

*Displaced Narratives of Iranian migrants
and Refugees: Constructions of Self and
the Struggle for Representation.*

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“I Mammad Aidani declare that the PhD thesis entitled Displaced Narrative of Iranian migrants and refugees: Construction of Self and the Struggle for Representation is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part , for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my won work”.

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the multiple narratives of Iranian migrants and refugees living in Melbourne, Australia. The narratives are constructed by men and women who left Iran immediately after the 1979 revolution; the Iran – Iraq war; and Iranians who are recent arrivals in Australia. The narratives of the participants are particularly influenced and contextualized by the 1979 revolution, the 1980-1988 Iran – Iraq War and the post 9/11 political framework. It is within these historical contexts, I argue that Iranian experiences of displacement need to be interpreted. These historical periods not only provide the context for the narratives of the participants but it also gives meaning to how they reconstruct their identities and the emotions of their displacement. This thesis also argues that Iranian migrant and refugee narratives are part of a holistic story that is united rather than separated from one another. These narratives are part of a continuum that are influenced by historical events that have caused their displacement.

For Iranians in this thesis displacement and a traumatic past often creates many different forms of rupture that includes spatial, temporal, cultural and emotional experiences that are constantly being re-valuated, re-negotiated and changed. In the narratives of the participants we find people struggling to negotiate their identity; devising strategies to cope with displacement and a traumatic past; and they tell stories on the ways they are stereotyped and caricaturized in western discourse. The participants' recount stories about how the objectification of their cultural background fails to take into account the complexity of their experiences and their suffering. For the participants the simplistic notions about their identity and experience in the popular imagination of western culture they believe ignores how their narratives of home- (Iran) are connected with the host (Australia) context. The narratives of the participants' have

a lugubrious tone which tries to express the effects of the cultural, social, political ruptures they have experienced. The thesis addresses the theoretical issues underlying such experiences and focuses on a narrative methodology to bring to light the problems of identity, stigmatization, cultural trauma, and the significance of representation in the lives of Iranian migrants and refugees.

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Chapter Outline

In the following pages I provide an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

Chapter one provides a theoretical discussion about displacement, narrative and the importance of telling stories. In particular it argues that stories are not just an important aspect of Iranian cultural experience but is a critical aspect of the psychological makeup of the society.

Chapter two links the theoretical discussion in chapter one to an analysis of the methodological framework deployed in the study. It discusses the importance of the phenomenological method in studies on ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants.’

Chapter three delves into the issues identified by the participants on the ‘struggle for representation.’ I explore how refugees and migrants construct and reconstruct their identities and the culturally specific words they use to define their displacement. Furthermore, in this chapter I discuss why Persian poetry, music and literature are important in bringing together narratives of displacement and separation. I ask why Iranian refugees and migrants use poetry, music and literature as a nest for their experiences of displacement?

Chapter four focuses on cultural trauma and inquires deeper into the perspectives that give meaning to the participants’ alienation and trauma. In particular it ties together the notion of stigma and trauma arguing that they are interrelated in the experiences of

Iranian refugees and migrants in particular in the construction of dominant Australian representations of Iranians.

Chapter five looks at the counter narratives of the participants' in this study. It argues that while the broader Australian community has a particular negative representation and view about Iranians, Iranians themselves in this study have put forward counter narratives against these stereotypes that stigmatize them as 'religious fundamentalists' and 'terrorists.' Thus the counter narratives focus on Persian hospitality; Persian history and culture.

Chapter six concludes the thesis by bringing together the issues relating to cultural identity, the cultural trauma of displacement, stigma, representation and counter representation.

Chapter 1

Displacement of Narrative: Iranian Migrants and Refugees

Context of Research

This thesis discusses the multiple narratives of Iranian migrants and refugees living in Melbourne, Australia. The narratives are constructed by men and women who left Iran immediately after the 1979 revolution; the Iran – Iraq war; and Iranians who are recent arrivals in Australia. The narratives of the participants are particularly influenced and contextualized by the 1979 revolution, the 1980-1988 Iran – Iraq War and the post 9/11 political framework that has affected the ways some Western countries have reinterpreted their policies towards migrants and refugees, in particular those from Middle Eastern Muslim backgrounds (Ansari, 1992; Hiro, 1991; Karsh, 2002; Mamdani, 2004).

For Iranians in this thesis displacement and a traumatic past often creates many different forms of rupture that includes spatial, temporal, cultural and emotional experiences that are constantly being re-valuated, re-negotiated and changed. In the narratives of the participants we find people struggling to negotiate their identity; devising strategies to cope with displacement and a traumatic past; and they tell stories on the ways they are stereotyped and caricatured in Western discourse. The participants' recount stories about how the objectification of their cultural background fails to take into account the complexity of their experiences and their suffering. For the participants the simplistic notions about their identity and experience in the popular imagination of Western culture they believe ignores how their narratives of home-

(Iran) are connected with the host (Australian) context. The narratives of the participants' have a lugubrious tone which tries to express the effects of the cultural, social, political ruptures they have experienced. The thesis addresses the theoretical issues underlying such experiences and focuses on a narrative methodology to bring to light the problems of identity, stigmatization, cultural trauma, and the significance of representation in the lives of Iranian migrants and refugees.

There is a research lacuna on Iranian narratives of displacement and the collective reconstructions of their traumatic past especially in Australia¹. The psychological and cultural distress experienced by Iranian migrants and refugees are scarce, underdeveloped or limited in scope and analysis. Indeed, the most frequently cited research on the psychological distress of Iranians (Good & Good, 1986) is over a decade old. This research project addresses an important vacuum in the literature on Iranian narratives of psychological and cultural displacement and distress. It also expands on the general theoretical research on the language of displacement and the cultural meanings of terms like 'refugee', 'migrant', 'hospitality', 'displacement', 'distress', 'pain' and 'trauma'. I am hoping to extend the academic research on refugee and migrant experiences of pain, displacement and distress by focusing on the language of distress and survival from an Iranian cultural perspective and experience. By focusing on migrants and refugees from Iran this thesis will make a contribution to the current interdisciplinary debates on the psychological, anthropological and sociological effects of displacement, distress, fragmentation, cultural trauma, narrative identity and representation experienced by migrant and refugee communities.

¹ There is limited research on Iranians and trauma. A few studies as cited in the body of the thesis reveal some limited evidence from North America.

The aim of this thesis is to extend the previous analyses on the psychological distress experienced by migrants and refugees by deploying a narrative approach. In order to reveal the psychological distress experienced by Iranian migrants and refugees in displacement I will use a narrative method that draws from psychology, sociology, anthropology and literature to bring forward the “storied nature of human conduct” (Sarbin, 1986:152) in a culturally engaged manner.

The interdisciplinary method of narrative focuses on how individuals deal with their everyday experiences through stories. The narrative method is intellectually concerned with the idea that human experience is made up of “meaning” and that stories rather than rational and scientific formulations, are the medium by which it is communicated.

The narrative approach not only enables the participants to use ordinary everyday language and experiences to tell their stories but it also draws out a culturally specific framework to reveal the culturally specific linguistic idioms, physical descriptions, symbolic, and the metaphoric references they use in order to share and communicate their experiences of displacement and identity.

Studies on the language of distress and physical and psychological displacement experienced by migrants and refugees have largely been inadequate because they assign meaning from an outside perspective on experiences that need to be understood within a culturally symbolic and semantic context. Kleinman and Good (1985) argue that one

cannot make simplistic cultural assumptions that reduce the other to a coherent whole and ignore the diversity of experience and beliefs. This thesis seeks to establish some connecting threads by linking the narratives of Iranian migrants and refugees. Indeed, I argue that the migrant and refugee narratives of Iranians is part of a continuum and that unlike other studies on migrants and refugees I do not stress on a clear distinction or boundary between them (Dag, 1989; De Varies, 1996; 2002; Lefly, 2002). My argument is based on the unique migrant and refugee context of Iranians in western countries. My argument is that the historical context of their displacement is difficult to reduce into distinct entities. This issue is discussed in detail in chapter 3. The thesis draws largely from Ricoeur's analysis of narrative identity to examine the ways in which displacement impacts on a person's 'exchange of memories' and in 'translation' between cultures (Ricoeur, 1996).

Narrative Identity

Story telling for Iranians, as Barthes would say, "is simply there, like life itself"; it is, in Lyotard's (1977:19) words, "the quintessential form of customary knowledge," depending on its own social performability for its power and authorization. "The narratives of the world are numberless," according to Ronald Barthes. "Narrative" he explained:

is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive a man's stories. Able to be carried by articulate language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting...stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation.

Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives...Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural; it is simply there, like life itself (Barthes 1977:79).

This chapter sets the framework for the ensuing chapters and to underscore the claim that story telling is an important component of identity. Recent academic works in psychology, the humanities and social sciences call for more attention to narrative as a way to provide insights into how life worlds are interpreted and constituted in times of tragedy, change and crisis (Becker 1997; Mattingly 1998; Zigura et, 2000). In other words, this thesis has adopted the narrative genre because it allows the participants to adopt different ways to tell a story. They have used stories, myths, legends and narrative elements like songs and poetry as analytical devices to set the tone and character of the plot of their stories. Indeed a central question is: what is being claimed by the kinds of stories told by Iranians in this thesis? The stories recounted in this thesis provide us with insights into how the participants address stories that are related to their lives and the ways in which they order and reinterpret knowledge and human experience.

Iranians use narrative to constitute and explain their identity in displacement but also to paradoxically maintain and create new meanings of their identity. Anthony Giddens captures the importance of producing narrative:

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to

be found in behaviour, nor-important though this is-in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going (1991:54)

According to Paul Ricoeur, a phenomenological hermeneutic philosopher, in narrative identity, the person is not simply the one who tells the story, or simply the one about whom the story is told, but he or she "appears both as a reader and the writer of its own life" (1987, 246). Thus, the person is both, the *interpreter* and the *interpreted*, as well as the *recipient* of the interpretations. Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity points to the idea of a self as a storied self. Accordingly, a self is an entity made up of stories that are tied to the stories that a person tells or that are told about them. Thus in this thesis Iranians begin by telling a story about stories and the ways they are defined and situated in stories. They recount their stories and the ways in which stories about themselves are conceived and told. Furthermore, the sense of narrative identity developed by the participants give further meaning to Ricoeur's view that identity is "mingled with that of others in such a way as to engender second order stories which are themselves intersections between numerous stories...We are literally 'entangled in stories' " (Ricoeur, 1996:6).

Central to this argument is the notion of emplotment, which Ricoeur describes as the continual process of reconfiguration and the medium through which narratives attain and claim intelligibility. Stories are not merely a chance configuration of real experiences thrown together subjectively and in an arbitrary fashion, but rather, it is the narrative of configuration itself that provides meaning and status to experiences and events.

Ricoeur describes the intersection between story, event and emplotment:

an event must be more than just a singular occurrence. It gets its definition from its contribution to the development of the plot. A story, too, must be more than just an enumeration of events in serial order; it must organise them into an intelligible whole, of a sort such that we can always ask what is the 'thought' of this story. In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession(1983: 65)

Emplotment involves and needs resources, what Ricoeur calls 'fictive resources' those aspects of history and fiction which a person draws upon to narrate a story. Ricoeur ties emplotment, fictive resources and 'real life' together to explain how identity is constructed:

As for the notion of the narrative unity of a life, it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organise life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction or from history (1992: 162).

Emplotment, according to Ricoeur is not limited to events, but is also the process through which an identity is constructed. He argues that there is . . . not just an emplotment of actions; there is also an emplotment of characters. And an emplotted character is someone seeking his or her or its identity (ibid).

As demonstrated in the chapters in this thesis the research participants do not have a lack of narrative coherence, and they use fictive textual resources, such as songs, literature, legends, and poetry, for emplotting their identity. There is coherence in the identities constructed by the participants because it is derived from being part of an important story or a collection of stories that are not constructed out of adding events

to each other, but in constructing 'meaningful totalities out of scattered events' (Ricoeur, 1981:278).

In Ricoeur's words emplotment does two things. Firstly on the chronological dimension it "constitutes the episodic dimension of narrative. It characterises the story insofar as it is made up of events". Secondly on the configural dimension it "transforms the events into a story. The configural act consists of 'grasping together' the detailed actions or what I have called the story's incidents. It draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole . . . it extracts a configuration from a succession" (1988: 66).

Emplotment involves the imaginative aspect that allows people to reconstruct their stories by bringing together elements that might not have had an obvious connection. The plot is that which situates the story within the larger framework. For the participants in this study, the plot of their story consists of the 1979 revolution; the Iran – Iraq war (1980-89) and the diaspora condition of fragmentation and displacement in the West.

For Ricoeur (1984: 184) narrative identity mediates between two extremes: harmony and dissonance, lived and told, innovation and sedimentation, fact and fiction, "what is" and "what ought to be", voluntary and involuntary, exalted cogito and "shattered cogito". For him a person's identity is intrinsically linked to their narrative. A person's identity stems primarily from their narrative location. He explains that the perennial question 'Who am I?' cannot be answered through metaphysical truth structures but, rather, from the contingencies of the narratives in which the person is situated. There is an organic interaction between events and narrative as one gives meaning to the other in a narrative framework. Ricoeur stresses that narrative is a way to join up the 'time of

the soul' with the 'time of the world'. Thus stories and memories express the time of being-in-the world and of being-with the time of events and experiences in the everyday. Thus for instance when participants recount songs they sang in Iran on special occasions; holidays they experienced in the countryside, and the traumatic experience of leaving behind family and friends- it is in Ricoeur's words the extension of the temporal flow in each life that is tenderly memorialized.

Narrative and History

Ricoeur defines narrative as a 'language game' based in 'historicity' which involves both the doing and the being of the historical. The narratives of the participants in this study reveal that they are located in history and 'we belong to history before telling or writing history' (Ricoeur, 1984:294). Ricoeur explains that 'the form of life to which the narrative discourse belongs is the historical condition itself' (Ricoeur, 1984:288). By establishing the narrative genre as historical, Ricoeur is subverting the disjuncture between subject and object. Ricoeur argues that the narrative genre is pertinent to the historical condition of human beings. Accordingly:

A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal, hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both. This response to the new situation leads the story toward its conclusion. (Ricoeur (1984: 150, paraphrasing Gallie's notion of a story).

Ricoeur explains that narrative involves both 'real' and 'imaginary' events and experiences and that there are two distinct types of narrative: the true (real) and the fictional (imaginary). He revokes on three grounds the asymmetry between true and fictional narratives. Firstly, all narratives are referential; secondly, there is fiction even in positivistic history; and thirdly, the positivistic and narrative fictions are based on a mimesis. Mimesis is defined as a creative imitation in regard to the meanings applied to events. Thus interpretation provides a 'kind of metaphor of reality' (Ricoeur, 1984:291) like a piece of art, 'an iconic augmentation of the human world or action (Ricoeur, 1984:291). For Ricoeur, a person is a creative being that puts together personal reflections of events from the many contingencies existing in their surroundings. The argument stemming from this analysis is that because of the creative employment of mimesis, the paradigm on which narrative relies on is fiction. Fictional images offer 'a model for perceiving things differently, the paradigm of a new vision' (Ricoeur, 1984:291). Hence fiction does not only reproduce but also creates images, providing opportunities for new perceptions. This role is quite significant as 'symbolic systems make and remake reality and all symbolic systems have a cognitive value, they make reality appear in such and such a way.'

Fiction provides symbolic systems within which to 'reorganise the world in terms of works and works in terms of the world' (Ricoeur, 1984:293). Thus although, 'history is both a literary artifact (and in this sense a fiction) and a representation of reality' (Ricoeur, 1984: 291), the two are not necessarily disconnected from one another. History in its endeavour to reveal the past 'explores the field of imaginative variations which surround the present and the real' (Ricoeur, 1984:295). While history relies on fictional elements it also argues that it represents reality. This analysis insinuates that

the historical elements of human experience mean that narrative can only be viewed as an intersection between truth and fiction.

Thus in both fiction and history there is a metaphor of reality which describes events and applies meaning to it:

If our historical condition requires nothing less than the conjunction of two narrative genres, it is because of the very nature of our experience of being historical (Ricoeur, 1984:294).

Ricoeur believes that events gain their meaning not only through their singular invocation but from their position in a significantly larger narrative form. A self is constructed at the intersection of the biographical and the historical aspects of being-in-the world and being-with as lived in the world. For the participants in this study a self is constructed at the intersection of these two narratives, which bring together the personal into the collective. The personal narratives of the participants are weaved within historical dimensions to create and sustain a collective experience.

Distress and Pain at the Intersection of Displacement

There is a large body of academic studies on the sociological, anthropological, psychological and historical dimensions of migrant and refugee experiences and how minority communities reconstruct their past in their new countries of settlement (Bottomley, 1992; Langer, 1990; Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1982; Littlewood, 1996; Kirmayer, 1996; 1997; Zigura, et al, 2000; Ganesan, 2000; Fara & Patters, 1998; Wills, 2002; Hage, 2003).

In particular the psychological studies concentrate on the psychological distress that migrants and refugees experience (Cinefuegos & Monelli, 1983; Mc Donald, Steel, 1997) when settling into a new country. However these studies rarely discuss the language and narrative of distress, pain and survival that migrants and refugees experience. Indeed, the language of distress, pain, and survival of migrants and refugees are culturally informed psychological concepts. It frames psychological experiences within a cultural and linguistic context hence drawing out the cultural ideas and theories about distress and survival as they experience, express and observe it in their society (Kleinman, 1986; Lefly, 2002; Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; Kilimids et al, 1999; Munck, 2000; Hage, 2003). Thus the participants in this study draw on the Persian language and cultural context of distress and pain to explain the meanings of their displacement.

Indeed the literature argues that the psychological distress experienced by migrants and refugees are rarely the same (Littlewood and Lipsedge, 1989; Littlewood, 1996; MacMullin and Loughry, 2000). The psychological distress experienced by refugees is marked by what is commonly referred in the literature as the 'trauma story'. (Silove, Steel & Mohan, 1998; Weine, Vojvoda, & Lazvove, 1998, Aidani, 1997; Sullivan, 2000; White & Epton, 1999) The trauma story involves the humiliation, anger, hatred, hopelessness and despair that refugees experience as a result of their victimization in the event of a war, religious, political or ethnic persecution. It is argued that the trauma experience is imprinted in the memory of the body of the refugee and the psychological distress that they experience needs to be understood in its cultural and linguistic context.

The distresses experienced by migrants on the other hand are very different to those experienced by refugees. It is argued that migrants generally experience alienation and marginalisation as a result of their lack of familiarity with the dominant culture and language. In particular if they have not reached their goals in terms of economic wealth or educational achievement it impacts negatively on their psychological well-being and causes distress. It is also argued that immigration changes traditional family dynamics and gender roles and hence this causes distress to both immigrant men and women (Silove, Steel, & Mohan, 1998; Naficy, 1993).

In my study I do not situate only Iranian refugees as carrying the ‘trauma story’ because I argue that Iranian displacement is a ‘trauma story’ whether they are migrants or refugees. Thus the ‘trauma story’ cannot be a schemata of deduction to discern meaning only to those who are categorized as refugees. As I discuss in chapter 3 the migrant and refugee narratives of the participants are part of continuum of the ‘trauma story’ and that categories of ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ purely serve bureaucratic and sometimes academic purposes rather than give meaning to the stories of displacement and suffering experienced.

The pain experienced by the participants in this thesis cannot be easily explained by adding ‘refugee’ or ‘migrant.’ Because the pain of displacement is ‘so sore’ as one participant stated a bureaucratic term cannot give full meaning to the experience. Thus it is difficult to describe the pain of displacement as I demonstrate it can only be expressed in figurative terms and often cannot be explained or remembered particularly well. The pain described by the participants can only be understood in the context of the cultural and historical experience of the 1979 revolution; the Iran-Iraq War; and post September 11,2001..

Pain as Private

Hanna Arendt in the *Human Condition* argues that pain cannot be ‘transform[ed] into a shape fit for public appearance’; it is ‘truly a borderline experience between life as ‘being among men’ (*inter hominess esse*) and death, so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all’ (1958:50-51). Arendt argues that pain ‘at the same time is the most private and least communicable of all [experiences],’ fixing the sufferer away from self as well as world and it ‘actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else’ (ibid). Arendt claims the incommunicability of pain and her argument is similar to what she says about the paradox of memory and communication in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She argues that it is impossible to comprehend the camps without having been there, but paradoxically also equally impossible for a survivor of the camps to convey detail of the experience. She observes that

The more authentic [the reports] are, the less they attempt to communicate things that evade unreality and lack of credibility that are assigned to survivors’ accounts of death camps. Human understanding and human experience- sufferings, that is that transform men into ‘uncomplaining animals.’ None of these reports inspires those passions of outrage and sympathy through which men have always been mobilized for justice. On the contrary, anyone speaking or writing about concentration camps is still regarded as suspect; and if the speaker has resolutely returned to the world of the living, he himself is often assailed by doubts with regard to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality (1951:439).

Pain not only disables voice but narrative. The inability to communicate the experience of trauma means that survivors remain in some ways, inside the camp. Arendt situates pain not in the 'phantom world' of the camps but more so in the domestic sphere because the social sphere 'hides away' pain. Arendt's essential point is that 'while we have become excellent in the laboring we perform in the public, our capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private' (198:49). She argues that human beings have been transformed as components in a bureaucratic machine and this allows no recognition of pain in its members and thus is able to inflict pain on others.

The framing of stories of pain by the participants in this study is also eclipsed by silence. It is through poetry, songs, and stories that the participants can allow pain to stand and speak thus putting themselves aside and allowing the creative and figurative language to set up the context that constitutes pain. Participants usually expressed their pain through their metaphorical and poetic references. This is a cultural practice amongst most Iranians and is accepted as part of the grieving process that they collectively embrace when experiencing tragic events. By adopting this attitude participants believe that they can cope and deal better with the impact of their settlement.

Many studies argue that those refugees and migrants experience deep psychological pain and paralysis after their settlement in the host country. This is often described as being due to the loss and separation that migration and refugee experiences give rise to. The loss that migrants and refugees experience can include the displacing of one's social, educational, economic status, and separation from language, culture, family, land

and other familiar systems (Fadiman, 1998; David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, 2003; Dummentt, 2003).

Indeed, these experiences often compound the psychological feelings of loss and pain resulting from physical, social, linguistic and cultural displacement. Both pain and paralysis are linked to the psychologically displacing experiences lived by migrants and refugees as well as the social and cultural gaps that many migrants and refugees find themselves in their new place of settlement (Scarry, 1985; Levi, 1987; Said, 1984; Dag, 1989; Kristeva, 1991; Gow, 2002; Brett, 2003; Aron & Corne, 1994; White & Epton, 1990; Hage 2003).

Problems experienced by migrants and refugees as a result of settling in a new and unfamiliar cultural and linguistic environment include depression, anxiety and loneliness, and lack of understanding of the dominant cultural, linguistic and social symbols of their new society (Socialstyrelsen, 2001; Tseng, 1999; Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1989; Moffaert & Vereecken, 1989).

According to a study by Beryl Langer (1990) refugee women from El Salvador living in Melbourne experience deep psychological distress and social displacement. Using data from El Salvadorian refugees in Melbourne, Langer argues that psychological interventions alone cannot address the pain, grief and paralysis which many refugees experience and that issues such as social isolation, unemployment, and an inability to communicate in the English Language cannot be defined in a purely medical or psychological manner. Indeed, Langer poignantly indicates that the prescription of

tranquillizers and even “professional health by appointment” (1990: 83) cannot address the structurally caused problems that El Salvadorian women refugees’ experience.

According to Langer problems such as the “political violence that killed their relatives, the racial hostility they encounter in public housing estates, or the complex immigration rules that keep them permanently separated from half of their family” (1990:83) need to be addressed within a holistic context that takes into account the psychological as well as the social aspects of the problems they have experienced.

Littlewood and Lipsedge (1989) studied the different psychological affects of migration. Although there are many different theories about the delay of psychological symptoms Littlewood and Lipsedge argue that the psychological stress that migrants display do not manifest itself until after some years of settlement. In Australia research on migrant health indicates that the psychological as well the mental health of migrants deteriorates after ten years (Alcorso & Schofield, 1991) of migration. It is argued that the psychological illness that migrants’ experience is largely connected to other life experiences and environmentally induced stress, such as poor housing, unemployment and isolation.

Psychology of distress

While immigrants and refugees are vulnerable to particular emotional and mental distress they also have specific types of psychological responses to the pain of being culturally and linguistically displaced, isolated and separated from family (Mattingly, 1998; Mattingly & Garro, 2000; Kilmidis et al 1999). If they come from cultural

backgrounds, like Iranians, that are very communal based (around family and kin) and then find themselves in an ego oriented Western culture (Fischer, 1986) they experience vulnerability and insecurity (Lefley, 2002).

A study undertaken in California amongst both Iranian refugees and migrants found that depression, sorrow, grief and anguish at being 'displaced' from one's homeland were expressed in a culturally and linguistically specific manner to deal with the distress experienced. The unique survival mechanism developed was also within a familiar cultural and religious framework. Indeed it drew on Shi'a Islamic frames of mourning. This mourning ritual has its base in one of the central stories, *Kerbela*, which constitutes the body of Shi'a Islamic identity. The *Kerbela* story is based largely on the mourning about the martyrdom of a key Shia'a Islamic imam. According to the researchers, drawing on religious forms of mourning is a medium for expressing sorrow and grief when people feel that they have no discourse and feel alienated by the psychological loss that they have experienced (Fisher, 1984). The participants' in my study did not draw on religious narrative to give meaning to their experiences of displacement. Indeed, many situated their identity within a secular framework but were cognizant of the political dehumanization of Islam in the West as a result of post 9/11 and other regional conflicts in the Middle East.

Lefley (2002) believes that practitioners in the West are confronted with many ethical dilemmas when they are working with culturally diverse communities whose psychological paradigms may not necessarily conform to the ones held by a western-trained clinician. Furthermore, Lefley argues that there has recently been more emphasis on the importance of defining psychological concepts such as, "psychotic,

mood and anxiety, somatiform and dissociative, childhood onset, and personality disorders” (2002:10) from a cultural context and experience. Hence this thesis will add to this scholarship by focusing on the narratives of Iranians migrants and refugees experiencing psychological distress, fragmentation, pain, displacement to reveal the cultural meanings of such concepts.

Language, Culture and Meaning of Mental Health

Medical anthropologists and psychologists (Kleinman, 1986; Fischer, 1986; Good & Good, 1986) working on cross cultural theories of mental illness have extensively illustrated the different meanings and forms of expression given to distress, depression, anxiety, and other forms of disorder. For Shi’ite Muslims in Iran, the consequences of living justly in a ‘mercilessness’ and ‘brutal’ world is the ability to experience sadness, grief and suffering. Mental grief, suffering and sadness are considered to be conditions of strength and demonstrates the vigour of a person (Good & Good, 1986; Kleinman, 1986).

Thus, the narrative accounts of Iranian migrants and refugees about displacement, settlement experiences, psychological suffering, pain, cultural isolation and stigmatization underscore the view that these experiences are made up of complex linguistic, symbolic and cultural constructions. And that the participants in this study use a myriad of linguistic expressions, cultural symbolisms and cultural poetics to give life to their emotional experiences of displacement. These expressions are deeply rooted in the Iranian and Persian culture and language and they also reveal the complexity as well as the cultural frame from which they speak about their predicament in displacement. In the following chapter I discuss the theoretical and

practical methodology I applied to gauge the views and perspectives of the participants on their narratives of displacement and identity. Chapter two ties together the issues I discussed in chapter one by drawing out the significance of the phenomenological method which provide the participants a frame to speak from but also an analytical theory to apply to their narratives.

Chapter 2

Phenomenological Methodology: Inquiry into Refugee and migrant Narratives

Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological approach adopted in my study on refugee and migrant narratives of displacement and well-being. I begin by setting out the theoretical terrain and methodological approach of phenomenological psychology paying particular attention to the key concept of the “lived body” without which I argue refugee and migrant narratives cannot adequately be understood. I then consider the field context of my study and the methodological approach deployed to examine the ‘everyday lived experience’ of being a refugee and migrant from Iran living in Melbourne, Australia.

Defining Phenomenology

The term phenomenology has its roots in the Greek word *phainomenon*, whose core words are *phainein* translated as appear; and *logia* which means science or study. Phenomenology is viewed as the study of appearance (Moran, 2000; Spinelli, 2005). The phenomenological research approach stresses the issue of perspective, and emphasises the organic and relative disposition of truth. On the other hand, in natural science positivist thinking it is believed that truth is objective, fixed and absolute. While phenomenologists have neither defined nor outlined a research method there are however a plethora of significant material describing the ways phenomenological research is conducted. These are outlined in the works of Husserl (1859-1938),

Heidegger (1889-1970); Merleau Ponty (1908- 1961); Paul Ricoeur (1913- 2005); Hans- George Gadamer (1900-2002); and others. Their works have been significant to the debates surrounding methodology in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology and indeed they have enhanced our understanding of human experience. In my research on Iranian refugees and migrants in Melbourne I employ a phenomenological approach to shed light on their lived experiences of what it means to be a refugee and migrant and to understand how they give meaning to their experiences.

Phenomenological approaches in Psychology

The most common research method employed in psychology is primarily quantitative research examined through a natural science positivist lens. Against this background, there are calls for psychology research to more frequently utilize qualitative methodologies. Thus in the debates concerning methodology in the discipline of psychology, one of the most significant academic contributions to this discussion is the emergence of what is called the phenomenological research method. The paradigmatic positions of natural science, positivism and phenomenology are often discussed in the literature in terms of an antithesis between two schools of philosophical theory (Gummesson, 2000:19). In particular, Husserl (1970) in his work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* critiqued the positivist sciences, principally psychology, for drawing on and applying the methods of the natural sciences without recognising that their objective was different.

Thus, phenomenological psychology research approach reveals the methodological tensions inherent within psychology research in particular those that privilege a ‘methodology modeled on the natural sciences’ (Kaye, 1995:36). The natural science methodology model investigates psychological variables according to firstly, observable, quantifiable constituents; secondly, conducting controlled experiments; and thirdly, searching for verification by way of replication. This approach is critiqued because it situates psychology research as being made up of a body of systems and rules as if it were a ‘lawful process’ whose observable components can be separated, ‘in which cause and effect can be empirically discovered and in which the critical variables lawfully related to change might be systematically established’ (Kaye, 1995:36).

One of the central criticisms of this approach is that it isolates the research components under investigation from its context. Indeed, John Kaye critiques this methodological paradigm within psychology and neatly captures the ramifications of this approach upon the discipline:

Research within this frame necessitates either the reduction of the phenomenon being studied to quantifiable terms, or the selection for study of only those aspects of the phenomenon, which can be converted into measurable terms. This can only result in a partial picture one which also represents its holistic, contextual nature (1995:46).

The axiom of phenomenon being translatable into a quantifiable system is critiqued by phenomenological research, which is steeped in the human science framework, because it argues that individuals are complex beings that cannot be expected to

respond to conditions in fixed or predictable ways. Rather it argues that psychology researchers need to 'get inside the forms of life and the socially normative regularities in which the person's activity has taken shape. This requires an emphatic and imaginative identification with the subject' (Gillet. 1995:112).

The phenomenological approach draws attention to the detail of psychology being about the examination and interpretation of meaning. Thus its tools of enquiry involves a different set of concepts to those employed in the natural science methodology in particular because it gives credence to concepts such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and confirmability. These terms are contrasted with the natural science positivist notions of validity and reliability and are criticised by phenomenological (Benner. 1994) and other human science researchers (Harré: 1991 and Gillet: 1995) because their 'verifiability' depends deeply upon 'whether another researcher can assume the perspective of the present investigator, review the original protocol data, and see that the proposed insights meaningfully illuminate the situations under study' (Churchill and Wertz, 2001:259). Taking this discussion further, Rom Harré argues that despite the predominance of the natural science approach and its insistence of 'individual subjectivity' within psychological research it however needs to recognise that 'many psychological phenomena which have traditionally been ascribed to individual people are actually joint products of essentially conversational interactions,' (1991:16) thus experience is relational and contextual.

Consequently, phenomenological research method in psychology is concerned with deciphering and understanding the human condition as it reveals itself in lived and

solid experience. It not only takes account of the observable behavioral effects of experience but also moreover incorporates the inter-relationally construed ways of being such as instances of pleasure, nervousness, uncertainty, and indifference. It includes every possible experience open to human contemplation. Unlike the natural science positivist methodology phenomenological research tries to institute a more acceptable set of measures for the enquiry of phenomena as it is lived out and experienced in the real world. This point is pertinently illuminated by the work of Valle and King (1978) who point out that:

Phenomenology seeks to understand the events of human experience in a way which is free of the presuppositions of our cultural heritage, especially philosophical dualism and technologism, as much as is possible. When applied more specifically to human psychological phenomena, phenomenology has become that psychological discipline which seeks to explicate the essence, structure, or form of human experience and human behaviour as revealed through, essentially descriptive techniques including disciplined reflection (Vale and King, 1978:7).

The keystone of phenomenological research method in psychology is to describe and shed light on the make-up and construction of lived experience because experience it is argued is not an intrapsychic practice 'inside our minds' but is inter-relational and at all times already in the world. Accordingly, phenomenological research opens up for questioning the way of being of any structure of experience and its meaning. For example, in the context of my research on refugees and migrants I will use a phenomenological methodology to collect and analyse narrative materials on how they perceive, interpret and give meaning to their experience of displacement,

loneliness, cultural and linguistic alienation in order to gain an understanding of the lived experience of being a refugee and migrant in Australian society.

Phenomenological research method posits that knowledge and understanding are set in the everyday world and that it cannot be quantified or even reduced to numbers and statistical tabulations. They argue that concepts such as truth and understanding of 'being-in-the-world' can only come to the surface from people's lived experiences. Unlike the assumptions fixed in the natural science positivist approach, phenomenology does not claim to speak with an authoritative tone about the 'true' or indeed 'objective' nature of reality and human experience. Rather phenomenology argues that one can never know the real world, but we can only understand the interpreted world that is the world that materializes and becomes apparent through our marks upon it. Thus all accounts of the world can only be viewed as assertions and approximations and individuals can hardly speak about the 'truth' with any form of certainty because our descriptions reveal limitations and our assumptions hinder our capacity to explain, portray and comprehend things as they really present themselves in the world. In contrast to the positivist approach of looking for causality and fundamental laws phenomenology is interested in focusing on what is happening.

