



Iranian Women in the Diaspora: 'Being Here and Being There'

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List of Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; also: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN)
ICT	Information and Computer Technology
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NL	Netherlands
TAN	Transnational Advocacy Network
TFN	Transnational Feminist Network
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WLUML	Women Living under Muslim Laws

Abstract

Today the term migrant have been shifted to diaspora and women are becoming a significant focus of attention in Diaspora and Transnational studies. The focus of this study is on Iranian diasporic women in the context of their relationship with home and host land, interrelations between different groups of Iranian communities, and their socio-cultural or political action through transnationalism and the issue of women's rights in Iran. To explore their transnationalism, these women were individually interviewed about their perspectives on reasons for their departure from Iran, questions of Iranian women's rights and the women's new relationships in the land of settlement. The author applies Kim Butler's 'five dimensions' of diaspora analysis in order to differentiate groups of Iranian women in the diaspora. The study examines the reasons and conditions of dispersal and the women's ties with homeland and host country. The study is thus able to conclude that interrelationship patterns depend on the type of migration involved, and the age, class and activities of different groups of women with the Iranian diaspora communities. The study distinguishes between Activist women, Housewives and Students, as significant sub-categories of diasporic Iranian women, constructing their own kinds of transnationalism, whilst living in Europe and North America.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research paper contributes to scholarly and practitioner debates around diaspora and transnationalism, by studying a number of Iranian women living in different diasporic communities and with varying backgrounds. This may help to provide a better understanding of the importance of how dispersal takes place, and of relationships, for comparative diasporic studies more generally. The study explores how specific groups of Iranian women make connections across and within the diaspora, how these relationships have been established, and some differences among Iranian women depending on their positions, as reflected in how they pursue women rights' claim.

Keywords

Diaspora, Women, Iran, Relationships, Transnationalism, Homeland

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 About the Study

Diaspora,¹ a word, travelling from simple Greek² to conventional Diaspora studies, turning into a complex study on the flow of populations (Greek, Jewish, American, African, Asian) due to the drift of time or globalization (Clifford 1994, Butler 2001, Dofaix 2008). Since the late 1990s attention has been given to this term as an extremely valuable concept within broader sociological studies on migration and migrants' experiences. Moreover, this concept has been defined as 'a forced and voluntary exile' and even as identity of 'political capital' (Butler 2001:201,206). Kim Butler's work has been an important source for this study, as is explained in Chapter 2. Vertovec (1999a: 2-19)³ explains that a diaspora can be defined in three ways: '...diaspora as social form, type of consciousness, and as mode of cultural production'. Diasporas are usually defined as populations living outside of their homeland, and by maintaining a relationship with the homeland, becoming part of a transnational community (Clifford 1994:311, Cohen 1997: ix, Safran 1991:83-84, Vertovec 1999a:1).

¹ Before my studies, I had never come across the word 'diaspora'. But during ISS 2013-14 Term II (course leader Helen Hintjens) course code 4227 Securitisation of Development: Violence, Humanitarianism, Social Transformation, I did a group work on Orjuela, Camilla (2008) "Distant warriors, distant peace workers? Multiple diaspora roles in Sri Lanka's violent conflict", Global Networks, Vol. 8 (4): 436-52. EUR-E-Journals and became a fan of this term.

² *Speiro*, 'to sow' or 'to disperse'

³ Author used this citation for the study, available on line;
Vertovec, S. (1999a) 'Three Meanings of 'Diaspora', Exemplified among South Asian Religions', *Diaspora* 7(2)
<<http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/diaspora.pdf>

Vertovec, S. (1997) 'Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified among South Asian Religions', *Diaspora* 6(3): 277-300 (Not Available)

However other studies (Butler 2001, Dufoix 2008) suggest there is still a need to refine how we use the concept of diaspora. As Butler (2001) emphasizes, the term 'diaspora' is under-theorized in the literature vis-à-vis the relationship between diasporas and their homelands; many other aspects of this relationship have yet to be examined (Cohen 2008:17). The relationship between Diasporas and transnationalism, especially among ordinary women, has only rarely been the focus of research (one example is Moghissi 1999a). Moreover, in recent years, the stereotype of migrant women as poor, passive and socially excluded has started to change, and within this the identity of Iranian women has changed from 'migrants' to 'diaspora' (Ghorashi 2003). In the case of the Iranian diaspora, Shahidian reflects (2006:100), "the diaspora are talked about and talked to, but they are rarely a party to the conversation". Nevertheless, the women's diaspora, their memories of leaving Iran, their ties with women and others in the homeland, and with those in the diasporic Iranian communities, and within the 'host' country, are significant areas worth studying. As Lentin (2006:3) analyses transnationalism as a 'link of immigrant groups living in developed countries with their respective sending nations and hometowns', their actions may even have the potential for empowerment, insofar as they generate the ability to mobilize international support and influence events in both homeland and host country (Butler 2001).

Yet, diaspora and transnationalism are very broad concepts, and need to be connected with "the gendered and often racial matrices in which these processes are embedded" (Lentin 2006:3; see also Moghadam 2005). The past and the lost home remain an essential part to these women and their identity (Ghorashi 2003:8) and transnationalism is a "multidimensional phenomenon which differs, among other variables such as class, religion, ethnicity, also most importantly, according to generation and gender" (Salih 2006:48). Therefore, referring to the relationships between groups of Iranian women and their homeland and host land as 'being here and there', this study has made a theoretical framework of transnationalism. A working definition described by Basch et al. (1994:7) can be expressed as "...a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their socie-

ties of origin and settlement”. This approach is comparable with the analysis of Butler, who identifies five dimensions of a diaspora (2001).

The special focus of this study is on Iranian diasporic women in the context of their relationship with home and host land, interrelations between different groups of Iranian communities, and their socio-cultural or political action through transnationalism, especially around women’s rights issues in Iran.

1.2 Justification for the Study

As well-known feminist, Nancy Fraser (2005) said, it is commonplace nowadays to speak of ‘transnational public spheres’ and ‘diasporic public spheres’. The concepts of ‘diaspora’ has attracted scholars as a concept, and started to replace other terms like labour migration, brain drain or global migration during the 1990s (Clifford 1994, Safran 1999, Butler 2001, Cohen 2008: xiv-1, Dofioix 2008). The term gained further acceptance through the journal, *Diaspora* (Helly 2006:5). The term ‘diaspora’ may also be considered as part of a wider framework for the study of specific processes of transnationalism among migrant groups that go beyond remittances, and involve more political forms of intervention and identification. Some scholars question the way the term diaspora has been generalized, however, and Safran (1999) has pointed out that the term is often used very loosely, overlapping with terms like ‘minorities’, which may not mean the same thing (Safran 1999:255). Scholars have discussed diasporic communities in collective terms, often ignoring individuals, since diasporas are mostly qualified on the basis of ethnicity, religion, origin or economic sector. Women are common to every diasporic community, and are sometimes forced to move with family members. However, their dependence and relative invisibility may why women were hardly discussed in early diaspora studies.

Conversely, it is diasporic Muslim women who have attracted the most attention from scholars, especially in relation to issues of religion, gender and place. Such women, as Aitchison mentions, are often presented as passive victims of

oppressive family structures and religious cultures (Aitchison 2012: 4). Several works have been done on Iranian migrant women in relation to the Iranian revolution (Ghorashi 2003:6), but the present study is somewhat different from most, since it focuses on individual women within the Iranian diaspora. This study seeks to understand the connections women belonging to the Iranian diaspora have with their homeland, and how they perceive the struggle for women's rights in their homeland. Considering the scholarly arguments mentioned, this study focuses on applying the five dimensions of diaspora presented by Butler (2001) to three groups of Iranian diaspora women located in different host countries in the EU (European Union) and North America (Canada and America). The dimensions being:

1. "Reason for, and condition of, the dispersal
2. Relationship with the homeland
3. Relationship with host lands
4. Interrelationships within communities of diaspora
5. Comparative studies of different diasporas"

(Butler 2001:195)

Moreover, a major reason for selecting analyzing the dimensions of diaspora is that after the literature review of pioneering work in diaspora studies (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; Vertovec 1999a; Safran 1999), then these dimensions appeared as a mix of key concepts of diaspora, including the modern feminist scholars (Moghissi 2006, Moghadam 2000 and Ghorashi 2003) point of view that emphasizes examining diaspora women living in diverse community from different approaches. Where it studies the interconnectivity of diasporic groups, it also encompasses their linkages to their homeland and their influence in building momentum for political affirmatives in terms of women rights. And, like other diasporas, they 'develop networks, activists, pattern of living and ideologies that span their home and the host country' which require more attention. (Basch et al. 1994:4)

1.3 Context: Two failed Revolutions: Women in Iran

The emergence of a women's movement in Iran happened in the 19th century when Iran was going through some major socioeconomic changes. In the middle of Constitutional Revolution, Iran witnessed an organized attempt by women to change their social conditions (Mahdi 2004:427).

Iran has a long history of reform and revolution, including the Great War with Iraq (Abrahamian, 1982). The extensive struggles of women fighting for their rights go side by side (Mahdi 2004).

Women saw the period of 1970s as 'temporary freedom', very different though than the past (Ghorashi 2003:18). Each revolution offered prospects for freedom and liberation in its own way for Iranian women but never delivered; neither the Khatami nor Rouhani revolutions proved any different, leaving the Iranian women clichéd (Kazemzadeh 2002). The Islamic fundamentalism⁴ transformed Iran into an Islamic monopoly and fundamentally targeted women's liberties (Moghadam 2005:47). It resulted in women resistance, starting with anti-veil protests combining socio-cultural & political factors against fundamentalism, and linked with the Iranian women in exile shaping them into a 'vibrant and highly politicized émigré community' (Moghissi 1999b:189). Mir-Hosseini (2006) shares her feelings of the time very expressively, reflecting the reality women were facing as they applied their own perception to build laws, 'I found myself a second-class citizen. No access to justice for me, as a Muslim woman' (Mir-Hosseini 2006: 629).

