefits of the oral history method in the discipline of anthropology. While anachronistic references to “non-literate” are frequent and their approach is geared to anthropologists working in many “pre-contact” areas, the historical review, nuts and bolts of methods, and their discussion of analysis, the “self,” the wholeness of being, and ethical issues are helpful. They emphasize that their contribution comes at a time (originally published in 1981) when “‘person-centered’ ethnography … on the part of American scholars and others [is] to portray the lives of ordinary individuals” (1).
Cole and Knowles (2001) emphasize how reflexivity, relationality, and artistry unfold in the process of collecting peoples’ stories, and the relationships that arise between the interviewer and storyteller (viii, 9). With academia as their subject, they demonstrate how the lives of academics unfold relative to “social, economic, historical, religious, and educational circumstances” (ibid.:2-3). Life histories as co-constructed works (e.g., editing together) teaches those involved their roles as “subject” and “researcher” in that “any research project is an expression of elements of a researcher’s life history. … [All] research is in some way autobiographical” (ibid.:10). The final rhetorical decision (e.g., chronology, life themes, major incidents) (ibid.:4) should reflect an aesthetic emphasis that consciously eschews a linear, rational scientific approach in order to be creative and responsive (ibid.:10). Oral (or life) histories illuminate the particularities of complex events, reveal subjective ideas about the past and changing notions of self, and uncover how people “produce, evaluate, and transmit knowledge about the past” (Giles-Vernick 2006:86). By interfacing individual agency and structure (Payne and Payne 2004:24), they paint a rich, detailed description of the individual’s understanding of self in the context of historical change (ibid.:87).

The oral history method has critics, which raises concerns of reliability. One critique is that it displays the interviewee’s lack of knowledge of the past, fallible memory, and/or a subjective, selective interest to relay different messages to different audiences (Giles-Vernick 2006:90). Langness and Frank (1995), referencing Crapanzano’s biography of Tuhami, note that it is more a matter of balancing art and science: the “portrait of Tuhami stresses the art of perceiving truth in experiences
branded as lies or delusions in one’s culture. Likewise stressed is the science of recognizing how much of what we know about other (and about ourselves) depends on how the tale is told, to whom, and why” (5). This perceived disadvantage may also inform the research design and theory. For example, postmodern and feminist anthropology contest claims of “authenticity” and “truthfulness.” Narratives are constructions of the “subjective ‘worlds’ that informants create,” and represent alternative voices silenced by the elite (ibid.:92).

The origins of this method in American anthropology date to anthropologists’ work on American Indians (ibid.:17). Problems with these accounts were given by “highly acculturated individuals who had been influenced by missionaries” (ibid.:15-16), and that the American audience had a particular desire to understand (ibid.:16) the “noble savage” (ibid.:14) and/or “the lives of ‘deviants’ or unusual people” (ibid.:17). Early “biographies” in anthropology (as the authors refer to them) tended to be descriptive and non-theoretical (ibid.:20), following psychological anthropology and the quirks of representative individuals. Toward the middle of the twentieth century, the introduction of theory was meant “to illuminate cultural and social facts instead of individual lives or aspects of personality” (ibid.:21). Presently, approaches include: portraying culture and/or cultural change (e.g., Oscar Lewis’s Five Families and Sidney Mintz’s Worker in the Cane, respectively); highlighting marginal individuals or the insider’s view (e.g., Rebecca Reyher’s Zulu Woman); communicating unprecedented ideas; and examining “unusual cases” (ibid.:24).
Another common criticism is the use of oral histories as the sole method. Because “life histories emerge from the fieldwork context itself,” they should be “a collaborative enterprise” (ibid.:32). Data is more accurate if the individual’s history is “based upon direct observation” (ibid.). On the other hand, the interview provides data that cannot be obtained via observation, such as beliefs that “exist only in the midst of the actors” and “motivations, judgments, values, attitudes, and emotions” (ibid.:45). If the goal is to obtain “something like ‘modal personality’ or ‘national character’, you should strive to get a number of them drawn as randomly as possible from the group … to get an adequate sampling of age, sex, and social position. And it is also important that you get similar information of the kind you require from each informant” (ibid.:52). The concern to locate a representative modal personality, however, really depends upon the analysis, and theoretical approaches that have changed over the course of the last century in the discipline of anthropology. Even in older “basic personality” studies, the shared features within the social structure will be rendered (e.g., as in DuBois’s The People of Alor) (ibid.:67). In this way, one can demonstrate “how the broader cultural and social changes affect an individual’s concept of self and how that process, in turn, affect the motives of individuals” (ibid.:69).

The Problem of Iranian Anthropology and Anthropology of Iran

As the edited volume Conceptualizing Iranian Anthropology (2009) attests, it is both problematic and promising that Iranian anthropology and Iran anthropology have a recent, sketchy history. Foreign anthropologists have conducted fieldwork in Iran from
the early 1900s, but Hegland (2009) was unable to trace any work by Iranian anthropologists prior to 1960 (45). Her chapter addresses the advantages and disadvantages that native and foreign anthropologists face. While native anthropologists have greater access, it is more difficult to distance themselves and avoid suspicions of local people who “associate Iranian-born researchers with government officials” (ibid.:46). Between the 1950s and 1970s, pioneering approaches were followed, since “any topic … addressed was novel for Iran” (ibid.:49). In the 1970s, “border-crossing work” by native and foreign anthropologists appeared in several areas: Iran’s minorities, medical anthropology, communication, Shi’a Islam, and feminist views of marriage, sexuality, and gender (ibid.:46-48). The revolutionary period required Iranian anthropologists to obtain their education outside of Iran, and made it difficult, if not impossible, to conduct research in Iran (ibid.:49). This led to the study of diasporic communities, and a focus on public anthropology and anthropology of the media (ibid.:53-54).

By the late 1990s, Hegland sees a hopeful future for Iran anthropology, including two anthropological journals, the return of some Iranian American anthropologists to Iran to do fieldwork (a prospect more difficult for non-Iranian anthropologists), and an increase in PhDs among the diasporic generation (ibid.:57).

Influenced by the dynamism and diversification in topic and methodology that has developed in Western anthropology and by the influences of modernization and globalization on Iran and Iranians, a new group of Iran anthropologists are
breaking barriers into new topics through new modes of research and analysis.

(ibid.:61)

Still, most publications are in English, no anthropology Ph.D. program exists in Iran, and Iranian anthropologists have not “become a part of the worldwide field of anthropology,” which means both Westerners and diasporic Iranians dominate the discipline (ibid.:62).

Bromberger (2009) furthers Hegland’s analysis of the anthropology of Iran by criticizing the knowledge produced about Iranians, which has created a “truncated human” that defies the discipline’s holistic endeavor (195). Iran anthropology’s “late start” relates to three facts: “Iran was never colonized,” “Iranian societies are not primitive enough to raise broad anthropological interest,” and “prevailing studies of the monumental heritage and learned written traditions have left little space for studies of daily life” (ibid.:196). Political and ideological obstacles also stand in the way (ibid.:197).

The revolution transformed the political landscape, making fieldwork a difficult if not dangerous task (ibid.). Ideologically, the revolution reversed the Shah’s favorable view of anthropology in that it “became a suspicious discipline, responsible for perpetuating archaisms, for disconnecting Iranian culture from its Islamic foundations and for using Western concepts to reduce irreducible phenomena (such as religion) to sociological or anthropological interpretation” (ibid.). The “taboo themes” that have plagued Iranian anthropology in the past (e.g., “‘serious’ or ‘exotic’ topics” that Orientalists have criticized, such as “villages, ploughs, tents, rural houses”) ignore the fact that “the majority of Iranians live in other frames of mind” (e.g., the increase in a
‘child-focused’ lifestyle as evidenced by a “marked increase in children’s birthday celebrations” (ibid.:200).

In order to move studies into a truly modern domain, we need more foci on urban areas as well as abroad, especially following “a multi-scale analysis, considering individuals in the different social spaces and networks” (ibid.:202). The result of regionalism has been “to reinforce the feeling of national identity … [that imposed] a strong feeling of the singularity of the country’s culture and tended to over-Iranize the facts … [which leads] to a constant effort to find the remnants of a brilliant past in recent contemporary rituals” (ibid.:). Bromberger suggests a comparative perspective as a partial answer to over-Iranization, such as conducting a “diachronic comparison focused on the transformation of customs and practices” (ibid.:202-203).

In my own field research (i.e., participant observation at annual community-wide events, private parties and holiday celebration, conducting life history interviews), the recent and sketchy history of Iranian anthropology had implications for how I conducted my own research. Firstly, although Bromberger (2009) notes that the Shah was favorable toward the discipline, people were suspicious of me (i.e., wondering whether I am a spy) as well as circumspect about being “subjects” in a study. While Iranian researchers are also distrusted, because they are pegged as government workers (Hegland 2009:46), the problem with being “a subject” in the Iranian diaspora relates to questions of “authenticity” as subjects as well as their unfamiliarity with being a focus of a study.

Because the revolution constrained anthropological research in Iran, studies on diasporic communities have expanded (ibid.:49, 53-54), although researchers tend to be
Western and diasporic Iranians (ibid.:62). Of course, this study represents a Western researcher’s perspective, but I would argue that the life history interviews, which expanded the individuals’ life trajectories—childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, including marriage and children, migration—take into account the impact of the global economy and international relations. The broad scope of life histories moves away from “taboo themes” of Iranian anthropology, and highlights “other frames of mind” (Bromberger 2009:200). Further, Bromberger calls to conduct studies with foci relative to urban areas, how individuals inhabit social spaces and networks differently, and identify with alternative constructions of Irannianness (and Americanness) to avoid the problems that arise with claims to “the singularity of the country’s culture” (ibid.:202). Because this study focuses on the fission-fusion pattern of Iranian settlement in the Twin Cities, it directly speaks to how and why this pattern represents differing needs of community and identity, and defies any claim to a singular culture.

Moreover, Bromberger’s direct challenge to include a comparative perspective that is diachronic and “focused on the transformation of customs and practices” (ibid.:202-203) is vital to this study. Not only do comparisons between the Twin Cities’ Iranian community with other diasporic communities demonstrate how macro-structural governmental and international policies influence the degree to which transnational Iranians are “absorbed” into the host society, but how they take control of and utilize their adopted identity to succeed. The diachronic nature of this study disclosed the fission-fusion pattern of institutional life, which exhibits both a desire to “make
community” as well as the difficulties associated with dispersal and the politics around maintaining identity.

Minnesota: “The Land of Ten-Thousand Lakes”

Wherever one lives in Minnesota, “going to the lake” is a sacred ritual. NO one concludes there’s just one lake; still, most Minnesotans refer only to “the lake.” Oddly, they never mean the really big lake, Superior; they call that the “North Shore,” even though it’s actually the lake’s western shore, but never mind (7). … It’s this passion, this visceral connection to trees and water, that informs Minnesota history, identity, and life. It’s the impulse that makes Minnesotans Minnesotans. (Atkins 2007:10)

Minnesota is “a land ‘of fish and old-time things, of losers and stars, of lakes and modest skyscrapers.’ … [T]he struggle to find its own image is part of what the state is all about. Maybe that is because there are so many different Minnesotans.” (Marling in Gilman, 1989. P. 225)

Minnesota Myth-Making: “Minnesota Nice” and Its Immigrant Communities
Atkins’ (2007) portrayal of Minnesota and Minnesotans is situated within the “current historical issues, including whiteness, modernization, material culture, environmental history, gender analysis” (xiv). Her goal is not to delineate the uniqueness of Minnesotan identity, but to show its configuration within the United States—how American it is—and who within the State claims representative authority to tell its tale (ibid.). We are all a part of creating Minnesota and “constructing the stories that give meaning and context to our lives. History is never a ‘given’; it is always a ‘creation’” (ibid.:xv). Minnesota’s identity is entwined with water—we “go to ‘the’ lake,” the North Shore, our moniker is the “Land of 10,000 Lakes”—despite the fact that one half the state has no water (or trees) (ibid.:6). The Midwest is viewed as exotic—another time and place—because of its remoteness; “Minnesotans both deny and make a virtue of it” (ibid.:9). Atkins describes Minnesotans as a people infused with longing; not something to get away from, but “a soulful yearning to be elsewhere” (ibid.:10). As non-indigenous people settled Minnesota in the late 1880s, its early demographic encompassed Germans (thirty percent), Norwegians (thirty percent), Swedes (nineteen percent), and British and Irish (nineteen percent) (ibid.:84).

A few similarities between “Minnesotanness” and Iranianness are uncanny. Like Iranians who have “fled” Minnesota for the East or West Coasts, Atkins notes that artists from Minnesota have left for places that are “more charged and electric” (ibid.:216). The myth of “Minnesota Nice,” a kind of “reserve and restraint” demonstrated by not accepting “food until it’s offered three times” or not standing “too close or ask[ing] too many questions” is akin to *ta’aroof* (ibid.:242). Minnesota’s strange accent and
“Minnesota Nice” were popularized by “Howard Mohr, one of the regulars on [Garrison] Keillor’s *A Prairie Home Companion* in the 1980s, [who] published *How to Talk Minnesotan*” (ibid.):

Minnesotans in the last several decades have begun to identify a vaguely defined set of cultural characteristics as “Minnesota Nice.” The set usually includes a polite friendliness, an aversion to confrontation, a tendency toward understatement, a disinclination to make a fuss or stand out, emotional restraint, and self-deprecation. If those characteristics describe you and you’re a Minnesotan, you likely think Minnesota Nice is benign, even nice. If, however, you wave your arms when you talk or blow up, ask too many questions, tell too much, talk too much about yourself—you may not applaud Minnesota Nice. The pro-Minnesota Nicers think that nice makes the world work a little better, smoother, more easily. Words said cannot be unsaid; … so why not save the words and hold back the hurt? But critics of Minnesota Nice call this behavior passive-aggressive and bridle at never knowing (ibid.) for sure what Minnesotans think. Nicers, they say, pretend consensus where none exists and fail to express disagreement or emotion directly; the reserve feels cool, even cold. Racist, too. (ibid.:243)

Atkins attributes many of these traits to the “state’s ethnic, religious, and political history. … Scandinavians have a reputation for being reserved” (ibid.). “No doubt much of Minnesota Nice is rooted in this Scandinavian, Lutheran, rural soil” (ibid.:244). Atkins credits these behaviors to American Indians as well:
When Father Louis Hennepin wrote about his time around the Great Lakes in the 1680s, he observed the difficulty in knowing when Indian people were persuaded, “For their civility hinder[s] them from making any objection or contradicting what is said to them.” (ibid.)

People who reject Minnesota Nice see it as a “deep-seated resistance to change. They see evidence of its passive-aggressive side in attempts by dominant-group Minnesotans to be ‘nice’ to minority-group Minnesotans—stroking the hair of an African American child (‘oh, isn’t that pretty’), not noticing that the child and mother recoil from the touch” (ibid.:248).

The Twin Cities is home to a very diverse collection of refugee and immigrant communities (e.g., Hmong, Kenyans, Somalis, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Nuer, Liberians, Oromo, Eritreans), which have drawn scholarly attention (Arthur 2000; Holtzman 2000). From the late nineteenth through the late twentieth century, the demographic makeup of Minnesota has altered dramatically. Holtzman’s (2000) ethnography on the Nuer refugees in Minnesota provides evidence of the state’s changing demographic makeup. The Nuer began arriving in 1994 in a significant wave, who settled in northern suburbs, and stood out for this reason as well as their phenotype and need of assistance (ibid.:107-110). Because officials affiliated with Anoka County did not want to see disruption in their communities, they made efforts to recruit staff, volunteers, and church goers to help transition them. “It is true that Minnesota is a relatively progressive state socially and politically and does not have a history of significant problems with race relations. Nevertheless … racism certainly exists”
Holtzman’s ethnography chronicles refugee resettlement in the Twin Cities, which contrasts starkly with the slow but steady migration pattern of Iranians. Although Iranian refugees exist, they blend in with other Iranians at community-wide events. The Nuer, on the other hand, fled a brutal war in the Sudan, came with little to no possessions or economic capital, formed a community based on friendships (not family) forged in refugee camps, had difficult finding work and maintaining jobs, and faced serious challenges in gender and family changes. While friends became fictive family for the Nuer, the absence of the extended family structure so central to life in Sudan made their reliance upon American institutions central to their successful transition and absorption in the Twin Cities.

Arthur’s (2000) study of African migrants in the Twin Cities follows a pattern “chain migration.” Field surveys were piloted in the Twin Cities among thirty-five immigrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, and Somalia with the goal “to collect data on aspects of the immigrant experience not captured by the official data on immigrants” (ibid.:13). His concern is “to coax out the forms, patterns, and meanings associated with the migratory transfer of Africa’s human capital to this country. A secondary goal is to give voice to the migratory experiences that reveal how the Africans negotiate the formation of ethnicity, racial identity, and the multifaceted relationships that they forge with the members of the host society” (viii). Similar to Iranians, Africans are “[f]iercely kinship-oriented in their worldview,” and share remittances with extended families who “become agents of social change in their home countries” (viii-ix). Significantly, Africans differ from Iranians, Latinos, and Asians in their transnational migration
patterns in that they “have a low rate of naturalization. Many consider themselves sojourners in the United States, intending to return home when economic and political conditions improve” (ibid.:3). Arthur refers to them as “[a]cculturated but not assimilated” immigrants, who experience American culture selectively by taking advantage of educational and economic opportunities; “education is seen as the pathway to social mobility and economic development” (ibid.). The 1990 Immigration Act benefited African immigrants by making “it possible to increase the total number of immigrants admitted on the basis of skills for employment in the United States … [and] to promote diversity among the immigrants admitted” (9). Holtzman had difficulty navigating the gender restrictions within traditional African culture. “Access to the homes of immigrants did not mean unlimited rights to chat informally with everyone in the household. Usually, there was a spokesperson, a male, who took it upon himself to answer all the questions” (ibid.:13-14).

Paradoxically, Minnesota’s liberal policy toward refugees belies “transplants” the feeling of being wholly Minnesotan. Iranian, African, and other “outsiders” experience “Minnesota Nice” as social impenetrability or “Minnesota Ice,” “a synonym for phoniness and passive aggression,” and an attribution for “all kinds of strange Minnesota phenomena” rooted in the state’s Scandinavian and German immigrant populations (Yuen 2012). Intriguingly, my interviewees’ comments aligned with the “outsiders” in Yuen’s (2012) report on many points, including: planned “get-togethers” that never materialize; being “loyal and neighborly,” while keeping “outsiders at a comfortable distance”; “making friends and finding a sense of community is daunting”; “transplants”
forming their own community and sense of belonging, based on shared experiences as “outsiders” and being “international”; cliquey behavior attributed to elementary and junior high school friendships; and a lack of empathy for living alone in a new place. Immigrants express “frustration with trying to penetrate their rigid social circles,” particularly people of color, who experience a gulf between their own cultural and Minnesotans’ lack of cultural knowledge (ibid.).

Minnesota also boasts the second-lowest rates of outward migration of college-educated people in the nation. “It bears out the old adage: ‘It’s really hard to get people to move to Minneapolis, and it’s impossible to get them to leave’” (Thompson 2015:3). However, this statistic does not apply to Iranians in Minnesota, as evidenced by the “UMN Student Community.” Of course, individuals who stayed behind constitute the roots of the small population of Iranian Minnesotans. Modarres’ (1998) research shows Iranian students migrate out of Midwestern states upon graduation to join family, friends, and/or to move to metropolitan areas (on par with Tehran) (42).

The Land of Ten-Thousand Iranian Communities

The question remains as to whether there is, strictly speaking, an Iranian ethnic group in the United States. Excluding Iranian Armenians and Assyrians, Iranians in the United States do not exhibit a high degree of cohesiveness. Immigration of individuals rather than large groups, a lack of critical community size, the relatively recent arrival of most Iranians,
the desire and ability to assimilate rapidly, prior lack of experience and trust in institutional forms, the prosperity of most immigrants which enables them to get along on their own, and the lack of cohesiveness provided by a religious focus have all had an inhibiting effect on the formation of an ethnic group consciousness. However, the patterns of immigration have changed, the number of immigrants has increased dramatically in recent years, and there is continued devotion to Iranian culture among Iranians, including long residence in the United States. In addition, there is the recent emergence of instruments of group preservation, particularly the publication of several nationally distributed periodicals aimed at the largest Iranian community. These factors suggest that a group consciousness is developing. As of the late 1970s Iranians in the United States are mostly a collection of individuals. However, most Iranians are new arrivals and it is too early to exclude the possibility that ethnic group consciousness will emerge. (Thernstrom, Orlov, and Handlin, 1980, p. 524)
Thernstrom, Orlov, and Handlin’s (1980) entry in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of Ethnic Groups* regarding Iranian immigrants in the U.S. is worth quoting at length because of several enduring patterns that remain. While the quote is nearly four decades old, remarkably, several factors relative to the endurance of ethnic group consciousness dovetails with Iranians in the Twin Cities: an initial immigration pattern of individuals; a small population; a young community; an assimilative tendency; institutional distrust and absence of sustained institutional life (exceptions are a Sufi group, the Persian Student Organization of Minnesota, and Bahá’ís); prosperity and lack of dependence; and an absence of religious unity (except Bahá’ís). Despite these inhibitive features, most significantly, a “continued devotion to Iranian culture” (ibid.:524) endures. These patterns are described below through a history of the evolution of the Iranian community, as presented in secondary sources, and from my own involvement in various layers that comprise “the Iranian community” of the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

*A History of Iranian Student Life in the Twin Cities*

Former Iranian students who made the “decision” to stay in Minnesota, established the roots of the local community through the expansion of their families of orientation, by virtue of immigration policies favoring family reunification, and families of procreation, through a strong preference for endogamy. Minnesota is a destination for education and/or employment, due to its attributes of its mythical “good life,” lack of competition in commerce, and its approach to business taxes.
The Twin Cities is home to numerous two- and four-year universities and colleges, which drew Iranian students since at least the 1950s, evidenced by the Iranian Student Organization (ISA) (Miller 1981:524). The ISA sponsored a national convention in 1958, attended by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to celebrate and commemorate “the centennial of Minnesota statehood” (ibid.). Only fifty students (out of 180 registered Iranians) were involved in ISA. By the 1970s, approximately 182 Iranians resided in Minnesota: “Job prospects and a lower inflation rate induced some to immigrate, and religious, political, and kinship considerations played important roles in their decisions” (ibid.). Similar to other Middle Easterners, Iranians socialize within their religious cohort, although Iranian “Muslims were seemingly less religiously cohesive than Bahais” (ibid.). Though Iranians are not, per se, economic migrants, the pursuit of education was predicated on their eventual return to Iran in order to become “captains of industry,” according to Bob. “During the hostage crisis of 1979-81, the 500 Iranian students in the state were frequent targets of American resentment” (ibid.:524).

Gilanshah’s (1983) Ph.D., *The Iranians of the Twin Cities*, “oriented to the potential for community formation among Iranians,” provides indispensable information about the early stages of the Iranian community (164). Her study reformulates Max Weber’s “original insights into the peculiar role played by commensualism and connubialism (table community and marriage community) in the community formations of guest peoples” (ibid.:165). Any amount of human interaction, whether intra- or inter-cultural, has the potential to build relationships that transpire into communal relations. Emphasizing Weber’s notion of community as a *process*, she situated her research on
Iranians in the Twin Cities in “institutions of socialization (the family, religion, education)” associated with the preservation of roots, cultural heritage, and survival (ibid.:11). Gilanshah’s portrayal of Twin Cities’ Iranians between 1983 and 1989 consists of a small but fairly cohesive group that would predictably become “larger and more stabilized” (ibid.:17). Community is predicated on any degree of human interaction, whereby constituents create “solutions to all the categorical problems of interpersonal life (making a living, socialization, and social control) into a more-or-less stabilized, more-or-less complete system adequate to the cycles of the day, year, and lifetime” (ibid.). Given this definition, Gilanshah contends the existence of “an Iranian ethnic community” based on several factors: the diversification of the demographic beyond men and students (to include women, family members, and a broader age range), a committee to institute an Iranian Center of Minnesota; a radio program addressing immigration, family, and identity issues; an Iranian restaurant and grocery store; and professional associations (ibid.:12-16).

Three general categories of Iranians are identified as significant (although not necessarily due to numbers) (ibid.:1): “the pioneers,” who arrived between 1947 and 1968; “the colonists and students,” who arrived between 1960 and 1972; and increasing heterogeneity, which began in early 1972 up to the hostage crisis (ibid.:2). Gilanshah made personal efforts to contact the earliest Iranian arrivals to the Twin Cities, and attempted, discreetly, “to ascertain the class and professional backgrounds of such early migrants and their motives for coming to the United States and the Twin Cities” (ibid.:249). Iranian “pioneers” were wealthy, upper-class urbanites, who “came for the
adventure, though some intended to pursue educations … [while] others to enter business or professional occupations” (ibid.:250). The Twin Cities was typically not their original destination of choice, but they “learned about the area from persons elsewhere and came out of curiosity” (ibid.). Interestingly, although they did not favor the climate, they “spontaneously remarked about their pleasure at the cordiality, low level of prejudice and ambience of the Twin Cities” (ibid.). Even some who left for other cities returned, because they found “Minnesotans were far more tolerant and receptive to foreigners” (ibid.). One of Gilanshah’s informants provided an estimate of “approximately a dozen Iranians in the area though some others estimated this to be far too low” (ibid.:251).

While the exact number of “pioneers” (late 1940s to early 1960s) is not given, it is assumed to be small, which may explain why those who remained in Minnesota prioritized maintaining connections with other Iranians scattered around the U.S. (ibid.). “They formed a country-wide friendship network which facilitated a slow increase in the number of migrants to this area, recommended by friends elsewhere” (ibid.).

The “colonists” and “students” began arriving in the early 1960s. Media drew attention to public marriage of an Iranian woman, who:

was from upper class stratum of Teheran with relatives in the Iranian government. When information of her impending marriage was through some accident called to the attention of the local newspapers, reporters were dispatched to cover the event. To the newspaper personnel assigned to cover the marriage, it was a source of curiosity, for they seemed to have no clear idea of precisely where Iran
was and some were of the opinion that it was a desert kingdom of tent dwelling camel nomads. (ibid.:252)

Throughout the 1960s, information and friendship networks began to create “a kind of infrastructure,” and with time, as oil prices improved “and a process of rapid modernization was underway in Iran,” Iranians arrived in the U.S. to obtain “special training,” while others “came primarily to study, [and] the number of persons intending to stay—to colonize so-to-speak—was also increased” (including women) (ibid.). The “migrants were well-to-do, high status individuals and … ‘formed a relatively homogenous group’” (ibid.:253). Interactions entailed weekly get-togethers, special occasions, and marriage ceremonies.

By the early 1970s, the Twin Cities’ Iranian community remained fairly homogenous, based on their elite position in Iran’s socio-economic hierarchy. These individuals were “proud of the importance of their fathers in Iran,” and expressed “the traditional appreciation of ascribed status which was manifest in the tendency to address each other formally (for example, as Ms. Dr. X or Mr. Dr. Y)” (ibid.). Homogeneity altered as non-elite Iranians arrived in the course of political events between the U.S., Iran, and oil-producing nations in the Middle East (ibid.). In the early 1970s, the oil crisis and OPEC’s announcement to use Persian Gulf oil to “discipline the West politically in its operations on the Third World, riveted attention of American [sic] on the area and providing new awareness of Iran” (ibid.:254). Modernization projects accelerated as the price of oil increased in the post-sanction, OPEC era (ibid.:253-254). A secondary effect of modernization projects was to spread wealth throughout “a new
variety of social strata from both urban and rural areas and a diversity of religions and ethnic backgrounds,” impacting migration from diverse strata (i.e., class, religion, education, place of origin) (ibid.:254).

These macro-structural events in Iran had micro-structural implications for Iranians in the Twin Cities. Gilanshah discovered that “[c]ompeting cliques became the rule. At times the pioneers and colonists among local Iranians reported that they found themselves thrust into the background by the noisy, cliquish newcomers” (ibid.). The original Iranians referred to them as “the newcomers,” who consisted of families, women, and middle- to lower-class people, characterized by clannishness, an insistence on maintaining Iranian traditions (e.g., teaching children about food, customs, culture), in-marriage, pressuring children “to marry trustworthy Iranian women and men,” and purchasing Iranian foodstuffs and ingredients at Middle Eastern (mostly Arab) and Asian stores to prepare Iranian dishes (ibid.:255). Gilanshah contends that “the Iranians of the Twin Cities while superficially dividing into competing subgroups were, in fact, laying the foundation for an internally differentiated Iranian American community” (ibid.:255-256).

Gilanshah’s study coincided with the fall of the Shah, the hostage crisis, and the Islamic Revolution, all of which impacted Iranian students and settlers in Minnesota. Traditionalists and modernists alike came to oppose modernization projects, because their fast pace made it difficult for people to adjust (ibid.:256). Referencing the Shah’s ruthless police and administration, she compares the fall of the monarchy to the demise of the Russian Czars: “most segments of Iranian society welcomed it [the revolution] and
felt a kind of euphoria—Iranians experienced themselves as taking their affairs into their own hands … [and experiencing] a heightened sense of national and ethnic self-consciousness” (ibid.:257). Because the Shah was perceived as an agent of the U.S. government, “opposition to the United States became coextensive with opposition to the Shah” (ibid.).

Iranians “stuck” in the U.S. were ambivalent about the political changes. While some “felt estranged from their American hosts, who they now saw as supporter’s of the Shah’s repressive regime,” it inspired “a new sense of national identity” (ibid.:257-258). When President Carter granted entry to the Shah for medical treatment, it enflamed Iranians, who believed “it a trick, a conspiracy to return the Shah to power”; the hostage crisis enlivened Iranians when the students demanded “the return of the Shah as ransom for their release” (ibid.:258). Anti-American chants, flag burnings, fists shaking, and chants to “‘Destroy the Great Satan!’” were “exhilarating,” because the David versus Goliath tale unfolded before Iranians on television, and David appeared to be winning (ibid.:258-259).

For Iranians in the U.S., the revolution “supplied a new sense of unity, of pride, of identity … [but] respondents reported an awareness of prejudice and hostility toward themselves for the first time by Americans during the year long hostage crisis” (ibid.:259). Gilanshah proclaims that Twin Cities’ Iranians were “hostages as well”; they experienced fear, presenting “a low profile, to remain as anonymous as was possible” (ibid.:260). Counterintuitively, they limited interaction with fellow Iranians (ibid.). And
of course, not until the hostages were freed did Iranians feel they could “breathe freely again,” reestablish contact, and “do business with Americans without hostility” (ibid.).

Migration in the post-hostage crisis era increased the number of families, women, and refugees, who intended “to make America a second home. At times such persons already had children who were studying in the United States. Some came to visit their children, but never returned to Iran,” since returning to Iran was unlikely (ibid.:262). During this time, Gilanshah observed “the crystallization of institutions of an Iranian community” (i.e., restaurants, a band, a radio program, schools, foodstuffs) appeared in “partly complementary, partly antagonistic, forms” (ibid.:262-263). The complementary form morphed into an Iranian-American community that ignored U.S.-Iranian tensions, whereas the antagonistic student settlement intended to go back to Iran and remained anti-American (ibid.:263). Notably, “both groups share a strong appreciation of Iranian culture and acknowledge the value in an Iranian community” (ibid.).

From the late 1970s through the end of her research in 1983, patterns of institutionalized behavior arose (the estimation of between 1000 and 1500 Iranians could not be verified) (ibid.:145). The University of Minnesota had “a good reputation in Iran,” and attracted quite a few Iranian students (estimated at 270 in 1981-1982, which dropped to 188 in 1982-1983) (ibid.:145-146). In addition to restaurants, community institutional life consisted of a social structure (based on political ideologies and sports groups), religious institutions (although only a few of the eighty percent attended the Islamic Center), fifty Bahá’ís who worshipped in individual homes, ten Jews (some of whom reportedly converted to the Bahá’í faith), three Armenians, and five Zoroastrians (who
traveled to California for religious celebrations) (ibid.:148-149). While a newsletter did not exist at that time, Iranians posted events on bulletin boards at the University of Minnesota, which “spread through families” (ibid.:152-153). A half-hour radio program, broadcast on a community radio station in Persian and English, “concerned primarily with political news” (ibid.:153).

An Iranian school was established, which served Iranian families whose children were young when they left Iran or were born in the U.S. Utilizing a party room at the University of Minnesota (on the West Bank), twenty-two students (five of whom were from “mixed marriages”) attended classes (ibid.). Students organized events, including a band which played at “celebrations, weddings and other social gatherings,” political meetings that attracted diverse Iranians, and Noruz (requiring renting a venue and procuring Iranian music). The different approaches to the celebration of Noruz provide an important predecessor to the composition of the Twin Cities Iranian community. For example, some preferred “to gather with close, intimate friends in someone’s home or at a restaurant. Some are quite selective, only gathering with people of the same social class as themselves in Iran. … Most parties are heard of through friends” (ibid.:155).

Gilanshah’s mention of the imbalanced sex ratio at that time brings up the gendered antecedents that made up Iranian gatherings and the community. She attributes the imbalance to four factors:

1. Traditionally, more Iranian men are sent to the United States for education than women; 2. Women show less interest in participating; 3. Iranian women are more interested in gathering with other women than with mixed groups; and
(4) Iranian single women are watched more closely than any other group. In some respects, the shortage of Iranian females at such gatherings is a vicious circle. They avoid the meetings because of excessive competition for them and their shortage exacerbates the tension. (ibid.:155-156)

Such interactions impacted the Iranian familial institution in that forty-five percent of Iranian male students married American women (presumably because they are preferred because they have less expectations and restrictions) (ibid.). While some Iranian men had expectations that their American spouses would learn Farsi and cook Iranian food, others distanced themselves from Iranians (ibid.:157).

Gilanshah predicted that the divisions between Iranian-Americans and student would persist in light of the fact that students do not involve themselves in ethnic communities, are single, and preoccupied with education (ibid.:265). She predicts that “a classical ethnic community” will form eventually, but students “remain in secondary status” (ibid.:266). Iranians who opposed her research began to cooperate, and any new studies should “refine both the theory and methodology to take into account the extent of the differences” which she describes as “a major serendipitous finding” (ibid.).

**Gastronomy and the “De-Exoticization” of Middle Easterners in the Twin Cities**

Gilanshah (1983) describes the evolution of Iranian restaurants in the Twin Cities as an outgrowth of the community’s expansion. Food is “a relatively ‘safe’ way” to mediate and socialize culture, because it introduces “members of the larger society to a different culture in a nonthreatening way” (Miller 1981:526). Curiously, Middle Eastern
immigrants in Minnesota are disproportionately represented in terms of “the extraordinary number of restaurants they operated … and in contrast to, say, the few eateries specializing in Scandinavian food” (ibid.). Middle Easterners brought entrepreneurial and small-business acumen with them; “opening food establishments was a phenomenon in which both old and new immigrants took part” (ibid.). Dating from the early to middle 1900s, Middle Eastern immigrants established restaurants near their communities. Miller notes that, more recently, restaurants “run by Egyptians, Palestinians, Syrians, an Afghan, and even a Pakistani couple, were located near colleges and universities, in downtown Minneapolis, South Minneapolis, the Highland area of St. Paul, and the Minneapolis suburbs,” whose recipes were modified “‘so that they will be fit for the American taste’” (ibid.:526).

At the time of Gilanshah’s study, one restaurant served Persian food exclusively and a steak house owned by Iranians served Iranian-style kebab. Middle Eastern and Asian grocery stores carried Middle Eastern foodstuffs, although Iranian customers were reticent to “‘place orders or make suggestions for better serving their needs’” (149-150). The need for Iranian ingredients increased with the influx of families and older women, who were housewives and:

familiar with the art of Iranian cooking. … They taught the younger women and students, who did not learn the skills back home, how to cook Iranian food, where to obtain the ingredients and, if the item was not available locally, what to substitute for it. Iranian men were delighted as half-forgotten tastes were awakened and Iranian women had something to offer rarely available in the
American society. At parties and gatherings there is great competition among, and admiration for, Iranian women able to prepare good, pure, traditional Iranian food. (ibid.:151)

Caspian Bistro and Marketplace, one of the original Iranian restaurants in the Twin Cities (referenced by Gilanshah), still exists and has expanded and renovated its establishment since they opened. Several Iranian-owned restaurants—Atlas Grill, Crave (Aburia 2013), Downtowner Woodfire Grill, Shish Café, Tavern on France (Youngblood 2010)—serve “American” food exclusively, while some have a combination of American and Persian-style fare.

In a point of comparison, Iranian men in England dominate in “commercially oriented food-work” in the public sphere (Harbottle 2000:72). Like many local restaurateurs, Iranian males predominate in non-Iranian takeaway food chains (later developing into an ethnic economy), which Harbottle associates with their “perceived spoiling of national identity since the Islamic Revolution … [because] these migrants seek to disguise and to protect their identity” (ibid.). Despite “the aesthetic sophistication of Iranian cuisine,” the paucity of Iranian restaurants is attributed to socio-political-economic factors: high capital investments (ibid.:86), negative stereotypes and unfamiliarity of Iranian food (ibid.:87), a “much smaller and more sparsely settled” Iranian population (ibid.), “lack of skilled chefs” (ibid.:88), and the demands of the job, since intensive preparation of Iranian food should not use “cheap alternatives” or “simple shortcuts” (ibid.). Similar to the invocation of “Persian” versus “Iranian” in restaurant names, Iranians in England used Persian “rather than using the more negatively perceived ‘Iranian’ identity” (ibid.). Furthermore, advertising ethnic,
political, or religious affiliations detracts customers. Among Iranians in England, “there is a considerable degree of mistrust between different ethnic, political and ethnic interest groups. For many Iranians the prospect of dining out, in the company of hostile or disapproving others, may provoke intense anxiety and discomfort” (ibid.:94).

The success of Iranian restaurateurs in the Twin Cities might be summed up in an interview with Ansari (Youngblood 2010), who learned lessons from his father, a Minister of Health during the Shah’s reign. Ansari recalls that his father “‘entertained officials from around the world. … I was brought up in a culture of making guests feel at home.’” Building on his upbringing, Ansari caters to his customers using a highly personal touch: “such neighborly activities as escorting elderly customers to their cars or, when a regular customer's auto is seen entering the parking lot, having his favorite cocktail waiting for him when he walks in.” Iranians in the Twin Cities support Iranian restaurateurs whenever possible, especially at Noruz events. However, in the past, the PSOM students did not cater Persian food made by Iranians, but provided a menu and recipes to D’Amico and Sons, a Minnesota-based Italian American chain. While the food was acceptable, quintessential items such as tadigh (the crispy rice from the bottom of the pan) was missing and the maast (yogurt) was sweet. The Noruz event sponsored by Atlas Grill does serve Persian food, and may have ghormeh sabzi in the kitchen, but customers have to ask for it since it is not on the menu.

The Presence and Evolution of Iranians in the Twin Cities: History and Biographies
The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was an important change in ending discriminatory immigration legislation (Portes and Rumbaut 2004); it abolished the national-origins quotas, the ban on Asian immigration (122), and “exempted immediate relatives of U.S. citizens from the numerical caps” (ibid.:123). This Act alone is an insufficient explanation of the quantitative and qualitative changes in immigration (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:8). Portes and Rumbaut (1996) also note that “well-educated” Africans and Asians took advantage of the changes the Act made (64). In a table titled *Foreign-Born Groups with Highest Population of College-Educated Persons, 1990, and Characteristics of Countries of Origin*, Iran ranks tenth out of eighteen nations “contributing the highest proportions of college graduates to the United States in 1980” (ibid.:65; emphasis in original). The nations in the table share three characteristics in that they are distant from the U.S., recent origin immigrants, and less developed (ibid.:64). Portes and Rumbaut conclude that “the lure of economic and occupational opportunities in the United States, created by the new preferences system, had its greatest effect on countries where similar opportunities are most scarce and where the well educated did not have this alternative in the past” (ibid.). Portes and Rumbaut address the faulty assumption that “the educational level of immigration has been declining over time,” citing Iran as one of the immigrant pools from which “[c]lose to 50 percent or more of the best-educated groups … arrived in recent years” (ibid.:60). Immigrants admitted by the U.S. for political reasons (i.e., refugees) show that early waves “tend to come from the higher socioeconomic strata,” although “the high educational profile of recently arrived Iranians, Soviet Jews, Ethiopians, and Afghans” levels off as lower classes arrive
Furthermore, at the time of 1990, Iranians “exhibit high rates of self-employment” and above the U.S. average (ibid.:73), although what self-employment means is a matter of question. In the thirty years since the Act was established, immigrants have created “a large new second generation formed by children of immigrants born in the United States or brought at an early age from abroad” (ibid.:232).

In the Twin Cities, the nascent student population that settled and did not migrate to the East or West Coasts or abroad, is perhaps the most stable core of Iranians for facilitating the growth of kinship networks among immigrants. Iranians have certainly taken advantage of this legislation. When family members (i.e., parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings) visit, they stay for a prolonged period of time (from three to nine months or more). Children become an important link in helping family members obtain citizenship or become legal residents (through a “green card”).

Parents stay with their children, but may eventually rent or purchase a home, apartment or condominium in close proximity. These visits from extended family members revitalize “old world” values, by encouraging spoken Farsi, cooking Persian cuisine, and supplying love and care for children and grandchildren. Parental and grandparental visits provide a temporary “day care service,” and therefore are important to childrearing and enculturation. The urban, extended Iranian family and household replicates residence patterns in Tunis, Tunisia (Holmes-Eber 2003:74). Tunisoise rent or purchase households in close proximity to kin. This effectively helps “maintain ties of assistance and support between kin. … [Also] kin-neighborhood complexes often serve as a central meeting place where the extended family congregates and can visit with
everyone at once” (74-75). There are, however, some key differences between these patterns, in that, Tunisoise kin-neighborhood complexes result from rural to urban migration and high housing costs, whereas among Iranians they are established through a small cluster of single-family homes in wealthy suburbs (e.g., Woodbury, Minnetonka, Edina, Plymouth, Minnetrista). Significantly, interviewees did attest to the extended family apartment complex dwelling as a common pattern in Iran, and therefore demonstrates a cultural pattern of family as central to cultural persistence.

Although the community has diversified, and there are a few Iranian restaurants and professional associations, there is no community-wide ethnic association or radio program. The proposed Iranian Center of Minnesota did not come to fruition, although for a brief period the Historical and Cultural Association of Iran (HCAI) existed (which local Iranians call the “Farsi School”). The HCAI was an ethnic association with the mission to preserve and promote “the rich Persian heritage.” It offered Persian classes for Iranian American children, youth, and interested American adults. It also sponsored an annual, community-wide Noruz celebration. At the inception of my Master’s thesis research in 1997, the HCAI still served the community.

The Persian Student Organization of Minnesota (PSOM), an officially registered student organization at the University of Minnesota, coordinates an annual Noruz celebration. The original venue for the celebration was the St. Paul Student Center (SPSC), on the University of Minnesota’s (UMN) Saint Paul campus. As the community has grown, the McNamara Alumni Center on the East Bank of the UMN hosted the Noruz event for several years. In 2015, budget constraints pushed the Noruz celebration
back to the SPSC temporarily, although in 2016 it is being celebrated at a new venue in Uptown (according to PSOM’s Facebook page). As experienced personally with my initial gatekeeper and informant, the move from the SPSC to the McNamara Alumni Center was precipitated by a planning debacle one year, in which the organizers sold too many tickets for the number of tables and seats, leaving many angry attendants with no place to sit. My informant and I left the venue before the festivities began, and he argued unsuccessfully for reimbursement. While PSOM has staying power in the community, the celebrations are sporadic. Nonetheless, they reinvigorate identity and connection, like family or high school reunion. Those who do not attend critique past organizational debacles or question the students’ Iranianness.

The University of Minnesota (UMN) Student Community

My involvement in this community occurred from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. This community included first-, 1.5, and second-generation undergraduate and graduate students, some of whom were involved in the Persian Student Organization of Minnesota (PSOM), structured around patterned fusions wherein students took turns hosting parties. I recruited life history interviews from this micro-community, which consists of the following individuals.

**BOB:** I was introduced to Bob through his wife, who suggested it would be critical to Iranian men’s point of view. Bob arrived in Minnesota in 1977 via a network of relatives: an uncle who resided in Oklahoma in the early 1960s, and died in the late 1960s; a
brother came to Washington, D.C. in the late 1960s, through an uncle’s friend; another brother who came to Minnesota after two months in Washington, D.C., and decided with “a bunch of friends, apparently, and the story goes, that everybody was talking about how great the schools in Minnesota [were].” Bob is divorced from his first (American) wife. He remarried a first-generation Iranian woman, with whom he has one daughter. As his pseudonym implies, Bob identifies as an Iranian-American, although he identifies with both identities intensely.

NADIA: Nadia was born in England in the 1970s. Her family moved back to Iran when she was not quite two years old. She obtained a degree in Mining Engineering from the University of Tehran. She got married in the early 2000s in her late forties. She met her husband in California through his brother’s wife, with whom she was friends. She and her husband had a long distance relationship (via email and the phone), and married (in Iran) within three months. In Minnesota, she and her husband had a civil ceremony in the courthouse. Her husband works in a Fortune 500 company. They have a son (born in the mid-2000s), and
a daughter (born in the late-2000s). Her father earned a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering in England, and her mother taught high school biology. Nadia has one sister, who flouted her parent’s marriage advice, and married her Iranian-German husband whom she met at university in Germany. Most of Nadia’s mother’s relatives live in the U.S.: “Eighty or ninety percent of my mom’s relatives live in California. I’m trying to go there at least once a year.”

NATE: I met Nate through Zohreh, although he was not involved in our “roving parties.” Nate and Zohreh are related, about which Nate jokes: “Most Iranians—if you put ‘em in a room—they’re either related through marriage or blood.” Nate was born in west Tabriz in the early 1960s in an American hospital, and delivered by an American doctor. He points out that his birth certificate is from Tehran, by which he avoided military service in Tabriz. He went to school in Minnesota, where he received a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science, Philosophy, and Economics. He wrote forty pages of a Master’s thesis, but never finished it (which he regrets). At the age of nineteen, Nate married his “childhood sweetheart” from
Iran (who left him after five years), and got remarried to an American woman in the late 1980s. Her children (from a previous marriage) produced two grandchildren, whom Nate notes are “the only thing I live for now.” Nate’s father was a judge in Tehran and his mother a political science graduate, who worked in the Prime Minister’s office. Nate has an older sister who lives in Canada, about which he jokes: “My dad always makes fun. ‘I got two kids: one is American, one is Canadian. I got grandchildren: one is Canadian; one is American’.”

ZOHREH: Zohreh was born in Tehran in the late 1960s. In the late 1990s, she traveled to Europe where she waited for her visa to process, then met her brother in Minnesota where he was attending school at the UMN. She was a nurse anesthetist in Tehran for one year. When she came to Minnesota, she dabbled in human physiology, dental school, and hematology but eventually earned a Ph.D. in Psychotherapy. She met her Iranian-American husband through tangential involvement in the Twin Cities’ Iranian community, and they married in Iran in the mid-2000s. They have one daughter. Zohreh’s dad has his Ph.D. in Engineering,
and was a chemistry professor at the University of Tehran. Her mother has a Bachelor’s in French literature, and worked for the Ministry of Economics, where “she used both her French skills and her business skills she had kind of combined.” Both her parents studied in Europe, traveled extensively, could speak several languages, and “they both got that culture and brought it back [to Iran]. In our house, there was tons of Iranian food. [But] before anyone knows about lasagna or pizza [or] goulash, I would tell the kids in school, ‘For lunch we had goulash’, and they’re like, ‘What? What’?” Zohreh has one brother, who has a Ph.D. in Engineering, and has lived in several U.S. states and Europe. She is an admitted unaffiliated Muslim. Zohreh did not become a part of the Iranian community in the Twin Cities until the late 1990s, where she met her husband through whom she got her U.S. residency.

These biographies highlight the interviewees’ ability to construct their “portable ideologies” in a way that situates their Iranian identity firmly within the landscape of the Minnesota and U.S. immigrant community. The thread within them also suggests the importance of education both to Iranians personally, but also to the evolutionary structure of social networks. The demise of this micro-associative network indicates Iranian
migration patterns upon graduation from university. Within this network, approximately twelve of eighteen graduates left Minnesota (careers include engineer, inventor, psychotherapist, dentist, neurosurgeon, optometrist, computer programmer, architect, Persian calligrapher, potter, professor, entertainment publicist, graphic designer) to go abroad (e.g., Norway, Germany, Iran) or to large urban areas (e.g., Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., Dallas, Houston) for employment, marriage, and/or family reunification. The few who remained married people whom they were dating from that period, and planted familial roots in Minnesota.

The Persian School I and II Communities

For approximately three years in the late 1990s, I attended Persian classes at what local Iranians call the “Farsi School” (defunct), which was affiliated with the Historical and Cultural Association of Iran (HCAI), a defunct cultural association. In the early 2000s, at the Tarbiat Persian Institute (TPI) (defunct), located in a Bahá’í temple in Minneapolis. From my involvement, two networks developed including: the “Persian I Community,” with parents whose children were in Persian classes, and the “Persian II Community,” encompassing Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í Iranian parents, their children, and American adults.

As Miller (1981) noted in her discussion of Middle Easterners in Minnesota, Bahá’ís invoke their faith as a central facet of identity. Their Iranian pride is situated in middle nineteenth century Persia as the birthplace of a progressive religion, and the prophet, Bahá’u’lláh. I made entrée into a community, which developed into the Tarbiat
Persian Institute (TPI), and where I took Persian language classes. Through time, as I gained trust and became a familiar “fixture.” This community became a viable source through which to recruit interviewees. However, many Bahá’í avoid non-Bahá’í Iranian events, although a few families attend the PSOM Noruz celebration, while also celebrating a separate Bahá’í event. This emphasizes the fact that Bahá’í Iranians in the Twin Cities mingle with other Iranians, which is unlikely (perhaps unheard of) in Iran.

Significantly, some non-Bahá’í Iranians warned me against interviewing Bahá’ís, noting that the discrimination and persecution they experienced in Iran would bias their responses. Nonetheless, Bahá’ís informed me of their painful realities of life in Iran: marriages are unrecognized, and children are considered illegitimate; denial of civil rights (e.g., access to education, passports); divestment of businesses (especially after the revolution); and, in the extreme, torture and execution. A harrowing escape from Iran is an experience shared by many Bahá’ís.

The Persian School I and II Communities reflect the desire of local Iranians to continue to put in the effort to teach children Persian, whether to maintain identity, read prayers in the vernacular and/or simply commiserate with other Iranians. Of course, these communities could not fissioning (for various reasons discussed in other sections of this study). My own involvement in these communities led to friendships from which I recruited several individuals to conduct life histories, including the following individuals.

**MEREDITH:** I met Meredith through my “apical ancestor” in the community, and got to know her better through her involvement in “the Farsi School,” where her two sons took Persian classes. She was born in
Minnesota, but her family moved back to Iran in the 1960s, where they stayed for twelve years. Just before the revolution, her family moved back to Minnesota. She obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Architecture from the UMN, and worked in this profession until her oldest son was born in the early 1990s. Her younger son was born in the mid-1990s. Meredith did a lot of part-time work (related to healing), but was “a total stay-at-home mom for ten years.” She met her husband in the 1980s at the University of Minnesota. What would be scandalous today, he was a teaching assistant and she was a student in his class. Her father is a mechanical engineer and her mother is a stay-at-home mother.

NASRIN: I met Nasrin at the TPI, where she taught and her extended family members were heavily involved. Nasrin was born in “a very tiny town in northern Iran” in the mid-1960s. She moved to the U.S. the year the revolution broke (followed by her mother in 1980 and father in 1981). She received a Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Arizona. As a child, she traveled to India with her family, where her parents did service work for the
Bahá'í community. She attended a Catholic boarding school and learned fluent English. Eventually, she met her (slightly older) husband at a Bahá'í meeting in Arizona. They married in the early 1980s, and had "three boys [and] one daughter in heaven." After her husband earned his Ph.D., they moved to Minnesota, where her husband works for a Fortune 500 company.

Her parents live in Minnesota, where her father works as a school bus driver (and was an accountant for an oil company in Iran), and mother works as an accountant. Nasrin is an only child.

Nasrin’s upbringing was “well off [and] higher-middle class,” although her father taught her that Bahá'ís “don’t say, ‘Okay, you’re not in my class. I’m not going to hang out with you’. If you’re Bahá'í, you’re family. You … have an open heart.”