Methodological Debates in Phenomenology

There are many different accounts as to how phenomenologists' apply their methodology into their inquiry. I will discuss some of the key ideas on this issue from some of the influential thinkers on phenomenology, such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, because their ideas and approach are significant for my

research and the way I have conceptualised an understanding of the life experiences of Iranian refugees and migrants in Melbourne, Australia.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is recognised as the father of phenomenological philosophy which is often described as a ‘reasoned inquiry into the world of appearances, that is, anything of which one is conscious’ (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990:3). He argued that the aim of phenomenology is to study experience as it transpires in consciousness, in an attempt to examine the phenomenon immediately as it is experienced, that is before the phenomena has been rationalised and before an account is provided on where it is derived from and why it was instigated.

In order to study the experience of phenomena as it emerges and comes out in consciousness phenomenologists focus on studying the life-world of the individual that is their everyday lived experience in the world. Following the preparatory phase of phenomenological movement in Germany which was instigated by philosophers and scientists Franz Brentano (1839- 1917) and his students Carl Stumpf (1848-1936) Husserl argued that in order for a researcher to grasp the essence or real meaning of experience, that is experience in its absolute nakedness without its superfluous aspects one had to employ a method of ‘phenomenological reduction’ which involves shelving or leaving out ones beliefs, values, knowledge and assumptions concerning the phenomena under study.

To use Husserl’s own words one’s experience in the research needs to be ‘bracketed’ in order to describe the phenomena under study without bias and prejudice. For example, in my research I want to understand the significance of Persian poetry,

music and both classical and modern literatures in the narratives of Iranian refugees and migrants, Husserl's approach would take for granted that I would bracket everything I know about being an Iranian with knowledge and understanding of Persian poetry, music and literature. According to Husserl, bracketing would facilitate me as a researcher to identify the 'essence' of Persian poetry, music and literature free of my prior experiences of being a displaced Iranian with knowledge and connection with Persian poetry, music and literature. Bracketing takes for granted that individuals can somehow demarcate their personal knowledge from their lived experiences.

It is on this particular phenomenological perspective that Martin Heidegger, who was Husserl's student, punctuates Husserl's ideas concerning bracketing. He argues that individuals create meaning through shared experiences, their backgrounds and the world in which they live. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger acknowledges that one's life experiences, such as class, gender, culture and even history exclude the researcher from making an impartial and even detached analysis. Although this excludes an objective perspective it however allows for a sharing of experience that has familiar meanings and traditions. Heidegger did not subscribe to the view that it was possible to bracket our beliefs and assumptions about the world in which we live but considered that through authentic reflection we could become conscious and sensitive to our countless assumptions about the phenomena under study.

For example in my research I weave myself in and out of the narratives told by Iranian refugees and migrants because I share a common experience with some of them in particular with those that left after the 1979 revolution that toppled the repressive regime of the Shah and instituted a theocratic system. With the participants

that were embodied in the 1979 revolution I share a common experience of disappointment, anguish and grief for it has left us as one participant described it 'homeless' because the events of 1979 not only overthrew the Shah and its system out of Iran but also abandoned thousands of young people who had participated in the revolution into displacement. Hence it is this complex common lived experience that creates shared meaning between me and the participants in this study. This intersubjective experience reveals that I cannot bracket myself from the phenomena under study but rather I am part of the framework of the research as an engaged and subjective actor not as a detached observer.

This empirical example from my research reveals how the phenomenological approach can open up the meaning of and the essence of the 1979 experience lived through by Iranian refugees and migrants living in Melbourne. Thus a dialogical association is created between the researcher and the issues and events under study. It does not substitute the researcher from the issues under study.

Thus Heidegger's approach to phenomenology can be outlined as a means to interpret experiences that have common meanings and practices that are rooted in particular milieus. He discarded the notion of the dichotomy of subject and object contained in Husserl's philosophy that is the researcher as subject exonerates and releases his/her mind of preconceptions so as to examine the objects of consciousness. He underscored this view by arguing that human beings live their lives by experiencing it, not by knowing it (Thompson, 1990) and that human existence is specific to each individual, although an analysis of human existence can still be provided. For Heidegger (1962) existence, *Dasein*, being-in-the-world takes place in a world that is

already given and which we take as already established and fixed. Accordingly many of the aspects that form our being-in-the-world are hidden and need interpretation for existence to be fully known.

Heidegger's interest was to uncover these hidden phenomena of existence and its meanings. Instead of phenomenal reduction and bracketing he stressed the importance of our preconceptions. He argued that we experience and understand the world through projection, and that 'an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something present to us' (1962:66). Hence our interpretation is made up of structures of pre-understanding, that is, a 'framework of already interpreted relations' (Odman, 1988:66), which anticipates the future and includes the individual's past and present context. Understanding and experience are tied together.

Therefore, this perspective is known as hermeneutic phenomenology and is very different to that of Husserl's phenomenology, which can be described as descriptive phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology examines experience with the aim of revealing consciousness. Its central premise is that phenomena has a core essence that can be intuited by way of a process of bracketing which then allows the phenomena to be examined objectively and the findings are provided through detailed descriptions.

Hermeneutic phenomenology enquires beyond descriptions in order to find meanings that are not immediately obvious to us Merleau-Ponty, (1966) argues that preconceptions are an important part of the process of understanding individual experiences and that we cannot bracket our assumptions. Thus hermeneutic

phenomenology takes into account some elements of descriptive phenomenology through modification and includes them with the hermeneutic ways of understanding.

Building on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty points out that an individual is a being who perceives the world *from different standpoints depending on the situation in time and space*, who perceives specific perspectives that differ accordingly to the perceptual field one finds themselves in– which is a *horizon*², that is, the place of our lived experience. We can perceive objects, things and beings, from different spaces, at different moments. These ideas are key theoretical notions for my research, that is, perspective, field and horizon, which can be elucidated by the example of perceiving a house that Merleau-Ponty brings to our attention in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*:

We perceive a neighbouring house we pass by it. When we come closer, firstly we see one side, then, as we walk by, we see the front of the house and next, the other side. If we went around the house, we would see its back and, if we could get in, we would see the inside from several angles according to where we were. As we have a different view from each angle and as we know that it is a house, we conclude that the house exists by itself, independently from any perspective. At the same time any view we might have from any angle whatsoever would allow us to know that it is a house. Seeing the house is therefore seeing it from somewhere, at a certain moment, i.e. seeing it in a multiperspective way, at a certain place, at a certain moment referred to as a horizon. Thus, seeing a house implies being able to see it from several perspectives, which are various possibilities (1945:81-83).

² Merleau-Ponty borrows this concept from Husserl.

These theoretical notions of space, time and structure are centred on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological methodology. He indicates that when we solicit descriptions from participants of a certain phenomenon being examined, we accept and appreciate that each will give their description relative to their situation and from where they perceive the phenomenon and that different people's perceptions, at discrete moments in time and places, are provided to us as a number of views from dissimilar perspectives of that phenomenon, which meet each other in inter-subjectivity and present to us shared common meanings that make it possible for us to understand that phenomenon's structure. The emphasis of this methodology is to take account of experience, as a *Gestalt* that is, in its wholeness and indeed in what I would say its paradoxes.

Furthermore, the phenomenological perspective of the data, the phenomenon's construction, is viewed and interpreted from the point of view of the researcher, which adds another dimension, another field, another horizon to our knowledge of the matter under study. The description and analysis of the data provides us with a field of generalities that can explain the general structure of the phenomenon. The phenomenon, hence, rests on the perceiving perspectives of individuals which bring about different perceptions from different situations in time and space.

Indeed it is pertinent at this point to bring the ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) who emphasised the importance of language as forming both our experiences and interpretations. He argued that attention needs to be placed on the importance of language in particular on words used in the writing of text, their origins, and permutations so that its underlying meanings can help illuminate understanding. In

addition to emphasising the importance of language he also stressed that the hermeneutic experience of understanding which is characterised by three metaphors: the fusion of horizons, the act of dialogue and the hermeneutic circle (1997). I will discuss these three metaphors and explain how they illuminate my methodological approach to the study on Iranian refugees and migrants.

The Fusion of Horizons

Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' concerns itself with issues relating to the process of understanding and is made up of a 'range of visions that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer, 1997:302). Our fusion of horizons is a frame of reference based on our lived experiences which positions us in the world. An individual's particular horizon is not predetermined and unchanging but rather their vision opens up as they develop their understanding of being-in-the-world. Methodologically, the concept 'fusion of horizons' refers to the meeting point between the researcher and the study under investigation, that is the two standpoints move towards each other, hence 'we genuinely let the standpoint of another speak to us, and in such a way that we are willing to be influenced by the perspective of another' (Thompson, 1990:246).

Accordingly, Gadamer highlights the view that all research is value-laden, because the researcher inevitably always brings forth their preconceptions and biases to the research matter and hence influences the findings and its interpretation. Gadamer states that our preconceptions are the medium through which we orient ourselves to

the subject matter under investigation and that we should be open to the meaning of the other person:

The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore meanings (1997:269).

From the point of view of my research, I have delved into the participants' and my own linguistic, cultural, social, aesthetic, political, and historical orientation in order to fuse these two horizons together which are in the interim separated and differentiated from one another. As a researcher I had to consequently situate and analyse my personal orientation to this research topic as well as delve into the question of why I chose this issue as well as what led me to this research. I was born in the south of Iran and am the oldest of a family of eight children. My childhood and family life was one that was characterised by poverty, which not only included living in poor quality housing but also involved an underprivileged education. My parents were not educated and cannot read and write.

The modernisation process that encircled Iran under the leadership of the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s was something my family barely encountered or experienced. Rather than experiencing the social and economic benefits of modernisation we experienced adversity and only had a limited space to carve out our life. The massive unrests taking place in Iran during the latter part of the 1970s also engulfed my family and others like us. The community that I was living in became absorbed in the 1979 revolution and like many young people I took part in demonstrations whose objectives were to oust the repressive regime of the Shah who ruled my country since the early

1950s. The aim was to bring about a democratic regime where the riches of the society could be more evenly shared. The ensuing events of the 1978- 1979 revolution brought about a massive exodus of Iranians leaving for Western countries. I was also part of this exodus and found myself on the move to Europe (Italy and France) and I spent almost 4 years working and studying there until I migrated to Australia. My narrative intertwines with the horizon of the participants' in this study who experienced the 1979 revolution and were forced to leave the country for various reasons including personal, economic and political but my experience differs from theirs in significant ways.

Their families, unlike my family, were middle class and had not experienced the elongated vicious 8 years war between Iraq and Iran during 1980- 1988. It was during this war that my birthplace Khorramshahr was totally destroyed by Saddam Houssian's army. As a result of this war my family became displaced citizens and were relocated to an internal refugee camp for war affected citizen and they later moved to another city. In the early years of the war when my family lived in the camps I had lost communication with them for several years.

My experiences of living in the diaspora and my experiences of, what I call the diasporic condition, that is alienation from the dominant Anglophone language, culture, social and educational institutions puts me in a status that allows me to understand the participants in this study who left after 1979 and found themselves striving to seek and make a new life under different cultural circumstances. Similarly, although I have not lived in Iran since 1979, I can orient myself to the issues that have given rise to the recent phenomena of Iranian refugees in Australia. The number of

Iranian refugees coming to Australia in the last decades has been quite measured (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3) and involves a relatively young and dynamic population seeking free expression and independence from what they consider to be a 'closed society'.

Here, I want to explain that my own personal experiences of and in connection to linguistic, social and cultural displacement has oriented my interest in the refugee and migrant narratives of Iranians living in Australia. As an Iranian I was interested to understand in a more detailed manner the experiences of Iranians as both refugees and migrants so that I could give meaning not only to my own experience but also raise an awareness of the meanings that Iranians give of their social world. I wanted to know more about Iranians in the diaspora and show how the migrant (1979) and refugee (1990 onwards) narratives could merge and dialogue with each other to tell about the condition that gave rise to their displacement and also how that condition has shaped their lived experiences of being an Iranian refugee and migrant in a society that commits little trust towards them.

This research process is described as the 'fusion of horizons' because it allows the standpoint of the participants to talk to us and we let ourselves to be inspired and shaped by what we hear and learn. This involves putting into the open our projections and then reevaluating them in the course of what we have ascertained and understood. Indeed, studying refugees was to learn more about the experiences of people growing up and living in post 1979 Iran and the conditions that have shaped their identity as a refugee in Australia. Although I did not want to compartmentalise and label the narrative of those who arrived in Australia in the latter part of the 1990s and early

2000 as the 'refugee' condition I however found myself instituting this and it was only by allowing the voices of the participants' to speak to me that I was able to leave the assumptions behind the 'refugee condition' or the straw figure of the Iranian refugee, and allow them to speak in a multiplicity of voices that in many instances involved stripping away the narrow pieces of identity ascribed to refugees (sufferer, melancholic, sad, unhappy).

Indeed, many Iranian refugees in this study did not want to be defined as a refugee as this had a very negative connotation and limited the telling of their narrative. Indeed, the word refugee conjured images of helplessness, and despair whereas their experiences involved overcoming despair and vulnerability and indeed they came from socially and economically vibrant families in Iran. Thus the label refugee was too narrow a definition of who they were and it could certainly not encompass the complexity of their experiences. It was also a limiting standpoint for them to speak from. In an interview I conducted with the participant Arash who had arrived in Melbourne in 1995 I asked him what it felt like to be a refugee. This question caused an annoyed and incensed response:

I am a doctor and I studied in Iran. For many years I worked as a doctor and I realised that I was not appreciated by my society. There was no place for me to contribute, my educational background was not valued and I could not enjoy my profession. Are you interested to hear my story? Can you help me gain confidence and assist me to get back into my noble profession? I am not a refugee that cannot do this and that. All I want is to practice my profession. A French, an Italian, and English man leaves his country because he might be unhappy for not being recognised and not accepted by his own country but no one labels him as a refugee. Because of my birthplace and the

stigma of that country people only see me as a refugee and I can only leave and be accepted as a refugee. They want me to keep talking about the regime in Iran but I want to talk about my career and practice as a doctor here.

What is so compelling about this narrative is that Arash has had the courage to contest the speaking position assigned to him as a refugee. He has also challenged me as researcher to look beyond the 'refugee condition' because it is not a fixed condition but one that many desire to leave behind as it hinders their personal growth. Indeed, what this participant speaks about is moving on from and beyond the refugee condition to one that progresses into him being incorporated into Australian society that will recognise his professional qualifications. Hence I needed to rethink my outlook and approach to the lived ways-of-being a refugee and it certainly did not involve embodying a stereotype of the suffering refugee but rather involved a great effort to take apart this label and for this participant it involved getting back his professional identity as a doctor.

Thus I needed to ask questions that went beyond the notion of refugee, that totalizing concept to which everything is defined by and reduced to. This necessitated me to go beyond questions that fitted them into their 'refugee past' and ask them about their present experiences which they did not relate to their refugee condition. According to Gadamer 'all correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze 'on the things themselves' (1997:266). The dialogue between the Arash and me reveals how my assumptions of what it means to be an Iranian refugee was too limiting but also how it helped me to begin to understand that the refugee aspect of their narrative is a small component of the larger experience of being an Iranian in Australia.

The Act of Dialogue

According to Gadamer the fusion of horizons takes place through the act of dialogue that is ‘the art of questioning and of seeking truth’ (1997:367). In this context the researcher needs to hold on to a position of openness to the issue under study and put together questions in such a manner as to ‘broken open’ the topic and make way for the expression of the ‘truth that the topic reveals’ (ibid: 363). The point of this approach is not to identify and understand the individual participants in the study but instead to understand ‘that thing’ about which they talk about and narrate. Thus hermeneutic phenomenological research encompasses an engagement of dialogue and at the same time insists on holding on to a position of openness. In my research I deployed this approach by conducting open-ended conversations with each of the participants in order to delve into their experiences.

The underlying question that I asked of both refugees and migrants were ‘what is your experience of being a refugee or migrant from Iran?’ This general question allowed me to explore into more specific issues such as what was their experiences like in an Australian detention centre, what was their life like in Iran, what made them decide to migrate or seek refugee status in Australia, has their identity changed since coming to Australia, and is their life different to how it was in Iran? These questions opened up other questions relating to relationship with partners and children, their relationship with the broader Iranian community, the absence of significant others in their lives and its impact on their well being, how they interact with Australian society, such as employment, health, and education.

The Hermeneutic Circle

The intriguing aspect of the hermeneutic circle of understanding is that it is a circular movement that is forever an enlarging circle of understanding and interpretation (Gadamer, 1997). According to Gadamer, an issue is approached with pre-conceptions and projections, and projections are considered and modified in light of what 'the things themselves' show to us (1997:27), thus pushing us to further explore the issue in the context of new understandings. Hence the issue under study is understood by seeing the 'whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole' (291). This organic development of understanding from projection to issue to new projection, and from whole to part to whole, represents the hermeneutic circle of understanding and interpretation. Therefore, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to 'reveal a totality of meaning in all its relations' (Gadamer 1997:471) through an organic process of interpretation and analysis that entails making discernible things that are not easily visible, comprehensible and thus being mindful of things that are absent and seeing things beyond their appearance and outline. Hence questioning taken for granted assumptions in order to bring forward a fuller understanding and meaning of human experience.

Participant Recruitment

For the overall study I approached sixty Persian speaking men and women. I contacted Iranian community organisations such as Saturday language schools, Iranian cultural community agencies and organisations working with Iranians, students studying at TAFE colleges, universities, and individuals who I knew. Out of

these sixty people, 10 women and 10 men agreed to take part in this study and to be interviewed. From this group 12 identified themselves as migrants and 8 said that they were refugees.³

I explained to the participants the nature of the thesis and its scope and the areas it would be concentrating on. I emphasised that the interviews were a flexible interaction and if they felt that they could not continue they could stop anytime. Because some participants experienced distressful settlement in Australia I explained that the interview was a flexible interaction and that they could withdraw from the interview anytime. In plain language I explained to them the university's policy in relation to ethics and research and showed them the approval letter that I received from *The Ethics Committee* from Victoria University which approved my research methodology to conduct the research. I explained that the letter was important because it gave legitimacy to the research and that it was independent from government. It was also important for collecting the data because it demonstrated the importance of confidentiality and independence from government (see Appendix B on page 238).

The interviews took place in participants'⁴ houses, offices, shopping centres, cafes, parks, TAFE colleges and universities. The participants' ages varied from 25 years of age to 50 years of age, they came from different parts of Iran and all of them said that they had finished their secondary school education in Iran and 6 of them had accomplished their tertiary education in another country.

The participants work in different professional sectors such as the building sector, taxi industry, health and social welfare services. Five of the participants were not married and the others were either married or engaged. Five of the participants said that they had children.

³ The other 40 who were contacted wished to participate but decided not to take part in the interviews due to personal issues such as the anxiety surrounding their applications for permanent residency in Australia.

⁴ All the names that are mentioned in this thesis are not the real names of the participants (see Appendix A). After the interviews were transcribed the participants were contacted and asked if they wished to read their interviews for verifications.

Nine of the participants have directly come to Australia from Iran as migrants and the other three who have come as migrants said that they came to Australia through a third country. The eight participants who identified themselves as refugees mentioned that they came to Australia through a third country. Five of them said that they came to Australia from Indonesia and the other three mentioned that they came to Australia from Pakistan. Four of these refugees said that they came to Australia as singles and later brought their partners from Iran once they were granted residency in Australia.

Issues of trust, identity, memories, and life in Australia and in Iran, friendship, hospitality and social well being as well as loss were some of the main issues discussed with the participants. The interviews usually lasted for about one and half hours and were generally conducted in Persian. I tape recorded 4 face-to-face interviews and 16 interviews were written up immediately after the interview. Some of the participants in this study did not want me to tape record their interviews, because they did not feel comfortable of their voices being recorded and as a consequence I took notes of their responses and immediately wrote them up after the interviews. I also checked particular points and sought their clarification on issues they had focused on during the interview. Because of the exploratory character of my research a heuristic approach was chosen (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999) because it provides a medium for the participants' views and experiences to be articulated and also acknowledges the influence of the researcher's experience, background and perceptions.

Data Analysis

Creswell describes the hermeneutic phenomenological approach of analysis as follows:

The researcher reflects on his or her own description...seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 1998).

After all my interviews were completed along with an assistant transcribed the tapes and I checked the transcriptions against the tapes and the notes that I had taken during the interview process. This process allowed me to ensure that I had transcribed the conversations accurately and it also allowed me to discuss points in the interview with the participants for further elucidation and description. The transcriptions provided me with an account of the different thematic areas that I could systematically organise the interview conversations under. Grouping data under thematic areas is commonly known as horizontalization (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998).

Indeed, all the participants' conversations nearly always opened with what their life was like in Iran and progressively moved to how they arrived in Australia; how they re-established their lives; displacement of language and culture; meaning of health and well being; relationship with family and friends in Iran and Australia; Islamic identity and September 11; and the stigma of being an Iranian.

Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology stresses the role of the researcher as being the one that inspires and engages the reader with their writing in a creative and practical manner (Gadamer, 1997:393), as a result I have been extremely mindful to present my writing in a manner that is meaningful so as to capture the details of the experience conveyed to me. Thus I have provided detailed direct quotes from the open ended exploratory interviews I conducted. Based on the interviews I categorised the

issues that emerged under different themes. These themes included, but were not limited to: identity; cultural representation; displacement; trauma; hospitality; and 'home.' In particular I explored specific Persian words relating to displacement, migrant and refugee and their meanings in the lives of the participants because many found the 'English words applied' to them quite perplexing and not reflective of the meanings of their experience.

Many found cultural shortcomings with the English words used to describe them by bureaucratic organisations and by the media. I examine these issues in greater detail in chapter 3 suffice it to say that some of the participant described themselves as *ghrībe* (stranger). This word is applied to anyone who moves away from their birthplace. It can also be applied to those who move from one city to another within Iran. Thus it is applied to internal as well as external migrants.

Hence, the Persian words provided by the participants to describe their situation is what Gadamer suggests (1975) 'getting inside' each other. This experience of 'getting inside' each other is what is required in order to understand the emotional significance of a person's narrative regardless of its ontological status. This process of 'getting inside' each other requires that we become aware of the meanings and significances associated with language; culture; history; and the contents of perceptions and experiences that structure the 'refugee' or 'migrant' narrative.

Thus it is critical to look for that experience within the language of the participants' rather than the one imposed by the research process or from an 'outside bureaucratic' language. In this study I have not tried to 'fit' the participants' into bureaucratically

formulated criteria but have instead searched for the meanings of the words they chose to describe themselves with. It is also crucial to recognise that when we engage in a conversation with the other the conversation demands from both of us a contrapuntal⁵ understanding and interpretation. Said describes this as involving:

That is, we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others (Said, 1994:36)

As we engage in a contrapuntal reading of the narratives presented in this thesis we are better able to situate ourselves in relation to the experiences described and give another perspective to our phenomenological world that is incomplete and limited by its 'horizons.

Outsider-Insider: Where does the researcher belong?

There has been an enormous amount of work on cross cultural interactions in the research process. Researchers are now more inclined to write about their experiences of the research process and its influence on the collection and interpretation of their data. In particular researchers' from the same cultural background of the community they are working with have written about the complexities involved in such a process. Thus many have questioned whether they are cultural 'insiders' or 'outsiders.' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). In the latter part of this chapter I will trace my own research trajectory with the participants in this study.

⁵ A Saidian term.

In the Melbourne Iranian community I am known as a playwright, poet and drama teacher. The community is aware of my creative work and I have had many opportunities to address cultural forums and events via the Persian media as well as through social events. Thus unlike other researchers who are not familiar with the cultural milieu of their participants I have a good knowledge and understanding of Iranian diaspora politics and the issues that are at the heart of the Iranian community in Melbourne. Despite this familiarity with the community I am also acutely aware that the community is diverse in its social, economic, cultural, religious and political perspectives. In fact regional differences are an important factor in the lives of Iranians' in Melbourne. Thus my background as an Iranian from the South immediately conjures images in the minds of 'other' Iranians. The region I come from is well known for its unique southern (*Bandari*) music and dance and is a strategically important region producing the majority of the country's oil. Historically, it also has an image of being an area that instigated the first mass strikes against the regime of the Shah.

While these can be regarded as superfluous by the uninitiated to the community they are indeed important factors in how one is situated and perceived by the broader Iranian community. In a space where diasporic people's status is marginalized one's region and history become important components of cultural capital. Hence in relation to my research it played a critical and important role with the participants in that I was positioned as someone who could be empathetic and compassionate to their stories of displacement and separation from the 'homeland' because it is assumed that as a Southerner I would have experienced marginalization as a result of the war and

the dislocation that came with military destruction as a result of the war between Iran and Iraq from 1980 to 1988.

Because of my status as a playwright and teacher I had a challenging encounter in trying to recruit participants to be part of the study. Many wanted to be involved in a creative process (theatre project), they wanted to write their stories and they wanted me to help them perform their stories. This was a very difficult issue to negotiate and I was reluctant to immerse myself into such a project when I had barely started my fieldwork. However, as the weeks and months passed, I realized that this request and the interactions with large numbers of people, who could potentially be research participants, was actually the start of my fieldwork and they were actually asking me to reciprocate. That is they would be willing to participate in the research if I would also be willing to work with them to develop a creative piece of work focusing on their experiences of displacement; loneliness; and the longing for 'home.'

Before I agreed to this process I explained to them that a creative theatre project is quite complicated, intensely bodily and very interpersonal. And that it takes a lot of energy and time and the creative process sometimes takes 'you' to emotions and feelings unexplored which could be very challenging. Despite the demanding and provocative nature of such a project they pointed out that they were 'ready' for the challenges of such a project. However, I was ambivalent and not quite sure if I shared their enthusiasm and excitement for a creative project. But I finally acquiesced and we agreed to meet once a week for 3 hours with only 10 participants. Our initial meetings focused largely on the writing process. During this time they experimented with the creative and imaginative. They were all very erudite and highly educated with tertiary

qualifications. Through this writing process I realized that I was also being presented with 'data' and that I needed to think beyond the structured interview process and accept that data can be collected in many different ways and forms. This creative writing process gave me the context to 'hang' their more formal narratives onto.

A process that I embarked on with trepidation became dynamic, energetic and I began to better understand their stories, their hopes and aspirations. I enjoyed the process immensely but also found it very arduous in terms of time commitment. For example, the woman who was distressed to act the character of an old mother confined in an apartment expressed to me later that it triggered feelings and emotions towards her own mother and senior relatives living in Iran. I encouraged her to go to those emotions about her mother and other relatives so that she could act the role. She later told me that by letting in the emotions that she felt towards her mother helped her make the role she was acting more dynamic and it also allowed her to take control of the deep emotions that she felt towards her senior relatives and mother. This participant and the others were excited to have successfully participated in a rich and stimulating theatre project.

The acting workshops with these participants took 8 weeks and after this they were ready to perform their play *Har-koja hastam* (wherever I am) for the community. They performed it at the Beynal Theatre in Heidelberg and there was an audience of more than 300 people. The performance was warmly received by the community and many people came and asked if I would do similar theatre workshop projects in the future. I explained that I would think about it for the future and that I was now very busy writing my PhD thesis.

This methodology and the process of galvanizing support for my project was not one that I devised as part of my research methodology but was one that organically came from the field. I am glad that I responded to it as it has made me a 'richer' researcher and has allowed me to be more flexible in how I collect and view data. This process also assisted in allowing the participants to get closer to me than usual with their stories.

Therefore, the bodily contact and trusting relationship that acting creates was an important medium in how they told their stories. In their acting I saw the physicality of their displacement; their anger; their cries; their laughter; reflections and of course; their hope. The stage that they created for their performance was riveting. It was Persian carpets, smell of spices and everything which represented 'home'.

The performance gave a deeper meaning to their narratives and I appreciated the meaning of the 'lived body' which is an important element from which we perceive the world. Their performance also underscored the idea that our experiences are always coming from an embodied perspective.

I want to conclude this chapter by briefly stating that because of the particular social conditions of the participants in this study the phenomenological method was a very useful methodology to employ because it allowed a vulnerable group of people to talk about their perceptions and feelings about their experiences of displacement, identity, trauma and its concomitant effects. Employing this form of methodology has allowed me to pay increased attention to the perceptions of the participants and it has allowed the participants to bring in 'things', in the form of songs, stories and other objects to allow them to speak about the issues that have shaped and are shaping their life world. While I believe that the phenomenological method is important and useful

in particular for undertaking research with vulnerable population groups and on vexed social issues there are however, like other methods, limitations of this approach. In particular, one can question the 'objective' social reality of the participants and how it fits into the political reality of the society they are critiquing. The way 'meanings' are constructed from the participants' perceptions is also an important question that can be raised about the phenomenological approach. Thus the problem of 'meaning' raised in other methods (quantitative, empiricist and positivist approaches) is also one that haunts the phenomenological paradigm.

It is argued that the phenomenological approach can adopt an uncritical approach to the beliefs and consciousness of informants without taking into consideration their epistemological adequacy. I am deeply aware of the limitations of the phenomenological method and that an uncritical reflection on the beliefs of the participants can lead to voyeurism. However, I have adopted the phenomenological approach because it is self-reflexive and self critical and unlike other methods does concern itself with reflections on methodological limitations and discusses its effects on social theory.

The phenomenological approach has been pivotal to this study because it provided a means to search beneath the surface of hidden meanings of everyday appearances and issues experienced by Iranian migrants and refugees. The thesis has revealed how historical and political accounts of social phenomena (such as the Iranian revolution, the Iraq – Iran war, and September, 11) are grounded in people's everyday experiences of these events and furthermore I have shown the forms and categories the participants use to explain these everyday life experiences. This thesis has only touched the surface of the issues encountered by Iranian migrants and refugees and more studies are required to reveal the complexities of their experiences and further innovative and culturally specific methodologies are required to get beneath the surface of the everyday of migrant and refugee lives.

In the following chapter I provide a theoretical discussion about displacement, narrative and the importance of telling stories. In particular I argue that stories are not

just an important aspect of Iranian cultural experience but that they are an important medium in how the participants frame and speak of their pain and displacement.

Chapter 3

The Struggle for Representation

Introduction

Thus, by approaching the house images with care not to break up the solidarity of memory and imagination, we may hope to make others feel all the psychological elasticity of an image that moves us at an unimaginable depth. Through poems, perhaps more than through recollections, we touch the ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house (Bachelard, 1969: 6)

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the interconnections between the migration and refugee narratives of Iranians living in Melbourne. I will concentrate on the ways in which participants' emphasis their experiences of displacement and how through the course of this dislocation they assemble and bring together the cultural implications of their experiences. I also want to describe how they dismantle and reassemble their individual lives because, I argue, the Iranian 'migrant', the Iranian 'refugee', the Iranian 'exile' is produced out of and against the Australian bureaucratic account in which it is given no social importance or cultural meaning. I have already argued and pointed out earlier that Iranian migration and refugee narratives are not reflected in the official discourse of Australian multiculturalism and is often marginalized or indeed totally absent in most descriptions of multicultural narratives.

This chapter will trace a number of themes: one relates to how migration and displacement have been represented by the participants in this study and how they negotiate their cultural meanings and practices. Another theme raises the question of

how literature, poetry and songs are used by the participants to represent the ways in which they feel and experience their displacement. My interest in this chapter is with Persian poetry, literature, and songs about migration, displacement and homelessness, which, I believe, crystallizes and conveys the emotional and physical experiences arising from a loss of place that the participants in this study have suggested.

The connection between cultural beliefs concerning people who are migrants and refugees and the experience of 'losing roots' demonstrate some of the ways in which the participants in this study reconstruct and dismantle their identity and place in Australia and Iran. I describe the ways the participants give form and meaning to the bureaucratic construction of 'migrant' and 'refugee' which often complicates and strips them of their collective and individual identity. I argue that on the one hand they submit to these modes of representation (migrant, refugee) in order to neutralize the bureaucratic system's damaging effects on themselves, or as Bourdieu so poignantly suggests 'to submit to them in order to make use of them (in accordance with the logic of the *eminence grise*)' (Bourdieu, 1977:165). But at the same time, although they recognize the legitimacy of these categories, they bring into question its relevance to their everyday experience and resist it through poetically imaginative understandings of displacement. To use Jacques Attali's words, we 'must learn to judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festivities than by its statistics' (1985:3). Such an approach can disclose a depth of understanding not usually presented in psychological studies on migrants and refugees. Thus I am not framing my study of Iranian 'migrants' and 'refugees' through a bureaucratic set of policies; laws; and psycho-social programs, because I believe they take on a rigidity

that negates and conflicts with the participants' feelings of being a '*gharibe*' (stranger) that usually accompanies the 'migrant' and 'refugee' experience.

Calvino in his essay on 'The Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature,' argued that literature is acutely important when it:

gives a voice to whatever is without a voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude. I mean aspects, situations, and languages both of the outer and of the inner world, the tendencies repressed both in individuals and in society. Literature is like an ear that can hear things beyond the understanding of the language of politics; it is like an eye that can see beyond the colour spectrum perceived by politics (1982:98).

The use of poetry, literature, and songs by the participants in this study, I argue, is used to elegantly structure 'ways of telling' (Berger, 1975) of the personal experiences of displacement, exile and migration. The language they use is metaphorical, symbolic and poetic, what Dyer terms a 'shadow language, a language of alienation that is at home nowhere' (1986:113). But this 'shadow language' also mediates between the participants' perceptions and emotions of being a *gharibe*, (stranger) and the historical contexts that shape that experience.

Contextualizing Iranian Departures

Iranians' have been migrating to Western countries, in particular to the United States, since the 1950s and this movement is often categorized as being both voluntary and forced (Mostashari & Khodamhosseini 2004).

Part of the explanation of this phenomenon is related to the economic prosperity experienced after the Second World War as a result of Iran's oil resources. This produced socio – economic wealth and created a small but significantly wealthy elite class. Many from the wealthy elite formed the core of those who searched for education, success and social capital in Western countries, such as Europe, England and the United States. Social success was characterized not just in terms of economics but defined by Western markers of education and lifestyle. Hence the new elite could buy Western education and an independent lifestyle which was relatively restrictive in Iran despite the huge modernization process the country underwent. The modernization process had huge social, economic, cultural and political ramifications for Iran and while there were ardent supporters of this development there were also strong criticisms of the implications of its effects which was often criticized by the critics as a form of *westtoxication*. This was a label attached by Iranian progressive thinkers as well as prominent figures of the religious elite to the economic and social policies of the Shah.