⁴ Religious fundamentalism misuses religion for political power, and selects specific aspects of modernity as going against religious identity while rejecting others. It is associated with conservative authoritarian policies. Religious right ideologies use discourses on religion and culture to maintain and extend power over the public and private domains. Religious fundamentalists impose their worldviews and apply religious law to all aspects of life. Women are often considered the custodians of family norms and honor, and religion is used to control them in direct and indirect ways. (adopted from <http://www.wluml.org/resource/influences-religious-fundamentalism-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-women>)

In addition to that, women's involvement in the Iranian revolution of 1979 took place at many different levels. They had modern ideologies tweaked with tastes of Marxism, Islamism, liberalism and women's rights which provided Iranian women a chance to have a political identity for the first time. (Ghorashi 2003:6-7). The Islamic Feminism's emergence in the late 1990s brought a new way of thinking, a gender discourse in the Muslim world following the teaching of Holy Quran⁵, seeking gender justice and equality for women. However, like other religions, the problem did not lay in the religion but in the misinterpretations of the religious rhetoric used to aid the patriarchal social constructive system which creates the laws and rights for women and men (Mir-Hosseini 2006:640-641). Therefore, women stood for themselves, after realizing from the past that depending on men, political parties, and the previous achievement of national struggles against regime and imperialism were all in vain (Mahdi 2004:444). Even some Islamist women in governmental circles have begun to speak in terms of power and gender inequality (Afshari 1994:254 see also Afshar 1985; Afshari 2011)

Similar to other feminists living in Muslim countries, Iranian women also formulated networks, i.e. Women Living Under Muslim Law, and strategies to deal with fundamentalism and achieve their rights (Moghadam 2005:48). Today, the ideology at the back of the movement for women's rights, from inside or outside Iran, as Moghissi (1999b) explained, is equipped with lessons from past experiences. Knowledge of gender equality and social justice has made the émigré feminists a new discourse (Moghissi 1999b:190), leading Iranian women to establish their own organizations, forums, and groups, encouraging collective action to discuss national and international issues from their own standpoint. (Mahdi 2004:439). Sadly enough, Iran is amongst the very few countries that have not signed CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms

⁵ Religious Holy book for Muslims

of Discrimination against Women⁶, perhaps since systematic violations of women's rights are permitted by constitutional law and other laws that shield those who claim that a religious orientation requires a patriarchal social order. Which is why, despite Islamic Feminism and the renewal of the Women's Movement, in the three or more decades since the Iranian revolution, women living in Iran have remained deprived of many basic human rights, such as choice of education, mobility and legal equality (Gerami and Lehnerer 2001). Fear and pain replaced hope when the Islamists took over power in Iran in 1980, and eliminated all opposition (Ghorashi 2003:73). More recently, Iranian feminist groups, many with a novel approach to liberation, have encouraged Iranian women in Iran to speak up for their rights (Moghissi 1999a). One of the objectives of this study is to understand better the kinds of inter-connections and connectivity that exist, and how women in the Iranian diaspora perceive and support women's rights in Iran.

1.4 Statement of the Problem: What kind of Transnationalism?

Are all of the women, while sharing the same nationality but differing in terms of the time they left the country and the reasons for doing so, part of same diaspora (Tetreault 2006:81)? Many facets of diaspora women and their experiences as a group remain hidden behind the curtain and are under-researched. The earlier studies of diaspora communities, and on their social ties, have been found lacking in providing insight on their relationships both at micro and macro level, which could provide ample understanding about the transnational groups and diaspora communities (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009: 668). The issues women face is understood as being implanted in the social structures they live in and also in their networks and information sources. As Moghissi (2007:

⁶ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.html>

xviii) emphasizes diverse studies would help us in understanding the complex process of exposure to, formation, and adoption of transnationalism.

Moreover, some scholars, like Lentin (2006), have argued that “theories of transnationalism often neglect class, gender and other hierarchies within migration networks” (Lentin, 2006: 2). This study intends to add to the field of knowledge about women whose lives have been shaped and influenced by Iran’s history, exile, and immigration to Europe.

As Ghorashi and Tavakoli (2006) critically point out, during the early 1970s Iranian diaspora remained detached from Iran and the struggle against the Iranian regime was not acknowledged. It was not easy for them to carry on with their activism in Iran. After the years of ‘frozen images’ of Iran, the Iranian diaspora have now re-connected with Iranian activism and have produced a prolific knowledge that shows a unique perspective and voice with new hybridity of culture (Ghorashi and Tavakoli 2006: 99). Women are at the centre of the debate over culture and authenticity. They are also central to the issue of the control and exercise of power in Muslim societies (Afshari 1994: 254).

Moreover, Moghissi (1999a) reflects that Iranian diaspora especially that of women has great influence on a patriarchal civilization and such an ideological system of domination that produces prolonged, rigid and uneven sexist values and practice. But, Iranian women, through a process of transformation and liberation in the diasporic experience, have started dealing with it with flexibility and resourcefulness. As Vertovec relates (1999a: 8) diaspora with consciousness puts greater emphasis on describing a variety of experience, a state of mind, and a sense of identity. ‘Diaspora consciousness’ is a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among contemporary transnational communities. It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion and positively by identification with a historical heritage (ibid). Besides, it confronts male power not only in the ‘private’ sphere of the family but in the ‘public’ realm of politics (Moghissi 1999a) too.

1.5 Research Objectives and Questions

The study aims to understand in what ways women of the Iranian diaspora remain connected with women living in Iran. This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding about different Iranian women groups within what can be viewed as the diaspora.

The objectives of this research are:

1. To understand the diversity in types of Iranian diaspora women, given their reasons for and condition of dispersal
2. To analyse types of transnationalism Iranian women have created through their relationships living in different diasporic communities and with the homeland and host country.
3. To examine different Iranian diasporic women-perceived women's rights in Iran.

There is one key research question, and a number of sub-questions, that together guide this study.

Main Question:

Through the lens of transnationalism, how do different groups of Iranian diasporic women feel about their relationships with homeland and host lands and how these relationships shape their perception of women's rights in Iran?

Sub-questions:

- What types of transnationalism is created by Iranian women in the diaspora?
- What were the main conditions and reasons for dispersal of the Iranian women in the different diaspora communities?
- How are the Iranian diaspora women connected to Iran and their host country?

- How are Iranian diasporic women connected to other (Iranian and non-Iranian) diaspora women and to women's struggles for rights in Iran?

1.6 Methodology

By adopting the recent developmental changes in the social research methods (Elliott 2005:1) this study has used a qualitative approach to analyze the research questions. As the researcher Elliott has stated (2005:21), qualitative research is well suited to accessing otherwise hidden information, for example through the narratives that emerge from in-depth interviews. And as qualitative approach not only provides strategies of inquiry, such as narratives and open-ended data, but also assists in drawing out the opinions of respondents, which have multiple meanings of individual experiences (Creswell 2013:18). Therefore, the primary data for this study was collected through a number of semi-structured in-depth interviews (15 in total), combined with oral history tools (though not full oral histories given the time constraints).

As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:165) have pointed out, it can be difficult to “find your ideal interview subject”. Due to the specified field of investigation for this study, it was hard to get a hold of the respondents, doubled by the sensitivity of the subject, which also made it difficult to extract the responses. Four out of fifteen Iranian women were contacted through an Iranian NGO, one respondent through the second reader, one through a friend of a respondent herself, two respondents studying in the same institution as of the author, and the rest of the eight respondents were contacted during a Women Right's conference in Paris. It has expanded the geographical field of the sample to UK, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, USA and Canada, given the respondents' countries of residence, respectively. The information collected was obtained through face-to-face and on-line interaction with the subjects (12 face-to-face, 3 Skype interviews).

Moghissi (1999a) explains that Iranian women in the diaspora mainly come from urban and modern, middle-class backgrounds, and are rooted in a more secular, non-traditional lifestyle than most Iranian women from a traditional or working class background, with a low level of education. Therefore, a distinct group has been selected of Iranian women living in the diaspora. For categorization, the author divided them into three sub-categories based on the described identity by respondents, similar to Langer (2013) who made 'writers' as a main category to study Iranian women living in the diaspora.

Of the fifteen Iranian women I interviewed, all had completed secondary school, and some had a high level of education, having completed Bachelors or Masters Degrees. Some were doing PhDs. They could be categorized in three groups, reflecting their stated identity and professions: (i) Activists (ii) Students, and (iii) Housewives. Closer analysis of their relationships and ideas about home and women's rights, based on such distinctions help provide new insights into their varying perspectives and contributions. Housewives were the most reluctant to provide testimony, and felt the least comfortable speaking on tape. Students and activist women, most of them author interviewed in public places, were happier for tape the interviews, and seemed able to trust author more, not to misuse the data collected.