Her parents worked in the oil industry in Iran, and their town was inhabited with “a lot of oil company people” (which she compares to 3M people). Her family traveled a lot in the summer. Nasrin came to the U.S. when she was thirteen. She shares one of her personal stories: “I find it hilarious that I was born in Iran, and I didn’t know a bit of English ‘til I was five
years old. But for years I used to watch Wheel of Fortune. ‘Oh, I wish I could be on that show’. I finally did make it. … I solved six out of the eight puzzles and was the big winner. [I won] 51, 900 dollars. I’m a substitute teacher here. … I tell [my students], ‘Look, I didn’t know a word of English until I was five, right’? But then, when I got called to be on the show I really practiced hard, I did my homework.”

PARDIS II: I met Pardis II at the TPI. She was one of a small group of semi-identifying Muslims who were drawn to the Institute to teach their children Persian without forcing religion on them. Our interview took place in a noisy coffee shop (and was recorded poorly). However, much of her relevant information appears in her responses. Pardis II has a Bachelor’s degree in Physics from Iran, but got a second Bachelor’s degree at the UMN. She was in Iran when introduced to her husband, and set the conditions of marriage prior to moving to Minnesota: she had to go back to university. She and her husband have two daughters, which has inhibited her from pursuing an advanced degree.
ROSE: I met Rose (born in the early 1970s) at the TPI; she is one of a few semi-identifying Muslims whose children took classes there. However, it is important to note that she has made a point to attend Lutheran church in order to understand her neighbors. Rose was one of two individuals who did not want the interview to be recorded, resulting in “sketchy responses.” She made a point to mention that she never finished her Master’s, which was a source of frustration.

Rose’s responses disclose marital issues, in that her husband did not see a benefit in her having a degree, needing to work, while emphasizing that she needed to stay at home. Such control became a source of tension due to her inability to make decisions in the home (e.g., to renovate), leading to a circular argument of “I decide, because I work, and you ‘do not work,’ so you don’t decide.” Rose has a Bachelor’s degree in Physics. Because Rose came to the U.S. to get married, she did not finish her higher education because, which disclosed resentment.

Rose’s familial structure is “traditional” in that her husband (who is ten years older), is a
second-cousin, and professed is love for her when he was five (at which time he wanted to marry her). Additionally, her sister married his older brother. She and her husband have three girls. Rose’s ancestry extends from Shiraz and Esfahan. Her father worked in the mill industry, and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. Rose has an older sister and brother (and her husband has five siblings), all of whom live in Minnesota (as well as Fargo-Moorhead, Philadelphia, and Texas). Rose distinguishes herself as patient, and has taught herself not to get upset by problems with her in-laws, husband, and when her children throw fits. She reads parenting books and goes to classes at a church, to learn how to improve her skills. Rose lives in a wealthy area of the city, in close proximity to her sister-in-law and another Iranian couple involved at the TPI. In addition to parenting classes, Rose takes her children to a Lutheran church so they understand what her Christian neighbors and friends value. Her girls are both in the choir at the church. She iterated that Christians see Jesus as a kind of God, while Muslims believe he was an important person. She was adamant that it was important for her
children to understand their neighbors. Rose’s husband’s extended family lived with them for six months when they moved to the U.S., and he supported them for fifteen years. This created a lot of tension and frustration for Rose, who was expected to do all the work for an ongoing entourage of family get-togethers.

SHAYDA: I met Shayda at the TPI. She is one of a small group of Muslims whose children attended Persian classes there. However, she is adamantly against any kind of organized religion, because she believes it is the source of many problems in the world. Nonetheless, she is very involved in a monthly meeting with many of the Bahá'í Iranians who attended the TPI. Shayda left Iran when she was eighteen. She attended a French school in Iran prior to the revolution, and moved to France and then Montreal, until she and her husband moved to Minnesota for his work. She met her husband in Iran while she was on a visit. They have a son and a daughter.

TAHIREH: I met Tahireh at the TPI, who was one of the leading and organizational members. (She chose this pseudonym because it represents a figure of martyrdom
and prominence in the birth of the Bahá'í faith). She was born in Sangsar, Iran (and is now in her early seventies), where there were many other Bahá'ís, and which influenced her father moved his family to pioneer for his faith. Tahireh has two sisters and two brothers. Given her age, she has a memory of pre-modernized Iran: mules pulling carts, measles, trucks loaded with sheep and people, hearing loss (due to an inferior medical system), and traveling along dirt roads for medical emergencies (dropping pomegranate juice in the mouth of the ill). As now, the level of discrimination was intense then, and her father “squatted” with his family for five years in an abandoned town, where for five years he established a small business “to sell food and all those things.” While doing pioneer work in India (five years), she and her husband went to night school for accounting. Eventually, they returned to Iran where she was an elementary and middle-school teacher. Tahireh met her husband in what might be described as a traditional arrangement: “His father is the second cousin of my mother. ... And then my brother was getting married with his cousin, so we met. I was like fifteen [and] he
was twenty. ... So we fell in love.” Tahireh’s mother was a midwife, and which reflects an interesting personal story: “She delivered babies. She didn’t have any education, but she was learning from other people. And the last one was my daughter; she delivered my daughter. She really saw my suffering, so she stopped that. At that time, there was not a doctor in the city. Then the city government ... brought a doctor from outside and that was it.”

Because the TPI accommodated all parents and students, changes to the class schedule were common, and communicated via email. Class time changes were typical (e.g., from 3:00 to 5:00pm every other Sunday as opposed to every Sunday, cancellation due to inclement weather, a death in the community). The nominal registration fee for the academic year ($50.00 per student) made the TPI accessible. Children’s classes were categorized by Levels One, Two, and Three (rather than age), and taught Persian as well as content on culture, history, and geography.

The highlight of the year was the graduation ceremony and party, and a serious undertaking. Iranian Bahá’ís, Muslims, American Bahá’ís, and Americans participated. As the culmination of the year’s efforts, participants dressed up. All participants were recognized; volunteer teachers were paid respect, and students’ received a graduation certificate and a gift (e.g., a book, a journal, coins). The standard structure of the annual ceremony included: a costume dance of different ethnic groups (e.g., Bandari); a poetry recitation (e.g., poems of Ferdowsi, Abu Ali Sina, Saadi); a piano or violin recital; a
singing performance (which evoked boisterous audience laughter); a toddler performance in which each child read one Persian word (then laughing at mispronunciations); a discussion of geographic areas in Iran; showing photographs from previous years; and a skit performed by the adult Persian class. Performances were planned and rehearsed weeks in advance of the graduation.

“Graduation” was a misnomer for the adult Persian students, since our yearly “progress” demonstrated mixed results, evidenced by our inability to carry on a simple conversation. Volunteer instructors (four men and one woman) taught classes, but lacked second-language teaching experience. Classes were unstructured, due to inconsistently presented content, sporadic student attendance sporadic, homework assignments inapplicable, and dominating students “hijacking” the class. Classroom progress was interrupted: loud children running through the halls; introductions of Iranian Bahá’í newcomers or out-of-towners; mothers being pulled out to attend to children or sign paperwork; and discussions of community-wide events (e.g., the “Axis of Evil” comedy tour). Moreover, when a new student joined the class, we reverted back to learning the alphabet. An overemphasis on grammar, coupled with a lack of opportunities to practice conversational Persian, impeded confidence and fluency. Though we conversed in some Persian phrases with Iranians, one elder teacher discouraged the informal tense (i.e., which he called “market language,” that spoken by the “bazaar,” the merchants in Tehran’s bazaars).

Adult Persian classes, however, revealed interesting cultural nuggets, shared according to an instructor’s whimsy: only men say “ghorbaane shoma” (I will sacrifice
myself for you) to a woman and not vice versa; it is a “cultural thing … [Iranians do not have] a very moderate culture”; always use the polite form—even with your friends—when speaking Persian; Iranians, like Italians, use their hands when taking; the purpose of the play performed by the American adults at the graduation ceremony “is not torturing,” but to show your personality, to recognize the letters of the alphabet, and to have fun; always put kheili (very) in front of motshakaram (thank you); Iranians pay back a bigger compliment than the one received (i.e., in order to be “the last person standing”); if you offend an Iranian, they will say nothing; the phrase khaakhesh mi konam (you’re welcome) is the most commonly used phrase in the culture, and forces you to be “super-polite”; Iranians use different words for “thank you,” because they do not want to be repetitive; the use of “merci” (“thank you”) began during the Qajar dynasty; always answer with Chera? (Why?) to show humility, because Iranians do not want to brag about their ability—“the whole culture is like that”; finally, references to Arabic words “infiltrating” the language, and an appeal to “clean up the language,” are common.

A highlight of the graduation was the adult Persian class skit. One year, a TPI female founders presented us with a dance program that she wanted us to perform. The video, a California production by an elderly Iranian choreographer, became fodder for laughter and entertainment in class, because it paired the old man with a bevy of young, beautiful women. Our male Persian teacher and “director” of the play joked that it gave the dirty-old-man stereotype a new name. They referred to the performance as a “deluxe pizza,” because many of its elements were not “pure” Persian. The teacher nixed the “dirty old man deluxe pizza” video, and replaced it with a skit about American tourists
ordering food in a Tehran restaurant. Rehearsing the skit was a productive, fun way to learn, to gain knowledge of key cultural phrases, and to imagine how conversation unfolds. Unfortunately, the students’ improvement was thwarted by the teacher’s unwillingness to correct poor pronunciation and grammatical errors. My insistence upon learning proper pronunciation and the musicality of phrases reaped laughs from fellow students, who teased me that only educated people would know the difference. Student’s success or failure in front of the audience reflected upon the teacher’s ability to teach (not the students’ ability to learn). Thus, we were instructed that if we could not pronounce or remember a word, we should not attempt it; to avoid embarrassment or shame. Public “screw ups,” nonetheless, inspired raucous audience laughter.

The adult Persian class skit stole the show, and had the unanticipated effect of opening up communication channels among a wider swath of people. Children and parents complimented me: “You’re the funny waitress. You should be a standup comedian.” “Awesome!” “Great!” “Impressive!” Women were complementary and men laughed, asking: “Aab dariim?” (“Do you have water?,” a line from the skit). One woman thought I was an Iranian acting with an American accent. Another woman interrupted our conversation, claiming I could not possibly be Persian, although she was impressed. Years later, when I meet Iranians who attended the ceremony, they bring up the “starring role” in the skit—my “claim to fame.”

When the TPI closed its doors indefinitely, the graduation ceremony was celebrated with less hoopla than previously. Food is mandatory at all Iranian gatherings. We planned for approximately seventy to eighty people via an email sign-up sheet. At
least seven women volunteered to bring a main dish or dessert. One year, the final classes were postponed until July in order to pay respect to “one of the elders of the Tarbiat school members [who] has passed away” (and the graduation party took place a few days later). Another year, the final Persian class (scheduled for the same day as the graduation ceremony) was cancelled, because the female teachers of the children’s Persian classes were occupied with food preparation. Even with the nominal registration fee, there was enough in the budget one year to cater the event. Atlas Grill catered Iranian food (joojeh kebab, chelo kebab, naan, grilled tomato, raw onion, salad), and the caterer’s wife (a student in the adult Persian class) commented that this group was a pleasure to cater for, because they were more “polite” than other groups.

The last teacher of the adult Persian class (one of the Muslim participants) sent an email to the class expressing her appreciation: “[I was glad] to know each one of you and now I can continue to see you even out of the class structure as a friend. Thanks for coming to the classes and thanks for being so great and enthusiastic about learning Persian and other cultures.” She was willing to continue informal Persian conversation “in a park (weather permitting), coffee shop (50th and France) or even my house, or we can meet at 4:00 [at the Bahá’í Center]. … [I also brought] a small art work from Iran that [I] would like to give to each of you, as a sign of my appreciation for your interest in cultural activities, and people [who] are taking interest in Iranian culture. … Some time people don’t see their good precious things just because they see the inside view. Your papers [sic, my dissertation] would be [a] great source of watching our culture and
behaviors from outside. … Our kids could be benefited from it too.” The instructor even offered the services of her mother, husband, and children, who could bring food to share.

While attending the TPI, the National Spiritual Assembly mandated decentralized worship, ending devotionals for Iranians at the temple in Minneapolis, and effectively terminating the TPI. Subsequently, devotionals were localized in the neighborhoods of the faithful. After this, my Bahá’í gatekeeper hosted devotionals in her home. Ironically, her house was located forty minutes outside the Twin Cities (i.e., not centrally located for the participants), which defeated the purpose of having devotionals in one’s immediate environs. The hostess and host prepared rice and kebob, respectively, for the guests. In typical Iranian fashion, tea was served to each guest individually (at least five times) on a silver tray. As in many cultures, tea service is ritualized: tea is served in small, clear glasses to appreciate its color; it is held in the hand without the aid of a plate; it is sipped through a plain or saffron sugar cube lodged in the mouth; and is accompanied by dried fruit.

The Bahá’í value of gender equality offered a window into ideal versus actual behavior. In this case, the “newly trained” American husband mastering chelo kebab and the Iranian wife fussing over the rice, thanking her husband for dusting, the husband’s acknowledgment of his duties and obligations in the house, all appear like gender complementarity. At the same time, women predominated in the kitchen, and only a few men offered help. After the meal, the guests showered the American kebab-maker with compliments—going so far as to claim that his kebab surpasses kebab made by an Iranian (likely due to his “secret ingredients”).
After dinner, people are instructed to get their own prayer book, informed that there are people of many faiths present, and the random reading of prayer commences. Post-dinner conversation covers a variety of topics. For example, women discuss the dilemmas (perhaps stereotypical) of marrying a Muslim man, such as abuse or disallowing his wife to travel. When traveling, Bahá’í face passport dilemmas, feel stateless, and are disqualified from obtaining a passport in Iran if they refuse to wear a veil in their passport photograph. Because Bahá’u’lláh’s remains are interred in the Bahá’í temple in Haifa, Israel, Bahá’í pilgrimages are common, which prompts conversations about Israeli security and accents, although there were no complaints of treatment upon entering and exiting. Bahá’í are curious about people’s faith, and the topic of conversion and people’s journeys to the Bahá’í faith (typically from Christianity) are commonplace. Finally, the topic of the persecution of Bahá’ís crops up in most conversations. Because of its universalist message, Bahá’í gatherings are diverse, and people often reference that they are part of the United Nations (in the U.S. but not Iran). Finally, the topic of the persecution of Bahá’ís crops up in most conversations.

Both “the Farsi School” and the TPI celebrated Iranian holidays (primarily Noruz), and had annual graduation parties for the Persian language “graduates.” Another attempt to revitalize Farsi classes at the UMN (late 2000s) attracted primarily “heritage Iranians” (a name given by a 1.5 generation friend) (Woodward 2009), but met its end due to lack of funding. Augsburg College currently offers online Persian classes, and incorrectly claims (on its website) to be “the first post-secondary school in the Twin Cities to offer Farsi” (emphasis added). Involvement in Persian-related institutions
opened access to gendered and religious aspects of Iranian life (i.e., families, women, Bahá’ís).

The Noruz Advisory Board (NAB) Community

The “Persian I Community” evolved into the “Noruz Advisory Board (NAB) Community.” My initial gatekeeper introduced me to Fatemeh, an Iranian American mother, whose sons attended “the Farsi School,” although she severed her ties with the “official” spokespersons at the HCAI, because she deemed their cultural messages and programming to be irrelevant for her American Iranian children (e.g., performance of Iran’s pre-revolutionary national anthem, stories related to Takht-e Jamshid). Fatemeh countered this by pitching a one-day, annual celebration of an American-Iranian interpretation of Noruz to a program director at the Minnesota Children’s Museum (MCM). The NAB was composed of 1.5 generation Iranians (many came to the U.S. during their teens). My involvement as a board member culminated in my Master’s thesis (Zank 2004). For approximately five years (late 1990s and early 2000s), we held monthly meetings to strategize a positive portrait of Noruz (Iranian New Year) in the American public sphere. This community consists of the following individuals.

ARESH: I originally met Aresh through a job at the Science Museum of Minnesota, where his son was involved on a museum exhibit produced by teens at the Youth Science Center. Later, Aresh played a central character of the Noruz celebration at the MCM. Aresh was born in Kerman in early 1950s. After receiving a
two-year degree in Iran, he moved to the U.S. to further his education. Aresh met an Asian woman through an international student group at university, and married her in the early 1980s. His son was born in the early 1980s and his daughter in the late 1980s. Aresh’s parents were born in Kerman; his father was a “city doctor” (i.e., trained by an English missionary, but did not have a degree) and his mother an elementary school teacher. He is the youngest son of seven siblings. Because they are all older than Aresh, they were settled with family and jobs, and remained in Iran. After his two-year compulsory military service, he moved to Tehran, where he worked for three years. This move was facilitated by the fact that two of his three brothers had connections: “They have influence where I should stay. They somehow talked me into staying in Tehran.” (Aresh)

GHOLAM ALI: I met Gholam Ali through a relative of his who was associated with one of the Farsi groups. Gholam Ali was born in Minnesota in the early 1960s. In the middle 1960s, his family moved back to Iran, where they lived for over a decade, and returned to the U.S. just before the revolution. He met his
first-generation wife in the late 1990s through a mutual friend, and they had two children (a boy and a girl). His father came to the U.S. in the 1950s on a Mechanical Engineering scholarship, and was one of five people chosen. His mother was a homemaker all his life.

LILI: I met Lili through her husband’s family, some of whom were associated with the original Persian Community. Lili is a first-generation Iranian, born in Tehran in the early 1970s. In Iran, she attended university for graphic design. While her choice was originally to obtain a Master’s degree, she decided to obtain her Bachelor’s degree from a design school in the Twin Cities in order to “have a better portfolio to be able to get a better job here.” Lili has dabbled in multiple careers since being in Minnesota, and therefore nurtures relationships with select groups of Iranians (some of whom are her clients). She met her husband while he was visiting Iran with his family in the late 1990s. Her husband’s sisters were talking to a mutual friend, and they asked if the friend knew anyone for their brother to meet. They married shortly after they met, and had their children
in the late 2000s. Lili’s father was a civil engineer and her mother was a stay-at-home mom.

PARDIS I: I met Pardis I through her husband, who was involved in the Noruz program at the MCM. Pardis I was born in Tehran. She is Bahá’í, and met her husband at a Bahá’í conference in the late 1980s. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in Business from the University of Minnesota. She and her husband have one son and two daughters. Her father worked in pharmaceuticals and her mother was “just at home raising the four of us.” She moved to Minnesota as a teenager (in the early 1980s). Pardis I was reluctant to be interviewed, and did not want it to be tape-recorded. She works in the family business, which was slowing down due to the economy. She identifies herself as “Persian” rather than American. As with most interviewees, she lived in an extended family apartment arrangement in Iran: “We shared a wall [between my] dad and uncle’s wall, but connected [on the] upper level.”

This association network matured into sisterhood with Fatemeh, and “adoption” into her family. As an adoptee, I have celebrated and mourned the true spirit and spark of Iranian
family life in the private sphere, including graduation parties, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, and memorial gatherings for deceased family members.

The Educational Institutions Cluster

Within this cluster, I met several individuals who had some association with education: two ESL students whom I met through a good friend who taught English to Iranians in the immediate post-revolutionary period, one anthropology student from a community college at which I taught, one PSOM member who worked in an administrative position at the UMN, and a tech expert at a state university where I taught. This cluster of individuals consists of the following individuals.

   ABDULLAH: Abdullah lives in an eastern suburb of Saint Paul, and met his American wife while attending vocational school. After a brief hiatus in Iran, he returned to the U.S., and called his wife from the airport to surprise her: “’I’m at the airport. I will be at your home [soon].’ She didn’t believe it. We dated another four years, and then I decided, ‘I’m gonna marry her’. We have now two children.” His two daughters were in college when I interviewed him.

   Abdullah was born in Tabriz, and graduated from high school in the early 1960s. He has two siblings. After compulsory military service, Abdullah worked in a Kurdish town contributing to development and
modernization projects implemented by the Shah (i.e., teaching villagers). He lived in the village head’s house for eighteen months. He describes his relationship with the local people as appreciative, because of “what you’d given them, and what they’ve given to you. I did a nice thing for the people there, and that [makes] me proud. That was the most important highlight of my life; to be important to the people.” Following that, with the help of an American Peace Corps volunteer (to whom he became close), they built a vocational school, and Abdullah was appointed principal for four years.

In the middle 1970s, he was in Tehran and applied for a job at a Fortune 500 company in cyber computer work. At a restaurant, he serendipitously met the women who would interview him. She looked at him and said: “You go get your passport. You’re on your way to United States!” He was in the U.S. for a few years, but returned to Iran.

Abdullah found it difficult to adjust to the changes implemented by the Shah: “I don’t think it was [a] good idea to move fast and change the whole system of Iran to Westernize. That’s the conflict of the
country.” Having felt familiarity with U.S. culture, he returned to Minnesota where he attended vocational school, and later got a job in soil research.

AZAM: Azam was born in Tehran in the early 1960s. She came to the U.S. when she was in high school, graduated in the late 1970s, went to community college to complete her Associate’s degree, graduated from a state university in the middle 1980s, then moved to California where her father started a business with a high school friend. For approximately four or five years, she resided in California with her brother (five years younger), sister (eighteen months older), and parents. Azam is the middle child: “I have all the syndromes of the middle child.”

Suddenly, Azam decided to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology and Social Work. Although her father had supported her previously, she decided she was: “gonna be independent. I wanna do it by myself. So I remember I saved three thousand dollars, and I packed, and I left. I got on an airplane. I’m a very city girl and like fast life. I like parties.” In time, Azam decided to pursue her Mater’s degree, but her mother got ill, and passed away.
Azam met her husband in the late 1970s, and they married in a religious ceremony in the middle 1980s. They have a son, who was born in the early 1990s, and a daughter, who was born in the late 1990s. In Iran, her father was a manager of a manufacturing firm and her mother was a homemaker. She claims to be a descendant from a king of Iran, which granted them the privileges of being financially stable and a family who “never had ‘prejudism’.”

NEDA: Neda was an anthropology student of mine at a community college where I taught, and she worked and attended classes. Neda has an “adopted” (fictive) Bahá'í family in Minnesota, with whom she lived for most of the time after she arrived in the U.S. She was born in Iran in the late 1960s. She married an older, white American man, who died prematurely. Devastated from the death, she left Minnesota (and has not been back since) to live with her sister in California. Her birth parents live in Australia; they had three daughters and one son. Neda is Bahá'í, fled Iran as a refugee, and lived in a transitional country for almost twenty years. In late 1990s, she came to the U.S. (with her sister) in her late thirties.
NIA: I met Nia at a state university where I taught. Nia was involved with “the Farsi School” (where her son was enrolled in Persian classes). Nia was born in Tehran, but her family moved to the U.S. when she “was around three to four [and has] no childhood memories of Iran.” She grew up in Kentucky. Her birth mother died when she was young; her Iranian father remarried when she was several years after his wife’s death. Nia has a Bachelor’s in English Literature and a Master’s in Teaching English as a Second Language. Nia and her Iranian husband have one son. Her father was born in Rasht, Iran, and her mother was born in Pennsylvania. “My mother was a divorcee. When she married my father, she already had a child from that marriage. So I had a half-sister from that marriage, and then my father had three children with my mother, and one child with my stepmother. So we were a total of five kids. She was the evil stepmother. No, I’m just kidding. She was very strict, but she was also very fair.” Nia met her husband in Kentucky, where they were both involved in a small Iranian community. She moved to Iran in the early 1980s with her husband, and they moved to
Minnesota in the early 1990s. Nia is good friends with a local Iranian musician, whose parents she knew well in Iran. When she decided to move to Iran, her friend helped groom her: “She gave me all her clothes, jewelry. I’d gone over there with American clothes, and in Iran you dress much more than you do in the United States. I was totally unprepared for Iranian society. We became very close friends. She helped me with my Farsi.”

PARSA: I met Parsa at the University of Minnesota. He was born in Esfahan in the early 1990s. He describes the significance of his “hometown”: “It’s a historical city in Iran. People go [there] for honeymoons. It’s a beautiful place, because they are trying to keep it historical—no skyscrapers. Esfahani people are known to be very smart and very stingy. The stingy part depends [on] what part of the city you are from. [They] call some part of the city the Jew of the city, because they associate being stingy with being Jewish.” Parsa did one year of high school in Iran, and then moved to Arizona, where his maternal uncle lives. His family moved to Minnesota in the middle 2000s, because his father could not find a job.
Parsa is single. He has a little brother who was born in the early 2000s. He feels his relationship with his little brother is like “a big brother, father-sort-kind-of-type.” His father was also born in Esfahan, and is an electrical engineer. His mother, born in Esfahan, was a chemistry teacher, but works at the Mayo Clinic now.

The likelihood of meeting Iranians in educational institutions is not accidental, since Iranian students had one of the highest acceptance rates of foreign students prior to the revolution (Jones 1984). As can be surmised, the majority of my life history interviewees were affiliated with an educational institution in some manner.

Gilanshah’s (1983) study provides a juxtaposition to the Iranian community at present. Though my interviewees did not refer to themselves as “pioneers,” “colonists,” or “newcomers,” many of them came either to pursue education or to work in business or professional occupations, similar to Gilanshah’s interviewees. Also, word-of-mouth chain migration did occur for some, who heard there are good colleges and universities in the Twin Cities. Curiously, early Iranians found Minnesotans “tolerant and receptive to foreigners” (ibid.:250), which dovetails with my interviewees’ perspectives, although benign brushes of discrimination and prejudice take place. The nascent community members, similar to my respondents, made efforts to maintain “a country-wide friendship network which facilitated a slow increase in the number of migrants to this area” (ibid.:251). However, Iranians rooted in these networks tap them to support outward migration as well. While Gilanshah
referenced Iranians who returned to Minnesota, this is not the case among the UMN Student Community, with whom I was involved.

A substantial difference between the early and current communities is the transition from being homogenous to heterogeneous. Gilanshah attributes this increase in heterogeneity to macro-structural events (i.e., modernization in Iran, the oil crisis, OPEC’s involvement), all of which led to an internally divided community with the arrival of “newcomers.” It is worth reiterating that Gilanshah associated this cliquish, clannish, and competitive wave of immigrants as “laying the foundation for an internally differentiated Iranian American community” (ibid.:255-256). In some ways, this wave re-institutionalized a priority on tradition (e.g., intra-marriage, insistence on teaching Iranian culture), which still transpires through transnational travel.

Another difference is how Iranians confront discrimination. In the hostage crisis era, Gilanshah remarks that Twin Cities’ Iranians kept a low profile, remained anonymous, and avoided contact with their compatriots. Whereas some of my interviewees followed similar strategies, most relied a “toolkit” of strategies to address discrimination and prejudice. Still, it is remarkable that these majority-minority interactions are still prevalent.

While “the crystallization of institutions of an Iranian community” ensued in the post-hostage era (ibid.:262-263), as I have noted, the fission-fusion pattern of institutional life is one of the central problems associated with the Twin Cities’ Iranian community. Gilanshah states that future studies on the local community must “take into account the extent of differences” (ibid.:266), which both my Master’s thesis and this study do. Her prediction that students will “remain in secondary status” resonates but also contradicts the situation in the
current community. It is accurate in that many older, first-generation Iranians do not recognize the students as “authentic” Iranians, which ignores the fact that a flow of students still come from Iran (and which creates internal divisions around the hyphen within PSOM). The prediction of being “second status” does not apply in the current community in that PSOM and community-wide activities present a consistent centripetal force in the Twin Cities’ Iranian community, albeit one riddled with layers of difference.

Finally, the early gendered makeup of the community provides a significant contrast to my study. Whereas Iranian males previously comprised the vast majority of community members, and represented the bulk of celebrants at public Iranian gatherings, women and families are highly conspicuous. Although respondents do get together in private sphere, Iranian-only gatherings (e.g., sofrehs), the sex ratio is more balanced within the local community. In fact, the seating arrangement at the PSOM Noruz celebration is a clear indication of this balance and the evolution of families that comprise the various political, economic, and social differences throughout the multiple micro-communities within the “Land of Ten-Thousand Iranian communities.” Although family supplies a consistent centripetal draw toward identity, the “crisis of patriarchy” arises through gender role reversal, requiring significant adjustment for Iranian men and women. Women benefit more than men in the assimilation process and establish a place for themselves transnationally, because they are presented with options not present in “traditional” Iranian families. Thus, women contribute to fission process in their disinterest to return to Iran, while men maintain a centrifugal hold on the “myth of return” (Bozorgmehr 1998; Darvishpour 2002; Mahdavi 2006; Mahdi 1997; Moghissi 1999). Although most
respondents in this study grew up in what they described as a “traditional” family, transnational Iranian families point to individualism, education, mobility, and urbanization as factors that alter women’s status relative to men’s, while still prioritizing having some kind of collectivistic connection to family.

The Literature Review addresses how macro-processes, especially U.S.-Iranian global relations and economic development affect micro-processes, particularly familial decision-making relative to Iranian migration and settlement. In order to argue how these processes are complexly and intimately interlinked, the first field of inquiry takes into consideration Iranian historical and political literature, with a focus on the gendered dimensions of the modern Iranian nation during the Pahlavi era, which crafted Iranian masculinity and femininity in alignment with the West. Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution swung the Pahlavi pendulum from gharbzadegi (“Westoxification”) to Islamic tradition and Sharia law, and incorporated a contradictory model of gendered citizenry. Both regimes utilized the media, science, education, and law, with far-reaching disciplinary effects, to manipulate the citizenry’s perceptions and practices of the benefits and detriments of modernity and tradition. Public sphere politics permeated private sphere lives, especially concerning gender roles, racial purity, and marriage and family. In addressing how macro-developments are translated on a micro-level depends upon an individual’s identification with and practice of Iranian national identity, I utilize literature on “national character” studies and “essential elements of Iranianness” to establish how a proclivity to ambivalence is embedded in Iranian communication, literature, personality, and the public-private spheres. In the transnational context, the ambiguous inheritances
of Iranianness translate into highly syncretic “portable ideologies” that configure “the community” into multiple micro-communities of camaraderie.

The second set of literature that I utilize to argue the differentiating processes of power and difference relate to the bearing of macro-forces of global migration on the micro-practices that construct transnational identity. Global migration is implicated in the world-system, the Western pursuit of “progress,” and economic development. While nation-states engineer a hegemonic notion of national identity, migration alters these discourses, especially through legislation and differentiation of acceptance and absorption of migrants. Historical changes (e.g., war, revolution, economic sanctions) modify the outlook on and flow of migrants, as U.S. immigration, diaspora, and transnational migration theories argue in terms of power vying, project-specific activities and associations that displace authority, reconfigure national identity, and challenge hierarchies of power.

U.S.-Iranian relations throughout the twentieth-century has transmuted Iranian immigrants from students to “diasporans,” “transnationals,” “refugees,” “exiles,” and “immigrants.” Given this historical relationship, the Literature Review addresses specific incidences of Iranian migration waves and settlement patterns in cross-cultural comparison. Here, I address how and why Iranian migration occurred relative to geopolitical macro-processes involving the U.S., Europe, Scandinavia, and Iran, and the pursuant effects on Iranian nationals. The Islamic Revolution introduced new tensions for Iranian transnationals. I examine differences and similarities related to the nascent Iranian diaspora, particularly how identity is informed by encounters with, questions of,
and involvement in discrimination, prejudice, ethnic associations, economic enclaves, assimilation, pillarization, majority-minority relations, absorption, belonging, and gender change. These undercurrents sway Iranians’ identification with their adopted nations, micro-communities, individual identities, and familial life.

The final set of literature focuses on how macro-micro global dynamics influences individuals’ exploitation of the ambiguities of inherited and adopted national identities. This self-reflexive process entails reconciling dilemmas in modernity prior to constructing an individual “portable ideology” in order to establish a presence in the immigrant landscape. Within this literature, the key centrifugal and centripetal macro-processes informing public sphere identity include discourses and policies of the nation-state relative to race, ethnicity, Islam, immigrants, and refugees. Particularities of a nation-state’s history produce unique ideologies, as the “melting pot” in the U.S. and “pillarization” in Europe, which formulate Iranian communities differently. The former case presents opportunities for Iranians to accept syncretic, adopted national identity, while preserving inherited aspects of identity. The latter case conceives Iranian immigrants as a “different,” separate pillar, which precludes total assimilation. Private sphere identity is shaped through the “traditional Iranian family,” which faces changes and challenges such as gender role reversal, the “crisis of patriarchy,” and intergenerational conflict. The literature, however, references how porosity in Iranian families incorporates change, while Iranian national identity persists through an appreciation of collectivism as an Iranian familial norm.
In this chapter, I contend that while the inheritance of a traditional upbringing in an extended family network enmeshes individuals within a rigid, authoritative structure (i.e., patriarchal and/or parental “interference” in matchmaking, marriage, migration decisions, public sphere chaperoning, etc.), the ideo-spatial structures of tradition versus modernity and private versus public life orient Iranians to assess irreconcilable differences along their maternal and paternal lineages. Appraisal of “sides” is modeled for children in order to rationalize ambiguity along one’s parent’s lineages (e.g., pro-Shah versus pro-Revolution, religious versus anti-religious). The convoluted but malleable snare of “blood” includes not only extended family, but friendship, fictive kin, neighborhood networks in order to sustain a thick web of dependencies of trust and safety, wherein priorities of recreation guarantee healthy childhood development. Within this structure, parents act as “the disciplinarians,” and oversee the daily regiment (e.g., meal preparation, homework completion, limited television), while grandparents, the “boundary pushovers,” loosen controls when grandchildren visit. This structures a “panopticon of play” in which lateral (i.e., affines) and longitudinal (i.e., consanguineal) kin are located in adjacent flats in apartment complexes and/or neighborhood dwellings, and ensure children’s freedom to navigate an extended “private sphere.” Transnationally, the primacy of family is structured similarly, wherein familial-friendship assemblages
settle in geographic proximity. In so doing, the expression of and identification with heritage in the private sphere solidifies their need and desire to constitute a group in order to not only belong, but establish a foothold in the American immigrant landscape.

Memories of growing up in Iran bear similarities to the closeness of “family” in the Arab Middle East in which consanguineal and affinal kin are the fulcrum of economy, polity, and culture, although no assumptions should be made “about the nature of family and group identity” (Eickelman 2002:143). Within new situations, cultural identities are “established, elaborated, reproduced, and modified”; kinship is an “ongoing process of ‘becoming’” (ibid.:140). Locally, patronage, neighborliness, and friendship have economic and political meanings (ibid.). Obligation extends beyond “blood” to include “relationship.” Ibn Khaldun contends that ‘asabiya (group feeling) is not a “natural” (i.e., “blood”) phenomenon. Rather, solidarity results through physical closeness within a neighborhood, quarter or cluster of households reinforced by obligation and duty. “In many ‘traditional’ spatial settings, neighbors who cooperate with each other claim to outsiders that they have common descent as a means of enhancing their prestige”; working collectively (e.g., exchange networks) was a shared feature of the morally upstanding participants (ibid.:148).

A “day in the life” of an Iranian girl or boy occurred between “the disciplinarians” (i.e., parents), “the emotional blankets” (i.e., grandparents), extended family (i.e., aunts, uncles, cousins), and neighbors, who established the priority of education in the child’s daily routine, interrupted only by a respite of television and treats. Respondents reported a typical, regimented day: 7:00 AM breakfast with family; being transported to school by
a parent, chauffeur, taxi or city bus; return home for lunch, chores, a nap or a visit; return to school; return home; the evening’s anchor activity of homework; and watching a favorite television program (the content changed from Western, pre-revolutionary programs, such as *Little House on the Prairie, Donald Duck, Tom and Jerry, Sesame Street, Star Trek, Starsky and Hutch,* and *Charlie’s Angels,* to post-revolutionary Asian and Iranian programs, and VHS movies rented from a door-to-door “movie peddler”; eat a snack; dinner; and go to bed by 8:00 PM. The workweek routine was punctuated by the “absolute ritual” of family gatherings, which occurred on Friday (the day of rest), and summer vacation (which entailed travel to a cabin or villa). Celebrations and get-togethers were never an exclusionary act; children were omnipresent.

Meredith’s memory of growing up in pre-revolutionary Iran was how “ridiculously ridiculous” it was, because she and her siblings were “spoiled little brats.” Though spoiled, her parents discouraged socializing outside of the family:

MEREDITH: [My best friends] had a pool; it was ridiculously ridiculous. We went to a public school. I never saw any of my friends in summertime. My parents were very strict. We weren’t really allowed to socialize. Our social life was really our family. We had a lot of cousins. We had a full life. We were very spoiled little brats.

Contrary to the restrictions placed on Meredith by not being “allowed to socialize,” she “had a full life.” Pardis I also recollects being “way too spoiled.” Unlike Meredith’s limitations on socializing, she depicts her neighborhood as a well-connected,
close, extended playground, and people spontaneously “just show up at your door,”
because there was “less formality.” The extension of trusted relationships, not only in the
extended family, but throughout the neighborhood, relieved stress and feeling
overwhelmed (a common experience in the U.S.), because “we had support of neighbors
and family.” Travel away from the city offered the “best memory of Iran.”

PARDIS I: [Families] were more connected, and closer. People just show up at your door. [There
was] less formality. [We] didn’t feel so overwhelmed, because we had support of neighbors and family. [My
parents would say]: “You guys are way too spoiled.” We did active things; playing in the street with
neighbors’ kids; piano lessons. Life was less stressful. [During summer, we went to] a villa one
half hour from home. [It is my] best memory of Iran. [My] uncle owned it. [On] Friday [it] opened to
everybody.

PARDIS II: [My memory of growing up in Iran] is happy. No matter where [friends] are, what they do,
what the environment, they have an energy and happiness, and we had that too. It was really fun.
We had a very big group of classmates—twelve of us. We were constantly seeing each other every week; go to
cinema, parties. In Iran, transportation is mostly by
taxi, so twelve of us sat in one taxi. We had good parents, but they had to balance between what was going around [in the public sphere after the revolution].

Attempts to normalize children’s lives were essential in the post-revolutionary period. Pardis II’s memories, guided by her parent’s desire to balance the children’s need to have a happy, fun, energetic childhood in the public realm, allowed them to “constantly [see] each other every week.”

Geographic and temporal distance fail to threaten family connections; “the family has to come first.”

PARSA: The family has to come first. In Iran, some of the people lived with their parents ‘til they’re married. Independence is very limited. Now that I am here—not living with my parents—my dad is devastated. Every time I go there, he makes smirky comments: “He’s left us now.” [Tracy laughing.] [My dad] calls the family every week; he’s gone to Iran every year just to visit the family, [and] especially my grandparents. He’s very family-oriented.

Weekly contact via telephone, annual trips to Iran, and prioritizing a family-oriented outlook are Parsa’s father’s priorities. His young, first-generation son struck out on his own, a decision that would be unorthodox in Iran, and prompting his father to press him with a little guilt: “He’s left us now.”
NASRIN: It’s always been family and togetherness; helping each other out; kinda like Italian families. When I wanted to come here, I had family to fall back on.

Striking a balance between industry and entertainment, productivity and play, respondents recalled an upbringing of being “sheltered,” “enmeshed,” and “interfering,” but also “like heaven,” “fantastic,” “a good life,” “very fortunate,” “a dream world,” “so much fun surrounded by friends and family always,” and “the best time of my life.” Social life was “quiet” and “most of the time at home,” the central meeting place for an entourage of drop-in visitors. Holmes-Eber (2003) identifies drop-in visits among Tunisia women as “the backbone of most women’s day-to-day social life” (91). Although these visits may be strictly social, they “are one of the primary ways that women disseminate information and trade assistance and services on a day-to-day basis” (e.g., food sharing, child care) (ibid.). Socio-economic information had several functions, including to: mobilize kin networks to help and assist; discuss prices of material items; and analyze “the problems of appropriate social behavior” (ibid.:93). The drop-in visits reported by my interviewees often transpired into semi-large parties, at which an extensive meal would be served. “Mom had to supervise and manage the chef” (Azam). Similar to Holmes-Eber’s point that “one does not actually ‘loan’ food, a concept alien to Arab principles of hospitality. Rather, food is given and shared with all who are in need, with the expectation that at a later date the favor will be reciprocated” (ibid.:95). Drop-in, pop-up parties among Iranians were spur-of-the-moment, and as such, appear to have been part of a reciprocal system. “Daily drop-ins create ties of cooperation and aid
between neighboring households,” and challenge the notion that “nuclear [and extended] households are really separate, independent social and economic entities” (ibid.:99).

Part-time families are an anomaly, even non-existent. At any given time, a party might materialize. Because Iranian culture is “kid-friendly; family-oriented; hands-on,” children were “always involved with every activity.”

AZAM: [Family is] not just for Christmas or once a year. We get together for any occasion; the kids are there. We always had a lot of company. We’d have parties; Mom had to supervise and manage the chef. Dad would just say, “We’re having forty people for dinner tonight.” I was always involved with every activity. [It was] kid-friendly; family-oriented; hands-on. One of the things I like about Minnesota culture or American culture is the privacy. In Iran, there is no privacy. The Iranian culture is very enmeshed; very into each other[‘s] business. The neighbor would know what’s going [on] in your life. The freedom, and the safety, was really there. We didn’t have to worry. Neighbors would watch you for protection. You weren’t going to get stabbed by your neighbor. Everybody on that street is one big family. My mother was always attending to us kids; my dad was always the financial provider. He was authoritarian.
If we would do something that was not okay, Mom said, “Wait until your dad get’s home!” Dad would never have said anything to us, but that statement would scare us enough to stop whatever we were doing.

Azam’s positive memories are entangled in a paradoxical dance of having a “get together for any occasion … always had a lot of company,” and that everyone is “into each other[‘s] business. The neighbor would know what’s going [on] in your life.” Still, she is appreciative of the certitude of safety. Azam’s reference to her authoritarian father was countered by an empty threat—“Wait until your dad get’s home!”—that did not materialize into action, although it scared the children into submission. In the space of the empty threat, the authoritarian father diminishes his revered hold on control.

In dual-professional parent households, such as Zohreh’s, “the disciplinarians” were absent during the day, but grandparents were just a floor away to the promise of being “spoiled rotten.” Physical closeness was inescapable, but boundaries were porous: since “people could just drop by.” Boundaries are subject to stretching; family and friends appear freely, and gatherings emerge, but children were obligated to complete the day’s task (i.e., homework) prior to any merriment.

**ZOHREH:** The first floor was occupied by my grandparents, and we lived on the second story. My mom and dad both worked, so we always just come down the stairs to my grandparents. [I] was spoiled rotten. In my family, we celebrated birthdays. That’s unusual. On the other side, we did what other
Iranians did. We were very family-oriented—it’s the bigger family—aunts and uncles, cousins. I don’t call it enmeshed to the point of not having boundaries, but there [were] a lot of gatherings. People could just drop by. We were obligated [to] finish our homework. The disciplinarians would allow us to watch one program before dinner.

Zohreh describes herself as atypical (i.e., both parents worked, birthday parties), although her response is similar to others in terms of proximity to extended family, being spoiled rotten, being family-oriented, and having sudden parties. Micro-processes, such as birthday parties, set “modern families” apart from monolithic portrayals of “traditional families,” and clarify reasons for structural differences (such as class) (Smith 2006:20). Socioeconomics and Zohreh’s social location (upper-class, non-identifying Muslim) challenge claims to a “uniform experience” of “the Muslim family” (Sherif-Trask 2006:233).

Rose’s memories of growing up in a more traditional extended family expose the juxtaposition shows not only male and female duties within the household, but how loyalties influence household dynamics. The “parents were disciplinarians,” the paternal grandfather maintained loyalty to his father by not breaking up the extended family, and the grandmother “brought the house together.” Similar to other respondents, her response refutes claims to the monolithic, traditional, patriarchal household: male-dominated-breadwinner-authority and female-submissive-homemaker (Sherif-Trask 2006:231-232). In fact, parents were involved in disciplining, and the grandparents (usually the
grandmother) maintained peace. Rose grew up with her paternal grandparents (until her paternal grandfather died), because her father, the only son, did not want to betray his father by establishing his own household. Grandmother “brought the house together. The parents were disciplinarians, but Grandma was [a] soft, emotional blanket,” who wrapped around Rose and her siblings as they watched television in the evening. Grandmother would scratch and massage their heads, and “cuddle,” prompting Rose’s mother to tease her—you “grew up on her tummy”—which swished around like the sea because of a hernia.

Although Lili feels the adult-living-with-parents-pattern (into their thirties and forties) inhibits finding one’s voice, it is a “shock” when a sibling proclaims independence. “Parents have to help to make choices.” The extended family, multi-floor, apartment living arrangement, in Lili’s perspective, was infused with ambivalence, but inspired children to assess multiple viewpoints. Due to differences in her father’s and paternal uncle’s parenting styles, a rift occurred, and the uncle sold his flat to a religious family. Lili recalls this as “terrible,” but praises the Muslim family as “such good people, much better than my uncle.” Growing up in Iran was like “heaven for [the] kids,” they were “the kings and queens of the neighborhood,” and there was an absence of “loneliness’ that I feel sometimes in the U.S.” While recognizing her grandmother’s incompetency as a mother-in-law, she clings to her memory:

LILI: We were all very open-minded, but my dad had different [ideas] in terms of raising his kids. [My uncle’s] boys were coming [from] parties. [His daughters] could have boyfriend[s]. My dad was pretty
strict. Eventually, it cut our relationship with my cousins. We were all in the same building—very private—and, all of a sudden, [my uncle] sold it to [these Muslim people]. It was terrible. They were such good people. I think they were much better than my uncle. [Lili laughs.] I lived with my parents ’til I got married. I got my voice when I got a job. You can become forty years old, still [living with] your parents.

My house was a social place. The sense of “loneliness” that I feel sometime in the U.S. didn’t exist. When my dad got married to my mother, they all lived with my grandparents in the same building: my aunt, first floor; we were second floor; my grandmother, third floor; and my uncle was on the fourth floor. You’d think it was heaven, but it wasn’t. [Lili and Tracy laugh.] Not everybody gets along. [Lili and Tracy laugh.] It was heaven for us kids—seven of us in the same building—like the kings and queens of the neighborhood. [Lili and Tracy laugh.] I had the best memory with my grandmother, but she wasn’t the best mother-in-law. That was always a problem.
While Lili identifies her family as “very open-minded,” this did not extend to child rearing approaches. The latitude her paternal uncle granted to his children, especially his daughters who partied and had boyfriends, was diametrically opposed to her father’s approach to raising his child. Lili’s case demonstrates problems between extended family members when a clash of values occurs. For example, families fission and privacy is compromised when “strangers” occupy the flat left vacant.

Pardis II takes a comparative approach, weighing excessive freedom in the “American way.” Because it is a “new culture,” young Americans become independent too early; they “go and make a life” and “grow up by themselves.”

PARDIS II: I [do] not necessarily and totally agree with [the] American way. This is a new culture, and they didn’t have as much wars and bad things that happened. So kids could grow up by themselves. At eighteen, they could be independent, and go and make a life. In our culture, that never happen[s]. Parents have to help to make choices. I was talking to a Jewish friend, and she said, “I’m such a Jewish mom,” and I said, “What does that mean?” She started explaining that, “We interfere.” I said to her, “That’s how we are!”

Iranian parents “help to make choices” and “interfere,” and thereby orient children through Iran’s complex history, in which they have experienced revolution, war, and other “bad things.”
Because the public sphere drew young people out for entertainment, if children ventured into the public sphere, surveillance by trusted elders, authority figures, parents, and/or neighbors was necessary. “Neighbors would watch you for protection. You weren’t going to get stabbed by your neighbor. Everybody on that street is one big family” (Azam). “Public displays of play” between members of the opposite sex became highly restricted after the revolution, prompting parents to organize “play dates” to feign the freedom they experienced growing up. The mutual refrains—“there was nothing to worry about,” “life seemed a lot more carefree,” “less stressful”—can be construed as a privileged reality, since well-to-do Iranian youth are not required to work (even discouraged), which contrasts with American youth, whose quintessential rite of passage is a first job, obtaining a driver’s license, and owning a first car to explore the road of independence.

The constant presence of extended family requires work, give-and-take, and compromise. Nia’s statement about family life also reveals ambiguity in that it “can be very oppressive, but you deal with it. It can [also] be very rewarding, like marriage.” Although her in-laws were “very liberal” and “very independent,” navigating the public sphere demands zeal, like a shield that protects against the deprivation of misfortune and fervor of trouble. In the inner sanctum of life contrasted with the post-revolutionary period public sphere, guided by the dictates of Sharia law. This forced Nia to enter into a temporary marriage (sigheh, muta). Modernists and traditionalists debate the benefits and detriments of sigheh in post-revolutionary Iran, but it presented a loophole for couples to navigate the public sphere, and avoid slander or arrest. When Nia moved to be
with her future husband, *sigheh* allowed them to “maintain appearances” and avoid negative repercussions:

NIA: It can be very oppressive, but you deal with it. It can [also] be very rewarding, like marriage. [Nia and Tracy start laughing.] It’s a lot of work. It’s a lot of giving. It’s a lot of compromise. You pull your hair out one day, and you’re happy the next. I actually love spending time with my mother-in-law. When I was in Iran, I was with her quite a lot. She was fun, feisty, very adventurous. Quite frankly, she was one of the few people I trusted to take care of [my son]. We had a house just a couple blocks away from them, and he loved going over to see [them]. He worshipped his grandparents, and they worshiped him. It was a mutual love affair. He was their only grandson. [My in-laws] were very liberal. My husband and I actually lived together in their home before marrying. His mother had led a very independent life, and his father as well. They maintained appearances. As soon as I got there, we performed a small ceremony that made me a temporary wife, so that, legally, there would be no repercussion [and we] could not get arrested. They were quite understanding of the idea
that I might return [to the U.S.] if I can’t make a living. They said, “What would make it possible for you to stay here?” I said, “I need to work.” Within a week of being in Iran, I got a job; plus teaching English. I felt welcomed, I felt supported, and I had what I needed to have in order to be successful. I would tell my husband that I went to Iran for you, but I stayed because of your mother. She was like a mother for me.

Nia’s son had the freedom to visit his grandparents, who lived “just a couple blocks away.” The “mutual love affair” between her son and his grandparents engendered one of the few relationships of trust concerning her son’s welfare. Her in-laws were central in her sense of feeling “welcomed,” “supported,” having what she “needed in order to be successful.” Nia recalls her move to Iran and having to learn how to navigate the public sphere.

NIA: I didn’t blend in [in Iran, in] the sense that it took me a while to actually start, you know, Americans walk differently; Americans smile on the street. In Iran, for many reasons, you should not smile on the street, and especially as a woman. I used to think, “Why does everyone look so grim walking up and down the street?” And then I realized there are cultural norms, and you don’t walk around smiling
like a goofball, which is what I do here, you know? [Nia and Tracy laughing.] And, of course, I was very happy to be there initially, and I was real excited about all the new things, so I had a big smile on my face a lot of time. And you really have to keep a kind of serious look on your face or people will assume you’re flirting. So I had to learn to keep a serious face, and to not look so excited and interested in everything, because that set me apart as obviously a foreigner or a loose woman. [Nia laughing.]

One of the funny things was that, in Iran, when you hand money to a merchant, you’re not supposed to let your fingers touch his. I didn’t know that, and so I wasn’t watching for that. There was this one bakery near our house where I often went to pick up stuff, because you always have to have something in the house. I would go to the bakery all the time, and one of the guys behind the counter thought he was having quite a relationship with me, because I would let him touch my fingers. [Nia laughing.] I didn’t realize what was going on, but as time passed, I heard from the conversations of women that he was trying to
touch my fingers, but [after that] I put [the money] on the counter.

I just kinda started absorbing this idea and then I realized—start thinking back—this guy was touching my fingers quite a bit. And so the next day, I walked into the bakery, and as I walked in I saw him nudge one of his friends like, “There she is [Nia and Tracy laughing]. The woman who’s been having an affair with me.” [Nia and Tracy laughing.] And I was pissed. He’s not only touching my fingers he’s talking about it. [Nia and Tracy laughing.] He’s touching and telling. [Nia and Tracy laughing hysterically!] And here I am, an honest, married woman. [Nia and Tracy laughing.] My reputation is torn. I was upset, actually, because I was, like, you were taking advantage of my fingers. [Nia and Tracy laughing.] So then, of course, I went up and I ordered, not looking at the guy; just ordering it in a very arrogant, kinda nasty way. I put my money on the counter, and I went off, and I was as nasty as I possibly could [be] to let the guy [know], “Hey, the relationship’s off. [Nia and Tracy laughing.] No more fingers for you, bud.”
As an American Iranian, who grew up most of her life in the U.S., Nia had to learn the cultural norms of the external realm of Iranian life. Suppressing her excitement “about all the new things” she was experiencing, she “had to learn to keep a serious face” in order to avoid being pegged as a flirt, a loose woman, and a foreigner. The slightest misstep can mean one’s “reputation is torn”; the baker takes advantage of an “honest, married woman,” then brags to his friend that he has “been having an affair” with Nia’s fingers. “He’s touching and telling.”