It was used by these groups to attack the Shah's fervent and powerful stance towards the West and his lack of respect for Iranian people's human rights, traditions, customs and cultures. The word *gharbzadeh* (westoxifcaiton) entered into the everyday lexicon of Iranian people to give emphasis to the Shah's elitism. The privileges of his regime were shared by the *crème de la crème* of the country. The vast majority of Iranians experienced a sense of alienation and dispossession from Western values espoused and economic policies deployed by the Shah. This word became so potent that most Iranians used it during the revolution in order to articulate their opposition towards the despotic personality of the Shah and those who supported his monarchy.

What is quite compelling about this modernization experience is that many young Iranians were sent to pursue a western education in the United States simply because of the close relationship between the Pahlavi regime and the United States of America (USA). This close relationship between the two countries was very powerful and was indeed firmly cemented by the events which led to the USA backed 1953 Coup d'eta which brought Mohammed Riza Shah back into power, after he had been briefly deposed in the same year. He was deposed because of his conflict with Prime Minister Dr Mohammad Mossadegh⁶ (Thaheri, 1985).

It should be noted that the conflict between the Shah and Prime Minister, Dr Mohammad Mossadegh (B, 1882- D, 1967) began as soon as Mossadegh became Prime Minister in 1952. Soon after Mossadegh took office he passed legislation to nationalize Iran's oil industry which up to that point was under the undisputed control

⁶ This struggle between Mossadegh and the Shah was related to the nationalisation of Iranian oil which Mossadegh pursued and supported by the Tudeh Party (pro stalinist communist party) but was potently challenged by the Shah and the British which had overall monopoly over oil of Iran's oil fields. Thus US support was mobilised to support the *coup d'etat* to reinstate the Shah in 1953.

of the British. The Shah was against this policy and Mossadegh was convinced that it was the only way that Iran could gain its sovereignty and independence from the former, British, colonial power. The nationalization process of Iran's natural resources was to demonstrate that it was Iran and not foreign powers that had control over its valuable resources.

But the implementation of this radical policy aggravated the conflict that already existed between Mossadegh and the Shah. The conflict was such that the Shah decided to leave the country under the pretence of a short holiday. However, he soon returned back to Iran when a military coup designed, financed and executed by the USA and supported by the British deposed Dr Mossadegh, as Prime Minister. After a trial he was sentenced to three years solitary confinement and then spent the rest of his life in internal exile in a small village near Tehran, Ahamd Abad, where he died in 1967.

Soon after being reinstated the Shah entered into an agreement with major Western oil companies from Britain, America and France. The bond between the Shah and the USA became so close that in 1959 he signed a military agreement with President Eisenhower that gave American protection to the Shah regime. From this date onwards that the Shah began his obsessive policy of modernization, militrization and blind 'Americanization' of Iran. When the social upheavals against his regime began in 1978 until the last months of his reign in February 1979 he strongly believed that America would come and support him to maintain his dynasty in Iran, of course this never materialized and he was forced with his family to leave the country in February 1979.

However, before the revolution many Iranians were selected by the Shah's regime to study in the West and particularly in the USA. This close tie with the USA and the intimate relationship that began soon after the coup between the two countries provided opportunities for affluent Iranians to live and study in the USA. This continued up until the 1979 revolution which eventually brought an end to the close alliance between the two countries.

The climax of the Shah's modernization and westernization policy is best illustrated in the years between 1977 and 1978 where there were more than 100,000 young and wealthy Iranian students studying in higher education institutions in Western countries. And according to Shirin Hakimzadeh (2006) approximately 36,220 students were residing and studying in American colleges and universities.

However during the years of 1978 and 1979 the number of young Iranians who were studying in the United States rose to 45, 340. This number was further increased in 1979 and 1980 to 51, 310. This increase was due to the immediate political tensions that were brewing in Iran and particularly the discomfort that members of the middle class experienced after the 1979 revolution. These issues alongside the closure of many Iranian universities in 1980, and the rapid social and political instability forced large numbers of Iranians' to leave the country. (Ibid)

These departures were largely to the United States where many of the previous Iranian students had their relatives, friends and families. Another factor and question that the revolution created for many of those who studied abroad during 1978 and

1979 related to whether they remained in the United States or returned back to Iran. Indeed, many remained in the United States and eventually permanently settled with their families.

As Shirin Hakimzadeh argues:

The census bureau estimates that the Iranian-American community (including the US born children of the Iranian foreign born) numbers around 330,000. However, studies using alternative statistical methods have estimated the actual number of Iranian Americans in the range of 691,000 to 1.2 million (2006: 4).

It is noteworthy to mention that one of the largest group of Iranians who during or immediately after the revolution left the country were members of the Pahlavis family and families who were closely related to them, as well as large contingences of their supporters and sympathisers.

The flights of many Iranians to Western countries after the revolution have been further exhilarated in the past two decades. The war between Iran and Iraq during the period 1980 to 1988 also caused many people to escape and seek refuge in safe countries. The lack of opportunities for stable work for young and educated people as well as the many restrictions and state interventions into people's personal and private lives has caused many departures to foreign lands (Ibid).

One of the most recent forms of migration in the last decade includes the departure of thousands of young professionals, academics, and highly skilled people who have sought to find better salaries and more comfortable and stable lives abroad.

Alongside the migration of highly educated Iranians there is also a large number of Iranians who have left and continue to leave the country as working class labor migrants, economic, and political refugees.

In a number of ways, therefore, the politically corrupt Pahlavi regime and its aftermath, the war between Iran and Iraq and the current political and economic oppression have had significant consequences that have compounded the circumstances that have given rise to the condition of ‘migrantness’ and ‘refugeeness.’ As a result, thousands of Iranians experience the condition of ‘migrantness’ and ‘refugeeness’ which have affected their cultural, physical and psychological circumstances, an issue that I will discuss further in this chapter.

Iranians in Australia

In countries like Iran cultural diversity is not widely proclaimed but is a well defined aspect of the country that is subtly weaved into its history. Each ethnic group in Iran has a very unique relationship to the national identity of Iranian-ness. I don’t have the space or the capacity to discuss this in detail suffice it to say that alongside the Persian-speaking people (51 percent) there are other ethnic minorities with a distinctive language and cultural identity. These include but are not limited to: Arab Iranians (2 percent); Azerbaijani Turkish Iranians (24 percent); Gilaki and Mazandarani Iranians (8 percent); Beluchi Iranians (2 percent); Kurdish Iranians (7 percent); Turkmen Iranians (2 percent); Luri Iranians (2 percent) (Hakimzadeh, 2006: 1).

There are also a small number of Armenian Iranians, Assyrian Iranians, Jewish Iranians and members of different faith groups such as Bahi Iranians and Zoroastrian Iranians. And of course within these groups are also secular Iranians.

Iranians have been visiting and migrating to Australia since the early 1930s and 1940s. Most of the early arrivals consisted of a small number of students who came to pursue tertiary education. While there is a paucity of research on Iranians' in Australia what the available evidence reveals is that Iranians did not actually settle in Australia until the early 1970s. Australia was an unknown country to many Iranians and it was in the 1970s that the two countries engaged in official trade agreements. The success of Australian athletes at the Munich Olympic games in 1970 as well as the Shah's visit to Australia during the Whitlam government's period in office (1972-1975) brought Australia to the attention of Iranians as a destination to study and migrate.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2005 report from 1986 until 2005 there were only 7,496 Iranians who had settled in Australia. However, this figure has risen due to social, political and economic circumstances which have compelled Iranians to seek settlement in Australia. This increase is reflected in the 1991 figures which reveal an increase of the Iranian population to 12,914. And according to the latest statistics, of 30 June, 2005 there were approximately 24,588 Iranians settled in Australia. Almost 11, 536 of these Iranians are settled in New South Wales.

The ethnic breakdown of the Iranian community is not provided in Australian Bureau of Statistics profiles thus it is difficult to accurately gauge the ethnic and faith based

make- up of the community living in Australia. However, a cursory observation of the community reveals that the ethnic and faith based diversity of Iran is also visible in the Australian Iranian community.

The paucity of research on the migrant Iranian community in Australia not only makes it difficult to generalize about its characteristics but it also conceals the community. The community is too small in numbers and is thus out of sight of mainstream multiculturalism.

According to one of the few studies conducted on Iranians in Australia Hossein Adibi observes that:

From a socio-economic point of view, the Iranian community is a highly stratified community. Within the community there is a status mobility contest based on social class. Taking education, occupation and income, these indicate that over 50% of Iranians in Australia in 1986 had no qualifications; nearly one third of the population was placed at the lower end of the occupational classifications and a great majority of Iranians had annual incomes of \$26,000 or below in 1986. Only 0.3% had incomes of \$50,000 or more. This indicates that, although professionals constitute a distinctive stratum, the bulk of the population appears to be in lower income brackets. Research clearly demonstrates that the Iranian community, as a small community, while endeavoring to establish its own identity and uniqueness, is experiencing difficulties and facing problems mostly due to settlement related needs, discrimination, and overt and silent racism.

(<http://www.farhangiran.com/pdf/iranaustralia.pdf>).

In relation to the educational attributes of Iranians Adibi found that:

The Iranian community with 40.2% post school qualifications (compared with 30.2% for Australian total population) and 13.9% with a university degree or higher qualifications (compared with 4.9% for Australian total population) experience one of the highest degrees of unemployment in the country (29.7% for Iranians and 8.5% for Australian total population). Despite all serious obstacles and barriers, which Iranians are facing in Australian society, they do not consider themselves as oppressed minority, but rather as a group trying to improve their status further. Iranians in Australia are also trying to resist the racism of assimilation by guarding and using their own cultural baggage.

The Iranian migrant community has a discernibly different migration trajectory to the post war migrants that arrived in Australia. It is generally recognized as a community that is well educated with social and economic capital and thus has an impalpable presence in government and community discourses on migration and multiculturalism. Although community members may be outside of mainstream professional employment this is mainly due to the exclusionary discriminatory policies of Australian workplaces. As the data above indicates it is a community that is highly educated but finds it difficult to enter into professional employment and many are forced into operating small scale family businesses.

However, the recent arrival of Iranian refugees has been more controversial. The exact numbers of those categorized, as Iranian 'refugees' is unknown. But in 2004 there were approximately 70 Iranians, made up of men, women and children, who were detained in the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre in Port Augusta, South

Australia. A majority of these people were detained for up to 5 years. Iranian refugees have experienced long delays with their claims for asylum and as a result have been diagnosed with mental illness, such as depression and anxiety disorders.

In fact, some Iranian refugees were involved in a hunger strike at the Baxter Detention centre to raise awareness of their long incarceration and deteriorating health conditions. The hunger strike lasted up to 20 days and three men spent 12 days on the roof of the detention centre of up to 40 degrees celsius. And in order to highlight their lack of voice five refugees had sewn their lips to draw attention to the violation of their human rights. Despite these protests many Iranian refugees were returned back to Iran. Indeed, the Australian Government even tried to cajole Iranian refugees by offering them a “package” that involved returning back to Iran (<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=5867>).

An Australian Labour Party Member of Parliament, Carmen Lawrence, who visited Port Headland detention center made the following observations after meeting with Iranian detainees in October 2003:

They were subdued but firm that they would not accept the Government's "package" and return to Iran. I will never forget the hurt in their eyes, their despondency; strung between never ending internment here and certain punishment if they are returned to Iran. ... They begged me to urge the Minister at least to assist them to gain asylum in some third country more willing than Australia to help them rebuild their lives. They were as one in insisting that they cannot go back to Iran - one said that it wouldn't matter if he was offered \$200,000 instead of \$2000; he would not go back because his

life is forfeit if he does

(<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/09/02/1062403516638.html>).

Two research participants' who had spent time in a detention center while their claims were 'processed' described the oppressive conditions they were subjected to especially the lack of empathy that was displayed towards them:

Do they hear these words, *eltemas mikonam*, (I beg you) in our language? And how about '*Man daram divane mishavam inja, chera mara reha nemikonid*' (I'm going mad here, why don't you let me free)

And another participant recalled remarks made by a detention centre guard or officer:

Why do I have to listen to your story and believe it and give you the permission to stay here. I know there are more than 20,000,000 young people like you who would love to come to my country from your county. Why should I allow you to stay here?

It is these experiences that have left a scar in the experiences of some Iranian refugees. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in a media release announced that should the Iranian detainees agree to voluntarily choose to return to Iran they would be provided with financial and social support:

This would include providing reintegration assistance at \$2,000 for each individual or up to \$10,000 for each family and meeting the costs of airfares and travel documents. Detainees have 28 days from the date of formal notification in which to accept the offer. Should the offer not be accepted detainees will be

returned to Iran without any of the benefits offered to voluntary participants
(<http://www.dimia.gov.au/media/media-releases/2003/d03031.htm>).

This offer was made based on an agreement between the Australian Government and the Government of Iran which approved the return of failed Iranian asylum seekers. According to Adibi's report, refugees were:

at the end of 1989, there were 953 individuals considered to be refugees. This accounts for 8.3% of the total Iranian population of 11,421 in 1989. Of the total refugee population there were 81 individuals under 16 years of age which counts for 8.5% of the Iranian refugee population.

From this brief résumé of Iranian migrants and refugees it is clear that these limited studies do not provide the narratives and the layers of Iranian experience of 'displacement.' In this chapter I shall return to discussing how Iranian migrant and refugee narratives of identity are, as Hall points out, 'placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history. Every statement comes from somewhere, from somebody in particular' (1987:46). In exploring the participants' perceptions and experiences of displacement, I found a significant degree of cultural self awareness, which were clearly articulated regarding their relationship between two cultural milieus (Anglo Australian and Iranian) that mark them as 'migrants,' 'refugees,' '*gharibe*,' (stranger) '*mohajer*,' (immigrant) '*koly*' (Gypsy) and '*khareji*' (foreigner).

Cultural Constructs of ‘Migrant’ and ‘Refugee’

Man khodam ra ham gharibe va ham Khareji midunam, vali manyee k man be in calame mideham koli ba manyee k inhah behemsh midenah fargh dare....

I consider myself a stranger and foreigner, yet the meaning that I attach to the noun ‘Refugee’ is very different to what they do [government institutions]. So please, if it is possible don’t use the word ‘refugee’ when you ask me your questions. I had to tell you this because I do not identify with this word at all. I know people here find it enigmatic and interesting, but I don’t feel that I’m a ‘refugee’ the way these bureaucrats, politicians and many people use it (Reza).

Studies on migrants and refugees often fail to question the terms that are attached to define and give meaning to those who occupy the social identities and conditions of ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’. Words like ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ are concepts and indeed social markers that are responsible for some of the meanings and values through which institutions and the public understands their circumstances and being. But meanings of words and the way they are deployed are always questioned and challenged. The culturally contested concepts of ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ as well as the conditions and practices that accompany it will be discussed from the perspective of Iranian ‘migrants’ and ‘refugees’.

My argument is that terms like ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ used by bureaucratic institutions impoverish our understanding of the conditions of the ‘migrant’ and

'refugee' existence. Also it negates the beliefs of 'migrants' and 'refugees' and how they give meaning and understanding to their constructed position. In this chapter we will hear from the participants of this study on some of the effects of the contested words 'migrant' and 'refugee' and why they do not see these words as pertinent to their condition and identity.

In an interview, I asked Reza if he arrived to Australia as a migrant or as a refugee. Reza begins his narrative by asking me not to use the word 'refugee' as he does not identify with it because of its 'enigmatic' connotations. While in the eyes of the Australian government he qualified as a 'refugee' in the legal and policy sense, Reza however explains his unease with this label:

Some times I think they use this word for their own interest. And they never ask me how I feel about it. I'm glad that you speak my language and come from the same cultural background. I could explain to you how I feel about it. I really dislike it when I hear the word refugee attached to me. I feel that most of people feel sorry for me and I despise this feeling. Yes, I'm living in '*Gorbat*' (foreign land) in a strangers' land but this does not mean that I'm a refugee. This causes me a great deal of alienation. I feel like a stranger 'alienated' from my country and people, this is how I see myself. The word '*fararri*' (escapee)) has a very negative connotation in my language and culture. I have not escaped from my country and people. I left Iran because I was tired of not having a job and a bright future there and wanted to make a new beginning. Yes, I left to have a fresh start. I keep telling people I did not escape from my country. But they keep labeling me as a refugee. It's as if I have a sickness, called leprosy. Maybe they don't mean that. But I feel that way. I wish they would stop calling and labeling me a refugee.

Here, it is worth noting that *gorbat* has been an underlying theme of Iranian experience of migration for thousands of years. It is an experience a condition that represents being a stranger in a foreign country or a strange place. Iranians' also use this word in Iran when they leave their place of birth, ancestral home, and migrate to another part of Iran. Even if one is an 'internal' migrant the word *gorbat* is deployed because they are a stranger in a 'foreign' place. As I pointed out earlier, Iran is a country that is rich in cultural diversity, thus migrating from the South to the North or even within the north means that one is crossing the boundaries of one's cultural space and homeland.

The word *gorbat* is Arabic, meaning a place that is foreign to one's familiar and native home. Feelings of strangeness and alienation accompany the experience of 'being in' *gorbat*. Moreover, as Reza points out, the word refugee does not convey his experience because it is too overloaded with 'pity'; and with 'people feeling sorry for me.' Instead he prefers to describe his predicament as one that involves 'being in' *gorbat*. *Gorbat* demonstrates 'loss' of place, home and the centrality of being a 'stranger' with an underlying tone of grief, sorrow for the 'lost' country and place rather than for oneself as a *ghrabe* (stranger).

The complexity of words used to describe one's displacement is of course not lucid even in the Persian language and its application depends very much on the user of the words. Because words like *ghrabe* and *mohajer* (stranger and migrant) are not just descriptive terms to describe those who have migrated away from their native home but also it is laden with emotions, and feelings. In a sense temporality is deeply

embedded in these words. The sense of temporality gives meaning, significance, and emotional importance to such words as *ghribe* and *mohajer*. The following narrative is a poignant example of this:

It is my life and it is my definition of my experience of living out of my country of birth. There are days that I feel that I'm a *ghribe* (stranger) and they are other times that I feel that I'm a *mohajer* (migrant). For me both reveal different emotions and understanding of my state of mind of being here as a displaced person. It is no body's business to ask me whether I'm an immigrant or refugee. The point is that I'm here legally and get really annoyed that people out of the blue ask me whether I'm a migrant or refugee. I tell them that I'm an Australian born in Iran. Don't you think that's a sufficient answer?

Thus the adoption of the terms *ghribe* or *mohajer* is very much determined by a person's temporal, cultural, historical perspective. The participants' are aware that these and other Persian words structure the meanings of their displacement and give expression to their 'situation.' But their situation is not fixed and is continuously, as Merleau Ponty (2005) says, restructuring and being restructured by our perceptions. Thus the participants' perceptions are phenomenologically experienced and are always coming from an embodied perspective. The following quote, which by one participant, who is a refugee, is clearly indicative of this point:

Yes I'm a *ghribe* (stranger) but I'm not a refugee, especially when I talk to Iranians. I only use this word here and there (different occasions) when I talk to Australians. But deep down I don't feel that I'm the kind of person that they think I am. It is strange when I say that word, it makes me very sad and lonely and I feel that I have lost all

my roots with my people and country which I don't feel that I have. I did not think such a simple foreign word could have such a strong and negative emotional and physical impact on me so I don't like to use it (refugee) at all. I prefer to use *mohajer* or *ghribe* because they are about my feelings of loneliness. This country [Australia] is not accepting me and this makes me feel that I'm a stranger here, it's different from refugee.

It is apparent that the usage of these words amongst participants also gives a different affect and emotion to the experience of being a refugee or migrant when articulated in the Persian language. My point is that the 'refugee' 'migrant' identity is fluid rather than a 'fixed' and stable category; especially when observed from its cultural, linguistic and historical perspective.

The Persian words to describe 'the refugee and migrant' do not represent them as an 'injured' party who cannot help themselves but rather the Persian words give depth and meaning to emotional feelings about distance; separation; displacement; and detachment from one's birth place and memories of loved one's.

Reza explains that the term refugee implies a fixed identity that is overloaded with misfortune; suffering; political definitions; and victimhood. For Reza and other participants the word refugee constitutes an identity that invariably involves being cast as an 'outlaw', and using 'illicit' means to gain an identity. It also categorizes and objectifies them as a people without an identity, a country, a history, thus marginalizing their cultural and historical background.

The English 'word' refugee was found by the participants to be too deeply rooted in the politics of Western ideas about borders, suffering, victimhood; and does not encompass the cultural and historical experience of being what I term a 'culturally diverse' refugee. Thus the universalising discourse about refugees' is one that negates the specificities of the experience and perceptions of the individuals' concerned. Thus I am advocating for a more nuanced understanding and reading of refugee narratives that gives meaning to the cultural expression of the situation experienced and takes into consideration the ideational perspectives of the people concerned.

Thus studies that concentrate on the 'refugee experience' often generalise and indeed essentialize refugeeeness because it posits a unitary and transhistorical refugee identity and experience. Almost like an essentialized ethnic group, refugees are not just a diverse group who share a particular legal status, but they are situated as 'a culture,' 'an identity,' 'a social world' or 'a community' (Gold, 1992). And according to Liisa Malikki this search for the 'refugee experience' shows how in many disciplines there is a tendency to:

Seize upon political or historical processes and then to inscribe aspects of those processes in the bodies and psyches of the people who are undergoing them. In this way very mobile, unstable social phenomena may be imagined as essential "traits" and "characteristics" attached to, or emanating from, individual persons. Instead of being content with seeing commonalities and differences in the socio-historical processes that produce refugees, researchers tend to seek to fix and make permanent something "essential" about these processes and to do so by personalizing them (Malikki, 1995: 503).

While Malikki provides a theoretical critique of the essential 'refugee' my thesis provides the empirical evidence for this critique and reveals that there are no essential 'traits' and particular 'characteristics' that can be uniformly attached to the refugee body.

Identities cannot be merely imposed at the exclusion of an individual's own definitions of how they want to describe their identity. There are considerable variations and complexities within the Persian language to describe a 'refugee' and 'migrant' and the participants in my study all differ in how they use these variations because every narrative has a specific context and they do not want to reduce their identity to one at the exclusion of another. In fact, the participants argue that their identity shifts and it is not a question therefore of one identity being more 'authentic' and 'genuine' than the others. What is clear is that the participants' prioritize different fields of social life which will have different effects on how they specify and label their identity.

Thus relations with an immigration officer will yield a different frame in how they funnel their narratives compared to how they speak about themselves amongst other members from their (Iranian) community. To my knowledge, many acquiesce to 'official' definitions because the language of the bureaucracy delineates a legal frame to speak within and structures a dominant and subordinate relation of power that systematically forces refugee claimants' to adopt the dominant speaking paradigms that will give access to 'temporary' or 'permanent' refugee status. The dominant frame of the bureaucracy renders invisible the significance of specific contexts and assumes a unitary base to the Iranian 'refugee' condition. The delineation of an

individual to the category 'refugee' by the bureaucracy is a very crude way of constructing collective narratives that are cross-cut by social, economic, gender, class, cultural, and religious differences. Based on these differences the bureaucracy accords legitimacy and status to those that 'fit' its political legal, and policy frame.

My research indicates that the bureaucratically 'officially' pinned refugee needs to be examined within its own linguistic, cultural, social, and political context (Zetter, 1991). The participants in this study recognize the bureaucratic refugee identity, however attenuated, because it accords them 'legitimacy' in Australia but its cultural and social meaning is lost in their everyday interactions and practice.

Laurence Kirmayer in his study on refugee narratives and its encounter with the psychiatric system argues that the clinical response often fails to confront the enormity of the refugee's loss and understand differences in cultural self presentation, memory and identity. He extends this observation by stating that the potential for incredulity is exacerbated in the formal cases that are brought before the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) that decides the application for refugee status:

...the Immigration and Refugee Board assesses the narrative of asylum seekers against the notion of a truthful story as fixed and isomorphic to a single historical sequence of events. From the perspective of the IRB members, any deviation from this fixed account is evidence of dissimulation designed to claim the value status of refugee (2003:167).

And psychologists Rosenwald and Ochberg maintain that:

The object of study is not the ‘true’ event, as it might have been recorded by some panel of disinterested observers, but the construction of that event within a personal and social history. In short what interests us most is precisely what the realist finds most discomfiting – the factitiousness of the tale. In the form a particular narrator gives to a history we read the more or less abiding concerns and constraints of the individual and his or her community (1992:4).

For Iranian refugees in this study the dilemma is not necessarily about telling a ‘true’ story but about trying to establish understanding of the linguistic and cultural differences in self presentation, in the construction and interpretation of identity and displacement. Thus the bureaucratic frame does not allow the Iranian refugee to ‘speak’ from its own experience but one where they have to ‘bracket’ their narrative to ‘fit’ with the official administrative requirements of the country offering refuge.

Linguistic Games – Defining an Identity through Language

Due to social, cultural, religious and political circumstances the word *penahendeh* (political refugee) has had significant metamorphoses in the Iranian vocabulary over the past 40 years. For example, it was readily used to denote the English word ‘refugee’ in the early 1970s and 1980s by those who left Iran for political reasons. Under the Shah's regime and subsequently under the Islamic regime it was used by Iranians to refer to ‘dislocation from one place to another’ and this dislocation could also be within Iran itself.

From my observations and the data available, the participants in this study do not use this word but instead employ terms such as *az- Ja- Kandan* - to be cut off from one's place of origin-, or, - *Be- ghorbat- raftan-*, moving to another alien land. These terms

are used because they express deep emotions about displacement whereas the word *penahandeh* is a formal and emotionally detached word that does not capture the emotional experiences of displacement. In fact the word *penahandeh* was often accompanied by the word, *syasi*, political, in the 1970s and 1980s amongst the Iranian refugee communities in order to signify their displacement as political.

Of course most of the Iranians' in this study are aware of the word *penahandeh* and *syasi* and its meanings but they avoid its usage. It is important to stress that regardless of their religious and political backgrounds most of the participants' used the universally accepted word *mohajer*, migrant, to define their identity as it captured in an apposite manner the passage and the channel of their displacement.

The word *mohajr* relates to the date of the prophet Mohammad's migration (*Hegira*) from Mecca to Medina (DC 622) which is essentially the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Three interconnected words describe this migration. Firstly, *hijreh* defines the journey. Secondly, *Mohajerat* describes the migration and thirdly, *Mohajer* describes the migrant, the one undergoing the passage, the movement to *gorbat*, foreign land.

The word *mohajer* is used as a significant point of reference by Muslims from diverse backgrounds because it aptly defines a departure from one place to another (Eichelman and Piscatori, 1990). Iranians' use the term *mohajer* to define experiences of displacement regardless of its religious connotation and see it as an integrated part of their linguistic and psycho-social narrative. They feel comfortable with this description rather than *penahandeh* (political refugee) which carries a stigma

because it narrowly focuses on the ‘political’ dimensions of their passage rather than its psychological and sociological aspects.

The word *mohajer* compared to *penahandeh* is politically less loaded. It does not have the same strictness of the word *penahandeh* which is often situated in a political experience and describes a conflict with the State. The word *mohajer* presents a more meaningful and acceptable term to articulate versatility of their experience and it also makes them feel socially and emotionally more comfortable. The word *mohajer* creates a sense of belonging with the Iranian community in Australia. The word *mohajer* does not ‘fix’ their passage in a political and ideological frame.

Participants in this study who are bureaucratically classified as ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ feel most comfortable in describing themselves as *mohajerin* (migrants) depending on what their past experiences were in Iran, they stressed that they have been reflecting on the multiple meanings of this word and its relationship to their experience of displacement. This word is important to their self representation because it reveals and poignantly clarifies their experience of moving away from their ‘home’ – Iran. It is clear from their narratives that they have been thinking deeply about what it means to ‘belong’ and to be ‘uprooted’ and about their place amongst the *maha* (us), Iranian folks and the *inha*, -others, non Iranian-. The meaning of home and displacement --*Az Ja Kande Shoden*. This sentence is used to define the fact of dislocation, removal of the body from a familiar place to a new one. Iranians have found new meanings to narrate and define their day-to-day experiences of displacement by using language that provides them with the most clarity and insight into their new identities. Hence the word *mohajer* seems to have gained a new

currency that provides positive meanings in which they feel more comfortable to present themselves.

Hence, it is up to the individual to fill in the space created by the word *mohajer* and they can call it *syasi* if they so desire. The word *mohajer* has an affective aspect that functions as a social and cultural anchor to counteract the negative assumptions of being a refugee, which more often than not in the Iranian case is explicitly viewed as politically based and they don't wish to be represented as only 'political.'

For many Iranians to be categorised as 'political' means they are a 'problem' and they believe accentuates Western fears about 'ideologically' or indeed 'religiously' driven Iranians. In this complex context of processing specific terms and definitions of identity the participants' are conscious of Australian community's perceptions that regard their (and indeed all those that are of Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim backgrounds) presence as culturally 'difficult' and many do not want to be viewed as 'suspicious' or construed as 'untrustworthy.' Because they are unable to control the broader social context of their existence many do not wish to politicise their narrative beyond what is require for bureaucratic purposes.

This is particularly marked in the following story which reveals the contradictions and tensions that arise when the word 'refugee' is accorded centrality, as I mentioned earlier, the word refugee brackets out the lived narrative and constructs a collective history that some do not quite identify with. The case of Bahai Iranians is a poignant example of this tension where dominant ideas of Bahai Iranians is one where their

problems are explained in only cultural and religious terms. Saleh's story is a potent example of this:

I'm a Bahai. I know a few friends who are Muslims. We left Iran because things were hard and we thought that when things get better we will go back. I have been back several times and things are different to when I came here about 18 years ago. There are perceptions that all the Bahi's who came here are refugees because there is this deep perception that they are the only group or people in Iran who have been having a hard time because of their religious beliefs. Well like everywhere else in the world in Iran there is discrimination against others too. But as soon I say that I'm Bahai, people feel sorry for me as if I'm a victim and ran away from my country as a refugee, an exile. As a matter of fact I left Iran as a migrant and have been living here for all these years and I am still labeled as a refugee. I do not identify with this label, it makes me upset when people use this term and I have started telling people 'please do not use this term because this is not how I see myself.' I tell them that I'm an Iranian Bahi who lives in Australia, that's all.

Saleh complains of the burden represented by the word 'refugee' and as Zygmunt Bauman argues the problem of our time is not about finding an identity:

And so the snag is no longer how to discover, invent, construct, assemble (even buy) an identity, but how to prevent it from sticking. Well constructed and durable identity turns from an asset into a liability. The hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity building, but avoidance of fixation (1996:24).

In personal terms a 'fixed' identity hardens the experience of the journey and passage to another country and the stories from the participants reveal their resistance against being:

'fixed' one way or the other. Not to get tied to the place. Not to wed one's life to one vocation only. Not to swear consistency and loyalty to anything and anybody. Not to control the future, but to refuse to mortgage it; to take care that the consequences of the game do not outlive the game itself, and to renounce responsibility for such as do. To forbid the past to bear on the present (ibid: 24).

Of course there is nothing undignified about being labeled a refugee except that the participants do not want to be 'fixed' with it forever as it does not encapsulate their feelings of displacement and longing for the 'things that have been left behind' including one's identity and history. The identity of the refugee is always situated as heartbreaking, miserable and distressing. These adjectives come to constitute the persona and qualities of the person who has been ascribed with it and many of the participants in this study find these qualities of being a refugee quite unrealistic. Many do not want to be caught up in the vocabulary list that makes up the subject refugee because it fails to take into account their cultural experiences. The following story shows how individuals' try to resist being caught up with the imposed identity of a refugee:

Look I don't care whether I came here as a refugee or migrant. I'm just angry the way we all have been treated since the tragic events of 11 September 2001. I'm an Iranian and am very critical about what is happening in my country of birth. I have been here for ten years. But the last 4 years have been hell for me to live here in Australia

because of the ways they treat us people of Middle Eastern background. I neither identify with the words refugee nor migrant. I'm a resident in this country and that is it. Why don't they leave me alone to make my own mind about who and what I wish to be called? I think they label us to deliberately confuse our sense of belonging and identity.

In this story the participant draws our attention to the historical context of their existence, that of September 11, 2001 and confronts the myth of Australia as a hospitable country. The negative effects of post September 11, 2001 and its signifying practices inscribe those of Middle Eastern background with a frame that bespeaks of their 'suspiciousness' and leaves this participant questioning whether labels are used in a calculating manner to confuse one's sense of identity and belonging. The values and feelings expressed in the word refugee fails to open up to the lived cultural experience and reality of Iranian refugees' in Australia who live within a system of power that 'marks' and brackets them out within the system.

However they also employ tactics to resist this alienation and exclusion. Michel de Certeau (1988) has termed "the practice of everyday life" which corresponds with the ways the participants in this study employ multiple and polyvalent tactics to operate within an oppressive social and cultural system by denouncing the fixation on present images and symbols of their identity – refugee- by generating narratives that subvert the dominant image.

At the core of these narratives are the dominant themes of how they are perceived and their lack of control in how they are defined. The following narrative maps out the

psychic space and the narrative layers of Rashid's identity and experience thus deconstructing the notion of a 'fixed' identity:

Jenab man khod ra 'Mosafer' midanam. I see myself as a traveller. I can't set root anywhere except in my own country. I love it here and I love it there. I think it is part of our culture that when we leave Iran we see ourselves as constant travelers. You know even travelers can stay in one place for a long time and have a longing for their birthplace. I'm comfortable with this definition, for example, when I'm tired I go to Iran and stay there for a while and then come back here. All these things that have been happening in my world have made me like a '*koly*' gypsy. Yes, I'm really a modern gypsy (he laughs) and I'm happy about it. The point is that I love my life as it is. I hope I make sense.

In this narrative the participant Rashid has not only given up on a fixed identity but also on a fixed 'home'. Being a traveler, a *koly*, helps him to have power over the 'here' and 'now' of the host society (Naficy 1993:131-132). Displacement opens up possibilities of being a traveler and a *koly* and in this case the nostalgia of a 'home' in Iran stabilizes his marginal identity in Australia. Having a 'name' – traveler, *koly*, makes it possible to find a 'home' as Tester argues, "after all, a home is a fabrication that tends to become a reification" (1995:130).