In conducting qualitative interviews, this study used a specific set of questions that each time used similar words in a particular order. The interviews were planned so that things could proceed smoothly and as naturally as possible. During each interview, author maintained as open as possible a space so respondents could talk more deeply, and took pains to listen silently and pay close attention, taking notes, and guiding the conversation in such a way as to collect as much data as possible. The interviews between late-June to late-August 2014, were mainly conducted in Den Haag and Paris; in the latter, interviews with Iranian women from different parts of world were conducted

during a conference⁷ organized in support of the Iranian People. Moreover, one researcher (Tetreault 2007:81-82) argues that the “intimate connection woven over time between persons sharing social space produce historical memory, a collective sense of past”. This past has an effect on the present of women in the diaspora too, since remembering what they have lost can be viewed as a special feature of contemporary diasporas (Helly 2006: 12).

1.7 Scope and Limitations

This research is not about the causes and dynamics of Islamic laws, fundamentalist movements or the Iranian regime, nor is it an insight into transnational women’s rights movements. It is about how different groups of Iranian women, living in the diaspora, are creating new forms of transnationalism, and negotiating their relationships with both homeland and host country networks. It is a small-scale study, done in a relatively short time-period, with several limitations, for example:

- Given that diasporas are generally highly mobile, the result was that some interviews had to be rescheduled, sometimes several times. Besides, it was Ramadan (Holy month) during July, so that most of the sample author sought interviews with, were on vacation. This limited the sample to 16.
- Some respondents did not agree to be interviewed given the sensitivity of the subject matter and what they felt was lack of clarity about this study, despite explanations and reassurances.
- Other respondents who were interviewed refused to be taped, so that some interviews were recorded using notes, written during and after the interview. In order to uphold the interviewees’ confidentiality, author used pseudonyms for all respondents, even though some respondents (especially the activist) were happy for me to use their real names, author decided not

⁷ Iran Gathering 2014 <<http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/iran-gathering-2014>>

to do so. While quoting, this study refer to their original place of residence, age, date of leaving Iran, and category, i.e. Activist, Student, or Housewife, and replace their real names with other, typical Iranian names, so that verification is possible.

- Some of the women interviewed had a difficult past to reflect over, which made it sometimes painful for them to provide in-depth information.
- The author conducted a few initial interviews at a Conference in Paris on 26 June 2014, with the result that the first six interviews (three were completed later) were of respondents who could be viewed as a self-selecting group, belonging to those broadly supportive of a particular mindset or political agenda in Iran (i.e. those who would attend a Mujahidin conference).⁸ To avoid this bias from influencing the rest of the data, the author then looked for women with different backgrounds, and whose political opinions would vary from the first group of interviewees. Fifteen interviews were completed by September.

1.7.1 Organization of the Study

In this first chapter, the purposes of the study have been explained, and some background provided that places Iranian women in the diaspora in their contextual realities. The research objectives, questions, methodology and the challenges have been described. The next Chapter (2) discusses the theoretical and analytical framework used for this study, definitions of Diaspora and Transnationalism, and how these concepts overlap. Chapter 2 also ends with an overview of comparative diaspora studies. Chapter 3 sketches out fifteen in-depth interviews with Iranian diasporic women, presenting key narratives around the

⁸ As the author is not from Iran, the idea to conduct a study on women living in diaspora struck during a conference held on Women's International Day in Paris, where the author witnessed the empowerment of diasporic Iranian women, as also described by Moghadam (2005: iii), struggling for their rights using the Transnational and global networks mentioned. Link can be seen for the details of the conference. <<http://women.ncr-iran.org/internationalwomensday2014>>

role of these women as transnational actors, who feel they are both 'Here and There' simultaneously. The focus is on their Memories and Feelings, which are central to this study. Chapter 4 is based on the five dimensions of Butler's approach, and uses these to analyze the stories of women in the Iranian diaspora, by focusing mainly on their condition and reasons for leaving Iran and their feelings about their host society. Chapter 5 then discusses the relationships that diasporic Iranian women experience between home and host-land, and between their roots and the journey they have had to the present. Further analyzing their relationships and networking, Chapter 6 examines relationships that diasporic women have among themselves, and with women in Iran, cultivating into a political activism concerning women's rights issues in the homeland. The seventh and final chapter provides conclusion and synthesis.

Chapter 2 **Conceptual and Analytical Framework**

“We may therefore conclude that the study of diaspora fills the gap left open by institutionalist perspectives that fail to capture the discursive and practice dimensions of transnationalism. Yet, the study of diasporic mobilisations also takes us beyond the sociology and anthropology of ordinary transnational practices that sustain economic, cultural and family networks across borders.”

(Bauböck and Faist 2010:320)

2.1 The Diaspora and Transnationalism as Framework

This chapter presents the conceptual tools later used to analyze groups of Iranian diaspora women. A sense of transnational solidarity and of wider attachment that goes beyond a particular locality emerges from these accounts. Additionally, the framework applies five dimensions of analysis to ascertain their categorical placement. This chapter also theorizes and elaborates on how groups of Iranian women, being a modern diaspora living in different diasporic communities, forge new forms of identity that can be shaped via transnationalism. The later part of the chapter gives a short overview of comparative studies of different diasporas done by different scholars at different times.

2.1.1 Defining ‘Diaspora’

The use of the term ‘diaspora’ was already discussed briefly in Chapter 1. Here the debate is returned to and reflected on more critically. Diaspora can refer to a set of social practices (Dufoix 2008:xi; see also Vertovec, 1999a) and as a concept which calls attention to the often complex relationships between identity, active contribution in the politics of the homeland, and settlement and contacts in the host country (Butler 2001:191). One critique of the use of the term ‘diaspora’ in migration studies is that those living in diasporas are often depicted as powerless, longing for home, in painful exile and displaced forcibly. This may be attributed to the origins of the term diaspora in the experiences of

the Jewish diaspora in particular (Butler 2001; Dufoix 2008). At the same time, as used in migration studies, the concept of diaspora network suggests something other than victim status, and has the potential to refer to empowerment that can generate mobilization for transnational forms of influence and identification, both with the homeland and the host society (Butler 2001:190).

Diaspora scholars remain broadly divided into two camps: one that views the diaspora as something modern, and the second that views it as a phenomenon rooted in a long history (see Safran 1999:255; Dufoix 2008:60).

Moghissi argues that the term diaspora seems to have become a mantra or buzzword in the past two decades or so, though it simply means ‘loss and dispersion as the result of a forcible displacement of people from countries or regions’ (Moghissi 2007:3). Early scholars like Clifford (1994:302) built their own frameworks for analyzing the term diaspora, and applied this to different diaspora communities, including Jewish and Armenian, among others. Later, the notion of ‘deterritorialized’ or ‘transnational’ communities was an important addition to how a ‘diaspora’ came to be defined (Vertovec 1999a:1). As Moghissi also notes, there is a great deal of continuity with earlier uses of the term to refer to the global dispersion of the Jewish people (Moghissi 2007: xviii).

With this in mind, author of this study chose to identify specific sub-groups of diasporic Iranian women, to see how these sub-groups differed in terms of their stated ‘relationship with the Iranian women’s rights struggle’, with transnational networks among Iranians and with the host society. This enabled to compare sub-groups of Iranian women in the diaspora according to their profession or self-defined identity and especially in relation to women’s rights issues in Iran and beyond.

2.1.2 Defining ‘Transnationalism’

The term transnationalism can be addressed from three different perspectives: as a notion, as an analytical framework, and as a process or set of processes

(Bauböck and Faist 2010). Basch et al. (1994) state transnationalism as processes that are used by immigrants/diaspora in such a way that it builds social fields that go beyond nations, cultures or political boundaries. In line with Portes' (2001:182) view that 'everyone is transnational' today or a 'transmigrate', in my research the concept transnational reflects the process of 'being here and there at the same time' (Vertovec 1999a:8). This study has drawn on his reflection that immigrants can be both here (i.e. in Europe) and there (i.e. in Iran) at the same time, through their family ties, remittances, religion, and through political organizations and mobilization that rely on their memories and feelings as well as their interests. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

For Vertovec (1999b), 'transnationalism' provides an umbrella concept for some of the most globally transformative processes and developments of our time (Vertovec 1999b:459), and he unpacks 'transnationalism', preferring to pluralize the term to refer to the multiple ties and institutions that link people across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec 1999b:447). Iranian women, as this study will show, negotiate their identities as 'a mode of acting and performing' (Dahinden, 2009:1367). Chapter 6 will analyze interviewees' own perceptions to produce a cognitive set of classifications of their transnational realities.

From around the mid-1980s, new network spaces known as Transnational Feminist Networks (TFN) started to become more central to diasporic women's experiences (Moghadam 2005:61). These TFN arose from among the women who formed part of global diasporas emerging at that time. The Iranian women's organizations that emerged at this time were almost exclusively run by women. Many had been established to work with Iranian political parties or deal with complex impacts of globalization and political upheaval on Iranian women (Moghadam 2005:1). By the mid-1990s, TFN were part of a wider Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) that came to be organized around human rights demands and priorities (Moghadam 2005:2). A more recent study of the Iranian diaspora shows that during the last decade, the TFNs started to be facilitated by new technology that enabled transnational networks

among Iranian diaspora women, while enabling Iranian women and also men to reflect more explicitly on their positions in relation to Iran (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009:688).

Women from diaspora communities started to be recognized in the movements and associations during the 1990s, following the major UN Conferences (Rossetti 2006:35). As Moghadam puts it, women came together through transnational activities to voice their concerns about their homelands from within the diasporic communities (Moghadam 2005). Although transnationalism as a concept has arguably been overloaded (Vertovec 2001:576), these transnational networks are important and interesting for this study, whose main focus is on how individual women's are involved, or not, in forms of transnationalism. Some suggest that transnational organizations provide transmigrated communities with social status and other advantages (Basch et al 1994:249).