In matters of love and marriage, parents recognize that love confounds the intellect and reason is elusive. The pragmatics of parental decision-making and negotiation concerning marriage safeguards against the perilous nature of young love—“[w]hen love has come the intellect has fled … [l]ove’s home, which is not reason or mind” (Attar 2000:116). Between individual desires and respect for the wisdom of elders, a compromise is struck. “Traditional marriages” grant respect to elders, whose wisdom knows the lover one “who flares and burns … who in frenzy yearns” (ibid.); parental blessings and approval are critical for a successful union. One’s “pool” of potential mates extends through familial, friendship, and neighborhood networks, which secure and reinforce the values of female chastity, a responsible male provider, and a “good family.”

Pardis II provides the historical shift from the “special era in Iran’s history,” when couples “fell in love” and married, to the post-revolutionary period, when “there was a lot of control.” Acceptance of parental supervision is rationalized and welcomed, because young people did not have the freedom “to go, and roam, and date, and choose.”
Concerning the “traditional sort of marriage,” families “have rules,” and “they introduce people,” they accompany children when navigating the uncertainties of the public sphere, but the bride and groom “make the choice.” Pardis II’s transnational engagement was made through family, but she felt “there was a lot of ambiguity. It was a calculated risk.” In post-revolutionary Iran, supervision is necessary, since it is very risky to be at a mixed-sex gathering or party in the public sphere.

     PARDIS II: Most Iranians go to [the] traditional sort of marriage. We don’t have the freedom, culturally, to go, and roam, and date, and choose. Adults know these families have rules, and they introduce these people. Have you seen the Great Dictator? Charlie Chaplin and [this] little Jewish girl decide to go out together, and twenty adults [accompany them]. It’s something like that. You make the choice. The culture says supervise; don’t force, and don’t push. So, when people say “arranged marriage,” that confuses me. If it means you are forced to marry someone that your parents want you to, that’s not true. If it means that you have a lot of parental supervision, yes, that’s true.

     My parents were fully educated. They fell in love. It was a special era in Iran’s history. For me, it wasn’t like that. My father was very sad about
that. After [the] revolution, there was a lot of control. When I was at college, I couldn’t just go out and talk to a boy classmate. I would have two of my friends with me as [an] alibi. You were always scared. I did the best I could do with it. My husband was introduced to me by a relative. I was there; he was here. We saw each other twice in Turkey. We talked a lot [for about a year], and we decided to get married. I felt there was a lot of ambiguity. It was a calculated risk for me.

I recognized later when I went to college that my parents were exceptional. All these friends [of mine] probably were people from my faith, social class. I didn’t recognize that until I grew up. My brother couldn’t tell me what to do. And I had a classmate who did everything, but she sneaked out of her brother’s eyes all the time. Her parent[s] weren’t educated. They were nice people, but they weren’t educated. So this one college student had to sneak everything behind her brother’s eyes—not her dad’s eyes—brother’s eyes. She was a fun girl, but she had to sneak everything.
Pardis II contrasts how her experience in the educated, upper-class differs from her traditional friend’s experience, whose brother was her keeper, who “had to sneak everything behind her brother’s eyes.” Pardis II has the advantage of an open-minded upbringing, which her parents modeled, but which she did not come to appreciate until later in life. Similar to Pardis II’s reference to the fear experienced at college, where conversing with a male classmate is forbidden, Lili’s response lets slip the problems that arose when she went to university and the temptation that parties presented. Whether the “moral’s police,” neighborhood gossip and “research,” or the “damn taxi agency guys,” the worry regarding an adventurous evening out is palpable, because it jeopardizes a “good girl’s” reputation, and influences her opportunity “to get married in that country.”

LILI: I had my priorities set, but I was very adventurous. When I started going to university, I could go to parties, but I had to come home at ten. On the phone, “Mom, please, please!” And she will say, “What can I say to your dad?” If you want to get married in that country, you have to be a good girl, because people will talk; they research and talk to the neighbors. We had this taxi agency in front of our street and [Lili laughs] I was saying, “Mom, no one knows when I come.” “The taxi agency knows you are coming home late!” [Lili laughing.] I had to be worried about the damn taxi agency guys.
Neda accepts the familiarity of interference, justifying it as protecting her, but then contradicts herself: “They interfere in each other’s life a lot, but I enjoy [it]. … I grew up like that … and they love me.” At the same time, Neda values independence, asserts her desire to remain childless, marry an older, anti-social American man, and be unlike those who interfere.

**NEDA:** They interfere in each other’s life a lot, but I enjoy [it], too, because I grew up like that. I was only twenty-three [and] people were saying, “You’re so old. When do you want to get married?” Thirteen years after that, I married an older man. My friends [said], “Are you sure you wanna do that?” Sometimes [it] is too much. Some of them complain: “He’s not [a] very social person.” You know how the Iranians are; they always want to get together and laugh. Another thing is having kids. “You’re forty. You’re old. Hurry on!” I said, “I don’t wanna have a kid. I wanna travel. This is my life.” And they said, “That’s just a stage. You will regret that you don’t have somebody.” They do it because they love me, but still, that’s not right. I try to change myself if I’m that way with my other friends.

Whether the urging of marriage from age twenty-three or procreation from age forty, Iranians offer advice and meddle out of love, although “sometimes [it] is too
much.” Recognizing this, Neda reflexively proclaims that she will change herself if she is “that way with my other friends.”

Though Rose was not forced, elders “picked” her fiancé, whose threat to jump off the roof “if you don’t give me Rose!” discloses a measure of control. Generational differences regarding the tradition “to get married and not know the person” are apparent in Rose’s siblings’ counsel against it. Rose disregards her siblings’ advice, and trusts her grandmother’s judgment to choose a husband from a family like the Prophet’s, who “weren’t the flashy kind of people.” Rose, however, is an exception to the traditional marriage rule, since most other interviewees either chose their own spouse or negotiated the union with their parents.

ROSE: Grandma advised me in marriage. [She] picked somebody that elders thought [would be best]. Marriage wasn’t forced. [My] brother [and sister said it is] too early: “When you get married, fun is gone.” [My husband] kept sending mail, cards, tapes, [and made a threat]: “I’m going on the roof [to jump off] if you don’t give me Rose.” [The] young people in my life were telling me not to marry, because it wasn’t [the] tradition anymore to get married and not know the person. I loved my in-laws. [We had a] special bond, because they weren’t the flashy kind of people. The Prophet was like this. What balances me [is a]
verse in [the] Qur’an: [You are] measured by actions. Appearance doesn’t matter to God. Your heart matters. In addition to guiding marriage decisions, elders act as the family therapist to resolve spousal conflict. Azam’s ambiguous assertion that “you can always rely on them [parents]” financially, but the therapy does not lead to “actual problem solving,” references an ineffective approach to conflict resolution. Parents and in-laws advise the married couple to “shut up and make the best of it. At least he’s not beating you; not doing drugs; not sleeping with anybody else.”

AZAM: The therapists are the elders of the family. You have marital problems? You go tell your mom. There’s a big meeting, and then they’re gonna tell you, “Shut up and make the best of it.” There is no actual problem solving. My in-laws or my family [say]: “At least he’s not beating you; not doing drugs; not sleeping with anybody else.” They’re taking the situation and comparing it. “Don’t compare with anything else. I’m not happy. I need this situation to be changed.” No matter how old you are, you can always rely on them. If I get in a financial “bound,” I can say, “Mom, Dad, I gotta come back home and live with you guys.” But the majority go to the in-laws, because it doesn’t look good for the husband to go to her family.
While Azam appreciates the “revolving door policy” of the parent-child relationship, she deems marital issues to be contextual, and should not be weighed against other people’s problems. Each couple’s problems are specific, and require different approaches to resolving them. Underlying any family or holiday gathering, the “therapists” discourage divorce, say “buck up,” and get on with the celebration. Even when a couple has broached the subject of separation or divorce, the pretense of togetherness is maintained at holiday celebrations. Elders are sought for advice in choosing a mate. Parents and grandparents act as a “dating service,” and weed out families who do not “have rules.” If the couple faces financial difficulties, the likely scenario entails the couple moving in with the husband’s parents, “because it doesn’t look good for the husband to go to her family.” While Pardis II rejects that parents force children—they choose suitors from respectable families—she laments the freedom to fall in love, a luxury her parents experienced during “a special era in Iran’s history.” In post-revolutionary Iran, parents and friends act as alibis in an environment of fear. A parent says they do “the best I could do with it,” and steer the fate of their children’s mates. Transnational matchmaking, as in Pardis II’s case, contains “a lot of ambiguity,” because of the “calculated risk” involved. Although a relative knew her husband (who had settled in the U.S.), the in-laws and fiancé were the great unknown for the bride.

*Split Loyalties: Ambivalent Lessons of the Revolution*

While the seat of authority traditionally rests in the patriarchal household, respondents described a dual-parent, extended kinship household, which involved negotiations
between mother-father, parents-grandparents, and parents-aunts-uncles. Porosity lends opportunities for the manipulation of a repertoire of meanings, and idiosyncratic ideologies of expression, compromise, independent thought, and a positive admiration of alternative viewpoints (e.g., “My dad was religious, but my mom wasn’t”). The Islamic Revolution required families to approach the events unfolding beyond the sacred space of home. In so doing, the revolution “revolutionized” family and self-identity. As the revolution loomed, violence and the public sphere became intertwined: confronting the horror of tanks; torture; brothers and sons on the frontline; jail; a parade of posts holding the decapitated heads of the Shah’s supporters; incessant brownouts and blackouts; taped windows; bombs; and living in one room of the house. Fear was a palpable reality. In this context, the private sphere guaranteed peace, security, tranquility, and normalcy.

However, as revolutionary zeal swept the nation, the private sphere became a battleground. Religio-political fault lines created split loyalties along matri- and patrilineages. This is evident in the common refrain of the “sidedness” of one’s family: “there’s a lot of conflict in our family”; “Dad’s mom was so happy. Mom’s mom was so upset”; “my mom’s family, they’re huge fights between sisters”; “Dad’s side—they’re not that religious, but my grandma is”; “my mom grew up in a family [that was Tudeh]. Tudehs are communists; very political; non-religious. My father’s family is very religious.” The implementation of Sharia law in the public sphere converted the private sphere into a “classroom” in which children were “deprogrammed” by weighing the opposing ideologies of the pre- and post-revolution eras (i.e., “this is what we believe” not “that”) and deconstructing prominent symbols of the revolution (e.g., the veil,
mullah’s beard, turban). Although this instructive approach to understanding the unfolding events provided lifelong lessons, the extreme results were that “families fell apart” and there were “huge fights.” Despite warnings from the anti-revolution camp that “they are lying to you,” supporters “all of a sudden [started] wearing a scarf.” Contentions exist “between traditions and [the] Westernized way of living and open-mindedness,” impacting familial reflections and interpretations of Iran’s politico-religious history. While relatives are the “closest thing we have,” tensions along one’s parent’s lineages exist when “father’s side was very traditional, religious, [but] mother’s side was not.”

The initial thrill that permeated people’s hopes following the revolution quickly transpired. Iranians yearned to throw off the yoke of Western control, end torture, and seize the oil reserves, all of which came to symbolize the Shah’s corrupt reign. Yet, families that celebrated his ouster also had members who were “pro-monarchy and pro-Shah.”

ZOHREH: Finally, we can get rid of Shah. People are not going to be tortured, and economical corruption is going away. The oil money is going to stay in Iran. At the same time, the majority of our relatives are pro-monarchy and pro-pro Shah. So, there's a lot of conflict in our family. My mom's cousin—her husband—was one of the very high up military people with the Shah. They escaped; packed
up their three kids, and came to our house. They didn’t want to be killed.

Between anti- and pro-Shah family members, “there’s a lot of conflict.” Pardis II describes economic and personal conflict experienced by her parents, rather than fights between her father’s and mother’s side. Her “very calm,” “privileged” life was built by her “highly educated parents,” who worked as engineers in the oil industry. Calm converted into catastrophe following the Iran Iraq War, when her house was destroyed and parents went bankrupt.

**PARDIS II: My parents were both educated. They were both engineers, and they were working for the oil industry. Our house was bombarded. So it was a catastrophic event. Until I was eight, until the revolution started, I had a very calm [life]. I feel I had a privileged—sort of life with two educated—highly educated—parents, both with high incomes. We had a lot of fun. Right before the revolution, my dad had an assignment to Britain, and after the revolution, we came back to Iran. After the war, things changed. My parents were bankrupt. I grew up after the revolution with my teenage years, until I was twenty-four, when I came to United States. So, life goes on.
As a child you don’t understand that [the revolution]. My mom always said it was a lot of pressure. It’s not just the environment. It was the war. It’s being bankrupt after the war. [My parents] had to have ways to try to make this balance. We lost everything; all the investments. It’s not like here, if you have bank accounts, credit card, everything is your credit—there you go, you purchase a house. After the revolution, and the war, we didn’t have a house. It was completely destroyed. When the house was bombarded, my dad got injured. We had to move. We had to run away. We went to Shiraz, and my parents rebuilt everything. I hope my children won’t see war.

There was a lot of pressure from the society; ordinary people always trying to compensate for what is lacking [after the revolution, and] what kids really needed. I saw no flaw in my parents or my friends’ parents. They were trying harder to give back those freedoms that were taken from us. You know, it was like a quest. For example, we wanted to go snowboarding. Traditionally, you can’t do that because the revolutionary guards would come and take you. So my dad—though he wasn’t interested in it—he’d
sit and watch. If it was me and my friends, and their brothers, and my brothers, or a group of boys and girls, he had to always follow us and take us here, so we can have that fun. Or for example, I like astronomy and Shiraz had a nice telescope and, you know, you usually have to go at night. If it wasn’t at the certain time, I would have probably have gone myself, but I was a girl and, at the time, I couldn’t still be safe by myself. So my dad would take me and stay there. Still, it was very hard on them, but these were the freedoms that were taken from us. So our parents constantly tried to give these things back to us. It’s nice. I feel they did a lot of sacrifice for us. A lot. There was a very small town, and we went there for snowboarding one winter. Naturally, we didn’t have snow, but in the mountains they had snow. I remember we were throwing snowballs at somebody’s brother, and he was our age, and the revolutionary guards [are] coming and asking us, “Who’s this? Who’s that? Are you guys related? Are you brothers and sisters?” And my dad had to come and intervene, because he was [the] parent in charge of our group at the time. When there is an adult there, it’s okay.
I grew up in Iran when Khomeini was still alive. It’s a very old country, and I often think about that. “What happened to us? Why this has happened to us?” After the revolution, it turned out to be a disaster. Iran is a very, very old country. This is not the first revolution. It has had a lot of attacks. Usually Americans think, “Okay let’s move on.”

Sadnesses live through generations in [the] Middle East. Our culture has all those stories in it, partly because we are [an] old culture. It’s not a young, happy culture like North America. It’s an old culture that has seen a lot, and it’s a little bitter. It has a little bitterness to it. But it is what it is. It has a lot of beauty.

People think Iranians are—blah—I think they’re really misunderstood. They’re not represented right. I understand why, but I feel sad because a lot of beauty is being flushed down the toilet just because somebody is saying something wrong—the media. Not necessarily everybody has the time, like you, to go and study other cultures to try and understand other people.
Parents struggled and sacrificed for children in order “to give things back” that were lost after the revolution. Snowboarding and throwing snowballs at boys, simple taken-for-granted activities, might draw the attention of the revolutionary guards. Pardis II focuses on the beauty Iran has to offer, mourning the media images that misrepresent Iranians, who are “really misunderstood.” Taking a historical approach to understand “Why this has happened to us?,” she is realistic that a “very, very old country … [with] a lot of attacks … [and] all those stories … has a lot of bitterness to it.” “Sadnesses live through generations in [the] Middle East,” which are starkly contrasted to the “young, happy culture like North America.” The bitterness that Iranians have tasted historically has parallels with what Bob calls a “chip on the shoulder,” which gives Iranians an intimidating edge that Americans lack.

Familial divides between Westernization and modernization and tradition also creates “a lot of contention.” Gholam Ali, affiliates Westernization with freedom and open-mindedness that he sees in his wife’s and mother’s families. In contrast, his father’s traditional, religious family eschewed frank self-expression, especially if it hurts the person who is the subject of the conversation.

GHOLAM ALI: I gauge it to my in-laws. My wife had a lot of freedom. There’s a lot of contention between traditions and [the] Westernized way of living, and open-mindedness. The closest thing we have is relatives, [but on] two different ends. My father’s side was very traditional, religious. My mother’s side was not. [My wife’s parents] “download”
everything. It’s good to be able to speak up. I’m not very vocal about my feelings. I’m very fascinated with it. It was frowned on in our family. They know about everything in everyone’s families. Their memories are just so detailed. My dad [says], “You don’t talk bad about [other people]. Don’t talk about the suitors my sisters have. It’s not good for the suitor who was turned down.” Many times, my wife, at a gathering, talks about, “We’re gonna have some people over.” I told her, “Don’t say that in front of people. That’s not nice.” That’s how I was raised. For her, it’s no big deal. Somebody else might say, “Well, how come we’re not invited?”

Gholam Ali wavers between fascination with his wife’s ability “to speak up,” and how her family knows “everything in everyone’s families.” The obscure reference to gossip, however, was discouraged in his family of orientation. His enthrallment is thwarted by his upbringing; do not brag to people about a party you are having to people whom you have not invited, and do not chitchat about “the suitor who was turned down.”

Vacillation between Western culture and Islam, both of which “forced people to live” a way not of their choosing, impacted ideological hostilities in Iranian homes. The anti- and pro-veil camps meant that “aunts kept battling” and “there were huge fights between sisters.” In Rose’s family, the hijab created an tug of war between her paternal grandmother’s happiness and maternal grandmother’s disappointment.
ROSE: [My] aunts kept battling over the veil on my shoulders. During the Shah’s time in Iran [it] was like L.A. Culture was forced on us by movies—Elvis Presley, Jane Fonda. After the revolution, everything changed, and they encouraged Persian-made movies, and a new culture was forced on us again. [The Pahlavi era] forced people to live [unveiled, and a] lot liked it, and kept it that way. Dad’s mom was so happy. Mom’s mom was so upset, and wouldn’t let kids go to school. Mom would wear the scarf [on the way to school, and] fold it in the alley before school. Kids would tease her.

Similar to the clash over the veil, the mullah’s turban and beard signified a different warning. For some, the “mosque just wasn’t on … [the] radar,” but others suddenly proclaimed “they’re Muslims, and they’re praying.” “Families fell apart.” For children, these symbols were confusing and disorienting, especially for those who grew up as quasi-Europeans. They packed an emotional toll, especially for families who associated with scarf with sadness.

MEREDITH: “Who’s this guy with this thing on his head?” [The] mosque just wasn’t on our radar; we were such Italian girls. [Meredith and Tracy laughing.] “Who are these bearded people? This is not the Iran that I know.” Families fell apart, because all of a
sudden families decide, “They’re Muslims, and they’re praying,” because they wanted to go with the revolution. [On the other hand, the other side says], “Watch out for these guys. These are extreme.” My husband’s mom said, “No way, Jose, do I buy that these guys are gonna do anything good for our country.” [In] my mom’s family, they’re huge fights between sisters. All of a sudden, one is wearing a scarf. It was so overwhelming, very sad. I really couldn’t make sense of it.

Family members against the revolution predicted that the revolutionaries “are extreme” and “are lying to you.” Warnings along lineages often aligned with the degree of education that extended family members had. In other words, educated Iranians tended to be more vocal in their admonitions to traditional elderly relatives, and the non-educated, who tend to be more religious.

PARSA: My grandfather from mother’s side used to work in the oil-processing factory; this side was well off. My grandma—God bless her—she’s not that educated; she had to go through the social suppression. Dad’s side—they’re not that religious—but my grandma is. My uncles or my dad are telling her that, “They are lying to you. Don’t listen to them.” [Parsa and Tracy laugh.] My dad’s outtake of
it is that there was something wrong; otherwise, people wouldn’t have done the revolution.

Parsa’s oblique reference to his grandmother’s lack of education and being religious, like other’s association of being religious and uneducated, is modified by a phrase such as “God bless her” or “she’s a nice lady.” Taking a lesson from her son, Parsa’s grandmother is cautioned about the dangers of listening to the revolutionary authorities. “They are lying to you. Don’t listen to them.”

Though Nate’s mother’s family was Tudeh—“very political; non-religious”—and did not believe in the hijab, she wore it “after the revolution [because] she believed this was not the time to break up the country over these issues,” and she respected Nate’s father. Nate describes the contrast between his mother’s side and father’s side of the family, though he does not find conflict. Rather, he intellectualizes the social, political, and economic aspects of Islam without submitting to it (i.e., being a Muslim).

NATE: My mom and dad are both different. My mom grew up in a family [that was Tudeh]. Tudehs are communists; very political; non-religious. My father’s family is very religious. My dad’s overly religious, but never, ever, ever imposed it on us. My mother took the hijab after the revolution, [because] she believed this was not the time to break up the country over these issues. My dad, every morning, would get up at 4:00, and do his prayers. I’m kind of anti-religion. It’s not that they’re [Iranians] anti-
religion; they’re anti-Islam, and that has to do with them [the Arabs]. They came and conquered us. We were Zoroastrian, and we were great. [Iranians] just think that the Muslims imposed their religion on us. It’s a racial thing. They hate Arabs. I was an Islamic ideologue, but I wasn’t a Muslim. I like Islam in many ways—social, political, economic ideology—but I don’t believe in God. I always liked Khomeini. It’s funny that I grew up in an intellectual family, but we weren’t anti-religious. My mom had a respect for my dad; follow certain rules. She didn’t believe in them but she did it, because that was my dad’s strong belief. But at the same time, we were never pushed either way. So, I had a very open mind toward a cleric.

Nate’s view of the revolution is highly pragmatic. Because his father “never, ever, ever imposed … never pushed [religion] either way,” religion was not something to fear. His father practiced, but did not preach it. Thus, Nate learned to have “a very open mind toward a cleric,” to “like Islam in many ways,” to like Khomeini, but not be a Muslim or believe in God.

Nadia’s and Pardis II’s stories are parallel in that their families were both in England when the revolution broke, and they returned to Iran. While their fathers’ sides of the family supported the revolution, their mothers’ sides did not. Curiously, Pardis II’s
point that the opposing ideologies in her family “wasn’t a normal Iranian tradition” (i.e.,
her father did not drink alcohol, but her mother did when she had the opportunity), most
respondents reported similar “traditions.”

NADIA: My mother’s side didn’t support the revolution; my father’s side did. My parents wanted
to come back [to Iran], but my dad doesn’t like to risk things. My mom was in England [and] had me. My father was done with his Ph.D., and my mother was kind of depressed, and wanted to go back to her relatives.

PARDIS II: Part of my family actually was very interested in politics and history. [My] parents were nationalists. [My dad] loved Iran: “This is the best place in the world, and Iranians are the greatest people in the world.” My dad was optimistic. He was the religious figure, but [it] was never forced on anyone. My dad didn’t drink alcohol. My mom, when she had [the] opportunity, she did. It wasn’t a normal Iranian tradition. My mom always said it was a lot of pressure. [She] was an atheist. She always claims she knew what was coming. She had read about [Khomeini’s] claims, [and said], “Islamic revolution is going to be worse.”
My mother- and father-in-law are very different from my family. They have big family and I have to—I can’t say fight—change a lot of things. The West is very important to me. My mother-in-law—she’s a nice lady—but culturally, she was one generation behind my mother. She was from a poor family. Her expectations [as] a bride [were] very different than my expectations.

The differences between Pardis II’s family of orientation and family of procreation poses challenges, because the “West is very important” to her. She is not willing to sacrifice this aspect of her upbringing, which she cherished from her parent’s special time in Iranian history. The gulf between her mother-in-law’s old generation and her own requires assertiveness to “change a lot of things.”

Perhaps because “culture was forced,” and then “a new culture was forced again,” parents were reluctant to impose their own ideologies on children. Remarkably, all memories reported on the revolution address the fact that children were exposed to competing ideologies: religious versus intellectual; West versus East; royalty versus revolution. Parents enculturate children to acquire insight through different sides, appreciating that realization is individually acquired. Like a classroom in political economy, Iranians raised in extended families were exposed to a muddling of ideologies that required weighing various perspectives on an issue, and incorporating a personalized lesson in one’s repertoire of personhood: they were “very interested in politics and history”; they were “nationalists”; “I was an Islamic ideologue, but I wasn’t a Muslim. I
like Islam in many ways—social, political, economic ideology—but I don’t believe in God”; “the West is very important to me”; “Tudehs are communists; very political; anti-religious”; my mom was “atheist [and predicted] that the Islamic Revolution is going to be worse”; “It’s funny that I grew up in an intellectual family, but we weren’t anti-religious.”

While revolutionary ideology “trickled down” from the state hierarchy to the innermost identity of Iranian children, parents neither forced nor concealed their ideological stance or fervor. “My dad didn’t drink alcohol. My mom, when she had [the] opportunity, she did.” In so doing, Iranian boys and girls grow up to value their unique way through the mysterious revelation and unveiling of the “secrets” along the many roads traversed. Though sometimes diametrically opposed, mothers and fathers trust their convictions to teach children to evaluate opposition and to delve into the mystery of our differing pathways, because “no bird ever knows / The secret route by which another goes” (Attar 1984:179-180). The spark of personality marks each sojourner’s unique path, whereupon “insight comes to us by different signs” and “different spirits different rules obey” (ibid.).

As the loyalists of royalty capitulated to the loyalists of revolution, Iranian families suffered the frustration and fear of momentous historical change. Children were “sacrificed” to the West as cogs in the Pahlavi push to modernize Iran, just as they were urged to remain in exile, beyond the borders of the Iranian frontier, to protect them from becoming zealous martyrs for the father of the new Islamic Republic of Iran—Ayatollah Khomeini. Only hindsight grants insight into the mysteries of the inevitable unknown.
Because the public realm (zafer) of unfamiliarity is calculated, measured, untrustworthy, foreign, and guided by appropriateness, respectability, and integrity, relationships are informed by the uncertainty of social class and connections. This prescribes public behavior and interaction with “outsiders” according to the mantra: “keep up external appearances!” The private, internal realm (baten), on the other hand, is intimate, comforting, known; a place to let your guard down among the intimacy of “insiders.”

Considering the dangers inherent in the world outside the domestic domain, parental advice is valued as concern for children’s welfare and critical for life decisions, but bemoaned for its imposition on individual desires. The extensive support network nurtures sociability, spontaneity, being spoiled, and not feeling overwhelmed. While ambivalence is palpable in the responses describing extended family life as emotionally supportive, financially secure, and carefree, it is also characterized as being “interfering,” “smothering,” “meddling,” and “offering advice.” The moral collective articulates, models, and guides individuals to value productive citizenry and humanity by managing one’s life course, social relations and roles, and subjective world. Extended family provides the practical means to model these values through time management (i.e., the strict regiment of the daily schedule), appraising religio-political perspectives (i.e., split loyalties regarding revolutionary philosophies), and separate but interlocking familial spaces (i.e., granting children freedom to roam within a structure of surveillance). Multi-floor, family apartment complexes, neighborhood networks, adult children residing in their parent’s home until married reinforce the safety network that enables children to
establish a future “nest egg.” The adult, unmarried children in parental residence pattern is “traditional,” “that’s just the way we do it,” which underpins social and gender roles throughout adulthood as well as parent-child negotiations as therapist-client, advisor-advisee, and mentor/mentee.

Iranian transnational identity is informed by the inheritance of “deep-rooted authoritarian tradition” along three patriarchal lineages: kingship-nation, patriarch-family, and cleric-layperson (Mackey 1998:93). While these authoritative structures determine the rules and codes within hierarchical Iranian culture, loyalties in the Iranian private sphere of my interviewees (assumed to be middle- to upper-class) do not adhere strictly to the patrilineage. Most respondents grew up in the shadow of and setting sun on the Shah’s White Revolution, and the Pahlavi modernization project throughout the twentieth century. Their responses reveal an intimate portrait of how state level edicts breached the sacred threshold of Iranian homes. Rather than an either/or orientation, the tableau of tradition-modernity inspires a muted interplay between an and/but orientation of “blood” relations that include both “Dad’s side” and “Mom’s side.”

Loyalties along both lineages act as a pedagogical tool to comprehend the rationality of ambiguity. Since the public sphere is inhabited by the uncertainty of strangers, wherein the maintenance of appearances and surveillance of gendered behavior is constantly reinforced, the private sphere becomes a haven and “home school,” wherein life lessons instruct individuals how to negotiate the insecure outer realm in order to ensure safety and avoid psychic dissonance. Family provides the essential framework of the “home school.” Family is defined liberally to include one’s patrilineage and
matrilateral line as well as friends, fictive kin, and neighbors within the apartment complex and neighborhood. In this milieu, the extension of trust and safety relations stretch the possibilities within the “panopticon of play”; surveillance by multiple authorities guarantee freedom of movement, spontaneous social interactions, and the relaxation of rules.

Traditional structures secure self-identity, while social change challenges self-assurance within traditional institutional life. From the Shah’s fast-paced push to modernize, to Khomeini’s swift revolutionary fervor, extensive personal and social change reverberated through every interviewees’ patrilineages and matrilineages, sometimes causing deep chasms, split loyalties, and family feuds. Social change requires the altered self “to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process,” and thereby initiate novel social forms (Giddens 1991:33). Facing change at the interchange between tradition and modernity requires reconciling “dilemmas of self” in order to avoid the suspended reality of personal meaninglessness, and to assist in the construction of one’s self-reflexive project (ibid.:187-201). According to Giddens, authority versus uncertainty is a dilemma that arises in the context of scattered authority or “an indefinite pluralism of expertise” (ibid.:195). Religion, kinship, and community, as traditional bases of authority, are critical to lasting trust (ibid.:195). The post-revolutionary period installed a supreme religious authority that instilled “claims of rival authorities” (ibid.) between family lines.

Iranians pursue community connections in the transnational context as an alternate basis of authority. The dilemma of diminished authority and increased
uncertainty must be addressed through “a mixture of routine and commitment to a certain form of lifestyle, plus the vesting of trust in a given series of abstract systems” (Giddens 1991:196). Growing up in Iran, the complex definitions of relationship (‘asabiya in Arabic)—shared, flexible, neighborly, affines, cooperative, patrilineal-matrilateral, patron-client, solidarity, physical closeness, pretense of descent—are situated in architectural closeness wherein family and friends reside in intergenerational, consanguine-affine family apartment complexes and/or neighborhoods. Symbolic proximity builds a structure of dependencies of trust, overseen by the managers of the “panopticon of play,” who guarantee safety. Between the “enmeshed” nature of Iranian culture, where “there is no privacy,” and claims that “freedom, and the safety, was really there,” Iranians hang in suspended ambiguity. The nature of relationship relates to the fact that the “neighbors would watch you for protection,” “everybody on that street is one big family.” Group feeling was omnipresent in spontaneous parties: “We’re having forty people for dinner tonight.”

Connection with other Iranians is sought in the transnational context, but trust beyond the intimacy of family becomes elusive. Furthermore, although settlement locally occurs in extended family pockets, the neighborhood does not comprise a network of trusted relations that mimics the neighborhood in Iran. Family and a small, trusted circle of intimates, therefore, acts as the source of authority and routinization. The proliferation of authorities in these circles of intimates explains the local community as a collection of “ten-thousand communities,” and attends to the critical source of family for the persistence of national identity. The Iranian state has less and less influence on
transnational families in terms of inhibiting the movement of Iranians to and from Iran.

In fact, transnational kin flows continue to provide a critical source of cultural reinvigoration, and thereby become a critical source of new communities.
CHAPTER V

THE EBB AND FLOW OF IDENTITY IN MODERN WATERS:

STRATEGIES OF DETACHMENT AND UNITY AMONG TWIN CITIES’ IRANIANS

How individuals identify with and express Iranianness in the Twin Cities is directed by interactions with the local Iranian community as well as Minnesotans. In both cases, tool kits of strategies are assembled to negotiate centrifugal and centripetal forces that confront the ebb and flow of identity, and the psychic effects it creates. Centrifugally, temporal-spatial and political impediments inhibit intra-community cultural practices and preservation. Transnational time-space compression does not alter the fact that the vanishing point of departure and age suspends Iranians in a liminal state, spurring a desire for national camaraderie and community involvement. Ironically, centripetal pulls toward community create ebbing effects as internal differences (e.g., class, pro- versus anti-revolution, pro-Shah versus pro-Khomeini) surface and “burnout” occurs. Attempts at unity, therefore, may lead to detachment, configuring “the Twin Cities’ Iranian community” as a disjointed collection of micro-coalescences. Further, centrifugal pressure from the host society is experienced through exchanges with Americans, whose abysmal ignorance of the Middle East requires a mini-history lesson in the course of conversation. Iranians employ strategies, such as assuming the role of teacher, comedian, and/or political activist to alter or assuage prejudice and discrimination, although they grow weary of explaining their cultural origins. Discrimination inclines Iranians to “be good human beings,” which paradoxically eschews national and cultural attachment.
Negative interactions generate a centripetal movement toward family, a constant safety net against discrimination. Furthermore, transnational kin confluences, in the form of visits to and from Iran, Skype chats, refugee migrations, fiancé flows, et cetera, continuously recharge cultural “synapses.” Unity with identity is restored, and reframes an individual’s relationship to cultural frameworks and community. Conversely, relative to the visitor, one’s waning command of Persian highlights an inability to strategize the complex Iranian principle of communication, causing stress, shame, and even embarrassment. Centrifugal-centripetal constraints on identity, as played out in host-native interactions, arouse opportunities for personal growth. Tactics to maintain a semblance of Iranianness transpires through a reinscribed personal history informed by a humanistic concept of personhood.

Centrifugal Sources of Cultural Practice: Ebbing Influences on Identity

... in Iran a guest is accorded the highest status, the sweetest piece of fruit, the most comfortable place to sit. It’s part of a complex system of ritual politeness—ta’arof—that governs the subtext of life here. ... [T]he idea of ta'arof—to abase oneself while exalting the other person—is Persian in origin, said William O. Beeman. ... He described it as “fighting for the lower hand,” but in an exquisitely elegant way, making it possible, in a hierarchical society like Iran’s “for people to paradoxically deal with each as
equals.” … Being smooth and seeming sincere while hiding your true feelings–artful pretending–is considered the height of ta’arof and an enormous social asset. (Del Giudice 2008:43-44)

A History of Institutional Disintegration: Learning in the Fading “Farsi Environment”

In the Twin Cities, there is a pattern of institutional dissolution, especially relative to structured Persian language instruction. While the original “Farsi School” offered the benefits of formal instruction and meeting other Iranians, internal disagreements and political differences frustrated some Iranians (e.g., teaching the Iranian national anthem from the Shah’s era, being denied teaching opportunities, relevancy of content). Family and the home are critical contexts for the maintenance of children’s Persian fluency, especially if grandparents and extended family members are nearby or visit from Iran regularly. While some respondents reported that there are parents who insist on a “Farsi only policy,” others cannot justify “pushing Farsi” at home. As children enroll in school, English inevitably supplants Persian as the second-generation’s native tongue. Given this, parents struggle with the perennial immigrant concern of alienating children from the English-speaking culture. They pose the question pragmatically: “When are they going to use Farsi?” In response to this inquiry, parents balance their priorities: Is the time it takes to dedicate to learning Persian well spent? Or will the children’s fluency become a source of alienation?

Having a native’s command of Persian is essential to maneuver “the fancy language” of ta’arof, and as the vanishing point of fluency dissipates, it becomes a
central concern of identity. Transnational kin flows reinvigorate language fluency, while underscoring the inability to communicate expertly in the highly ritualized rules of respect and hospitality. Iran is a stratified, class-conscious society in which social order is legitimized and maintained through “obligations of status.” Beeman (1986) regards this “multipurpose strategical conduct” as that which “gives social life in Iran its unique flavor” (58). Ta’arof encompasses a wide swath of “behaviors that mark and underscore difference in social status. [It is the] active, ritualized realization of differential perceptions of superiority and inferiority in interaction” (ibid.:56-57). The individual with perceived superiority is the bearer of gifts, favors, and noblesse oblige (ibid.:60), and it is incumbent upon the inferior individual to show gratitude, submission, obedience, and respect (ibid.:40). Ta’arof epitomizes the “untranslatability of cultural difference” (Sullivan 2001:15). It “celebrates certain forms of repression and concealment … to impose one’s superiority on the other” (ibid.:16-17). Ta’arof, is entangled with status, which is articulated by compliments, gifts, good manners, respect, and honeyed phrases (such as referencing oneself as a slave, and the person you are addressing as “your excellency”) (Hillmann 1984:68). In the political game of ta’arof, the performer displays cordiality and deference if he or she desires to persuade the other; “saying it as it is” is eschewed in order to present oneself as cultivated and self-respecting (ibid.).

Within the milieu of hospitality, host-guest interaction requires treating a guest with the ultimate respect and deference. Second-generation youth “cry in despair at its pervasiveness, but are powerless against it and practice it themselves even while complaining about it” (Mahdi 1986:89). Youth have difficulty integrating this aspect of
“traditional Persian culture” with their lifestyle in the U.S., which is “diametrically opposed”; but disrespecting the practice relative to elders haunts them with “feelings of betrayal, shame, and ostracism” (ibid.). Interstitial Iranians, such as the 1.5 generation, reported similar feelings, especially on return trips to Iran.

One of the community’s first attempts to create an ethnic association that would offer Persian classes ran successfully for nearly one decade. It is a testament to the priority of Persian as a marker of identity as well as an interest in involvement with Iranians. However, time delineates political differences and agendas. Thus, the centripetal pull toward community incites centrifugal pushes of power differentials. As a community elder, Aresh’s involvement in the early planning stages of an Iranian cultural center reveals the persistent problem of indecision and disagreement concerning local Iranian affairs. Some of these issues included: how to name the center (Iranian or American Iranian); whom to appoint to the board; how to muster community support; and reluctant community members, whose “luggage [was] packed in the closet, ready to go home.” As Aresh mined his memory to recount the story, his wife listened intently while she prepared dinner. Aresh attributes the lack of a single organization to the fact that “everybody’s busy,” but his wife disagrees.

ARESH: One time we decided to have an Iranian cultural center. We couldn’t agree [on] what we wanted. We wanted to have American [Iranian]—no Iranian [Center] of Minnesota. We went to four or five meetings. I said, “Well, first of all, you have to have some people; you have to choose a board
member. You have to start somewhere.” There [was not] a lot of agreement. Still, we have our luggage packed in the closet, ready to go home. Hopefully, things will change [in Iran]. But you realize that, “Hey, it’s not going to get better.” Unfortunately, we do not have any solid one organization, because everybody’s busy. [Aresh turns to his wife and asks], “How many groups are they?”

WIFE: I don’t think that’s the reason though [i.e., that they are busy].

ARESH: What’s the reason?

WIFE: Look at the Chinese? Look at the Filipino. They’re all working. They have solid groups. They’re establishing their own community centers.

ARESH: There is no active leader.

WIFE: I think it’s competition, maybe?

ARESH: What competition?

WIFE: Look at the Farsi School that the kids used to go to. The women who run it were dedicated to it as long as their children were in it, but when their children graduated from Farsi School, they did not train other parents to ….

ARESH: … continue
WIFE: ... take over; to continue the mission.

ARESH: That’s why khanegah [the Sufi center] has their own Farsi [program].

WIFE: Khanegah is more like a religious [group]. Chinese are all competitors, but they band together. It’s not the competitive nature. Maybe it’s just lack of leadership?

ARESH: I think mostly ... I would say lack of leadership.

WIFE: We have an organization of people from my province [back home]. It’s only two or three years old. It used to be only my family from our province here. Then, the last ten years, that number increased, because there’s a guy who recruits nurses in our province. Most of the newly arrived are nurses—either the husband or the wife—they raise their kids here, but they’re also helping their families back home. So they really work hard. They don’t have the time to be dedicated to organizations, right? But yet, when we have a social gathering for the organization, they come. Our gatherings are always potluck. But when I call for a meeting, everybody comes late or don’t show up.
ARESH: And I think Iranian …

WIFE: I think it’s just a leadership, and a long-term leader who does not burn out. The ladies at the Farsi School really burned out, and they were doing that for what, ten years? There were a few clashes [of personalities, too]. I talked with other Iranian ladies in our group [who said] the problem was they were not welcoming of other Iranians. No, they were welcoming in terms of, “Okay, come, bring your kids.” They were not welcoming of other Iranians to become teachers; to become active, organized.

Curiously, Aresh’s and his wife’s dialogue concludes with her own experience working with Iranian mothers, who like the Chinese “are all competitors,” but the failure of the program was not due to time constraints. Her “ethnological” analysis of Filipino, Chinese, and the Twin Cities’ Iranian Sufi group challenges and complicates Aresh’s initial observation that Iranians “do not have any solid one organization, because everybody’s busy.” While burnout and self-interest are given as likely explanations for institutional termination, tangential reference to competition exists in her statement about not welcoming other mothers. Beneath Aresh’s comment that the early group “couldn’t agree what we wanted,” the lack of organization, board members, and community support appear to be problems that plague the community.

Factors of failure, according to his wife—“women who run it were dedicated to it as long as their children were in it, but when their children graduated they did not train
other parents to continue the mission”; the “ladies at the Farsi School really burned out”; and there “were a few clashes [of personalities, too]. I talked to other Iranian ladies in our group [who said] the problem was they were not welcoming of other Iranians to become teachers”—ring true for Meredith. Initially, Meredith became involved because she was in search of community. When she discovered “the Farsi School,” she volunteered excessive energy, believing: “this is my community.” Shared values of mentorship, unity, and knowledge, she thought, changed to disillusionment, as she discovered women with self-centered motives. In her final year as a volunteer, Meredith informed the teachers of her plans to organize a program celebrating Noruz at the Minnesota Children’s Museum (MCM). Her reaction supports Aresh’s wife’s reference about motivations and political differences at “the Farsi School.” Meredith’s excerpt highlights this “clash” and her “turning point” of “another meeting of roundtable [sessions].”

**MEREDITH:** I joined them without my kids 'cause they were young; just to see what was there. I was volunteering at the shelter, and I thought, “Okay, this is my community.” These were different people than the people that my parents knew. Many of them were teachers in Iran; working women [who] were very different than a lot of the women I had grown up with. [But] the turning point was finally another meeting of roundtable [sessions]. One of these women was going on; supposedly, this was a meeting of teachers talking
about our curriculum. One of them [was] venting, “Ah, I was huge in Iran. I was respected,” and blah, blah, blah. We [were] spending two hours hearing this woman, and I said, “What the hell I’m doing here? My kids are home. My husband is home. I’ve wasted my Sunday listening to this woman bitch at everything.”

I was a part of what I thought was their community, and I realized it was all about “Me, me, me.” It was like, “We’re here for a meeting. This is not about you; this was about the curriculum—kids.” They weren’t willing to listen or hear. Iranians do not work together. They are very bossy people. No negotiations. It’s my way or the highway. I’ve been a part of many groups where we have to sit down and compromise. You come to a decision, and you don’t make factions within the group. You’d think for a minority of people you would let go of a lot of stuff for the whole, but that doesn’t happen; not in Minnesota.

I’m like, “You can’t even speak English,” and you wanna teach our kids the national anthem [of Iran]. That was my biggest problem. I was like, “Why the hell are you guys teaching them the national anthem of
Iran? "Ey Iran-e marze por gohar ..." [Meredith sings Ey Iran]. It’s interesting because it’s one of those childhood things—every student in Iran—first thing in the morning, you all went out, and the music went on, [and] everybody sang to the king. We always had to stand. That woman, that day, that did it for me. I don’t want my four-year old singing this national anthem that isn’t relevant to him 'cause there’s a lot of nationalism in it—I’ll die for you. For me, lyrics are very important. The teachers said, “Oh, it’s just words.” I’m like, “No, these are really important words.” They didn’t accept me as a teacher; not in a million years would they train you and accept you or mentor you. You will never be as good as them [Meredith laughing]! That’s the kind of mentorship you get from them. These people [who] supposedly are my support system, my social life, have [a] different agenda.

I realized, “Okay, I need to find my community right here.” All of a sudden, it dawned on me. I took a huge part of my son’s six years from him by not engaging in what was here. I volunteered at his school, but engaging truly means a lot of work. [Then
I decided to have the Noruz celebration at the MCM, and that pissed them off. I realized they have so much ownership; they felt like they have to control everything. I’m definitely not a person that can be controlled. So that was the highlight of my turnoff. They couldn’t even be excited about it. None of them showed up for the event. Later on they did, but [not] that year. I didn’t hear anything from anybody. [There] was a very bad silence. I thought, “Hey, this is not very healthy.”

Meredith’s frustration references Aresh’s wife’s comment about a disinterest in passing the torch of the original mission. Her admiration for the women at “the Farsi School” initially stemmed from their roles as “working women,” “teachers,” “different people than the people that my parents knew.” But the connection snapped during a meeting—purportedly about the children and curriculum—when one teacher mourned her lost status. Meredith’s awakening came in the realization that she squandered a whole “Sunday listening to this woman bitch at everything.” In her viewpoint, “Iranians do not work together,” because they are “very bossy,” there are “no negotiations,” and it is “my way or the highway.” She is incredulous that, as a “minority of people,” they cannot “let go of a lot of stuff for the whole.” Her memory of standing for the national anthem—“first thing in the morning”—and singing to the king was so powerfully instilled, it explains her refusal to allow her four-year old son to sing the pre-revolutionary Iranian national anthem. The call to sacrifice for the nation—“I’ll die for
you”—had “a lot of nationalism in it” that was irrelevant to growing up in the U.S. Also, words and language have meaning; “lyrics are very important. These are really important words.”

The alignment between Aresh’s wife’s and Meredith’s quotes are striking, particularly on the point of acceptance, mentorship, and training. The competitive, judgmental nature of those at the helm of the institution reminds the “underling” that he or she “will never be as good as them.” For Meredith, this guilt-ridden turning point led to involvement in her American community, especially in her sons’ school and among Minnesotans. Involvement means true sacrifice. “Engaging truly means a lot of work.” Ultimately, Meredith finalized the rupture from the Iranian community with the implementation of the Noruz program at the MCM (Zank 2004), which challenged their “ownership” and need “to control everything.” Their “very bad silence” was illuminating.

In the Bahá’í Community, the Tarbiat Persian Institute (TPI) (now defunct) in South Minneapolis, which was open to people of dissimilar backgrounds, was a common interest association dedicated to teaching Persian language and culture to Iranian, Iranian-American, and American children and adults. Three of seven interviewees who associated with TPI are Muslim (although only one identified Islam as being influential in her life). My association with the TPI occurred through a chance encounter with an acquaintance (whom I met at Persian classes at the HCAI), who informed me of Persian classes at a Bahá’í temple in Minneapolis. The adult class was comprised of Americans: current and former wives of Iranian men, whose Iranian-American children attended
classes; a self-proclaimed female, American Sufi; a Jewish man with a fascination for anything Middle Eastern; a lone anthropologist; and an American Bahá’í interested in reading Bahá’í prayers in Persian. My entrée into this community established a foundation of new friendships and involvement in activities.

The TPI’s mission was to teach Persian, but other gatherings transpired from this association (e.g., picnics, private sphere parties, Seezad Bedar celebrations, potlucks). *Shab-e Yalda*—“a very old Persian tradition … [that] will be great to teach our kids the meaning and importance of” (email communication)—was not celebrated often, because of conflicting celebrations hosted by PSOM and/or families traveling for winter break. For any gathering, the community was polled via email about a couple’s interest in hosting a celebration, and asked for suggestions for activities to entertain children.

According to Nasrin, whose mother was a founding member of the TPI, people lose sight of the value of Persian language acquisition, especially because it takes a full day of the week commitment. Parents mention “burnout” as a significant reason for pulling their children out of classes, a phenomenon associated with political agendas. Parents whose children can no longer take classes, because they reached the highest grade level, see little purpose in contributing to the effort, and children lose interest. Time is precious, which outweighs language fluency. While Nasrin values Persian fluency as a tool for her children to read and understand Bahá’í writings in the original Persian, her own lack of fluency makes it difficult to justify why her children *need* to know Persian.

*NASRIN:* I was a teacher for a while [at TPI]. My kids went there when they were younger, and as they got older, they kind of got tired of it. Time-wise,
there was like, “Do you wanna take that Sunday—all afternoon—and devote it to this? Is it that important? When are they really gonna use this Farsi again?” First, the older one said, “I’m not coming any more,” and then the second one. [Nasrin laughs.] I’m not gonna go teach if none of my kids are coming. [Nasrin laughing.] It’s important. It’s fun. It’s good for them to know Farsi; not only because it’s their culture or where they’re coming from, but also because the Bahá’í writings are in Farsi. They won’t get the idea of it in English. Let’s be honest; my Farsi is not a hundred percent. I left when I was, what, thirteen? So it’s not like I can read every Farsi [word] and understand it. I read them in English ‘cause that’s where I’m strongest. If I say, “Hey kids, I want you to learn Farsi ’cause I want you to read the original,” [and] I can’t even do that myself [then I am not being honest]. [Nasrin and Tracy laugh.] My oldest son—he can really understand Farsi. He can speak it okay. If we’re at a family reunion or something, where everyone’s speaking Farsi, they pick it up right away, and they kind of get back in the groove, but every child gets less and less
Farsi in their head. I guess it’s not a big priority right now. Every Sunday morning, we had the Bahá’í classes there, but then when they [the National Bahá’í Council] kinda said, “We don’t wanna have it [devotional worship] all centralized,” the convenience part of it kind of went away. [Also], it was hard to find another time where it was convenient for everybody to come.

Nasrin’s response underlines the problem that Aresh’s wife and Meredith raised about the lack of support for the community as a whole: “I’m not gonna go teach if none of my kids are coming.” Maximizing family time takes precedence, as Meredith’s mention of her husband and sons being home without her, and Nasrin’s reference to donating an entire Sunday afternoon to it. Persian fluency and conversational competency with grandparents and elders are valued, and influences whether parents speak Persian only. Although family reunions are occasions to “get back in the groove” of Persian, “every child gets less and less Farsi in their head.”

Pardis II is one of the Muslim parents whose children took classes at the TPI. She preferred TPI to the Sufi group, because “honestly, I liked the fact that their religion wasn’t combined.” When she arrived in Minnesota, she was not fluent in English. Knowing the importance to “have good English,” she attended courses at the University of Minnesota (within one month) to improve her speaking skills:

PARDIS II: I really wanted my kids to have a Farsi environment. I didn’t want something religious.
I wanted myself to teach religion to my kids, not another version. What I’m trying to do is basically create tradition. For example, we usually have no rules. In Iran, people used to observe all the equinoxes—that’s ancient Iran. There are a couple of religious ceremonies that were intertwined; the Muslim ones. I try to make them important. My mother-in-law, and everybody, does that. There are certain ceremonies we try not to observe. I don’t fast myself; I’m not that observant. But I try to teach them certain verses of [the Qur’an]; when somebody dies, this is how you send a blessing. I try to choose the ones that are [relevant]. My oldest daughter asked me about Noah’s Ark. I personally don’t like that story at all; I think that God shouldn’t be punishing.

Pardis II is a recent, first-generation immigrant (who met and courted her husband transnationally). She links a lack of rules in Iran to the penchant to “basically create tradition,” which she does by intertwining some Muslim elements, avoiding others (especially those that are “punishing”), and focusing on the lessons that are relevant. Although parents see the value of children being bi- or tri-lingual, some take a functionalist perspective: “When are they going to use it?” At the same time, they recognize the crucial association between language and identity, and prefer get-togethers
with their micro-Iranian communities, especially because it is easier to speak Persian, and it avoids having to “explain oneself.”

More recent immigrants have the advantage of being closer to Persian fluency. Transnational marriages (between Iranian men who have lived in the U.S. for a long period of time and newly arrived Iranian brides) increase the likelihood that Persian will be spoken at home. As referenced in the previous chapter, marriage decisions are guided by elders, which reinforces the strength of family. Furthermore, because Iranians brides are interested in American Iranian and Iranian American husbands, such transnational flows ensure that Persian fluency is spoken in the home, and maintained. Fiancé flows, therefore, not only provide a significant centripetal reinforcement to the Iranian community at large, but also within the home to ensure Persian is spoken. These parents desire not only to find community locally, they do so through involvement in Persian schools. Nia moved to Iran, where she improved her Persian and prioritizes speaking it at home with her husband. She also got her son involved in Persian classes at “the Farsi School” in the 1990s. She also became involved in organizational aspects of the institution.