The image of a *koly* gives meaning to how this participant feels and identifies with his place in the world of displacement. *Koly* is an image that provides lightness to his displacement from his native home and familiar place. The *koly* in Iranian folkloric culture is depicted as free and happy, someone who expresses his or her feelings in an open manner despite the social ostracism they may experience in society, they are at

ease with their *koly* identity. In many ways the participants in this study make reference to the experience of the *koly* because like the *koly* they too feel unimportant and insignificant, in Australia, but at the same time they are comfortable with who they are and about their experiences of being without a 'home.'

The participant does not use the word '*koly*' lightly. He knows that once individuals in his culture are alienated from their society they need to be resilient and spirited in order to deal effectively with the thorny challenges they may experience. Thus it is often the romanticized psychology of the *koly* that gives this participant and others the courage to confront the arduous world of displacement. *Koleis* refers to Iranian gypsies who are homeless but are in a state of contentment as they wander around the country from one place to another. Although they live on the margins of society they often represent themselves as free spirits not bothered by material attachments to land and country. It is this spirit that the participant wants to embrace.

The participant insisted that the word *koly* and his identification with its emotional and physical connotations allowed him to express the profundity of what he feels to be in Australia as a displaced person. To him *koly* and *gharibe* present his remembering and longing both for places he used to be in and the place he is in now. They are, we could say, used by Iranians to resist the act of not forgetting the past and the memories it contains. In the case of the participants in this study it is a reflection of how they perceive themselves in displacement and how they chose to create their identification with it in order to move on. It is also a place where they could dream, feel happy and sad, think, remember, plan their future and chose to participate in the wider society.

To conclude this section, we are reminded by Hugo of St. Victor that displacement poses a challenge for individuals:

The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his (quoted in Said, 1994:365).

So far, I have argued, in the context of the narratives presented, that Iranians in Australia, whether migrants or refugees, negotiate cultural meanings in their struggle for an identity. We have also seen that identities are not always taken on in a free and voluntary way but are imposed, taken for granted and inherited. The participants' also spoke of how identities can become a stigma and a psychological burden.

Poetics of displacement

At the beginning of this chapter I stated that I will be analyzing music, poetry and literature to raise questions of how the participants in this study may represent the social and cultural realities of their identity and social world. In particular in their search for a 'home' music, poetry and literature functions as a cultural anchor for not only romantic nostalgia of lived emotions and experiences but also as a carrier of memory and collective experience. In them they have obtained their unique recollections of the places in which they live and the homes in which they were raised. Poetry, music and literature allow them to go back and recapture the emotions and the depth of their experiences that only can be articulated within the poetic

imagination. It is through Persian poetry, music and literature that they are 'being at home.' Gaston Bachelard in his book *'The Poetics of Space'* reveals in an elegant manner the power of poetry:

The great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams. The house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams. Each one of its nooks and corners was a resting-place for day dreaming. And often the resting place particularized the daydream. Our habits of a particular daydream were acquired there. The house, the bedroom, the garret in which we were alone, furnished the frame-work for an interminable dream, one that poetry alone, through the creation of a poetic work, could succeed in achieving completely (1969: 15).

Hugo of St. Victor in examining exile and displacement juxtaposes three sets of individuals, the tender soul, the strong and the perfect individual. The participants in this study evoke the multiple emotions, of these three sets of individuals, which give meaning to the fragments of their identity, and to feelings about 'loss of home'. In discussing these issues I will be using poems, songs and literature, drawn on by the participants, to crystallize emotions and experiences that, as one participant said, 'cannot be expressed in everyday language, everyday words'. The poetry, the music and the literature recounted by the participants in this study compels us to listen to the sounds of Persian melodies and rhymes, which tell us in discrete, symbolic, and ambiguous ways the feelings of being in perpetual displacement.

How can Persian poetry, music and literature tell us about identity, displacement, longing for a 'home' and the construction of subjectivities? The participants in this

study emphasis the importance of poetry and music in helping them find traces of their memory about home and their relationship with Iranians, even if it is a romanticized and ‘imagined,’ collectivity. Poetry is traditionally an important cultural practice and an important aspect of Iranian psychology.

Poetry communicates the unsaid emotions of oppression, marginalization, displacement, and feelings of being a stranger both at home and in ‘foreign’ lands. For Iranians’ poetry speaks to them about ‘fragmentation’ which is seen as a critical theme of their recent history and its significant effects in splintering their lives. While knowledge of poetry is usually associated with education, and social knowledge, and in Iranian society where education is not accessible to everyone, yet almost everyone has knowledge of Iranian classical and contemporary poetry. And people from all walks of life can recite poetry off by heart. For example, it is not unusual to encounter people who can barely read and write to recite in a very engrossing and intense manner poems by classical poets such as Ferdowsi (935- 1020), Attar (1142- 1220), Sa’di (Ca. 1200- Ca. 1291), Hafiz (1321-1389) and of course Rumi (1207-1273) as well as modern poets. The participants in this study when struggling with words to describe their feelings and mood would pause and say: ‘do you know the poem *The Wind Will Take Us* by Forugh Farukhzad where she says: “I am addicted to my despair.”

Despair (*Yaes- Mayous*) is a common theme that was raised by the participants and my argument is that it is a very different form of ‘despair’ from those represented in stereotypical images of refugees in camps. My argument is that the ‘despair’ ‘addicted to’ as represented in the narratives of the participants is an existential kind of despair.

It is a reflexive despair. It is through despair that one comes to have a paradoxical relationship with one's loneliness, one's loss of 'home' and 'identity' and thus despair leads to a 'fuller' meaning of one's existence in displacement.

During my interviews Halehe one of the participants' described the feelings created by music and poetry:

When I read poetry or listen to our classical music I feel lighter. They, of course, initially remind me of some difficult times but after a while I feel fresher and calmer and for some strange reason I feel that I come out of this feeling of being a 'stranger'. Yes, maybe they take me back deeper to my past and make my present clearer. It is a difficult thing to describe. Music and poetry brings me back to who I was before being in *ghorbat*.

Many of the participants pointed out that they have a very close attachment to Persian music and literature and look to it for emotional and spiritual nourishment and comfort.

They stressed that reading poetry or listening to Persian music usually provided them with a deeper sense of empowerment which also encouraged them to reflect and indeed to expand the power of their imagination in order to cope with their displacement. Poetry and music also connects them with other Iranians as it is through these two creative mediums that they feel more at ease to narrate their experiences. It is also a strong bond that connects them to their individual and collective histories.

These art forms provide a frame from which the participants can look and explore in a poetic way the fragments of their experience rather than psychologising their

‘addiction to despair’ which as one participant pointed out was another way of saying they were ‘addicted to displacement,’ to being a *‘koly’* (gypsy) as if somehow they were ancient Persian dervishes, who were often forced into exile, who befriended their despair, loneliness and exile in order to heal its wounds and to overcome it. It is through Hafiz, through Rumi, that the participants’ in this study experience their displacement, their cultural and linguistic displacement. Ancient Sufi mystics often saw displacement, *ghorabt*, as signifying a form of primordial alienation and fragmentation and its antidote is through “detachment.” Hence, the participants’ in this study try to embody the ecstatic cry of these poets in order to tend their displacement with a level of ‘detachment’ that is required to survive it.

More generally one could apply Herzfeld’s observation of a poetics of social interaction, to this study, whereby individuals connect and relate the ‘self’ with broader frames of ‘poetic’ identity. As the narratives of the participants in this study reveal poetry, literature and music are mediums through which they speak about their predicament.

The three central themes that make up the songs, poems and literature chosen by the participants are: despair, fragmentation, longing and renewal.

The following poem cited by a participant, Maryam, from the modernist Persian male poet, Sohrabe Sepeheri (1928-1980) shows both the simplicity and complexity of leaving and looking at things differently with new eyes:

Eyes must be washed
A different way we must see
Umbrellas must be closed
Under the rain we must go
Under the rain we must take our
Thoughts, and memory
One day
I shall come
And I shall bring
a message
I shall come bringing
lilacs to beggars.
I shall come.
I shall give a lilac to the beggar.

.....
I shall love.

This poem echoed Maryam's yearning to look at her experience of migration from Iran in a more hopeful way to see the possibility of returning back to Iran. For this participant who migrated to Australia ten years ago this poem is a compelling reminder of the emotionally troubled way she left with 'thoughts and memories' nestled in her and the helplessness she felt when she thought about 'returning.' But the lilacs, and the rain in the poem symbolize hope and love and of the need to quite literally wash her eyes after ten years of living in *ghorbat* so that she may see her predicament with fresh eyes. For this participant the poem represents her immediate feelings about displacement and 'home' in Iran. Furthermore, it is a poem about hope, about feeling at ease, to some degree, with one's loss and *gharibe* status.

Another participant told me that: ‘here we all live in *Sarab* (Mirage). *Sarab* is usually used by Iranians to illustrate their sense of loss and a mirage like existence. To explain her situation as a refugee who has been here for 4 years this participant used the following poem by Sohrab Sepehri too and chose the word ‘*sarab*’ in the context of the poem to define her world of displacement.

Aftabes o, biaban che fragh
Niest dar ann na ghiah va na darkhat
Ghire avaye gharyan, dighar
Beste har banghy dar in vady rakhat
Dar pase pardhi as ghardo o ghobar
Noghteie larzad as dur siah:
Cheshm agahr pish ravad , mi binad
Adami hast ke mi poyad rah.

There is sun and the desert is so vast
There is neither the sight of vegetation nor trees
Except the rawness⁷
There is no evidence of any other sound in this place.

Behind the currant of dust and dimness
There is a black dot, which is trembling from afar
If eyes go near, they can see
A human being who is in search of his road.

⁷ the participant got really immersed in this poem and at this point began to sing the poem.

This poem vividly captures the formation and reformation of the experience of displacement. In this poem she is searching to explain her life beyond ‘the dimness from afar’ in which she finds something to arrange her deep thoughts and feelings. She says that by reading this poem and thinking about it: ‘I’m able to arrange my thoughts and feelings. The poem deeply communicates with my inner life and helps me to move on beyond what is happening in the present.’

The poem also represents hope after loss. For her the poetic lines ‘if eyes can see’ are very strong symbols of hope. The participant gets enormous inner strength by reading the lines ‘if eyes go near they can see’. For her these lines reveal that if human beings are curious they can go near and close to suffering or happiness and see it and search for solutions in order to overcome them. Thus for her if she can go near hope then she may not only see it but also live it even if it is paradoxical.

Rumi’s Poetry of Displacement

Most of the participants’ felt the poetry of Jelaludin Rumi echoed their raw emotions of displacement. Rumi as he is known in the West is one of the most read Eastern poets in the Western world. His poetry is deeply rooted in his lived experience of displacement and he is known as the greatest mystic poet of the East. He was born in 1207 in the city of Balkh in the Persian province of Khorassan, in what is present day Afghanistan and died (1273) in Konya, Turkey. He lived during the time that Chengiz Khan had established his absolute rule over most of Central Asia which also included Korassan. Rumi and his family were forced to leave Khorassan for Konya

(Iconium), which was then the capital of the Seljuk Empire. And as Helminski a historian on Rumi, writes:

...Konya was a stable and peaceful haven in those times. In Konya Baha'uddin (Rumi's father) accepted an important teaching position, which his son would inherit, and this ancient city on the high Anatolian plain would become the lifelong home of Jelal and his descendents for generations to come' (1981: 53).

Rumi's work, *Mathnawi*, is one of the greatest works of mystic poetry ever written as the English poet, lexicographer and critic Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) observed when explaining the *Mathnawi* and Rumi as its creator:

He makes plain to the Pilgrim the secrets of the Way of Unity, and unveils the Mysteries of the Path of Eternal Truth' (Helminski 1981: 9).

For many Iranians Rumi's poetry represents the definition of a 'perfect human being' the '*Insane kamel*'. A human being in whom the Presence of divine and inner purity is dwelling. Rumi is known by the name of Mullana. His personality and poetry are recognized as representing human emotions that cuts across cultures and religions. Even though a mystic, Rumi never denied his faith but always advocated for the mystic religion of Love. He emphatically says that: 'The religion of Love is like no other religion' (ibid: 10).

And to make this more explicit he wrote the following about wanting to be 'placeless' that is not to belong anywhere except to his lived experience, as he perceived it poetically. It is about fragmentation but what is quite compelling about this poem is

that for more than a 100 years the modern and post-modern western philosophers, poets, writers, painters have been struggling with the same arduous question to deconstruct and explain notions such as identity, time and place which still dominates our contemporary society. And if we observe carefully we can see how the following poem speaks volumes about the anxiety that surrounds these complex issues.

what shall I do, O Muslims?

I do not recognize myself...

I am neither Christian nor Jew,

not of the land, nor the sea.

I am not from nature's mine,

neither of wind nor fire.

I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust on this carpet.

I am not of India nor China,

not of Bulgaria, nor Saqsin;

I'm not of the kingdom of Iraqain,

nor of the land of Khorasan.

I am not of this world nor the next

not of heaven, nor of purgatory.

my place is the placeless,

my trace is the traceless.

Thus many participants read this poem or made reference to it as it embodies both the metaphysical and material dimensions of their displacement and emotional longing for a place, despite their powerful experiences of being placeless. In many ways this ties in with their feeling of being *koly* and of their place as the placeless. Thus this poem echoes the fragmentation of their psychological experience which in many ways

puts them in a powerful position: that is not to have a place but they recognize that in this complex social experience one must also belong to a place. But even having a place is not without its problems as many who return to their 'place' (Iran) they feel 'out of place' (Said, 1999). Thus it is these paradoxes that the Iranian 'migrant' and refugee experiences a yearning for a place but also a feeling of being out of place in a place.

It is very important to note that for Iranians the name Rumi is unquestionably associated with divine love and the deep grief that separation causes in human life. Therefore, I was not surprised to hear that most of the participants referred to his most revered poem: *Song of the Reed*

The poem is profoundly symbolic for all the participants in this study. In this poem they see separation from loved ones and their 'home.' The expressed pain of separation is both vivid and intoxicating and the portrayal of a 'breast torn and tattered with longing' speaks to us about the pain of loss through the body. The separation of the lover is personified as the reed, from the motherland, the reed-bed. For the participants these are metaphors about their own separation, the body from the physical environment of their birth.

In particular, several of the participants emphasized how the following verse represented their social realities. Kamal, a male participant, stated that he is like Rumi's *nay* (reed). Rumi used reed to represent himself who is lamenting to the world as a reed does when it is played by the reed player:

man be har jaamiati nallan shodom
jofthe badhallan o khoshhallan shodaon
Harkesi az zane khod shod yare man.

I've become a companion of happy and sad.
Each befriended me from his/her own ideas,
And none searched out the secrets within m.e.

In order to make bearable his displacement Kamal did not see a disjunction between happy and sad but rather invited both emotions into his psychological space and often has found it difficult to distinguish 'one from the other.' He explained that this was an emotion only those who had experienced separation could feel. Despite these feelings he felt that this poem united him with the larger Iranian collectivity who shared his marginalization from the 'reed- bed' which to him represent memories of his beloved ones, friends, culture, language, home and of course his country of birth. It was only the 'breast torn and tattered with longing' that could convey his anguish about the separation from loved ones, from memories that are buried in time and space that is not physically reachable and emotionally too fragile to open up to everyone.

Beshno as nay chon hekayat mikonad
Vaz jodayha shekayat mikonad
Kaz nistan mara bobridand
Az nafiram mard o zan nalidanad
Sineh khaham sharhe sharhe az fragh
Ta begoyam sharhe daredeh eshtiagh
Har kesi ko daramad as asle khish

*Baz joyad rozzegaher vasle khish
Man be har jamiyati nallan shodam
Jofte badhallan o khoshhallan shoddam
Har kesi az zan khod sohod yare man
Vaz drone man nejost esrare man.
Sere man az nale man dur nist
Leek cheshm o gosh ra noor nist
Tan ze tan va jaan ze jaan masuor nist
Leek kas ra dide jaan dastur nist.*

*Listen to the reed and the tale it tells,
how it sings of separation:
ever since they cut me from the reed bed,
my wail has caused men and women to weep.
I want a breast torn and tattered with longing,
so that I may relate the pain of love.
Whoever has been parted from his source
wants back the time of being united.
At every gathering I play my lament.
I've become a companion of happy and sad.
Each befriended me from his/her own ideas,
and none searched out the secrets within me.
My secret is not different from my lament,
but the senses cannot perceive it.
The body is not hidden from the soul,
nor the soul from the body, but the sight
of the soul is not for everyone*

(Helminski:1981:19).

Khayyam's Ruba'iyat and Displacement

Another poet that was strongly given emphasis by the participants was Omar Khayyam who is considered to be an important Persian mathematician, philosopher and astronomer. Omar Khayyam (1048-1131) was born in Nishapur, which was the capital of Khorrasan, a province of Persia (modern Iran) in the North West of the country. It was the first province of the Persians' that was invaded by the Turkmen tribes under their Saljugh rulers in 1040. They began to expand their rule from Nishapur over all of Persia and Mesopotamia. Peter Avery and John Health Stubbs in their introduction to Kayyam's Ruba'iyat state that:

Khorrasan was commercially rich. It's principal cities lay on trade routes which extended from the far East through Persia to the Mediterranean. It was also fertile and so attracted invasion by the nomadic peoples' of Central Asia once their tribal hosts had come as far as west as the river Oxus. Throughout the middle Ages the inhabitants of Khorrasan were taught painful lessons in sudden reversals of fortune. The incursions of tribesmen who initially had little understanding of the life of settled cultivated or the communities of rich cities threatened its people. (1981: 14-15).

This is the historical context of Omar Khayyam's poetry. In his poetry he committed himself not to suppress his personal feelings and wrote his poems against the established eulogies of court poets who were obliged to write in order to please their rulers.

Khayyam's Rubiyat, according to Avery and Heath-Stubbs:

..became a favourite verse form among intellectuals, those philosophers and mystics in eleventh – and twelfth –century Persia who were in some degree non- conformists opposed to religious fanaticism, so that they have often been called Islam's free-thinkers' (1981:13).

Most of the participants' who referred to Khayyam knew that the essence of his Ruba'iyat were deeply embedded in his Persian philosophy and belief and as Avery and Heath- Stubbs in their introduction about his Ruba'iyat and their essence explain:

...the frequent imagery of mortal clay turned into pots, or of flowers and the edges of books that were once human lips and limbs, can be considered pantheistic. But the emphasis is on Man rather than on God, and in Persian thought it is not so much a matter of 'pantheism' as of the sense of that all the elements of God's creation- of nature –are inextricably and sympathetically combined. Thus the 'pantheism' in the imagery of Persian poetry cannot be taken unreservedly as representing what is meant by this term in the West. Its origins lie in a deeply rooted Oriental acceptance of nature's oneness, a concept which may or may not include belief in a divine Creator in or outside the nature order (1981:19).

The following Rubiyat is illustrative of the oneness of nature:

Chon khod nemishavad kesi farad ra,

Hali khosh kon to in dele soda ra,

May nosh be mahtab, ey mah ke mah,

Besiar begardad ve naybad ma ra.

Since nobody has a lien on tomorrow

gladden the sad heart now:

drink wine in the moonlight, my dear,

because the moon will revolve a long time and it won't be able find us. (Ruba'i- I 8)

Or

what is the gain of our coming and going?

where is the weft of our life's warp?

in the circle of the spheres the lives of so many good men

burn and became dust, but where is the smoke?

For the participants, Omar Khayyam's poetry and the messages they represent are extremely significant in their lives. They think that his poetry provides them with deep insights about their displaced lives. They believe that his philosophy carries meaning to and helps them to reflect more and assists them to continue their lives here regardless of the hardships. This attitude was explicitly evident in one of the participants who when talking about Omar Kahyyam and his influence on his life suddenly recalled the following Ruba'i (22) and recited it to me:

if only there were occasion for repose

if only this long road had an end,

and in the trak of a hunderd thousand years, out of the heart of dust

hope sprang, like greenness.

Challenging Tradition – the Voice of Frough Faroukhzad

Many participants' especially women, referred to the contemporary poet Frough Faroukhzad (1935-1967). Faroukhzad was born into a well to do family in Tehran. She experienced and observed a deeply divided society that separated men and women. She was deeply aware of the historical marginalization of women in her society. In particular she was deeply affected by the lack of opportunities that were provided to women. This was reinforced in her own personal life where she was forced to endure an arranged marriage at the age of seventeen. Through her poetry we understand her unhappiness in this marriage and of her courage to go against traditional gender expectations by divorcing her husband after three years of marriage. The divorce had serious consequences for her as she had to give up the custody of her only child as the law dictated that men have the right to custody of children. After her separation from her husband she pursued a career as a poet and filmmaker.

Her intense poetry is mostly about her own direct experiences of physical and emotional intimacy. They are expressed in her books *The Captive* (1955); *The Wall*; *The Rebellion* (1958); and *Another Birth* (1963).

Frough was the first Iranian female poet to express the sensual desires of a woman through poetic language. The publication of her works in Iran caused much controversy amongst traditionalists and conservatives but also amongst the established intellectuals. Her poetry challenged the deeply held conservative views about women, love, and desire and female sexuality.

She was constantly undermined in the media and was introduced to the public as a ‘morally loose’ woman. However, her works and personality surpassed this demonisation. Her poetry is revered amongst millions of Iranians. And the participants’ in this study regard her as an important and courageous modern poet.

The participant, Fatma, explained that:

I love to read the poem *Ali Kochike* (Little Ali). This is a poem written by Frough Farokhzad our great poet. I love this poem because unlike other poems by Frough, which are mostly sad and melancholic, this poem is very cheerful and the messages it conveys are so obvious that even an ordinary person could understand it.

Another female participant who also identified with the poem *Ali Kochike* explained that:

Well, even though Frough’s poem is about little Ali (*Ali Kochike*) and of course Ali is a boy, and, I’m not, I still identify with the poem. Simply because it is written by Frough who had to struggle a lot against difficulties which she had faced as a woman and a mother in Iran. And she dared to write her incredible poems. I think this poem is a conversation between a mother and her little son and the dream that Ali has one night. For example, the famous beginning line of the poem: ‘*be’ Ali goft madrash roozi*’ / ‘one day Ali’s mother told him that’. I love it and it always reminds me of my stories, my parents, friends, my city and many things that come to me like dreams. And this poem is a dream which is written by Frough who wishes to tell us many things. That’s why I like it and makes me happy to think about it.

This participant recited the poem *Ali Kochike*:

Little Ali

Little Ali

Woke up in the middle of night

Squished his eyes

Yawned a few times

Got up and sat

What did he see?

What did he see?

.....

Little Ali and the pond full of water

.....

Where is little Ali now?

In the garden

What is he picking up?

He is picking up plums from far away orchids.

Amazing, how brave he is!

In this simple poem Frough highlights the depth of the relationship that exists between a mother and her little son, Ali. And joyfully articulates a dream that many children, especially poor children, may have to achieve something that is not always achievable. She symbolically introduces the desired fruit which little Ali dreams of (in this poem red plum). Little Ali achieves his desire and picks plums from far away orchids because he does not have a plum tree in his garden. Thus as one participant

said ‘we have all gone to faraway orchids to find our dreams’, thus the orchid and plum are symbolic and represent the journey of the participants in this study.

Music and Identity

Music like poetry is tied up with identity, experience and memory. It is a powerful medium that communicates emotions in an aesthetically melodic manner which can give strength to memories of shared identity and experience. The powerful role of music in giving meaning to a person’s past was poignantly captured by Alan Lomax (1959: 929):

....the primary effect of music is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work- any or all of these personality shaping experiences (Lomax 1959:929).

Music in the lives of migrants and refugees can also have important therapeutic outcomes, especially for those who have experienced traumatic events such as war, torture and trauma (Dokter, 1998). The narratives of the participants’ reveal the important role that music plays in their lives, especially when they are ‘far away’ from where the music originally comes from, that is from their home. Persian music can be classified into three genres: classical music that was developed in the royal courts over the period of dynastic rule; folk music that is culturally and linguistically very diverse; and urban pop music. Thus each geographical region in Iran has a particular genre of folk music. For example in the South of Iran the folk music is very

swift and very bodily. The music is very much devised towards dancing and called *Musghei Bandari* or Bandari music.

Urban popular – pop music is a type of music that is very much developed in the big urban cities like Tehran and also by the large diaspora community in the United States. Urban pop music, now largely comes from Los Angeles. Each of these music forms encapsulates to a degree the singing of poetry. In particular Sufi poetry, based on Rumi and others, is mixed with music.

The participants in this study referred to the song, *Jomeh*, (Friday) which they felt expressed their pain. This is a song that was sung by an Iranian modern and progressive singer, Farhad (1944 – 2002). The poem *Jomeh* was written by Shahriar Ghambari. The song writer was Esfandyare Monferdzadehe.

In the early 1970s Farhad's songs inspired many young people in Iran who were disillusioned by the political system and angry about the oppression it was imposing on their lives. His most famous song was *Jomeh*. During the rule of the Shah many cultural expressions of art were under censorship because they were regarded as 'subversive.' However, this song managed to escape censorship perhaps because it was a more subtle expression of the grief people felt and experienced. Interestingly, young people interpreted the song as an anti-establishment song and the lyrics captured the public imagination.

Thus the participants' in this study, who were part of that generation of young people, see it as one of the most evocative protest songs of that period. Indeed, the

participants' see the lyrics of *Jomeh* as conveying the reasons of their displacement. The blood symbolizes the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized. It was their blood that poured on Friday and not rain. Friday is also significant as it represents a spiritually sacred day. The idea of wanting to close one's eyes in order not to see the blood is not possible, as there is nowhere to escape, because 'blood is pouring down from the black cloud.' Many of the participants' said that they felt hurt, pain and total sadness at what they had sacrificed and to see that at the end of it all they had ended up as 'gharbeh' and *mohajet* and had finally not only become a stranger in a foreign land but also to oneself. This was a song that evoked emotions not only about their displacement but also was a lament about how they observe and lived their lives from afar, from their birthplace.

In the drained picture frame of these windows

I see a sad picture of sad Fridays

How black is its mourning dress

In its eyes I see the heavy clouds.

Rain is pouring down from the black cloud

My breath is suffocated, Friday is not coming out

I wished I could close my eyes, but I'm not able to do so.

Blood is pouring down from the black cloud

On Fridays blood rains from the cloud instead of rain.

The birth date of Friday goes back to a thousand years

On Fridays the pain rains

(Adam- ensan) man is exhausted of his/her own

They are screaming with their lips closed

Blood is raining from the black cloud

On Fridays the clouds rain blood instead of rain

Friday is the time for leaving, it is the time to take your heart and go away.

The only one who is with me stabs me from behind

Blood is dropping from the black could.

Friday's blood is dropping instead of rain.

For Omid one of the participants in my study this song epitomized memories and meanings about Iran. For him this song evoked memories about his grandmother and his feelings towards her. Omid is 35 years old. His grandmother would play this song when he was only 7 or 8 years old and hence he was too young to remember its impact on the older generation. He said that it was also a song that he ingenuously sang on Novrouz (Persian New Year). However, in Australia this song brings forward different understandings, emotions and feelings. In Australia Omid said that he becomes aware of and perceives the song's potency against power and oppression. In particular he gives it a social and political meaning which he had not furnished it with while in Iran as a child. This song he feels provides a poetic meaning to his experience of detention in Australia. Alienation from Australian culture and system of government as well as his mistreatment at the hands of Australian authorities gives this song a different meaning because he feels it captures his 'inner self', his essence, about his displacement in and out of detention in Australia. In his own words Omid pointed out that:

I still listen to this song and when I listen to it I feel that in one song I am in two different places. One is the memory of my grandmother, her silence, love and colours of Iran and the celebrations of Nowroz. And the other is my experience of being detained in a detention centre in Australia and all its pain and alienation.

The song provides a clear account of space, time and the world as Omid lives it. The song changes in meaning according to his standpoint time and space. Indeed, his experience of the song *Jomeh* in Iran did not encompass mine as I always listened to this song as a corollary of the coercion imposed by the Shah on the people. I did not perceive this song as an ordinary song but rather one that was part of the tapestry of resistance weaved by Iranians. One of the potent lines of the lyric is ‘On Fridays’ blood pours instead of rain’ and this epitomised to me the oppression experienced by Iranians under the Shah’s regime in Iran. Unlike the participant the song did not provide meaning for my diasporic condition in Australia.

Our different interpretations are inherent in our spatial and temporal lived experiences of the song and reveals how meanings are multidimensional and based on our intersubjective relationship with the language and cultural space and historical time that the song was created in. Hence it can be argued that a phenomenon, the song, is hardly ever viewed in its totality, as this would be an abstraction.

A few participants also recited a song by Freydon Froughi, another extremely popular singer during the 1970s. Froughi was from the same generation as Farhad. He had a booming voice which posed a great deal of emphasis on the lyrics he sang. He was a

very socially and artistically aware musician and his songs always received negative responses from the Shah's regime. This of course made him even more acceptable to the Iranian youth in the 1970s who were actively mobilizing against the Shah and what his regime represented. After the revolution like many other progressive singers, artists and intellectuals who stayed in Iran he could not practice his music or indeed perform in public. The following song was chosen by some of the participants. The song reflects the artist's sense of displacement in his own land and provides a deep sense of inspiration for Iranians' in this study. The song is called *Gharrie' man* - my village.

In my imagination (royah)...I see an ancient village

In which there are a handful of shadows who are generous.

In my village, instead of steel people believe in the springs,

in my village kind, hospitable one day I spoke with beautiful poem,

and one day I saw a yellow hand which came from the hell and put a blaze to my village.

There with a handful of steel which were stolen from the spring (cheshmeh)

I saw how they took the shadow and gave it to the sun.

My village was my roya (dream/ fantasy)

and that beautiful spring (cheshmeh) my world.

Hassan who immigrated to Australia 16 years ago explained to me that because the singer Froughi felt totally neglected and ignored by the music industry and left Tehran and lived in a village. Whilst living in the village he allowed a few friends to visit him. It was in this village that he was inspired to write and sing his songs. Hassan told me that this song not only expressed his commitment to his artistic work and the

suffering he endured in his own country, but it also gave depth to his own feelings of displacement in Australia. Like the other participants' Hassan said that:

This song like Farhad's songs are very inspirational to listen to'. He wanted me to know that: ' I play this song and *Jomeh* over and over again. This song and Froughi's voice and words always provide me with new meanings to understand where I come from and where I am. It really captures something deep for me.

A female participant, Shoule, spoke passionately about her favorite Iranian female singer, Googosh:

I like to listen to Googosh's songs. I'm not thinking of any particular song of hers but overall I like her music because it makes me happy. There is too much unhappiness in Iran that is why I left. I think Googosh is a unique symbol of womanhood. The songs, which she sings, represent the inner voice of being a woman. Her songs are about our everyday lives. They make me look at life more positively. I like her approach to laughter, love, womanhood, and freedom. I usually think of her and her songs and spend a lot of time listening, singing and reflecting about them.

Googosh (1951) is a very different singer to both Farhad and Froughi and was one of the most popular pop stars of Iranian music during the Shah's regime in the late 1960s and up until the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Her music, concerts and appearances on Iranian television and radio had a strong following in Iran and was extremely popular amongst the young.

After the revolution she was banned from performing and releasing any records. Unlike many Iranian pop musicians who left Iran during or immediately after the 1979 revolution, fearing that they might be accused of being anti-Islamic by the new regime, Googosh chose to stay. However, she was banned to perform her music. For almost twenty years she lived in seclusion in Tehran without producing and performing music.

Soon after the revolution the Iranian Islamic Government banned all women from performing in public especially in the presence of men. She was granted to leave the country in 2003 and her first concerts abroad, especially in London and Canada, were extremely successful and were enthusiastically attended by thousands of Iranians.

For many different reasons, Iranians, especially those who were born after the revolution and those who belong to the pre-1979 generation perceive her as an icon of an Iran that no longer exists. Googosh represented a free woman under a very despotic regime during the Shah and she sang songs of love, even forbidden love. All of this was considered too decadent for both many intellectuals, traditionally minded Iranians from all walks of life as well as the Islamic regime. However, for the participants' in this study, especially for those who were born after 1979 she represents a free spirit and a longing for an Iran where women could be free to perform and express themselves creatively. Interestingly an American filmmaker, Farhad Zamani, has made a film about Googosh. The film is called: 'Iran's Daughter'. It traces her life and music and its status under the Islamic regime. The film also makes reference to the changing plight of women in Iran under different political systems.

Persian Literature and Resilience

Apart from poetry and music, literature was also viewed by the participants as an important way to help them reflect and think about the past and present of their experience. In particular the book, *The Little Black Fish*, (1997) written by Samad Behranghi (1939-1968) was considered to be an important story that profoundly affected them. This book was first published in Persian in 1968.

The participant, Hassan who came to Australia as a refugee, captures the feeling that Behranghi's book had on him. Hassan has been living in Australia for almost 16 years:

Samad's *The Little Black Fish* was one of those stories which had a great impact on me in my youth. It was before the revolution of 1979. It taught me how a little person (the fish) can widen its horizon to move away from a small place to a bigger place in order to learn and change things in his or her life and those of others. But to achieve this it had to overcome a lot of obstacles⁸ to arrive there. The story of the black fish and how it dreamed to enter the sea and tackle problems it came across after leaving the pond in which it and other fishes were trapped was really a great lesson that I learnt from Samad Behranghi's book.

I was so immersed in this book and even today keeps me wondering of how this little fish had to overcome all the ups and downs in order to arrive to its destination. It taught me about resilience. I have to admit as a young person in Iran this book definitely influenced me and shaped my identity. It still has a huge impact on me as I feel like a little fish in this place. I have overcome

⁸ Hassan used the word *Sad* 'dam' to signify the obstacles that one needs to cross over before reaching to the desired destination

many of my problems to live here but there are still so many others to deal with too. And any time I feel that I'm stuck I think of Samad's book.

Since his death in 1968 Samad Behranghi has become a very important figure in Iranian literature. Samad dedicated his rather short life to teaching and writing for children until his death. He spent years teaching in the rural areas of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan. It was in these years of teaching children in remote villages that he observed the harsh conditions that they endured. This motivated him to dedicate his whole life to teach and work with children in remote parts of Iran.