However, to understand diasporic women's identity-building across transnational networks requires us to also recognize the 'Paradoxes of Transnational Space' (Ghorashi and Tavakoli 2006), which may reinforce inequalities as well as provide social networks. As Portes points out, transnationalism has brought to diaspora studies a new level of analysis and novel hypotheses about historical patterns of settlement and adaptation of diasporas, which go beyond the usual models firmly rooted in a 'national' framework as the norm (Portes 2001:182). This study draws inspiration from Portes' point, and builds on Moghadam's critiques (2005) that most studies have centered on institutions. In contrast with national and institutional frames, this study focuses on diasporic Iranian women mainly as individuals and actors located within networks of relationships (Moghadam 2005:59-60, see also Ghorashi 2004).

2.1.3 Diaspora and Transnationalism

According to Bauböck and Faist, in the social sciences the terms 'diaspora and transnationalism' are overlapping terms, so much so that it is difficult to distinguish them clearly from one another (Bauböck and Faist 2010:33). Indeed the

two have even been described as ‘awkward dance partners’ (Bauböck and Faist 2010:9). ‘Diasporas’ depend on transnationalism, which is in part composed of the shared identities of diasporas, making the two concepts both complementary and interwoven (Vertovec 2001:574). Transnationalism became a very popular term from the 1990s onwards (Bauböck and Faist 2010:7; Tölölyan 1996:13-15). This study explores the awareness of a multi-sited existence the diaspora who share the same roots and sense of belonging transnationally, so that home and away, here and there become bound up with one another, and that sense among Iranian women (Vertovec 1999a:8).

2.1.4 Theoretical Framework

As Cohen points out, when studying something as complex as the ‘proliferation of diasporas, one has to start somewhere’ (Cohen 2008:159). As mentioned earlier, this study is bringing two concepts into single framework to understand diaspora and transnationalism. First, as a working definition this study applies the transnationalism of Basch et al. (1994:7): ‘a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’. For the purposes of this study, this definition can be divided into two sub-propositions, as follows:

1. Link towards their societies of origin and settlement
2. Forging and sustenance of multi-stranded social relations on a transnational basis

(Basch et al. 1994:7)

Secondly, the study adopts Butler’s (2001:195) framework of five⁹ dimensions of analysis of diaspora, and applies it to Iranian women living in diasporic communities. A clear analytical framework can help to map the social formations within and across a diaspora like the Iranian one. In the case of Iranian women, what is of interest are their unique and idiosyncratic characteristics,

⁹ One of the five parts of the dimension ‘Comparative studies of different Diasporas’ is only briefly described due to word limits.

which need to be pinned down in order to understand the formation of their identity as a form of transnationalism (Butler 2001:194). Besides comparative studies, which are dealt with later in this chapter, there are four remaining dimensions in Butler's approach: (i) reasons and conditions of dispersal; (ii) relationship with homeland; (iii) relationship with host country; (iv) inter-relationships among the diaspora.

Reasons and conditions are a 'logical starting point' for 'typing, naming and labeling' (Butler 2001:197) Iranian women. Moreover, as typologies are not easy, this will help to investigate details about these women. Why did they move? Women who fled voluntarily are different from those who were economical or political forced (Butler 1999). Then, the gendered question: who decided on emigration, and within that sub-set, was the migration of these women forced or voluntary? Additionally, this aspect also helps to discover the levels of relationships that Iranians maintain with their country of origin (Iran) and host land while living in various countries.

Relationship with homeland: Relationships are complex and often contradictory. In this case, the 'homeland' in consideration is Iran. The condition and reason for dispersal determine the Iranian diaspora women's relationship with homeland which 'constitutes hallmark identity' of diasporas (Butler 2001:204). The idea of a shared origin and birthplace is a common feature of diasporas as 'fibers of the diasporic rope' (Cohen 2008:165). Butler (2001:206) adds that connections to homeland may include how the attitude from home towards diaspora women and about their roles and perceptions. Transnationalism has been defined as the currency of diaspora discourse (Clifford 1994:310). This study tries to examine the process of transnationalism which provides ways to sustain those linkages between their societies of origin (homeland) and host countries.

Relationship with host country: Butler (2001:206) reckons the host countries is an essential factor or primary agent in the formation of diaspora and their identities. Besides, how these host societies (West) influence the ways women connect with their home country facet is also the other part of transnationalism

(as shown in the figure No.1) which provides bridging with the host country. This study also refers to Safran's (1991:83) feelings of alienation or feeling unwelcomed by the host societies.

Interrelationship within the diasporic groups: Interrelationships are a critical dimension to the analysis of diaspora experiences and justifies the study of diasporic groups' consciousness and unity in saving the relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991:83-84). As the 'network is one face of cosmopolitanism' (Vertovec and Cohen, 2003:25), this dimension helps to map these women's internal (as shown in Figure 1.) dynamics in juxtaposition, presenting a transnational reality (Butler 2001:209) along with facilitating their relationships towards their host country and homeland. Together, these are the lenses through which I approach this study, as seen in the diagram below.

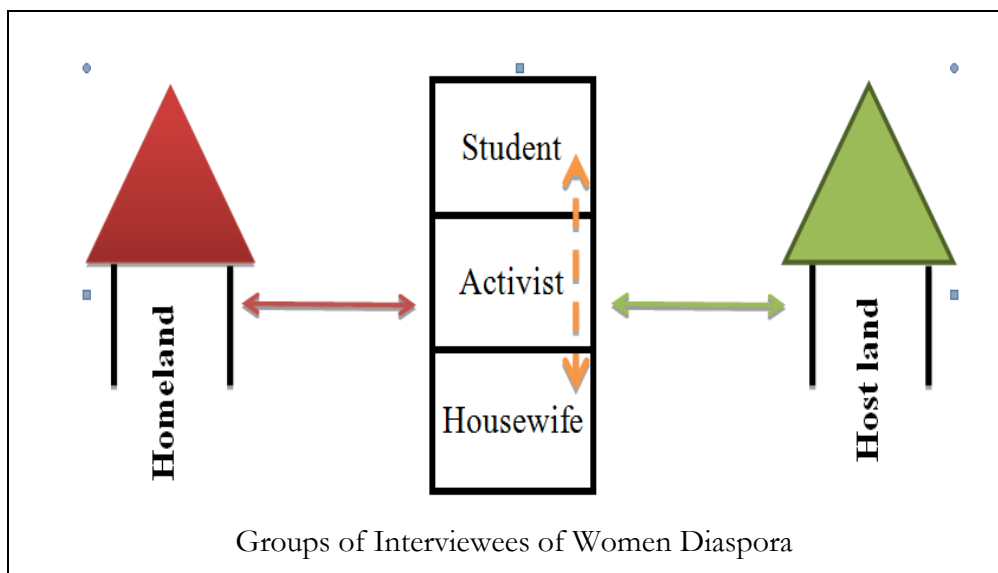


Figure 1: Author's own model of Iranian women's complex transnationalism

This study represents an attempt to elaborate on women's diasporic transnationalism in relationship to various sub-groups of Iranian women living outside Iran, and in relation to their feelings towards homeland and host land. Figure 1 shows the complex ties that bind diasporic women to both homeland and host country, and simultaneously how they do (or do not) inter-relate and retain their concern for their 'sisters' (i.e. all women) in Iran, and their human rights.

2.2 Comparative Diaspora Studies: A brief Review

This section presents one of the five dimensions adopted from Butler and a brief overview of the huge body of studies conducted on different diaspora at least what is possible within the space available. The main aim is to address the changing definition of terms, as well as the influence of globalization and new technologies on trends in diaspora studies.

It emerged in this inquiry that almost all academic studies define different types of diasporas¹⁰ and that ‘this development of exploring the complexity of diasporic forms and experiences is not complete’ (Cohen 2008:16-18). It has been observed that all comparative studies on different diasporas were influenced by the definition used for Jewish diaspora. However, with the passage of time it has been described in the context of contemporary conflicts, globalization and the emerging identities associated with global migratory movements (Vertovec 1999a:2; Lyons 2004; Cohen 2008; see also Ben-Rafael 2013).

2.2.1 Safran’s Leading Questions for Comparison:

In previous studies, scholars compared the conditions of exile. Safran (1999) highlighted that the Jewish diaspora had always been a central point with which to compare other diasporas, as it was considered the ‘ideal type’ (Safran 1999:84). To take the discussion ahead, Safran (1999:95) suggested a few questions to consider in comparative studies of different diasporas: (1) In which kind of representation and what social category do these diaspora fit in? 2) What should be a starting point to make differentiation between different diaspora? 3) Do the development and cultural dichotomies of homeland and host country prove helpful to examine the behavioral model and thoughts of a diaspora community? 4) Do the various diaspora communities behave differently from each other as minority communities? 5) How long does it take for a dias-

¹⁰ For ‘Types of Diaspora’ see Appendix 3.

pora consciousness to develop, and what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for its survival? 6) Does this consciousness weaken with the passage of time? 7) What is the connection between a 'millenarian' approach to the country of origin and concrete action? For example, does the myth of Jews to return to their homeland 'at the end of the days' serve to encourage them to anticipate the event by settling in? 8) Is there any 'ideal type' of relationship between country of origin and diaspora community? 9) What factors or conditions such as language, religion, relative deprivation and political relations are necessary or sufficient for the maintenance of a homeland myth? (Safran 1999:95) Additionally, Safran (1999) is also analyzing the work done by other scholars on different diasporas. He not only put query on various scholars work but also questions what the differences among ethnic minorities is by using the labels of 'Diaspora, Semi Diaspora and Non diaspora' (Safran 1999:261).