NIA: When I learned Farsi, I was able to speak to my grandmother. I got to know her as an adult, which was a lot of fun. We immediately signed [my son] up for Farsi classes on Sundays, and he was very strongly involved in the Farsi School for about five years, until they didn’t have any classes for him. We became very close friends with those people who were engaged
in this. I also helped out with the newspaper. My husband [and I] were actually the editors; we solicited articles; we solicited poetry; we helped out with that. We’ve also been fairly—still are—active in helping arrange for various different art programs, some of the music programs. We’ve helped fundraise for that or we’ve helped arrange some of the different venues that they’ve played [at], especially a couple times over at Hamline.

My son is interesting because he had the Iranian school [Farsi School], and when he got here he was eight years old. He had gone to first and second grade in Iran, so he had a base of reading and writing in Farsi, which he continued here. His attitude was very positive toward the Iranian culture, and he grew up in a very strong Iranian culture, and in the home we worked very hard to maintain his Farsi. So he grew up bilingual, and he grew up with a strong Iranian and American identity. I would say definitely his American identity has grown in strength because of the time of eight to twenty-four [years] he was here. He’s made numerous visits back to Iran and he’s maintained his language.
GHOLAM ALI: We try to speak the Farsi language at home. I still cannot speak English to my parents or my wife. Homeland has always been prison. For our children, to learn it for the sake of just learning it, I don’t want to pressure them [into] reading or writing it. They have no use for it here. Both their grandparents speak English. It’s more for them to know another language, and the benefits that they say a child can have [being] bilingual, then trilingual.

NEDA: All the times, mothers especially [feel] that they should push [children to speak Persian]. After they get into the house, there is no right that they talk in English; they have to talk in Persian. If they don’t do what they say, there is a discipline for that for sure. They get so Americanized. They don’t [have] respect [for parents] the way they are respected in Iran, or their teachers. The way they behave is so different from Iranian culture.

MEREDITH: I spoke Farsi to both of them [my sons]—especially the older one—and I think that separated him a little bit. He realized he was very different. I don’t think that separateness is necessarily a good thing for all personalities. They
already are very internal and separated; that’s my little psychology thing. Every kid experiences it differently and, in many ways, that’s how I experience it, too. Right away it hit me; I’m doing the exact same thing that I hated that was done to me [my parents speaking only Persian]. I felt like I’m trying to catch a breath. But you know what? In many ways, it was very good. It was what it was, but it was a very huge ‘aha’ moment for me. [I] also realized, all of that, up until then, was about me; it really wasn’t about them. It was all my own identity crisis. I remember my neighbor, eighty-five-year old Frank who’d come over when I lived in Minneapolis. He would say to me, quietly, “So glad you’re speaking Farsi to him.” He was from Poland or his parents were. [He] never learned Polish. [He would say], “I wish I knew how to speak it.” And then his wife would come over and say, “You need to speak English to this kid.” She had a lot of wisdom, but so did he. There was a reason why she said that, and there was [a] reason why he said [that]. It’s a really hard balance, and it really affects you, depending on your
personality. That really has made it very clear to me, especially having two very different kids.

PARSA: It’s where you’ve been born; it’s your own language. I don’t have a problem speaking English, but I would much rather speak Farsi. It’s a beautiful language. I’m not bitter that I am here. I am lucky, because a lot of people don’t get the chance.

Parents enculturate children pragmatically, believing they will fare better and face less discrimination. Although Zohreh has Iranian friends who speak Persian only to their children, parents in this study generally raised children to be “Iranian and American, and [to] be very proud of both.” Making the effort to learn and speak Persian acts as a forceful centripetal pull back toward native identity. As Nia noted, it not only reinforced her relationship with her grandmother, she forged lifelong friendships with Iranians involved in “the Farsi School.” Additionally, spinoff opportunities to reinforce culture occurred through a newsletter, and art and music programs. Maintaining Persian in the home is a challenge, as evidenced by Nia’s point that “in the home we worked very hard to maintain his Farsi.” Travel to Iran also indicates a source to reinvigorate language skills. Although some parents worry that a “Persian only policy” will alienate children, as Meredith notes they see the value in having a “double consciousness.” Meredith respects the advice of the elderly couple in her neighborhood, who faced this perennial immigrant dilemma. However, she adds the determinant of personality as influential to how 1.5 and second-generation children identify with Iranian heritage. Older children tend not only to speak Persian, but have a stronger identification with Iranian identity.
Younger children, on the other hand, “don’t like to be Iranian.” This gives children “some tools” that confer an advantage. Finally, Neda alludes to the relationship between language and behavior; second-generation Iranians who defy an “authoritarian” Persian-only policy in the home act like disrespectful, Americanized teenagers.

The Politics of the Public Sphere: “Ta’arofing” to the Top

Being fluent in Persian is central to mastering communication in, what Iranians call, “traditional Persian culture.” At the heart of this tradition is ta’aroof, which deeply structures Iranians’ subjective worlds. Their opinions on it range from visceral disdain to melancholic reminiscence. Ta’aroof impinges upon whether individuals embrace community or alienate themselves from it, in part, because it requires pretense to “sugar coat” things. Temporal distance from Iran “oxidizes” the intricate know-how required to navigate ta’aroof, developing a low tolerance to “play the game.” Both Khashayar and Sullivan reference the time it takes “two people to pass through a simple doorway” as a manifestation of the game. Iranian transnationals who refuse to play the game or have lost the sensibility, risk offending relatives and friends.

“I may offend you, I don’t mean to and let me know.” There were social issues within the house, [but] I was myself, who I am here [in America], except I became very polite. [He laughed.] Ta’aroof is a part of it, so I gotta do the ta’aroof thing. But even at ta’aroof, I wasn’t very good. Instead of giving them the compliment, I ended up giving myself the compliment. [We laughed.] From there on, they didn’t know what to expect.
Let me back up. Ta’arof is a word that—I’ve had arguments with Iranians over [this] because as a member of the community, you don’t see it. But as a scholar, you step away from it and you analyze and see it. So, I present that analysis to an Iranian and they deny it vehemently. They say, “No, there is no such thing.” But it’s everywhere. ...

... there are very few instances where there is a little bit of tension when they’re establishing who stands where. Your age is a determinant. There’s a big difference in age, there’s no question. When boundaries become a little more blurred, then there is more tension. That is permeated in the entire Iranian culture, and that concept is the concept of ta’arof. ...

... Walking through a door; no two people people walk at the same time, one has to go [first]. Let’s say a couple of people are entering a room, or exiting a room. The first person to exit or enter has higher status, but that person doesn’t want to say they’re higher than you are, so they sort of say, “Go ahead,” and the other person says, “No, you go ahead, you go ahead.” There is this push and shove. ... (Zank 2004:29-30, emphasis in original)

On a return trip to Iran, it takes time to adjust to the rhythm of ta’arof, but its enduring effects still create culture shock, as Khashayar’s reference to giving himself, rather than the host, a compliment. One’s waning command of Persian generates a discrepancy between a savvy performance and stilted response, and signals impending “Americanization” and cultural loss. Temporal distance from Iran magnifies the complexities of ta’arof, and raises the question of belonging. Shayda recalls “looking
forward” to her first trip back to Iran with her husband and two sons, at which time she would meet her in-laws. Excitement was dashed by “culture shock” as the implicit negotiations of ta’arof became explicit, driving her “absolutely bananas.” Her visceral response—it “gets on my nerves”—contrasts sharply with the implicitness of ta’arof when she lived in Iran—“I never felt it.”

SHAYDA: There are many things I cannot tolerate any more. If I would be living in Iran, it would drive me absolutely bananas. The ta’arof system gets on my nerves, to the point that I may talk back to somebody. [When I was] living in Iran, I never felt it. [After this long time] I didn’t know many fancy ta’arof words. I called my friend, and her dad picked up the phone. I didn’t know how to talk to him, because he was using all those words. I felt embarrassed. I felt stupid. The way they talk, and the way they would put their nose in people’s businesses, was very, very strange to me. They ask me how much I make; how big is my house [Shayda laughs]; how many cars I have. I said enough to survive. I could have not fit in Iran, because I don’t have the traditional Persian culture. I’m so straightforward; I say it as it is, and it may hurt people. In Iran, you don’t say it as it is.
Shayda’s point that when she lived in Iran she “never felt it” intersects with Khashayar’s claim that “as a member of the community, you don’t see it.” Time away from Iran renders the outlines of the practice explicitly. The inability to navigate this taken-for-granted complex of interaction instills embarrassment, feelings of stupidity, and friction for those who are “so straightforward” and “say it as it is.” Hospitality, as a manifestation of *ta’arof*—“traditional Persian culture”—is a core value of Iranianness—“That’s a big thing in Iranian culture.” However, the negative aspect is that “over-politeness” generates competitive behavior—a “keeping up with the Joneses” hospitality competition—motivated by jealousy, according to Parsa.

While tolerance for *ta’arof* wanes, enculturation endures and spurs incredulity when American guests reach for food before the obligatory offer-refusal interaction occurs “at least three times,” if guests are made to wait for food, or if a guest takes the food they brought to a potluck. Gholam Ali recalls his surprise when the American host and hostess of a dinner party offered no appetizers prior to dinner.

**GHOLAM ALI:** We got there [and] there was nothing on the table for the kids. Dinner wasn’t gonna be served ‘til five. Our kids were just frustrated, crabby, and there was nothing there ‘til dinnertime. Iranians seem to be a lot more hospitable [and] offer people things. [You] go out of your way. Typically, Iranians are very social. [Tracy laughs.]

**NASRIN:** You put the guest in front of your own needs. You try your best to make them feel
comfortable and feed them. I want to take as much of the positive things from the Iranian culture, and teach those to my children, and then maybe take away some of the negative ones. One of the super-negative ones is the whole ta’arof thing, where it is excessively insisting. If you go to someone’s house, they say, “Would you like some tea?” “No, no, no.” “Please have some.” “No, no, no,” when you really want some. [Nasrin and Tracy laugh.]

NEDA: Ta’arofing is too much. I don’t ta’arof. When I am with my Iranian friends, their ta’arof always makes me so nervous. I want to scream. For example, when we go to a party, after lunch, the dishes are dirty. I hear the screams of women, “No, you shouldn’t wash these! You’re guests! Go sit.” Ta’arof, to me, is kind of dishonesty, because deep in your heart you really want the person helping you wash the dishes.

[One day, with my husband] we went fishing and [my husband] brought pizza for lunch. So at night, when we went out for dinner, [my husband gave his] credit card to manager. When we finished dinner the friend went to pay, and the manager said, “I was
already given a card, sorry. I’m gonna charge the other person.” [When the Iranian guest] saw the card, she grabbed it. The manager came to our table, and said, “I’m so sorry.” [My husband] told me that this is not ta’arof. It’s being impolite, because somebody is offering something, and you push it back and say, “No, I don’t want that.” Sometimes ta’arof is too much.

Arguably, one outcome of ta’arof is the facility to appreciate multiple facets of an issue, which Gholam Ali references. Rather than the American propensity to state everything at “face value” or “say it as it is,” evaluating the subtlety of alternative perspectives instills a “yes, but …” approach to understanding the meaning of things said.

GHOLAM ALI: It’s more [of a] culture thing; we see many sides to everything. Here in the States, there’s only one side. With most Persians, whatever you say, they see different meanings in it. The way I am is face value with everything, [whereas] my wife and her family evaluate every little everything. That’s pretty common in Persian culture.

PARDIS I: [With] Persians, [you] never know exactly what someone is thinking, because of ta’arof. [In] America, [you] say what you think. Iranians give up [the] best things for their guests; Americans do

Because someone’s speech has the potential to have “many sides” and “different meanings,” interactions between Iranians are imbued with ambiguity and uncertainty. “[You] never know exactly what someone is thinking.” Iranians who distance themselves from the “old, traditional culture” cite nervousness, dishonesty, and pain as problems of Iranian culture. “*Ta’arof* bites you in the behind.” Zohreh is “still debating” the value of hospitality, because warmth and politeness “can burn you at times.” While she does not use the word *ta’arof*, Zohreh refers to “old, traditional [culture]” as being a people who are “warmers”; they “offer a helping hand to anybody that asks for it.” Her repeated use of the phrase “at the same time” throughout the interview indicates ambiguity about being a “surrounded-oriented person,” but refusing to enter into “this game that you play in Iran … called ‘having politics’.” As others have addressed, “saying it as it is”—not sugar coating your words—is a direct, confrontational strategy that defies the practice of *ta’arof*.

**ZOHREH:** We offer a helping hand to anybody that asks for it. Maybe it comes from our old, traditional [culture]. If I see my neighbor is sick, I will make that chicken soup without even asking. We’re warm [but that] can burn you at times. But still, we’re warmers. You have to think about yourself—what pleases you—at the same time that you’re giving everybody else value. In Iran, we are selfless. We
never learn how to take care of ourselves. We never learn, “How about I do something for me?” There’s this game that you play in Iran that I never learned to play. It’s called “having politics.” I was always told by mom and dad, “You have no politics, sweetheart. You say it as it is. You don’t sugarcoat it or you don’t change your wording.” They both were like that; they didn’t see much good out of that.

The game of “having politics” withholds the individual voice, and forefronts the needs of others over self. Because Iranians are “more pleasant, warming, loving,” boundaries are permeable. Zohreh and others who responded to the question of what people like or dislike about Iranian culture find the pretense of ta’arof as a “kind of dishonesty.” Others find warmth, sincerity, hospitality, and politeness at the heart of Iranian culture.

PARDIS II: Politeness pays off, and I tend to value [it] more. My mother hates [ta’arof]. I don’t see [it] that way anymore. It’s a tool. In Iran, they victimize: one [form of ta’arof] is very polite, one is okay, and one is very rude, and they all mean the same thing. It’s your choice, and it shows your character, which one you use.

LILI: Warmth, sincerity, hospitality [is what I cherish most about Iranian culture]. If I have a
friend who’s sick, I deliver food. I don’t do it once; I do it ten times. In Iranian culture, it is very normal. This is part of humanity; being a person. Here, people want to have their own space, and don’t want to be interrupted. When I was pregnant, I went through difficulty. No one helped me; my mother-in-law stopped by once. I called my parents [and] said, “Financially, we can’t eat all the time outside. Come and help me!” Even Iranians have adopted from this culture. This is [a] shame. I decided to become better [Lili and Tracy laugh], because I believe in karma. That is my religion.

We have this very good friend; her husband is from Germany, and he loves coming to our house. [They have never invited us, and] they’re very good friends. They invited us finally—once—and the wife became so busy that she couldn’t cook anything. About 7:20 the husband came inside the kitchen and said, “It’s time to put the kids in the bed” [Lili and Tracy chuckle], and we left. That never happen[s] in Iranian culture. If that happens, it’s like [the] end of the relationship.
Interviewees’ responses reveal the difficulties in maintaining a core institution to serve the diverse needs of community. The centripetal draw toward institutions dedicated to maintaining a “Farsi environment” (Pardis II) initially reinforces community. However, centrifugal dynamics within institutions to reveal competing agendas. Political tussles stymie constructive approaches to public representation (i.e., who is “the voice” of the community, what is the focus of representation), despite the fact that public celebrations of Iranian culture might educate Minnesotans (and improve people’s understanding of and viewpoints on Iranians). Political agendas repel community involvement, which translates into a pattern of multiple, micro-communities that construct an idiosyncratic narrative from the interactive shreds of shared history and memory. Iranians may alienate themselves and experience liminality in order to avoid judgment, criticism, gossip, “backstabbing,” superficiality, and pretention. An absence of a common ground between one’s parent’s circle of friends, and their children who feel little need to nurture those connections, is a reason 1.5 and second-generation Iranians do not engage. Meredith’s community, initially, evolved from her parent’s connections, but her disinterest in their superficiality has alienated her from them.

MEREDITH: [Those involved in the community are] very, very connected with a kind of high society Iranians. I don’t know if I should say it: they’re very superficial. They are very much about who’s doing what. There are big people here. They are very well off, and they like to show off. My sister-in-law wants to know these people, because they’re good
customers for her. So it works for them. There are other groups of Iranians; they’re not on my radar.

Meredith’s awareness of several groups of Iranians contradicts her claim that: “they’re not on my radar.” A history of negative encounters with Iranians, whom she perceives have self-centered pursuits, solidifies her disinterest. With wealth and high society backing them, they do what “works for them,” know “who’s doing what,” and “show off.” Zohreh’s response camouflages class structure among local Iranians when they intermingle with their compatriots at public sphere events—the OBGYN rubbing elbows with the janitor, kebab-maker, and mechanic. An outcome of the class structure is, as Zohreh implies, judgmental behavior and jealousy, because Iranians “just cannot see another person succeed.” This translates into “a ton of name-calling and backstabbing just because they’re not like you. They just bring you down.”

ZOHREH: We come here to this country; people are intermingling just [because of] the fact that they’re Iranians. So, you see your mechanic, and the person who changes your oil, and your OB/GYN [Tracy laughing], and someone who makes kebab, and someone who sweeps Walgreen’s floor after hours. They’re all sitting at the same table. [Tracy laughing.]

Iranians who immigrated to United States, [and] who still do—this is my personal opinion, and maybe I’m in the bunch, too—they become extremely judgmental. Again, we’re all human beings, but
they’re all judgmental. There’s jealousy going around, because people just cannot see another person succeed. There’s a ton of name-calling and backstabbing just because they’re not like you. They just bring you down. So I was really hesitant, and I must say I am very sorry that I ever even join[ed] the Iranian community. I have basically quit the Iranian community. I have not one minute of time [for that]. But then, in entering the Iranian community, and getting to know people, I first met my husband’s sister, which was part of the Iranian community.

Zohreh’s response is fraught with ambiguity. While she admits that Iranians in the U.S. “became extremely judgmental” and “maybe I’m in the bunch too,” she is critical about intermingling with Iranians based on nationality solely. And although “we’re all human beings,” the sideways reference to class comes through in the intermingling of the hierarchy of professions at Iranians gatherings. Although Zohreh has “basically quit the Iranian community,” her brief involvement in the community joined her to her Iranian husband. High expectations present a centrifugal force that repels Iranians from community involvement. Although respondents cited hospitality and helping others as central to Iranianness. However, Azam proclaims that doing favors for other Iranians entrenches them into a twenty-year reciprocal relationship of having to say “thank you” and returning favors. Community involvement entails darting in and out in order to avoid the burn.
AZAM: We get burnt out by each other. If I do something for [an] American person, they appreciate me over and over. But if I do something for [an] Iranian person? “Oh, she had to do it.” What does she want me to do? [Tracy giggles.] Say “thank you” for [the] next twenty years? That’s how they look at it, and that’s why they pull away. I don’t [want] them to say “thank you” to me. I don’t want to have anything to do. I’ll just keep my connection as far as three hours a party, and that’s it. To be honest with you, they’re kind of scared to do things for each other, mainly because if it goes, it goes good, [but] if it goes bad, they have to take the shame; they have to take the blame. And there’s no appreciation for the time and effort they put toward [something].

There are extensive expectations in reciprocal exchange. The favor-thank you balance is omnipresent, but it explains “why they pull away” from the Iranian community. Limiting interaction with community, for Aresh and Gholam Ali, can be summed up in two ways; first, either you are or not involved; second, beyond one’s intimate circle of friends, a lack of trust, conspiracy theories, boredom, and jealousy define relationship dynamics. Suspicion is “ingrained in our culture from way back,” according to Gholam Ali, who limits involvement because of the “very complicated
ARESH: There are two types of Iranians here: they don’t want to do anything with the other Iranians [or like my involvement where] my house was open. For me, having been with Iranians, I feel a little bit better. Plus, my kids learn the culture.

GHOLAM ALI: There [are] really great bonds between friends, but when the circle gets larger, they don’t mess with each other. It’s a lack of trust in everything; all the different conspiracies. I see that in my in-laws constantly. They travel here; they try not to get involved in any Iranian [functions] ‘cause they’re afraid they [local Iranians] may cause trouble for them. They’re very suspicious of others. It’s been ingrained in our culture from way back. Iranians are aliens: “We’re this; we’re that; we did that.” We’re so proud of our history, but what is that going to do for us today? That is what our problem is as a culture. I’m not excluding myself from the rest of Iranians. There [are] some impressive Iranians in this community—and in Iran—but as a whole, we’re individuals. It’s a very
complicated social structure. Maybe that’s why I don’t get involved. Things come out in all sorts of things: “How we met? How this guy came on to you? My wife fell head over heels for this guy.” It was really driving my wife crazy, and I said, “Don’t even think about it.” Some [of it] is boredom, jealousy—a combination—not want[ing] somebody else to be better than themselves. It’s a very complex culture. I try to ease up on it ‘cause that’s what my dad used to say. It completely disrupted our household.

Similarly, Lili reveals the intricacies of class divisions, which comprise a “very interesting mix … [of Iranian] people [who] come from all over.” Unlike the marker of occupation made by Zohreh, Lili “layers” Iranians within the strata according to an utterance; “he had this tone when he was speaking Farsi.”

LILI: I know some good Iranian people here that I really enjoy, but they are really limited. Unfortunately, they all left to other states. Many girls who go to U of M are more involved in that community. I came here another time of my life, so I didn’t get a chance to meet them. I just met the older people, who I don’t like. Some of them are really nice. There is a group of Iranians that get along here. If they invite me, I go [but] it’s on the
surface. It’s like clashes and things going on between them. They are not my cup of tea.

When you come to the U.S., [Iranian] people come from all over, and you never know until you start talking to them. It’s [a] very interesting mix. They come here, they [are] educated now; there is opportunity. This woman from [the lower class] get[s] married to this guy, and now she’s like a millionaire—living [a] luxury life here. And that’s part of the community. She just open[s] her mouth, and I know where she’s coming from. Not saying that I’m from the best place in Tehran, but I have nothing to do with that person. So to me, just being in the community is okay, but I can’t really get involved. I met this guy here; he’s educated; he’s very nice, but he had this tone when he was speaking Farsi. I was saying, “Where are you from?” He would say, “I am from Shush,” and Shush is [a] very low class part [of Tehran]. I couldn’t believe it; he said it with pride. We still see each other. It is something that bothers me here the in [the] community.

People who are my friends, we get along on Facebook, that kind of communities. They are all
people I knew. We all share the same thing: the same values; taking piano classes or taking language classes or going to paint. It was that culture that was admired: going to museums; watch all the Russian movies; Italian movies; going to art school. We were doing it because we loved it and appreciated it.

While education is the equalizer of opportunity, it does not cut through class divisions. The signifier—“she just open[s] her mouth”—signifies her position in the hierarchy. Lili claims to “know where she’s coming from,” which determines whether she will interact with this person. The “very interesting mix” of Iranians includes hypergamy and intrigue; “this woman … married this guy, and now she’s like a millionaire living [a] luxury life here.” The educated Iranian from Shush, a “very low class” section of Tehran, remains alienated from Lili’s intimate circle, and engagement in her personal, private sphere. And although she still sees this person, his pride in his roots “is something that bothers” her about the Twin Cities’ community.

Lili’s case shows that immigrants who have arrived recently (e.g., first-generation of the revolution) possess a half-hearted connection with the community. Whereas Iranian students have the opportunity to forge lifelong friendships if they are affiliated with PSOM, others may only know a small clique of Iranians through intimate family circles. Lili’s connection to the community exists through her husband and his parents. She says, I “just met older people, who I don’t like.” In order not to avoid getting too involved, and thereby avoid gossip, conspiracies, mistrust, and jealousy, some Iranians prefer to keep their interaction “on the surface.” Lili knows “a group of Iranians that get
along here. If they invite me, I go, [but] it’s on the surface. It’s like clashes and things going on between them.” Her preference to is maintain “really great bonds between friends,” and finding solace in virtual communities, who share an appreciation of art, music, language, film, and museums, are preferable.

Iranians are conflicted by connections with those whom would never be part of their friendship circles in Iran. Although some respondents recognize that Iranians here are “nice,” and “there is opportunity” for them, the achieved status of becoming an educated person (and the implicit reference to the trappings of the nouveau riche) does not supersede the class divisions. Iranians in the Twin Cities are aware of multiple groupings, and where they fit within the “invisible hierarchy.” While some maintain a surface relationship with the “high society Iranians” for business purposes, others avoid it in order not to be brought down. The centripetal effects of large group gatherings uncover negative attitudes and behaviors that incite centrifugal forces, the effect of which is to draw back into an intimate circles of friends.

The Discriminating Craft of Public Self

[In Germany, there is an] often-cited joke. ... A black man in Germany is asked: “Where are you from?”

He answers: “From Munich.”

Q: “And your parents?”

A: “Also from Munich.”

Q: “And where were they born?”

A: “My mother in Munich.”
Q: “And your father?”
A: “In Ghana.”
Q: “Ah, so you’re from Ghana.”

Not so much a punch line as a stereotype, the joke reinforces the idea that the real, unbreakable tie a migrant has is to his or her “country of origin” … even if the person was born in his home country.

(Ghorashi, 2009, p. 84)

Iranians v. Persians
I am an Iranian
with terrorist tattooed on my forehead
that reminds everyone I meet
of the hostage situation in 1979
my passport gives permission
to every international airport
to escort me to the back room
and strip-search me to the bone

As soon as a bomb explodes—
World Trade Center in New York
Federal Building in Oklahoma—
every news station reports with no shame:
it’s probably Iranians again

But you Persians
have the soft and friendly look of a Persian cat
beauty of a Persian rug
you live your lives
without verbal repetition
that your father has one wife
and she is the boss

You live your lives
without restating
that camels live in the zoo
and are not a mode of transportation

When one asks
the difference between Iran and Persia
you mumble
it’s the same thing
but forget to mention
Persians don’t have enough Iranian blood
running through their hearts
to eat the harsh words of society
Discrimination and prejudice pose a significant centrifugal force upon Iranians, and their ability to “attach” themselves to Minnesota and Minnesotans. U.S.-Iranian relations and Middle Eastern political events establish the backdrop against which one’s public image is crafted and narrative content chosen for Iranian diasporans in the Twin Cities. Following Cohen (1985), performing identity entails “a mêlée of symbol and meaning cohering only in its symbolic gloss” (20). Intermittent interactions with Iranians in the public sphere possess a degree of depth because of a shared historical repertoire, while interactions with Minnesotans are characterized by the symbolic gloss that presents a thin veneer of Irananness. Iranians confront and negotiate discrimination vis-à-vis Minnesotans, which discloses varying degrees of liminality. First, negotiating “Minnesota Nice” or “Minnesota Ice” entails being able to “read” “covert prejudice” and cliquishness. Second, because Minnesotans “don’t even know where Iran is,” Iranians constantly have to explain Iran’s complex social structure and history (e.g., revolution, war, religious persecution), a lesson which escapes the average Minnesotan. Third, the phenotypic contrast between Iranians and the predominantly Scandinavian and European
Minnesotans renders Iranians conspicuous. Finally, one’s social location at the time of the revolution impacts family and self-identity.

Curiously, despite Marvasti and McKinney’s (2004) claims of extensive discrimination against Middle Easterners and Mahdavi’s (1998) research cataloging incidences of discrimination against Iranians in the U.S., my respondents report brushes with discrimination as relatively benign, although they qualify their responses with “but”: “Well, I haven’t really faced discrimination but…” The qualifier indicates remarks regarding their accent, phenotype, and/or a derogatory, essentialist category (e.g., “camel jockeys,” “terrorists,” “pedophiles,” “misogynistic oppressors”). Phenotype sets the stage for latent discrimination; Iranians’ “accent” and/or “look” identify them as “foreign” and “different.” Twin Cities’ Iranians typically educate, explain, and model a philosophy of understanding and association. While some ignore the incident of discrimination, others invoked similar strategies to Middle Easterners and Iranians when faced with discrimination, including: transforming the interaction into a teachable moment; finding humor in Americans’ ignorance; playfully confusing the discriminator; passing as Italian, Jordanian, Egyptian, et cetera. rather than confront the discriminator or take path of least resistance. Another strategy is to separate Iranian and American friendship circles to preserve energy in order to express emotion and thoughts in Persian, and thereby avoid having to “explain that it’s a complicated country.” The presentation of Iranianness relates to highlighting ethnicity (Persian) rather than national identity (Iranian). For example, the switch from “Iranian” to “Persian” students occurred during the era of the revolution and hostage crisis. Image management in the revolutionary
period prompted the name change. For Americans, Persia evokes images of cats and carpets. Tahireh had to set her co-workers straight after they teased her about her accent. Because many Minnesotans lack a global worldview, Tahireh keeps two circles of friends. She prefers to express herself in Persian, rather than English.

TAHIREH: [My co-workers] laugh at me, because I have an accent. I told them in a meeting, “I have [experienced] prejudice. Don’t laugh at me or make fun of me. Laugh with me, if you want to laugh.” I have lots of friends, [but] usually I don’t mix them together, because then you have to speak English, and I love to speak Farsi. American friends—I really want them to know more about other people’s culture. At work, if I’m talking to my manager, I stand [with my arms crossed]; this, in Iranian culture, is a [sign of] respect. They told me, “Why you are so closed? This means that you don’t want to talk to me or you are angry.” I said, “See, this is culture. You should know and respect my culture, and I respect your culture.”

Rose felt communication with other parents at her daughter’s school was important to combating loneliness. Although her husband discouraged her from learning English, she insisted it was critical in order to create a niche in Minnesota.
ROSE: I can’t talk [without an accent]. I promised myself to go back every year to Iran [but it was] disruptive. [My] husband encouraged me to not do English, [but] I couldn’t communicate with [the] parents at [my daughters’] school. I felt so lonely, but [as] my communication skills [improve], I feel more [like I] belong.

Iranians are constantly reminded of their outsidedness, particularly in light of the persistent interrogative: “Where are you from?” While most respondents “say it straight,” and say they are Iranian, one respondent refers to herself as “Persian, because they [Minnesotans] don’t even know what I’m talking about.” Iranians are matter-of-fact about being hyphenated, “accented” people. Although prideful of their heritage, Iranians recognize that time has given sway to some “American blood.” Time allows them to “feel a sense of ownership towards American culture and American people.” Thus, ownership in adopted and pride in inherited culture combine to control the interaction as an educational encounter. Iranians explain they are Iranian, “an Iranian-born person” or “originally from Iran” in order to breakdown stereotypes.

NEDA: I’m so proud of being an Iranian. My faith is coming originally from Iran. If somebody asks me—that’s a very, very common question—“Where are you from, by the way?”—because of my look, I’m so proud to say, “I was born in Iran, and I grew up with Persian culture.”
NADIA: I say Iranian. I have an accent. Look at me. [When people said discriminatory things], it wasn’t easy for me. A friend—Minnesotan—I have to kind of explain that it’s a complicated country. Even when you explain, they don’t get that. Even some of my relatives don’t like black people. Come on! Look at the color of your face! What about [how] the white people [are] thinking of us? What I learned in U.S. [is] that everyone is the same. I told my mom, and also my sister, we are different, but this one thing is similar.

AZAM: [I don’t go to the mosque], because I don’t have the time. My family was not very religious, [but] I chose to wear hijab in seventh grade. [In high school in Minnesota] I was just standing out like a sore thumb. [Tracy giggles.] I would walk in the hallway, and kids were talking: “She doesn’t have ears. She’s bald.” All these judgments; that is another thing I pulled through in my life. Early ‘80s, I decided to take my hijab off, because of the revolution. Even people from [my] country were looking at me differently, even though I had nothing to do with the new regime. I couldn’t get a job.
I consider myself an Iranian-born person who has been living in this country for thirty years. I definitely consider myself Iranian–Iranian–American. I lived over there for sixteen years, and I’ve been here since ’77. I feel a sense of ownership towards American culture and American people. My son says, “Mom, I’m so proud of you. You know how to make friends.” But I have to get myself out of my comfort zone; I try to make new friends, and I try to expand my connection with people. My philosophy is we need to have people in our life and we can learn from each other. It’s very important to be with people.

I personally think I have a little bit responsibility to give the other person—who’s seeing me for the first time—the chance to get to know me, even though they’re going to reject me and be judgmental. A lot of people think I’m Mexican. Then, when I start talking, they’re like:

“Oh, that’s a different accent. Where are you from?”

“I’m from Iran.”

“Where?”

“Iran! Next to Iraq?”
“Oh, ‘Eye-ran’.

“No, ‘Ear-rawn’. It’s not ‘Eye-ran’. It’s ‘Ear-rawn’. That’s how you say it.”

“Oh, okay.”

I can take two paths: I can be defensive and ugly or I can be nice and educate people. I want them to know me, because whatever they know previously, it’s not good information. I am going to take that responsibility to educate them; to change them. It depends how much value I’m putting on that identity of mine. I do have a lot of value for who I was and where I came from, because I had a good childhood. I have good memories from my country; from my parents.

The pedagogical approach taken by Neda, Nadia, and Azam relates to the fact that “whatever they [Minnesotans and Americans] know previously, it’s not good information.” But the difficulty in providing an explanation is “they don’t get that,” because “it’s a complicated country.”

ZOHREH: I still have a very strong accent. People ask me everywhere [where I am from]. They haven’t seen a foreigner. They don’t even know where Iran is. I explain what I am, and I don’t ride camels. I never say Iranian-American. Never! Anyone who says to me, “Are you Persian?” I say, “Persian is
our heritage and our culture, but I’m not Persian, because I am a person.” People don’t want to [say] “Iran,” because they’re scared of judgment and the media. Persian is a rug. It’s a cat. [Tracy laughing.] It’s not a person.

SHAYDA: I always [say I am] Persian, because they don’t even know what I’m talking about. I love it. One person told me, “Is this in Europe?” I do not fit in here one hundred percent, and I do not fit in Iran one hundred percent. I’m in limbo land. I had the privilege to live in three countries. It did not take me long to realize that [Minnesotans] are in their own little cocoon. They were extremely nice, but it goes only that far. You don’t know how many times in a day I have to repeat [the answer to the question]: “You have an accent. Where are you from?” [Tracy and Shayda laugh.] Until the day I die, I will always feel, deep down in my heart, that I am a foreigner here. If I would have left when I was much younger, maybe I would not have felt that way.

Also, the revolution put such a scar in my life. I left Iran during the bomb dropping of Iraq, so I experienced that fear. I went to France, and every
single day I was praying, and I was hoping, that my family will be alive, and their houses will stand. Those are scars that will never, never fade away. Here, I cannot share my experience. My neighbor[s] know nothing about my life. They don’t even know where is Iran. I love to look at their ignorance. That’s cool; they’re happy in their own little world.

I went to India and Philippines, and I have talked to Indian people and to American Indian people and to American Philippine people, and they have the same things to say to me: How can I share this with an American? They never even saw the other side of the world. Tell me [something] besides work, besides the weather, and school. I have a very good friend; she’s a second-generation German, and her husband is Italian. I have shared many of my experiences with her, and she has shared many of her parent’s experiences with me. They would tell their kids: “Shhhh, don’t say you’re German.” It’s the same thing. Iranians are so ashamed of Ahmadinejad and the government. Sometimes, I’m so scared of prejudice, [but] if they ask me where I’m from, I have to say it straight.
NATE: I had an ongoing argument with every Iranian in this country. Everyone calls themselves Persian. By the way, the word Persian came into being after the hostage crisis. They started saying “Persian,” because they just didn’t want to say they’re from Iran. Since 1977, this is what I saw. Before that, they were Iranians, and then everybody became Persians. I used to be actually Jordanian, because I didn’t want to argue. Believe me, if they knew I was Iranian, they would’ve killed me. Jordanian? They didn’t know what the hell that meant. It’s just a foreign guy who plays pool and takes our money. But the Persian thing? I was arguing against it from day one. First of all, I am not Persian. There are sixteen ethnic groups in Iran. I do have some Persian in me—my mother’s dad was from [the] dynasty before the Qajar.

While Nate might take issue with Shayda’s claims to being Persian, Shayda feels no need to explain to Minnesotans, since they are “happy in their own little world” and “in their own little cocoon.” Iranians see Minnesotans as culturally illiterate—“they never even saw the other side of the world”—which contrasts sharply with their real world experiences (of revolution and war), and precludes them from sharing their experiences. Exasperated by such encounters, Iranians befriend other “accented people,”
because of mutual understanding and common experiences. In so doing, they engage in amateur ethnological studies, comparing and contrasting their experiences, and commiserating in their frustration—“How can I share this with an American?” For example, sharing mutual shame, because of past (Nazi Germany) and present (President Ahmadinejad) governmental actions, diffuses the need to “explain” oneself. Other transplants “get it,” allowing friendship circles to be founded upon and grow from life lessons acquired through the immigrant experience. Paradoxically, discrimination humanizes Iranians by refusing to become “defensive,” “ugly,” “to get out of my comfort zone … and learn from each other … [because] it’s very important to be with people.” In so doing, the discriminator wears the label of the ugly American.

MEREDITH: I think there is such a separation between the cultures, and such misunderstanding, that it’s not talked about. The reality is, we all live through our neighbors. Unless you go to the same places together, you don’t know each other, and there’s a lot of fear. [Meredith crying.] Every time I think I’m passed it, something will trigger it. It’s still within me.

NEDA: People in Minnesota are nice, and more interested [Neda laughs], but I had [a] very, very bad experience. My sister [and I] were waiting for the doctor. I had my niece on my lap, and I was reading a Persian book. There was a woman next to me [who]
started mumbling. I was wondering, “What’s wrong with her?” I was thinking of everything except my language. There was a young guy—American—behind us. He started telling her, “You’re prejudice! You’re a racist!” She said, “Shut up!” I said, “What has happened here?” That woman said, “You [are] talking in a different language. You [are] offending me.” I said, “I’m just reading a book in my own language. It’s for children. Why should that offend you?” She jumped up from her chair to come and beat me. People said, “Call security!” For many days, I just cried when I remembered the way that she wanted to attack me. In this century, you can still see people [who are] ignorant. She didn’t even know who I was; where I came from, what my background was. She probably thought I was Muslim. I just try to explain to people that [it] is the government; that’s only ten or twenty percent of people. All Iranians love Americans. They love to take care of you—as a guest in their country. So when you hear about Iran, don’t judge people. I try to explain [so] there wouldn’t be a stereotype about Iranians.
The American public sphere can thus erupt at the utterance of Persian being spoken or read aloud. Neda takes the pedagogue’s approach—“I try to explain so there won’t be a stereotype about Iranians”—but also is frustrated by Minnesotans who rush to judgment before knowing her origins, background, and being mistaken for a Muslim.

**PARDIS II:** In my entire fifteen years that I have been here, I was offended [only a few times, because of] how I look, and who I am. I feel that this is my home. [I say I’m] originally from Iran. I’ve always told my kids that you are Iranian and American, and you can be very proud of both. My younger kids don’t like to be Iranian. My older daughter, she has been to Iran more than my younger daughter, and she is proud. She introduces herself as an Iranian and American. She can understand [and] speak [Farsi]. It’s like my English with an accent. She feels she has some tools. We used to go back [to Iran] every other year, but after the kids started school, and work, it’s not as often.

The comparative analysis of experiences of discrimination by first-, 1.5, and second-generation Iranians provided by Pardis II emphasizes age as a factor in identification with and pride in Iranian identity, and the importance of this for standing up to the discriminator. Bob states: “Kids don’t recognize it [discrimination]. They’re oblivious to it. [My] nephews and nieces are some of the most popular kids in their own
schools. Kids are kids. They don’t know what discrimination is or racism. The
grownups teach them.” He philosophizes that his second-generation nieces and nephews
have an edge in popularity, because Iranians have a “chip on their shoulder.” This chip is
a defense mechanism, passed down through generations, that facilitates adaptation. His
nieces and nephews “are a little forceful [because that] chip on their shoulder is a little
bigger than some other kids,” and it “kind of intimidates people.” Still, discrimination
may become prevalent when they graduate from high school and enter the “real world,
and compete for jobs.”

Bob rationalizes that discrimination is inevitable—“You’re gonna feel it; it’s
there”—but aligns with his father’s philosophy: “‘If you’re ever discriminated against,
it’s because you allowed [it].’ That’s a little romantic, I think, because he was never
discriminated against.” Bob poses a case: if at a gas station he experiences
discrimination, he will say, “Screw it,” and take his business elsewhere (although he calls
the action “elitist”). He agrees with and critiques his father’s philosophy:

BOB: You’ve lived all your life in Iran, which is
a very homogenous community—a lot of different ethnic
groups—but when it comes right down to it, all
Iranians are Iranians. If you’re highly educated, if
you are an order-giver instead of an order-taker, then
you simply won’t allow anyone to discriminate against
you. Nobody will dare. Once you have economic power,
you tend not [to] be discriminated against, and the
ones who do discriminate against you don’t matter
anyway. Because of numbers, we don’t really feel it that way. If we were twenty-five percent of the population, like American Blacks, then [it would] be a different story. But Iranians being Iranians, that chip on the shoulder kind of intimidates people.

Both and Abdullah put the act of discrimination in the hands of the discriminated, by allowing the discriminator the power to control the interaction. This is a choice the “assimilationist” Iranian makes, and thereby becomes an “order-giver.”

ABDULLAH: [For] my daughters, I didn’t see any discrimination. Occasionally, you’ve got to deal with it. If a person discriminated [against] me, he’s not going to hurt me. I just ignore them. I had a neighbor in Roseville. He was training his ten-year old kids to point their shell gun out their window [at me]. “What are you teaching to your children?” I moved out of my home, because I didn’t want to have any backyard neighbors. I made a better choice. I made good money, and I’m living better than him. He realized himself later on, that it wasn’t a good idea. If I engage [in the same type of behavior], for how long [will] I have to suffer?

I was in the Jacuzzi with my wife—during the hostage crisis—there were a couple of ladies [who]
said, “You are not from here. Where are you from?”
If I say to this lady, “I’m from Iran,” she’s gonna get out of the pool. [So I] said, “I’m Egyptian.” [And she said], “Oh, so you are nice people. You released all the hostages.” Later on, slowly, I approached [her], and I said, “I’m from Iran but I’m not hostage taker.”

Choice is a tool to live a better life than the discriminator. The intimidating “chip on the shoulder” guards the “assimilationist” against harm and suffering. It sets the tone of the interaction, and turns discrimination and prejudice back on the agent. The student dressed in “Middle Eastern clothing” laughs hysterically at the ignorance of a fellow student, who mistakes him for a “dirty Jew,” and “walked down the hallway.”

SHAYDA: I’m happy for my kids that they are fitting in here. It is very important to me for them to speak Farsi, but that’s as far as I go.

NIA: My older brother had sent to [my son] this long draping outfit that he had picked up in Lebanon or somewhere, and one of those little skull caps. [My son] was one of those people who didn’t care; he wore it to school. The ironic thing is that some kid passed him in the hallway and said, “Dirty Jew,” and my son just laughed. He thought that was hilarious. He was like, “You idiot! [Tracy and Nia laughing.]”
This is not Jewish. I’m not Jewish.” [Tracy and Nia laughing.] The guy was upset because he had insulted my son, and he kind of was thinking that he would react, but he just laughed, and then walked on down the hallway.

Abdullah, like Bob, sees discrimination as a generational issue. While his daughters did not experience it, he faced it occasionally, but refuses to allow it to hurt him. Abdullah takes satisfaction in making “a better choice” than his angry neighbor. Yet, his early experience as a young, Iranian during the hostage crisis, similar to Nate’s, led to them feigning their national origin in order to play the “stump the dumb American” game.

While discrimination acts as a centrifugal force for Iranians in finding a sense of home and belonging among Minnesotans, it pulls Iranians centripetally toward their own community. In pulling away from Minnesotans, Iranians may construct monolithic portrayals of Minnesotans and Americans, and thereby mutually discriminate. This phenomenon forges solidarity among Iranians, which is an important perennial force for all immigrants, not just Iranians. However, internal politics, as noted in other parts of this chapter, arise as Iranians engage in close community interaction with other Iranians. Furthermore, Bahá’í Iranians who are mistaken for Muslims may also perpetuate negative ideas of Muslims, rather than educating the discriminator about differences and similarities between these two religious groups. Iranians’ frustrations thwart explanation, since Minnesotans tend not to have a deep understanding of the Middle East or Iran.
Discrimination in the Post-9/11 Era

In the post-9/11 era, discrimination and stereotyping galvanized at the state and individual levels. Following the attacks, profiling policies by the U.S. government targeted Iranians, despite the fact that Iran had no involvement (Mahdavi 2006:226). Policies against Iranian Americans do not relate to national security; they “‘make a political statement’ about Iranians” (ibid.:234-235). Citizens transformed into deputies, who embraced their “patriotic duty” to report “suspicious” people and activities (Mahdavi 2006:230; Marvasti and McKinney 2004:91). Profiling and discrimination have collective and individual consequences for Iranians. They thwart identification with U.S. citizenship, civic engagement, political representation, and, if internalized, foster negative construction of group identity (Mahdavi 2006:214-215). “Iranians in America have been cast as disloyal, potentially dangerous, and certainly undesirable” (ibid.:232). The 9/11 attacks forged a fragile unity around the U.S. as victim and against the Middle Eastern “Other” by deemphasizing race, ethnicity, political differences, and domestic terrorism (Zizek 2002). Middle Eastern Americans were denied the “new sense of unity and camaraderie” (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:74-75) by solidifying boundaries through social exclusion (ibid.:75-76). “The immigrant other is seen as ‘culturally different’ and possessing values that are not only at ‘cross-purposes’ from Western values but that threaten to destroy Western civilization in its entirety” (ibid.:77). The attacks of 9/11 tore open the wounds that had scarred over from previous experiences of discrimination since the revolution and hostage crisis.

MEREDITH: I was hysterical. It was a trigger of, “Oh my God, I don’t belong.” I’ll never forget—my
kids were in elementary school and I had to be there. Of course, I hadn’t said anything to my kids. I ran into the principal, who was an amazing man, and as soon as I saw him, I was crying nonstop. [Meredith starts crying.] I remember him saying, “You belong here. You’re one of us.” I do still separate myself, and I’m okay with it. In many ways, it’s really wonderful, because you have two perspectives, but when you isolate yourself [too much, it happens in] a really negative way. It took me back to my high school years, where I just felt like [Meredith starts crying] I can’t talk. I’m from Iran. I have to be silent. I’m muted. Period! When I think back—the adults—why weren’t they more vocal? They too internalized. They didn’t have a way to get it out either. That’s what they were modeling for us; a lot of us kinda picked that up.

ZOHREH: [Then] 9/11 happened. For the first couple years, nothing happened. We were all scared. Our visas were endangered. Bush was on, and they attack Iraq. [Then] they started talking more and more and more about Iran. When Ahmadinejad went to [the] United Nations and denied the existence of
Israel, and said that, “You should wipe Israel out of the world,” people realized, “What is this country that has that crazy Ahmadinejad?” People started making comments, [but] nothing personal. I started working for [the] State of Minnesota in the prison system. One person turned to me and said, “We work too much for these prisoners. We should send them all to Iran where they belong.” I stopped and said, “Why Iran?” He said, “Iranians are all just a bunch of murderers and rapists anyway.” Everybody heard that. Nobody did anything about it. I said to him, “If you don’t stop talking, I stop you.” And then, last week, we’re talking about child rape, and [one guy said], “I guess in your country all men fuck with younger kids.” I said Mark, “I am giving you the opportunity to take that back.” I looked at my boss and said, “Am I supposed to file another useless incident report?” And my boss told him to stop that. So, yeah, negative media. They say that we ride camels, and cover our faces, and we eat cockroaches for dinner, and all of our men are raping young girls. It’s their responsibility to learn about other cultures, but
media doesn’t help. Having George Bush took us back fifty years.

NIA: Around 9/11 [my husband] had just begun working at an engineering company and there was a woman who had a desk across from him, and she was very upset at being near him during 9/11. She left and went home. She kept glaring at my husband, and then, finally, she just got up and left. They’re now good friends. My husband jokes about that a lot; not that incident, but in general about terrorists. I think he does that deliberately to let people say, “Okay, think about what you’re thinking.” He tries to highlight the ridiculous attitude that is often taken by people who identify everyone from the Middle East as a fundamentalist terrorist, and the irony in the fact that we have state sponsored terrorism in the US that is far more horrendous than anything these small terrorist groups have done. That’s something the Americans are, by and large, unaware of. And so I think he juxtaposes that sometimes. I avoid the whole thing all together, but my husband’s very comfortable and able to do that in a way that it’s comfortable for a lot of people. It’s a joking-type thing. For
example, he’ll go out drinking with people, and they’ll say, “Why are you drinking beer?” and he’ll say, “’Cause I’m a fundamentalist Iranian.” [Nia and Tracy laughing.]

PARDIS II: After 9/11, we were scared like everybody else, and we were devastated like everyone else. But I never felt people were coming and asking if we were safe. Even when they ask, it always gives you the idea that you’re not one of them.

PARDIS I: After 9/11, [people are] more suspicious. [I] tell [my son], “Please shave. You don’t want to look like a terrorist. Have a cleaner look.” Sometimes I laugh, but sometimes [I get] angry.

NEDA: When I travel, that’s kind of hard for me, because there is a stereotype about Iranian[s]. Even before September 11th they just kind of throw the passport in front of me and said, “Iranian?” Once in Canada [and] once in Los Angeles, I had to tell them, “Yes, I’m Iranian, but I’m Bahá’í, and I was persecuted in Iran for many years, but I escaped.” They didn’t even care. With Ahmadinejad, it changed back: they don’t execute; they just intrude; they
encourage ignorant people in the mosques. They are afraid of the United Nations; they don’t execute them officially. Their phones are monitored. The problem is [lack of] freedom. Even if they are educated, they get brainwashed. Everyday that I wake up, I thank God I am in this country. I appreciate my freedom.

As noted above, mutual discrimination typically occurs among Bahá’ís to draw attention to the fact that they are not Muslim. Neda’s and Pardis I’s comments demonstrate the attempt of Bahá’ís to differentiate from Muslim Iranians, although this does not address the problem of stereotyping Muslims or Iranians. In fact, it discloses an outlook on Muslim Iranians as looking a certain way—“Please shave. You don’t want to look like a terrorist.”—as well as assumptions of respectability—“Have a cleaner look.” Bahá’í Iranians experience double discrimination; religious persecution in Iran and in the U.S. for their nationality. Whether they escaped Iran or followed U.N. refugee channels, they fled only with prized, sentimental possessions, endured a liminal phase in a neutral country (Turkey, Pakistan), and separated from family. Bahá’ís find discrimination baffling and frustrating, especially since Americans cannot distinguish Muslims from Bahá’í Iranians, and may not care. Bahá’í lessons for the prejudicial person relate to Iranian diversity, being friendly toward the U.S., and experiences of religious persecution in Iran.

Each new terrorist incident “triggers” feelings of outsidedness, fear, and muteness. Iranians hold the media and political leaders responsible (especially Presidents George W. Bush and Ahmadinejad). Parental internalization of negative treatment
encourages conforming to the stereotype, which speaking out could change through education. As Meredith noted, if parents do not speak out, children internalize that and are silenced, unable to voice opposition to grossly constructed stereotypes—camel riders, pedophiles, cockroach eaters. While most respondents felt attacks were not personal, they are implicated in the stereotype. Iranians remain detached in the liminal space of discrimination. Some educate and critique the stereotype’s simplicity, some joke and laugh, but if Minnesotans remain attached to inaccurate understandings of Iranians, they feel justified to discriminate against the “Other.” Respondents who felt it was Iranians’ responsibility to educate Americans about their ignorance far surpassed those who thought it was the responsibility of Americans to know. At the same time, Iranians in the Twin Cities seize control of the interaction by bemusing, confounding, teaching, mocking, and any number of strategies to suit the interaction. In so doing, the Iranian “assimilationist” wrests the rules of the game and baffles the ignorant.

Centripetal Confluences and Continuities of Identity

Unity is marked by “the oneness of diversity, [n]ot oneness locked in singularity” (Attar 1984:191). The individual’s attempt to escape group association is in vain; he or she is bound to “various necks by one tight collar” (ibid.). Transnationally, Iranians experience the loneliness of unity in several ways. First, the discriminator does not distinguish individual from group. In the discriminator’s eyes, terrorism and fanaticism bind Iranians by one collar; the loneliness of unity is experienced through dehumanizing stereotypes, prejudice, and racism. Second, Iranians’ hopeful approach to their own community
claims a common national thread, though its “oneness of diversity” has numerous fault lines along class, religion, time of arrival, ethnicity, among others. Third, the illusion of unity is ephemeral due to the political devices of power differentials, because the challenge of representing unity for public consumption is subject to competing claims of authority (Zank 2004). While the politics of representation discourages intra-community involvement, it encourages individuals to venture into the American immigrant landscape in search of a voice.