Samad was an astute observer of Iranian society and was a thorn on the side of the Shah's regime that detested his writing because it challenged its corruption. His works explored important themes that touched the feelings of a large population who felt marginalized and neglected by the Shah's regime. His stories explored the division between the rich and the poor, the life of a village and a city dweller and the differences that existed between the educated and the illiterate.

Kaveh the Blacksmith- The Iranian Spirit of Hope

For Iranians the epic poems of Shahnameh (King's Letter) is like Homer's Iliad for Greeks. But contrary to Iliad, the Shahnameh stresses the importance of the lives of its characters who are generally mortal humans. According to Banani (1988) the Shahnameh contains a realistic approach to events. It is therefore more historically, religiously and psychologically inclusive than the Iliad which is largely based on Homer's deep attachment to mythological events and to the figures he created to

represent ancient Greeks and their supernatural Gods who controlled and maintained the universe.

Banani comparing these two texts in order to discuss Homeric and Ferdowsian gods says that:

But the God of the *Shahnameh* is the unknowable God of Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Unlike the deities of the Iliad he (Ferdowsi) is not implicated in the struggle of the mortals, though he is constantly evoked and beseeched (1988:118).

The most quoted story from the *Shahname* by the participants in this study is the story of *Kāveh the Blacksmith*. This could be because of the harsh and repressive experiences that many of them have endured. It is also a story that gives hope and where tyranny is overthrown. Kaveh is a mythical figure of ancient Persia who leads a popular rebellion against a cruel and callous foreign ruler, Zahhak, who is from Babylonia. Zahhak is not human but a mythical character, a demon and is implicitly representing a malevolent king. After losing 18 of his sons to Zahhak's serpents Kaveh rebelled against Zahhak's rule in Persia and mobilised the people to overthrow the tyrant King.

The story of *Kaveh the Blacksmith* is recounted by a participant who read a small section of the story to me and gave me the Persian text which is translated below. This story is important to Iranians in that it represents the other side of their story. I include this summary of the story of *Kaveh* to draw attention to the spirit and resilience evoked by *Kaveh* and the faith and confidence it offers to the participants. For them *Kaveh* represents resistance against any kind of oppression and symbolizes the Iranian spirit its ultimate victory over tyranny:

Eblis [the Spirit of Evil] appeared to Zahak one day in the guise of a righteous man, and he conquered the heart of the young prince through the appearance of goodness. The young man, ignorant of the stranger's ill deeds, entrusted to him his willing ear, his mind, his heart, and his pure soul. Thus he threw himself into misery.

Eblis then switched to another strategem. He disguised himself as a young man, eloquent of tongue, perceptive of heart, and pure of body. He went to Zahak's home and said, "May the king be satisfied with me. I am a famous cook." When Zahak heard this, he gave Eblis the key to the royal kitchen, and put him in charge.

At that period the human body grew slowly, because there were fewer foods. So the evil Ahriman [Spirit of the Lie, the Evil which Eblis embodies] gave Zahak the idea of killing animals. First the cook gave him the yolk of eggs, and for a time kept him in health. Then he made food from all kinds of animals, from birds and four-footed animals. He nourished Zahak like a ferocious lion to make him more savage.

Whatever he commanded Zahak, Zahak would do, even placing his soul in pawn at his command. Zahak ate all this new food, and praised the cook. And the taste of the food became good to that unfortunate man.

The deceiver said, "May you live forever, O majestic King! I will make a dish for you tomorrow that will nourish you completely." He departed, spent the night considering what he should prepare the next day to surprise him.

Next morning, when the blue dome of sky displayed its golden jewel, he cooked a partridge, and approached expectantly. The foreign King placed his hand on the table to eat, and in the emptiness of his mind he bestowed his affection on the cook.

On the third day, the cook decorated the table with fowl and lamb of different varieties.

On the fourth day, when he had set the table, he brought food prepared from the spine of the cow, seasoned with saffron and rosewater as well as vintage wine and musk-butter. When Zahak stretched out his hand and ate, he was amazed how skilled and wise the cook was, and said, "Tell me your fondest wish, and I will grant it."

The cook said, "O King, may you live forever and always be King. My heart is wholly filled with your love. The wealth of my soul is in beholding your face. I have only one thing to request, though I realize I am in no position to ask. That is, that you permit me to kiss both your shoulders, and to touch them with my eyes and face.

When Zahak heard the man's wish, he had no way of knowing his secret intent. So he said, "I grant it. Your name will be famous." Thus he permitted the demon to become one with him. As soon as Eblis kissed him, the demon vanished, a wonder such as no one had ever seen. And from Zahak's shoulders grew two black snakes.

Zahak became distraught, and asked everywhere for a remedy. At last, he cut the snakes off. But wonder of wonders, like the cut trunk of a tree, those two snakes grew back again. Wise doctors gathered around him, each offering a different opinion. They searched all fields, including that of magic, but could find no cure.

Then Eblis appeared once again before Zahak, in the guise of a doctor. He said, "This sickness has a cure. Wait and you will see that there is a painless remedy. Prepare food, and quiet the snakes by feeding them. There is no other way. Give them nothing but the brains of men. This is your prescription. Your pain and its cure are lamentable. Each day you must kill two men at once, and feed their brains to the snakes." Through this advice, the chief of the demons intended to pursue his work in secret, destroying all people on earth.

When Zahak became King, he reigned for a thousand years. The tradition of the Wise Men [*Magi*, priests of the Zoroastrians] disappeared. The greed of demons spread

through the earth. Art became debased, and sleight of hand was admired.

Righteousness was hidden; hurtfulness and the lie were everywhere. The demons stretched out their hands toward evil. There was no sign of goodness, except in hiding.

Two ladies from the house of Jamshid (the first methological Persain king) -- both sisters of Jamshid and crowns of womanhood -- were dragged from the court, trembling like willow leaves. Shahnaz and Arnavaz were carried off to the house of Zahak and delivered over to that dragon. He led them into the path of evil, and taught them sorcery and magic. The whole world was his, and he knew nothing but plundering, burning, killing, and the teaching of evil.

Each night two men, from the hills or elsewhere, were taken by the cook, the "feeder," to the King's kitchen. From them he prepared a cure for the King, killing them and drawing out their brains to feed the dragon.

At that moment, the voice of a petitioner was heard from the gates of the palace, crying for his rights. They brought before the King this man who claimed he had been unjustly treated. The king asked with arrogance, "Tell me, who was it who mistreated you."

Beating himself on the head, the man replied, "I am Kaveh. I have come here to demand my rights. My soul groans because of your acts. O King, if your duty is to grant men's rights, may God give you praise. I have come to you before, several times. Each time I come, a knife cuts away at my heart. If you are not in fact reaching your arm forth in injustice, then why do you kill my sons?"

Consider my position, and have mercy! Each time, you have crushed my heart. Tell me, O king, what have I ever done to you? I am innocent. You give no reason. Look at me, O great one! Do not add even more evil to what you have done. My back is

bent with years. I am no longer young, and I have no more sons. There is no bond in the world greater than that of a son. Even injustice has its limits. I know you use pretexts to conceal your injustices; but what is your pretext, evil man, for tormenting me? I am an old blacksmith, and used to fire. But you pour more fire on my head.

You are a King, a King with the body of a dragon. Still, I appeal to you for a fair verdict. If, as you claim, the seven lands of the world are yours, why then does the evil of the world fall upon us? I insist that there be a trial between us, the outcome of which will stand as one of the wonders of the world. Your account must be made clear. They say the time has come for my last son to be killed. Should the brains of my sons, one by one, be fed to your snakes? "

Considering what Kaveh had said, the King was amazed at his words. He ordered that the man's son be returned to him. Then the King said graciously, "Now, you too join with the others in signing the document."

When Kaveh had read the certification, he turned his head away and cried out, "O men gathered here at the foot of the demon, have you broken from the love of the King of the Universe? All of you have taken the path to hell in binding your hearts to these words. I will not certify this document. I am not at all afraid of the King." And he leapt, trembling, from his seat, tore the document into shreds, and stamped on them. Then, with his son he left the palace and headed for home.

When Kaveh left the palace, the people gathered around him in the market place. He shouted, exhorting the people to justice and the whole world to compassion. He was wearing the leather apron that smiths wear when working with fire. He took it, and raised it on the point of a spear. A tumult then rose in the market. With the spear in his hand, he shouted, "O good people, believers in God, whoever has love for Faridun (a mythological hero) in his heart, withdraw your necks from Zahak's chains!

Together, we will go join Faridun and be secure there in the shadow of his love. The struggle will be hard, for this is the kingdom of Ahriman, sworn enemy of the Creator of the Universe.”

Beneath the standard of that worthless animal skin, voices that had been friendly to Zahak now became the voices of enemies. Kaveh led them, gathering a great army. The people took Zahak to Shir-Khan, to Mount Demavand (the highest and scared mountain peak in Iran) and there they placed him in chains. His very name was deemed unclean. He was separated from his relatives. And the world was freed from his evil.

The participants in this study are passionate about the story of *Kaveh the Blacksmith*. This story is in many ways a tale about themselves and the history of their homeland which has been deeply affected by cruel Kings, invaders and oppressive rulers. The story is one of hope.

Conclusion

Poetry, music and literature give meaning to the experiences and feelings of the participants in this study. The writers, the poets, the musicians they have chosen speak volumes about their social world, their ethics, their politics, their longings and desires. As I pointed out many do not want to be identified as ‘political’ as it seems very doctrinal to them, but rather they articulate their ‘political’ feelings through poems, music and literature. It is an elegant and discrete way to give voice to feelings that cannot find expression in reductive and oversimplified language of politics. It is not only the lyrics of a song, the verse of a poem or the character in a story they identify with but also they identify with the poets, the musicians and the writers. The lives and

struggles of the poets, musicians and writers, they have cited here, is seen to reflect their own points of experience.

This chapter has traced the negotiation and dynamics of identity and the ways the participants come to understand, negotiate and deconstruct its meanings and effects on their everyday lives. At the same time I have analyzed the mediums through which the participants speak to us about their experiences of displacement, the loss of place and the destruction and construction of their identities and experiences. Through the narratives of the participants, it appears that the poetic language of literature, music and poetry has potency, vigor and a depth that can speak about their struggling emotions of displacement, of being a stranger in a foreign country. When 'everyday language' fails to give meaning to their emotional feelings of displacement it is the poetic works developed in the Persian language and Iranian culture that gives profundity to their experiences of loss, loss of friends, loss of memories, loss of home, and the ambivalence of being a stranger.

The next chapter discusses the cultural trauma of displacement and the effects of cultural stigma on Iranian migrants and refugees. While this chapter has discussed the ways the participants' construct and deconstruct their identity in displacement and on how they speak about their displacement the following chapter focuses specifically on how cultural trauma is experienced and the ways the participants narrate this experience.

Chapter 4

Narratives of Cultural Trauma and Identity

To try to understand the experience of another it is necessary to dismantle the world as seen from one's own place within it, and to reassemble it as seen from his. For example, to understand a given choice another makes, one must face in imagination the lack of choices which may confront and deny him. The well-fed are incapable of understanding the choices of the under-fed. The world has to be dismantled and re-assembled in order to be able to grasp, however clumsily, the experience of another (Berger, 1985:92-94).

Introduction

It was in 2004 and I needed several statutory declaration forms to be signed and my friend Nahid agreed to be a witness and to authorise them. Once she had signed the papers I folded them up and gently placed it in a yellow envelope. It was not until the next day when I went to present the papers to the government department that the officer stated that 'Monica Newman' could not be a witness to my documents as she was a student. I responded by saying that I did not know who 'Monica' was and that she did not sign my papers. The officer looked suspiciously at me and with his index finger pointed to the name signed on the forms I submitted. I gently took the forms away from under his hands and stared at the signed name, 'Monica', totally staggered and shocked at not recognising this rather puzzlingly signature. When I arrived home

I rang my friend and explained what had happened. She laughed loudly and apologised for not telling me that she had changed her first name and as a family they had adopted 'Newman' as their surname. They found the name in the yellow pages and unreservedly accepted it by officially applying to the Office of Births, Deaths and Marriages. She and her four siblings decided to change their name because it was 'difficult' she explained, being identified as Iranian especially when they travelled overseas. By adopting the name 'Monica Newman' she could disguise her Iranian identity and thus not carry the racial and religious 'bits and pieces' that cause her shame as well as stigma. The 'hiding' of one's racial and religious 'bits and pieces' are a dramatic disavowal of one's cultural and ethno religious identity.

Arthur Frank in his book, *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995) makes reference to Erving Goffman's work on stigma and the debilitating effects it has on the stigmatised body. Frank's analysis of stigma is especially poignant in regard to 'Monica's' story and her attempt to conceal her identity by Anglicising her name:

Erving Goffman's classic work on stigma shows that society demands a considerable level of body control from its members; loss of this control is stigmatising, and special work is required to manage the lack of control. Stigma, Goffman points out, is embarrassing, not just for the stigmatised person but for those who are confronted with the stigma and have to react to it. Thus the work of the stigmatised person is not only to avoid embarrassing himself by being out of control in situations where control is expected. The person must also avoid embarrassing others, who should be protected from the spectre of lost body control (1995: 31).

I have quoted Frank at length because it illuminates the stigma experienced by 'Monica' and hence her need to change her name; while theoretically she has 'removed' the stigma of being labeled as Iranian her physical bodily representation cannot hide her Otherness, the 'Middle Eastern appearance' or in the words of Goffman she cannot hide her 'spoiled identity' by 'passing' as 'Monica'. Narratives such as 'Monica's' reveal not only the stigma of being Iranian but also the cultural trauma experienced.

It is within the context of this and other narratives of Iranian refugees and migrants living in Melbourne that I want to bring to the fore an opening up of the 'cultural trauma' experienced by the participants in this study. The ethnography on which this chapter is based draws primarily from 5 main participants who are refugees and migrants and looks at how they sense their migration and refugee experiences and 'under what conditions' they experience cultural trauma (Alexander 2002:9). In particular I want to analyse how cultural trauma is produced through significant events that the participants in this study have experienced and I try to unravel why the collective identity of Iranians is so powerfully associated with 'fragmentation' 'loss' and 'trauma.' The questions this chapter asks: how do Iranians experience and represent their trauma? And do Iranians in the diaspora⁹ experience their cultural trauma as a form of stigmatization?

⁹ I use the term diaspora to encapsulate immigrant, refugee and exiled communities who despite their heterogeneous make up share the experience of departure and separation from a common home and of which they have a collective memory. This term is based on Safran's definition and is cited by James Clifford (1994) and diasporas are defined as: 'expatriate minority communities that are dispersed from an original 'centre' to at least two 'peripheral' places; maintain a memory vision or myth about their original homeland; believe they are not and perhaps, cannot be fully accepted by their host country; and see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; are committed to maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and finally a diaspora group's consciousness and solidarity are 'importantly defined' by its continuing relationship with the homeland.

Theoretical Framework - Cultural Trauma

The interdisciplinary literature on theories of cultural trauma is extensive (Berkman, 2000; Garder, 1997; Gibney, 1997; Kelaher, 2000; Bauman, 1989; De Varis, 1996) however the theory of cultural trauma outlined by Alexander et al is particularly apposite to studying Iranians in the diaspora because it helps illuminate how the historical events of post 1979 in Iran have had a profound cultural and traumatic effect on their identity so much so that I wish to argue that they have experienced their traumatization as a form of stigmatization in Australia.

Alexander (2000) offers an eloquent discussion of trauma and stresses that it has both a collective and individual dimension. A cultural trauma transpires 'when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever, and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander et al; 2004:1). Generally, psychological and psychoanalytical theories structure trauma at an individual level however for this study I have sought to employ a more cultural notion of trauma as it could provide an elucidation of the new collective identities being formed by Iranian immigrants and refugees who feel that their 'identity' as an 'Iranian' have been undermined because of the injury and destruction caused by the events of post 1979. The ongoing social turmoil in Iran, I argue, is embedded in their everyday life as *trauma* as the characteristics of post 1979 and the current situation are experienced by the participants in this study as a form of violent disruption and change. Arthur Neal in his study of trauma and memory poignantly argues that national traumas have been produced by 'individual and collective reactions to a volcano-like event that shook the foundations of the social world' (cited in Alexander

et al 2004:3). He further explicates that an event or historical episode can traumatise the collective identity because it is ‘an extraordinary event,’ that has such ‘an explosive quality’ that it produces ‘disruption’ and ‘radical change...within a short period of time’ (cited in Alexander et al 2004:3). Likewise I adopt Neal’s conceptualisation of trauma to establish the experiences of trauma experienced by the participants in this study. ‘Disruption’, ‘displacement’ and ‘rapid change’ are the critical words used by the participants in this study to describe their experiences of trauma. Thus the narratives discussed in this chapter reveal the materialisation of identities that are being shaped and formed in moments of crisis.

Unlike psychological or physical trauma which causes an emotional injury and creates pain, distress and agony to the individual; cultural trauma refers more to a severe and dramatic loss of collective identity and one where the social fabric of the group is torn apart. This is aptly captured by Kai Erikson who describes collective trauma as: ‘.....a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with ‘trauma.’ But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization and that an important part of the self has disappeared...We no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body’ (Erikson 1976, 153-54).

It is argued that cultural trauma does not need to be experienced by everyone in the group nor does all or any of them have to live through it; but rather the major ‘cause’ of the traumatic process needs to be identified and established through discussion and

contemplation. Alexander identifies this process as ‘a meaning struggle,’ ‘a trauma process’ or ‘trauma drama’ where a group’s experience of a social crisis or disruption develops into a crisis of identity and meaning. Neil Smelser describes cultural trauma in a more tangible manner: ‘a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect; b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society’s [or groups] existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.’ (Cited in Alexander et all, 2004: 270).

In the following pages, I will describe the ethnographic data on ‘cultural trauma’ based upon my interviews.

Iranian Stories of Cultural Trauma

An underlying and compelling aspect of Iranian diasporic experience is one that insists on the *fragility* of identity. Concepts about ‘who are we’ and ‘what have we become’ are frequently uttered by Iranian men and women who are refugees and migrants. Their unfolding stories, in this chapter, represent their identities as being connected to and born out of extraordinary social upheavals that link personal lives to historical conditions. The social landscape of their diasporic experience is one, they argue, where their identity is deeply fractured but is also situated as ‘threatening’ the harmony of the global community. Thus the fragility of their identity are shaped, to a large degree, from the trauma experienced ‘over there’ in Iran because as the medical anthropologist Sandy Gifford in a national radio interview pointed out: the destructive effects of torture, trauma and displacement effects not just the body of the individual but also their wider community thus the ‘effects are passed from one generation to the

next becoming collective nightmares that haunt the successful rebuilding of community difficult to accomplish' (Gifford, 2005).

I would extend this argument by arguing that the fragility of their identity and personhood is also affected by the undignified labels fixed on to them as a result of historical tensions played out in the international arena. Indeed these fixed labels, which I will illustrate with the narratives of the participants below, come to inform their identity as a form of stigmatisation. Thus Iranians in the diaspora have come to epitomise 'undesired difference' (Goffman 1959) and it is through this social construction of Iranian identity in the diaspora that we can see the links between cultural trauma and stigmatised identity formation amongst the participants in this study.

The participants in this study talk about a collective torment, sadness, and resentment which they explain stems from the historical circumstances of Iran which have interrupted their lives, dispersed, and displaced them all over the world. Among the narrative of refugees and immigrants in this study there are three events that stand out above all others which shape their fragile identities as well as their traumatic experiences and stigmatised identity: 1) the 1979 revolution; 2) the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988) and; 3) post 9/11. It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss the ideologies surrounding the 1979 Iranian revolution, the war between Iran and Iraq or indeed post September 11, but rather I want to give poignancy to the stories that vividly capture the conditions of trauma; the personal sacrifices; and everyday hopes; as well as the identities and aspirations that are temporarily put on hold as a result of these historical experiences. My approach to the study of narratives of cultural trauma

is like what Jeffrey Alexander in *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma* (Alexander et al, 2004) explained when he wrote that ‘it is neither ontology nor morality, but epistemology with which we are concerned’ This epistemological approach is concerned with “how and under what conditions the claims’ of trauma are made and with ‘what results’ (Alexander et al, 2004:9).

This approach is quite different to most studies on trauma which seek to establish ontological authenticity and try to assert the truthfulness of the claims made by individuals. Unlike the ontological approach my study of Iranians’ in displacement and their experiences of trauma is concerned with ‘the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves’ (ibid: 10). Thus this thesis is not examining the ‘ontological reality’ of their trauma but rather the effects and consequences of it.

The narratives of the participants in this study serves to underscore my contention that the 1979 Iranian revolution provides the contextual frame of a link between the post revolutionary migrants that arrived in Australia and those that have entered Australia two decades later as migrants or refugees. What is fascinating between these two narratives is how the 1979 revolution has produced people unknown to each other’s stories and experiences thus the post revolutionary migrants are seen as a ‘mystery’ by those who are recent arrivals, as refugees or migrants. The mystery of the post revolutionary migrants and refugees largely stems as a result of their erasure from the Iranian nation’s memory. They are unknowns by a generation that has lived through the revolution that ‘they’ created or at least were part of but nevertheless felt that they could not live under its conditions.

The 1979 revolution can be viewed as the linchpin that connects and provides a continuity of narrative for the post revolutionary migrants and the newly arrived refugees because the effects of the revolution are viewed as the fundamental reason for their ‘dispersion into foreign lands, languages and cultures.’ Rather than viewing 1979 as disconnecting post revolutionary migrants and refugees from newly arrived migrants and refugees I am arguing that it provides the links between their past and present. In a compelling way the post revolutionary migrants provide the ‘past’ and the newly arrived refugees symbolise the ‘present’ of their histories. Thus giving continuity to the stories of the post revolutionary migrants and providing context for the narratives of the recently arrived migrants and refugees.

Trauma of 1979 and Identity in the Diaspora

The 1979 Iranian revolution is remembered as a time in which thousands of people were forced to leave their birthplace¹⁰ and is seen as having permanently changed the substance of what it means to be an Iranian. In particular the qualities and attributes of individual social lives are seen to have been disrupted and displaced by the powers of a theocratic state. The stories of the participants in this chapter provide raw data for an understanding of the cumulative effects of trauma and its relationship to their identity in the diaspora. Often the participants remarked on the tragic comic manner of the revolution: the despotic leaders of the regime were overthrown and sent into exile; but paradoxically they (many of the participants in this study who were involved in the mobilization against the Shah’s regime) too found themselves in exile in the diaspora. Often one of the tragic experiences of being ‘outside’ Iran identified by all the

¹⁰ For various reasons circa 3,000,000 have left Iran since the revolution of 1979.

participants has been the erroneously inflated negative identity assigned to them by the western media, western cultural and political discourses. Generally the identity that is 'fixed on to' Iranians is one that is made up of fragmentary bits and pieces, and it is often symbols from the 1979 revolution, in particular of 'mad mullahs,' and 'veiled women'.

The first major traumatic event of central importance in the forging of an identity in the diaspora is identified as being the 1979 revolution which participants stated identified them with 'conflict' and 'fragmentation.' As the revolution unfolded, they watched on television, what I call, the 'theatrical performance' of young Iranian students who took over the American embassy and which subsequently led to hostilities against Iranians in Western countries (Efrain, 2002). Indeed, many of the participants explained that their identities evoked a violent presence in the minds of Westerners as a result of the 'hostage crisis' and it was almost impossible for them to craft an identity and narrative of their displacement outside the popular distorted constructions. There was no considerate perspective of who they were and what they were doing in Australia, it seemed as if Australian society had viewed all those that left Iran as a mirror image of the 'hostage takers.' The 'theatrical performance' of the hostage crisis in the American Embassy in Tehran had generated a great deal of attention in Australia as indeed internationally but for many Iranians living in Australia and travelling to European countries and North America the hostage crisis made their every movement traumatic and became an intimidating force that undermined their very existence and identity.

Story One

Rana came to Australia as a migrant in 1980. She is a 45 year old woman and is married with two children. As a university graduate she is currently working as a store manager:

The reason that I wanted to leave my country was not political, I was always apolitical during the Shah's time. I was not interested in anything really except to have a normal life with my family and friends. I wanted to leave because of the violence and chaos. I was young and really wanted a peaceful life like the one before the revolution of 1979. I was shocked to observe so much violence in my country of birth and I'm not the kind of person who can tolerate it for long. Tehran was a terrible battleground. As soon the Shah left and later as Americans were taken hostage, Tehran and the whole of Iran changed. The violence accelerated and there were hundreds of executions in the *midans* (public squares), it was frightening and terrible. I was terrified to see the dead corpses of the executed in the daily newspapers and the television for months and this really began to effect me. I became insecure and fearful of anyone who I did not know and began to have nightmares. These conditions, this violence and especially the uncertainty forced me to make a critical decision to leave Iran. I left with a very sad feeling. The decision of leaving had caused me deep sadness.

Being forced to leave her country of birth because of uncertainty, violence and insecurity Rana took the path of many Iranians that left Iran after 1979. Rana was compelled to leave and was able to gain a visa to Canada and subsequently to Australia. Although she returned to Iran for a visit several years ago she felt haunted by past events, especially the one's that took place in the *midans* that have left a

traumatic injury on her body so much so that when ‘these strong feelings and memories’ are evoked she feels agitated and frightened and ‘I look for a place to hide and cry.’

The dimensions of trauma caused by the events of the 1979 revolution present permanent injuries to the collective identity of Iranians and the way they experience this identity in contemporary Australia. Rana continues her story by talking about the ‘hostage crisis’ with a sense of alarm, anxiety and dismay because it has had such a compelling affect on the construction of ‘Iranian identity.’

the hostage crisis lasted for nearly 14 months, I think, and everything was quite tense. The students’ wanted the shah to be trialed, there were demonstrations everyday. I was terrified. But when I came here the ‘hostage crisis’ was always on TV and the newspapers. Even when it ended I saw documentaries and footages of the embassy and the hostage takers. It always brought back hurtful feelings, it scared me. People in the West saw us as hostage takers and terrorists. Before this incident we did not have a bad image in the West maybe we were unknown, as a country and people but these events made sure the world knew where Iran was. I always felt uneasy about travelling and even saying ‘I am Iranian’ because I began to feel after the ‘hostage crisis’ that we were not a modern and civilised community. I felt like how they depicted us: angry, insensitive and as if we were somehow untamed humans. I began to really believe this because people would say: ‘why do your people do this?’ I tried to be dismissive of my Iranian identity because there is so much misunderstanding as if the hostage takers and Iranians living here are the same, many of us left because of that type of zealous behaviour. Our culture, our history and our literature are never represented in the media. We only see footage of mobs in streets and even today there

are TV current affair programs that show images of the 'hostage crisis.' I don't know why. It is finished but their affect on me, on us, as a community, is huge.

The 'hostage crisis' was deployed by the media in a very intense manner and it overpowered any kind of meaningful representation of Iranians. Through the images of the 'hostage crisis' Iranians came to represent religious fanaticism, violence and belligerency. Edward Said, in his analysis of media representations of Islam and the Middle East observes:

Within a week after the embassy occupation took place on November 4, pictures of a scowling Ayatollah Khomeini were as frequent and unchanging in what they were supposed to be telling the viewer as the endless pictures of vast Iranian mobs. The burning (and selling) of Iranian flags by irate Americans became a regular pastime; the press faithfully reported this kind of patriotism. Increasingly there were frequent reports showing the popular confusion between Arabs and Iranians, such as the one carried by the Boston Globe on November 10 of an angry Springfield crowd shouting "Arab go home" (Said, 1997:88).

Said concludes his analysis by arguing that Iranians' were represented as fanatics wanting to achieve martyrdom at any cost and Iran was a "poorly defined and badly misunderstood abstraction" (ibid: 83). As Rana's story reveals the demonisation of Iran during the 'hostage crisis' had a profound affect on her identity and the difficulties it posed in her interactions with mainstream Australian society.

While Rana left Iran because she could no longer tolerate the trauma and chaos caused by the 1979 revolution she however found herself in an environment, Australia, although far from Iran was nevertheless deeply affected by what was happening there. The historical episode of 1979 is considered by Rana and other participants as an abrupt ‘volcano’ or ‘earthquake’ because of how quickly their lives were changed, and their identities were reformulated and their trajectories mapped out without their engagement.

It was abrupt and they had no time to prepare for it. In fact because they had no time to prepare for it many opted to leave the country to ‘prepare’ their lives somewhere else. Arranging one’s life in another country as Rana’s story reveals is not straightforward and unproblematic. For the Iranian diaspora struggling with negative stereotypes is a critical factor of their trauma narrative. The ‘hostage crisis’ not only frames but also links Iranians to negative stereotypes, as Rana’s narrative reveals Iranians form a despised group that is highly stigmatised. The ‘hostage crisis’ became her ‘personal’ problem because she was Iranian. Erving Goffman in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* argues that stigma ‘.....reduces the bearer from a whole and unusual person to a tainted, discounted one’ (1963). Rana’s narrative poignantly explores this transformation from a ‘whole’ person to a ‘tainted’ one:

I come from a relatively well to do family and as far as I remember I had a rather sheltered life with liberal minded parents. They were not supporters of the Shah but they also did not mind the system we had and lived in. My father died just before the revolution and my mother left for Canada to live with my sister. I could not go because I could not break from my brothers and sisters and I loved our house and

neighbourhood. I was very attached to everything there. I met my husband in Australia and it has taken me years to understand the impact of being forced out of your country, leaving things behind and I could not identify with Australia – they have no idea who I am, where I come from, all they see is ‘conflict’ and ‘conflict’ there is more to us than this. When you say ‘I am Iranian’ it immediately becomes very political rather than cultural. Our whole identity is reduced to this [politics] and nothing else that’s why I feel so strange and in transition, I cannot settle.

Rana’s story highlights how historical and political settings not only detach individuals and groups from their context but also how they popularise particular negative stereotypes. The social salience of the ‘hostage crisis’ is significant because it has affected the meanings ascribed to ‘Iranian’ and has come to signify Iranians in a particular way, and generally of ‘making a meaning stick’ (Thompson in Deacon et al. 1999,325). Thus the assigned meanings that ‘stick’ to the social construct ‘Iranian’ are ‘terrorist’ ‘anti western’ ‘fundamentalist’ add infinitum, where ‘Iranians’ in the diaspora are assumed to fit in with these stereotypes. Rana laments that people in the West do not know who they are, for example she is from a liberal middle class background that was quite apolitical; she had a sheltered life; and the stereotypes that she has come to be identified with in the West are quite ‘*ajeebe*’ (strange) to her and other Iranians.

But Rana like so many of the participants in this study are eager to point out that there is a disjuncture between these sticky labels and who they are. She grew up during the ‘modernist’ period between the 1960s and the mid 1970s where Iranian middle class women wore ‘mini skirts and freely travelled to European countries’ without being labelled in derogatory terms or scrutinised at every check point. The stigma of being

Iranian in Australia and generally in European and Anglophone countries, have added to the emotional trauma of being abruptly 'put out of place;' dislocated from one's native language; culture; and community. Before the 1979 revolution Rana's life included a rich network of friends and social and cultural activities and an intimate array of relationships with neighbours and extended family. She had affective relationships that she finds hard to establish in Australia. Social isolation compounded with negative stereotypes has forced Rana to be reclusive.

In reading Rana's narrative, one notices the situational nature of identities and how it moves and changes according to the context and its relational features. Iranian identity during the modernist period where women like Rana could travel to Europe without being stigmatised is quite different to how it is experienced in the 21st century which is underscored by global politics around 'terrorism' and the preservation of 'western values and norms.'

According to Stuart Hall: 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned and position ourselves within the narratives of the past' (Hall, 1996). In times of historical and political change collective identities become a means for expressing common understanding of events- political ideologies and cultural symbols circulating in the public domain are inserted into some collective identities. Therefore 'Iranian' identity in the diaspora represents popular understandings of current political events and to a large extent is made up of negative modes of meaning.

In a study like this it is quite challenging to write about ‘the migrant experience’ and ‘the refugee experience’ because as Langer argues it ‘detaches people from the structural and historical conditions that produced them, changing them from historical actors to social types and placing them in a category which is so broad that it tells us little about any of the people in it’ (Langer in Hosking 1990, 69). As Langer points out the key to understanding refugees ‘is not to be found in some generalised notion of ‘the refugee experience’ (ibid, 69) or might I add ‘the migrant experience.’ But rather one needs to look at the history that has created them. Among Iranian migrants and refugees in this study it is quite difficult to compartmentalise their narratives as ‘the refugee experience’ or the ‘migrant experience’ because the historical context that has produced Iranian ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’ are inexplicably tied together. Thus rather than juxtaposing and privileging one narrative over the other I am arguing that the trajectory of refugee and immigrant narratives in this thesis cross and dialogue with each other and provide an opportunity to frame a collective experience of Iranians in the diaspora.

At times their turbulent stories go under and out through each other and meet at creative points that generate continuity of their collective experience and diasporic condition. As I have argued in the last chapter and also briefly in this chapter the narratives of ‘the migrants’ and ‘the refugees’ are part of a continuum of historical factors that have produced their displacement. Hence ‘the Iranian migrant’ is not the Other of ‘the Iranian refugee’ or vice versa but rather their narratives are born out of a history that is joined together and they only become ‘the migrant’ and ‘the refugee’ because of western, and in this instance, Australian bureaucratic formulations. In the study of Iranians in displacement I see ‘the migrant,’ ‘the refugee’ as a subjective

construction, the product of political and bureaucratic representation and very much an artificially contrived binary which simplifies the complexity of the relationship between the two. As I argued in chapter 3 the participants in this study do not categorise themselves as 'refugees' or indeed 'migrants' and these terms only came to the fore in response to my questions as to whether they were 'migrants' or indeed 'refugees.' Thus these distinctions are seen by the participants in this study as arbitrary and although their stories vary as to why they are 'displaced' and are in the diaspora, it is explained in terms of the post 1979 historical and social forces which have traumatised their lives.

In the following narrative we listen to the story from Bakhtiar a male 'refugee,' who continues to suffer from the traumatic fear and pain of the Iran-Iraq war.