Cohen (2008:17) follows the shifting denotation of diaspora and shares features¹¹ of contemporary types as victim diasporas, trading, labour and business diasporas. Cohen also seems to belong to those schools of thought who take diaspora as scheme of moderation. Likewise, McAuliffe (2007) explains that the diaspora 'who left voluntarily saw their homeland as a place of difficulty and complexity', and that with the passage of time they develop a more sympathetic set of images towards their homelands (McAuliffe 2007:307). He further argues that 'belonging to transnational diaspora and religious identities are just one route towards unsettling the hegemonic dominance of national identities' (McAuliffe 2007:309). The above discussion characterizes a deep impact of transnationalism in studies of diaspora. Historical studies reveal that earlier migration flows could also be characterized as transnational (Bauböck 2008:3).

¹¹ For Common features of diaspora see Appendix 4

2.2.2 Diasporas Comparison Studies

A study done by Ballard (1994) explores the way migrants from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have found a settlement place in Britain and analyzes them on the basis of 'The South Asian Dimension' (Ballard 1994:2 see also Dwyer 2000). Furthermore the author explains that although these diaspora have different religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism or Islam, they feel they belong to the same community because of their 'South Asian' identity. Even author name them as 'Britain's South Asian Population' (Ballard 1994:5). Furthermore, this scholar analyzes all selected diaspora communities on the same dimension developed by Safran (1991, 1999; Clifford 1994) and applies the checklist from dispersal to feeling of alienation. He also illustrates these diasporas as minorities of South Asia with twice migration. His book title 'Desh Pardesh' (Hindi word) is similar to the title Moghissi (1999a) used: 'Away from Home'. He also debates on the diversity of religion, class, castes and culture these diasporas have in host land.

2.2.3 Muslim Diaspora and Women Diasporas

Moving further to the elements of religion and national origin centric to formation of communities (see also Dufoix 2008:75-78), the 'Muslim diaspora'¹² type is taken as the most complicated identity because of overlapping triple identities: Religious Identity (Muslim Sunni, Shia), Origin-Wise National Identity (Iranian Pakistani, Afghani) and New National Identity (American, Canadian, French) combined with the bifurcated diversities on how faith is perceived and practiced. One identity at one time may dominate the other with unique characteristics (Rahnema 2006:32-33).

¹² 'Muslim diaspora' generated 1,700,000 hits on a Google search in August 2007 (Cohen 2008:153).

Scholars (Cohen 2008; Moghissi 2006) report that besides the impacts of globalization, major global shifts or incidents like that of 9/11¹³ also change the positioning of diaspora and the discourse around them to the extent of affecting their identity (Cohen 2008:xv; Moghissi 2006). As modern scholars understand the versatility and hybridity of the concept and ascertain that the word ‘diaspora’ is flexible to change depending on its context, even though its sociological realities, parameters and processes need to be identified (Helly 2006:2).

In modern diaspora studies, the Muslim diaspora and gender identity are the topic addressed more often of the day. Aitchison et al. (2012:2) note that experiences, reasons, conditions of dispersal and religious orientation formulate the diaspora identity and further emphasizes that the “Muslim women diaspora” has gathered great attention from scholars interested in the interaction between religion, gender and place however, they are often presented as the subjects of oppressive cultures (Aitchison et al. 2012:4).

Aitchison et al. (2012) collected different scholars’ studies based on Muslim identities and analyze them through the lens of gender and their culture as belonging, but the purpose of this book especially focuses on the rapid change which influenced the identities of Muslims starting from the attack of 9/11(see also Moghissi and Ghorashi 2012). In addition, Aitchison et al. (2012) explore the diversities of diaspora as Muslims but also because of their geographical range. The transitional experiences of the Muslim diaspora were also analyzed in this study (Aitchison et al 2012:2). Similarly, Moghissi (2006) collected different scholars work conducted specifically on women living in different diasporic communities, Here Moghissi again focuses on identity and relation with the ‘other’ who share the same experience and values (Moghissi 2006: xv; see also Moghissi 2003; Heitlinger 1999) Furthermore, this work explores the

¹³ The date of the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001

women's role in the process of transnationalism as a connection with their home land to diverse aspects of their relationship with host country

In a study on transnational activities related to women, Mojab (2006) claims that transnational activists often neglect the role or involvement of women and their political participation or non-participation (Mojab 2006:119; see also Ghorashi 2004; Goodman 2006; Gholami 2014). Talking about women as a diaspora, he notes that women remain with and sustain their homeland values and culture (Mojab 2006:123). He reflects on the problems faced by women diaspora as 'culturalization paradoxical' as these can be complicated by culture, politics, class, language, dialect and religion (Mojab 2006:129). Moreover, Farahani (2006) takes sexuality as the focus in a study of the Iranian women diaspora in Sweden. By taking women's narrations of sexuality and ensuing production of gendered socio-culturality, the scholar concludes that women feel torn between two different cultures (see also Hojabri 2006).

2.2.4 Conflict-generated Diasporas:

There are many studies (Shain 2002; Lyons 2004; McAuliffe 2007) over diaspora in terms their homeland conflicts. Lyons (2004) calls them 'conflict-generated diasporas' who maintain connections to the homeland. While making their identities, these diasporas always wish to go back to their homeland when it is 'free'. Further, diaspora remittances also play an important factor towards any conflicts or their resolution. Such diaspora communities also stay traumatized (Lyons 2004:1). Shain (2002) analyses the case studies of 'Armenian-American and Jewish-American diasporic involvement in conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh and the West Bank and Gaza' (Shain 2002:115). Shain's (2002) study points out that the diasporas contribute to conflict according to their ethnic community's identity and interests, although it is not necessary that a diaspora's perception of conflicts always matches with the view of the homeland authorities (Shain 2002:116).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter illustrated debates around definitions of diaspora and the concept of transnationalism from different scholars. Then, it discussed how the two approaches merge into a single framework in order to study the selective responses of Iranian women. It then explained the relation between the working definition of transnationalism of Basch et al. (1994:7) with the five dimension of analysis described by Butler (2001). The chapter ended with an overview of comparative diaspora studies, from one of the five dimensions of diaspora analysis taken from Butler (2001). In general, it can be concluded that debates in the field have continued to revolve around the extent to which one ancient historical diaspora is taken (or not) as the definition, in relation to comparing diasporas in relation to their ethnicity, religion, identity and origins. Finally, the chapter teases out the implications for the Muslim diaspora and Iranian women.

Chapter 3 Diasporic Women's Transnationalism: 'Here and There'

Introduction

This chapter will explore and consider participants of this study as transnational subjects. It informs how nostalgia leads to the process of transnationalism. By exploring memories and feelings, including those which can be disturbing and upsetting, but also funny and encouraging, this chapter tries to give a deeper picture of the meaning of transnationalism as allowing to bring out 'lived' and fluid experiences (Basch et al. 1994:8) in the lives of the interviewees. It shows that transnationalism is a useful way to understand how they remember and talk about their past. This chapter first gives a brief overview of the 15 respondents.

3.1 Introducing 15 Women

The 15 women interviewed were selected because of the differences among them (see Table 1 below). The table shows the respondents divided into three main identities: student, housewife and activist. Although in practice, a woman can fall under more than one of these categories, each woman was asked to give her principal identity for purposes of clarity. Students and activists did overlap, as one can both studying and engaging in advocacy. Housewives, however, were not in education and were rarely activist in their orientations. Thus, activists and students could be said to have an element of mixed or multiple identities. Unlike housewives, who were isolated, students and activists had relatively strong networks with both host countries and also friends from the Iranian and the host communities. Housewives, especially divorcees who had to work for the household's economic survival, often in low-paid jobs, did not share any contacts with natives in the host lands. Even when they were

working and divorced, these women preferred to identify themselves as housewives.

Table 1: Comparison of respondent groups¹⁴

Name	Group	Year of Dispersal	Host Country	Age	Marital Status	Reason of Dispersal
Fairuza	Activist	Born abroad	Norway	31	Living Relation	FE
Gulbahar	Activist	Born abroad	France	34	Single	FE
Esfir	Activist	1977	UK	65	Divorced	Education
Jasmine	Activist	1999	NL	39	Married	V E
Laleh	Activist	1983	Canada	65	Married	VE
Mahin	Housewife	1998	NL	50	Divorced	VE
Roksana	Housewife	1996	NL	42	Divorced	VE
Niloofar	Housewife	1990	NL	45	Separated	VE
Banu	Student	2011	NL	37	Single	Education
Shahrzad	Student	1989	Belgium	32	Married	VE
Vashti	Student	2008	NL	34	Single	Education
Parvaneh	Student	2009	NL	35	Single	Education
Zareen	Student	2010	NL	38	Married	VE
Bahar	Student	2003	Canada	22	Single	F E
Anahita	Student	1996	US	40	Married	VE

All the names of the respondents, except one individual who requested anonymity, are provided in Appendix 2.

¹⁴ FE- Forced Exile, VE- Voluntary Exile

Note: Two respondents mentioned as Born abroad, they are also considered into FE group as their parents were political forced exiled.

3.2 Recalling Life in Iran

Talking with the participants of the study, the process of transnational identity construction became evident through the way that sets of consecutive actions were shown to have taken place both ‘here and there’ by the women speaking. Finding themselves part of an immigrant group in a host society, the author was interested to understand how they viewed their past. ‘Transnationalism’ as a term is often used to refer to all sorts of social formations, such as transnational active networks, groups and organizations, but it can also refer to the migrants’ own identity formation processes, when these involve durable ties imagined across countries and globally dispersed communities (Bauböck and Faist 2010). The importance of this is apparent in the feelings and memories of the interviewees this study and reported here.