Transnational Kinship and Gender: The “Traditional Patriarchal Household” Revised

Transnational kinship and friendship flows have a centripetal force that reinvigorates Iranianness and reconnects individuals to family. Transnational visits from relatives (grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins) are expensive, grueling (especially for aging family members), common, and extend for several months at a time. Unless an apartment or condominium is purchased or rented, visitors can disrupt or support family life. For example, Nadia’s meddling mother-in-law makes her life hell, while Shayda’s mother-in-law is appreciated, because she assumes the roles of nanny, maid, and personal chef for months.

NADIA: I have lots of difficulties with my in-laws. [They] make my life hell. [They stay for] one, two months, but after two days, I can’t take my mother-in-law. As she got older, she got more difficult. This time they got a place for themselves.
As I get older, I can’t take it. I prefer to get divorced [rather] than living with them.

ROSE: [My] mother-in-law [is] controlling me. [My] younger brother-in-law paid all [the] family bills for fifteen years. [When my] sister-in-law came from Iran they used to force relationships with family. [But] my voice counts. [I also had to] resolve [my] communication skills. I don’t feel left out any more. I feel comfortable with the challenge.

Paradoxically, transnational family visit may exacerbate feelings of “lost” identity. Similarly, trips back to Iran heighten an individual's sense of “un-Iranianness,” even while performing mundane, taken-for-granted activities (i.e., buying bread, negotiating ta’arof). Furthermore, because visits to Iran are brief, they offer a selective, skewed view that instills an appreciation of certain privileges in the U.S. (e.g., orderliness, rules).

In the decades following the revolution, Iranian communities in the U.S. were reshaped, and emotional ties reinforced, in part, through family reunification policies. Analogous to the multiple-floor apartment complex structure and neighborhood kin-friendship networks in Iran, extended family members in Minnesota coalesce in adjacent condos, homes or apartments. Transnationally, “proximate pockets” comprise extended family, fictive kin, and friends from childhood connections, neighbors, and/or religious affiliates (especially Bahá’í).
Matchmaking is one outcome of micro-concentrations of Iranians in Minnesota, facilitated by the relatively large percentage of Iranian students in the U.S. (prior to the revolution). It should be reiterated, however, that parental consultation remained critical in the decision to marry. As noted in the previous chapter, authority in the extended family did not neatly extend from the father as the ultimate patriarch. Although some respondents did cite the father as the authoritarian figure, more often than not both parents and grandparents played some role in marriage decisions. In the transnational context, parental control slackened slightly as young Iranian students began to meet each other at university or in university-related settings. Scandalously, some young Iranians decided before consulting parents that they would get married. Soon after she arrived in the U.S., for instance, Azam met her husband through Iranian students in her apartment building. Although she had a traditional marriage, both sets of parents were upset because of their youthful decision and its potential to obstruct the main goal of being in the U.S.; that is, to obtain an education.

AZAM: When [my uncle, my sister, and I] moved into this apartment building, we ran into another Iranian couple, and we became friends. [She] said, “My brothers are here from Texas. I want you to meet them.” I saw this nice, good looking, handsome, young boy, and I’m like, “He would never like me.” I was wrong. He tells his brother he needs to move back to Minnesota. A month later, he asked my mom to marry me. My mom said, “You guys are too young. You need
to finish school.” His dad was furious at him: “I did not send you over there to get married. I sent you to go to school. You are not getting married yet.”

[My husband] lived with me, my sister, my brother, mom, and dad. We were not married. I was still wearing my hijab. If I would get married, I would not get my green card, and [my husband] would not get his. That put a lot of pressure on us as a family. [In] 1984, I got my green card. My grandmother wanted to be here for the wedding. We decided [to] do a religious marriage. I have to go to courthouse [to] be his legal wife, and apply for him to become resident, which was another big transition; a lot of paperwork; a lot of stress in our life; all this immigration stuff. When my green card came, we got married. He had to go out of the country, and come back as a legal person. The best place for him to go is Canada. We have family members over there.

So, 1990, he was missing a lot of things, because of his status. And I got pregnant. He was kind of devastated. He’s like, “I don’t want a child.” I said, “Well, then I can divorce you, ’cause I’m not gonna have an abortion.” Nine months later—boom! I
got laid off. He lost his manager job, too! I don’t have that family support. I was the main financial supporter-provider. It put a lot of stress on my marriage; my parenting. I ended up working in [a] group-home. I could work one to nine, and [my husband was] working during the day. One of us could be a hands-on parent. One day, he came home in January, and was really sad. He said, “I lost my job today.” I said, “Oh, okay. It’s not the first time. We’ve pulled through this many times.” He takes care of the house and cleaning stuff. I’ll do the laundry, pay the bills, and he does other things. So we try to keep it balanced. I don’t have a problem with that.

While Azam’s and her husband’s parents were involved, and “furious” about their decision to marry, they capitulated, evidenced by Azam’s fiancé residing with her family prior to marriage. This, combined with her outward Muslim identity (wearing the hijab), is highly unorthodox, but attests to the malleability of the transnational family and household. Since marriage would jeopardize her legal status, they prolonged the unusual arrangement until Azam obtained her green card. Stresses, such as legal immigration status, unemployment, and unplanned pregnancy, engender instability in “traditional” gender roles, wherein the wife becomes “the main financial supporter-provider … [and] he takes care of the house and cleaning stuff.” Elasticity circumscribes household relations in order to relieve stress, “keep it balanced,” and so “one of us could be a hands-
on parent.” Notably, the priority to have one parent or relative available reveals a distrust of daycares, nannies, and other caregivers of children.

Quasi-matchmaking networks founded through old neighborhood friendships in Iran, family ties, Facebook connections, and tangential community involvement in the Twin Cities reinforce the prevalence of a preference for endogamy. In this way, there is a pool of potential mates for first- and 1.5-generation Iranians, who were unable to return to Iran after the revolution. Gholam Ali, a 1.5 generation Iranian, married in his late thirties. He was introduced to his wife through a mutual acquaintance, they had a “virtual courtship,” and held their wedding ceremony in Iran. Similar to Azam, Gholam Ali refutes monolithic constructions of Iranian marriage. He is open to learning from his wife and grow “as an Iranian, [as an] American, as a person.” At the same time, because they are “still getting to know each other,” their marriage is a “work in progress.”

GHOLAM ALI: My wife has really opened my eyes as an Iranian, [as an] American, as a person. Most people say they know each other for such [a] long time before they get married. We [are] still getting to know each other, although we’ve been together for ten, eleven years. It’s [a] work in progress. [What] we want our kids to have is being close to family and relatives. Both sides are large families; so either one side or the other would get together. [IN Iran] we’d spend the whole Friday together; have lunch, dinner together; play around and be with the cousins.
And that’s something that’s really missing with our kids. Life is so busy here. [My family of orientation] made a point of keeping to tradition; I was to be home on Saturdays for dinner. My sisters’ kids are teenagers, and have got their own schedules. [We’re] scattered all over the place.

Gholam Ali’s marriage to a woman the first-generation of the revolution lent the opportunity to reinvigorate national identity. Yet, in the U.S., family unity is elusive. Time shatters tradition and people are bound by busy schedules. While Gholam Ali’s family of orientation live in close proximity, generational differences between his and his sisters’ children (who are second-generation university students) has “scattered [them] all over the place.” Time is the enemy of unity. Gholam Ali’s recollection of growing up in Iran—“both sides [of his parents had] large families; so either one side or the other would get together. We’d spend the whole Friday together; have lunch, dinner together; play around and be with cousins”—has diminished in Minnesota. While he and his sisters were growing up as Iranian teenagers in the Twin Cities, his father enforced the “keeping to tradition,” which meant being “home on Saturdays for dinner.”

Whereas Gholam Ali’s match was made through a friend, direct or tangential involvement in the Iranian community presents occasions to meet a spouse. Often, the wedding ceremony takes place in Iran, especially if parents and close relatives still live there and the bride comes from Iran (rather than the Twin Cities or another transnational Iranian community). Zohreh describes how her future sister-in-law played matchmaker
at an Iranian function. Although Zohreh is not involved in the community, this gathering proved to be critical for the pull toward community.

ZOHREH: [At an Iranian function, my future sister-in-law said to me]: “You should meet my brother.” I made fun of her brother. [He] was divorced and working at [a pizza chain]. I thought, “Another loser Iranian. Yeah, let’s marry him.” [Tracy laughing.] But he was nothing like what I thought; he was a regional manager. Yes, he was divorced, but I didn’t see [a problem with that]. But then my husband has a lot of issues—a fear of commitment, fear of being hurt. They say time heals. So we got married. By that time, I knew him pretty well. I’d met his parents. He has a sister and two brothers here, who are all married and have family. So I knew the family. [We] decided to get married back home, because my father and his parents live there. We had to have [a] pure, traditional, Iranian marriage [with all the symbols]. Traditionally, all women in the ceremony, and just the groom, comes in. But no, as usual, we have two million men. I was in a strapless wedding gown, and he [the cleric] said, “I can’t look at the naked body of the bride.” He took a
good look at the naked body of the bride, [and] the cleavage. [Tracy laughing heartily.] [We had] a party, and we really held back—two hundred and something there. Everyone talked about how fat the bride is, but we had fun with it. That’s how Iranians are. [Tracy laughing.]

Time remedied Zohreh’s fears of her fiancé’s social and personal taboos—working class job, divorcée, relationship baggage issues. Being familiar with her husband’s family—“I’d met his parents. He has a sister and two brothers here, who are all married and have family. So I knew the family”—was a critical determinant to marry.

“Time heals all wounds.” As a first-generation Iranian woman who watched the revolution atop her father’s shoulders, she wanted a “pure, traditional, Iranian marriage.” Her husband, a first-generation Iranian “stuck student” in the Twin Cities, clings to his Iranian identity tenaciously. They married in Iran because their aging parents lived there. Zohreh’s reference to wanting a “pure, traditional, Iranian marriage” contradicts her references to her “strapless wedding gown,” “cleavage,” and the cleric who cannot escape the gaze, and takes “a good look at the naked body of the bride.”

Nia’s involvement in the small Iranian community in Kentucky was the source of her spousal match. In a small community, “you got to know everyone.”

NIA: Typically, an Iranian would come to town [and] we would help them out. It was a small community, so you got to know everyone. Everyone would [say], “Oh yeah, we know the Iranians,” and they
would be introduced to our family. I met [my husband] through that.

Nadia’s transnational friendship was the source of her eventual marriage to an Iranian working at a Fortune 500 company in Minnesota. Throwing out a joke to a friend, Nadia planted the seed to find “a husband in the U.S.” (i.e., her friend’s brother-in-law). Similar to others, the wedding ceremony was held in Iran, but the legal union, was made in the courthouse, which “legalizes” the fiancé.

NADIA: [I jokingly said to my friend]: “You have to find someone for me in [the] U.S.! What about your brother-in-law?” We had a ceremony back in Iran, but we got married here. My parents really wanted me to get married. They pushed me. My sister said, “I don’t like anyone to come to the house and ask me to marry.” She did exactly the opposite than me; she went to Germany and got married to her [German-Iranian] boyfriend. They met at the university.

While Nadia did not marry according to the khastegari traditional arrangement, pressure from her parents “pushed” her to seek an Iranian husband. Suggesting her friend’s brother-in-law as her future spouse modernizes the traditional approach, a decision her sister made on her own. Nadia’s response contradicts other interviewees’ claims that parents do not force children to marry, but supervise. Happenstance encounters, thus, can led to marriage. On a return trip to visit her ailing father, Shayda met her future husband.
SHAYDA: I came back to Iran, because of my father [who] then passed away. It was fate. [My future husband] went back to Iran to visit his parents, and I happened to be there. [Tracy and Shayda laughing.] In Tehran, we got engaged. He went to San Diego, and I was going to school in Montréal. We stayed engaged for two and a half years before we got married in ’93—long engagement. I didn’t want to come to U.S. My studies were postponed, because of the revolution, and because of my dad’s health. I told Mahmoud, “I love you, but I have to finish my school first.” My studies were way too important. Mahmoud moved to Montréal. The poor guy was miserable.

While the decision to marry was quick, Shayda’s and Mahmoud’s engagement was prolonged because her “studies were way too important.” Their decision, similar to other couples, references the need between them to compromise, find a balance, and ensure the marriage avoids conflict. Similar to Shayda, Nate knew his wife from a young age, and a serendipitous encounter brought them together.

NATE: [My wife and I] met when we were fourteen. I fell in love with her. She kind of turned me down: “I love you as a brother.” “Thank you very much. I already have a sister.” She went to England. I came here. I wrote to her—love letters. I got a call from
a good girl friend of mine, saying, “I ran into her in the street [in London]. She wants your phone number. Can I give it to her?” “Hell, yeah!” [Later] she was in Iran, and she found all these letters I had sent to her. Her mom had hidden them. We talked on the phone for a month. It was decided we were gonna get married in July. My dad said our families were too different. I called my dad and said, “I’m getting married.” He said, “Are you telling me or asking me?” I said, “I’m telling you.” He said, “Who is it?” I said, “Mr. P’s daughter.” There was a pause, and he said, “He’s not an honest man.” I don’t wanna bad mouth my ex-wife. I still don’t know why she came after me, and married me. I was [a] good catch, technically; from a decent family; go to school here; future. She was probably one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever seen. People still talk about her, but there were some things not right. She lied—made things up—about me.

[In 1983] we decided to come to Minneapolis, live here, [finish school], save some money, and then buy things, and go back to Iran. I kind of screwed up at school, [and] she told me she’s not happy; she’s gonna leave me. Her brother came. I knew it was planned.
She had divorce papers from the Iranian Consulate in her purse. She took off with all my dad’s money. I didn’t have anything under my name; our bank account was under her name. I was raised to respect women. She went to California—her sister was in Santa Barbara. For [the] first six months, I tried to get her back. I still loved her. Then love turned into anger, and went completely the opposite way. My mom came from Iran to talk. When my mom came, it was already pretty much done. My mom came and stayed for six months—which was the worst time of my life—after she left, you never know how lonely you are. It took four years for her to divorce me. I finally tracked her down in California; I divorced her in absentia.

Nate’s response is riddled with the paradoxes of the tradition-modernity dichotomy: love marriage-parental warning; good catch-screwed up at school; individual decisions-differences in families; and female versus male head of household. In the end, Nate’s mother was the source of his solace, and her six-month stay assuaged his anger, finalizing the divorce in absentia. By going against his father’s wishes, Nate put fate in his own hands. In this case, parental guidance predicted that the dishonest man raised a dishonest daughter, who absconded “with all my dad’s money.”

Associations with other Iranians, whether formed through minimal involvement in the local community, the university, “fate,” serendipity or neighborhood connections
from Iran, are critical to meeting a spouse. Once the couple determined to marry, they determined to respect traditional procedures was followed: consulting parents for support and advice and seeking their blessings; heeding parent’s warnings of notorious families; prioritizing education before marriage; and holding the marriage ceremony in Iran.

The tradition-modernity interplay alters in transnational families and households. In Iran, families of orientation followed a nearly universal female-homemaker/male-provider pattern. Transnationally, although not a universal pattern, families of procreation reconfigure. Some couples are dual-income professionals, while others have a male-provider/female-explore-her-potential household. In the latter, the female remains a homemaker and raises the children, but explores her talents and humanity through school, starting a home-based business, creating a website, becoming a local celebrity, et cetera. Even in dual-income professional households, females performed stereotypical maternal duties, but explored career options as children grew.

Marriage is a significant centripetal force for Iranians. Even Iranians who married exogamously have spouses who are “adopted” by the community, and prioritize the celebration of Persian traditions and language. While divorce and separation has occurred among some interviewees over the course of this research, the divorced couple still appear at family gatherings together. In this way, “assimilation” also plays out in private sphere gatherings.

Iranian couples approach parenting of their second-generation children pragmatically. First- and second-generation parents acknowledge that American-born, Iranian children must learn lessons on their own, but are vexed by the quick pace of
growing up in the U.S. Concern about failure precludes parents from granting too much freedom. To stem the tide of free choice (and disastrous outcomes potentially), parents act as consultants when children are confronted with critical life decisions (e.g., marriage partners, relocation). Even when children “go it alone,” they are welcomed back if they “lose their way” or need a transitional home. Gholam Ali’s parents allowed him to live on campus; they “were a lot easier on me than my sisters.” While he views his father as an “open-minded” person, willing to incorporate “the good things” from both cultures, his upbringing was “sheltered,” “protective,” and “traditional,” constraining his ability to make his own decisions. Having tasted the “best of both worlds,” first- and 1.5-generation parents assess and weigh the benefits and detriments of both cultures:

GHOLAM ALI: My father had lived in the States, and he tried to instill what he thought was good things in this culture and the good things from our culture. Our father was extremely conscious of and concerned about leaving us alone. We were pretty sheltered. He didn’t want us to make mistakes. Thinking back, I disagree with that. When I left “the Cities” in my early 30s, he still was being protective. [I] said, “It’s time for me to make my own decisions.” In our culture—more traditional families—the girls stay with the family until they’re married off. I met my wife [in California], and then decided to come over here, so it’d be easier for her
to adjust. That was a decision made by the elders. My father persuaded my wife’s father that this would be good. We could have made it there, but it’s that whole parent thing. The culture uses scare tactics: “If you don’t do this, you’re gonna fail miserably.” They [do] not allow you to be free, do as you wish, live life, and experience it.

Leaving children to their own devices is something parents are “extremely cautious of and concerned about.” Because the American public sphere is fraught with the potential to “fail miserably,” traditional Iranian parents wield considerable influence over the decision-making process. Gholam Ali’s father and father-in-law reversed his decision to leave the Twin Cities, based on the advice that it would be easier to adjust here. “My father persuaded my wife’s father that this would be good. We could have made it there, but it’s that whole parent thing. They [do] not allow you to be free, do as you wish, live life, and experience it.”

Even after more than thirty years in the U.S., Azam is cautious about her children roaming their neighborhood, especially her daughter. Frightened of a “perpetrator,” she does not “sense that security here.” Her response aligns with Gholam Ali’s point that a daughter requires more protection, and parents are “too protective.” Azam misses the cousin connection that provided a “more hands-on” experience growing up in Iran:

AZAM: I will not let my daughter go beyond the driveway, and one of us is gonna be out there with her. What’s gonna happen if that perpetrator comes
and grabs them? I don’t sense that security here. Guess we’re too protective. With her [compared to my son] it’s very different; it’s more stressful. My childhood was more hands on. My children are missing the sense of, “What does it feel like to go sleep at your cousin’s house?” There are some disputes within my family, [so] we don’t get to even spend time within the little family we have here.

Another difference between here [in the U.S.] and there [is] eighteen years is the cutoff; the time for me to pull the plug. You never hear that [from Iranians]. A person can be thirty-some years old, and they can still go to the family and ask for help; for a place to live; for money. They’re gonna provide it for them without any questions or degrading a person. My son moved out three years ago to California. After six months, he wanted to come back. I said, “You can come back, but can you tell me why? I’m just curious.” “Well, in California, there’s a few things I can’t have: my mom, my dad, my sister, and my grandpa.” I said, “Come on back.” And for him, being a twenty-one-year old boy, living at home with us, he has no problem. We have no problem. Everyday he
says, “Thank you for not charging me for rent.” I’m like, “Are you out of your mind?” It’s the history. It’s family connection. It’s the richness of the culture and ethnicity. They’re proud of their culture; proud of their family origin; proud of where they came from.

Family connection, according to Azam, gives Iranian culture historical significance and pride in origin. While she and her husband granted her son permission to move to California, he learned by himself that he was missing something—his family. Back in his natal home, “he has no problem.” Family’s maintain an “open-door policy” with children, a strategy to ensure that they do not lose their way. The arbitrary age of eighteen is not a magic number of maturity, according to Iranian parents.

Parents are concerned about raising children who, as Abdullah notes, are “ready for society.” Abdullah worries about his daughters, and does not want to add “one more stranger to this society.” He dreads the dilemma of the first automobile rite of passage—that “every American daughter can have”—in light of his daughter’s choice to go to school in Rochester, Minnesota, because she is “free” and “can do anything”:

ABDULLAH: The younger [daughter] decided to go [to] Rochester. She didn’t know how to live. She thinks, “‘Cause I’m free, I can do anything.” If I don’t support her, I’m adding one more stranger to this society. It’s hard for parents. Every American daughter can have a car at age sixteen. She hit the
deer and she totaled the [car]. Now I’m worried. I wasn’t [a] really tight person to leash my daughters, but I [also] wasn’t giving her freedom [to] do anything. [She’s] mature enough, but not ready for society. My older one, she was home [until getting her degree]. She has] her mind set for the right thing to do. I was age twenty-four, [and still] living with my parents. I was saving the money for my own wedding [and] house. My sister’s kids [will] live [with her] until they get married. Society in Iran doesn’t support [young girls living alone]. They have to learn, but not so fast.

Problematically, Abdullah’s daughter who left home to attend college “didn’t know how to live.” While children “have to learn,” they do not have learn “so fast.” The contrast of his older daughter’s positive experience confirms for Abdullah that staying at home until matured, as he did in Iran with his parents, is critical to success. Between keeping a tight leash and granting children “too much freedom,” parents agonize over what a lack of support might produce.

Neda associates this dilemma with becoming “so Americanized.” Just as Abdullah’s daughter “didn’t know how to live,” Neda reasons that a “child doesn’t know what is the right thing until they get into their twentieth [year].”

NEDA: They [Iranian American children] get so Americanized. There is too much freedom for the kids
in the U.S. A child doesn’t know what is the right thing until they get into their twentieth [year]. In [the] Bahá’í community, the kids are more controlled. It’s not acceptable for a Persian family to see their kids out [in public] like that. I have a friend who has a daughter; she is fifteen, and she is terrible. She was arrested by police once, because the friends were shoplifting. She’s a good girl, but her friends are troublemakers. When she comes to home, she starts fighting with her mom. She broke the door once, because she was slamming [it]. I saw that; I couldn’t believe it. [Neda laughs slightly.] When we were teenagers in Iran, we had no right [to] look straight [into] my dad’s eyes. When I was teenager I had those hormones change, but I always knew you have to respect your parents.

Neda’s reference to the “Persian family” as being impermissible in allowing children to be “out” in the public sphere, prevents them from assimilating the negative attributes of American teenagers: shoplifting, trouble making, disrespecting and fighting with parents, and destroying property. Knowing that “you have to respect your parents,” and even with “those hormones,” “we had no right to look straight [into] my dad’s eyes.”

Aresh, an outlier among the respondents, belonged to the “lost generation” of Iranians. The “lost generation” were unable to return to Iran after the revolution, and
lacked family connections. This meant that their approach to parenting was to make it up as they go, with consideration of U.S. law.

ARESH: We didn’t know how to raise our kids the way our parents raised us. We were [a] lost generation. Should I go with the way my dad did it? I couldn’t do that, because I would have been to jail if I spank the kids. We tried to be moderate. That wasn’t the culture back home. Education was our first priority. At [the] same time, the only option we had [was that], we couldn’t be as strict as back home [and] we couldn’t be as open-minded as here.

Aresh and his non-Iranian wife shared the common experience of being international students, but neither had family connections to provide a structure to “know how to raise our kids the way our parents raised us.” They resolved to strike a balance between being “as strict as back home” and “as open-minded as here,” with the guiding priority of education.

Rose is the interviewee with the strongest affiliation with Islam, and struggles to teach her children that the trap of materialism generates unhappiness. Pretensions of material life prioritize a “spotless” lifestyle that is not spontaneous—“I like not to be prepared. [It’s] more real”—and disingenuous.

ROSE: [I am always] fighting against material life. [My nieces and nephews are] moving to this material world. [I teach my children lessons about
the less fortunate. We pray every night about African kids. All families [are] falling into this trap, [and] they feel unhappy. I’m not going to cause problems thinking of appearance. I don’t want to lose my peace. I raise my kids to be familiar with all religions. I don’t know the values of my neighbors. People are cold here; they invite you for open houses, [which is] more like showing off. We came from a place with hospitality. I don’t like that show: “My life is spotless!” Whose life is spotless? I like not to be prepared. [It’s] more real.

Enculturation in the U.S. presents dilemmas for families of procreation, who try to balance the centrifugal force of “too much freedom” and the centripetal draw of traditional, extended family guided by an authority figure. Transnationally, impediments to customary cultural reinforcement include time constraints, daycare needs, employment responsibilities, lack of extended family, American cultural influences, among others. Given the weight of these, parents compromise, accept change, and/or surrender authority to some extent. Vacillating between the “traditional Iranian family” and the arbitrary American age of eighteen cut off, they maintain an “open-door policy” for children to return, and guarantee success and productivity. The “stuck students” lacked a traditional family structure, and identified as a “lost generation,” because they had to construct their own family institutions.
Because the majority of the earliest migration of Iranians was comprised of students, student organizations represented their desire to build a cohort based on national identity, common interest, and mutual support. Prior to the revolution, the nascent community of Iranian students in the Twin Cities forms a sketchy outline of “community.” As single college students, small cohorts of individuals became one’s solace into an Iranian world.

BOB: [Activities were] “half-hazard,” and done by seat of the pants, instead of planning for six months in advance. Two days before, somebody calls and says, “Hey, why don’t you guys come over to my house or let’s do it at my house.” There were some guys that got stuck with the Iranian community more than others. [It was] a dispersed group of people that don’t really belong here. My brother came here in ’69 and now the family, after thirty, forty years, has grown into seventeen; there’s brothers, sisters, children, thirteen grandkids. That’s how any community grows. [As Iranians we need to] stress the fact and be proud of our heritage, and instill those values in our children. We can gather around and identify with [it]. The community’s only thirty-seven years old.

After the revolution, we stayed: we ran roots, got jobs, started businesses, started families. Now
that number has multiplied. If there was a thousand of us back then, now there’s times four, because we have kids, and have gotten married. Some have moved from other states. Now, we know we’re staying; we’re not going anywhere. [Bob laughs.] There’s a very good chance that [the] Iranian community will become so assimilated that we’ll be non-identifiable. One or two generations down the road my daughter’s children will not identify themselves as Iranians. They might possibly mention it, but not recognize it, and practice it, and cherish it.

The “half-hazard” nature of the Twin Cities’ Iranian community evolved because of Iranians’ inability—even impossibility—to return to Iran. While some of this relates to U.S.-Iranian political events, Bob attributes it to “roots” and assimilation to the point of Iranians being indistinguishable. Iranians of his ilk and generation realize—or resign themselves—to plant “roots” (i.e., jobs, mortgages, families, etc.), and thereby shift demographics. Parsa’s father shared a similar story regarding the nascent Twin Cities’ community.

PARSA: One of my dad’s friends said it [used to be] Iranian Association, not Persian Association. “Iran” was a bad name. [Parsa and Tracy laugh.] They turned it into Persian soon after [the] revolutionary time. There was less people here, so it was more,
"You bring the food [and we'll] cook it together." No food permits; now, we have to provide catering. These are all extra cost[s].

Gatherings in the early years of the student community were intimate, spontaneous get-togethers that entailed a contribution of food and communal cooking. As the community expanded, securing a larger venue became crucial, which increased costs due to the need to follow public health and safety laws and ordinances (i.e., obtaining food permits).

Assimilation is threatened by pride and value of heritage, but the Iranian community “could go either way [and] develop an identity of its own; have an identity with infrastructure; events that pull us together with community centers.” Bob credits the PSOM students with “doing some great things,” but are not “really Iranian.” “The jury’s out” regarding the community’s future, especially since, as Bob proclaims, assimilation is “part of our genes.”

The fractured Twin Cities’ Iranian community relates to the history of institutional disintegration. Yet, the Persian Student Organization of Minnesota (PSOM) at the University of Minnesota (UMN) hosts a long-standing, annual Noruz celebration (and recently introduced a Shab-e Yalda celebration). Intermittently, a concert, comedian or film screening is hosted, but no central authoritative voice speaks for “the community.” In the absence of institutional life and an authority, diverse interest networks cohere around divisions within the community. Because no evident economic enclave exists (with the exception of a few Iranian restaurants), compatriots come together as Iranians to celebrate pre-Islamic holidays. National identity camouflages
boundary markers that determine interactive processes in Iran (e.g., class, educational, professional). The veneer of national unity is enacted at public Iranian gatherings through nostalgia of homeland, vernacular sentiment, and the communitas of migratory experience. Repeated community interaction, however, reveals the differentiating processes located at the hyphen. Recently arrived, younger generation Iranians involved in PSOM, for example, seize the helm, claiming they “have a sense of it [culture]” because they have been taught it.

Parsa, a former president of PSOM, transposes national identity around the hyphen to claim that Americans to the left of the hyphen “cannot have as much of an effect in PSOM to enrich the culture or keep the culture’s way.” Whereas Iranians to the left of the hyphen “have a sense of culture, a background.” The politics of planning the Noruz program is different for “Iranian Americans” and “American Iranians.” Second-generation Iranians or those with one American parent are dispossessed of the “sense of culture,” “background,” in part because they are not made to “go to Farsi classes” and “behave a certain way.” Without these indicators, other Iranians may not “recognize them as Iranian.” In Parsa’s estimation, Iranian Americans are more authorized to manage PSOM, because of an enriched knowledge of “the culture’s way.”

PARSA: I came here as a post-second year student. I just wanted to get involve[d]; to have a networking in the Persian community, and help them; do some volunteer work. Two years ago, one of my friends became president, [and] I became vice president. He ended up going to California and never came back. It
defaulted that the vice president has to become the president; so it was really not my wanting to become the president of this organization. I just wanted to see the involvement.

I saw a little tension on different sides, because a lot of them were not actually Iranian Americans. They were American Iranians; they’re Iranian kids that had one or two parents as Iranians. If you’re born here, then you’re American Iranian. If you come from there, you’re Iranian American, because you have a sense of culture, a background. Some of them that are now in PSOM have two parents [who are] Iranian, who make them go to Farsi classes; make them behave a certain way, so that they could at least recognize them as Iranian. It’s fine if you’re recognized as American, but I think you cannot have as much of an effect in PSOM to enrich the culture or keep the culture’s way if you don’t have a sense of it, if you haven’t been taught. It’s fine if you’re there to learn. It’s not fighting. For example, for Noruz, the American Iranians [said], “Play Obama’s message that says, ‘Happy Noruz’.” But I thought, as an Iranian American, that it’s irrelevant. It has no
place there. We’re not representing the American government. [It is a] social-cultural program. From my perspective, [and] many other perspective[s] that were from Iranian American[s], they don’t like that. Irrelevant content presented in the public celebration of Noruz—President Obama’s Noruz message to the Iranian people—stresses an American agenda that distracts from the socio-cultural content of the spring rite. While “it’s fine if you’re recognized as American,” are American political messages are improper program content. Emphasizing that these differences are “not fighting,” Parsa compliments American Iranians for their organizational acumen; they know “the way the system works,” and need to document everything. When Iranian Americans take charge, “it’s very disorganized. Everybody is disorganized in Iran.”

PARSA: [American Iranians] know the way this system works. For example, if there [is an] application process, they know what to do better than we do. The last president had everything documented. But then we had another Iranian American take over this year, [and he] did not do that. He went back to the same Iranian way that he had; it’s very disorganized. Everybody is disorganized in Iran.

We had [a] two hour meeting every week—sometimes twice a week—before the events. I spent ten hours during the week doing the weekly stuff, because we had
Shab-e Yalda, Noruz, we used to bring movies for free, [the] end of year picnic. Whoever wants to come in, has to do the program; [the] scheduling for that. We have to have performances. Not everybody wants to do volunteer work, so they will demand money. They have to do budgeting, scheduling. Everything has to fall in together, and that’s a lot of hassle for a person who is working, studying, has his own life. It’s just very complicated work. And then you have people who have a lot of expectation[s] from you. If it was not for Caspian, we would not have sold a lot of tickets. Caspian does help us significantly.

Responsibilities of the PSOM president require time commitment, scheduling and organizational skills, having connections, and fund-raising and budgeting abilities, because “everything has to fall in together.” While volunteers are critical to PSOM’s success, the Caspian Bistro’s support appears important for success. Parsa’s reference to “people who have a lot of expectation[s] from you,” draws attention to the difficulty students face in serving “very demanding” people, whose high expectations are disproportionate to the ticket price. It is important for the students to pull off the Noruz event without a hitch. Because Iranians have high expectations, any disappointment translates into community gossip and criticism.

The move from the humble Saint Paul Student Center to the swankier McNamara Alumni Center—a “very nice place”—made it “a little more expensive.” This move,
introduced by the president who preceded Parsa, was accompanied by other unforeseen changes. Significantly, it instigated Iranian “lawlessness”—“we want to get ahead in [an] unfair fashion,” “we don’t want to abide by the rules”—such as disrespect for reservation signs, claiming other people’s tables, and the food line bulging at the center or near the front. Hosting too many activities at the same time in separate spaces would jeopardize the procurement of future entertainers. If the majority of celebrants remain on the dance floor for the evening, the performer in the banquet hall, where the elders remain seated, will “be disrespected. … You can’t have a singer out there and then a DJ noise; they are not going to be focused on the singer.” Parsa is concerned not only about entertaining people who want to dance, but to ensure that elderly people who remain seated in the banquet area (while others dance) are enjoying themselves.

**PARSA:** The president before me brought it to McNamara, which is a little more expensive, but it’s [a] very nice place. It’s partitioned into different rooms for different things; so if you don’t want to dance, you just sit there. I wish we could provide a different service to people who are sitting out there, but it’s sort of impossible because of the noise. You can’t have a singer out there and then a DJ noise; they are not going to be focused on the singer. He’s going to be disrespected. You can’t have performers that are not paid attention to; they are not going to
do the show. The older people are complaining about that every year.

[The last] two, three years was the same program, [but the former president] did a new thing; he brought it here and then I continued it. I think I was more organized. The year before that, we sold five hundred tickets. I sold four hundred seventy-five tickets. I left two tables and a half empty so there wouldn’t be sitting problems. There are always sitting problems, because if there is ten seats here and eight people sit here, people with four kids or four family members, they’re not going to sit in the two seats. People have to realize that it is almost impossible for us to organize this. You’re not going to get good seating if you don’t come early. The last fifty seats are first come, first serve. If you come a little later, then there is nothing we can do; reservations [are] not going to work. People just took off the reservation [sign, and] sat down. [Tracy laughs.] People who had the reservation came in and said, “Where’s my reservation?” He was upset with me, but he was a friend, so he just let it go. [Some people reserved seats near the front of the venue,
where the emcee stands, because they] gave donations.
So we gave them reservations, which didn’t make sense,
because they paid more money. All I did this year was
financing, because I didn’t trust the financing
candidate last year. [Parsa and Tracy laughing.] So
I did the financing, and talking to the audio
[people], and the contracts. But the functional
stuff—the executive stuff—was done by “A.” I don’t
want to blame it on him; there’s not much that he can
do. We did do reservations, but they were like, “Why
didn’t you tell us to do reservations?” We did
announce sponsoring in the e-mail, but nobody actually
did a sponsor [except] five or six families. There
were two tables; one for my family, because if we are
helping out at least we can get a table and then one
for “A.” They were complaining about that too.
[Parsa and Tracy chuckle.]

Go to Iran. If there is [a] line there for
people, the line is not straight. People are just
like, “Oh, yeah, my friend was here, and I’m just
holding his place.” The line is expanding from within
and then people just cut in. [Tracy laughing.] It’s
in our culture. We want to get ahead in [an] unfair
fashion. We don’t want to abide by rules. If you go to Black Friday, you see this exact same thing.

Comparing to [other years], I think the quality came down this year a little bit, because it was less organized. Before that, it was very disorganized. People did not follow up. We have done lists of people; we have repeated year after year annual contracts with some people to come in and help us out—like the photographer or the dining program. It’s just something that gives us a structure. When I was the president, I did agendas for every week. I summarized the whole thing at the end of the year for the next president so they could just follow up the rulebook. [Tracy repeats something Parsa called himself earlier: “You are OCD.” Parsa and Tracy chuckle.]

During Parsa’s tenure as president, he endeavored to be organized. Parsa’s awareness of previous problems of high-ticket sales and insufficient seating prompted his management decisions. Selling twenty-five less tickets, and leaving two and one-half tables empty, secured his reputation to be “more organized,” and “so there wouldn’t be sitting problems. There are always sitting problems.” Putting some of the onus on the community to understand “that it is almost impossible for us to organize this” is another reference to the demanding Iranian celebrants, and their high expectations. Securing the
“important” table—near the food or the entertainment stage—requires getting to the venue early or being a sponsor (i.e., paying to advertise one’s business). Prompting complaints by attendees, such entitlements are justified by PSOM volunteers, who “are helping out at least” (although this privilege extended only to the president and the financial executive volunteers).

PARSA: This year they had more people help out—fifteen, sixteen people; last year, was five people in the board. This year, it was more Iranian American, because of the way we recruited [and] the way we do things. Maybe some of them don’t like it or maybe their personality doesn’t match with the way we do things; they have different ideas. We had a girl who applied to be president this year. We didn’t choose her. There’s [an] election. Iranian people like to have constant communication with each other. [It’s] not just an organization; we’re friends. If you’re in the same social group, we can communicate better. Things can get done faster. She was not in the same circle. We had a lot of problems with her [over] last two years, three years. The board members [vote]—[there are] six, seven—the rest of them are officers or just voluntary officers. They don’t get to vote.
It's really tough for kids. Iranian people, as much as I love them, they are very demanding people. They get what they’ve asked for, and then they complain about it. [Tracy chuckles.] It’s a good amount of money for the thing that you are paying—the building. The food itself was twenty-two dollars, for each dish. Each ticket had to be forty dollars, but by grants and sponsorships we brought it down to thirty, thirty-five. This year that [price] would be coming up. PSOM actually has a plan for next year to do [a] Farsi social group, so that people can speak Farsi [and] learn from each other. [But] there is no teacher. It was supposed to be done this year, but the officer took off.

[I resigned because] I have to apply for Dental School. It’s too much work. Otherwise, I would have loved [it]. The complaining and stuff is one thing, but [Tracy chuckles] it’s a great feeling too. I think what I did the most was networking for people who wanted to come here; the grad students or the undergrad students who came from Iran, [and] who didn’t know anyone or didn’t have anywhere to go. If I knew that person is an architecture major, then I
would introduce them to the person who’s an architecture major or chemistry-chemistry, engineering-engineering. If they are looking for [a] house, I would take them or I would have somebody else take them. It’s important to keep our culture, but that’s the most important part—to help out people. When I came here it was just a shock. Everything has changed and I don’t know the language. It’s a great opportunity to help out people. They email PSOM and say, “Can you help me with this? Can you give me some information?” It’s probably simple things; you just have to go to the website and give them that information.

[Compared to other Iranian student organizations in the U.S.] it’s right on average. [In] California and Connecticut, they are more active because it’s more Iranians that graduate. Here, we don’t get that much funding. That’s another thing that I did; I would apply for a student service fees and we got zero dollars. [The] Minnesota international students [International Student and Scholar Services] got the big chunk. I was surprised. MESA [got seventy thousand] and then the Al-Madinah probably got fifty,
forty. It gets published in [The Minnesota] Daily. We were asking for like five, six thousand. The Student Union Activities—you can apply [for] grants there, and they give it to us—but that’s very limited. Each year the maximum is around ten thousand, but they give you two, three thousand max. We have to scale everything down. If you want to bring in a speaker [or a] performer, you can’t do that. People won’t pay sixty, fifty dollars [for a ticket]. We can’t risk that. If they don’t pay, then I have to pay out of my own pocket.

Minnesota is not the most popular place to come. It’s risky to do out of ordinary things. [The Iran House of Art students] don’t do anything. It’s just some grad students who are artist[s]. Some of them play guitar, some of them sing. Last year they had another singer around Noruz and they were short on money. Compared to PSOM, they have no organization. People would reserve tickets, and then would pay at the door. So you have zero money going into the event. Some people might not show up. They ended up not selling the eighty-dollar seats.
Clearly, financing community-wide events is a risky, surprising, frustrating, and challenging endeavor. Parsa associates this problem with a small demographic, because “Minnesota is not the most popular place to come.” How this translates into student groups on campus—PSOM, Middle Eastern Student Association (MESA), Al-Madinah Cultural Center, International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS)—is competition for grant monies, support, and recognition ultimately. Although Parsa does not reveal how different awards relate to the scale of the student populations, it is likely due to their larger representation on campus. And although the Student Union Activities grants PSOM up to three-thousand dollars, it is insufficient to hire a speaker or performer, requiring the students “to scale everything down.” Pointedly, the Caspian Bistro’s support appears to be a make or break gesture, which Parsa admits, without its help in selling tickets at the restaurant, “we would not have sold a lot.” Parsa’s reflexive comparison between PSOM and the graduate students’ events reinforces the incapacity to institutionalize cultural events; they had “no organization,” scheduled events without a budget, and expecting people to “reserve tickets; and then … pay at the door.” Parsa proclaims that he is not prepared to take the shortfall and “pay out of my own pocket.” In order to present an impression of managerial expertise to the community, PSOM students do not “do out of ordinary things.”

Organizational concerns are critical for the PSOM board and community members. Since PSOM is “not just an organization; we’re friends,” exclusivity influences who gets elected to the board. When I interviewed Parsa, Iranian Americans predominated on the board, edging out a girl who “was not in the same circle,” and with
whom they “had a lot of problems.” Having different personalities, ideas, methodologies, and social cohorts impacts the election process for reasons of efficiency: “Things get done faster.” Further, Iranians are a “people who have a lot of expectation[s] from you,” “are very demanding people,” and although “they get what they’ve asked for,” they still “complain about it.” “The president is American Iranian, but her parents are both Iranian, and she speaks fluent Farsi. She behaves the same way. She doesn’t seem like she’s being assimilated as much.” Parsa prides himself on his tenure and ability to maintain a systematic structure. First, he honored annual contracts (e.g., photographer, caterer) to the same people in previous years for continuity. Second, he kept weekly or bi-weekly agendas to stay on task. Third, he provided end of year summaries of events, which allowed the new president to “just follow up the rulebook.” Finally, he attempted to keep people’s reservations (although some “lawless” Iranians disregarded them< and keeping a few tables open.

For Parsa, the demands and complaints “is one thing,” but “it’s a great feeling too. I think what I did the most was networking for people who wanted to come here—the grad students or the undergrad students who came from Iran, [and] who didn’t know anyone or didn’t have anywhere to go. It’s important to keep our culture, but that’s the most important part—to help out people.” Transnational support serves as a wellspring to the community’s “collective effervescence,” although it may alienate American Iranians. Denying the “others” in their midst the opportunity to showcase some aspect of American Iranian identity (e.g., President Obama’s Noruz message), Iranian American students perpetuate an idea of authentic Iranian identity. Living the illusion of
authenticity—the more or less Iranian—opens space for the “less.” This prolongs the problem of cultural brokers; the self-appointed guardians of “pure,” “authentic” culture. In this way, tradition transforms through time as a reconfiguration of contextual forces seized upon by the hijackers of hyphens.

As Parsa’s discussion of the PSOM students’ vying for power and representation suggests, individuals must be willing to help, to invest time and energy to help establish and maintain institutions, and must take on the responsibility to assume representative authority, especially when things go wrong. Aresh is a community elder who accepts this responsibility. He likens himself to the “911 emergency service,” identifies as “one of the most senior Iranian[s]” in the community, a status that affords responsibilities upon which community members rely (e.g., assisting and advising people traveling between the U.S. and Iran). Aresh’s depiction of the constitution of the Iranian community—as clusters of family groups or close friends—intersects with the metaphor of “layers of an onion” utilized in my Master’s thesis (Zank 2004).

ARESH: They’re a lot of different [groups of Iranians in the Twin Cities]. There’s not really one big Iranian organization. There are just clusters of family groups or close friends. There’s not really [an] organization with a common goal. They’re just social groups. Every year, the [students] put on a [Noruz program]; they are the kids of the second-generation. If you go to [the] “Farsi School” or University of Minnesota Noruz [program], you see every
group. A lot of Iranian[s] want to see each other; they are not just running away from each other. [I never see] Iranians who know me or know I am Iranian [who] doesn’t say “Hi.” If I hear that they speak Farsi a little bit or I just say a word, and he doesn’t know us, he just start[s] talking.

[My wife and I] have fifteen or sixteen families; our kids [are] the same age. We go camping; we do things together; we have [the] same background: working professionals, doctors, engineer[s]. Our camping group—most of them have PhDs—they are professors; they are educated. Then they have a group that are religious; they go to the mosque. If you look at my group, now their kids [are] getting married; some of them have grandchildren. We came before revolution. They came [a] little bit after revolution. Now they got married. They have fourteen- or fifteen-year old kids. They find their own niche. We meet them, but we don’t have any gathering[s] together. The nice thing about this group: they know each other; they respect each other. [A] couple weeks ago, I saw one group [at] a French park in Plymouth, [and] I saw another group. I go to
Caspian [Bistro]; if I see [an] Iranian, I say, “Hello.” It’s not like you turn around [and] walk away. I don’t think there is any friction between Iranian[s] here.

[In the Twin Cities], it’s not like California [where there are] too many of them; you hate to talk with them; you hate to see them. My brother came from Toronto; there are 50,000 Iranian[s] there. They are more down-to-earth than people in California; people in California look at what you have. The one[s] in California are [a] little bit more show off. They look at what you do. [Here] ninety-nine percent [of] Iranian people call each other by first name. I have about four Iranians [at my workplace]; four or five of them have a Ph.D. We go out for dinner. If we see each other, we may not speak Farsi. We just say, “Hi, how you doing?” That’s the society of Iranians.

PARSA: In California, even though there are one or two million there, I don’t think there is as much sense of community as there is [here], strangely enough. They don’t help each other out as much. I don’t like to generalize, but that is my feeling of it. Here, when I see an Iranian, we start talking.
You know right away, and you start talking, and it’s not weird. But in California, you can’t talk to an Iranian, because then, you’re like, “Who are you?” Toronto is the same: “I don’t know you, so why are you talking to me?” You just feel like that person is Persian or Iranian, and they’re walking past, so you stop talking or you start speaking in English.

Delineating the “layers” of micro-coalescences within the Twin Cities, and in which layer an individual belongs, is an active sport. Spontaneous, public sphere conversations, as described by Aresh and Parsa, incites “Iran-o-dar” (“Iranian radar”). This is an ability to detect and “just feel like that person is Persian or Iranian” or to “hear that they speak Farsi a little bit or I just say a word, and he doesn’t know us, he just start[s] talking.” “Iran-o-dar” is a tool used because Iranians “want to see each other” and are “not just running away from each other.” (While Aresh claims a “lot of Iranians want to see each other,” I have witnessed deliberate dodging when one’s “Iran-o-dar” goes off in a public setting where you see Iranians, but with whom you do not want to engage. In this way, avoiding the complex gesticulations of ta’aroof is ensured.) Smaller Iranian communities provide the intimacy of family and friends. Local Iranians contrast this to large, Iranian communities (like Los Angeles and Toronto), where there are “too many of them; you hate to talk with them; you hate to see them,” and “you can’t talk to an Iranian … [because they look at your like] ‘I don’t know you so why are you talking to me?’” While Iranians in Toronto may be “more down-to-earth,” “people in California look at what you have … [and are a] little bit more show off. They look at what you do.”
Problematically, these portrayals of Iranians in California as hedonistic materialists, and Iranians in Minnesota as down-to-earth, perpetuate Iranians as a monolith. However, Aresh does have extensive experience of interaction with local Iranians.

Aresh speaks from a situated history of traversing various networks and microstructures within the community. His initial involvement entailed work on *Peyvand*, a free, local Iranian newsletter (now defunct). *Peyvand* was an English-Persian publication that printed stories on immigrant-related issues (e.g., visas, legal status, dealing with the Intersection of Iran, current events, recipes, lifecycle notifications, community events) in the pre-Internet days, which Aresh describes in brief history.

**ARESH:** People didn’t know what to do with immigration forms or [how] to contact the Intersection of Iran. They didn’t have access to [a] computer to get [the] latest news or who died. [One community member] and his brother has a printing shop, so they got involved. We sit down, and talk about art, culture, what we should put in, and then they would print it. Every month, I would fold it, I sort it [Tracy giggles], and take it to the post office. [We did that for about] five, six years. Now there is a [another newsletter]. This guy said, “I’ll do it. I have advertising, but I put [a] monthly fee for it.” He put it in the Caspian. He put it in the Holy Land. [Why should] I pay him ten dollars for one-year
membership? If you want to hear something, you could hear it from everybody else.

Continuing the newsletter required coordination, consensus, and community. In the pre-Internet days, it served its “town crier” function. Similar to other references regarding commitment to institutional viability, the coordinator needed time and awareness of people and events in the community, so the newsletter’s content was germane to community matters. Social media and the Internet have replaced the anachronistic newsletter, prompting Aresh to deride the editor of a new newsletter, who requires remuneration for his efforts. Whether distance from the community, a self-appointed representative or an individual with a particular agenda, this editor does not possess the pulse that Aresh does by virtue of his status as an elder and role as a “911 emergency operator.”

Familial and friendship associative cliques, to which Aresh alludes, evolve out of parental friendship circles. For 1.5- and second-generation children, the links may be perfunctory or the source of life-long friendships. Gholam Ali’s and his wife’s close circle of Iranian friends are tenuously connected through his parent’s friendship circle, although they avoid them because of gossip.

**GHOLAM ALI:** Most of [my connection to the community] was through friends of my parents. They’ll be the ones we socialized with. I did feel an urge to be with Iranians. I had a few, young [Iranian] friends growing up here. There was one that was in [our] neighborhood, so I spent a lot of time with him.
Then through college time, I wanted friends, and those are the ones I had the most interaction with. It wasn’t that it was only Iranian or American. We’d go to family [gatherings], but I was out there just floating along. It wasn’t a priority; my priority was me.

While Gholam Ali felt “an urge to be with Iranians,” his social circle encompassed his parent’s social group, which resulted in his being “out there just floating around.” Contradicting his urge, he concludes that associating with Iranians “wasn’t a priority; my priority was me.”

MEREDITH: I was always involved [with] my parent’s social group; Iranians that my parents had met, they had nothing in common with other than being Iranian. [Meredith laughs.] Here is my dad—all these principles—here are these guys—they’ll be smoking something later, and they were probably sleaze balls in Iran. [Meredith laughs.] In the same party, they’re socializing, and somehow my dad is pretending that he’s “in.” [Meredith laughs.] My dad reads journals, and is up-to-date on everything. He speaks English. They all talk behind my parent’s back, because [some members of my dad’s family were] part of the revolution. Two of my dad’s nephews were big-time
Khomeini’s supporters; one of them was the head of the banks in Iran. These are the cousins that I can’t stand, because they wouldn’t even look into my eyes when I talk. They send kids [and grandkids] over here though. How ‘bout that?

Political loyalties in Iran are erased by nationally-based friendships in Minnesota.

The pot smoking sleaze balls disregard the party host’s nephews “were big-time Khomeini’s supporters.” Nationality, therefore, outmaneuvers class. Lili’s experiences mirror Meredith’s, although her attachment to Twin Cities’ Iranians was fostered through her affines.

LILI: I met [Iranians in the Twin Cities] through my in-laws. There are some New Year’s parties; I went to a couple of them, and I didn’t find them interesting. Everybody’s into each other[‘s business]; they want to know what you’re doing, how much money you have [and] you make. It really does not matter about how much money you make. It’s about who you are. Education is important; what you do for a living. I like that mentality. [Iranians] become Westernized; it’s like, [I’m] better or you’re better. I’m not looking for what kind of car you drive. If I drive a good car, I do it for myself; I am not doing it to show it off to you.
Lili’s Iranian community is linked to her husband’s parent’s micro-community about which she is disenchanted. Certain Iranians, the type who base relationships on materialism, do not focus on being. Instead, she emphasizes mentality, education, and profession as the foundation of community. This ironically indicates certain professions as more or less meaningful according to salary.

Depending upon when one’s parents or in-laws arrived, connections to Iranians through them lose or lack importance for the 1.5- and second-generations, who disregard relationships with Iranians based solely on nationality. Parents who “read journals” and are “up-to-date on everything” associate with pot smoking, backstabbing, “sleaze balls,” who would never be invited to a party in Iran. For these reasons, Gholam Ali, Meredith, and Lili are ambiguous about their parent’s friends and friendships linked through them. These “secondary” friends find the inconsistencies between shared principles of parents and children as hypocritical.