Story two

I came to Australia 18 years ago. I left Iran in 1986 and went to Pakistan and through there I managed to get here. It was very hard and painful to live in Pakistan as if somehow I had not left Iran, of course I was not in the direct firing line in Pakistan like I was in Iran but it caused me a lot of anxiety, worry, fear. I always felt it in my body and my feelings. When you walk in your neighbourhood you feel it because you see and smell it. Even now I feel it and my body shakes. I hate war. I was scared that the war will find me there [Pakistan]. It was not easy to come to Australia to get entry here was hard. I left Iran because of the war between Iraq and Iran. I was frightened that I was going to be sent to the front. I did not want to go to war, I was scared. Maybe I am a coward but I just did not want to go to battle. I saw the destruction it had caused. You asked me about the images I remember and if I have

settled here. I have not settled. I could not talk about my experiences all these years ago, I could not bring them out and talk about them. I saw the imposed war on us by Iraq first hand I saw thousands killed, displaced, running for shelter, leaving their homes, running somewhere to save their lives or the lives of their beloved ones. After Saddam Hussein invaded I was trapped in my city Abadan for 6 months during that terrible war.

Iranians know the Iran- Iraq war as the 'Imposed War' (*Jang-e-tahmīlī*). The war took place from September 1980 to August 1988. It is known as 'the longest conventional war of the 20th century' and caused 1 million casualties in Iran only (Hiro, 1991). It was in this war that Saddam Hussein first used nerve and musted gas as well as other chemical weapons. During this war many cities were ruined and the participant Bakhtiar comes from a city - Abadan destroyed by the war and which is a boarder town between Iran and Iraq and has the most important oil refinery in Iran and is the largest in the Middle-East.

Bakhtiar in his story reveals the anguish he experienced during the war especially its immediate effects: the displacement of thousands of Iranians who lost their homes, their lives and 'many were forced to stay, they could not go anywhere, there was nowhere to go, it was heartbreaking.' Following Alexander's theory of trauma I take up his questions and try to explain: what were the traumatizing experiences for Bakhtiar during the war? And what were the immediate and long-term effects of the traumatizing experiences of the war?

I want to firstly approach the former question. For Bakhtiar the trauma was triggered by the war, and the destruction it brought to his city, his family life and community.

As an Iranian man, Bakhtiar, who in the 1980s, came from an area in Iran, where the war had its most damaging effects. As I indicated above his city was a very important city and is on the boarder of Iran and Iraq. It was one of those cities which was attacked by the Iraqi army when Saddam Hussein decided to invade Iran. He stressed that he was trapped in the city as it was surrounded by the Iraqi army and there he joined the rest of Iranians to defend it but ultimately exhausted he decided to leave and still lives with traumatic experiences as a result of this.

Bakhtair's story reveals in a very potent manner the relationship between the body and the traumatic experience of the war, his body became the reservoir that was stored with the smell, and pain of the war. Thus the war is a bodily experience for him and it continues to cause 'havoc,' in his mind and body thus making 'settling' in Australia difficult. Embodiment is a critical node for understanding Bakhtiar's experience because it is the existential state in which the self, identity, culture and society are jammed together (Stoller, 1997; Csordas, 1993). For him the war is lived through the body it is the channel through which he experiences his social and cultural world (Merleau-Ponty 1962:146). 'Settling' in Australia is difficult as his body cannot 'become calm to put down roots and set up a home' because the bodily experience of the war continues to 'harass and disturb' him. Bakhtiar continues telling of his distress in Australia:

I soon realised that Australia was not an easy place to live especially when I began to tell people what I had experienced and what was happening in Iran. It was futile, people were uncaring, no feeling, ignorant. Remember this was the 1980s there was no where you could go and get help so I became dependent on alcohol believing that it would help me forget, it did sometimes but I became more confused with no

strength to deal with the pain of the destruction, the tanks never leave me or the poor children disoriented, it is quite painful when you think about it, what happened to these people, I became depended on the alcohol but what about the others. There were few times that I thought of taking my own life, it did cross my mind but I felt responsible for family back in Iran. I survived but the hurts of living in a refugee camp in Pakistan and the many Iranians' who lost their sanity in the camps, these things are still with me, inside me, and deeply bothering me. I still have nightmares of people wandering like mad one's in our cities for shelter or food. Nothing was there to give them shelter.

Here we get glimpses into the long and short term effects of the trauma caused by the war. For Bakhtiar, alcohol became part of his everyday habit, it was used to suppress his pain (*Dardam ra-* my pains) and hold back his trauma. The trauma of losing his friends, the destruction of his city and the displacement of his family life. However, the alcohol was a poor antidote to the effects of the war; such as 'seeing healthy normal people and friends who suddenly turned mad' and being separated from his family and familiar surroundings. While Bakhtiar bemoans that there was no support and understanding of his experience in Australia, Beryly Langer, explains in term of El Salvadorian trauma, which can be without a doubt applied to the Iranian experience: "Such stories highlight the inadequacy of bureaucratised and commercialised compassion, for suffering on this scale is not amenable to professional help by appointment only" (1990:83). In many ways the 'commercialised' pre packaged compassion offered by professionals within business hours is unfitting for many refugees or migrants, and who are often asked to 'settle down, learn the language and get a job' because this does not build up a closure to the trauma of destruction lived through the body and for Iranians' the negative and

harmful stereotypes compound the effects of displacement and trauma and even further lessen the hope of recovery:

Bakhtiar is ambivalent about 'settling in Australia' not only because of the 'flash backs' he experiences but also:

I feel that we are a forgotten people in all those years of the war, 8 years that is a long war. No one talks about us, neither here or in Iran. And now the West is interested in who we are, we are in the front pages of the media, I do feel humiliated and offended thinking that the majority of Australians believe that we are a bunch of stupid and aggressive people. What really hurts and distresses me is the negative and bad images that the Westerners have of us. I'm sad about the stereotypical images they have of us. Our suffering is not even talked about as if we have no feelings, no family, we are just numbers of bodies, that have disappeared, killed. How can this be?

In the flood of newspaper, television and radio stories reporting the Iran - Iraq war I was living in Europe and when I came to Australia in the early 1980's I learnt that my city of birth was invaded by the Iraqi army and the objective was to annex it from Iran and make it part of Iraq. I feared for the safety and well being of my family who lived in Khorramshahar. My parents and six siblings and each of their families lived in this city and I was a 'new migrant' to Australia who had just left after the 1979 revolution. The euphoria of ousting the Shah was short lived and I was struggling with the despair that Iran and people of my generation, the youth of the revolution, were in. We were dispersed everywhere around the world trying to make sense of what happened to our revolution and I still had hope that peace and stability could be

restored to the country. But even these quixotic ideas were brief and it rapidly changed my focus away from the effects of the 1979 revolution to the war.

Like the revolution of 1979 the war was abrupt and sudden. My birth place disappeared. I read in the papers that it was completely destroyed, not a soul was left, vegetation destroyed, the beautiful palm trees burnt, not one left, their lives taken away. And I was thousands and thousands of miles away from this destruction. But was I? It was not only my city, the city of palm trees, but my family had also without a trace disappeared. I had no idea where they were. I was plunged into the thick of the war without actually physically being there. I wrote letters and sent them to our home address in Khorramshahr.

As I remember the old Khorramshahr was a small and rather beautiful and significant commercial town in the south of the Persian Gulf with an air of cosmopolitanism. It was a town near the important rivers of Tigris and Euphrates. For four years I persistently wrote letters to my parents, without a response. It took me four years before I found my family who were moved into an internal refugee town. It was then they told me that they never received these letters because as soon as the bombs were dropped in our city and the Iraqi army had invaded, they had left, they deserted their homes and belongings and left with, as my mother told me when I found them in 1985, 'heavy hearts full of anguish and pain.' The following is a letter that I wrote to them in early 1983 and it was published as a forward to my novella: *A Picture out of Frame* (Aidani: 1997):

Dearest,

I'm so worried about you. I have not heard from you for so long. The war is still going on. I'm also worried about my solitude, and lack of sleep, my deep isolation in this city and my mental restlessness and not knowing the language. I feel that I am suddenly buried within my memories. Any time that I think of the war and our city, seeing how my birthplace has been ravaged by war horrifies me. I hate war; I hate anything, which creates violence. I don't care who causes it. I feel now that I'm alone I have to create my world in my mind's imagination. It's strange, but I will do it, I'm sure I'm capable of it. Because, I do not want to collapse. I'm writing like a mad person. I'm not sure what is happening within me. It feels as if something had suddenly exploded inside me. I will concentrate on keeping well. I have not told you before, but I'm also writing many other things. My food these days is reading and writing in our language, and at the same time, I'm trying to improve my Italian and English. I don't know what to do with my writing but of course I will destroy most of them as I have done before. I'm seeking goodness and love, for beauty and knowledge, as you have taught me with your simplicity and poverty.

You know I started to write this book to keep myself sane. I'm not sure what will happen to it but I have to write it. I know you might laugh but I mean it – I have this strange feeling that if I don't write I will die unnoticed. You see...when I write, I only think of writing and what's in me to write, and then I think I'm forgetting the pain. My creativity is not for idealistic or materialistic reasons, it is for art, which enhances life and increases my hope for a better world without prejudice and with love for human nature. I'm not sure if you are still at the same address or not. I'm always hopeful that you are. I hope that the bombs will stop and I will receive some news from you and my friends. People here don't talk about the war and us at all, as if that part of the world where I come from is irrelevant. I don't know, I 'm so confused. As you know, all my life alongside you, I have suffered without

complaining. I'm really tired, but this silence of not having any news is killing me and I don't have many people to talk to. You know I'm only a young man, that's unfair....I wish you all happiness, and please give my love to everyone who knows me, and all family members.

I have not inserted this letter to underscore my ethnographic authenticity but because it is an important aspect to understand the phenomenological, reflexive and narrative ways the research (Nisser, 1988; Ricoeur, 1992; Moustakas, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 2005) that is partaking and engaging with the narratives of the participants with one's own story and reality. In hermeneutic research the researcher becomes an important instrument for research because a critical aspect of the data comes from how the researcher experiences the phenomena under investigation. During the transcribing of the interviews I realised that I was thinking with the stories of the participants rather than about them. As Arthur Frank says:

To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse that content...To think with a story is to experience it affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one's life (1995:23).

The stories of the participants that intersected with my narrative were about: the language of the body that has experienced war; isolation and trauma; separation from one's language, culture and identity; and stigmatization as a result of the 1979 revolution and post September 11, 2001. Thinking with these stories I appreciated even more the reality that I and the participants were indeed, 'wounded storytellers' (Frank: 1995). Through this approach I am not trying to find a 'dialectical' relationship between the participants voices and my experience, but rather at finding a

Bakhtinian 'dialogical' relations which brings together viewpoints without insisting on a reconciliation between them. As Bahktin so poignantly says, 'there is neither a first nor a last word. The context of dialogue is without limit. They extend to the deepest past and the most distant future....Every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival' (quoted in Holquist 1990:39). By inserting my narrative into the research I am aiming to extend the dialogue both in terms of the past and the future with the participants in this thesis.

My narrative in this thesis has become an integral part of the story I was asking other Iranians' to tell me. My involvement in the storytelling in this thesis reveals that I was never just an observer, an outsider to the narrative being unearthed. My voice and the voice of the participants' are constantly overlapping and exchanging stories and producing what Bakhtin described as a plurilinguistic poetics (1978). Narratives move with people and my recollections and memory of the war between Iran and Iraq have been scattered in letters to family and based in my poetry. The memory of the Iran-Iraq war was recently made 'real' for me and other Iranians, at the announcement of Saddam Hussein's execution. This execution forced me once again to reflect on the damages that the Iran-Iraq had on me and millions of other Iranians as well as Iraqis.

The following is an article I wrote about my memories of the Iran- Iraq war and Saddam Hussein's execution for the newspaper *The Age* (2007: 13). It is important to insert this article here as many Iranians, Iraqis and Australians responded to it by telephoning and sending me emails about their own experiences and thoughts on this issue. One letter writer to *The Age* (January 5/ 2007: 10) made a point that my narrative was 'emotional' thus in the West to be labelled 'emotional' is a form of

stigma in that it effectively labels you as irrational. My story is emotional and at the same time irrational because war, the death of millions of innocent people, displacement, loss, and trauma are irrational, but is a large facet of our history and lives:

I am against capital punishment. Saddam Hussein's execution has brought one of the closures in my life that I have been waiting for since I was a teenager. For me "this name" for at least 34 years of my life has always been associated with pain, fear, terror, torture, war, hatred, invasion and killing of innocent people. As soon as I heard that he had been executed the first question, which triggered in my mind is: 'I wonder if he has ever asked himself about the pain and trauma he has caused people during the three decades of his power?' I try not to answer this question and let it remain ambiguous but my inner voice pains me: 'no way!' - Saddam was a kind of human being who I would suspect, would not give a damn of the pain he has caused. Saddam was not the man who would give any meaning to the word remorse. Saddam was the man who used anything and anybody to carry out his hatred to devastating effects.

Another dictator has gone, at least without pomp and ceremony. No mass weeping; no contrived speeches on his glory; no manufactured sound of women ululating to mark the high emotion of their 'love' for a brutal man. I and millions of his victims can sit, take a deep sigh, and remember those victims who cannot witness the end of this ignominious man. It is not just his brutal actions that our bodies remember but his name arouses a deep fright in our emotions, in our psyche. My mother tells me that in our city, women call their violent husbands, fathers and father-in-laws, Saddam Hussein, so that the men's actions meet public opprobrium that it indeed deserves.

I wept when my body remembered, once again, the colossal pain from his military invasion. He used his first chemical weapons in my city and on my people. This killed many of my friends and displaced my family, who became 'internal' refugees in their own land.

I consider myself as being deeply wounded by Saddam's invasion of my city of birth, Korramshahar, South of Iran. It was his army that not only destroyed my little city which bordered with Iraq. His military endeavour left it in ruins. It is now literally a ghost city with a few inhabitants. The ashes of millions of perished life and burnt palm trees remain. The consequences of this war changed the course of my life. I was forced into displacement and to seek a new home in a safe country whose name I had barely heard of - Australia. Being displaced as a result of war from one's home, one's language and culture is never easy even if you are offered the comforts that come with living in a 'safe' country. The grieving for friends, for the city, for the language, definitely never stops.

Of course I know quite well that nothing could bring back my city of birth; my home; my school friends; not even his execution. But I have to admit that his execution brings a kind of closure to one of my most painful nightmares. The nightmare of this man has haunted me for the last 34 years. His pictures all over the newspapers and on the television screen bring upon a bodily experience of hurt that no legal argument against his execution can reconcile and nurse back to health. In my fragile memory, despite the hurt and pain it brings, I try to remember my city, friends, and my beloved ones, whom I had left almost 27 years ago. And I ponder about this man's end. I try to reason about his power, his actions and its effects. I feel emotionally and physically numbed. There is a sense of disbelief. A tyrant leader, an executioner, who I thought was eternal, had finally exhausted himself and his people.

I first heard the name Saddam Hussein al Takriti in 1972. The years between 1972-1975, I witnessed the Baathist regime gathering power in Iraq and then experienced the effects of the nationalist party of Takrit's, which turned my birthplace Khorramshahar into a military base. They used menacing propaganda against Iran over the claim that the river that divided the border between the two countries was 'theirs' and it was only through military action that they could restore it back to its 'rightful' owners.

In my city we all feared Saddam Hussein. We knew he had a menacing streak especially when we saw images of a gun over his shoulder. We knew he was pointing it at us from the other side of the river. Our fear was not in vein. It was totally justified. He had finally invaded us. He had become the masculine soldier. It was this invasion and consequently the total destruction of my city and the humiliation that his military imposed upon our people that drew our hatred towards him. The insufferable weight of his military destruction is rooted in our city, in the bodies and psyche of millions of men, women and children. His name, even in death still resonates with fear because our bodies cannot forget the pain, suffering and loss of innocent lives.

I know his death invokes many raw emotions both positive and negative. But for me and I believe for millions of other victims the invisibility of his body and voice opens another chapter in our lives. He will still haunt many of us. But physically he is not here. We can no longer hear his voice. We will no longer hear his politically phony diatribe on the oppressed in the Middle East

I believe in negotiating the meanings of pain and suffering. It is important for the victims of Saddam's rule to bring to life the pain, the destruction that was imposed on them. Their lack of concern regarding the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of the legality of

Saddam's trial should not silence their stories, should not deny them a voice, or make them marginal. The point is that a human rights reading needs to take account of both issues, that of the legality of the trial and that of the stories of the victims, which I now fear will be excluded within all the international legal human rights discussions now dominating the political arena. We must therefore listen to the voices of the victims and give emphasis to their stories in order to draw out and broaden the human rights implications of this and futures trials of despot rulers.

Of course my grieving won't end with the execution of Saddam Hussein. Painful memories will linger but it's a special moment for all of us who have suffered from his brutality. We can now try to move on with our life but we must also continue to ask: what kind of lessons have we learnt from this brutality and humiliation? How can we stop the destruction of our communities, our culture, our identity and live with some hope in the Middle East? These are fundamental questions for us and are far more compelling than the technicalities of the rights and wrongs of Saddam's trial.

Displacement as we have seen causes many disturbances. It can be quite horrendous and unbearable. It affects the way one experiences the new society and makes the creation of an alternative 'home,' as the participants stories reveal, quite difficult. While the modern era has been defined by Edward Said as: 'the age of the refugee' it does not offer succour to displaced individuals and communities because it cannot 'reassemble an exile's broken history into a new whole- is virtually unbearable and virtually impossible in today's world' (Said, 1994:360). This insight underlines the pain and trauma that is at the heart of the narratives of the participants in this study. The idea of not being able to put the 'broken history' into one unbroken piece is a shock to the body of the displaced and is part of the ongoing suffering and trauma one experiences. I see my letters to my illiterate parents during the Iran- Iraq war and my

article in *The Age* as memorialising that ‘broken history’ because for me and the participants I have interviewed for this study ‘what has been lost is the continuity of the past...what you then are left with is still the past, but a fragmented past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation’ (1978, 212).

Story Three

I was in year 12 when I heard of Ashraf-e Dehghani¹¹ and her heroic stance during torture she received from Savak¹². I was very young and heard a lot about the terrible secret police and could not make any sense of it. When I heard what they had done to Ashraf I was shaken. In a matter of seconds this woman became my heroine. You know the story of Ashraf-e Dehghani, of course? To me this woman symbolized hope and fearlessness. It brings out too many strong emotions and gave meaning to my life in those years of my youth. I always loved her not as a political figure but as a (Zane shojah) courageous woman who defied the male hierarchy and stood for what she believed. I was shocked when I heard the way she survived the torture and how she escaped from the most horrendous prison¹³ in Iran.

You know how they used to rape and destroy people who resisted the oppression. I don’t know how she survived when they left the snake in her prison cell. I read her autobiography a few years later after the revolution and it is still freshly on my mind. This book and this woman has always been a reminder to me of how much traumas we all have experienced and nobody seems to care.

¹¹ Dehghani, Ashraf was a member of left wing Revolutionary Group who was arrested by Shah’s secret police SAVAK and was put in the most guarded and feared prison called *Evin*. She was kept in a solitary confinement. Ashraf escaped from this impenetrable prison and went on to lead the military arm of the same organisation by making it her own guerrilla group. Ashraf later wrote and published her memories in 1978.

¹² . This was the feared Shah’s secret police which terrorized Iranians.

¹³ *Evin* Prison is the most horrendous prison that Shah built to keep his political opponents in the maximum security.

I don't have the book now, but I clearly remember the part, and can retell her story: They tortured her too much and in one of those torturing sessions one of the torturers brought a box with him. He called himself the snake charmer. As he opened the box he reached the snake and picked it up from it and brought it very close to her face and put it on her head. He left it there on her head and suddenly the snake started twisting and rolling around her face and neck. They were really brutal and their objective was to destroy her will. It was obvious that the snake was poisonous and naturally it would sting her and of course kill her. She knew this would happen; they were doing it to her because she was opposing the Shah' brutal regime and as far as I'm concerned in their eyes it was even worse because she was a woman. Of course there were other women who opposed that regime too. I did not care who and what these women believed then. The fact that they were Iranian women and had such courage gave me something profound to think in my youth.

Salime is a woman in her late 40's she came to Australia in 1992. Salime's story above is quoted at length because her style of telling 'her' story is quite unique in that she adopts a narrative frame that is not hers but someone else's, Ashraf- e Dehghani, in order to have a discussion about her own experiences of trauma. Thus the story of Ashraf while it has had a profound affect on her feelings about how the repressive arm of the Iranian state operated under the Shah it also oriented her identity and direction in life. Ashraf's strength against her male torturers inspired Salime as a woman. Why is it that Salime cannot tell her own story of trauma? Is she using this story in a rhetorical manner so as to talk about her own torture and trauma in prison because 'there is a hole in the telling,' of her particular story, as Arthur Frank has so poignantly described because of 'the chaos' encountered in trauma narratives? Salime is using Ashraf's story as a shield to guard her own untold story because

trauma and violence often ‘renders individuals internally powerless and in a chronic state of alarm even once the violence has abated’ (Kaplan and Webster, 2003:107). While Salime made reference, during the interview, to her political activism and fear of Shah’s prison she however did not delve into whether she was imprisoned or not and if she did she did not provide any information about her treatment and experience in prison during the interview.

Although I asked several questions such as: what was it like for you? Did you know the other prisoners? The questions were ignored and instead Ashraf’s story was generated. This could be because her own personal trauma has immobilized her from expressing her story and Ashraf’s story is taken as mirroring her own. For Salime, Ashraf’s story is the only ‘available narrative’ (Shuman, 2004) that is ‘culturally available for our telling’ (Ewick & Silbey, 1995) because stories are not ‘just’ personal tales but are also cultural and ideological. Salime associates ‘her’ story of and about trauma with how the West constructs Iranians:

Thinking of this story and on how the West thinks of us makes me cry and ask myself why we are misunderstood so much. I’m also mindful that our stories of fear, violence, of invasion, the American’s obsession to invade our country has made things that are happening over there even harder and traumatic for us these days. When I feel weak and helpless I think of Ashraf-e-Dehgani and recall those memories and help myself to get a long with my life.

What is quite compelling is that while Salime’s trauma might have immobilised her from telling her story she however sees Ashraf, and by extension herself, not just as a wounded soul but also as a body that resists and challenges the power of the West and

also the oppression in Iran during the Shah. Like the other participants' she understands that there is a lot of ignorance in the West about Iranians and in particular of their struggles against oppression. Negative stereotypes of Iranians compound her pain and distress and shape the way she observes and interprets the world. The stereotypical point of view affects through interpellation how Iranian culture and the subject is constituted but Salime rejects the interpellating call by drawing from Ashraf's identity and courage to put up an opposition to the hackneyed constructions of Iranians' in the West. Thus it is in such contexts that her memories about Ashraf give courage and hope thus helping her to 'get along with life.'

Story four

In academic writings about post September 11, 2001 it has now become a truism to mention Middle-Eastern refugees or migrants and 'Muslims' living in Western societies and the affects this event has had on their lives and identity (Mamdani 2004). Neil Smelser in his article '*September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma*' argues that: '.....episodes of extreme national fear and unity have always had their darker potential- for the muting of political opposition, sometimes self-imposed; for scapegoating of internal minority groups thought to be dangerous or somehow linked to the danger, and for the compromise of civil liberties in the name of vigilance and security' (Smelser, 2004:270). As a result of this linkage with the September 11 violence, Muslims' have entered the social and psychological space of all facets of Western intellectual thought and have also become an 'institutionalised' problem for Western societies because they are viewed as posing an 'integration' problem (Hage,2003:2 ; Will; 2002: 74) . As I articulated in chapter 2 the Iranians are a silent and unknown community who are rarely involved in national debates about

‘Muslims’ or indeed ‘multicultural issues’ generally. However, post September 11 has profoundly affected community perceptions about their identity and the way they see their identity.

All of the participants in this study see themselves through a secular lens and at the same time affirm their faith. The participants in this study realise that Iranians had an ‘image problem’ after the 1979 revolution and it was largely a result of the ‘hostage crisis’ and they see post September 11 as having a much more profound affect on their lives in the West. The effects of post September 11 on their lives are summarised in relation to severe restrictions to enter western countries either as refugees, migrants or even as a tourist. And widespread fear, anxiety and phobia have been embedded in the community against ‘Muslims’ so much so that a former Australian Prime Minister has written that ‘the next election will be the Muslim election’ (Fraser, 2006:9; Hage, 2003: 52) and furthermore ‘...the Government has sought to set Muslims aside, discrimination and defamation against Muslims has been rising dramatically. Too many have taken the easy path and accepted the Government’s contentions that Muslims aren’t like us and therefore it doesn’t matter if discrimination occurs and if access to the law does not apply. We have forgotten that discrimination once it starts, spreads’ (ibid). Some have sought to explain the discrimination and phobia against Muslims because they are a ‘visible minority’ (Kaplan and Webster, 2003:108). It is not only that Muslims or people from Middle Eastern backgrounds in the West are identifiable as the ‘Other’ but one must not also forget the long history of domination the west, in particular countries like France, Great Britain, and the United States of America, has had in the Muslim world. This historical experience has brought with it

the complicated ideological narrative of Orientalism which continues to define the framework of the relationship between the 'Muslim East' and the 'secular West.'

The stories of the participants in this thesis show that it is not because they are a 'visible minority' that they encounter abuse and violence in public spaces or more formal discrimination but because they bear the powerful ideological weight of September 11, hence September 11 is not just a symbolic event for them but a real act that embodies trauma and affects their everyday experiences and their relationship with the spaces of the society in which they live. The following story from Huri highlights the tensions and paradoxes that Iranians are generally struggling with as a result of post September 11:

I immigrated here ten years ago. I came here to free myself from many restrictions I had experienced in Iran. I did not go through many hassles to migrate because I'm a professional and highly educated person and my skills are needed here. I was very happy to come here, even though I was raised during the Islamic regime in Iran I was never forced to behave like a traditional Muslim by my family at all. So when I came here I knew English and after a short while I began to integrate and was very positive to continue living here and was planning to have children too. As you can see I'm not covered by any Islamic dress but I have great respect for my religion and the way my parents introduced me to it. As I said I never considered myself as a religious or traditionalists person and I was enjoying my life here until September 11, 2001 happened.

This story demonstrates in a very profound manner how Huri positions herself against the dominant western interpellations of Islam and gender. She indicates that she was

not brought up in a traditional Muslim manner and has no bodily covering that is she does not have a headscarf or wear the *chador*. Chador is the form of veiling that is mostly used by women in Iran. Her migration to Australia is caused by the social restrictions and limiting career opportunities she experienced in Iran. Through her uncovered body she demonstrates that her identity is quite compatible with Western norms even though she respects her religion. However, for Huri things turn sour after September 11 although she is not a traditionalist or religious person:

Soon after 9/11 I began to feel that my personality has been interrogated and my identity questioned and my rights to be what I have been ignored. It has been happening simply because I'm from Iran and Iran is a Muslim country. Before 9/11 hardly anyone would ask me about my religion but after that tragic event any time people ask me if am a Muslim or not I tell them that I am. I could not imagine that I could become like this. I spent most of my life in an Islamic society and was tired to justify that I was a pious woman to traditionalists who sometimes forced me to dislike Islam (their Islam) so I would insist not to mention the name Islam very often. And here I'm subject to different kind of humiliation. I proudly utter that 'yes' I'm a Muslim young woman. It is not about faith really; it is my dignity when it is under pressure it defies the rigid rules. I could not imagine that I could become like this, pressure and humiliations do these things to you. I'm part of that world and I'm part of Iranian culture and I feel so sad that our people here are under so much anxiety because of terrorism that has been happening in the world. Of course, I'm upset and especially being a woman and treated so badly. In my country as a woman I was respected enormously but here I'm just a person out there., and worse, someone from the Middle East and a Muslim.

Here the drama unfolds about the scrutiny and the surveillance that her identity as an Iranian of Muslim background is subjected to and the humiliation and distress this causes. September 11 causes shock and compels her to reconfigure her identity. She explains that in Iran most of her time was spent trying to fit into acceptable notions of pious behaviour and now in Australia she is compelled to identify as a Muslim or rather that all aspects of Muslim identity are called into question because of the fear created by 'Islamic' terrorism. Thus it would be fair to say that, she has been transformed into an ideological subject of September 11, 2001.

In Australia and in western countries generally, Muslim identity is viewed as monolithic and overlaid with negative connotations since it is understood to stand against the values and belief systems of the West. Huri and the other participants in this thesis are compelled to negotiate their identity within a set of norms and values that they have not constructed. Muslims are expected to present a particular 'face' that is in harmony with the social and normative value system of the society they are living in and indeed Huri's identity as an uncovered and non traditionalist woman could be interpreted as shifting the self to fit into the situation she now finds herself.

Before her migration her identity was shaped by her pious behaviour that would have required her to have bodily covering. Thus Huri has done what, for example Erving Goffman (1959) calls representing a particular 'face' to fit the current socio-cultural environment in order to obtain recognition and approval. Goffman argues that we create different faces in relation to different social contexts. For instance although Huri has presented a particular face of her 'self': uncovered woman, educated and non traditionalist; this should have yielded a favourable reception, but unfortunately in the

current social situation the political stakes of September 11 are so intense that there is no shift in the preconceptions and fear that her Muslim identity evokes for Australian society.

Story of the Clinic

It was a wet Wednesday afternoon and I had agreed to pick my mother-in-law up from the Royal Women's Hospital where she received her chemotherapy treatment. I arrived on the oncology ward and saw my mother-in-law and my partner sitting in the waiting room with three other women and was gently told that there had been a delay in the treatment due to an emergency on the ward and thus my mother-in-law had not yet received her treatment. I decided to wait with them and flicked through the magazines while my partner and her mother were having a vivacious conversation until a well groomed woman interrupted them and asked if they were speaking in the Turkish language. My partner replied 'yes' and then asked the woman if she too was Turkish. She laughed and shook her head. We found out that she was of Iranian background. The Iranian woman was quite inquisitive and direct in her questions and asked my partner and her mother if they were Muslims. My partner looked at her mother to express her consternation and alarm at such an intrusive question but my mother-in-law was not disconcerted in the least and turned to the woman and replied 'yes.' I was quite anxious about where this cultural interchange was leading and hoped that my mother-in-law's emphatic reply had put an end to it all but my partner asked in almost the same candid way whether she was a Bahi.

The dialogue between the three women I thought was taking an interesting direction, and I was in a totally invisible situation, and hoped that it was not going to turn into a

tempestuous argument over religion. The woman with an acute Persianized Australian accent was not diffident in addressing this question and gave details of her conversion to Christianity and explained that she was recently baptized in Melbourne and furthermore her daughter had also converted. She explained that she was a Bahi and after her separation from her husband she decided to convert to Christianity. There was a short pause and in a very unemotional and detached voice my mother-in-law said: 'all religions are the same, we all believe in the one God' in which the Iranian woman nodded her head in a somewhat reluctant agreement, without uttering a word.

This story like all the other narratives told by the participants in this chapter, frames the Iranian diasporic experience and condition of displacement. This story similar to the one at the opening of this chapter reveals how Iranian identity is in constant motion trying to seize any opportunity that could alleviate the stigma and humiliation associated with Iranian identity. Iranian identity in Australia is a difficult 'identity' to carry as it is constituted and loaded by so many ideological, cultural and religious meanings and in many situations the participants in this study have no authority over the 'meanings' that are channeled about their identity in the public realm. The meanings that are channeled into the public realm are not drawn from their lived experiences but produced through discourses and ideology.

Many Australians have a visceral reaction to Iranian identity: fundamentalism, seclusion of women, anti-democratic, violence, anti-western norms; thus a negative regime of representation dominates and furthermore causes social injury thus exacerbating the trauma experienced as a result of war and political turmoil. The social injury experienced by Iranians is generally an effect of the negative stereotypes

that stigmatise and marginalise Iranian identity and culture and the humiliating obligation they feel to ‘constantly explain who we are- we are not terrorists, we are not barbarians’ but ‘have a long and famous history and culture.’ While they offer another way to understand who they are to the wider society this is usually not taken up and thus exacerbates their frustration and inability to establish dialogue with mainstream institutions. For these participants cultural trauma is generated not only by violence, torture, war, and social upheavals but also by cultural and religious representations that distort and stigmatize their identity.

In the next chapter I examine the counter narratives deployed against the negative regime of representation discussed in this chapter. The following chapter focuses on counter representations – that is the way they would like to be represented and treated. Thus hospitality is brought into this thesis because the participants have raised it as an important issue for analysis in terms of their status and ‘belonging’ in Australia.

Chapter : 5

Counter Narratives: Displacement and Hospitality

In this chapter, I will elaborate on some of the interconnections between displacement and hospitality, bearing in mind the ideas introduced in the first four chapters. This chapter will take up a number of questions relating to the meanings, values and practices of hospitality and how these values are expressed and embodied by Iranians who have left, or were moved, to another set of cultural circumstances. I look into questions such as how do Iranians construct hospitality? What kinds of meanings do they ascribe to hospitality? Do Iranian migrants and refugees feel that they have experienced Australian hospitality? And does this experience of Australian hospitality affect their status and well being? Thus I will be examining notions and spaces of hospitality from the perspective of the participants.

The narratives offered in this chapter are what I call 'counter narratives' because the participants are challenging the hegemonic interpellation of Iranians which are based, as discussed in the previous chapters, on superficial understandings of Iranian culture and identity. The participants in this chapter talk about the 'collective' identity of Iranians that is strongly based on the ethics of hospitality. They use historical stories and other classical texts in which these issues are referred to articulate an identity based on sincerity, authenticity, and hospitality. It is the ethics of sincerity, authenticity, and hospitality that forms the counter narratives of the participants which

they pose against the stereotypes of Iranians as terrorists, women shuffling around in chadors, and angry mullahs.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Derrida's notion of hospitality as a way into this difficult subject and explores the implications for Iranian migrants and refugees living in a post September 11 Australia. It progressively moves on to discuss in more detail Iranian cultural notions of hospitality, and its meanings in displacement. The participants in this chapter speak and articulate their horizons of what constitutes hospitality in displacement.

The Politics of Hospitality

To shelter the other in one's own land or home, to tolerate the presence of the landless and homeless on the ancestral soil (...) –is that the criterion of humanness? Unquestionably so." Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*

The problem of hospitality [is] coextensive with the ethical problem. It is always about answering for a dwelling place, for one's identity, one's space, one's limits, for the ethos as abode, habitation, house, hearth, family, home. (Of Hospitality. Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 149,151)

On 26 August 2001 a Norwegian freighter Tampa, carrying 438 asylum seekers¹⁴ whom it had pulled out from a boat sinking in international waters between Australia and Indonesia was refused permission to enter Australian waters. The stand-off lasted twenty-four days. The Tampa was 246 miles from the nearest Indonesian port; it was

¹⁴ 369 men, 26 females and 43 children who were mainly from Afghanistan

75 miles from Christmas Island. It headed for Christmas Island. The Tampa's captain entered Australian territorial waters. Four miles off Christmas Island he was prevented from reaching Australian soil.