Many of the activist women were already interested in women’s issues before they left Iran. One interviewee of this group, an older woman, clearly remembered that her grandmother too was an activist, and defended women’s rights long before 1977, in the early 20th century. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Esfir, who was already aged 65 and living in UK, remembered that her grandmother, as ‘an illiterate housewife’, nonetheless campaigned for equality between men and women and ‘voiced for the rights of Iranian women’ in the 1930s. This makes the point that activism notably seems to run in families, something echoed by another interviewee, born in Canada and who has never visited Iran herself. Despite this, she retains a strong feeling for the country of her parents, which she learned about mainly through family stories and memories. As she explains: *“I have been surrounded by political activists, therefore it’s in my blood”* (Gulbahar, single, age 34, resident in France, Activist).

As another woman recalled how the Iranian revolution started to remove the basic rights of women and how violence affected her family members after 1979, she was in tears. As this was one of the interviewees who did not wish to be taped, the following account is based on notes from an interview with her in Paris (27 June 2014). In her late 30s and living in the US since her family left

Iran in the 1980s, she recently embarked on a PhD. Here she explains the increasingly traumatic events of her childhood following the Iranian Revolution:

“My father never let me to see animal sacrifice, but these mullahs forced us to watch publicly hanged people in the common places. Once I saw my teacher penalizing women for not wearing hijab as a Revolution Guard, a teacher to whom I was very much attached, who taught me in Grade 1. I got shocked and frightened. Since then I used to hate taking hijab as it was never an Iranian culture rather it has been dividing Iranians I promised with myself that I would never transfer this agony to my children.” (Anahita, age 40, moved 1996, resident in US, Student)

She revealed that she often shared her childhood memories with her two children. She felt blessed that her children were saved from what she had suffered in her childhood.

Memories recalled by all interviewees, irrespective of their ages, social status, profession or period of their dispersal (between 1977 and 2009), reveal shared agony regarding their observations and experiences with life in homeland. This phenomenon was described by Tetreault (2007:84) as ‘diaspora triggered off disasters that produce a mutual trauma, diasporic group feel same alike and recognized their suffering as same’.

This common phenomenon is expressed in the statement of Bahar, who was the youngest among the interviewees. The author met her during a conference, her looks were immature and it seemed that she might not have any mature thoughts to be shared. But when she spoke, her words shocked the author and proved her first impression false:

“My father was a political prisoner therefore my elder brother was barred to get education and later he was exiled, in such a tragic family situation I opened my eyes. I still remember first days of my school; I was told to tie up my hair in a prescribed manner and to take hijab otherwise I would be hanged. As a girl child I kept holding hijab tightly with fear, along with I started to hate myself being a girl; still unconsciously I feel pain of firmly tied hair.” (Bahar, single, age 22, moved 2003, resident in Canada, Student)

This also reflects that women from diverse cultural, ideological, class, ethnic, and religious segments participated in the struggle against the so-called revolutions of Iran, whether actively or passively (Mahdi 2004:436).

3.3 Gender and Religion: Remembering Controversies

In section 3.1 we heard from Anahita whose teacher was a revolutionary guard and disciplined a young girl for not wearing hijab. Here she reflects on the way that post-revolutionary Iran gradually removed rights from women and girls:

“...They gradually made us adopt the way of life according to their belief; like they forced us to wear same dress code with hijab in school, at that moment I never felt anything wrong with that, then as my conscious developed I kept feeling suffocated.”
(Anahita, age 40, moved 1996, resident in US, Student)

Like Anahita, PhD student in The Hague Vashti shared one of the craziest moments spent with her friends. They broke the law imposed by the mullah regime just to have the feeling of freedom: *“I still enjoy recalling the moment when we broke the law by drinking alcohol in Iran just for the sake of enjoyment, as it was prohibited, and we all felt rejoiced.”* (Vashti, age 34, moved 2008, resident in NL, Student)

Although her act as a woman may be termed as foolish or risky, it reveals resistance against the structure and can be noted as exercising her agency which ‘attempts to grasp individual’s capacities to act independently of structural constraints or against them’ (Bilge 2010:12). Such an unconscious aggression led her to want to be free from the suffocating environment of Iran. She is doing her Master’s degree and she still maintains relations through her transnational networks. Later, she became part of the One Million Signatures Campaign¹⁵ for granting women equal legal status with men.

On the contrary, one of the interviewee who is at the lower stage of confidence because of her identity as a non-Muslim still feels as minority and embarrassed with her natives, homeland and its culture;

¹⁵ Iranian women’s rights activists are fighting gender apartheid through the One Million Signatures campaign, which aims to collect a million signatures to demand an end to discriminatory laws against women and granting women equal legal status with men. It is a continuation of Iranian women’s century-long struggle for gender equality.

“I am not a Muslim, but still people around presume me as a Muslim therefore I have camouflaged my identity, because if they would know my identity (as non-Muslim and divorced) I would feel myself more insecure despite I am out of the influence of Iranian society. I am constantly noticing that when Iranian diaspora knows my identity they behave strangely that make me hide myself. There we, the non-Muslims, didn’t feel secure and economic opportunities were limited too.” (Roksana, age 42, moved 1996, resident in NL, Housewife)

Roksana’s identity was different from her Iran’s majority but Laleh who has a similar identity could not make up her mind to give birth to a child in a religiously suffocated society. Settled in Canada, Laleh recalls her agony:

“...Reason behind my late marriage was that I didn’t want to have children in a maniac society. I was searching my soul mate who could understand my point of views then I marry him. Still I don’t have a child despite I am living in a free environment because I desired to give birth to a baby in Iran, liberated with any sign of oppression.” (Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

3.4 Recollection

Both good and bad memories haunt the subject, who feels both moments of pain and imaginary happiness. These memories also impact the present formation of identity. Banu, a student who is well aware of civic rights, feels puzzled when thinking about the situation in Iran:

“Iran is rich in heritage, but culture of civil and political freedom has been buried therefore I feel aggressive about my homeland.” (Banu, age 37, moved 2011, resident in NL, Student)

Similarly, 65 year old activist Laleh shares the value of a homeland, even though she at the same time losing this feeling due to political conflict there:

“When you are in your homeland all support is at your doorstep, it’s like balance in your bank account. As I started activism, I was pushed to the wall. I started getting scared and alarmed, whenever the law enforcement agencies raided, they tried to dig out any evidence that could be against us. Though I was working with finance department of my country; still I was suspected and followed by the authorities.” (Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

However, Zareen, who is studying in the Netherlands but also identifies as an activist, derives motivation and courage from the sufferings she and her family tolerated in their homeland due to her activism:

“I am a born activist, ever tried to unearth and expose the truth. I was arrested many a times but never surrendered. My martial life remained disturbed in Iran as both my husband and son were charged many a times. Even my lawyer in Iran also was arrested; we shared courage from each other.” (Zareen, age 38, moved 2010, resident in NL, Student)

Some verbal recollections were transferred from one generation to other create narratives of history. Two of the interviewees who were not born in Iran nevertheless sensed pride about the struggles of their families even though they do not perceive the pain and suffering their families had gone through. Like Fairuza, sharing the conditions of her family’s dispersal, could not comprehend the ordeal of the journey:

“My grandfather, father and uncle were arrested by the then regime. Later grandfather asked my father to leave for Philippines to save his life. My parents migrated in 1975 therefore I was born in Thailand. Years later my parents took refuge in Norway in 1995.” (Fairuza, age 31, born and resident in Norway, Activist)

Last but not least, Jasmine, who moved from Iran in 1999, describes the pain of diaspora women who feel a loss of identity as they can neither detach themselves from Iran nor adore their host land as a home. Overcome by her emotions, with wet eyes, she shared:

“I still miss my plants and aroma when seasons changed. Even I’ve lost my original smile; physically I am here but nowhere, perhaps I am divided in both countries. I still miss hysterical chuckles with my friends.” (Jasmine, age 39, moved 1999, resident in NL, Activist)

Jasmine’s this abrupt expression *‘I am here but nowhere’* corresponds to the ordeal of these diaspora women.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter elaborates the interviewees’ memories of past events, which are still part of their identity. Some scholars have stated that nostalgia about their origin is one of the features of diasporas (for example Cohen 1997, 2008; Clifford 1994). For diasporic Iranian women recalling good and bad times or the times of their parents, even though they face discrimination on the basis of gender and religion, these ‘lived’ and fluid experiences are important since the-

se reflect their ways of connecting (and disconnecting) with Iran. 'Memories' can also be based on other people's experiences, such as close family, and these memories help to build a history and give a person a picture of unseen realities (Basch et al. 1994:8)

Chapter 4 **Reasons and Conditions for Dispersal**

“A people that is expelled will necessarily develop a different cultural ethos from those who flee, or who are taken as captives. A group that leaves en masse also differs from a group that gradually constitutes itself after a protected period of individual immigration.”

(Butler 2001:199)

Introduction

This chapter conducts a more thorough analysis. As Butler (2001:197) says, the process of diasporization is a logical starting point from which to understand the background of a diaspora. This chapter explores the motivations that led to one’s departure from Iran, linking these to their situation in exile whether as housewives, students or activists. This discussion logically leads to the connection that Iranian women have established with their host lands and the links they have with their community or homeland, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Reasons for Dispersal: Why did they leave?

According to the interviewees, their reasons of departure from Iran have been classified under three broad categories: forced exile, voluntary exile and education.¹⁶ However, the causes and nature of their sacrifices depict quite a variety of scenarios within these broader categories. Some of them belong to the families that left Iran in the era of the monarch, while others left when the country was ruled by fundamentalists, with episodes within an era varying as well.