First-generation Iranians, like Aresh, retain connections with people with whom they share values and interests (e.g., mutual respect, advanced education, common interests like camping, professionalism). Their children’s age set becomes, by default, a strong determinant of one’s circle of friends (although other children, like Gholam Ali and others described above, find their own intimate circles usually at university). Intimate, exclusive Iranian gatherings (including non-Iranian spouses) are occasions to “let go,” be oneself, and not have to validate or explain one’s origins, history, and/or culture. Belonging to a micro-Iranian community necessitates accepting responsibility to budget time and donate help fellow compatriots.
ARESH: If they want something [they ask]: “Aresh, do you know such and such a thing?” They call me to help them out. Somebody died, for example, I would go to [the] service. Somebody said, “Oh, Aresh, I need this document sent to Iran,” because he doesn’t want to mail it. I call somebody and say, “Can you do me a favor [and] send this one for him?” Or somebody call[ed] and said, “Hey, I need to send two-hundred dollars to my brother or sister.” I said, “Okay, here, I’ll find somebody to do that.” It’s good. [If] I could be involved in something I would do it.

Similar to Aresh’s micro-community of fifteen to sixteen families, Azam has Saturday get-togethers with Iranians who have become like family. The private sphere social life enlivens among a cohort of parents and their children, who have grown up together, and participated in getting “all fancied up, lots of food, lots of drinking, and fun.” It is a space that allows individuals to let go; there is no “need to validate … to explain [oneself]”. People at the party anticipate that she will break out into a belly dance or belt out a song. Family and fictive kin “understand and appreciate it.” Parents, children, and friends mature together as a circle of intimates, and regularly “have fun.” This strategy avoids discomfort felt among Americans who need explanations, and jump to judgments about Iranians as terrorists and interlopers. “Don’t look at me as a terrorist. Don’t look at me as somebody invading your privacy and your space. Gimme a chance to let you know who I am.”
Azam’s passion for partying—“I’m a party person”—influences her tendency to do “the whole shebang,” particularly birthdays and Christmas. Excessiveness, however, receded into modesty in the lessons she learned from her children. Her daughter stated: “I don’t want any birthday. I just wanna be with you guys. If I have a birthday, I might have a few of my friends, and I don’t want any presents. I have everything, Mom.” Azam’s extravagant celebrations, paradoxically, led her children to sacrifice their presents and donate to the needy.

AZAM: [Iranians in the Twin Cities] do become your family. I am very involved in my social life within my Iranian community. Every Saturday night we probably get together; somebody has a dinner at their house. We get all fancied up, lots of food, lots of drinking, lots of dancing, and fun. I do have a lot of friends who have daughters [the] same age as [my daughter]. This Sunday, she’s gonna go to a birthday party, and then she’s gonna go for a sleepover. I’m gonna go to my friend’s house on Monday for Fourth of July. Even though I’ve been here thirty-some years, and I feel that this is my home, I still enjoy being with my Iranian friends. I don’t need to validate myself; I don’t need to explain myself. I can belly dance and have fun. I can sing and they can understand and appreciate it. Americans make me feel
like I have to explain myself. I have to introduce my background: “Don’t look at me as a terrorist. Don’t look at me as somebody invading your privacy and your space. Gimme a chance to let you know who I am.” Even though I’m very comfortable with the culture here, my circle of [Iranian] friends—I’ve known them for about twenty-five years—we kind of grew up together.

I’m a party person. I remember, for my son, every year, we had a birthday party for him—about fifty to sixty people. It was a big bash. I’m talking about appetizers, dinner, alcohol beverage—everything—clown and entertainment for the kids, magic person. And I even did that for her [my daughter] up to two years ago, and she goes, “I don’t want any birthday. I just wanna be with you guys. If I have a birthday, I might have a few of my friends, and I don’t want any presents. I have everything, Mom.” Have them bring something to donate. For a kid at her age to say that she has enough—she feels complete, she’s not greedy—I feel so good when she says that, because we did good parenting. She always used to ask me, “Are we rich, Mom?” I said, “Yes, I would say we
are rich because we have each other, we have this house, we have a roof, I have a job. So, we are rich. Maybe it’s not a million dollar[s] rich, but we’re rich.” So it depends how you define rich and what you teach your children.

Community involvement obliges Iranians to help others, which Parsa feels is incumbent upon community members. He shares the story of an Iranian student whose brother was killed during “the Green Movement” of 2009. The student “went into a deep depression. If there is something wrong, [Iranians] all will rush in to help.”

PARSA: All the kids [involved with PSOM] helped him to recover. He’s functioning again. He’s not the same person. He became suicidal. The culture is very warm-blooded. We’re hospitable people. If you come to the house, we provide you so much. I think it’s a little too much. [Tracy laughs.] My mother’s acting like she’s serving those people. It’s the way they like to do it. Now, it’s a little more Americanized. If you go to Iran, it’s very intense, jealousy-hospitality-kind-of-type: if that person has this [or] that in their house, then I have to do better. [It’s] subject to gossip; to jealousy; looking at somebody else, seeing what they’re doing, and then trying to
copy. It’s something that is good or bad in the culture.

Sometimes I don’t do stuff for myself, so we can help each other, because we’re in a community. That’s why I joined PSOM. A lot of people who have prosperous business [who] are not willing to help students or even other family here. Iranians, we like to see each other fail. It’s just competition; I think here, less than the rest of the places, because it’s a small community. People know each other. Where [you have] personal contact with them, [you] tend to help them out or you want to have this sense of being part of the community, because you’re not well accepted in the American culture; the American family.

They don’t know where you came from, so you might as well just join the Iran[ians]. For my parents, it’s almost impossible to have American friends, because they don’t share the same activities of growing up with the same things. Social references are different. It’s easier to be with the same culture. But at the same time, because there are few of us here, we do tend to be with each other. They
are their own groups of individuals. It’s just these
groups that like each other, and they don’t feel like
they belong to the rest of the groups. Well, some
people come to just celebrate, food, and party, but
some come for seeing others, and some come for,
hopefully, celebrating their culture that they have
left. [Parsa and Tracy laugh.] I think PSOM is
essential to have. Otherwise, many Iranians wouldn’t
see each other. That’s why, when you see them, it
takes them so much time to sit down. They haven’t
seen each other [from] Noruz to Noruz.

Parsa’s response vacillates from the point that “the culture is very warm-blooded”
to Iranians who “like to see each other fail”, and practice a “very intense, jealousy-
hospitality-kind-of-type” thing. An outcome of competition and a small population is
that Twin Cities’ Iranians fracture into their own communities; there “are their own
groups of individuals. It’s just these groups that like each other, and they don’t feel like
they belong to the rest of the groups.” While Parsa criticizes the “prosperous business
[owners who] are not willing to help students or even other family here,” he recognizes
that “because it’s a small community “there is less competition. Smallness dictates
closeness within the various circles that comprise the Twin Cities’ community. “People
know each other. Where [you have] personal contact with them, [you] tend to help them
out or you want to have this sense of being part of the community.” As with other
respondents, Iranian cliques are one’s primary social groups “because you’re not well
accepted in the American culture; the American family” and Americans “don’t know where you came from.” First-generation parents feel “it’s almost impossible to have American friends, they don’t share the same activities of growing up with the same things. Social references are different. It’s easier to be with the same culture.”

Celebrating Noruz in the “Land of Ten-Thousand Iranian Communities”

The transportability of Noruz, especially its positive symbols and meanings of life and spring, facilitate its celebration in the transnational context. Busy work schedules and family members scattered nationally and transnationally hinder the observation of Noruz as a standard, thirteen-day holiday. Both public and private sphere festivities, therefore, are vital windows into the elaborate endeavors they are. The “simultaneous combustion” of multiple parties throughout the community in various contexts—large and small family, friendship, fictive kin; hotels; restaurants; university campuses—resonates metaphorically within the “Land of Ten-Thousand Communities.” Those who desire involvement with fellow Iranians may attend several events (e.g., some Bahá’í families attend both the PSOM and Bahá’í events), while others are content with the security of an intimate celebration within the private sphere among family. Without the PSOM Noruz event, Parsa proclaims, “Iranians wouldn’t see each other.” The annual event is “essential to have,” eat Iranian food, party, see each other, and revitalize “their culture that they have left.”

Public celebrations of Noruz
Several annual public *Noruz* events that I have attended include: the PSOM event; the Bahá’í community; and an “adult” celebration at Atlas Grill (where alcoholic beverages are imbibed). The community invests time and energy to these events in several ways. For example, they provide monetary support in terms of advertisement, but also give time, such as organization and meetings. Women may spend an entire day primping (e.g., manicures, pedicures, getting new clothing, having one’s hair cut and dyed). People often take the time to visit family in the U.S., abroad or return to Iran. Iranians also continue one of the central activities that ushers in *Noruz*, which is paying respect to elders in the community.

**AZAM:** The community always has a huge party, especially the students. When I go out, I have to get my hair done; my makeup. It’s a whole day process. Atlas would have a party; students would have a party; and other individual families might have forty people at their house. The older people in the community designate a day, and then us people—younger—go to the house and pay our respect. Those are the people [who] have been in my circle of friendship. For example, this lady here, I’ve known her for thirty years. She is in her seventies. She was at my wedding. She came to the hospital, visited me when I had both of my children; she was at my mother’s funeral. She’s having this gathering at her house. I have to make
sure I go there, even for one-half an hour. If I can’t go, I have to at least make a phone call and apologize. I always have to go to my dad’s house right after New Year with the kids. If the situation was different between my dad and [my husband], then we would all have a special dinner with him. It is hard. But then, you know, I got over it. I can be responsible for myself. I cannot be responsible for other people.

Azam suggests the significance of Noruz for the presentation of self in the public Iranian eye; “it’s a whole day process” to primp for the event. Multiple celebrations—UMN, Atlas Grill, people’s homes, hotels—may be on one’s schedule. Obligations to pay respect to the elders in the community mimic this ritual in Iran. Even if the visit is brief, it is incumbent upon younger Iranians to visit or at least call and apologize. In this way, the age hierarchy is enacted and remains in tact. Elder-younger relationships, according to Azam’s response, are reciprocal (i.e., elders attend weddings, funerals, and make hospital visits). Nonetheless, the visitation denotes this hierarchy every year during Noruz.

Nadia’s tangential involvement with “the community” does not dissuade her from stressing Noruz in the private sphere or attending a private hotel party. It is, she states, “one of the things I want to teach my children.” Reveling at a hotel Noruz party requires insider knowledge, to which Nadia and her husband are privy, and attend “because it’s fun, and we want to do some Iranian things.” Her bricolage approach to Noruz—one
evening at a hotel, waking up for sal-e tahvil, no community—contrast with her memory of going to the north of Iran, where she would party and play with young people and family for “the whole thirteen days.”

NADIA: We awake exactly when the New Year’s arrives. I’m always awake. [In Iran], we went to [the] north. The young people were there—partying and playing. I went with my family. People have their own homes [and would stay] the whole thirteen days. [In Minnesota] there’s no community. The only thing that we did [was go to a Noruz event at a hotel], because it’s fun, and we want to do some Iranian things, and have New Year’s. For me, New Year’s is just an older, very strong thing that I’m holding. There’s no religion; you celebrate life and spring. That’s for sure one of the things I want to teach my children.

Both Zohreh and Bob address the difficulties of restructuring the Iranian Noruz experience in Minnesota, because the entourage of family that travels around to visit relatives is missing, and the “two weeks of eating and laughing and sitting by the clock, waiting,” does not exist. Still, Zohreh says she “will keep the traditions,” even if she pulls her daughter “out of school—that one day [only].”

ZOHREH: People that are more enmeshed have a lot of relatives, and are together all the time, [and] can
really learn by just being around them. My husband has one brother [who] is married to an English woman, so they don't even do anything. The other two are not traditional. My parents are dead. [My mother-in-law] visits; she lives in Iran. I will keep the traditions. The most important one for me is Noruz. I will introduce it to her [Zohreh’s daughter].

Hopefully, I can pull her out of school—that one day—and we go together as a family. But she'll never have my experiences of two weeks of eating and laughing and sitting by the clock—waiting.

BOB: [In Iran], all the kids get two weeks off. Noruz is March 21st, and if it happens to fall in the middle of the week, you have to get up in the morning, and go to work. Kids have to [go to] school. It’s very hard to practice it here, because those dates are not observed in America. The other [reason] is, there’s nobody for us to congregate and drive around with, and to follow, and to be followed.

Being surrounded by family means Iranians “can really learn by just being around them.” In this way, culture as accumulation of experience requires immersion, and unfolding around a sacred length of time. Condensing time into “that one day … as a family” barely approximates the experience. Bob makes this very point, but focuses on
practice: “It’s very hard to practice it here, because those dates are not observed in America.” Exogamy and being “non-traditional” hinders the practice of celebration, as Zohreh notes regarding her brothers-in-law (one married an English women and the other two are not traditional). This impacts her family of procreation, since she cannot share the experience that would “naturally” unfold in Iran.

One semi-public PSOM Noruz (i.e., it is public as long as you are informed) event commenced with a serendipitous encounter with an interviewee, and revealed a picture of Iranian “lawlessness.” As celebrants arrived, the rituals ensue: stand up, greet each other, shake hands, hugs, and kiss on both cheeks. My interviewee grabbed and held my hand throughout the evening, and took me under wing the entire night. When we encountered the owner of Atlas Grill restaurant, my interviewee introduced me, and secured a free space for us on the guest list at their Noruz celebration. We sat at a strategically placed table near the food (and which facilitated sneaking to the front of the line) and the entrance (gaining strategic knowledge of the “who’s who” guest list). Arriving on “Minnesota time” had its perks! The evening events reveal public sphere exploits that support references made in the life history interviews about Iranians being “lawless” and competitive. For example, I snuck to the head of the food line with my interviewee, people commandeered additional tables, table settings, chairs, and “saved” them aggressively, which Parsa discussed as a lack of respect for reservations. At some point, another sneaky person absconds with “her” chairs, and gave them to her children. Finally, my interviewee’s elderly father slipped out to replenish his flask with homemade, infused vodka, and then offered, slyly with his eyes, to all at the table.
Past acquaintances from my experiences learning Persian gave the PSOM *Noruz* event the feeling of a family reunion. Fleeting conversations uncover random ideas. One of my Persian language teachers compared the “different races” of Brazilians and Argentines, believing Brazilians to be more beautiful because they are “more mixed.” He also pointed out the hierarchy of privilege in the banquet area; the reserved tables near the stage were secured by paying for advertising, which also allowed people to go to the head of the food line. As usual, talk of my dissertation was in the air. Women gossiped about older men, who divorce their wives and return to Iran for a young bride, and claimed it to be a common occurrence. Older women were aghast at the young girls’ “slutty” dresses, but then brushed it off as typical teenage behavior.

Besides the food line, the dance floor is the place to be. Women-women and women-men dance partners pull out their best moves of *eshveh*, a provocative exchange of coquettish flirtation. One shocked Iranian man with a heavy accent witnessed the exchange of *eshveh* between my Persian teacher and I, and was boggled that I was not part Iranian. Of course, the night did not pass without complaint: the DJ was unsatisfactory, and elder Iranians were disappointed with the erratic change midway through many songs. The song ceased just as the rhythm entranced the dancers, and the magical sparks of *eshveh* secreted their power.

Iranians who are more enmeshed in an extended family network locally more easily translate and mimic *Noruz* as practiced in Iran. Without the ritual rhythms and kin presence, parents can “hope” that children will acquire some appreciation. Not only do the calendars not coincide, the ritual rhythm of the “caravan visitation”—“there’s nobody
for us to congregate and drive around with, and to follow, and to be followed”—is non-existent in Minnesota.

Bahá’í *Noruz* celebrations

Bahá’ís follow a different calendar, and observe other holidays that conflict with Christian holidays, which Muslim Iranians observe in Minnesota. Generally, Bahá’ís do not celebrate Christmas to avoid confusing children, but also because of materialism and commercialization. However, Bahá’ís celebrate the Zoroastrian holidays. Nasrin contrasts *Noruz* contrast with the transnational celebration context, which condense into a shared occasion among “friends and family, instead of a big group.” With her families of orientation and procreation in Minnesota, the remnants of ancient rites translate into “a little fire pit in the back,” a saying while jumping over the fire, and for *Shab-e Yalda* a pomegranate, nuts and fruit, a fortune, and a wish. Gone is the cherished, traditional *korsi* (a low table covered with blankets or rugs and a heater under it), which she recalls as “a cozy remembrance.”

**NASRIN:** We still have a few celebrations or traditions. *Noruz*—that’s a Persian thing. The last Wednesday we still do that with my parents. They have a little fire pit in the back and we jump over the fire. We taught the kids the sayings. [Tracy recites the saying: “*Zardee-e man az toe, sorkhee-e toe az man!*”] “Nice!” [Nasrin claps her hands and says]: “A+!” [Nasrin and Tracy laugh.] The longest night of
the year [Shab-e yalda] we try to get together [with] friends and family, instead of a big group. Got to have the pomegranate. Gotta have nuts and the fruits. You tell your fortune. You close your eyes and make a wish. My dad has a korsi set up in the wintertime. That is such a cozy remembrance. I have little, tiny memories of sitting around a huge korsi; all the family members sitting with a whole bunch of blankets on top. That’s fun. [Nasrin giggles.]

Although several Bahá’í families appear at the annual PSOM event, the majority attend a Bahá’í-specific celebration. These gatherings are markedly different, since those in attendance indicate the Bahá’í faith’s universalistic message. Beyond the majority of Iranians, celebrants represent various ethnic and national groups, and the prevalence of the missionary practices and conversion. A community-wide Bahá’í Noruz celebration occurs annually. One year, surprisingly, it was held on Noruz, which typically does not occur because Iranians either celebrate with or travel to visit their closest family and friends. This year, the Bahá’í Noruz event took place at a private college in St. Paul. Approximately one hundred to one hundred twenty people attended. Only a simple banner decorated the hall and commemorated the Bahá’í year. A female attendee commenced the gathering by chanting a long, controlled Bahá’í prayer chanted in Persian. Others read passages about the Bahá’í faith and recognized non-Bahá’ís in attendance. Unlike the PSOM and Atlas Grill public events, which serve Persian fare, an
“American-style” dinner was served (at 7:30pm), with the eldest male forming the head of the line.

Although Noruz is a spring rite, the weather in Minnesota rarely cooperates. The cold climate, however, does not inhibit young Iranian women from donning sandals, strappy, revealing dresses, and short skirts. This does not go unnoticed by female elders, who urge the young to conceal their cleavage and fannies! As with every Iranian gathering, the implicit “dressy dress code” becomes explicit in the intermingling between Iranian and other celebrants. At any Iranian gathering, a persistent feeling of being either improperly or under-dressed is a given.

Following the meal, dinner tables were cleared and moved, and a dessert and beverage area (sans alcohol) was set up, around which men congregated for the duration of the evening. Post-dinner dancing is the pinnacle of the evening. The type of music played caused slight friction. According to my informant-gatekeeper, “white people” complained every year that the Iranian DJ played too much Persian music. Organizers addressed this by having an African DJ early in the evening, who played American, Iranian, and African music. Later in the evening, he was “relieved” by an Iranian DJ (at approximately 11:15 PM). Judging by the long, loud cheers when he arrived, his “star power” surpassed the African DJ’s status. With the first note of Persian music, the dance floor demographic changed: Iranians ruled, and “the others” were conspicuously absent. Iranians stopped only for a brief cool-down. Pulling elder females onto the dance floor signals respect. Men danced, but only with their wives or partners, and were less present than women on the dance floor. Children’s dancing inspired merriment. They danced
indiscriminately to hip hop (and owned the dance floor exclusively while it was playing) and Persian music. One Iranian woman expressed her disdain for hip hop, and flees her own home when her children play it. Eritreans gave “dance lessons” to revelers—despite its deceitful simplicity—moving in a large circle with a forward shoulder shrugging motion—the Eritrean dance proved difficult. My own efforts had them inquiring, jokingly: “Are you sure you’re not African?” While dancing underpinned diversity, food separated celebrants into “gastronomic ghettos,” and flouted the Bahá’í ideal of universal oneness.

The “spell” of matchmaking by female elders did not escape the evening. My gatekeeper, obviously concerned about my single status, introduced me to at least two eligible bachelors. One attempt involved the very uninterested Iranian DJ, who was “dragged” over to me, and introduced by saying: “This is the one I told you about.” In another attempt, I was pulled into the bathroom and asked if an older Dutch man appealed to me. Bahá’í public events are different affairs because of the prevalence of diverse groups (European Americans, Africans, African Americans). Public Iranian celebrations of Noruz, for example, are almost exclusively Iranian with the exception of a few European or African American spouses. Given this, it is easier to “blend in” at Bahá’í events. A single, non-Iranian female at a public sphere Iranian gathering is certainly a curious novelty.

Private Noruz celebrations
Privately, Noruz occupies the vital node in the mechanism of people’s memories, which contrasts sharply with their memories of Muslim holidays, such as Ramadan and Ashura (only two respondents recalled memories). In Iran, the thirteen day “big holiday” of Noruz involved: visiting extended family; traveling to “cabins,” villas or the “famous cities in Iran”; giving and receiving eid-ee (fresh money); donning new clothes; eating sweets; paying respects to elders in a roving “car caravan” or by train if the family was too large to travel by car; setting up the haft-seen; and watching the clock in anticipation of sal-e tahvil (the exact moment of the vernal equinox). Slotting family into an opportune, scheduled time is unheard of. The symbolic similarities (e.g., coloring eggs, sprouting grass) between Noruz and other spring holidays (Passover, Easter) facilitate its translatability in the transnational context. In the Twin Cities, Noruz is the holiday that Iranians celebrate universally, and determinedly “make a big deal of it.”

In the Twin Cities, the private sphere enlivens with “visitation processions,” and parties among friends and family in homes and hotels. For example, Aresh’s and his wife’s private Noruz party (which hosts up to sixty-five guests) persists, whereas other holidays—Chahar shanbe suri, Shab-e Yalda, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad—have not. And his college-aged children are still “looking for eid-ee. I’m still getting eid-ee. We have a little pool—we empty [it]—and we have a fish. We bought new clothes; if you have something new, the whole year you would be given new things.”

The amalgamation of multiple micro-communities is evidence of the steadfast devotion to Iranian culture that plays out within the intimate thresholds of home. Noruz is the mainstay anchor among all Iranians. Privately, Iranians celebrate with either their
closest family and friends, and perhaps have a larger gathering with their micro-
communities. One private celebration among my Iranian “family” uncovered the
perennial organizational problems that occurred at a community-wide event for a critical,
demanding group of people. The gossip about the *Noruz* gathering highlighted, once
again, patterns that plague the local Iranian community. As we met and talked prior to
eating dinner, celebrants began to discuss the unfortunate events of the PSOM *Noruz*
party that year. The private sphere conversation unfolds into a myriad of complaints of
public sphere foibles of Iranian organizational acumen.

*Noruz* returned, *tahvil-e sal* faded into the past, and an especially brutal winter
lingered outside. Tulips strain to be sprung. Transnationally, the thirteen-day ritual of
*Noruz* condenses into a Gregorian island in time—“the weekend”—when celebrants’
schedules coincide conveniently. Akin to the ritual of paying respect to the eldest family
members in Iran, the family “caravan” arrives at the condo of *maadar bozorg*
(grandmother) and *pedar bozorg* (grandfather). This year, the annual assemblage of
multi-generational, micro-spatial, variegated interpretations and expressions of the
holiday play out in *do ragheh* (two veined) fashion in an upscale, Minneapolis suburb.
Per “Persian time,” guests trickle in, and ritualistic greetings ensue: standing up as each
guest arrives, shaking hands, and/or exchanging kisses on both cheeks (or more
depending on trends in Tehran). The sport of teasing the anthropologist holds a playful
place in my Iranian “sister’s” husband’s heart. “Tracy, ‘real subjects’ are visiting from
Iran this year!” While drawing attention to hyphens and hybridity, the “real subjects”
reinvigorate tradition, and divulge dilemmas of dichotomies—past-present, inherited-
borrowed, private-public, individual-community, sacred-profane, authentic-alloyed, native-host, tradition-modernity, “blood”-borrowed—wherein celebrants reenact translations of an ancient, Zoroastrian rite of spring within modern, cultural confluences.

The evening unwinds around the island monolith at the Noruz celebration in the kitchen of the grandparent’s condo. Multiple generations inhabit multiple niches, animated by conversations and plays in the kitchen, the first-generation matriarch procures help from her husband’s cousin’s wife (from Iran) to prepare the extensive Noruz meal. Farsi conversation buzzes around the fireplace between the first-generation patriarch and his male cousin from Iran. The patriarch explicates the symbols of spring renewal on the haft-seen, and then quizzes young, old, and “foreign” about their meaning. Hungry children dart in and out of the fireplace area, digging into the appetizers (e.g., noon-paneer-sabzi, maast-o khiyar) to curb their pangs. Second-generation, Iranian-American children avoid their first-generation, second-cousin from Iran, and the awkward English-Farsi language divide. The college-aged, second-generation plays hide-and-seek with their young, second-generation cousins. Conversations click on about concerns of high school exams, varsity sports, grades, graduation, dating, and debate as to whether quality of life or prestige is more critical for one’s college experience. A first-generation sister-in-law sings praises about her business and fashion style, featured in a Twin Cities’ “happenings” magazine. After-dinner political conservations about terrorism, Israel, and Iran’s nuclear ambitions, tinged with conspiracy theory, filter through the living room around fruit, dessert, and chai. And the 1.5 generation in the
kitchen—daughters, sons, daughter-in-law, sons-in-law—don rubber gloves, do the
dishes, and tend to the samovar.

As time whiles away through the whines of the college-aged, second-generation’s
impatience, interrupted only by their obsessive attachment to mobile phone materiality,
the patriarchal grandparent distributes *eid-ee* in envelopes, addressed calligraphically
with each child’s and grandchild’s name. Aunts and uncles may distribute gifts,
followed by jokes about excessiveness: “What is this? Santa Claus?” Another essential
pre-dinner activity—the “paparazzi” family portrait—is time-consuming, since each
individual requires a picture with his or her camera or phone. The patriarch marks
affinity through the inclusion and exclusion of fictive kin in the family portrait (i.e., the
exclusion of the grandson’s American girlfriend or adopted anthropologist sister). Still,
“Grandma Tracy” (so named because the only way I fit into the photo was to sit on a
chair) sits in at least one of the family photos, although other versions are taken without
the “grandma.” Just before the meal, an obligatory prayer, penned by the patriarch,
incites groans, giggles, gripes, and rolling eyes from the youngsters, and the grandchild
chosen to recite it to the family celebrants does so begrudgingly.

At a crucial juncture in the course of the evening, a predicament reveals itself
regarding the Twin Cities’ Iranian community. A debacle ensued at the community-wide
*Noruz* celebration organized by PSOM. A tale unravels through an English-Persian,
code-switching conversation among the first- and 1.5 generation women, who are seated
around the kitchen island—our metaphoric monolith, our Persepolis of modernity.
Within the sacred space of the condo’s “courtyard walls,” attendees of the event enact a
“telephone game,” a play-by-play for the non-attendees of the event. “Conscientious avoiders” of public Iranian events listen with rapt attention, as attendees fill in the blanks of the evening’s fiasco, precipitated by two significant changes incorporated by the PSOM organizers: hiring a new Iranian caterer, and moving the venue (to reduce costs).

Frustrations with involvement in Iranian community events became painfully obvious in several ways. First, the Iranian caterer lacked experience catering Iranian food for a large event. Second, the meal was served too little, too late (reportedly after ten o’clock in the evening). Third, food was leftover, but most critically, full plates of crunchy rice—and not the delicacy of tadigh—scandalously dotted the tables at the end of the evening. Finally, the PSOM organizers were reimbursed minimally for the poor food and unhappy customers (especially in light of the exorbitant profit accrued by the caterers). Furthering the intrigue, negative word-of-mouth publicity on yelp.com disappeared mysteriously a day later.

In addition to the catering problems, issues related to the venue change also arose. Firstly, signage confusion and the lost crowd wandered aimlessly on an unmarked trail from the parking ramp to the venue. Second, the Fire Department’s limited the number of dancers on the dance floor, made worse by their inability to get a groove on to the Iranian DJ from LA. The young, female security guard’s failed to enforce capacity limitations, and her tearful attempts to placate angry celebrants prompted criticisms of the extremes of equal opportunity for the sexes (because of her inability to control the situation). At the end of the evening, the storyteller recalls having to stop for fast food to satiate her irritable, hungry children. The bitter taste of French fries outlived the
sweetness of friendship, familiarity, and family reconnections at the students’ Noruz event.

While the students’ efforts are appreciated, they are criticized as inexperienced, and contrasted with the Greek students’ organizational acumen. Finality punctuates the story as one “conscientious avoider” of Iranian events exclaims that “it just goes to show” that Iranians are never happy, prone to find fault, and incapable of organizing through a common purpose. The expense and poor organization of the event thwart both the attempts of student organizers and community celebrants to “support the community,” translating as negative feedback to non-participants. A paradox reveals itself. That is, out of respect for the caterers, who happen to be Iranian, but do not specialize in Iranian cuisine, participants of the Noruz celebration feel inhibited to complain or criticize too much, because business connections with the caterers might be jeopardized.

The bungled Noruz event is a metaphorical tale of the ongoing problem in the continuity of institutional culture within the Twin Cities’ Iranian community, and its implication for self- and transnational identity. A fluctuating institutional fission-fusion pattern has consequences for a shared, ethnic group consciousness among Iranian transnationals, who are nonetheless bound by the persistence of some thing Iranian. Iranian immigrants orient themselves to evaluate growth in their personhood. Nationalism is subsumed to good deeds, morality, and helping others. Iranian transnationals in the Twin Cities embrace the “happy” aspects of their inherited and adopted cultural repertoires in order to improve the human condition. An appreciation of perfecting the human spirit dwells in this celebratory nature, and spirituality is performed
through betterment of self and teaching this to children. The bricoleur’s selections result from and are guided by both host and native interactions as well as the need to adapt, “fit in,” respond to discrimination and prejudice, carve an alcove of intra-and inter-community belonging, and confront the permanence of Little Home in the wake of the vanishing point of Big Home.

Summary
The above reminiscences of my experiences celebrating *Noruz* indicate the ins and outs and ebb and flow of involvement with community is magnetic and dynamic. Iranians are drawn to community, but how they define community varies based on experiences within the larger circle of Iranians. As Gholam Ali states, “when the circle gets larger,” beyond one’s inner circle of intimates, mistrust becomes pervasive. The urge to join forces on a larger scale, as a “whole” community, exposes those willing (the doers) to pursue a cause to judgment and criticism, because “[Iranian] people cannot see another person succeed”: “they become extremely judgmental”; “there’s jealousy going around”; “there’s a ton of name-calling and backstabbing”; “they just bring you down.” A shared purpose requires negotiating and resolving issues for the sake of community, rather than self. But references to Iranians’ selfish pursuits are commonplace, and partially explain the proliferation of multiple, intimate communities. Local Iranians involved in institutional life in the Twin Cities’ Iranian community over several decades are wary of getting too close, because: “we get burnt out by each other”; “if I do something for [an] Iranian person, [they expect me to] say ‘thank you’ for [the] next twenty years”; “they’re kind of
scared to do things for each other”; “there’s no appreciation”; “if it goes bad they have to take the shame, take the blame.” Others experience Iranians’ competitive nature as an inability to compromise: they “weren’t willing to listen”; “Iranians do not work together”; “very bossy people”; “my way or the highway.” Still, others may have very limited involvement with wealthy Iranians, who may be good for business connections, but are more interested in what people own and one’s level of income. This group of Iranians, according to my interviewees, are shallow and not down-to-earth: “I know some good Iranian[s] here, but they are very limited”; “it’s on the surface, clashes and things going on between them.” Furthermore, Iran’s political history has created a culture of paranoia among Iranians. Although the public sphere is defined as a realm of corruption, and the inner sanctum a space of trust, safety, and expression, the small population in the Twin Cities does not inspire confidence. Within the larger community: “it’s a lack of trust … different conspiracies … afraid they may cause trouble … very suspicious. … It’s been ingrained in our culture from way back.” Prolonged interaction in the public Iranian sphere eventually reveals ethnic, class, and other differences that would establish distinct boundaries in Iran.

In some ways, the Iranian community is its own worst enemy, since the draw toward a larger circle delineates differences. While many Iranians in the Twin Cities make an effort to support the PSOM-sponsored annual celebrations, it creates “tiny little memories” and a fleeting sense of reinvigorated identity. In order to avoid the intra-public sphere politics at such events, the Iranian “assimilationist” constructs a toolkit of strategies wherein the evening is an entrance into detachment; distancing from the
priorities of purity and establishing a presence through a performance of altered realities.
The “traditional” Iranian self relies on remnants of ta’arof to navigate the principle of
communication, but disavows claims to inauthenticity. Visitors and recent arrivals from
Iran challenge one’s vanishing ability to adeptly maneuver interaction, while presenting
the opportunity to hone the skill.

Iranians who ultimately “burn out,” however, experience a more forceful
centrifugal push away from community. Detachment from “the” community creates
attachment to a micro-community. The kaleidoscope of communities that is the “Land of
Ten-Thousand Iranian Communities” represents the proliferation of inner circles of
intimate family and friendship that fulfill a close, interpersonal commitment to help one
another, commemorate a selected semblance of heritage, and relive beauty through the
transition from dark to light in the equinox and light to dark in the solstice. Ancient
history is reborn in the simple gestures of recognition among family and friends, and
tradition continues its march with time.

A more serious obstacle to the celebration and maintenance of identity plays out
in the American public sphere. Here, the “assimilationist” Iranian assembles a toolkit of
strategies containing different contents. Benefitting from a “dual nature of the Iranian
self” and a “double consciousness,” Iranians stand both outside and inside multiple
cultures. As has been noted, self-exile from the Iranian community grants a distant
perspective from which to assess the layer or location of belonging. The period of
“exile” is determined individually, and influences the positive or negative nature of
interactions. Public sphere, negative interaction may simply be brushed off by the
“assimilationist,” who then reconnects with like-minded individuals in private gatherings through the “bond” of gossip, mutual interests, shared experiences, and/or other cultural aspects of commiseration.

The “assimilationist” utilizes “dual nature” and “double consciousness” in the public American sphere as well. Strategies to address experiences of discrimination and prejudice occasionally require Iranians to confound the discriminators by temporarily suspending Iranianness; that is, in order to first establish trust or understanding, Iranians present themselves as “Persian,” Italian, Mexican or another ethnicity. The attempt to bamboozle represents an opportunity to direct the interaction in their favor, which they redirect by educating the ignorant about their real origins: “I say it as it is. I’m Iranian, but I am not a terrorist.” While “assimilation” is a tool to “stay under the radar” in the American public sphere, it incites a significant force on the determination of inter-community interaction. This may lead to superficial relationships with neighbors and/or act as a centripetal desire to engage in intra-community interaction. For many interviewees, this ebb and flow is continuous, and unfolds into a personal philosophy over the course of being a migrant, transplant, hyphenated individual. These philosophies, explored in the next chapter, present an attempt to explore the meaning of Iranianness in the American immigrant landscape, but more importantly, the contribution they make as immigrants for the betterment of humanity.
CHAPTER VI

REPACKING ONE’S PORTABLE IDEOLOGY:

SYNCRETIC APPROPRIATIONS TOWARD “ASSIMULATION” IN THE TWIN CITIES

Unpacking

We opened crates in the barn.

Shipping crates. Crow Bars. Bales of hay, the sun in the open bays and the summer air charged for a storm.

My son, who did not exist when these boxes were packed twenty-three years ago, helped with the heavy lifting, shifted that nail-studded chipboard lid as if it weighed no more than a withered old revolution.

Zara Houshmand (Karim, 2006, p. 308)

If you look throughout three thousand years of history, Iran couldn’t have stayed Iran. If Iranians couldn’t look up to Genghis Khan and say, “You’re the greatest, even though you’re Chinese. You decimated
us, killed all of us, but we love you anyway." Or when Arabs came and brought Islam, we became more Islamic than the frickin’ Arabs were, for cryin’ out loud! We have a great propensity for assimilation [and] to identify with our conquerors. If we put that in this context—Western culture—America is our conqueror. We have to become more American than the Americans themselves. (Bob, emphasis added)

Two events prompted our departure from Mali in the fall of 1983; both involved death and mosquitoes. … The second event was the death from hepatitis of a member of the American expatriate community. Mickey Vakil was actually an Iranian, the son of a diplomat who had grown up in the United States during the reign of the last American-supported Shah. Mickey was in Mali working for an engineering firm. In many ways, he was more American than Americans themselves, as evidenced by his ardent love of baseball. (Dettwyler, 1994, 14, emphasis added)

[My son] sees all these decorations for Christmas. I’m not going to shut it off; so, I introduced it to
him. I said, “This is Christian. This is their big celebration.” We decorated the house, and I gave him presents. I don’t want him to feel left out when he’s going to school. … It’s a celebration; [it’s] not going to kill anybody. … So I celebrated it with him for years until he got older. … And then we started with [my daughter]. [We put up a Christmas tree]. The whole shebang. Even worse than the American people! (Azam, emphasis added)

Democracy here is people can think independently. You see democracy in the root of families. Parents don’t force as much things as we force on our kids, and they don’t give as much as we give. So, kids grow up with a sense that they have to make their own decisions, which is good, and that they have to do everything themselves. We live with the consequences of our children’s actions; and that’s something I constantly have to work on. There has to be a balance. Democracy has to be protected. That’s the reason I value what I see here—maybe more than Americans. (Pardis II, emphasis added)
Despite the ebb and flow of affiliation with the or an Iranian community, the continuity of Iranianness, I argue, aligns with an appreciation of the pragmatics of bi- and multicultural modifications in the host society. Diametric viewpoints acquired vis-à-vis familial lessons privilege appraisal of the benefits and detriments of native and host identity markers for their adaptive and expressive utility in the preservation of national identity and growth as a person. Articulations entail relinquishing ethnic markers regarded as conspicuously “foreign” or “alien” (e.g., hijab, Muslim holidays), and accentuating “non-threatening” symbols with mutable meanings. Confronting their improbable return to Iran in the post-revolutionary period, Iranians reluctantly “unpacked their suitcases.” Yet, rather than a complete “desire and ability to assimilate rapidly” (Thernstrom, Orlov, and Handlin 1980:524), unpacking and belonging entails a process of “assimilation,” wherein the appearance of assimilation is performed in the public sphere; a strategy of “just enough” Americanness to be successful citizens in the pursuit of democracy, while nurturing private, “traditional” Iranian values that ensure cultural persistence. Although indecision and alienation for do-ragheh (two-veined) Iranians exists (Darvalan 1996), the creative compromise between “tasteful” rudiments of native and adoptive cultural repertoires and personal histories are assembled into “portable ideologies” (Adelkhah 2000; Sullivan 2001), which serve the “assimilation” process wherein the “outside Iranian” incorporates and performs “good” cultural markers (e.g., gift-giving at Christmas, music, pre-Islamic holidays, American democratic ideals) to present a public self identity informed by positivity, happiness, and morality. At the same time, the “inside Iranian” prioritizes Persian traditions, culture, and identity tied to
language, Zoroastrian fragments, the arts, trappings of ta’arof, and gastronomy, which are steadfastly celebrated in the company of close intimates. Childhood lessons are tapped to raise and orient the second-generation, American Iranian children to be what they choose to be—to write the next generation of portable ideologies—provided they do so within the confines of the law, civility, and precepts of that tradition.

Reconciling the dilemma of powerlessness versus appropriation is befitting here, and must take place prior to authoring what Giddens (1991) calls one’s self-reflexive project in modernity (i.e., portable ideology). The immigrant experience, informed by a host of “external agencies,” contrasts with the control afforded to individuals in traditional societies (which can also, of course, be oppressive) (191). Powerlessness is experienced on a personal and global scale, and a “survivalist outlook carries connotations of appropriation as well as powerlessness” (193). In the post-revolutionary period, Iranians were powerless to return, and confronted a period of alienation that required improvisation to reconfigure self-identity. The capitulation to unpack their suitcases established the first step toward appropriation, which is at the “heart of the self” (ibid.:193). Majority-minority interactions steer the assessment of self-identity, whereby negative interpretations by the majority thwart reconciliation of the powerlessness-appropriation dilemma. Based on majority-minority interactions, “identificatory decisions” are made, which may include: assimilation (integration, conformism), pluralism (accommodation, voluntary segregation), submission (self-hatred, forced segregation), militancy (aggression, contention), and secession (revitalization, avoidance) (Rinder 1970). The identificatory decisions that most apply to Iranians in Minnesota are
assimilation and pluralism (although submission, militancy, and secession are not overruled as relevant during certain points along the continuum of finding their space). Internally, the immigrant’s morale, heritage, and economic strength impact the loss of or identification with identity (Dothan 1987:97). Externally, phenotype, acceptance, and power relations influence whether the majority “want the minority to adopt their identity” (ibid.). The internal Iranian environment is situated in pride in ancient heritage and socio-economic assets, while the external environment is informed by prejudice and discrimination, generating power differentials that influence acceptance.

Through self-other interactions, knowledge of self evolves, but is also dependent upon an individual’s location (Bandlamudi 1994:487). The more complex the cultural matrix is in which individuals situate themselves, the deeper their “understanding of the self’s connectedness to various cultural institutions—family, school, ethnicity, [and] economic and political systems” (ibid.:484); self and culture are “constantly evolving through dialogic encounters” (ibid.). Interactions generate hierarchies of space, which manifest by “rethinking difference through connection” (Gupta and Ferguson 2002:67). A model of articulation, according to Gupta and Ferguson, should not assume the formation of a priori community connections out of space. “[B]y always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the processes whereby a space achieves a distinctive identity as a place” (67) as one that is “differently territorialized” (68). The “natural and essential connection between the place and the culture” has shattered (ibid.:69). Yet, concurrent with the blur comes a fabricated sense of community to which people become attached; an ideal sense of belonging
attached to “symbolic anchors” (e.g., mythical reunification with a “homeland”) (ibid.). Who makes the meaning of place salient depends on power structures, which are couched in terms of “natural” connections between certain peoples and territories (ibid.:70). Place making moves outside of the nation and “home” and “family,” where “the association of place with memory, loss, and nostalgia” lives (ibid.:71). In order “to move beyond naturalized conceptions of spatialized ‘cultures’,” we need “a willingness to interrogate, politically and historically, the apparent ‘given’ of a world … divided into ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’” (ibid.:74).

Interactions with Minnesotans are shaped by prejudice and discrimination, which is embedded in American ignorance of Iran, Iranians, Muslims, and Middle Easterners. Omnipresent inquiries—“What are you?” and “Where are you from?”—remind Iranians of their “foreignness,” produce “dynamics of inclusion and exclusion,” and paradoxically expect immigrants to “become American,” while being reminded that they are “outsiders.” Minnesotans say:

“You are going to be one of us. You’re going to give up your culture, you have to give up Iran, you have to learn our language as soon as possible so you can assimilate.” At the same time, they’re telling us, “You will never fit in. You are always an Iranian, Shiite Muslim terrorist.” … I walk around trying not to offend anybody. They tell me who I should be. … Minnesotans and this covert prejudice. … I know when I’m being watched. That’s the worst part. (Zank 2004:51, italics in original)
Iranians interpret the myth of “Minnesota Nice” variously as “covert prejudice,” “cold and removed,” “barricades they’ve built up,” “they don’t let you into their circle,” and “you’re never one of them; you’re never their friend; you’re never their family.” Yet, although there are phenotypic differences between Iranians and the majority Scandinavian and German immigrants in Minnesota, and it has impacted degrees of acceptance and power-play judgments, Iranians’ morale is rooted in pride and economic advantages. Because Minnesota is home to numerous Fortune 500 companies, its standard of living is attractive to Iranian parents, who identify Minnesota as a good place to raise children and enjoy the fruits of a small, but cosmopolitan, city. Nonetheless, life in the U.S. is described as “stressful” and “not as carefree” because of a perceived lack of safety, the need to be vigilant about children’s whereabouts (especially daughters), busy schedules, and excessive freedom granted to children. Parents manage their children’s lives by mimicking the guarded “open-door policy” safety net relished in Iran.

ZOHREH: People are cold and removed, and they don’t let you into their circle. Maybe someday I’ll love it? What I don’t like about Minnesotans—as nice as they are, and they have done only good to me—you’re never one of them; you’re never their friend; you’re never their family. You always stay outside those walls and barricades they’ve built up. I’ve always felt [like] an outsider, and I continue to feel that way. [My daughter] can be Iranian; can be American. I hope she belongs to a community, and it’s open to
have others in her community. I have been friendless. I always joke about it. [The] Iranian community hasn't done me right. After years of soul-searching, I know what I did wrong; I was too educated, too open-minded. I want [my daughter] to learn to abide [by] the law, respect the rules, and listen to what is said to her. I don't want her [to be] defiant. But at the same time, I want her to have an open, questioning mind of what's wrong and what's right. I don't want her to accept everything blindly; what media tells her. But at the same time, I don't want her to be lawless like Iranians are. In Iran, rules are meant to be broken.

Zohreh walks the tightrope of liminality as evidenced by her repeated reference to the phrase “but at the same time.” In Minnesota, she has “always felt [like] an outsider” and has been “friendless,” but also feels that the “Iranian community hasn’t done me right.” Her portable ideology attributes her betwixt and between situation to being “too educated, too open-minded.” She hopes her daughter will learn lessons of American civil society, rather than accept media blindly. She contrasts Iran, where people are “lawless” and “rules are meant to be broken,” with the U.S., where her daughter will “learn to abide [by] the law, respect the rules, and listen to what is said to her. I don't want her [to be] defiant.”
Parsa’s portable philosophy balances between the “weapon” of “newly gained freedom” and guarding against its abuse if “you don’t use it right.” Freedom to mingle with Americanness is “okay,” but only “if you’re a good American.” Parsa establishes his boundaries of self-identity around “just doing good.”

PARSA: It is a challenge to maintain your identity. It’s so easy to lose it. It’s that newly gained freedom that some people are not familiar with, and they don’t know how to use it. It’s like a weapon. If you don’t use it right, then you might end up damaging somebody. Freedom is good thing, but I think some people are not ready for it. It’s okay to become American, if you’re a good American. It is just doing good, not bad. [These are] the boundaries that I have set for myself to not cross.

National identity is a work in progress, particularly as one’s grasp becomes tenuous through time in the transnational context: “it’s so easy to lose it.” Although “freedom is a good thing,” abusing it leads to “damaging somebody.” “Doing bad” threatens one’s claim to understanding the power of freedom, which if abused reflects poorly on the Iranian individual, but also on “the Iranian community” and “the Iranian national” in the American public sphere. Like the nouveau riche, the abuse of freedom by the Iranian who experiences “nouveau égalité” can cross the boundary into bad country, give ammunition to Americans whose ideology of the Iranian “Other” provide “psychological equilibrium and order … [and] a frame of reference for understanding the
world” (Merskin 2012:305). Parsa’s surveillance of Iranianness in the public sphere entails not “doing bad.” Racist ideologies justify social inequality and the construction of difference. They erect a structure for perceiving others, for action and cohesion, and a determination of the dominant versus minority groups (ibid.). The formation of racist images is a collective process that “operates chiefly through public media in which individuals who are accepted as the spokesmen of a racial group characterize publicly another racial group” (Blumer 2012:118). Using freedom discriminately in the American public sphere, Parsa appoints himself as a “good” spokesperson for Iranians, and thereby defines his “sense of social position” vis-à-vis the American backdrop of prejudice (ibid.).

While being sworn in as a U.S. citizen, the inspiration of Azam’s portable ideology—“it matters if you’re a good person”—commenced from the judge’s counsel: “I want you guys to remember who you are and where you came from. Remember all the good things about your culture, and learn all the good things about this culture, and become a good human being.” Following this, Azam’s “goal is to make a difference in people’s [lives],” enculturate her children, and mature as a positive, optimistic person.

AZAM: I can make a choice of being in this country and living like one hundred percent Iranian or the other choice would be for me to live here [and be] Iranian and American. I can mix the cultures together. The day I became [a] citizen, I [will] never forget what the judge said: “I want you guys to remember who you are and where you came from.
Remember all the good things about your culture, and learn all the good things about this culture, and become a good human being.” I just loved what he said. It doesn’t matter where you are born, what color you are, what kind of a race or ethnicity you have, but it matters if you’re a good person. My goal is to make a difference in people’s life, and to teach that to my children, too.

The older I’m getting, the more positive and optimistic I am toward life. If you come here, you and I are friends, I see you at a gathering, you give me the cold shoulder; I taught myself not to be mad at you. I’m gonna find some justification; I’m gonna say, “She’s not had a good day today. It has nothing to do with me.” If I want to take it personal, I’m gonna come and ask you, “Did I do anything? Let’s talk about it.”

Between being one-hundred percent Iranian and living as an Iranian and American, Azam aims to “mix the culture’s together” by incorporating the “good things” of past inheritances and “all the good things about this culture.” As a strategy to confront negative interactions—“I see you at a gathering, you give me the cold shoulder. I taught myself not to be mad at you. I’m gonna find some justification. … Let’s talk about it”—she gains the moral high ground. Part teacher-part student, Azam seizes the judge’s
lesson, and incorporates it into her self-repertoire: it is important to “become a good human being, [because] it matters if you’re a good person.”

In Tahireh’s compact creed, the process through which Bahá’í Iranians learn “the good culture, and not the bad one” is fundamental to success and betterment as immigrants. Tahireh links this lesson to the foundation of her faith.

**TAHIREH:** We learn a lot from American[s]. I mean, education is the best here. We are learning very smart things from Americans. It’s not all that bad. There are so many people, so many good things [here]. It’s things like the disrespect [that are not good]. After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, his grandson said, “When you go to America, you learn the good culture, and not the bad one. Your grandchildren shouldn’t be educated like American[s].” [Iranians are successful] because they are hardworking people, and they grew up [with] the value of education.

While Tahireh acknowledges that certain facets of American culture are good—“education is the best here. We are learning very smart things from Americans”—her faith prescribes that “grandchildren shouldn’t be educated like Americans,” especially not in their propensity to be disrespectful. Tahireh interprets experiences with co-workers, whose ethnocentric judgments led to a misunderstanding about crossing her arms over her chest, as a sign of disrespect. Because her American co-workers jump to conclusions
about the symbolism of this behavior, she interprets this as a lack of interest in learning about Iranian culture.

Comparing Iranians in the Twin Cities to Iranians in Los Angeles, Nadia appreciates the mixture of “good and bad” cultural markers. Nadia’s perspective on “Irangeles” (Kelley, Friedlander, and Colby 1993) is positive, because it has married pre-revolutionary Iranian culture with American freedom: “It’s like a small Iran, [but] all the good things they got from [the] U.S. You don’t have to pretend that you are religious.” Freedom of speech and lack of religious pretense allows an individual to be “free to be whatever you want to [be].”

NADIA: [In Los Angeles] it’s like you’re living in Iran, but in a good era before the revolution. You have all the Iranian things that are good and bad. At the same time, you have the freedom of speech. It’s like a small Iran, [but] all the good things [Nadia giggles] they got from U.S. You don’t have to pretend that you are religious. It’s different inside the house and outside the house; in Iran, we party in the house. Here, you can be yourself. I’m more like Iranians who grew up here; they are like American Iranian. I can be friends with them; they’re more interesting; more honest. The people who came from Iran are complicated—the religious thing—they are not honest. They’re not direct. Iranian women are really
different from me. I can’t get connected with them or have a decent conversation [because they are so traditional]. I told my mom I don’t want my children [to] grow up in Iran, because you have to pretend. Being American, you’re free to be whatever you want to. I do admire [that]; that’s one of the reasons I came here. Being American is not an issue at all for me. It’s not being American; it’s like being yourself. I like both my children [to] learn Farsi, [and] to celebrate New Year’s—the only two things I want them to learn.

Nadia cherishes honesty over traditional culture (which she equates with being religious), and interprets the behavior of traditional people as dishonest, complicated, and indirect. She wants her children to learn Persian and celebrate Noruz, although these are “the only two things.” Nadia couples the repeated phrase “you have to pretend” with traditional culture, which constrains the individual’s freedom “to be whatever you want to.” She identifies with “Iranians who grew up here” (i.e., American Iranian), since being American means being yourself. Ironically, Nadia’s portable philosophy involves a fantasy visit; being in “Irangeses” is “like your living in Iran, but in a good era,” which necessitates pretense.