The captain, Arne Rinnan, who had been a sailor since 1958 and a captain for 23 years described the incident:

I have seen most of what there is to see in this profession, but what I experienced on this trip is the worst. When we asked for food and medicine for the refugees, the Australians sent commando troops onboard. This created a very high tension among the refugees. After an hour of checking the refugees, the troops agreed to give medical assistance to some of them.... - The soldiers obviously didn't like their mission (Tampa = Disgrace <http://www.onemansweb.org/jan/politics/tampa.htm>).

The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, ordered the ship be boarded by Australian special forces and stated that:

We will defend our borders and we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances under which they arrive (Burnside, 2002: 13).

According to a prominent human rights advocate Julian Burnside, QC, the Howard government directed that the port of Christmas Island be closed so that no boats could reach the Tampa:

The SAS, an elite Australian army unit, took control of the ship. The Captain was allowed only minimal contact with the outside world. The press were not allowed anywhere near the ship. Despite repeated requests from lawyers and others, no Australian was allowed to speak to any of the refugees. The physical circumstances

meant that no images of individual refugees were available. At best, film footage showed distant images of tiny figures under an awning on the deck of the ship (Ibid).

By stopping media and human rights advocates having contact with the Tampa the Australian government was able to pursue, what Burnside defines as, its:

cynical objectives with dishonest rhetoric, wholly unimpeded by facts. Although the misery of the refugees' situation was obvious enough none of them could be seen as human beings. None of them could tell their stories. Howard's crucial aim was achieved: the refugees were not seen publicly as individual people for whom Australian citizens could have human sympathy (Burnside, *ibid*).

Because the stories of the refugees were concealed and not available to the public they were demonised and accordingly represented as 'queue jumpers.' The government's political rhetoric of 'sending a clear message to people smugglers and queue jumpers that Australia is not a soft touch' appealed to a large body of Australians who reacted positively to far-Right anti immigration and refugee policies. This is reflected in the letters that were published in daily newspapers and web blogs. I will refer to several of these published letters in order to demonstrate the divisive feelings that the Tampa created in Australia, amongst both white and non – white Australians. The following letter written by Ertugrul Mete, who from his name one can assume is Turkish, stated that:

Our country Australia may look big enough to accommodate millions of people but only the coastal strips are fertile and the soil is too thin, so Australia's future cannot guarantee the well being of these overwhelming rush of newcomers. Besides you

have to draw a line somewhere. According to the reports there are 2000 refugees at sea heading towards Australia and about 10 000 waiting on the Indonesian coast for their journey across the Indian Ocean. If Norway is so sensitive and sympathetic about these unfortunate people why doesn't your government have them? I am a migrant in this country and waited for my turn to be accepted as a migrant. If there had been as many as boat people in those times I would have missed the opportunity to migrate to Australia. Contrary to misguided information about Australians in Norway, we are very generous people (Aften Posten, 2001).

Another letter writer, Richard Pollard, agrees with the government's analysis that the refugees on the Tampa are 'queue jumpers:'

For every illegal immigrant, we take one person less who has been following the proper channels and attempting to get here legally. A line must be drawn in the sand. Either you go through the correct process, or you don't get in (ibid).

A Melbourne letter writer, Shirley Gray, incensed by how Australia is represented in Norway wrote that:

While Darwin was being bombed in 1942 my father's best friend, Les Mahon from Tasmania, was getting himself killed trying to free your country from the Germans and your own Quislings. Nearly 70,000 of our young men died during World War II defending the Europe which now vilifies us. We do not have to justify ourselves or our actions to the rude, ignorant and ungrateful descendants of World War II survivors who may not even have been here were it not for the sacrifices of these Australians (ibid).

These three letters are representative of the emotions that the Tampa crisis triggered amongst the Australian population. Despite these letters there were also letters that expressed ‘shame’ at how the Australian government responded to the Tampa refugees. But as Burnside perspicaciously observes the Australian electorate was more disposed to supporting the government’s position and I believe many had positions that reflected the views echoed by the leader of One Nation, Pauline Hanson who said that:

If I can invite who I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country (The Age, 2006)

What emerges from the story provided on the Tampa is an outline of the political terms of hospitality offered by the Australian government. This kind of hospitality, of course, is strongly contested on a number of fronts, in particular, by human rights activists and citizens groups. For example, Kate Orman, a letter writer from Sydney sums up the views of many Australians who objected to how the government reacted towards the Tampa:

It saddens me to see that some Australians believe that “protecting our borders” means leaving kids and pregnant women sweltering on the open deck of a ship. There’s simply no need for such cruelty: allowing a few more refugees in our wealthy county (after checking their claims, of course) is hardly opening a floodgate for illegal immigrants. Three cheers for the generous people of Christmas Island, who have opposed the government’s stubborn stance and are ready to welcome the refugees (Aften Posten, 2001).

Before we consider the participants' perspective on Australian hospitality I would like to firstly discuss some of the political and ethical formations of hospitality. The word hospitality is derived from the Latin *hospes* (*hosti-pet-*), a term which literally means "the guest-master" (Benveniste, 1973:72). Although this definition may seem to be contradictory, it does convey the meaning of the word: the act of hospitality "is founded on the idea that a man is bound to another (*hostis* always involves the notion of reciprocity) by obligation to compensate a gift or service from which he has benefited" (ibid: 77).

Hospitality is an act of human bonding with each other. Once recognised it opens the path of reciprocity and equality between human beings as it is mentioned above. It is derived from the Latin word *hosti-pet* an idiom which means 'the guest- master' interaction. Of course if we read this rather negative term into the stranger and the host relationship we could recognise that the master owns the house and he/she need to fulfil their obligation and embrace the guest who enter their homes in which he/she have to make him or her welcome.

Benveniste says that 'hospitality is founded on the idea that a man is bound to another (*hostis* always involved the notion of reciprocity) by obligation to compensate a gift or service from which he has benefited (ibid: 82).

Derrida's thinking on hospitality is a deconstruction of Kantian notions of hospitality. Hospitality can be described as a 'good' virtue but it is also based on an economy of power between the host and the guest. According to Kant hospitality needs to be offered to the stranger as a duty. The host in this relationship as the one offering

hospitality is authorised with the power of welcoming the stranger. According to Derrida welcoming the stranger into a context where the host is the master implies an unequal relationship and one where the stranger must submit to the 'household' (society) of the host. Thus hospitality is possible only on the paradoxical condition that it is impossible. The existence of hospitality depends on the existence of a door; Derrida adds that if there is a door there must be hospitality that is hostile to the stranger because someone has a key to the door, which implies that they control the parameters of hospitality. Hence hospitality is the door- the threshold- that closes up the world of strangers so that it could allow entry to strangers-as-friends.

According to Michael Nass:

We extend our hospitality by opening our arms, doors, or borders, always from a threshold, from a limit marking what is our own- or what we take to be our own- from what is not. Although the threshold marks the limits of one's own, and so is always exclusionary, selective, often times harsh..., there would be no hospitality without it (Nass, 2003: 154).

Derrida in his analysis of hospitality moves away from 'romantic' understandings to one where he questions the relationship of hostility within hospitality. Hospitality is hostile in that it administers, legislates, rations, and selects movement across the threshold. To be allowed passage through the threshold as a 'guest' implies that one has accepted to be regulated, codified, and thereby succumb to the 'house rules' (laws of the country). Derrida pertinently states that invitations are not offered without conditions; indeed they are requirements for respectable and genteel behaviour. The invitation requires that the guest submits to the rules of the host who is the only one

who can issue an invitation. Invitations are not always lucid and are coded in terms of their requirements. The friendliness of the invitation will no doubt assure compliance. According to Derrida the friendlier the host's invitation the more likely the stranger will be transformed into the guest. The friendly nature of the invitation creates an ambiance where the guest feels and believes that they are not being forced under the authority of the host. What is compelling is that the more gracious and welcoming the invitation the more likely is the absolute concealment of hostility within hospitality. As Caputo writes:

When the host says to the guest, "Make yourself at home," this is a self-limiting invitation. "make yourself at home" means: please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine (1997).

Derrida's observations on the concealment of hostility within hospitality is very important, as it draws our attention to how societies can congratulate and praise itself on its inclusive policies towards migrants and refugees- strangers. The hospitality of the Australian state to strangers is indeed concealed with hostility as is evident with the Tampa crisis. It is important to also stress that in Australia hospitality is a state project that is oriented towards self – benefit. Strangers who are offered an invitation to Australia are situated as financial assets:

We've shifted very much to a skilled migration intake, bringing in people who are under 45, are qualified and contribute to the Australian economy (Former Australia's Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone).

Australian immigration is based on a 'welcome,' as Derrida explains that fits with the expectations of the host. The expectation of the host is that the guest will be an 'asset' and make an economic contribution to Australian society. Thus Australian hospitality is a conditional hospitality that is where migrants must accept the conditions they are 'welcomed' under. The conditions that migrants are welcomed under are organised around the benefits for the state. Immigrants must match the political and economic expectations and interests of Australia.

Hospitality, according to how Derrida and Dufourmantelle put it:

requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner, but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even names (2000:25)

According to this definition hospitality is not about trying to fit migrants into the conditions acceptable to the state. It does not require obligations. But rather hospitality seeks to welcome those that do not fit appropriately to the requirements of the state; it is a gift given to strangers who do not conduct themselves in the language, culture, values celebrated by the host. Hospitality is about offering to the other, to the outsider. According to Derrida the ethic of hospitality is not about what is acceptable to the host. But rather must allow the Other to be distinct and different from me:

Unconditional hospitality implies that you don't ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself. Even if the other deprives you of your mastery or your home, you have to accept this. It is terrible to

accept this, but that is the condition of unconditional hospitality: that you give up the mastery of your space, your home, your nation. It is unbearable. If, however, there is pure hospitality it should be pushed to this extreme (Keary and Dodley, 1999: 70) Derrida, hospitality, justice and responsibility.

Mireille Rosello in 'Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest' (2001) quotes Derrida's observation that 'when I open my door, I must be ready to take the greatest of risks' acknowledges that the political atmosphere of fear created by post September 11 has come to dominate Western consciousness about the 'risks' posed by strangers and foreigners. In the following pages I will discuss how Iranians experience and construct hospitality in Australia in a post September 11 environment.

Iranian Notions of Hospitality

Do good and keep your doors open to any who may come from far or near, for he who does not do good and does not keep his doors open, will find the door of Heaven and Paradise (*garodhman*) closed to you (Zaehner, 1976:111).

According to the participants in this study the notion of hospitality (*Mehman-navazi*) is deeply rooted in the Persian Zoroastrian code of conduct which maintains that individual's ascribe to 'Good Thoughts', 'Good Words' and 'Good Deeds.' These are the codes of conduct which set out the patterns of behaviour required for the practice of hospitality. Thus concepts such as *Pendar-e Nik*, *Goftar-e Nik*, *Kerdar-e Nik* form the essence of Persian hospitality.

The host or hostess is required to receive the guest into their home. The receiving of a guest into one's home socially transforms him or her from being a stranger: 'The man of good lineage, who is master of a house, should respectfully receive any person coming (to him), be it in consequence of an order or (other) pacts [*miroiby*]. The host or hostess is reminded to: Make the traveler welcome so that you yourself may receive a heartier welcome in this world and the next (Zaehner, 1976:111).

The idea of leaving one's door open for strangers and treating them as guests is deeply rooted in a spiritual belief that you have fulfilled the requirements of entering heaven and paradise. Thus closing one's door on a stranger is not taken lightly. The shutting out of a stranger from one's home is viewed as amounting to not finding the door of paradise. The host has a profound role in ensuring that they act in a hospitable and welcoming manner to the stranger because this equals to fulfilling the requirements of entering into paradise (Meagher: 1977).

Yann Richard provides the following account:

An Islamic tradition handed down by the Persian poets tells how Abraham, not wishing to eat alone, once sought to share his meal with an old man he met in the desert. When the time came to pray, he realized that his guest was a Zoroastrian and wanted to send him away. But an angel restrained Abraham saying, 'God has fed this man for a hundred years, how could you refuse him a meal?' (Richard, 1990: 30).

Iranians in this study translate these ancient traditions as 'ethical' and 'moral' responsibilities that affect the well being of the community. Hospitality towards a stranger is viewed as an act of friendship as well as bringing harmony to the

community. In particular in displacement, in another country, they see hospitality as an important virtue critical to one's well being and safety.

Trudy Conway elaborates further on Middle Eastern and in particular Iranian virtues of hospitality in her paper on 'From Tolerance to Hospitality: Problematic Limits of a Negative Virtue':

As Westerners we think of hospitality as merely a private act tied to demands of social etiquette, the welcoming of friends as reflecting a code of private social obligation. In contrast, in Middle Eastern society, hospitality, the welcoming and protecting of the stranger not of one's tribe, is acknowledged as the most esteemed virtue, disclosive of the true moral character of an honourable agent. Expectations of hospitality, not limited to friend and kin, extend to non members of communities crossing tribal borders and private thresholds. Wayfarers in traditional societies such as Iran, where travellers often lacked access to food and rest between caravanserais, could always count on the hospitable response to the stranger (2004:6-7).

Conway's description of Middle Eastern hospitality is not enshrined in any form of legal jurisprudence and unlike her I would argue that it is contained in a body of social rules on hospitality and etiquette towards the Other, the Stranger. According to Conway there are no formally codified rules of etiquette on hospitality in Middle Eastern societies. The participants in this study contradict her observation and detail the rules of etiquette observed towards the Stranger/the guest.

Hospitality is an important ritual in Iranian social life in the diaspora. It is described as a fabric of Iranian identity and culture. Many of the participants lament that their

‘authentic’ identity and culture is unknown by the dominant white culture in Australia and that many in Australia, they believe, perceive them as ‘unfriendly’ and ‘inhospitable.’ However, they recount historical narrative to demonstrate that they are a kind and hospitable people:

The Babylonians after conquering Jerusalem, destroyed the Hebrew temple and took the Jews into captivity (597-586 BC). The Hebrews were forced to abandon their religion and worship Babylonian gods. The Persian king after his conquest of Babylon freed the Hebrews and allowed them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their sacred temple.

This historical narrative alongside Zoroastrian notions of hospitality forms the nucleus of Iranian understandings of hospitality. That is one must accept the ‘difference’ of the stranger and welcome them into the inner circle of the community. They do not see the ‘difference’ of the stranger as a ‘threat’ to their existence and identity. The action of the Persian King Cyrus the Great who freed the Jews from their captivity forms the moral source of their values and informs their identity. Through this story they question why hospitality is not offered to them in ‘alien’ lands especially as they have been forced into foreign places because of the difficulties they have experienced as result of war, economic and religious tension in their country of birth.

This story provides the moral thread of their request for hospitality and demonstrates their cultures’ commitment to accepting the stranger in an unconditional manner that supports the stranger’s quest for freedom.

Perceptions of hospitality

One of the compelling forms of narrative that frequently emerged from all the female participants was in relation to how Australian society perceived them. That is not just as Persians or Iranians but more so as Iranian women. Many of the female participants were deeply bothered and frustrated with the ways they were constructed and constantly reduced to the status of 'idiocy' and of being highly 'oppressed' with 'no voice.' They argue that a stranger cannot be welcomed if the host has preconceived ideas about them especially when an encounter between the two has not taken place. Thus they believe that they can never be welcomed in Australia if the host holds such negative and derogatory views about the stranger who is struggling to be accepted and honoured as a guest. They believe that in order for the stranger to feel welcomed they need to be respected and not diminished by ill informed uncouth beliefs that come to be the all encompassing narrative of the stranger.

Anghize poignantly described this feeling:

What really hurts and distresses me is the negative and bad image that the Westerners have of us. I'm particularly sad about the stereotypical images they have of us Iranian women. It is depressing that we are seen as submissive and veiled figures that live in the ark ages. This is not a welcoming thought about us isn't it? They don't seem to want to get to know us.

And Bafthe echoed a general view which also shared by the participants:

We are seen as poor women who cannot speak. We are all in chadors and are submissive to our husbands. This image of us is against the image they [white Australians] have of themselves – free spirits and liberated. And of course they have a voice. How can we be welcomed when we are seen differently? Our common humanity is already diminished by seeing us as inferior and useless.

The issue of perception is a real one and the participants believe that in order to feel welcomed there needs to be a breakdown of the negative perceptions held about them or else hospitality cannot be experienced.

Hospitality accordingly the participants' cannot be about the guest constantly feeling 'grateful' and obliged to the host. They believe that they have to constantly be gratifying towards the host and be totally indebted towards them so much so that they have to renounce their identity and culture in order to be welcomed and accepted as 'Australian.' In particular this is very heavily inflicted on those of Muslim backgrounds who are viewed as 'space invaders' of white society and values.

The participants believe that there is an expectation that they must feel 'pleased' to be in Australia, since it must 'surely be better than where they came from.' And because Iranians like other migrants' retain aspects of their identity and culture they are viewed by the dominant culture as being 'ungrateful,' and unappreciative of Australian 'hospitality.' But for the participants in this study hospitality is not about the guest feeling obliged and grateful to the host. They believe it is important to acknowledge the hospitality offered – being allowed to enter the country. The

hospitality offered according to their experiences stops there. It does not go beyond the right of entry to the country. And once inside the country 'we are made to feel unwelcome, stupid and as if we have nothing to offer this country.' The participants feel that they are 'obliged to change who we are and we have to constantly recount ghastly and horrific stories to make the host feel superior and morally respectable. And of course we are not moral or respectful, are we?'

This narrative reveals a very potent theme that has emerged in many of the interviews where participants felt that they had to constantly talk about 'politics,' the bad rulers, and of course the appalling culture of their country. But many stated that they did not want to talk about politics or recount 'ghastly stories' but wanted to talk about Persian history, classical Persian poetry, and contemporary popular culture. These however were not the stories that the host wants to hear, according to the participants. Thus the stories that the host wants to hear immediately establishes a hierarchy of cultural moral worth where Persian culture is viewed as less humane because of its mistreatment of its citizens and Australian culture is constructed as superior because it does not inflict social or political repression on its citizens. However the participants realise that this is a very artificial and superficial way to make sense of cultural and political differences. They emphasise the deep interconnections between the current political status quo in Iran and Western political and strategic interests thus emphasising the relational nature of the current political and social crisis between Iran and Western countries.

The broader political crisis in Iran impacts on how Iranians are viewed and accepted by the host. At the present moment this acceptance is very much a grudging

acceptance of Iranians and this is deeply felt by the participants in this study. Thus it is a hospitality based on limits and one where the ‘guest,’ the stranger, is viewed with suspicion and is not considered trustworthy. For the Iranians in this study hospitality needs to be based on an ethics of trust and one that is not informed by injurious ideas about the guest. Otherwise it cannot be considered hospitable because the perceptions and feelings are not welcoming towards the Other. Hospitality, according to the participants needs to embrace the Other with all its positives and negatives, in its totality so that a true interconnection and dialogue can take place and the responsibility of guest and host can be clearly negotiated. The host needs to be open to differences and not disparage those differences purely because it is ‘unknown.’

As Khalil stressed:

it is nice to be here but tell you the truth I have not been able to find a friendship which makes me to feel *paywand*’ (connection) the link between me and others here. I don’t feel that I’m invited to be here, yet.

Paywand is an important concept in Persian culture and identity. It implies the close relationship that exist between Iranians in relation to their attachment to their past, and share knowledge of their culture, linguistic and historical backgrounds and particularly when related to specific aspects of their collective knowledge and translate it within their narrative of displacement.

For the above participant as well as others in this study what is missing is the ‘gift of being welcomed’ and invited into Australian society. For the above participant the missing point is the lack of *paywand* between them and the host. From this narrative it

is important to pick up the subtle implications of *paywand* and its social meaning. For *pay wand* to exist between the host and the guest it is important that a form of 'initiation' or more appropriately 'a rite of passage' takes place. The guest needs to be 'welcomed' and 'greeted' into the culture and society of the host in order for *paywand* to take place. The cultural expectation that one would be welcomed into society is an expectation that cannot be sincerely fulfilled because of the current political dynamics relating to the Other in Australia (Marr&Wilkinson, 2004 and Hage, 2003). Iranians' have a cultural expectation that a guest, a newcomer should be welcomed into society because of their 'newness,' and unfamiliarity with the social and normative expectations of the society, Australia, that they have migrated to. They feel frustrated of the prejudices that surround their identity and presence in Australia. As one of the participants called Naser remarked that:

If they don't want us here why do they allow us to come? This is a contradiction. I don't understand it. You either like your guests, the people you have allowed to come to your house or you don't and you should not give clashing views on this issue. I am not sure if Australia is happy with its Iranian guests. Also how long are we guests for? I have been here for 30 years and my children were born here. Am I still a guest? I don't think I am but I'm made to still feel unwelcome as if I am not part of this society. I work here and my children were born here but there is still an unease about us [Iranians]. They [white Australians] always ask me about Iran rather than how my life is here. It's as if I don't exist here. I have not been to Iran for 30 years so how would I know what Iran is like. I read the same newspapers and listen to the same radio news as they.... so my knowledge of current Iran is not much different from theirs. It's so strange I get frustrated with these questions. I think these

misunderstandings happen because the majority of people here have not experienced what it is like to be a minority; a stigmatised culture.

For Iranians the unwelcome nature of Australian society towards their presence is not only frustrating and disturbing but also impacts on their well being and how they bear the psychological stress of being ‘unwanted’ or as many explained ‘misunderstood’. This is highlighted in the following remarks by Mojghan. She said that:

I feel always stressed and sad especially when Iran is on the news. That means that Australians are forming an idea about Iranians and their culture. I don't want to tell people where I am from because they then look at you when you say Iran as if it is the most alien society in the world. They have no idea of our past and history. And I become very stressed. There is this huge weight that we carry and it really hurts our feelings especially when you think westerners are intelligent and they should know about the world- they travel a lot and see. We are unwelcome and we behave like that. Always timid, hesitant and nervous because of the fear that being unwelcomed can mean: distrusted or rejected.

Feeling unwelcomed can have psychological implications for an individual and the above narrative captures this eloquently. The signs of being a ‘stranger’ of not ‘belonging,’ of not being welcomed to a new society are manifested through physical signs like being timid and fearful. These feelings also reveal the lack of ‘confidence’ that participants feel about living in Australia. And it ties into the concept of *paywand*, the lack of connection with the host society. The narratives reveal how important the participants value the idea of being welcomed without preconceived

ideas and this is clearly indicated by Borzu who shared his feeling with me in the interviews I conducted with him.

I was recently at a cultural gathering and this old Australian man came and started to chat to me. As we started talking he asked where I came from and I said 'Iran.' He paused and said: 'I was in Tehran 40 years ago.' I was stunned and amazed. And he went on to talk about all the places he visited and spoke about how hospitable Iranians were. I got really annoyed as he kept talking as if he could not reflect and see that his country was not hospitable towards us. It was all this gratification as if Iran had to be hospitable towards him and other Westerners but for us to ask that from this society [Australia] seems a lot to ask for.

Many participants recounted stories where they met Australians who had visited Iran before the Islamic revolution of 1979. Many felt annoyed by these encounters and felt that there was a sense of superiority and arrogance that Australians who had travelled to Iran displayed. Many saw this as arrogance displayed in their freedom to travel anywhere without any form of restriction¹⁵. Many Australians could travel to most part of the world with or without a visa without being harassed. However, they [Iranians] did not have the same kind of rights and privileges to travel freely as Australians do. Thus it becomes apparent that some bodies can move around the world without being marked 'racially' and without prejudice. For many Iranians it is this racially unmarked identity that they long for but realise the impossibility of ever gaining that status.

¹⁵ I have come across a considerable number of Australians who have been in Iran after the 1979 and told me about the positive experience of hospitality they received whilst visiting Iran.

In many respects the freedom to travel without restrictions and hospitality are tied together. Those who can travel without restrictions obviously represent a 'body' an identity that has social and cultural power and hospitality in many ways is not only expected but bestowed on them. However, those who cannot travel freely and encounter barriers at each check point and border are also the least likely to experience hospitality from the country they enter. This, I believe, is very much the Iranian case. Iranian's do not have freedom to travel anywhere they desire. They need to make cumbersome applications to the country they want to visit or indeed settle in. Usually, this is not possible however some manage to 'pass through' either through luck or they have met some stringent Western Eurocentric criteria.

Many of the research participants' felt this very poignantly and inquisitively asked: why do we need visas to enter western countries and they [westerners] don't need visas to enter hardly any countries? And furthermore some participants' added to this question: why do they [westerners] receive hospitality and are welcomed in most of the third world countries and we are not welcomed into the first world? It is this set of complex questions that the participants think about and discuss. They realise that these questions are all linked to historical and political contexts and that they have no control in how they get translated into the 'real' world.

For Iranians hospitality 'needs to be offered to new comers.' Hospitality entails an interaction that needs to be negotiated between the host and the guest. As it is stated by Shiftehe one of the participants' hospitality needs to be achieved at two levels:

Of course the Government does not make us feel at ease here. They always have something to blame Australian Muslims, and I don't identify with the Muslim 'representatives' shown on TV but I feel that I am also implicated in what ever dispute is taking place in the media and at the government level. The Government needs to make new arrivals welcome and let them know that they are part of this society and they expect us to contribute economically, socially etc. But instead they keep talking about 'becoming Australian and having Australian values' which they never define. I accept that when you enter another country you have to act within its law but if that law is racist you have the right to work to change it. I really believe that. I believe that you have to give and take. I don't have a problem with that.

From this narrative we see that hospitality is linked to the role of Government and the law. In many ways it fits in with the parameters of Kant's understanding of hospitality where he argues that hospitality is not an issue of philanthropy but "of right" as he maintains:

Hospitality means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another's country" (1983:118).

Kant's idea of the 'right to universal hospitality' centres on the fact that no place of the earth originally belongs to anyone and hence everybody has a right to be on any region of the earth. Therefore, the earth belongs to no one and accordingly is open to everybody. Kant thus argues: "the right to visit, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface; ...because originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else" (ibid: 118).

Hospitality for Kant indicates:

... the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another. One may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but, so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one may not treat him with hostility.

The universal right for individuals to be on any region of the earth could be interpreted as being politically naïve. In particular the current historical moment reveals how far from the reality this ‘universal right’ is. Most western Anglo European countries are concerned with policy questions about ‘foreigners’ and the conditions that are imposed on their entry to “our” territory. The above participant made reference to reciprocating with the host and acting within a nation’s legal framework which resonates with Kant’s idea of ‘universal hospitality.’ While Kant argues that there is universal ownership of the earth this does not translate to meaning universal hospitality. In many ways, I believe, Kant’s hospitality cannot be viewed as universal as it argues that our acceptance of ‘foreigners’ needs to be based on ‘conditions.’ It is important to recount from Kant’s perspective what the grounds of conditionality are on ‘universal hospitality.’ Does Kant approach this issue from a legal framework like the above participant? What are the Kantian conditions for universal hospitality?

Kant limits the right of ‘universal hospitality’ to the right for foreigners to visit and not to live in foreign countries. Kant goes on to write that hospitality is:

... not the right to be a permanent visitor... a special beneficent agreement would be needed in order to give an outsider a right to become a fellow inhabitant for a certain length of time. It is only a right of temporary sojourn, a right to associate, which all

men have. They have it by virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse and hence must tolerate the presence of each other.

However, he continues:

“hospitality (hospitableness) means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another country. If it can be done without destroying him, he may be turned away; but as long as he behaves peaceably he cannot be treated as an enemy” (1983:118).

For Kant universal hospitality is based on a juridical and political framework that gives only the right of temporary sojourn and not the right of residency. It affects only the citizens of States. According to Derrida:

[t]he law and cosmopolitics of hospitality that he [Kant] proposes [...] is a set of rules and contracts, an interstate conditionality that limits, against the backdrop of natural law reinterpreted within a Christian horizon, the very hospitality it guarantees (Derrida, *Adieu*: 101).

Derrida suggests that Kant is mainly concerned with establishing the conditions under which the foreigner, -the other- has a right to hospitality and the limitations of that right. Hospitality is offered on the condition that the guest never shows hostility towards the host; that the guest always takes into account that while he may make himself at home, he is however not at home. Thus Kant’s ‘universal hospitality’ is based on conditional welcoming of the Other, the foreigner, which specifies the conditions of their ‘welcome.’ The conditions of hospitality are based on legal limitations. Thus ‘universal hospitality’ is based on hospitality as law and the foreigner is subject to the host’s law, culture and norms.

These ideas are weaved in the above participant's narrative. In particular the participant states very clearly that the 'guest' has a right to challenge 'racist laws' however according to the law of hospitality as exemplified by Kant this challenge could not be possible because the law of hospitality upholds the authority of the host as the owner of place, nation, and state. The guest has entered the city, the territory under the conditions the host – the master – has determined and thus challenging 'racist laws' would be against the conditions of the law of hospitality.

The Host Language: A barrier and liberator

The participant, Borzu confronts in a very unconscious manner the philosophical debates surrounding the conditions of hospitality and explains that a guest should not be obliged to:

assimilate to the culture and values of white Australia. There are hundreds of different cultures living here how can we chose which one to adopt. Australians in the bush are different to Australians who live in Box Hill. Those who live in Footscray are different to people who live in Toorak. There is so many different cultures and values in white Australia. I want to speak my language, practice my culture and traditions. I don't think I need to change my identity. Some people have been here for decades and still cannot speak the language. That is their choice and experience. There are many reasons why this is so. But I think it is important for one to learn the language of the country and understand its laws. You as an individual benefit from that. You can follow what is happening in the news and talk to your neighbour. Language is important and this country's language is English. I don't have a problem about learning the language but we should not be obliged to also adopt the culture. That is something different.

Shifthe's narrative directs our attention to Derrida's questions on hospitality. Derrida asks whether the guest should accept and live by the customs of the host; should the guest speak the host's language; if not how could the host welcome the guest without a common language; and should the guest upon arrival identify himself and give their name to the host (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000:27). These are poignant questions which I do not wish to discuss only on an abstract philosophical level but one that is informed by the lived experiences, from the phenomenological framework of, the participants in this study.

Anghize who arrived as a refugee almost 6 years ago brings the issue of language and identity to the issue of hospitality. he maintains that retaining one's culture and language should not be a barrier to being welcomed and becoming a 'good' citizen in the host's country:

The biggest problem is communication so I think learning the language of the country is very important. You need it for work, education and express yourself. If someone swears at you in the street at least you can say something back. Otherwise you are like a deaf person. Without the language of the country you are deaf and that is not good for your soul, for your health and even our confidence. We become like children always learning second hand and according to someone else's interpretation. I don't want that. I want to interpret things for myself. Hospitality needs a language even if we have different cultures at least if we speak a common language we can talk about our traditions and cultures. But without it [language] we cannot do anything. I think with the language you also learn something of the culture also. But I do not want to forget my Persian language which I think is a beautiful language but here our mother tongue gets used less especially if we work or are studying and if you are not in the

Persian community that begins to fade. So it's important to learn the language and maintain the mother tongue. I think it is good to be bilingual.

According to Anghize language is critical to one's sense of place in Australia. Without knowledge of the English language one is literally without an identity and one's sense of place. Language is also linked to well being both emotionally and physically. Anghize believes that the guest needs to decide whether they learn the language of the host or not and that it should not be dictated. Despite this she believes that knowledge of the language of the host gives power and confidence to the guest to be able to both represent and defend itself.

A different perspective is provided by Hale another whose status can be categorised as 'refugee.' She spent some time in a detention centre in Australia and states that:

I left Iran because I was very unhappy and wanted freedom. I could not believe what happened to me and others. I really believed westerners would welcome us with open arms. But people don't even know where Iran is. They have a terrible view of Iran and don't separate the difference between politics and our culture. That is the saddest thing and also I don't think people are kind here to find out about our problems. I have not been welcomed and there has been no *Mehman-navazi* (hospitality). I don't expect red carpet treatment but at least don't lock us up without knowing why we are here. This kind of experience already has left a bad experience for me and I don't trust anyone here. I speak the English language but its meanings are lost because my words are Persian. They carry meanings from my culture. When I speak the English language people look at me as if I am silly and this is because I am really speaking Persian. I have no problem to learn the language of the country you live in.

This is a very compelling narrative. The participant draws our attention to how meanings of words can get 'lost' because they are coming from a Persian language and cultural context. For example the participant asked 'do they hear and understand me when I say *'ma mehman- nevazim'* (we are hospitable people). The participant is alluding to the idea that when she utters this concept in English its meaning is lost because 'hospitality' in Persian is steeped in a deep cultural practice with defined normative practices. A Persian speaking Iranian would understand this concept and what it entails however to an 'outsider' the meaning is lost and remains quite superficial. For many Iranians in this study, to borrow from Derrida, 'the experience of language' is lost because it is not marked by a shared experience. Thus the participants experience loss, and offence in a traumatic manner because the authenticity of their feelings, and experience cannot be articulated in the language of English, although they might be fluent in that language. To further add to Derrida's concept of 'tracing in language', we could argue from the narratives of the participants that although one speaks 'the language' English, one is always tracing the sedimentation of the experience from another language (Persian). Derrida states that:

Because of the fold of such a re-mark is there, the replica or re-application of the quasi-transcendental or quasi-ontological within the phenomenal, ontical, or empirical example, and within the phantasm itself where the latter presupposes the trace in language, we are justifiably obliged to say at once that "we only ever speak one language," and "we never speak only one language" or "I only speak one language, (and, but, yet) it is not mine (1988 :26-27).

And when the participants speak in English that language is not 'theirs' because the meanings generated come from their Persian language and experience. The English language is appropriated to give meaning to an experience that does not come from

the English language. It is this point that the participants' are trying to articulate that even learning the language does not free them from their alienation but rather adds to it. To paraphrase Derrida, the participants ask: do you hear when I say: *Khane shomast, shad kardid ma ra* (feel at home, you brought joy to us)? And what about: *khosh amedid* (you brought happiness). These are important greetings that the host bestows on the guest. But when these concepts are evoked in the English language they become quite obsequious and lose its authentic meaning.