¹⁶ The author wanted to categorize interviewees in these three types based on reasons of their departure. But during analysis, it was found out that interviewees who introduced themselves as ‘voluntary exiled’ also fit into the category of ‘forced exile’ as they didn’t make the decision but were rather ‘forced’ to depart on the decision of a male family member.

However, the causes and magnitude of the misery and anguish endured more or less is the same. Their right to live had been ceased or conditionally stipulated by the Iranian regimes, their threatened wellbeing and livelihoods resulted in their dispersal and transformation into the diaspora. As Ghorashi (2003:132) explains, ‘the word exile and diaspora seems overlapping when both include the displacement and homeland’.

4.1.1 The Question of Voluntary and Involuntary Exile: A Dubious Paradox

In each category of interviewees (housewives, activists and students), some came from voluntary migrant families. Some housewives themselves were not forced but had to leave because their husbands were forced (economically or politically) to leave. Thus some interviewees in this group of women did not view themselves as forced migrants, even though their family was obliged to leave the country after the head of the household i.e. the husband or father, felt threatened by the regime due to, among other accusations, ‘disloyal’ political activities to the regime. Niloofar a 45 year old Housewife who moved to the Netherlands (NL) in 1990 and interviewed at Zoetermeer explained: *“Due to my husband’s political activities, my family suffered and we had to leave the country”* (Niloofar, age 45, moved 1990, resident in NL).

Niloofar also shared that it was hard for her to settle down in NL even in a neighborhood of other diaspora. The author felt the pain of leaving her siblings and parents behind as she had to follow her husband. Similarly, Laleh, a 65 year old activist met during the conference in Paris but interviewed later on Skype, also apparently opted for voluntarily exile although she alludes to other, actual circumstances:

“We were constantly being monitored and raided. My husband was booked twice but he was bailed out as no solid evidence against him was produced. But when they raided us third time, then we believed that we would not be spared again, therefore we decided that my husband would have to leave as early as possible, and he left the country.”(Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

Another interviewee Shahrzad, who left Iran in 1989 when she was only seven years old and now is married to an African non-Muslim, shared that her parents decided to leave to save the rest of the family from the brutal killing of Iranian regime: *“My brother was killed by the Iranian regime, so my parents left the country to save rest of the family”* (Shahrzad, age 32, moved 1989, resident in Belgium, Student).

Apart from political affiliations, socio-economic conditions also forced some of the interviewees to leave their homeland. Anahita, for instance, was not involved in any political activities but chose exile to provide a better future for her children:

“I was tired of that suffocating environment and wanted a life of choice for my only girl child; therefore I forced my husband to leave the country at any cost.” (Anahita, age 40, moved 1996, resident in US, Student)

Similarly, Roksana and her family were also choked by the environment where the majority of the liberals were pushed to the wall by religious fundamentalism. Being as a non-Muslim living in Iran, added fuel to fire to her and for her Iran become hell as scholar calls “home became hell” (Ghorashi 2003:53). Ironically, despite getting rid of Iran she still feels socially insecure about her native community. She hides herself even within the diaspora: *“I am constantly noticing that when Iranian diaspora knows my identity they behave strangely that makes me hide myself”* (Roksana, age 42, moved 1996, resident in NL, Housewife).

Butler (2001:199) emphasizes that the process of people’s relocation from their origin to another is result of an extreme, traumatic and typically abnormal living situation which in itself is very tragic

There are a few interviewees whom families were forced to exile. Either they were born in the host lands or were a minor or still young at the time of departure from Iran. Gulbahar, 34, shared that in 1975 her parents were forced to leave Iran due to their intensive political engagements against Islamic fundamentalism. She was born in Canada and has now moved to France due to her active involvement in a political movement against the Iranian regime. Her parents had to suffer the misery of dispersal. Similarly for Fairuza, 31, her

family was also forced to leave Iran because her father and grandfather were leading political activists against the Iranian government.

“My grandparents were very actively engaged in the struggle against imperialist regime of Iran, therefore my parents, who were newly married, were forced to leave Iran. I was born in Thailand. Now I am studying in Norway and trying my best to keep up the struggle that my family started.” (Fairuza, age 31, resident in Norway Student)

Additionally, Fairuza and Gulbahar belong to a type of diaspora who had to move to more than one place as part of their dispersal (Safran 1999, Butler 2001, Cohen 2008).

Zareen, a 38 year old student activist, who was arrested many times due to her activism against fundamentalists, was barred in 2007 from leaving the country. However, in 2010 with the help of her transnational activist group, she managed to escape from Iran as her dispersal became significant at present day (Cohen 2008) and now she is studying in NL. She was very excited and shared her interest towards feminism and activism as the motivation for her studies so that she would be able to raise the voice of Iranian women at the global level:

“I am a born activist and ever tried to unearth the truth. I was arrested many a times but I never submitted to the oppressors. My family life was disturbed, and even my lawyers were arrested.” (Zareen, age 38, moved 2010, Student)

Likewise for Bahar, in her 20s and moved to Canada with her family in 2003, the reason behind the migration of some families was to save lives of rest of family members. Although she was very young when she left Iran, she still remembered quite a bit of it:

“My father was an aerospace engineer when he joined movement against religious regime, they put him in prison. My elder brother was exiled by the regime, in the absence of male bread earner we were living hand to mouth. My mother started stitching clothes to feed the family. When my brother settled in Canada, he gradually pulled us all from that horrible situation.” (Bahar, age 22, moved 2003, resident in Canada, Student)

4.1.2 Departure for Education

Gerami and Lehnerer (2001:398) said that there is no doubt that women are everyday's fighters in negotiation for their identities as well as making diplomacy to deal against conventional processes. Likewise, few among the interviewees had left their homeland for better educational and economic opportunities as Banu, 37, moved to NL for studies in 2011. Tohidi (2010:121) explains that the discriminatory state ideology and policies of the Islamic Republic run against the modern socioeconomic ideas, especially with respect to the growing number of urban, educated, middle-class women and these policies make educated women leave the country. On the contrary, the reason for dispersal for some is self-actualization:

"My grandmother was an illiterate housewife, still she voiced for the rights of Iranian women. She was a lady of conviction; I still remember her words, 'If you need to live your life with freedom, you will have to educate yourself, and if you are to struggle for the rights of women, the need to be educated as it is the only capital that are not to be stolen.'"(Esfir, age 65, resident UK, moved 1977, Activist)

4.2 Conditions of Dispersal: How did they leave?

Conditions in which interviewees migrated were diverse. Some were born in host lands or were brought by their family members, while others followed the footsteps of their husbands (housewives), and yet others (activists and students) managed to get admission into the educational institutions of host lands.

Those who followed the path of their family member, or husband, showed a great deal of courage by travelling independently with their children. Family members who pulled them were their husbands, fathers or brothers. For the case of activist Jasmine, age 39, her husband left first to the Netherlands and invited her over two years later in 1999.

On the other hand, interviewees who left their homeland for better or higher education were offered scholarships from different educational institutions. Those who, besides their studies remained engaged in political activism in host lands could not return due to fear of prosecution:

“In 1977, it was easy to travel elsewhere for studies, therefore I opted for Britain for my studies as I always believed that education is the only tool which could be used to support women of Iran and through I could stand against the Iranian regime. Besides my studies I got myself engaged in political activities against the coercive regime of Iran, therefore it was not possible for me to return back to my homeland.”
(Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

She chose to stay abroad and then started working through a transnational network for the rights of women in Iran and became an activist. Two other students acquired the opportunity in a similar manner: Banu and Vashti are both are doing a PhD in the Netherlands and have no intention of returning to Iran. However, what differentiates them from each other is that Vashti (34, in NL since 2008) is engaged in activism for the rights of Iranian women while Banu (37, in NL since 2011) does not show any interest in activism. By following the multi-identity theorem perspectives from Ghorashi (2003:26), both women’s experiences and viewpoints can illustrate how identities change. Identity is not at all fixed or given, but a process by which a person keeps changing it is a process of becoming (Ghorashi 2003:27).

Concluding Remarks

Away from home, Iranian women show more readiness and capabilities to deal with the change. Many women, previously involved in the ‘affairs of bedrooms and kitchen’, have come to the economic field. They are flexible in readjusting as the question of staying under cultural and gender oppression changed (Moghissi 1999a). The experiences or memories shared by all interviewees with regard to the reasons and conditions behind their migration narrate the agony they went through before and during their migration. However, if the position and situation of Iranian women is discussed independently within the diaspora, it concludes as dependent beings. In most of the experiences women do not appear to be in decisive roles. They were subject to the situation created either by political culture or a situation where one of their family members was targeted. They were forced to take a decision or follow the decisions. Surprisingly, the women who had followed their husbands voluntarily or willingly out from Iran are now living divorced or separated in the host lands. In understanding

the women's narratives for reasons and conditions of dispersal, the author of this study agrees with Ghorashi's opinion that the "past life story method gave space to an interaction between past, activism, present's experience of exile and future expectations" (Ghorashi 2003:16).

Chapter 5 **Diasporic Ties: Relationships and Networks**

Introduction

This chapter discusses the women's relationship and networking to compare and analyze their transnationalism. The first part will discuss their homeland while the second part looks at how networks in host land "link together their societies of origin and settlements" (Basch et al. 1994:7). This chapter also looks at women's daily struggles, elaborating on the types of sacrifices they made by leaving the homeland.

Identity emerges out of the relationships we share based on similarity or difference of values and experiences with other people. In context of Muslim diasporic communities however, the formation of collective identity or diasporic consciousness often results as a form of response to discriminatory social patterning (Moghissi 2007: xv).