Azam is the only respondent who admitted to practicing Islam, although her approach to being Muslim is unorthodox: she prays, drinks alcohol, castoffs the hijab, and wears sundresses. Her portable philosophy contains a skeletal structure of Islam, but
she accessorizes it with her own interpretations, and making “it a little modern to my accessibility, to my lifestyle.” The goal is to “look at it as humanistic,” and teach her children to explore, appreciate, evaluate, and embrace what others value. For example, if her children become Christian, she supports that as long as they educate themselves on the practice and principles of the religion. Azam’s children learn their mother’s love lacks strings and stipulations, and thereby ensures they will “be comfortable and be happy.” Besides private prayer, one of Azam’s micro-communities comprises women who hold an annual sofreh. Sofrehs (literally “table cloth”) are private women’s gatherings (contrasted with men’s public visits to mosques and shrines), held in the home “or in front of mosques in order to give food to the poor” (Spellman 2004:62). Shia women engage in ritual sofrehs by spreading “food offerings [on a table cloth] to holy figures and fairies [pari] who are invoked through prayers and stories, and asked to help with tasks, problem and crises” (ibid.). As a singer, Azam is called upon to perform at a “private-public” sofreh (i.e., it is public in as much as individual Iranians are aware of it).

AZAM: One of my friends has a sofreh once a year. I do the Persian prayers. I don’t know how to do the Arabic, but I can sing. She likes my voice. She really goes all out. She decorates everything, and there’s a ton of different food. You get to eat and take some home for your family. Some of the people who are superstitious are like, “Oh, bring me something from [the] sofreh.” The purpose is you ask God to help you deal with this problem you have.
My mother taught me how to pray. I still pray every day but, on the other hand, I drink too. I dress [in] sundresses. I try to use the basics, but I kinda made it a little modern to my accessibility, to my lifestyle. Some of [my] friends are kind of surprised. I don’t think I can name one of my friends who would practice any part of Islam. They even laugh at me: “You pray? Why?” I said, “Because that is something that gives me the comfort; gives me the thing I need to connect with my God.”

I tell [my children], “You know what? I’m just going to teach you the things that I was taught about Islam and culture. You can add to it.” If you want to be a Christian, I don’t care. Get enough education, learn the procedure, go to church, and be a Christian. If that makes you proud, be one. I want you to be comfortable and be happy. Then again, I am extreme in my community. When I tell these to my friends, they’re like, “What!? How can you even say that to a child?” I said, “Because it’s a reality.” Because if I wanna tell my child I love him and her no matter what, I’m not gonna put a stipulation: “You have to be a Muslim. You have to do this: A, B, C, D,
then I’m gonna love you.” No, I cannot do that to my child, and I will not do that to anybody else either.

Iranians like to stick together. They’re proud of their culture; proud of their family of origin; proud of where they came from; that family connection. I look at it this way. I don’t look at it as an Iranian person. I look at it as humanistic. You need something? If I can, I’ll help you. It’s so funny, [I babysat for a friend, and] my girlfriend says, “Gosh, are you stupid?” And another friend said, “Do you really need the money?” [Tracy giggles.] I said, “I’m not even doing this for money. My daughter is learning something.” She told me: “I’m so glad for this experience; that this is gonna help me not to get into teen pregnancy.” This is [a] really strong statement coming out from [an] eleven-year old. The principle of doing this is: somebody asked for something that I could give, and it’s not taking that much out of me. Am I going to sit here and really think, “Okay, if I do this, what am I gonna get out of it?” I don’t look at it that way. I have friends that say, “If I do something for somebody, they better be able to do something for me in return.” That’s not
my philosophy in life. I’m trying to teach it to my kids.

Azam’s friends’ surprise that she prays, and her claim that she cannot “name one of my friends who would practice any part Islam,” is a testimony to the distaste for religion among Iranians. Still, Azam transmits to her children what she “was taught about Islam and culture,” but permits them to “add to it.” Practicing her humanistic stance, she babysits for a friend, a strategy to warn her daughter about the burdens of teenage pregnancy. While she does not maintain a balanced reciprocal expectation when she does a favor for a friend, her takeaway is to teach a lesson to her children to give and do for others without the anticipation of personal benefit or gain. Her daughter appreciates and assimilates the experience of babysitting as a means to avoid teenage pregnancy is then incorporated into her own personal philosophy.

Pardis II’s experiences since being in the U.S. are reflexive opportunities to develop as a person. Prior to coming to the U.S., she stipulated the condition upon which she would agree to her marriage: that is, to obtain an education. Through this process, she and her husband learned “what an independent woman means,” although he “really didn’t know what that meant.” Pardis II incorporates the value of democracy—“maybe more than Americans”—into her portable ideology. Democracy is important in families in that children learn to make decisions, be independent, and solve problems rationally rather than emotionally. Such directives are then incorporated as “teachable moments” in the American public sphere. Tired of her co-worker's religious preaching, she had to “straighten her out,” and educate her about religious rhetoric and the revolution, which permeated Iranian culture in the post-revolutionary period. Her response to her co-
worker is not unusual. Iranians deem American religious rhetoric as dangerous, because it so closely parallels the discourse leading to the revolution in Iranian.

PARDIS II: When I came here [in 1995], I learned a lot. There was a lot of planning, and a lot of adjustment. One of the conditions I wanted from my husband is to continue my education. We agreed prior to our marriage [that] I will go to U of M. My husband was very supportive. He wanted me to grow; he wanted an educated woman. He really didn't know at that time what that meant. That is a growth, not only for me, for him as well; to understand what an independent woman means. I learned it myself.

Nothing [about American culture] drives me crazy; honestly, because I feel I’m learning all the time. What I value most about American culture is anger management. People try to solve things calmly; try to understand; they try to analyze. We are more emotional people. What I’ve learned here is you can just pick things you love from another culture. It was hard to learn, but I did. Democracy here is people can think independently. You see democracy in the root of families. Parents don’t force as much things as we force on our kids, and they don’t give as
much as we give. So, kids grow up with a sense that they have to make their own decisions, which is good, and that they have to do everything themselves. We live with the consequences of our children’s actions; and that’s something I constantly have to work on. There has to be a balance. Democracy has to be protected. That’s the reason I value what I see here—maybe more than Americans.

All this rhetoric [about religion in the U.S.] is exactly what led up to the revolution [in Iran]. Maybe that’s why it scares us more. Life is the only thing that has roots in our culture, and family systems. So, you learn, you try to change; not necessarily for better, but you learn, you change, you try. Hopefully, God will bless you or you’ll be successful. What I am really tired of, and what I feel I run away from, was that force of religion on me. I have a co-worker who constantly talks about [religion]. I had to once straighten her out, and say, “You know, I ran away from a culture who wanted organized religion, and I don’t like somebody telling me God wants this.” Whenever somebody asks me what my religion is, I say, “Muslim, though I don’t practice
it, because I don’t care for a lot of things. I don’t go and seek a religion to make me better.” [In Iran], you don’t have as many options. It creates a little stress. We are not taught to have beliefs ourselves.

[In Minnesota] you meet [Iranian] people, and they say things you don’t like. You try to be polite. [They are] not necessarily the same pool of people that you want your children to be associated with, to learn from. In California or Toronto, which is [a] bigger pool [of Iranians], you would have that option, but here you don’t. So you value what you have. You try to teach as much as you can. Of course, the girls grow up and decide for their own some day, and they’ll learn different things, like we did. I’m not the same person my parents [were]. I’m not the same person I was fifteen years ago when I came, and I might not have the same beliefs in ten or twenty years from now, if I’m alive. When I started my work my boss says, “Why do you want to work here?” and I said, “My goal from working is to learn.” I got the job. I’m still learning.

Pardis II’s marital negotiations reveal Iranian women’s rights entering into the marriage contract. Pardis II privileged a university education as an essential stipulation
to obtain either prior to or as a condition of marriage. Given this, she plants the roots of
democracy in her family of procreation. Pardis II’s repeated references to learning—
“What I’ve learned here is you can just pick things you love from another culture. It was
hard to learn, but I did”—appears no less than ten times in the portion of her life history,
and underscores her enthusiasm to solve, analyze, and understand how to respond to
interactions that may potentially replace reason with emotion. She can appreciate certain
aspects of religion, but does not feel the need to “preach” to others about “truth.”

Significantly, Meredith’s quote—“I’m a whole different person from ten years
ago”—and Pardis II’s quote—“I’m not the same person I was fifteen years ago when I
came”—emphasize the practice of self-reflexivity as well as a penchant for learning and
incorporating new outlooks and worldviews to improve personhood. The experience of
growth as an immigrant can be painful, but Iranians embrace it not only in order to
“ground yourself … to deal with stuff that comes up.”

MEREDITH: I’m a whole different person from ten years ago. We evolve depending on where we are and
what we’re willing to be open to. I think that’s the thing about aging, but it’s also about growing as an immigrant. I remember, when we were doing the Children’s [Museum program], my mind was set for myself—this is who I am. If you had told me that’s not what I am, I would say, “To hell with you. You have no idea who I am.” I love anything and everything about people who know traditional ways,
traditional wisdom. I just think that helps you ground yourself. Life is about learning how to deal with stuff that comes up. Either you have those tools to deal with it or you’re in a panic mode. I was in a panic mode all the time with everything in my life, including the differences that came up in family issues.

Personal growth is linked to open-mindedness, having different lenses as immigrants, and the evolution of self-identity. Transformation of personhood depends upon one’s location (“where we are”), aging, and the immigrant experience. It is “good to be” bicultural and multicultural. Parents who impart this message predict options will present themselves to children. Zohreh is open to her daughter “to be a diplomat [or] a hairdresser who wants to have Iranian customers.”

ZOHREH: It’s good to be multicultural. It’s good to know two languages; maybe [my daughter will] grow up to be a diplomat [or] a hairdresser who wants to have Iranian customers. I can teach her reading and writing [in Farsi]. Her life history will be at the time that America had two wars: one to the east of Iran; one to the west of Iran. I’m going to take her to Iran for the fact of I’m from there.

Zohreh attributes the value of multiculturalism to being bilingual and having a “life history.” Her daughter will benefit from knowing two languages as well as having
knowledge of “the time that America had two wars: one to the east of Iran; one to the west of Iran.” Further, travel to Iran will inform her daughter of her mother’s and father’s birth culture and her inherited heritage.

Perhaps because the lasting effects of the Islamic Revolution reverberate today, an oft-referenced association between religious belief, closed-mindedness, and being uneducated informs most respondents’ portable ideologies. As in the previous quote by Pardis II, Iranians in the Twin Cities generally abstain from organized religion, preferring to pursue the mantra of “good deeds, and good morality, and helping others.”

SHAYDA: Mahmoud and I do not identify with any religion. People are killing each other; they are discriminating [against] each other; they are prejudging each other based on religion. Sorry for my language—[that] pisses me off! I want to keep my mind open to more people. I do believe in God—very strongly—and I make my kids believe in God, and good deeds, and good morality, and helping others. If I go to Iran, religion-wise, I will not fit in. Culture-wise, I will not fit in. And here, I’m not fitting in. I don’t know what you wanna call this—limbo land?

While refraining from religion may not preclude a belief in God, it creates a ghostly, invisible structure that leaves individuals in “limbo land.” Shayda notes that she does not fit “religion-wise” or “culture-wise” in Iran or the U.S. Because in the name of religion people “are killing each other; they are discriminating [against] each other; they
are prejudging each other,” she prefers to be open-minded, helpful, and to do good things for others.

The deemphasis of religion translates transnationally into a proclivity toward and articulation of moral fortitude; i.e., being a good human being is what matters. Having experienced a religio-nationalist revolution, which profoundly shifted public rhetoric from extreme Western secularism to religious fundamentalism, Iranians tend to steer clear of religion, and religious rhetoric in the public sphere. Respondents who identified with Islam, did so selectively, as their portmanteau approach suited their lifestyle. An aversion to force, especially regarding marriage and religion, is particularly repulsed. Asserting one’s individuality against a forceful attitude furnishes the requisite composition of one’s transportable philosophy. Similar to Meredith’s “willing[ness] to be open,” Abdullah is “willing to compromise” relative to religion. He respects his wife’s Christian and his mother’s Muslim beliefs, appreciating “some good things in that culture [Iranian Muslim] that I don’t see in this culture [American Christian].”

ABDULLAH: I don’t change my whole culture, because there’s always disagreement in every human being. I see some good things in that culture that I don’t see in this culture. I’m married [to an] American. I respect her religious [beliefs]. I am willing to compromise. Some of these religious people forced an attitude. I don’t go to mosque, but I’m not against Muslim [beliefs]. My mother was religious. She brought me up good.
Abdullah’s point that his “mother was religious,” conflated with traditional, is countered by his position that “these religious people forced an attitude.” He separates force from his own approach to religion by not going to the mosque, while not being against Islamic doctrine. Drawing on his immigrant experience as well as his mother’s teachings—“she brought me up good”—he recognizes that culture as a whole cannot be dismantled; “there’s always disagreement in every human being” that must be reconciled.

“Being a good person” resonates with Gholam Ali. He first evaluates “whether it’s good or bad,” then decides what to incorporate and what to disregard relative to his transportable ideology. As with others’ angst regarding parental controls, he still feels that “making decisions is hard for me. I want that approval.” Rather than turning “away from what we think is bad,” he and his wife utilize a bad situation to analyze, draw one’s own conclusion, and learn. His orients his family of procreation to having options in order for his children “to make their own decisions and, with our guidance, have them be free to come and ask us questions.”

GHOLAM ALI: [My goal is] being a good person. We don’t have to turn away from what we think is bad. We can observe it, and make [our] own decision whether it’s good or bad. We still expect the decision [to] be made by [parents]. That’s why making decisions is hard for me. I want that approval. I like to allow [my children] to make their own decisions and, with our guidance, have them be free to come and ask us
questions. That’s how my wife was too, [and it] made her to be a very decent person.

[Minnesotans are] so tied up in their daily lives; your life revolves around kids. In Iran, it’s different; the kids’ lives revolve around the parent’s life. [My wife] lived most of her life in Iran. It’s eye opening and brings back a lot of memories. We try to take the good and bad. We [are] not gonna be too pushy with outside activities. Pare it down—instead of soccer one night, basketball the other, piano, then dance, gymnastics—it’s time for them to be free; to enjoy life.

Teaching freedom and enjoyment of life, for Gholam Ali and his wife, translates into a lack of extracurricular activities and force on children. In so doing, they strike a compromise between the Iranian approach, in which “the kids’ lives revolve around the parent’s life,” and the American approach, where “your life revolves around kids.” Curiously, Gholam Ali’s traditional upbringing occurred mostly in Minnesota, while his wife’s relatively liberal childhood unfolded in Iran. Utilizing these experiences as sounding boards for their parenting styles, they hope to come to their own solutions (even as their parent’s lessons loom large in their memories). At the heart of their decisions, they endeavor to be good people, in the hope that their children model the mantra.
Nate’s universalist worldview informs his transportable philosophy. In it, he critiques nationalism and religion as ideologies of division that “take away from that goal” of shared humanity.

**NATE:** To celebrate one’s national spirit is to commemorate the death and destruction of other peoples and lands through the evolution of an empire. I’ve become anti-nationalist and a universalist. Go back to history—why people got massacred—always nationalism or religion. Anything that divides people; I really don’t like that. By adding things that divide us, we’re gonna take away from that goal. To be nationalistic, you have to be proud of something, and there’s nothing more stupid than being proud of what something anybody else did a thousand years ago. Iranians are proud of the largest empire in the history of man. Yeah, we killed people; we took their land; we took their stuff. Why be proud of that? They treated them well, but they conquered them. There’s nothing to be proud of.

I spent hours thinking what I would be like in Iran. My mom always says, “My greatest mistake was to let my children go.” And I’m like, “Mom, if you hadn’t, I wouldn’t be who I am. I really like who I
am.” My mom says, “If you were here [in Iran], you probably wouldn’t be alive,” which is true. It all really comes down to what is the purpose of those [traditions]. Just to say you are part of something? I don’t wanna be part of one thing.

For Nate, “there’s nothing more stupid than being proud of what something anybody else did a thousand years ago.” Nate finds the remembrance and recognition of tradition to be confining; he does not “wanna be part of one thing.” His mother decries having lost him to the U.S.—“My greatest mistake was to let my children go”—but recognizes that sending him off saved his life. Nate pleads to his mother to understand: “Mom, if you hadn’t, I wouldn’t be who I am. I really like who I am.” His immigrant experience aligns with his fellow Iranians who incorporate it as a necessary dimension of their personhood and identity, and which they incorporate into their portable philosophies. Nate is reluctant to demarcate belonging based on nationality, since drawing such a line means the individual is a part of something while simultaneously delimiting his or her relationship to other traditions.

The above responses attest to Iranians’ desire to be a part of their new national landscape, but also to incorporate other cultural features as long as they are positive. Incorporating history into their portable ideologies provides a wide-angle lens that demonstrates how Iranians remained Iranian, despite successive invasions and periods of colonialism. The conquered, in other words, resigns to the fate of being conquered, but does not capitulate the inner core of self and humanity. The degree of cruelty does not reduce the humane to the conqueror’s wrath.
While Iranian transnationals occasionally describe themselves as inhabiting a liminal state, self-identity is assessed to “fit in” in the public sphere as they “stay under the radar” to preserve private Persian sensibilities. Liminality and alienation may not debilitate, but encourage individuals to evaluate competing states, stances, and inclinations, and orient them to appreciate multiple perspectives. Improvisational portable ideologies include the individual’s selectivity from home and host ideologies, and their “picking and choosing parts, often in an inconsistent or contradictory manner” (Kugel and Smith 1986). For example, Bob’s portable ideology—“we become more Islamic that the frickin’ Arabs”—was inspired by a National Geographic article he read about Iran (Del Giudice 2008), which contends that Iran’s strategic geographic location and ancient history—“saturated with wars, invasions, and martyrs [and] … trade, cultural interchange, friction” (46)—has instilled an Iranian disposition toward assimilation. “[W]hen invaders came to Iran the Iranians did not become the invaders; the invaders became Iranians. … Iranians seem particularly proud of their capacity to get along with others by assimilating compatible aspects of the invaders’ ways without surrendering their own—a cultural elasticity that is at the heart of their Persian identity” (ibid.).

In addressing how Iranianness is preserved by assimilating attributes of the conqueror, Bob poses two rhetorical questions: “Are we gonna melt or are we gonna maintain [a] distinct identity? [Or will] Iranians become more Norwegian than Olaf himself?” Western culture and America, as modern conquerors, require Iranians “to become more American than the Americans themselves.” Iranians’ “great propensity for assimilation,” “to suck it in, and look up to your conqueror,” according to Bob, is a
survival strategy to remain Iranian. At the nexus of powerlessness and appropriation, the “survivalist outlook” has been fashioned through each successive conqueror in Iran’s ancient history, and has initiated “a common bond, ‘fictive or real’, which has historically brought various ethnic groups under one social and cultural umbrella in their struggle to cope with various despotic rulers and invading armies” (Banuazizi cited in Chaichian 1997:613-614).

BOB: If you look throughout three thousand years of history, Iran couldn’t have stayed Iran. If Iranians couldn’t look up to Genghis Khan and say, “You’re the greatest, even though you’re Chinese. You decimated us, killed all of us, but we love you anyway.” Or when Arabs came and brought Islam, we became more Islamic than the frickin’ Arabs were, for cryin’ out loud! We have a great propensity for assimilation [and] to identify with our conquerors. If we put that in this context—Western culture—America is our conqueror. We have to become more American than the Americans themselves. And that’s why there’s a good chance in most Iranians, that their children, and their children’s children only mention their heritage, and don’t really recognize it, and cherish it, and identify with it. You give me a group that’s been trampled upon from time to time, and has
maintained its identity. The only way you can do it to be able to suck it in, and look up to your conqueror, and say, “Yes master. You’re right. I’ll do what you say.” The only way you can do that is if you assimilate; just forget about yourself, and quickly become a Muslim.

Though Bob contradicts himself by stating that successive generations may “only mention their heritage,” he argues that it is necessary to recognize, cherish, and identify with culture in order to avoid melting into cultural indistinctness. A history of being “trampled upon from time to time” orients Iranians to “just forget about yourself, and quickly become a Muslim.” Since the conquerors rely on economic and political institutions to implement control, family as the primary social institution provides the cultural filter through which the success or failure of each new invasion is determined.

In the U.S., Western culture, as conqueror, is epitomized in the omnipresence of Christmas vis-à-vis “the American media tradition.” Christmas provides a clear case study of how non-identifying Muslim Iranians exemplify public sphere “assimilation” to publicly showcase their belonging, particularly since it does not threaten internal Iranianness. Rather than “shut it off,” parents explain, introduce, teach, immerse, and show children that Christmas “is their big celebration” (emphasis added). Parents justify this strategy in order to establish a corner in the host culture, and for their children: to not “feel left out when going to school,” “so the kids [are] not secluded from society,” and because “it’s something that they need to know about; there’s nothing wrong with it.”
AZAM: When my son was younger, it was hard to tell him we were going to the mall. He sees all these decorations for Christmas. I’m not going to shut it off; so, I introduced it to him. I said, “This is Christian. This is their big celebration.” We decorated the house, and I gave him presents. I don’t want him to feel left out when he’s going to school. I could have taught him, “You’re Iranian. We don’t celebrate that, and that’s that.” But why not? It’s a celebration; [it’s] not going to kill anybody. [Tracy giggles.] So I celebrated it with him for years until he got older, [then] he says, “Mom, you don’t have to buy me anything for Christmas.” And then we started with [my daughter]. Now, she’s kind of the same. [We put up a Christmas tree]. The whole shebang. Even worse than the American people! [Azam and Tracy laugh.] I think it’s fun. It’s beautiful. It’s colorful! Even though [my husband] and the kids are laughing at me, I’m like, “You guys can laugh at me. I don’t care. It’s a party time.”

Employing similar adjectives to describe Christmas was commonplace among respondents: “It’s fun! It’s beautiful! It’s colorful! It’s happy! It’s a party time! It’s a celebration!” Azam’s admission that celebrating Christmas “even worse than the
American people” reiterates the Iranian propensity to “hyper-assimilate.” Through the process of introducing it to her family, Azam clarifies that Christmas is a Christian tradition, while not referencing Jesus. Her focus on secular symbols—tree, presents, decorations—“de-Christianizes” it, transforming it into “party time.”

Concerns of children’s alienation translate the lessons of Christmas into an appreciation of multi-culturalism. According to Pardis II, (non-identifying) Muslim Iranian Christmases are not the exception, but the rule. Unlike Azam, the Christmas story is set in its autochthonous milieu (i.e., the Middle East), “because Jesus was Middle Eastern; he was a Jew.” Affiliating Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, she teaches her children that, in Islam, the “significance of Jesus is very different. … Jesus is a symbol of purity.” Accordingly, the Christmas story is appropriated for private sphere consumption as an evolution toward Islam.

PARDIS II: [A] lot of Iranians teach children about Christmas, and some of them even have trees. We do too, because it’s happy. It’s nice. Certain prophets have a certain significance in our culture; Jesus was Middle Eastern; he was a Jew. We have a lot of things in common. But, you know, the significance of Jesus is very different in our culture. Jesus was a symbol of purity or Abraham was a symbol of devotion to God. I read a little bit about Abraham in [the] Bible, and it was way different. I like our version better. I don’t like the punishing thing. There’s
enough of that in the world. I like Christmas. My daughter has a Jewish friend, and I had asked her parents to show that to my daughter—as long as it’s happy. If you want to say that Christmas is basically celebrating, not necessarily something [religious], I agree. Sometimes, as an outsider, you see this quantified version; the unholy version. Let’s bring some decorations in; we really emphasize them; we have a tree; we usually give a small gift. [It’s] for our kids not [to feel] secluded from the society.

Openness to other faiths is a healthy adaptation to belong in Minnesota. Celebrating the non-religious aspects of Christian and Jewish holidays, while avoiding “the punishing thing,” harmlessly presents children with chances to identify with chosen bits of American culture. Alternative interpretations of Christianity and Judaism are taught, and the “quantified version; the unholy version” is discounted. Consequently, the Middle Eastern origins of Jesus (and by extension Christmas) are reclaimed; “certain prophets have a certain significance in our culture.” The “reindigenization” of Jesus, and the celebration of Christmas is “not necessarily something [religious]”; it is revealed “because it’s happy, it’s nice.”

Zohreh, like Pardis II, regards the choice to not immerse her daughter in American culture as impractical. Children can learn what Christ means to Christians, and appreciate Christmas, because “it’s festive, and we want [our daughter] to be a happy person.”
ZOHREH: [My daughter] will have great Christmases and New Years’ [Eves] here. My husband and I, from day one, are going to immerse her in American culture as well. I have friends who—their kids do not speak a word of English until they are six years old—I'm not gonna do that. She needs to know English and Farsi. She needs to know there's Christmas, and that we are not pro-Christ. This year, I'm gonna [have a tree]. I will explain to her: “This is the American media tradition to buy gifts for one another.” We love it, because it’s festive, and we want you to be a happy person. Easter comes, I will explain to her: “This is what Christians believe, that on this day, Christ came alive.” I'm not gonna say: “This is bad. We’re not going to touch this.” If a friend of hers invites her to a Hanukkah [celebration]: “You go and celebrate.”

My husband is very Iranian, too. He came here when he was sixteen—thirty-four years ago—but he has remained to be an Iranian, who is very American at the same time. He loves the food; he knows the culture. He knows the value of picking up good things from every culture.
Zohreh, a first-generation Iranian who followed her older brother to Minnesota in order to pursue her PhD, shares many points with her husband’s portable ideology. Although he came to the U.S. as a teenager, he doggedly seeks out information about Iran on the Internet, and therefore, “he has remained to be Iranian, who is very American at the same time.” In disagreement with some Iranian friends, whose “kids do not speak a word of English until they are six years old,” Zohreh deems her daughter’s immersion in American culture a practicality of being bicultural; she “needs to know English and Farsi.” The familial lesson of Christmas, however, understates Christ—“we are not pro-Christ”—in favor of “the American media tradition to buy gifts for one another.” As others have responded, while explaining the importance of Christ to Christians, parents reject a “hands off” or “we’re not going to touch this” strategy, preferring to embrace “the value of picking up good things from every culture.”

Gholam Ali likewise approaches the lessons of bi-culturalism. Exposure to both cultures is something the children “need to know about. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

**GHOLAM ALI:** [Children] have to know both [cultures]. We got a Christmas tree this year, and we took them to see Santa. It’s something that they need to know about. There’s nothing wrong with it. We get together for Christmas dinner with friends and family, but we don’t exchange gifts.

Christian holidays are presented on a “need to know” basis. Gholam Ali and his wife forego gift exchange, and thereby circumvent the capitalist version of Christmas (which some respondents criticized). Instead, they chose the Christmas “classics”: a tree
and a visit to Santa. Most celebrants emphasized gift exchange, festivities, decorations, and the meaning of Christ for Christians. In the post-detachment phase from her culture, Meredith’s fulfillment of belonging in Minnesota was realized. While she yearns for Iranian culture, it escapes her grasp. At that moment, asserting aspects of secular and religious American holidays as her own marks the occasion of over-indulgence.

MEREDITH: Finally, it hit me: “I didn’t grow up with [Iranian culture]. I wanna have it, but I don’t have it.” So I put a Christmas tree up. I said, “Okay, enough, I belong!” [Meredith laughing.] I did the New Year’s [Eve], because it was the one occasion that I knew everybody else celebrates. And, in many ways, New Year’s [Eve] is exactly like Noruz. Everybody celebrates! That’s why I made that a huge one.

For Meredith, making New Year’s Eve “a huge one,” presumably more than Christmas, seems less threatening, “because it was the one occasion that … everybody else celebrates.” Rodriguez’s (2006) point on bilingualism as one of “two ways a person is individualized” is germane to the celebration of the host society’s heritage. “In public … full individuality is achieved, paradoxically, by those who are able to consider themselves members of the crowd. … Only when I was able to think of myself as an American … could I seek the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality” (26-27). In embracing Christmas and New Year’s Eve, Iranians mask Iranianness, and seize their rights and responsibilities as Americans, and thereby claim
their “full public individuality.” The religious significance of Christmas for Christians is divested of its sacred meaning. The tree (and other symbols), rather than Christ, marks belongingness for Iranians.

The paucity of references to Muslim holidays, and prevalence of anti-religious attitudes predominated. While a few respondents celebrated select Muslim holidays as children, only one admitted to praying daily. Being “more Norwegian than Olaf himself” is an assimilative response to claim a stake in the public Minnesota landscape. In this way, the individual Iranian “has remained to be an Iranian, who is very American at the same time. … He [or she] knows the value of picking up good things … from every culture.” For example, “doing” Christmas as “not pro-Christ,” but recognizing that “the significance of Jesus is very different in our culture,” stems the tide of total assimilation. Celebrating “the whole shebang—even worse than the American people”—is not harmful, but a necessity. Those who shun “the whole shebang” limit Christmas to iconic signifiers, such as the tree, Santa, small gifts, dinner with friends and family, and/or decorations. “Assimilation” orients the public American-private Iranian toward humanity, tolerance, neighborliness, and curiosity by honoring “the best” of both cultures, while understating “the bad.” Assembling an “Iranian version” of Christmas (as well as other secular and Christian holidays) is a strategy to circumvent children’s alienation. By engineering non-religious meanings of Christmas, parents practice culture to belong, believe it futile to “shut it off,” and see no conflict in celebrating a “happy” holiday. Bahá’í respondents, however, were exceptions. Generally, they did not celebrate Christmas, since it may confuse children, threaten Bahá’í identity, and they
deemed its materialism to be a negative message. Furthermore, Bahá’í holidays take precedence over Iranian and U.S. holidays. Outwardly, for Iranians who do participate in the celebration of Christmas, it signifies to neighbor and adopted nation a gesture of *respect*, an inclination to *learn* about one’s adoptive home, and a *resonance with* (through profane material symbols) and *separateness from* (this is their holiday and what it means to *them*) the host society.

Appropriating select elements of the “conqueror” (i.e., the host culture in the immigrant experience) serves as an adaptive strategy to claim a foothold in their adopted home. The nature and extent of appropriation is a competitive game in “outdoing” adopted cultural behaviors better than natives themselves. As the adage approximates, mimicry is the sincerest form of flattery, and Iranians adeptly mimic what they admire. Becoming “more American than Americans themselves” entails a process of becoming a model immigrant. In order to do so, Iranians acquire cultural lessons from “natives,” who inhabit taken-for-granted cultural worlds in which their senses have dulled. Iranian families, for example, remain the central source of cultural teachings.

“Assimilation” entails a reflexive assessment of life lessons, which are selectively incorporated into families of procreation. The “good things” in American culture are adopted for public sphere navigation, and the “bad things” are avoided. “Assimilation” in the public sphere, through the celebration of selective features of a media- and materialist-saturated holiday, justifies the appropriation of parts in order to establish a space and place in the landscape of U.S. immigration history. Even those opposed to hyphenation, and claim to be “one hundred percent” Iranian, admitted that,
“maybe some blood has turned American.” “Assimilation,” part resignation, part
defiance, and the individual’s “portable ideology,” formulated through assimilative and
pluralist approaches to not feeling “secluded from the society,” entail any number of
strategies: being a good human; “trying on” different religions; open-mindedness;
reflexive learning; being good and doing good deeds; being honest; and disdaining
pretense (i.e., saying it “as it is”).

The “assimilationist” approach follows neither a politics of difference
enunciation that pursues differentialism (i.e., a cosmology of purity and territorialization
of culture) nor convergence (i.e., universalism, global homogeneity) (Nederveen Pieterse
2006:42). Rather, a “mixing” logic informs identity and cultural production through
synthesis, creolization, and syncretism (ibid.:55). “Assimilationists” are master
hybridists who challenge conventions of primordialism and authenticity. As such,
cultural production is anchored to contestation and interrogation of narratives of
difference (Bhabha 1994:37). Enunciation objectifies cultural signs and meanings
through a translated “original” meaning in order for it to be “simulated, copied,
transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum” (Rutherford 1990:210). The
construction of meaning through imagination entails integrating past into present.
Hybridity is a construction of traces of meanings, discourses, and ongoing identification
“with and through another object [which] … is itself always ambivalent because of the
intervention of that otherness” (ibid.:211). Not so much an admixture of two identities,
hybridity “enables other positions to emerge[,] … displaces the histories that constitute it,
and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (ibid.:210-211).

While Iranians are marked by a phenotype of difference in the public sphere in Minnesota, the contestation of culture plays out in the appropriation and enunciation of American cultural signs and meanings in order to “under-define” their presence. The “under-definition” of Iranianness manifests as an “I’m here, and I’m more American than Americans themselves” stance. The Iranian version of Christmas, for example, highlights those features that signal a public stake in the neighborhood, the school community, relations with non-Iranian parents, and other aspects of belonging. Parents prioritize teaching children about host society culture as well, so that they do not feel alienated as they grow up.

This approach decontextualizes and synthesizes national traditions within the contexts of blurred norms, values, and structural controls, according to Mahdi (1998:90), who critiques the construction of the second-generation’s public Iranian identity as essentialist and monolithic (ibid.:79-80). The result is a nostalgic, idealized, imagined identity, which creates discrepancies parent’s messages relative to children’s allegiance to home here and home there (ibid.:92). Popular approaches to the construction of public national identity tend to be homogenous, and carefully crafted an image to present “an illusory harmonious community” (ibid.:79-80), which ignores “unfit” cultural aspects and complicates children’s enculturation. However, in my research, the “creative synthesis” and “portable ideologies” that immigrants and transnationals construct create a hybrid,
carefully crafted public self to navigate the American sphere, while not losing cite of their internal Iranianness.

Iranian transnationals cohere around these “portable ideologies,” which creates a fission effect from “the Iranian community,” but then forms multiple, micro-communities that fusion within coherent bundle of chosen cultural features. This fission-fusion pattern among Iranians in the Twin Cities comprises groups of families who have “grown up” together in the celebration of quintessential pre-Islamic holidays. They may publicly support “the Iranian community” by attending the PSOM Noruz celebration, for example, but create “private sphere” Iranian gatherings, such as go camping, meet in a city park for a picnic, attend a sofreh, or gather monthly to discuss pressing issues in American society (e.g., racism). While Mahdi (1997) notes that the interpretive, selective, and situational approach encourages people to “understand Iranian culture in their own terms, relating it when suitable and appropriating from it what is relevant and desirable for them” (ibid.:89), I put forth that it benefits Iranians as immigrants. Rather than incline them toward the preservation of a “pure,” “unadulterated” identity, they appropriate critical features of host and home cultures in order to establish a place for themselves, but also to contribute to the American immigrant landscape.
The Iranian community in the “Land of Ten-Thousand Lakes” is characterized by an institutional fission-fusion pattern with consequences for ethnic group consciousness as well as the individual’s identification with and expression of Iranianness. The “fusion phase” of institutional life unites Iranians in the celebration of pre-Islamic, Persian heritage in public community gatherings, private familial-friendship settings, and educational attempts to teach Persian, which is a critical tool to navigate the complexities of communication (e.g., ta’arof) in a hierarchal culture. Paradoxically, centripetal forces in the “fusion phase” introduce obstacles when engaging with other Iranians, including but not limited to: political infighting, criticism, self-interest, gossip, suspicion, and differences relative to one’s position in the hierarchy (e.g., class, education, time of arrival). In the pursuit of “making community,” a “fission phase” occurs, whereby individuals alienate themselves from community involvement. Fissioning is intensified by a geographically diffuse settlement pattern of familial-friendship “proximate pockets” located in wealthy suburban and exurban areas. Furthermore, centrifugal forces of discrimination and prejudice vis-à-vis interactions with Minnesotans inhibit identification with and presentation of national identity, and raise questions of belonging. The ebb and flow of involvement in community life and covert prejudice intersect with one’s personal assessment of and connection with Iranianness to reveal an unyielding yet slippery grasp of inheritances of Iranianness, particularly a command of Persian, celebration of
Zoroastrian heritage, and practice ta’arof or ritual courtesies. “Assimilation” is a strategy to simulate favored features of American culture in order to navigate the public sphere successfully, while reverting to a private sphere, preservationist observance of select essential elements of inherited and adopted identities. Rather than an inclination to fake it, “assimilation” is an approach to direct inter- and intra-external relations by exemplifying an ethos of integrity that contradicts the host society’s negative assessment of Iranians as well as to compete within the hierarchy of native niceties and finesses. Within the context of these centrifugal and centripetal forces, the question I pursue is: Despite a propensity for institutional dissolution, how and why do Iranians in the Twin Cities persevere in the creation of community?

My entrée into the Iranian community is rooted in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. As a recent high school graduate living in rural Minnesota, I was transfixed by the events unfolding in Tehran. Ted Koppel’s nascent Nightline program came to life via satellite in an age of the “relatively new phenomenon” of global interconnectivity. Covering the Islamic Revolution and “hostage crisis,” the program was my obsessive evening ritual and something akin to “attending a seminar on Iran” (ibid.:11-12), and which the media facetiously referred to as “‘the show brought to you by the Ayatollah Khomeini’” (ibid.:44). The impact of the revolution, being “held hostage” by Nightline, and a successive string of serendipitous encounters with Iranians ever since, kindled my lifelong interest in Iran, and connection to and friendship with the Iranian people.

Prior to the revolution, Iranians were one of the most highly sought after foreign student populations in American universities. It is, therefore, not coincidental that
educational institutions were the decisive loci through which my friendships and fictive kin have been cultivated, beginning with my “apical ancestor,” whom I met at the University of Minnesota (UMN) in the late 1980s. Eventually, he served as gatekeeper, key consultant, and the link in a chain “fusion communities,” from the late 1990s to early 2000s. These include: a “UMN Student Community”; a “Persian I Community,” where I studied Persian at what local Iranians call the “Farsi School”; the “Noruz Advisory Board,” a community spearheaded by an Iranian American mother who organized a Noruz (Iranian New Year) program to showcase at the Minnesota Children’s Museum, and which culminated in my Master’s thesis; and in the early 2000s, the “Persian II Community,” where I took Persian at a Bahá’í-affiliated ethnic institution.

Throughout my decades of formal and informal research, I have established a presence and familiarity among these multiple micro-communities. In time, the pattern of institutional disintegration and associated politics substantiated what Thernstrom et al. (1980) have attributed to diasporic Iranians, which is a “lack of experience and trust in institutional forms” (524). Involvement in these communities facilitated a snowball sampling method by which I recruited eighteen individuals, and conducted life history interviewees, which constitute the bulk of data in this research study. Life history interviews have the advantage of intersecting micro- and micro-processes of political economy. Following Marcus’ (1986) “strategically situated ethnography” (173), I endeavored to understand how micro-processes of migration, family, and community are both autonomous and constructed by macro-processes, such as U.S.-Iranian relations and the revolution. This method inquires: “Why precisely are you in this locale rather than
another’” (ibid.)? Thus, why precisely did Iranians land in the Twin Cities, and not elsewhere? The life histories I conducted unearthed individuals’ lineages of migration in the pursuit of education, with the intention to return to Iran and transform its infrastructure, economy, and global image. The rich picture that life histories paint of people’s understanding of self in the context of historical change was critical to comprehend how Iranians’ individual agency intertwined with the profound paradigmatic shift from the Shah’s White Revolution to Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution.

In addressing my research question, I present several claims. Firstly, I contend that while the inheritance of a traditional upbringing in an extended family network enmeshes individuals within a rigid, authoritative structure, two ideo-spatial structures—tradition versus modernity and private versus public life—orient Iranians to evaluate irreconcilable differences. Contrary to claims of a strictly patriarchal household, both parents had some input in critical decisions, especially concerning marriage, migration, and public sphere movement. Appraisal of “sides” is modeled for children in order to rationalize ambiguity present in the ideologies of both parent’s lineages. The revolution transformed the private sphere into a battleground along religio-political fault lines that reverberated along matri- and patrilineages. Common responses included: “Dad’s mom was so happy. Mom’s mom was so upset”; “in my Mom’s family, they’re huge fights between sisters”; “my Mom grew up in a family [that was Tudeh]. Tudehs are communists; very political; non-religious. My father’s family is very religious.” Since the implementation of Shari’a law transformed public sphere maneuvering, the private sphere converted into a “classroom,” wherein children were “deprogrammed,” and
encouraged to weigh the opposing ideologies and deconstruct prominent symbols of the revolution (e.g., the veil, mullah’s beard, turban).

Traditionally in Iran, the intricate but malleable snare of “blood” includes not only extended family, but friends, fictive kin, and neighbors, which sustains a thick web of dependencies of trust and safety, wherein priorities of recreation guarantee healthy childhood development within a “panopticon of play.” Within the private, internal realm, familial relationships are intimate, comforting, and known. Parents struck a balance between industry and entertainment, productivity and play, as evidenced by respondents’ recollections of a typical Iranian upbringing as somewhere between “sheltered,” “enmeshed,” “interfering” and “like heaven,” “fantastic,” “a dream world,” “so much fun surrounded by friends and family always,” and “the best time of my life.” Azam’s response reveals this: “The Iranian culture is very enmeshed; very into each other’s business. The neighbor would know what’s going [on] in your life. The freedom, and the safety, was really there. We didn’t have to worry. Neighbors would watch you for protection. Everybody on that street is one big family.”

The “assimilationist” predisposition appears to be an inheritance of the need to protect one’s integrity among strangers in the public realm. At the level of self and society, ambiguity is situated in the knowledge that outside appearances (zaher) are vulnerable in the external world, a realm of temptation and corruption, but are separate from inner reality (baten), which reflects personal attitudes, emotion, and free expression. Social class and connections dictate uncertainty of relationships, prescribing people to heed the mantra: “keep up external appearances!” In the post-revolutionary period,
parents became preoccupied with their children’s public sphere behavior and attempted to feign the freedoms they experienced as young adults, as Pardis II recalls: “Ordinary people are always trying to compensate for what is lacking [after the revolution]. My parents were trying harder to give back those freedoms that were taken from us. I feel they did a lot of sacrifice for us.” Parental interference guards against too much freedom, provides lessons in public sphere behavior, and assumes the role of a “dating service” and family therapist. Because the web encompasses apartment complexes and neighborhoods, the private sphere can be said to stretch beyond one’s extended family.

The second case I make in support of my research question is that identification with Iranianness in the transnational context is subject to and reconfigured by centrifugal and centripetal forces that require a repertoire of strategies to navigate intra- and inter-community interactions. Centrifugal influences are discernible as temporal-spatial and political impediments in the intra-community context. Political loyalties in Iran are erased by nationally-based friendships in Minnesota. For instance, the party host’s nephews, who “were big-time Khomeini’s supporters,” is disregarded by the pot smoking sleaze balls. Nationality, therefore, outmaneuvers class. Also, time of departure and age impacts identity, suspending Iranians in what Shayda calls “limbo land,” wherein they desire national camaraderie and community involvement. However, centripetal pulls toward community, ironically, incite ebbing phenomena. Community interactions disclose socio-economic and ideological differences that lead to “burnout” and detachment. For example, to stem the tide of fading Persian, Iranians seek opportunities to improve their fluency through classes. The “Farsi School” was an ethnic institution
that prioritized language instruction, and brought Iranians together for a period of time.

Yet, in carrying out the mission, political dynamics manifested. As Aresh’s experience shows, centrifugal effects thwart progress through indecision, disagreement, lack of organization, busy schedules, and no active leaders. His wife disagrees, stating: “Look at the Farsi School. The women who run it were dedicated to it as long as their children were in it, but when their children graduated they did not train other parents to continue the mission. The ladies [got] really burned out. There were a few clashes [of personalities, too]. Other Iranian ladies [said] the problem was they were not welcoming of other Iranians to become teachers; to become active, organized.” When children reach the age at which classes are no longer available, parents stop attending, preferring to dedicate that time to family. In this way, self-interest outweighs community involvement. Maximizing family time takes precedence over language acquisition when making decisions to withdraw children, and stop volunteering. Fluency and conversational competency are tools to converse with grandparents and elders, and an important influence on whether parents speak Persian only. Although many parents valued bi- and multi-culturalism, and being bilingual, another “assimilationist” approach, they ask the perennial immigrant question: “When are they really gonna use this Farsi again?”

Minnesotan’s general unawareness of the Middle East and Iranians has a centrifugal-centripetal impact. U.S.-Iranian relations establish the backdrop against which one’s public image is crafted. While studies provide evidence of extensive discrimination against Iranians in the U.S., my respondents report relatively benign
brushes with discrimination, although responses are qualified: “Well, I haven’t really faced discrimination but…” Iranians’ approach the discriminator using various strategies that epitomize the “assimilationist” Iranian. Nadia transforms the interaction into a teachable moment: “I have to kind of explain that it’s a complicated country. Even when you explain, they don’t get that.” Finding humor in Americans’ ignorance is a strategy employed by Nia’s husband: “My husband jokes about terrorists to highlight the ridiculous attitude that is taken by people who identify everyone from the Middle East as a fundamentalist terrorist. He’ll go out drinking with people, and they’ll say, “Why are you drinking beer?” and he’ll say ‘Cause I’m a fundamentalist Iranian’.” Playfully confusing the discriminator and passing as another ethnicity are strategies Nate chooses: “Before [1977], they were Iranians, and then everybody became Persians. I used to be Jordanian, because I didn’t want to argue. Believe me, if they knew I was Iranian, they would’ve killed me. Jordanian? They didn’t know what the hell that meant; it’s just a foreign guy who plays pool and takes our money.” Setting an example of being a good person in order to defy the stereotype is a strategy Azam deploys: “I personally think I have a little bit responsibility to give the other person the chance to get to know me, even though they’re going to reject me and be judgmental. I can take two paths: I can be defensive and ugly or I can be nice and educate people, because whatever they know previously, it’s not good information.”

Although a controversial tactic among Iranians, Shayda eludes detection by referencing herself as Persian: “I always [say I am] Persian, because they don’t even know what I’m talking about. [Minnesotans] are in their own little cocoon. They were
extremely nice, but it goes only that far. Until the day I die, I will always feel, deep down in my heart, that I am a foreigner here. I cannot share my experience. My neighbor[s] know nothing about my life. They don’t even know where is Iran. I love to look at their ignorance. Sometimes, I’m so scared of prejudice, [but] if they ask me where I’m from, I have to say it straight.”

The omnipresent inquiries remind Iranians of their “foreignness,” produce “dynamics of inclusion and exclusion,” and paradoxically expect Iranians to “become American,” while reminding them that they are “outsiders.” In this context, discrimination acts centripetally, wherein Iranians recede into their familial-friendship communities, which is associated with the strategies: to preserve energy; to express emotion and thoughts in Persian; and to avoid having to explain oneself.

The attacks of 9/11 tore open the wounds that had scarred over from previous experiences of discrimination. Each new terrorist incident triggers feelings of outsidedness, fear, and muteness. Meredith remembers: “I was hysterical. It was a trigger of, “Oh my God, I don’t belong.” It took me back to my high school years, where I felt like I can’t talk; I’m from Iran; I have to be silent; I’m muted. Period! [Adults] didn’t have a way to get it out either. That’s what they were modeling for us; a lot of us kinda picked that up.” Although most respondents felt prejudice is not personal, they are still implicated in the stereotype, and detached in the liminal space of discrimination, which inclines Iranians to present themselves publicly as “good human beings,” an “assimilationist” attempt that paradoxically understates national identity.
Against this receding current in the public realm, kin confluences become a vital centripetal force to reinvigorate identity, reestablish tradition, recharge cultural “synapses,” and reframe the individual’s relationship to cultural frameworks and community. Besides one’s familial-friendship networks in the U.S., transnational kinship flows from Iran last for several months at a time, and unless an apartment or condominium is purchased, visitors who inhabit the same space can be both disruptive and supportive to family life. For example, Nadia’s meddling mother-in-law makes her life hell, while Shayda’s mother-in-law is appreciated, because she assumes the roles of nanny, maid, and personal chef. Fiancé flows are common, and demonstrate a preference for “traditional marriage.” Unlike in Iran, the arrangement is made by individuals, but the parent’s blessing is still sought. Nadia’s transnational friendship facilitated her match: “[I jokingly said to my friend]: ‘You have to find someone for me in [the] U.S.! What about your brother-in-law?’ We had a ceremony back in Iran, but we got married here.” Quasi-matchmaking networks are founded through old neighborhood friendships, family ties, Facebook connections, and tangential community involvement in the Twin Cities, and reinforce the prevalence for endogamy. In this way, there is a pool of potential mates for first- and 1.5-generation Iranians, who were unable to return to Iran after the revolution. Once the couple determined to marry, a semblance of traditional procedures was followed, including consulting parents, heeding parent’s warning of notorious families, chiding children for neglecting the priority of education, offering support and advice, and planning the wedding ceremony to take place in Iran.
While kin confluences revive cultural practices, temporal distance underscores one’s waning command of Persian and traditional culture relative to the visitor, causing stress, shame, even embarrassment. Fluency is essential to navigate traditional culture, which is embedded in *ta’arof*, a complex of ritual courtesies requiring pretense in interactions. Iranians’ subjective worlds are deeply structured by *ta’arof*. Opinions on it range from visceral disdain to melancholic reminiscence. The outlines of the practice become explicit with time. Shayda’s reverse “culture shock” on a visit to Iran emphasizes this: “If I would be living in Iran, it would drive me absolutely bananas. The *ta’arof* system gets on my nerves. [When I was] living in Iran, I never felt it. I didn’t know many fancy *ta’arof* words. I called my friend, and her dad picked up the phone. I didn’t know how to talk to him. I felt embarrassed. I felt stupid. I could have not fit in Iran, because I don’t have the traditional Persian culture I’m so straightforward, and it may hurt people. In Iran, you don’t say it as it is.” Time corrodes the intricate know-how required to perform *ta’arof*, develops a low tolerance to “play the game,” risks offending relatives and friends, and raises questions of belonging. The discrepancy between a savvy performance and stilted response signals impending “Americanization” and cultural loss.

Hospitality is a manifestation of *ta’arof*. Although many respondents considered *ta’arof* to be a negative aspect of Iranian culture, a kind of dishonesty that “bites you in the behind,” Parsa emphasized the priority of hospitality: “The culture is very warm-blooded. We’re hospitable people. If you go to Iran, it’s very intense, jealousy-hospitality-kind-of-type: if that person has this [or] that in their house, then I have to do
better. [It’s] subject to gossip; looking at somebody else, seeing what they’re doing, and then trying to copy. It’s something that is good and bad in the culture.” Azam claims that it may entrench a person in a reciprocal relationship of expectations: “We get burnt out by each other. If I do something for [an] Iranian person? “Oh, she had to do it.” What does she want me to do? Say “thank you” for [the] next twenty years? That’s why they pull away. They’re kind of scared to do things for each other, mainly because if it goes, it goes good, [but] if it goes bad, they have to take the shame; they have to take the blame. And there’s no appreciation for the time and effort.”

The Persian Student Organization of Minnesota or PSOM organizes a community-wide Noruz program annually, and is the institutional anchor within the Iranian community as a whole. Along with the support of the Caspian Bistro, they constitute a relatively stable centripetal force. Yet, internally, the politics of representation play out relative to hyphenated identity. First-generation Iranians feel a greater sense of ownership, and try to control the helm of representation. Parsa, a former president, transposes national identity around the hyphen to justify why some individuals are more qualified than others to sit on the board. PSOM’s overriding concern is to ensure the Noruz celebration goes off without a hitch in order to avoid criticism. Parsa credits American Iranians for being better organized, although: “If you’re born here, then you’re American Iranian. If you come from there, you’re Iranian American, because you have a sense of culture. Some of them that are now in PSOM have two parents [who are] Iranian, who make them go to Farsi classes; make them behave a certain way. [You can] recognize them as Iranian. It’s fine if you’re recognized as American, but you cannot
have as much of an effect in PSOM to enrich the culture or keep the culture’s way. You don’t have a sense of it, if you haven’t been taught.” Parsa views PSOM as “not just an organization; we’re friends,” which upholds exclusivity in terms of elections to the board. Friends share personalities, ideas, and methodologies, facilitating efficiency: “things get done faster.” The illusion of authenticity eludes the more or less Iranian, and promotes the problem of cultural brokers and guardians of a pure cultural tradition, who reconfigure “the sense of culture” as hijackers of the hyphen.

Although the oscillation of interactions within host and native communities create assorted centrifugal and centripetal effects on identity, they are tackled as opportunities for personal growth. Against odds, the “assimilation” approach seizes strategies to preserve a semblance of Iranianness through an assessment of “good” and “bad” native-host cultural inheritances. The result is a reinscribed personal history informed by a humanistic concept of personhood that harkens back to the ancient Zoroastrian mantra: good thoughts, good words, good actions.