These concepts are deeply rooted in Iranian understandings and experiences of the 'institution' of hospitality. Thus one cannot translate and interpret concepts from one language to another without losing its meaning. Even to articulate it and practice these normative expectations of hospitality in Australia with people who are not Iranian brings a breakdown not only in language but also because the host is unaware of the normative expectations that are required of them. For example one participant recounted that she on many occasions offered plates of food to her Australian neighbour who took it with pleasure but never reciprocated back and her plate was always returned empty. However, if this relationship and interaction took place between two Iranians they would respond differently and reciprocate; that is the plate would never be returned to its owner without food.

Many of the participants' believe knowledge of the language is critical for 'getting along' in the society in terms of one's career and 'sanity': 'If you don't speak the language you might as well live in prison remarked one participant. Language was seen as an important medium not just to a job but also to 'move around in society' with ease and not be dependent on anybody else. While many reflected that learning the language was difficult and that they felt inhibited from using it to express many

personal issues they were however content that they had basic language skills. Huri stated that:

I tried to translate a poem to an English speaking friend. It was very difficult and I made the poem sound terrible. I don't think it made any sense. So we are trying to express ourselves in a foreign language and this is poor because its not our mother tongue. There are so many different ways to express your emotions in Persian and I can't do that in English because I only know a certain amount. You can't learn the whole language. In many ways we become aliens because of the language. Because we cannot express ourselves in a foreign language.

Language becomes both a barrier and a liberator for these participants. While many of them speak English they complain that they cannot express inner thoughts and often find the English language limiting either because they don't have a comprehensive knowledge of it or they find it culturally alien in its ability to give meaning to their culturally specific experiences. Many of the participants believe that learning the language of the country they live in is important and should not be seen as political assimilation. They object to assimilation but believe that learning the language is about one's own empowerment and freedom. Thus not speaking the language of the host is viewed as being trapped in 'silence.' It 'belittles' the soul and one's well being.

Huri complained that while she spoke 'perfect English I don't feel welcomed here. I have learnt the language and I know a lot about this country but people always ask me 'where are you from' I feel like saying 'space.'

Thus 'knowing the language' does not allow the guest immediate confluence with the host. While many politicians complain about migrants and refugees not learning the

language the narratives in this thesis reveal that many participants value the importance of learning the English language. However, knowledge of the language does not, as we have seen, make the ‘welcoming’ process unproblematic and painless. Indeed, the narratives have revealed the complexity of language and that for it to be effective it needs to be uttered from an experience that is shared between the guest and the host. The participants speak about experiences in a language that is not theirs. The problem the participants argue is that they are uttering the experience in a language that is not ‘theirs.’

Counter Narratives and Identity

The circumstances that shape the identity of Iranians in displacement, as we have seen in the previous chapters, are influenced by many factors, including religious stereotypes, geographic settings and political factors. The participants in this study draw on history and classical Persian epic texts to elucidate ‘who they are’ thus rejecting the hackneyed clichés of Iranians as the ‘aggressive enemy of western democracy and civilisation.’

In the following pages I will discuss the classical Persian epic texts and historical events that the participants draw on to challenge the misrepresentation of their identity. The texts that they draw on are used as counter narratives to challenge these stereotypes.

For the research participants Iran represents the *place* where they were born and raised and have left for many reasons. They are aware of Iran’s history and its ancient

culture. Khalil who arrived in Australia in 1989 and who recently visited Iran for the first time since her arrival talked about the psychological effect it had on her:

It is hard to live there [Iran] but when I came back [Australia] I noticed that I will always be an outsider here [Australia]. And tell you the truth I have had a great time here, since I have arrived to Australia in 1989. Regardless of what is happening in your birthplace it is always your birthplace. Especially for people like me who came here when I was in my mid 20s. When I went back to Iran I travelled a lot and it was during this time that I noticed that history was everywhere. Wherever I looked I witnessed it. It was in earth mounds, which are scattered across the country and some of which are hundreds of feet high. It was in remote places and places can be seen across ancient villages with very welcoming ordinary people. People who have belonged to these places for thousands of generations and know the roots of their cultures. I drove through the country and was so impressed with its richness. In this trip I always came across ruins of an ancient city, ancient palace, ancient caravan serai, mosques and ancient shrines. I learnt more about Iran, us as a people and how contrasting the land and its people are. It was great to listen to people who speak different languages and accents. And lots of tradition and culture that I was not aware of when I lived in Iran. You get a different perspective of the country and people once you have lived in displacement when you go back home. I wanted to really see my Iran because we are always in agony in the West because people here don't know our country and its history. I knew about it but I never experienced its richness and did not have the opportunity to see it when I was living there.

The ongoing tension between 'here' and 'there' is a real one for many of the participants. They feel like 'outsiders' in both societies but explain that despite the problems of living in Iran their 'roots' are deeply based in that society and also their history. In Australia they explain that they are 'unknown' subjects who are viewed

without a history and a country. While they might have tensions and problems to live in present day Iran this they state does not mean a negation of their culture, beliefs and history. In fact displacement makes the 'homeland sweeter' or as was stated by Hale it is like a 'forbidden love – you desire it more and more despite all the thorns that surround it.'

As a new arrival Bafthe in my interview with her stated that:

I have been here for only two years, and as you noticed my English is very poor, I'm well read and informed man in my language as you know my culture very well. I think here is a very nice place, people are comfortable, mostly employed, it is a free society and individuals can do anything they like. I'm a very responsible person and like to learn and share what I have. I have met people who made me feel that I'm dumb, simply because I do not speak English well. It makes me feel as if my spirit is imprisoned. I had a lot of trouble with Australian bureaucracy and feel quite exhausted. They made me feel very angry but I could not say anything to them. I was at their mercy and still feel that I am. As an outsider I feel that I'm constantly dependent on others like a child or like an old man. I come from a troubled country but when I think about it my spirit was freer there [Iran]. I had my people and I knew places where I could feel myself. I really miss that and this distresses me. I don't even have any Australian friends who I could invite to my place. As far as I feel they don't trust us. Because all these crazy things have been happening in the world and their connections with fanatical Islam and war. Sometimes I think as if they see us all as barbarians. Perhaps it is too early to give up but I hope life will be better for me as my intention to come here was to find a more peaceful life and I will do anything I can to achieve it. Because I really think that this place is a good place. I have to learn the language first and these people's customs, don't I?

Like Bafthe the difficulty for many of the participants is that they have not as yet been able to have the 'connection' with Australian society. But in Iran they had the 'connections' because they knew the country and the people. It is this connection that they miss and long for because in Australia they are made to feel like 'barbarians' or they have experienced distress at the hands of Australian bureaucracy. The loss of place and identity that they experience in Australia amplifies their longing and desire for Iran because it provides meaning and a reference to who they are.

Classical Texts and Historical Contexts

The participants largely have a positive perspective about their heritage which they believe many Australians are unaware of. Thus it is not just their history and heritage that they lose in the process of leaving Iran but also they are left without a narrative or they carry a narrative to the new country that has 'no meaning' Arthur Frank (1995) argues that as human beings we live storied lives and therefore our world is storied. Our epistemological and ontological views about our reality and the ways we perceive the meanings of our reality are all within the boundaries of the storied nature of our social context. Crossly (2000) states that our knowledge of ourselves, others and of the world is formed within our historical, cultural, rituals, beliefs and practices.

This is clearly manifested in the way the participants talk about their relationship with their language, culture and the stories that make up who they are. One of the revealing ways the participants contradict the fallacious stereotypes about Iranian identity and culture is the constant references to classical texts, ancient monuments

and folkloric stories. These texts provide knowledge about their past, their identity, and country of birth. Rahisd said that:

After 11 September I needed to find a way to overcome my fear of being Iranian, Muslim and from the Middle East. I met a friend and he told me 'you better start reading the books which tell about our ancient history' and I took his advice and began to read anything I could find to understand. I found out how deep and rich our culture is. I feel better because I could refer to our ancient kings, monuments, religion and so on when I talk to Westerners. I knew a little before but now I feel that I'm more informed about our history.

This and other similar comments are largely due to the displacement and its associated effects that the participants experience. During the course of the interviews it became more and more clear that references to and interpretations of classical texts are related to how they feel about themselves as modern Iranians situated in a rather tortuous and complex arena in Western societies.

They use classical texts as a means to tell us about how much they wish to maintain their culture and historical identity despite the complex situation they find encounter and live through. The following account mentioned by Rana is a revealing example of this.

I use my knowledge of our ancient history to explain who I am and I look at Iran's ancient culture and history, because I have to find something in order to justify, maybe not justify but explain my sense of belonging to this world. That I came from a civilisation that was important in the history of humanity and its contribution to

science, philosophy and literature. Everything you can think of because people do not see Iranians as a people, really. As if we are no one's in this world.

This is a poignant narrative which reveals how the consciousness of displacement when provoked is forced to interpret, to reconstruct, and construct itself between what is and what has been, that is, between the 'there and then' and the 'here and now.' The 'there and then' is always difficult to reconcile with the 'here and now' because it involves representation of a 'past' that is constructed through memories, imagination, attitudes and knowledge. The 'there and then' that the participants draw on, from classical Persian epics and history is used as a form to challenge the taxonomy of Western Anglo European desiccated features about 'Iranians.'

The participants reflect on their sense of belonging and the ways they are perceived in their displacement. Reflecting back on the past provides them with a sense of 'security' about their identity and memories. Their lived experiences in displacement is given meaning through these texts thus their lives are at the crossroads of many narratives that involve 'who they are' and 'what they have become.'

Self understanding through socio-historical context via reference to text is very significant to the participants as it allows them to trace and express themselves through various horizons of their past history and present situations. It provides them with different perspectives to offset the pressure they encounter as migrants and refugees in Australia. Ricoeur on the issue of narrative states that:

As soon as one takes *traditions* to refer to those *things said* in the past

and transmitted to us through a chain of interpretations and reinterpretations, we must add a material dialectic of contents to the formal dialectic of temporal distance [that is traditionally]. The past puts us into question before we put it into question. In this struggle for the recognition of meaning, the text and the reader are each in their turn familiarized and defamiliarized (2004: 63).

In order to enlighten themselves and their interlocutors about their identity and culture the participants reinterpret the past to bring out the rich traditions of their cultural history so as to ease the burden of alienation, and foreignness. But as Ricoeur argues this recognition can turn the Other into both a familiarized and defamiliarized subject. The participants' eagerness to draw on classical texts and history is not out of a longing for national aspiration, or nationalism but to restore self esteem and dignity to an identity that has become fragmented not only because of displacement but also because of Western attitudes towards Iranian identity and culture. In particular at this juncture of contemporary politics and history the participants see an even greater need to embrace Persian history and culture. It provides a prism to look inward in order to understand and give meaning to what is constructed externally.

The classical texts and history drawn on by the participants provide different ways of seeing and experiencing Iranian culture, identity, and history. It helps them to interweave subjective positions and perspectives in the context of displacement as well as mediating their changing experiences and perceptions of themselves. Many of the participants see Iranian history and culture as providing a form of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that can redefine 'who they are' in the Western context. As Bourdieu has stated in *Distinction* (1986), people gain 'knowledge without concepts' which is the point that many of the participants press that is they

see Westerners as having knowledge about Iranians without any notion of its culture and history. Social distinctions based on class, race, gender and so forth are inscribed in cultural practices and in institutions such as schools and the media, cultural, ethnic, class and gender classifications are inscribed in people's minds. Thus, knowledge about 'Iranians' is largely predefined by our social and political institutions. It is these predefined notions of Iranians that make the participants' feel distressed.

As 'outsiders' these participants have been cut off from their native land and cultures and have been obliged to integrate, adopt and assimilate to the 'said' and 'unsaid' rules and regulations, the language, culture, political, economic and educational traditions of Australia. This process of adjustments is a kind of racialisation that all migrants and refugees undergo.

The notion of home as a place which represents the beginning of each participant's life history and personal narrative is crucial to all of the participants when they seek to communicate their lived stories as 'strangers' in this society. The joy and pain they expressed about their lives in Australia is complicated by the magnitude of the disruption they experience and the struggles they need to endure to be able to 'reasonably' adjust to their new society. For Iranians in this study being 'understood' not just linguistically but culturally and being trusted by the host is obviously crucial to their process of adjustment, and public recognition of 'who they are'

It is not surprising that most of the participants emphasized the importance of their birthplace's historical roots and stressed their pride in their Persian identity. They were eager to tell me that their connection with their past was especially in regards to

the issue of hospitality. When asked ‘why do you think you are hospitable people?’

Anghize reminded me that:

Because there is so much evidence of our ancestors who showed kindness and generosity to each other as well as to strangers from other regions, and other cultures.

We are not scared of strangers and we always welcome and help them.

In general participants believed that acts of generosity and hospitality are either embedded in their mythological tales as well as in recorded ancient texts and monuments. Iranians see the traditions of hospitality and generosity largely through thousands of years of history, religion and political circumstance.

The participants depict a positive image of themselves and their culture. Persian hospitality and generosity is associated with the condition of the Persian generally. This implies that the very notion of Persian identity is associated with the richness of generosity, care and hospitality towards the stranger.

King Cyrus: Persian hospitality and respect for others

When I entered Babylon... I did not allow anyone to terrorise the land... I kept in view the needs of Babylon and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being... I put an end to their misfortune. (King Cyrus)

The participants interweave an account of Cyrus The Great (580-529 BC) as a tale of their collective historical narrative on hospitality and human rights. The participants

ask us to try to understand their experiences from the constellation of facts detailed in the history of Cyrus The Great. They argue that Cyrus the Great carries the collective history of Persian identity, Persian notions of hospitality and respect of human rights.

Cyrus The Great was the first Achaemenian Emperor of Persia who lived from 580-529 BC. He conquered Babylon, freed 40,000 Jews from captivity, ruled his people with respect and benevolence and inscribed on a clay cylinder his decree which is famously known as the first charter of human rights. The charter of Cyrus the Great, a baked-clay Aryan language (Old Persian) cuneiform cylinder, was discovered in 1878 in excavation of the site of Babylon.

It is this knowledge about the Persian King that the participants cherish and see his benevolent characteristics as being 'intrinsically Persian' especially his kindness, hospitality and generosity. They bemoan the fact that many Australians do not know who Cyrus the Great is especially his respectful treatment of many different cultures:

How can we forget the attitude of King Kurush Kabir (Cyrus) who conquered Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians and freed Jews from their Babylonian captivity. He gave them freedom to do whatever they wanted to do and commanded his representatives in those lands to allow people to practice their cultures and religion.

This participant was so eager to recount the deeds of Cyrus that he read parts of the decree that were inscribed on the clay cylinder:

Now that I put the crown of kingdom of Iran, Babylon, and the nations of the four directions on the head with the help of Ahura Mazda (Ancient Persian Zarathushtrain God), I announce that I will respect the traditions, customs and religions of the

nations of my empire and never let any of my governors and subordinates look down on or insult them until I am alive. From now on, till Ahura Mazda grants me the kingdom favour, I will impose my monarchy on no nation. Each is free to accept it, and if any one of them rejects it, I never resolve on war to reign. Until I am the king of Iran, Babylon, and the nations of the four directions, I never let anyone oppress any others, and if it occurs, I will take his or her right back and penalize the oppressor.

And until I am the monarch, I will never let anyone take possession of movable and landed properties of the others by force or without compensation. Until I am alive, I prevent unpaid, forced labor. To day, I announce that everyone is free to choose a religion. People are free to live in all regions and take up a job provided that they never violate other's rights.

No one could be penalized for his or her relatives' faults. I prevent slavery and my governors and subordinates are obliged to prohibit exchanging men and women as slaves within their own ruling domains. Such traditions should be exterminated the world over.

One participant brought to my attention that Cyrus had the foresight to insist that 'people are free to live in all regions' as long as they did not violate other people's rights. They make a direct comparison with their own experiences and point out that 'their' King was one of the first in the world to grant 'rights' to people:

I would like to remind Australians that we have a great history and civilization. Cyrus the Great is the first to put together a human rights charter. Many of our ideas on human rights is from this [Cyrus The Great] even the UN recognizes this connection.

But many people don't understand who we are and that we have such a deep history on human rights. During the Pahlavi's regime and at the present Iran is under terrible conditions but this should not mean that the people are terrible or that they don't respect human rights. This is what causes the misunderstanding when westerners see the people of Iran as being the Government. Well its just not like that. They are two different issues. So if people saw the difference then maybe they would show hospitality to us and welcome us to their country. I always thought westerners respected human rights but I was wrong because they do not see Iranians as deserving rights. I still don't really understand why they think like this.

In this narrative several issues are raised for us to consider. Like the other narratives it stresses the importance of Persian culture's deep connection to human dignity and that modern ideas of human rights have their roots in Cyrus The Great. It further asks why westerners cannot distinguish between current political situation in Iran and those who run it and the people of Iran. For this participant this is the crux of the issue- if westerners could only learn to distinguish the two they would recognize and appreciate that Iranians are suffering and are denied rights. Perhaps then hospitality and human rights would be granted to Iranians in a less begrudging manner.

The book 'Cyrus the Great', was written by a Greek military historian Xenophon (ca 430- ca 354 BC). This is a notable book which was brought to my attention by several participants. In this book Xenophon explores the ethical, moral and generous personality of Persians which he believes is best exemplified by King Cyrus the Great (580-529 B.C).

Regardless of their beliefs and backgrounds many of the participants mentioned this book to indicate how generous and hospitable their ancestors and especially their King Kuroshe Kabir- (Cyrus the Great) were. Xenophon who was one of the admirers and a close member of Socrates' Athenian circle depicts the Persian king as a kind hearted and graceful ruler. He stresses that King Cyrus was the King who ordered the writing of the first human rights charter in the history of human kind. He explains how he allowed the people under his control to be treated justly and fairly in his vast empire.

I was rather surprised to hear a considerable number of participants refer to Xenophon's book 'The Persian Expedition (1949) and the practices of Cyrus The Great because they are generally dismissal of the Kings that have dominated and ruled over Iran. But their reference to King Cyrus was mostly to stress their historical and cultural inheritance. This became even more obvious when Borzu explained that:

I'm against monarchy and any kind of dogmatic attitudes. I'm not a traditionalist Muslim and was raised in a liberal minded family but as part of my cultural heritage I can't deny the importance of our ancient King Cyrus as a historical figure and ignore how kind he

was with his own people and when he conquered other lands. We have this powerful historical figure who treated his enemies with kindness and respect and there are so many evidence that he allowed them to maintain their costumes and traditions without imposing his will upon them. I wished the Westerns and particularly Australians were aware of these ancient rituals which is deeply embedded in our ancient tradition. I think we Persians have inherited many of those attributes and practice them as part of our deep-rooted cultures. I wonder if they have ever heard of

our prophet Zarathustra or read Xenophon's book, which is written by an ancient Greek about Persian ancient attitudes towards others as they are represented by King Cyrus?'

Cyrus's openness to others was such that Xenophon called him the most magnificent monarch of the ancient world, because according to Xenophon Cyrus as a conqueror conducted himself peacefully and was reconciliatory with the former enemies and allowed them to maintain their local cultures and costumes. Cyrus the Great is known to be the first ruler who dedicated in writing a chart about the rights of his citizens and how they should be treated humanly and with respect. And as Larry Hedrick (2006) reveals:

Even those subjected by Cyrus the Great considered him an eminently just and upright man. Shapour Surenpahlav of the University of London notes that the Persians regarded him as the "Father", the Babylonians as the "Liberator," the Greeks as the "Law-Giver," and the Jews as the "Anointed of the Lord, (Hedrick, 2006: XIII).

Hedrick continues that:

A document in the form of a cuneiform cylinder was discovered in 1878 during the excavation of the Babylonian site, is acknowledged as mankind's first charter of human rights. In recognition of this achievement, the United Nations published a translation of Cyrus' Human Rights Charter in each of the official U.N languages (Hedrick, 2006: XIII)

Omid explained that:

The west knows us only because we have oil or thinks that we are bunch of stupid fanatics. Do they know that in the ancient times we were a bridge between far Eastern Asia and the land of Mediterranean as well as Europe? We were one of those earliest people who ventured to lower land and build villages, we cultivated crops and domesticated animals and built great roads and connected with ancient civilizations. It is through this background that we perceive our identities and think who we are. We are so disappointed that the films like “Not Without my Daughter” or “300” perpetuate a terrible opinion of who we really are.

Drawing on historical accounts the participants demonstrate how their identity is rooted in cultural forms and traditions that are difficult for Westerners, particularly Australians, to ‘imagine’ especially the cultural values and practices of hospitality. Their personal trajectories are linked with social and historical contexts which mediate their experience of displacement and hospitality. In this chapter, as we have noticed, the participants have further described the conflicts, contradictions, social and cultural adjustments they have been experiencing in relation to their to displacement and hospitality. It is clear that for many of the participants the concept of hospitality implies a relationship to history that is structured in circumstances ‘real actions’ and perceptions as embodied in Persian culture and traditions as well as in the deeds of their ancestors. It is these circumstances which break with the hackneyed clichés of Iranians as ‘evil’ and ‘uncivilised’ people. While the participants note that hospitality is embedded in the essence of their culture, Derrida however argues that:

Not only is there a culture of hospitality, but there is no culture that is not also a culture of hospitality. All cultures compete in this regard and present themselves as more hospitable than the others. Hospitality- this is culture itself (Derrida, Hospitality, in Acts of Religion year: 361).

In other words every culture has a culture of hospitality but I would add that its expression is different across cultures and thus some are indeed ‘more’ hospitable and open to the *stranger* than other cultures.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Thou you have shelters and institutions,
Precarious lodgings while the rent is paid,
Subsiding basements where the rat breeds
Or sanitory dwellings with numbered doors
Or a house a little better than your neighbour's;
When the Stranger says: 'what is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?
What will you answer? 'We all dwell together
To make money from each other?' Or 'This is a community'?
And the Stranger will depart and return to the desert.
O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions
(from T.S. Eliot's Choruses From 'The Rock')

T. S. Eliot elegantly reminds us to be prepared for the coming of the Stranger because the Stranger has always been the one posing questions and forcing one to question oneself and others. In this thesis the *gharibes* (strangers) have posed many questions for us about our society and the ways we situate and construct the Stranger. The voices of the *gharibes* in this thesis have brought many questions to the fore about displacement and its affects on identity construction. It has also raised questions about how the notion of stigma symbolically marks bodies and identities off as 'culturally unacceptable' and hence negating them from the meta-narratives of Australian society. The *gharibes* have questioned their 'despised' social identity in Australia and took us into their everyday lives so that we can see how stigma manifests itself. The *gharibes* have made us think about how stigma becomes embedded in their life trajectories. They not only question but provide an analysis of why they think 'Middle Easterns' as well as those from Iran have become the most recent targets of

Australia's racist trajectory (Burnside, 2002; Hage, 2003; Glover, 2003; Marr and Wilkinson, 2004) and vilified as possible threats to Australia but also for undermining its cultural fabric.

This thesis has filled an important lacuna in studies relating to Iranian migrants and refugees living in Western societies. While there is a good body of research that has developed over the past two decades on migrants and refugees across a broad range of disciplines ranging from anthropology to psychology to cultural studies what is pertinent is the lack of substantial attention payed to the displacement narratives of Iranian migrants and refugees. This is despite the fact that their displacement and migration process raises important questions about cultural trauma, cultural stigma, displacement, and how the migration and refugee process brings new meanings and understandings to the contours of everyday life in Australia.

In particular these everyday experiences and their relationship and interactions with Australian institutions relate to broader global political frameworks on Iran and the Middle East generally. Even though Iran has intensely dominated the political imagination of western powers for nearly 3 decades research on the Iranian diaspora is poor and limited in scope. Thus this thesis not only extends some of the minor research completed on this population group but it also critically engages with current research paradigms on stigma, cultural trauma, displacement, hospitality, representation and narrative methodology as it relates to Iranian migrants and refugees.

This research has revealed that for Iranian 'migrants' and 'refugees' the experiences of displacement is part of a continuum that cannot be easily compartmentalised as 'migrant' and 'refugee' because of the political historical conditions that have created their 'migrant' and 'refugee' experience.

The continuum is based on the historical continuity that has given rise to the migrant and refugee – 1979 revolution; Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). In particular, it is within these two historical periods that the trauma narratives of the *gharibes* in this thesis emerge. Because of the historical continuum of the Iranian experience in displacement many of the *gharibes* do not construct themselves as refugees as its meanings and

connotations are ones that they feel alien towards. They prefer to see themselves as *az ja kandeh shodeha* (uprooted one's) *gharibeha* (Strangers), *kolyha* (gypsies), *mohagerha* (migrants) or *bighaneha* (aliens) because it is rooted in their social world whereas the English word 'refugee' they view as being about controlling borders and Western constructions of who 'deserves' entry into Western countries. They also do not relate to the Western construction of a refugee as being someone who is totally destitute, barefoot, and voiceless and at the mercy of the UN agencies. Their identity of a 'refugee' is rooted in the poetry of Attar, Rumi, Hafiz, Omar Khyam and other great Persian poets and writers both classical and modern. Hence this is why they label themselves with the above definitions.

They have shown us the ways they resist dominant paradigms and explain cogently the reasons behind the resistance. For example, in the Persian language, they explain that there are a multitude of ways to describe displacement and migration and refugee status and whose meanings are very much rooted in the cultural and symbolic narrative of Iranian culture. They see themselves as part of a culture that they are deeply part of but paradoxically displaced from. These findings can be useful for social institutions working with refugees to explore further the language, the words and their meanings and to find out what kind of purchase they have within a particular cultural context.

This thesis has revealed the importance of 'stigma' as being a core component of the Iranian story in the diaspora. Stigma circulates in ways that not only situates them in Australian society but also they revealed how it affects their sense of self and identity. It forces some to change names because their identity is grist to the mill of political debates about 'terrorism' 'oppressed women' and 'religious fanatics.' Thus unlike other migrants to Australia who changed or indeed Anglicised their names so as to 'fit in' Iranians on the other hand change their names because they fear the new political surveillance (post September 11) politics and policies of western governments which they believe operate to 'single us out' and 'keep us out.' The cultural stigma of being of Iranian background is potently discussed by the participants in particular they relate how certain historical events, such as the Iranian hostage crisis, embeds them deeply into frames of stigma and only one narrative of this crisis is publicly acknowledged- the suffering of Americans however the impact of the crisis on Iranians in Iran and the

diaspora is not discussed because Iranians are viewed as monolithic and hence linked with the hostage takers.

I applied a cultural trauma framework to the narratives of the 1979 revolution not only because of the psychological levels of trauma experienced by the participants but also to reveal the culturally mediated perceptions of the 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis. Similarly, the Iraq – Iran war was also put within this framework to discuss its effects on the life experiences of the participants’ in this thesis.

Poignantly this thesis has not only revealed the frames from which Iranians in the diaspora are perceived by western cultures and governments but also its effects on people’s subjectivities, their identity and the ways they negotiate and challenge some of these frames. In this thesis I have shown through the narratives of the participants the ways in which social structures in society define them but also how the participants define and analyse aspects of Australian society.

The participants reveal the effects of particular ways society defines them (e.g., veiled Iranian woman equals passivity) and how this affects their everyday roles as individuals. In this realm we see how the body plays a decisive role in how the stranger is constructed and perceived.

The strangers’ in this thesis deploy counter narratives to challenge the meta narratives of western culture about Iranians to represent themselves. These representations are at times highly ‘nostalgic’ and ‘romantic’ but they are devices that are arranged to give meaning to their isolation, marginalisation, frustration, and non recognition and hence part of the hidden defense mechanisms against these experiences. Interestingly, while many of the participants reveal that they have experienced trauma in Iran they do not allow this experience to discount ‘good memories’ of the homeland and these memories are deeply felt and expressed through poetry, songs and stories. The participants have used poetry, stories and songs not only to express feelings which they could not in the everyday language but also to bring clarity to these experiences. These creative devices are important to recognize for refugees who come from oral based cultures as it provides a special medium to express themselves through figurative language, feelings that could otherwise not be articulated. Thus asking a

refugee their favorite song is a more elegant way to communicate issues of displacement and its concomitant effects. In this thesis I have revealed the richness of this approach and shown the ways migrants and refugees speak about their displacement and how they explain the construction and reconstruction of their identities.

At the beginning of this chapter I invoked T.S. Eliot's poem to give voice to the quandary of the 'coming of the Stranger' as it has a direct link to the chapter five on Counter Narratives: Displacement and Hospitality. Hospitality and the 'coming of the stranger' are directly linked issues and the participants in this thesis have raised issues for us to consider. They have raised questions about the concept of Australian hospitality, the treatment of Iranian refugees and migrants, and their place in the Australian landscape. They have questioned hospitality from a political perspective, explored it through ethnically and located it within their social and cultural world. Thus they have spoken about the lived dimensions of Iranian and Persian hospitality and located it within their ancient Zoroastrian traditions of welcoming and caring for the Stranger. The participants in the study dwell on displacement and on their lived experiences of 'not-at-home' in Australia and in Iran. Their experiences have shaped them to be fluid in their approach to the Heideggerian existential-ontological view of 'not-at-home.' Their experiences of 'not-at-home' have shaped their identities and are, what Stuart Hall, calls a:

People who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate *between* cultures, and who, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from *difference*. They speak from the "in-between" of different cultures, always unsettling the assumption of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and at *the same time different from* the others amongst whom they live (as quoted in Xavier Inda and Rosaldo 2001:19, [Hall] 1995, p:206]; emphasis in the original).

This thesis has shown the complexity of the migrant and refugee narrative and that is no linear narrative with a singular trajectory for Iranians living in Australia. The Iranian story is a complex one that is not fixed and there is as yet no conclusion

because Iranians living in Iran and in the diaspora are still writing their history and there will be many more stories to narrate and document. Their arrival in Australia emerged as a result of particular moments in history that engulfed them without any forewarning. Their status in Australia is an on-going negotiation. And we should not read their narratives as pre-given because collective experiences of physical and cultural displacement are negotiated. And the questions they raise for themselves and for us are that these narratives do not illustrate the end of their arrival to 'foreign places' because they are just emerging from the boats. While in the popular Australian imagination they are 'missing' and not yet in existence we need to realise that the Stranger has arrived and that the Stranger has many complex dimensions.

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Appendices:

Appendix A

Social – Economic Background of Participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Time in Australia	Background	Education Level	Employment
Bafthe	Female	35	4 years	migrant. She arrived in Australia directly from Iran.	She is Studying for her tertiary degree in Australia.	Works part time.
Anghize	Female	30	6 years	Refugee. She lived in another country for three years after living Iran and came to Australia in 2001 from Asia.	Tertiary level from Iran.	Professional.
Mojghan	Female	42	12 years	Refugee. She came to Australia with her partner and their child.	Tertiary level from Australia.	Professional.
Monica	Female	39	15 years	Migrant. She came to Australia as a student and decided to stay and was granted her permanent residency 10 years ago.	Tertiary level from Iran.	Professional.
Fatima	Female	45	20 years	Migrant. She came to Australia from a third country.	Secondary level from Iran.	Homemaker.
Omid	Male	35	10 years	Refugee. He came to Australia from a third country	Tertiary level in a third country.	Taxi driver.
Shoule	Female	25	5 years	Migrated to Australia from a third country.	Studying.	Part time.
Naser	Male	58	30 years	He migrated to Australia 30 years ago.	Tertiary level from Australia.	Family business.
Hassan	Male	44	16 years	He came to Australia from a third	Secondary level	Professional.

				country as a refugee.	from Iran.	
Huri	Female	42	10 years	Migrated to Austrlia under Family Reunion Scheme.	Diploma from Australia.	Unemployed.
Salim	Male	40		Refugee. He arrived in Australia in 1992 from a third country.	Tertiary level in Iran.	Self employed.
Rana	Female	45		Migrant. She left Iran in 1980.	Tertiary level in third a country.	Family business.
Bakhtiar	Male	51	18 years	Left Iran in 1986 and migrated to Austrlia through a third country. He came to Australia under family reunion scheme.	Secondary level in Iran.	Working part time.
Saleh	Male	32	3 years	Refugee. He came to Australia from a third country	Secondary level from in Iran	Unemployed.
Rahsih	Male	29	4 years	He arrived in Australia as a migrant in 2003.	Tertiary level in Iran.	Professional.
Khalil	Male	35	7 years	Refugee. He arrived to Austrlia through a third country.	Secondary level in Iran.	Taxi driver.
Karim	Male	40	8 years	Migrant. He arrived to Australia through Family Reunion Scheme.	Tertiary level in Iran.	Family business.
Shiffte	Famle	28	5	Migrant. She arrived from Iran.	Studying.	Part time.
Borzu	Male	41		He migrated to Australia after living in a third country for several years.	Studying.	Family business.
Frestehe	Famle	38	8 years	Refugee. She came to Australia from a third country.	Diploma level in Iran.	Homemaker.

Appendix B

Human Research Ethics Committee

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr Jenny Sharples
Principal Investigator
Psychology

FROM: Dr John McDougall
Director, Office for Research and Development

DATE: 1/5/05

SUBJECT: **Approval of application involving human subjects**

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your submission detailing amendments to the research protocol for the project titled, *The Psychological narrative of Iranians in displacement* (HRETH.017/03).

The proposed amendments have been accepted by the Human Research Ethics Committee and approval for application HRETH.017/03 has been granted from 1/5/05 to 1/9/07.

Please note that, the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants, and unforeseen events that may effect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 9688 4708.

The Committee wishes you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Dr John McDougall
Director, Officer for Research and Development

Appendix C

The questions below will be used as a guide to begin the ‘narrative interviewing’ with the participants.

Demographic background:

- What is your name?
- Which part of Iran do you come from?
- What language do you speak, are you Muslim, Bhai or belong to any other religions?
- Did you study here?
- What kind of occupation did/do you have?
- Are you married?
- Do you have children?
- How long have you been in Austrlia?
- Why and how did you leave Iran?
- How and when did you come to Australia?

The following questions are intended to trigger about the participants’ emotional and mental experiences of displacement from their familiar social, cultural and physical environment.

- Can you please think of a Persian poem or story and tell me about it?
- Can you please think of a Persian song or musician you like to listen to?
- Can you please tell me about a novel you like to read?
- Can you please tell me about why you chose this piece (poetry, song, story and novel)?
- Do you feel that these themes are relevant to your experience of displacement?