Finally, in addressing my research question, I argue that the persistent attachment to Iranianness and community involvement is attributable to an appreciation of the pragmatics of a bi- and multicultural lifestyle acquired vis-à-vis diametric viewpoints in familial lessons. These lessons privilege an evaluation of the benefits and detriments of native and host identity markers for their adaptive and expressive utility in the preservation of identity and community. Adaptive expression entails relinquishing ethnic markers regarded as conspicuously “foreign” or “alien” (e.g., hijab, Muslim holidays), and accentuating symbols with mutable, “non-threatening” meanings. As Iranians
confronted the improbable return to Iran, they reluctantly “unpacked their suitcases,” an
oft-invoked metaphor. Followed by a period of indecision and alienation, Iranians form
hybridity through the reconciliation of several dilemmas of self that arise in the transition
from tradition to modernity, which Giddens argues requires authoring a self-reflexive
project. It entails a creative compromise of traditional Iranian values and adoptive
American values taken from their personal histories and experiences of discrimination.
The result, a reassembled “portable ideology” (Adelkhah 2000; Sullivan 2001), serves the
“assimilationist” trajectory wherein the “external Iranian” incorporates “good” cultural
markers that establish their public presence as positive, happy, and ethical immigrants. In
the private sphere, the “internal Iranian” prioritizes Persian traditions, culture, and
identity tied to language, Zoroastrian fragments, and ta’arof. Parents impart this public-
private orientation to their second-generation children, explaining they can be what they
choose to be, provided they do so within the confines of the law and precepts of that
tradition.

Bob’s portable ideology, for example, alludes to the “assimilationist” Iranian as a
by-product of Iran’s strategic geographic location and ancient history. Following a
National Geographic article that he read about Iran (Del Giudice 2008), he declares
Iran’s disposition toward assimilation: “If you look throughout three thousand years of
history, Iran couldn’t have stayed Iran. When Arabs came and brought Islam, we became
more Islamic than the frickin’ Arabs, for cryin’ out loud! We have a great propensity for
assimilation [and] to identify with our conquerors. If we put that in this context—
Western culture—America is our conqueror. We have to become more American than
the Americans themselves. You give me a group that’s been trampled upon from time to
time, and has maintained its identity. The only way you can do it to be able to suck it in,
and look up to your conqueror, and say, ‘Yes master. You’re right. I’ll do what you
say’. The only way you can do that is if you assimilate.”

In the U.S., Western culture as conqueror is epitomized in the celebration of
Christmas vis-à-vis what Zohreh calls “the American media tradition.” The prevalence
of celebrating Christmas among Muslim Iranians exemplifies public sphere
“assimilation” as Iranians showcase it publicly without it threatening internal
Iranianness. Parents use the occasion to teach children that Christmas “is their big
celebration,” and for their children to not “feel left out when going to school,” “so the
kids [are] not secluded from society,” and because “it’s something that they need to know
about; there’s nothing wrong with it.” The repetition of the phrases—“It’s fun! It’s
beautiful! It’s colorful! It’s happy! It’s party time! It’s a celebration!”—represents an
openness to other faiths as a healthy adaptation to belong in Minnesota. The tree and
other secular symbols, rather than Christ, mark belongingness for Iranians, lend children
chances to identify with chosen bits of American culture, and provide a lesson in
multiculturalism. Azam’s admission to celebrate Christmas “even worse than the
American people” reiterates the Iranian propensity to “hyper-assimilate.” Parents clarify
that Christmas is a Christian tradition. Openness to other faiths is a healthy adaptation to
belong in Minnesota. Celebrating the non-religious aspects of Christian holidays
harmlessly presents children with chances to identify with chosen bits of American
culture. Concerns of children’s alienation translate the lessons of Christmas into an
appreciation of multi-culturalism. “Assimilation” orients the public American-private Iranian toward humanity, tolerance, neighborliness, and curiosity by honoring “the best” of both cultures. Outwardly, the celebration of Christmas signifies to neighbor and adopted nation: a gesture of respect; an inclination to learn about one’s adoptive home; and a resonance with (through profane material symbols) and separateness from (this is their holiday and what it means to them) the host society.

The paucity of references to Muslim holidays, and prevalence of references to an anti-religious attitudes predominated. Being “more Norwegian than Olaf himself” is an assimilative response to claim a stake in the public Minnesota landscape. In this way, as Zohreh referred to her husband, the individual Iranian “has remained to be an Iranian, who is very American at the same time. He knows the value of picking up good things from every culture.” Self-other interactions generate hierarchies of space that manifest by “rethinking difference through connection” (Gupta and Ferguson 2002:67). Differentiating processes that occur through connections among Iranians and between Iranians and Minnesotans, reveal micro-hierarchical power relations that configure community in a spatially distributed scatter gram. The centripetal and centrifugal forces stimulate, quoting Gupta and Ferguson, “processes whereby a space achieves a distinctive identity as a place” (67), and that shatter the connection between place and culture. Within this scattering and shattering, community is fabricated around an ideal sense of belonging attached symbolic anchors (ibid.): who out ta’arofs whom, whose Persian most eloquently eludes understanding, whose Christmas tree is brighter. Who makes the meaning of place salient is based on power structures, couched in terms of
“natural” connections, as in the case of the transposition of claims to a “sense of culture” around the hyphen (ibid.:70). We can learn from Iranian immigrants, that in the ebb and flow of making community, “assimilation” is a stance to reject a natural conception to “spatialized ‘cultures’” and a willingness to question political and historical motives that lay claim to ownership, which divide the world into ourselves and others.
Abu-Lughod, Janet  

Abu-Lughod, Lila  


Aburia, Hebba  

Adelkhah, Fariba  

Afary, Janet  

Afshar, Haleh  

Agnew, Vijay  

Ahmadi, Nader  

Al-Qazzaz, Ayad

Al-Rasheed, Madawi

Amanat, Mehrdad

Amin, Michael Camron

Anderson, Benedict


Ansari, Maboud

Ardalan, Davar

Appadurai, Arjun

Arthur, John A.

Asayesh, Gelareh
Asgharzadeh, Alireza

Atkins, Annette

Attar, Farid Ud-Din

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Badran, Margot

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de Groot, Joanna

Del Giudice, Marguerite

Dettwyler, Katherine A.

di Leonardo, Micaela, ed.

Drenning Holmquist, June, Ed.

Ebtekar, Massoumeh

Eickelman, Dale
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Mahdavi, Sara  

Mahdi, Ali Akbar  


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Marchal, Roland

Marcus, George, and Dick Cushman

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Marx, Karl


Massey, Douglas S.

Mehdipour, Abdullah
Meriwether, Margaret L., and Judith E. Tucker

Meryhew, Richard

Messina, Anthony M. and Gallya Lahav

Metropolitan Council

Milani, Abbas

Milani, Farzaneh


Milani, Mehrangiz Rafat
Miller, Deborah

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba

Mittelam, James H.


Moallem, Minoo

Moaveni, Azadeh

Mobasher, Mohsen M.

Modarres, Ali

Moghadam, Valentine M.

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Nederveen Pieterse, Jan


Nolin, Catherine


Nweeya, Samuel K.

Ong, Aihwa

Ortner, Sherry

Oz, Amos

Paidar, Parvin


Park, Robert E.

Pasha, Mustapha Kamal and Ahmed I. Samatar

Payne, Geoff, and Judy Payne

Pedraza-Bailey, Silvia

Peet, Richard and Elaine Hartwick
Polanyi, Karl  

Pollack, Kenneth M. 

Portes, Alejandro, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt 

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Rapp Reiter, Rayna, ed. 

Rapport, Nigel 
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Sciolino, Elaine

Seal, Jenna

Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi
Shah of Iran, 1958.

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Swanson, Jon C.

Tehranian, John

Thompson, Derek

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Valentine, David

Van Dusen, Roxann A.

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ENDNOTES

i Political and religious discourses disseminate a stereotypical, male-centric “vision of the husband as the economic provider … [and] calling for a ‘return’ of women to their ‘traditional’ place at the center of the family, as wives and mothers” (Sherif-Trask 2006:243).

ii The paucity relates to several problems: access, linguistics, lack of research tools, area studies, and training (Sherif-Trask 2006:234), and “the assumption that non-Western families in particular are governed primarily by unchanging cultural values, traditions, and laws—and thus are ‘understood’” (ibid.:235).

iii Male researchers who lacked access to female spheres emphasized men’s positions as “all-powerful, the primary decision makers, and the economic providers … [creating] a distorted Orientalist view of the Islamic family as a patriarchal family in which women are subjected, suppressed, and invisible” (Sherif-Trask 2006:233).

iv Traditional is defined as a “strict gender-based division of household labor … with the man being responsible for breadwinning and the woman … having primary responsibility for home and children”) (Haas 2006:357).

v Connolly (1987) contrasts Nietzsche’s exploration of “discordance lodged with order and rationality” (12) with Hobbes’ theory of political conflict, which associates resistance to rational order as “a sign of sin or irrationality in need of correction” (12). Humans pursue completeness to fit into an ideal social form, which Nietzsche professed is a “quest for concordance through containment or assimilation or conquest of otherness” (13). But quieting “the voices of discordance within the self” is a human weakness requiring punishment (14-15). Connolly urges vigilance to “obscure the violence in normalization,” and to recognize that ambiguity “encourages us to treat normalization as an ambiguous good to be qualified, countered, and politicized” (16).

vi In this study, including the “negatively alienated,” who cling to “a firm and ‘pure’ identity,” refuse to compromise Iranian identity, and reject Americanness, and “positively alienated,” who deemphasize Iranianness and remain open to any cultural influence (Hoffman 1990).

vii Legislation passed by the “Republican-controlled Legislature … increased state taxes and funneled most of the resulting revenue to local governments and school districts so they could, in theory, reduce property taxes” (Kenney 2013:2).

viii To date, there are nineteen Fortune 500 companies in the Twin Cities, “more than any other metro its size. … ‘There is something about Minneapolis that makes us unusually good at building and keeping large companies.’” Myles Shaver, a Carlson School of Management professor, argues “that Minneapolis is so successful at turning medium-size companies into giants because its most important resources never leave the city: educated managers of every level, who can work at just about any company” (Thompson 2015:2-3). Regional governance and a “fiscal equalization” plan “encourages high-income communities to share not only their tax revenues but also their real estate with the lower and middle classes. … Today, business taxes are used to enrich some of the
region’s poorest communities,” enforcing low-income and affordable housing to be constructed throughout the Twin Cities (ibid.:3).

ix Jones (2009) associates the downfall of two Minnesota governors (Wendell Anderson and Jesse Ventura) to the fact that they started acting too special.

x “The national average is closer to about six in 10.” Although this percentage remains high, a former demographer explains that “the percentage of homegrown Minnesota residents is shrinking” (Yuen 2012).

xi Minnesota ranks twelfth in the nation in terms of growth for foreign-born residents but homogeneity contributes to their cultural incompetence.

xii Yuen argues that there “is strong evidence that the state is generous and accepting to newcomers and people of different cultures and faiths. Consider the Vietnamese, Mexicans, Ethiopians, Liberians, Russians, Indians, Tibetans and others have come to Minnesota from every corner of the world. It's the first state to send a Muslim to Congress, a Hmong person to the state Legislature, and elect a Somali to public office. Minnesota also is a leader in refugee resettlement” (Yuen 2012).

xiii Ramsey County, the most diverse, “is still whiter than the national average,” although this is changing (Yuen 2012).

xiv Shaver studied “outward migration of employed, college-educated people who earn at least twice the national average income … only one had a lower rate of outflow than Minneapolis. … Among all college-educated workers, Minneapolis also had the second-lowest outflow (Thompson 2015:3).

xv “This avenue is open primarily to immigrants who have first entered the United States without legal papers or for temporary periods and who have subsequently married a U.S. citizens are given priority because they are exempt from existing quotas” (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:15).

xvi Advice books (e.g., Qabusnamah) from the eleventh century distinguish the “object of love” as male friendship, while wifely affection is directed toward procreation (Najmabadi 2005:157). But to guard against the male-male gaze, the Book on the Etiquette of Marriage was published to commend the contract of marriage and protect against “sinful acts” (159).

xvii In early Qajar times, the object of desire in Sufism was interpreted through gazing (nazar), assumed to be toward young males (Najmabadi 2005:17).

xviii Love of homeland required men to abandon “a variety of culturally sanctioned sexual practices – such as sex with other (younger) men, temporary marriage, illicit sex with prostitutes and housed servants” (Najmabadi 2005:177).

xix Love marriages are the “wrong type of marriage [and] is contrasted with marriage arranged through kinship networks and blessed by parental guidance and approval, in which love and affection between partners is to grow after marriage” (Najmabadi 2005:367). The Morning After portrays romantic marriage as an inherent failure, and the virtues of culture over desire are clear “the wisdom of the elderly, not on blind love; on kufu (social, class, and cultural parity), not on the daring transgressions of a class-crossing marriage; on considering and living within a tense yet blissful bigamy instead of
the illusive pretensions of monogamy; and on a return to the paternal family instead of escaping from it into a ‘nuclear’ hell” (369).

xx By the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea of romantic love became more popularized in two genres of literature: first, ‘‘clean’ romantic tales (with no hint of sex) that would underwrite and be dynamized by national, political, and reform imperatives; and second, the sexed moral tales of warning about urban corruption and abusive men taking advantage of naïve, young (often rural immigrant) women in the new climate of socialization between unrelated men and women” (Najmabadi 2005:367-368).

xxi Although the novel had mass appeal to women Najmabadi credits her readers with heeding the ‘ibrat (admonitory lesson), and taking only what is relevant to them (373). The topic of youthful, free love and “legalizing” passion through sigheh became the discursive buzz at Friday sermons and in advice columns (379). “If one believes these columns to be a true reflection of the real sexual life of Iranian adolescents, a not-so-underground sexual revolution is going on” (379). They tell the youth, assumed to be sexually active, to stay away from sexual involvement in the wake of youthful romantic fantasies; turn to your parents for advice in choosing a life partner; follow the rules of gender segregation between men and women who are legally entitled to marry; be careful where your intense same-sex relationships may be heading; and put your energy into studying, religious practices, and sports if your time for a permanent marriage has not yet come. (380)

xxii The researchers, Moghadam et al. (2009), had access to the Tehran Psychiatric Institute, University of Iran, and interviewed fourteen Iranian couples of various ages from the middle and professional class (43). They emphasized collectivist goals, interdependence, and social harmony within “a hierarchical system of gendered power into law,” reminding the audience (i.e., couple therapists) of the importance of a multiculturalist perspective regarding notions of gender equality (42). This hierarchical system stresses male dominance through legal codes, though “many Iranians believe that women are valued in Iranian society” (42). Iranians often point to “the literacy rate for women in Iran, at 80% in 2001, is higher than for men and is increasing at a faster pace” (42). In the newly formulated Islamic feminism, women reexamine Islamic texts as well as the historical Persian roots to mold a gendered identity based on “the principle of human rights established by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC” and women’s presence in ruling positions (42-43).

xxiii The researchers addressed issues of communication, decision-making, problem solving (Moghadam et al. 2009:43), “‘expectations of mutuality,’ ‘authority structure,’ ‘Islamic values and traditions,’ and ‘peace and harmony’” (45). Their research uncovered four patterns (traditional mutual couples; traditional male dominant pattern; transitional mutual mode; transitional stressed pattern) of marital power structures along the lines of authority, mutual support, and male dominance (51).

xxiv Still, Iranian clinicians “report that many women in Iran are unhappy,” and carry a heavier burden, since “men have not learned how to attend to others” (Moghadam et al. 2009:52).
Other risk-free subversions of religious meanings that Iranian women employ “to better fit their own existential situations” include (Hegland 1999:192): singing sexually suggestive songs at women’s wedding gatherings; critiquing female preachers; shifting the hijab to reveal the hairline; expressing public piety to “camouflage private misbehavior” (193); arguing for inflation adjustment on the payment women receive in the event of divorce (194); graveyard and shrine visitations that provide an unmediated relationship with the supernatural (195); and attending sofrehs, rozehs, or Moharram mourning gatherings (195).

The “more enlightened segments of the religious and political leadership” assured the populace that “pills and other contraceptives which would temporarily stop the creation of a fetus was not haram (prohibited)” (Johnson-Odim and Strobel 1999:12). The turnaround was made effective by “a powerful consensus-building campaign,” making contraceptives economically accessible and a trustworthy option (12).

The media, the pulpit, and medieval writings disseminated the notion that sustainable population control and balancing Islamic ideals of contraception with sexual pleasure were allowable (Hoodfar 1994:12-13).

Despite this, Khomeini’s new family law “represented one of the most advanced marriage laws in the Middle East (after Tunisia and Turkey) without deviating from … Islamic law” (Hoodfar 1994:16). The new marriage contract had eleven clauses with two key stipulations: one allowed the first wife to divorce in the event of nonconsensual polygamy and the other gave a woman a claim to equal division of “the wealth accumulated during the marriage” (16). The victory opened up “public debate and negotiation … [around] women-centered interpretations of Muslim laws” (16). For example, upon divorce, a wife is granted nafaqeh or “back pay” for her household labor, since it is not a requirement for “women to work in their husband’s home” (16).

Upper- and middle-class Iranians condemn sigheh as a step back for women, and a threat to a stable, monogamous, “love” union. Conversely, working class women acknowledged President Rafsanjani’s claim that sigheh is morally and respectably superior to Western sexual freedom, marginality, companionship, and also allows a war widow to fulfill her sexual desires purely (Haeri 1994).

Whereas “permanent” marriage requires a socially recognized contract with the guarantee of access to sexual services, temporary marriage is arranged between two consenting adults through a verbal agreement akin to “a rental arrangement” (Afshar 1998:140).

Negotiations between families follow a complex series of stages, including informal meetings, acceptance, financial negotiations, public recognition, financial transactions, and the farewell (Eickelman 2002:159-161). Parents and the preferred suitor “become one force in encouraging the young woman to accept their choice” (Kousha 2002:120). Kousha describes herself as a member of the “wanderers” and “world citizens … belonging to nowhere” (19). She interviewed fifteen Iranian women on a return trip to her native Iran, with the aim to counter images of Iranian women as powerless through a collection of individual stories of women on the inside.
In the past, it was not the parents but community hairdresser (mashateh) “who went from house to house providing their services to their customers” (Hannassab 1993:20). Female negotiators may ascertain spousal match criteria (e.g., reputation, social status, education) (Eickelman 2002:158-159). With the decline of the mashateh’s (community hairdresser as quasi-matchmaker) role, selection shifted to the realm of kin and friends (ibid.:28).

When translated into Farsi, heroism and spirituality correspond to darvishi and lutigari. The former is associated with the khaniqah (“lodge”) and the individual who eschews “formal doctrine or discipline, but shows a certain disinterest in the externals of this world” (Bateson et al. 1997:264); the latter is associated with strength and affiliation with the zurkhanah (“house of strength”), where “the tough man who has developed into a champion of his district or neighborhood” assumes the role of protector and arbitrator of “a certain rough justice” (265). These two orientations complement each other in “a lack of hypocrisy, a consistency between feeling and behavior, and a lack of ambivalence” (268). These two virtues demonstrate how harmony can exist between one’s interior and exterior self; “a personality in which the self is conceived of as having hidden depths” (269).

Adelkhah (2000) addresses the four areas in which revolutionary reason was accomplished: the bureaucratic and rational restructuring of political, judicial, and civil insurances of social life; a dually legitimate government of democracy and religion; centralized control of a diverse populace complicated by Iraqi and Afghan migrants and refugees; and economic challenges (xi-xiii).

The construction of Persian psychological features was based on the chronicles of travelers, historians, diplomats, social scientists, and anthropologists intending to show how “the character” of Iran’s people differed from the West (Banuazizi 1977:210-211). Connolly (1987) contrasts Nietzsche, the first modern philosopher to explore “discordance lodged with order and rationality,” with Hobbesian theory of political conflict, which associated resistance to rational order as “irrationality in need of correction” (12). Nietzsche’s position is that it is a human weakness “to close off the voices of discordance within the self,” as well as the propensity to reprimand “those whose discordant articulations create disturbance in oneself” (14-15). Connolly urges vigilance against the tendency to “obscure the violence in normalization” (16). Rather, embracing ambiguity “encourages us to be wary of doctors that glorify normalization by defining it as harmonization; it encourages us to treat normalization as an ambiguous good to be qualified, countered, and politicized” (16).

Rapport (2007) provides several domains in which contradiction as creative wellspring can be found: conventional-anthropological; literary-artistic; ethnomethodological-empirical; psychological-cognitive; and linguistic-symbolic (654). The conventional-anthropological works were inspired by Durkheim’s and Mauss’s (1970) groundbreaking work on the systematic relatedness of categories within symbolic classification schema (Miller 1997). For each society, classification schema are arranged in congruous wholes that necessitate its participants’ understanding, particularly to “make intelligible the relations which exist between things” (654-655). As they are culturally
specific, they can be read “as emanations of ‘the collective mind’ of society” (655).
Rapport demonstrates how Mary Douglas’ (1966) work builds off of this by examining
the divisions created by ‘dirt’ or pollution; “the notion that something is polluted serves
to protect cherished principles and categories from contradiction” (655). Where ‘dirt’
may also be powerful, power is typically located in ritual; that momentary time out of
order and control and also where there is “acceptance of the wholeness of the real in
contradistinction to the partiality of participants’ own nomic categories” (655). But
Rapport wonders why the boundaries of such systems are vulnerable and “why
recognition and embrace of the contradictory should be cordoned off in, and as, the
extraordinariness of ritual” (656). Rapport also examines Gluckman’s efforts to marry
Durkheim and Mauss with Marx. Also, the focus on ritual (rites of rebellion and
reversal) as catharsis from tension envisions “‘social systems’ as replete with
ambivalence: as fields of tension, co-operation and struggle” (656). These tensions
existed in between people, institutions, and principles of social-structural organization.
Likewise, Turner’s (1964) work examined symbolic systems of ritual as “unifications of
disparate, contradictory significata, condensations of distinct, everyday things and
actions. Ritual symbols brought together what was otherwise divided and kept apart:
they juxtaposed ideological against sensory meanings, the normative against the
emotional and the cognitive against the affective” (657). Turner (1969) later postulated
that “an oscillation, cognitive and social, between the structured, the classified and the
divided on the one hand and the unstructured, the uncategorized and the homogenous on
the other, was a ubiquitous human characteristic. Together and in opposition, structure
and anti-structure constituted human culture” (657). It was at the moment of communitas
that humans seek to shatter the rigid divisions of “status-bound social order” and yearn
for “a generalized social bond between human beings, a sentiment for humanity as a
whole, not yet fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties: a generic bond …
whereby human beings related to each other freely and as totalities” (657). In all cases,
there is some recognition of contradiction between social order and symbolic
contrarieties but it only pertained “between the states of order and disorder or un-order—
between social structure and ritual, between nomos and cosmos, between cleanliness and
pollution, and between structure and communitas—but not as a state in itself. What is
absent from this line of thought is an appreciation of the simultaneity of classification and
contradiction. Social order is predicated not upon the absence of contradiction but upon
its co-presences: the cognitive co-presence of the contradictory, of both/and, together
with the classificatory order of either/or” (658; emphasis in original). Rapport celebrates
the fact that the contradictory is a space of creative possibility, and, he argues, it is
ubiquitous; “so their cognitive creations of the ‘orderly’ are seen as deriving from their
simultaneous contradictory appreciations (and desires) of other possible ways in which
things might be conjoined and divided—in which things might be things” (658).
Rapport’s earlier work examines the contradictions inherent in cultural divisions: “how
such division is a labour and an achievement, and also a burden; how division gives onto
definition and order which are also an impoverishment; how division is ever uncertain
and contingent because arbitrary, partial and contested; and hence how the achievement of division entails the wise for, and the promise of, conjunction” (653).

Rapport’s earlier work examines the contradictions inherent in cultural divisions: “how such division is a labour and an achievement, and also a burden; how division gives onto definition and order which are also an impoverishment; how division is ever uncertain and contingent because arbitrary, partial and contested; and hence how the achievement of division entails the wise for, and the promise of, conjunction” (653).

Part of her cognitive angst comes through with her view that Israeli nationalism is characterized by “a psychological displacement of a real feeling that ‘We blew it: we ruined our chances of making it in The Land’” (664). “Displacement” plays out as aggression, and a type of madness that results from a population of peoples “from Oriental societies where individuality is not allowed and their real eccentricities cannot come out. Or else they are torn between traditional culture and the permissiveness of Western culture” (663).

While the ta‘āziyeh are typically men’s affairs, women host marsieh or rawzeh in the home, which are “less elaborate musical ceremonies recounting the deaths of the martyrs and the tragic light of their female kin left behind as prisoners” (Good et al. 1985:387).

Yet, while mourning rituals are extensively ritualized in Iran, there is also “a great deal of institutionalized denial associated with death of a close relative. It is widely agreed, among all social classes in Iran, that to receive tragic news while one is alone or away from one’s family can lead to a ‘fright’ illness” (Good et al. 1985:398). In exile, this may mean that Iranians are not made aware of a family member’s death until months, and in some cases years, later.

Asgharzadeh (2007) traces the development of an “Indo-Europeanist ideology” to the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), which relied upon connections between European racism, “the creation of the Indo-European language family, and the emergence of modern racism in Iran” (2).

Persian constitutes thirty-six percent of Iran’s total linguistic diversity: the “Persian language belongs to the Indo-European language family that, along with Kurdish, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Lori/Luri, Sistani, Bakhtiyari, and also Tajik and Pashtun, constitute what are called the Iranian languages” (15). Other languages spoken include, “non-Iranic languages such as Turkic, Arabic, Assyrian, as well as independent Indo-European languages such as Kurdish, Baluchi, and Armenian” (Asgharzadeh 2007:15).

A person of honest expression “cannot be moved by threats or coopted or bribed” (Bateson et al. 1977:271).

Following Margaret Mead (1962), regularized, patterned linguistic and nonlinguistic communicative behavior can be examined in subgroups, then compared to more generalized patterns (Beeman 1977:23). Subgroup patterns may be examined and interpreted through mutually shared codes and rules associated with “particular modes of speaking, topics or message forms, with particular settings and activities” (24), whereas general patterns of communication include linguistic forms, symbolic and behavioral forms, and widely varying contexts in which “the interpretation of codes including historic traditions,” and the calculation of the appropriate message within the context
The ‘feel’ about a culture which one senses to be regular is ... attributable to the fact that the behavior one is attending to consists for individual actors of specifiable codes of communicative behavior, presented in standardized contexts, involving categorized sets of participants’ (26).

The theme of uncertainty/insecurity is common in communication as “(a) messages cannot be interpreted according to any single set of criteria; [and] (b) an adroit operator never settles on a final interpretation of any message” (Beeman 1977:32). For example, villagers require a representative (kadkhuda) to deal with government officials and stand up for their concerns as small landowners and day laborers, but the only representatives who could deal with urban officials effectively were wealthy, large landowners who did not have the small landowners’ interests in mind (32-33). The villagers settled on two kadkhudas, who “were perfectly able to live with their official status ‘in limbo’, each tacitly acknowledging the authority of the other in its proper context” (33). Depending on the particular occasion or need of the villagers, the two kadkhuda may separately or together represent the village. Villagers demonstrate great flexibility when dealing “with the demands of different situations and value systems. Only an outside observer determined on knowing ‘the single truth’ about the matter would try to rely on any one statement about the identity of the kadkhuda as the actual state of affairs” (33-34).

Regarding the trait of cleverness/wiliness (zirangi), skilled individuals attempt to thwart “direct interpretation of one’s own actions or deliberately leading others to an erroneous interpretation of those actions” (Beeman 1977:34). An individual showing zirangi desires to influence through ingratiation or altruism, whether the end goal is to secure a request is favorably considered or “to forestall certain other behavioral acts, such as verbal or physical abuse” (34).

The characteristic of mistrust considers “that other people are so unpredictable that one never knows what malevolence they are going to inflict” (Beeman 1977:37). While difficult to directly translate from the Persian, “mistrust” is reciprocal to zirangi; i.e., “one person may be successful concealing his motives and true actions from another person, who, in turn, is unable to understand exactly what is taking place” (38).

Emotionality (that which is felt versus expressed) and its appropriate expression differs contextually in Iran than in the West (Beeman 1977:39). Examining the relationship between emotion and context will unearth “messages that are appropriate for expression at particular times in particular contexts and toward particular persons, rather than an investigation of personality traits as distributed throughout the population at large” (40).

“Accounting procedures” in communication systems include the transmission of “substantive messages” as well as “meta-communicative messages which constitute an account to others and themselves of what they are doing, have done, or are about to do. ... However, every action also serves to account for other actions and a license for subsequent actions” (Beeman 1977:41). While motivations, emotions, and psychological traits cannot be observed, expressions can “obliterate vast differences in individual psychology” (41-42). Communication entails “a series of ongoing dialectics between macro-structures of ideology and social values, and micro-structures of individual ongoing interactions; between pragmatic foresight and after-the-fact rationalization; and
ultimately between our own need as observers to account for the actions of a subject and his need to make himself accountable to us and the world at large” (42).

IV The criteria for inclusion were “high-quality prose or poetry, written and (first) published in Persian since the revolution of 1979. Cultural and linguistic translatability was also added as a condition” (xxvi). The editors title alludes to the censorship and the seemingly parallel lives that Iranian writers in Iran and in the United States, as the following quote suggests: “these are indeed strange times (my dear) not only in Iran, but in the United States as well. Recent rulings by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the Treasury Department of the United States of America designated the commissioning, editing, or marketing of material written in Iran, Cuba, and Sudan as ‘prohibited exports of services’ to enemy nations, unless a license was obtained from that department in advance … this in effect meant that editors, translators, and publishers had to ‘seek a government license to carry on First Amendment-protected publishing activities or leave themselves open to criminal penalties.’ In these days of ascendance of transnationalism throughout the world, it certainly seems bizarre, if not downright shortsighted and irresponsible, to further limit the already meager lines of communication and understanding between peoples with differing perspectives” (xxv).

IV Still, Glazer and Moynihan (1970) argue that immigrants never fully assimilate because of “the nature of American society itself” and a narrow conception of what it means to be “American” (14).

IVI Comparing southern and eastern with northwestern European immigrants in terms of achievement; comparing racial and ethnic minorities to southern and eastern immigrants; questioning whether new immigrants (i.e., Latin American, Asian) will duplicate the experience of other immigrants; and explaining how structural changes in society alter the immigrant experience (Pedraza-Bailey 2004:95).

IVII Portes (2004a) provides several examples of how structural forces drive immigration: “sustained demand for an elastic supply of labor, the pressure and constraints of sending Third World economies, the dislocations wrought by struggles for the creation and control of national states in less developed regions, and the microstructures of support created by migrants themselves across political borders” (30).

IVIII The differential impact of gendered migration is apparent in issues of human rights (e.g., trafficking, nanny-work, fiancé visas); labor and settlement patterns (e.g., remittances, degree of sedentarization); dynamics of the household, community, and economic restructuring relative to neoliberalism (Nolin 2006:34-35).

IX “Without either geographical, temporal or even clear ‘ethnic’ roots, and in the absence of incorporation as a subsystem of an already established religion,” Bahá’ís face difficulties “‘being taken seriously’ as one of the world’s religions” (Beyer 2006:262).

IX Its growth out of the Iranian Babi movement established its status as “Islamic heresy by dominant Muslim authorities. Its successor, Baha’i, carries the stigma of these origins and has been the subject of periodic suppression in the Iranian heartland” (Beyer 2006:262).

IXI The pre-Bahai faith Babi movement mimicked a millenarian movement, which was “not unprecedented in the Twelver or Imami branch of Shi’a Islam. Its founder presented
himself as the Bab, the gateway to the soon-to-arrive mixed representative of the hidden Imam” (263). Baha’ullah, who “claimed to be the one whom the Bab had announced,” left writings that became the “authoritative and inspired texts around which a religious programme could be fashioned” (263). Global universalism was the primary orientation, which he translated into an appeal to the “to the monarchical heads of the world’s states for unity and peace, one indication of just how much this religion was forming in a globalizing social context” (263). Baha’ullah’s son Abdu’l-Baha assumed his father’s mantle and brought the religion to the West, where it was directed toward practical universalism and social reconstructionism or engagement (263-64). The final spiritual head during the early phases of the Bahai was Shoghi Effendi, who formed the “Administrative Order”; the “two main planks of this structure were Local Spiritual Assemblies and National Spiritual Assemblies which gave Baha’i a hierarchal and geographically based organizational form that could be expanded as missionary efforts and numbers warranted” (264).

Historically, East-West, Islam-Christendom encounter occurred in three phases: first, at its peak between the eighth to the twelfth centuries, Islamic civilization contributed to progress in commerce, trade, science, and culture, culminating in Muslim Spain (then meeting its demise with the Inquisition) (Pasha and Samatar 1996:193); second, the split of the ummah (community of Muslim faithful) following European colonialism, between an outward looking, Western-educated, intellectual elite, and the introspective masses resistant to “spiritual contamination” (193-194). In the second phase, religious reformists pursue “ijtihad (individual judgment) and a renewal of Islam from within,” while modern reformists hope “to construct a bridge to modernity” and value learning as the essence of renewal (194). The third phase of globalization involves the delegitimization of Muslim elite, due to their inability to preside over “societal development and their aping of Western consumerism” (194).

Western science was reasoned to be “the only legitimate global language of social reform” (Schayegh 2006:195), and was supported by some clergy, who had to cast its advantages as harmonious with Iran’s ancient past (ibid.:196). The medicalizing strategy was guided by the West’s imposition of “international sanitary and public health policies,” and adopted by the Iranian middle class, who favorably received “eugenic practices” and their compatibility “with public health measures” (ibid.:111).

Iran’s religious minorities became a favored target of the Islamic government’s wrath. Bahá’ís received the most extreme persecution. For example, because Bahá’í marriages are not recognized in Iran, couples are “living in sin” and their children are deemed illegitimate (Jones 1984:5). Bahá’ís were also believed to have collaborated with the shah (despite that his regime also persecuted them). Nearly 870 Bahá’ís were reported executed or missing. Those who remain in Iran are denied education, jobs, passports, and have their homes, gravesites, and holy places desecrated (6). Since an edict “made participation in any Baha’i institutional activity a criminal act,” all Bahá’í institutions were disbanded (6). In 1984, the total number of Bahá’ís living in the U.S. was estimated at 7000. Although Jews are “recognized by the Koran as ‘people of the Book’ and … one of the four legally recognized religions,” Iranian Jews are “singled out and charged with
being spies for Israel or clandestinely promoting Zionist interests” (6). A great deal of fear exists within the community, leading to an exodus of one-half the population to Israel and the U.S. (7). Targeted Christian groups included Anglicans (because of their ties with Britain) and Armenians. As with other religious minorities, desecration of their holy places and businesses were motivated by moral (not religious) reasons, although this did not dispel their fear (7). Iran’s ethnic minorities—Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Turkomans, Bakhtiaris, Baluch, and Qashqa’is—have also suffered under the revolutionary government, because of their “demands for greater respect for ethnic identity and a larger measure of autonomy” (7). This is especially true for the Kurds and Arabs, but also ideological groups (e.g., Mujahedin-e-Khalq, the Tudeh Party, monarchists, the Fedayeen, the National Front, Westernized Iranians) accused of “military-inspired conspiracies” intending to reseat the Pahlavi dynasty (9). At the time the Issue Paper was published, Jones described the plight of Iranian refugees to be “a genuine humanitarian problem” that is misunderstood and about which people are unaware. Iranian refugees differ from other refugees “in several important aspects”: first, they have suffered from “perhaps the clearest and most compelling example of religious persecution in the world today”; second, their diversity exacerbates the misunderstanding of Iranians; third, they do not receive the same degree of support as other refugees; fourth, they are vulnerable because the Islamic regime is urging their return in order to punish them and discourage them from telling their story; finally, they are subject to an inordinate amount of negativity and discrimination (18-19).

Refugees are “provided with food, lodging, medical care, and an allowance … but must check in and out; violations may be punished by a fine or imprisonment” (Jones 1984:15).

Numbers show that “more than one-third chose greater Los Angeles as their destination, followed distantly by San Francisco, New York, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore” (Modarres 1989:38).

Mahdavi’s (2006) numbers are taken from the National Iranian American Council in 2003: “There are 22,856 Iranian Americans living in New York, the state with the second largest population of Iranians. 22,590 Iranian Americans live in Texas; 12,935 are in Maryland; 14,970 reside in Virginia; 9,625 live in Florida; and small numbers are scattered throughout the rest of the states as well” (237-238).

Modarres attributes the concentration of Iranians in Los Angeles to “the increase in the number of older Iranian immigrants, as well as graduating Iranian students and their search for jobs, families, and a sense of community” (38). The highest concentrations of Iranians in Los Angeles County occurs in ZIP codes areas with high socioeconomic populations (i.e., Reseda, Encino, Tarzana, Glendale, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, and West Los Angeles) (38), dense populations, few minorities, high educational levels, median household incomes between $24,127 and $97,972, home values exceeding $500,000, and excellent amenities (39).

“According to these sources, in 1980, there were 108,949 Iranians in the U.S. whose place of birth was Iran, and by 1990 this figure had doubled, reaching 210,941” (Modarres 1989:39).
By comparing the two areas where the concentration of pre-1980 Iranian immigrants has increased over time, it can be argued that the Los Angeles and D.C. metropolitan areas serve two distinct subgroups of Iranians: those in L.A. reflect family reunification and intra-group relationships, especially among religious minorities from Iran, resulting in a large Iranian ethnic presence, while the D.C. Iranians pursue middle-class professional careers, with less pronounced ethnic visibility and more economic integration in the larger community” (Modarres 1989:47).

Nearly 3,000 Iranian students arrived in West Germany in 1961 (remaining steady until 1971 with a count at 2,962 students). This contrasts greatly with “the share for the U.S. [which] increased from 2,943 to 6,771 in the same period” (Modarres 1998:35).

A Middle Eastern person is defined as “someone who identifies him- or herself as being from or having ancestral ties to the predominantly Islamic region of the world in Southwest Asia and North Africa” (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:xx).

Marvasti and McKinney gathered data from popular written and on-line articles in magazines and editorials for a one year period (beginning in September 2001) looking for themes of “self versus other,” and later developing “two conceptual categories: minimizing differences within the Western self and magnifying differences with the Islamic other” (69). Examining the articles for rhetorical constructions, Marvasti and McKinney “were interested in how they present one version of reality by excluding other possibilities … especially … how media accounts act as interpretive frameworks or ways of making sense of the terrorist attacks and their consequences for U.S. society” (70).

Terrorism is defined as the “clandestine, illegal violence inflicted upon civilians to influence a third party to acquiesce to certain political demands. This definition encompasses two distinct aspect of terrorism: (a) its illegality (unlike conventional warfare, the violence of terrorism is not sanctioned); (b) the immorality of its methods (terrorism seeks to bring about policy change through random and secret violence inflicted on innocent targets)” (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:54-55).

For example, in the Munich hostage crisis (September 5, 1972), Iranian hostage crisis (1979), first Gulf War, World Trade Center bombing (1993), September 11, 2001, and the War on Terror (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:53-64)

Prior to 9/11 eighty percent “of Americans opposed racial profiling,” although seventy percent of those polled still favored profiling for Arabs and Middle Easterners (Mahdavi 2006:212, 229).

In 1980, the New Mexico State University Regents barred all Iranians (on student visas and permanent residents) from enrollment, which they justified as a measure to protect Iranian students (Mahdavi 2006:219), and for economic reasons (i.e., Iranians should not reap tax benefits) (220); raising Iranian student’s tuition in Mississippi (220); beatings on campus in Illinois (221); child beatings on school buses (222); and polls declaring American attitudes of Iran and Iranians as enemies (223).

Mobasher’s study involved participant observation from September 1993 to August 1995, and 485 questionnaires completed by Iranian business owners. The Iranian community in Texas is the third largest in the United States. Iranian arrivals in Dallas follows a pattern similar to other areas of the U.S.: the first and largest wave occurred
between 1976 and 1978, and consisted of students; the second flow (between 1980 and 1983) represents internal migration, whereby students came from dispersed other areas around the U.S.; the third wave (between 1983 and 1987) consisted of refugees who lived in a transit country at the point of their departure after the revolution; and the final wave (from 1986 to the present) follows a pattern of family reunification (e.g., “parents, siblings, fiancées [sic], or spouses of naturalized Iranian immigrants”) (300). Mobasher also researched blue- and white-collar Iranian businesses that catered to Iranians, non-Iranians, and “mixed customers” (304). Businesses catering to Iranians and non-Iranians (e.g., mechanics, jewelry stores, beauty shops, etc.) comprise the majority of Iranian enterprises in Dallas. Generally, these business owners had been students who could not obtain employment in their field (305). Iranians who own blue-collar businesses (e.g., gas stations, cab companies, convenience stores) typically lack education, language fluency, or qualifications for other job opportunities. White-collar Iranians, who have greater language and educational capital, establish their own firms (e.g., engineering) because of “blocked mobility in the primary sector of the labor market” (Mobasher 2004:304).

Bi Parva (1994) defines Iranian ethnic associations “as organizations with at least a minimal structure (offices and members), which meet at least once annually, and which are recognizable as Iranian by their names or by virtue of the focus of their aims and activities on Iranian affairs, culture, religion, politics, friendship, and or [sic] customs” (375).

Biparva's research in the Washington, D.C. area entailed face-to-face interviews (with thirty-four representatives from thirty-two ethnic associations), informal conversations (with forty-one members), participation in activities, and review of written materials (376). He defined his research population as “all Iranian organizations, association, clubs, and institutions in the Washington metropolitan area that were active in 1987” (not including professional, business, or student associations) (375). He chose representatives who had some involvement as a founder, board member, and daily decision-making (377). Activities sponsored by the Iranian ethnic associations in the D.C. area included: National and traditional celebrations; cultural activities, political and religious anniversary celebrations; provision of information, advice and assistance about and for Iranians in the U.S., and provision of information, advice, and assistance related to American culture. (382)

Older generation Jewish Iranians are less threatened by American life, and while the “in-betweens” know the best of both worlds, they do not fit neatly into either. The organization wants to inspire belonging for the American-born generation without alienating them (Feher 1998:82).

Chaichian’s (1997) study is based his study on questionnaires (forty out of seventy were returned) and in-depth interviews (twelve total). The majority of Iowa’s Iranians are “‘professional loners’ who perform their tasks in isolation from professional networks and association,” which he associates with “a rural, small town phenomenon” (621). One indication of adaptation patterns is their preference to be called Iranian or Iranian-
American (with the exception of one naturalized American), citing it as a “baggage” issue, an inability to let go, or the stimulation the culture lends (621). He found the populations of Iranians in Johnson County (167 people) and Iowa City (0.35 percent of the total U.S. Iranian population) to have higher rates of intermarriage, low divorce rate, ethnic diversity, fewer self-employed individuals, and highly educated, skilled professionals (615). These numbers are uncertain because of Iranians’ suspicion about giving people information. The reasons for migration to the U.S. included: 1) “social constraints” (23.5%, 2); “political oppression” (17.6%, 3); loss of loved ones/property during the Iran-Iraq War (14.7%), 4) loss of job or confiscation of property (8.8%); and 5) religious constraints (5.9%). The remainder (29.4%) immigrated to obtain a better education (616).

Ghorashi’s methodology was based on listening to women’s narratives in the Netherlands for five years and on ethnological studies of Iranian organizations in Los Angeles.

“The construction of pillars — ‘own worlds’ — along lines of religious denomination and political ideology was long the dominant framework for thinking about differences in the Netherlands. … [P]illars are ‘separated institutional complexes of religiously or ideologically motivated institutions and members, which are marked along the same boundaries in different social sectors’. … [P]illarization … [is] ‘the process in which after 1880 Catholics, orthodox Protestants, and social democrats have gradually institutionalized their mutual differences’. … [I]t has had a channeling effect on cultural differences, with the result that ‘its supporters remained separated while the pillar-elites maintained contact with each other’” (82).

Iranians make up “the sixth largest non-European nationality in the European Community, amounting to 164,200 residents” (596). The 1960s through 1970s comprises the largest labor movement, although the Netherlands has more asylum seekers (596).

In 1994, Dutch citizens became aware of Iranian asylum seekers in their midst; prior to 1994, “the Dutch government considered Iran an unsafe country and rejected Iranian asylum seekers were not repatriated but instead granted a tolerated status” (595). The question of “genuine” and “bogus” applicants came to light as the Dutch government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs examined the human rights question in Iran, determining that some cases could be repatriated (Koser 1997:595). Koser’s population was located in two Asylum Seeker Centers, among thirty-two heads of household (596).

“The affinity hypothesis states that the higher the density of the network of friends and relatives in the origin society, the lower the probability of migration. The information hypothesis focuses on the way that information about potential destinations, provided either by return migrants or by contacts abroad, can promote further migration. The facilitating hypothesis focuses on how networks can facilitate migration, for example by lowering the cost of migration either directly through financial support or indirectly through lowering costs upon arrival in destinations” (Koser 1997:597). Koser outlines the problem with empirically supporting the affinity hypothesis in the case of the danger the respondents faced in Iran; thirty of thirty-two reported that they were to first to leave their homes (597). However, the definition of affinity can be extended to the absence of
relatives; some people were noted to have fled Iran due to a lack of family connections (598).

Koser’s discussion of the “information hypothesis” identifies two key information sources as returning migrants and contacts abroad (598). Previous experience in the migration process was passed on to relatives but normally related to experiences up to five years prior which meant that “information provided by these sources was outdated and of little use to potential migrants interested in quite specific information such as current asylum policies in European countries” (598). The majority (twenty-six of thirty-two respondents) had family or friends living somewhere overseas prior to their departure from Iran, which became critical as a point of contact once they arrived at their destination (598). Information typically consisted of the real possibility of being granted refugee status, the prospects for long-term social and economic integration, racism, and unemployment levels (598). In the cases that migrants did not contact family or friends prior to departure, it usually related to the difficulty situation with which they faced when fleeing Iran, the fact that they were being monitored by the Iranian government, or for the simple fact that relations were not being kept up between migrant and immigrant and they “saw no purpose in consulting them about their decision to move” (Koser does not mention for reason for this unfortunately) (598–599). “On the whole, the availability, quantity or quality of information were not reported as having been determining factors in the decision by the respondents whether to move” (599).

Koser cites the “facilitating hypothesis” as “a more accurate demonstration of how social networks interacted with the decision to migrate in the case of the respondents” (599). Only three of Koser’s respondents reported that they did not utilize the services of smugglers, who were “responsible for providing false passports and making travel arrangements” and garnered between four and six thousand U.S. dollars for help escaping (599). Those individuals who had difficulty gathered the required sum relied on social networks in Iran for contributions, without which they would be unable to migrate. “Indeed, many reported having known people in Iran with reasons equally as pressing as their own to leave who simply had been able unable to afford to do so” (599).

In the European context between 1983 and 1994, popular perception played out that the majority of applications for asylum were in fact “bogus,” and that economic migrants were pretending to be refugees (Koser 1997:592).

The social networks approach is examined through the links of “family and friendship, community practices, membership in associations, and via intermediaries such as labor recruiters, immigration consultants, travel agents, and smugglers” (Koser 1997:594).

The host of the gatherings “spent a considerable amount of effort and money to offer a place for regularly held Iranian feasts [mihmanis or bazms], with their usual ingredients of drinking, eating, poetry-reading, music, and dance” (Sanadjian 1995:12).

In Iran, according to Sanadjian, class status was consolidated through “continuous import, appropriating bourgeois elements—old and new—as a historically evolving and international formation. In exile, Iranians continued to reproduce themselves as members
of a bourgeois class drawing on their exoticism as ‘symbolic capital’” (Sanadjian 1995:16).

“[C]lass proximity rather than national distance accounted for the exiles’ ‘pragmatic refusal’ to resort to a narrative of loss and foreignness in their effort to position themselves in the concert” (Sanadjian 1995:19). “It was a spatially bounded, contingent negotiation based on the negotiators’ selective reproduction of their social class position” (19).

Paranoia does not exist in a vacuum. By constructing the meaning of homelessness in private only, the public domain becomes a space where “the genealogy of their foreignness” continues to be shaped and constrained by discourse around “the social ‘problem’ by blaming the foreigners” (Sanadjian 1995:25). This blame revolves around the misperception that foreigners are overstaying their welcome and intruding; “[t]he official announcement that ‘Germany is not a county [sic] of immigration’ renders the illegality of migrant workers’ overstay in Germany transparent” (25). “Thus, although the Constitution expresses universal language of ‘the right of man to political asylum’ in order not to ‘discern’ but to ‘discriminate’, it avoids overtly discriminatory and racialized language” (28). Those perceived as abusing the asylum process were also deemed intruders, contributing a sense of national loss and its recovery via the extreme right “which despite its variations ‘has been unified behind its nationalism and racism’” (28).

Hosseini-Kaladjahi (1997) avoided questioning Iranians about the degree of political integration, because of sensitivity to questions involving Iranians’ political positions and the difficulty of gathering this data (15).

For example, “the ratio of secondary school and university graduates among Iranians is over two times higher than Swedes … [and the] percentage of Iranian men graduated from university is almost four times higher than Swedish men” (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997:35).

Bauer (2000) categorizes the Iranians in her study as refugees since their experiences are defined vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic and the revolution, which still influence their adaptation, inability to return, fear of persecution, and individual differences (183). Over time, identity morphed from refugee to immigrant. Racism does not distinguish refugees from immigrant; Iranians experience racism regardless of their categorization.

Fischer and Abedi (1990) contend that exiles “live in a world of memory, idle talk, jokes, folkloristic references, and parables,” although some find “inspiration and renewal in the liminal spaces where cultures meet and cross-fertilize” (ibid.:255).

In a footnote, Hegland distinguishes these two in the following manner:

I use ‘Iran anthropology’ to connote all anthropological work based on research in Iran or with Iranians abroad, in other words, the anthropology of Iran and/or Iranians abroad. By ‘Iranian anthropology’ I mean anthropology as it has been developed in Iran, by Iranians, in other words, anthropology of Iran as it is viewed and practiced by Iranian anthropologists living and working inside Iran. (63)

“[T]echnical (for example, methods of ploughing and their organization), recreational (zurkhâne, Greco-Roman wrestling, combat sports from the Far East, etc.) … or social (such as marriage rituals or children’s birthdays)” (Bromberger 2009:202-203).
“Two-thirds of Minnesotans in 1900 had roots in Germany, Norway, or Sweden. Other immigrants in much smaller numbers had made their way to Minnesota in the nineteenth century. Croats, Finns, Serbians, Lithuanians, and others flooded onto the Iron Range, where they could find jobs and often relatively better-paying work.”

“In the early twentieth century, Italians, Russians, and Jews settled in the state. African Americans and Central Americans and Mexicans in increasing numbers moved to Minnesota. In the late twentieth century, Minnesota became home to the largest Hmong population outside of Laos and California, the largest population of Somalis in the United States, and one of the largest Liberian populations outside of Liberia. In 1900, nearly 70 percent of Minnesotans had arrived from Germany, Sweden, or Norway. In 2000, 77 percent of new immigrants had come from Asia, Latin America, and Africa” (Atkins 2007:245).

For example, among Arabs in Israel, hamula is a flexible set of relationships within “a complex web of patrilineal, affinal, and matrilateral ties, neighborhood … and sustained cooperation in political, economic, and ceremonial activities” (Eickelman 2002:145); and in Morocco qaraba (“closeness”), entails the “asserted and recognized ties of kinship … factional alliances, ties of patronage and clientship, and common bonds developed through neighborhood,” claimed as an unbreakable, “‘blood’ tie” (ibid.:146), but operating implicitly (ibid.:150).

Many of these policies are reminiscent of the retaliatory actions taken against Iranians after the hostage-taking in 1979: The Absconder Apprehension Initiative, a memorandum circulated by Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson, which “indicated that 314,000 non-citizens remained in the United States despite final removal orders commanding their departure. Of this group, several thousand were identified as coming ‘from countries in which there has been Al Qaeda terrorist presence or activity’” including Iran (Mahdavi 2006:226); the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System (NSEERS), which required “‘special registration’” of non-citizens and which, under Attorney General John Ashcroft, sent out a House Report reminding policy makers of “the 1981 amendment … noting that ‘the Iranian Crisis in 1980 [demonstrated] that immediate access to records of nonimmigrants may be vital to our nation’s security’” – Iran was one of five countries required to register (227).

This book has two titles: the cover reads, “Food for Health, Food for Wealth: Ethnic and Gender Identities in British Iranian Communities,” while the title page reads, “Food for Health, Food for Wealth: The Performance of Ethnic and Gender Identities by Iranian Settlers in Britain.”