5.1 Relationship with the Homeland: Holding on and letting go¹⁷

The interviewees expressed varied feelings of connectivity to their homeland, which can be categorized along three main perspectives: those who still felt strong connections, those who felt little concern or connection, and those who were confused about their feelings in relation to Iran. Esfir an Activist, she has devoted her life to the rights of Iranian women, falls into the first of these three categories:

"My homeland is literally a pivot in my life, what I am and what I will be it would revolve around it. I have dedicated my whole life to the rights of women of Iran" (Esfir, age 65, moved 1977, resident in UK, Activist)

¹⁷ Adopted from Dufoix (2006).

Although interviewees Fairuza and Gulbahar were born in the host lands, they could still relate and connect themselves easily with Iran. They said that this sense of a strong connection had been transferred to them by their parents and other relatives.

“My connection is rooted with my grandparents. It is so stronger that I feel myself as an interpreter or a representative of the oppressed people of Iran.” (Fairuza, age 31, born and resident in Norway, Student)

“Since my childhood I’ve been constantly listening the stories of struggle of my family, eventually Iran is running in my veins like blood. My parents remained engaged with Iranian political struggle even after they were expelled. I grew up in an environment where family and friends were engaged in activism; that made me feel as I was living in Iran.” (Gulbahar, age 34, born and resident in France, Activist)

These sentiments reflect their social environment in host lands where they are still culturally rooted in the homeland.

Contrary to these strong feelings of attachment to Iran among the activists, most of the housewives felt connected to Iran mainly because their relatives still lived there, rather than for any abstract reasons:

“As a country I don’t miss my homeland rather I am not nostalgic about it, however I feel nostalgic about my friends in Iran as they also care about me and I do care about them.” (Roksana, age 42, moved 1996, resident in NL, Housewife)

However, the connection of some of the interviewees with Iran was also complex, and was tied up with a feeling of being viewed as alien in the host land: *“...here in West we still are called Iranians”* (Niloofer, age 45, moved 1990, resident in NL, Housewife). Similarly, three interviewees among the students maintain their connection with the homeland;

“Struggle against the oppressive rule in my country is in my blood. One can’t imagine how strongly I am connected with my homeland.” (Zareen, 38, moved 2010, resident in NL, Student)

5.1.1 Travelling or Not Travelling Back

There was another surprisingly finding: most of the interviewees had never visited Iran after leaving it, especially those who were forced to exile. Interviewees in the activist and student groups did not travel back fearing that they might be prosecuted, like Esfir, who left Iran in 1977: *“I travelled to my homeland twice”(in 1980 and 1997). Later as my activities against Iranian regime had been discovered, I was not allowed to travel again”* (age 65, moved 1977, resident in UK, Activist). Similarly, Zareen said that *“If I go back I will be captured”* (age 38, moved 2010, resident in NL, Student). Laleh shared that although she had never travelled back, her soul lived in Iran:

“Since 1983 I never travelled back physically but my soul travels there. I want to go back but when Iran would be liberated, from mullahs and their stupid mindset”. (Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

On the contrary, students Anahita (40, moved 1996, resident in US) and Shahrzad (32, moved 1989, resident in Belgium) had never tried to go back as they had very distressing memories linked with Iran. In the present scenario of restrictions on women especially because of hijab, they would prefer to never visit.

5.1.2 Sacrifices Made

This is reflective of the Iranian diaspora in terms of their transformation into a different identity. The interviewees’ responses on what they had sacrificed could be summed up in a statement by Esfir: *“We have sacrificed our affection and love to each other”*. She claims she has lost her identity: *“I sacrificed not only my culture, family, friends, language, but also my identity”*.

As for Activist Gulbahar, who was born in Canada and had never visited Iran, imagined what her parents had sacrificed:

“Rather my parents sacrificed a lot and due to their suffering, activism transferred to me. Had I been in Iran, I would not have been too much concerned. Feeling the pain

of my parents, I left my studies in Canada for France where I am full time engaged in political activism.” (Gulbahar, age 34, born and resident in France, Activist)

5.1.3 Desire to Go Back to Homeland ‘Iran’

An interesting shift of identity appeared as most of the respondents, despite having a great connection to the homeland, did not wish to lose what they had gained here in West. One of the housewives argued in favor of her decision not to go back to her homeland in this way as one Housewife claimed: *“Here woman lives by her choice, there man is dominant, and hence I prefer to live here”* (Niloofer, 45, moved 1990, resident in NL). Similarly, Activists believed that the host lands are now their homes. It was evident from few other responses as well that the liberty and lifestyle of host lands suited their personal orientation; *“There are restrictions in Iran, I think I prefer to live here”* (Jasmine, age 39, moved 1999, resident in NL, Activist). Another activist said something similar; *“Even if Iranian regime is changed, I would never prefer to live in Iran as I feel Norway as my homeland now”*. (Fairuza, age 31, born and resident in Norway, Activist).

However, another perspective combined with conditionality also shows almost all the interviewees’ reluctance to return to live in Iran; *“Certain reasons and conditions compelled us to migrate if Iran is purified from such pollution, I would love to go back and stay there till my last breath”*. (Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

On the contrary, there are few voices among the interviewees that showed their resolution to return to their homeland. Zareen was convinced that she would return at some point in time: *“Always preferred to live in Iran, the country gave me an identity so how can I forget it. What I am, is because of Iran”*. (Zareen, age 38, moved 2010, resident in NL, Student).

According to Butler’s (2001:205) the relationship with homeland does not end nor does it continue and it also reflects in some of these responses. Instead, it changes the desire of physical return to emotional attachment and the reinter-

pretation of homeland and the representation of its culture also works in the construction of their identities.

5.2 ‘Strangers at Gates’ in the Host Land¹⁸

Due to uniqueness of this relationship, the connection of diaspora with the host land has been observed in various studies (Butler 2001:206). In this study, the diasporic women consider their host lands as quite different to Iran. Often because this is the world of opportunities for them, where it is believed there are no restrictions on women’s dressing, eating, socializing and living. Nevertheless, some are overpowered with nostalgia and still follow the religious culture of Iran and do not adopt a Western dress code so easily. Few interviewees believe that in moving out of Iran, their gains are greater than their losses:

“I belonged to a rich family and was a professor in Geography, had all what anyone could have wished for. Suddenly things changed, economy was destroyed, civil rights were usurped and dress code for women, especially hijab, was made a compulsion. Here I have all sort of freedom but couldn’t enjoy settled and soothing life style.” (Mahin, age 50, moved 1998, resident in NL, Housewife)

In terms of facing barriers or discrimination, Butler (2001) and Safran (1999) note that feeling of alienation is a feature of diaspora, this feature also observed in respondents. The opinions of the interviewees were equally divided into two extremes. As Fairuza who is Activist and was born in the Norway stated:

“It depends upon level of sensitivity a person has. Though I have no memories in Iran, still I feel being discriminated here very strongly. People of host land consider us as ‘educated monkeys’; and make us realize that we, the immigrants, learned manners in host society.” (Fairuza, age 31, born and resident in Norway, Activist)

It shows that discrimination also serves as a connecting link for the diasporas, Moghissi (1999a) explained that the discrimination faced in the host land push

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diaspora women towards keeping their own homeland culture, as “the pain and the anger that racism causes encourages members of the diaspora family to take refuge in their own culture to stick together and to suppress disharmony, no matter what form it takes” (Moghissi 1999a).

On the other hand, many of the student and activists do not think so. Zareen a Student claimed that she never felt any discrimination in the Netherlands, as people value her activism and struggle.

However, another dimension explored in this study is that some feel unwelcome within the Iranian diaspora. Roksana 42 years old Housewife, does not feel discrimination in the NL but feels biasness by Iranian diaspora community because she is not a Muslim and religious identity plays a critical role in her discrimination: *“As I am not an Iranian Muslim and don’t observe hijab, therefore I am offended by my natives, sometimes.”*

There was an indication of a great deal of difference in between the home and host lands. Besides Islamic fundamentalism, they were also suffering from patriarchal social structures and being treated like second class citizens in their homeland. Bahar, 22, was very young when she left Iran but still remembers the discrimination of being a girl child:

“There I hated myself for being a girl, but here I learned that I was wrong because a girl can also live the life she wants to live. While there were no options, so how can we talk of selecting between two. Here one feels secured either studying or working.”
(Bahar, age 22, moved 2003, resident in Canada, Student)

Similar feelings were expressed by another Student, Zareen, 38 years old, who moved to the Netherlands in 2010: *“I am still engaged in rights based activism here, life is busy but only remorse I have that I am not in my country”*. Zareen had been arrested many times in Iran. However, she now feels more relaxed and adores the culture of her host country, which provides her with many opportunities to get involved in the wider feminist movement.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided some glimpses of a resounding sense of connectivity that many Iranian diaspora women have with their home country, despite the way their present daily lives in the host country reshapes their realities and relationships. Most have the feeling that moving out of Iran has brought a great deal of privileges, especially in terms of their socio-economic and political self-actualization as women. However, most also cherish their past and culture as an important historical residue, even if they hardly ever think of returning permanently to Iran. Perhaps a dream of a liberated Iran which motivates the activists is more a domestic dream of family for the housewives. The students may want change as much as the activists, but only one plans to return to influence change at home. What this chapter has considered is some of the desires and passions of the women interviewed, and how their feelings about their old homes and their new homes translate into a certain social and political vibrancy. The next chapter considers the networks and the local and transnational relationships that matter to our interviewees.

Chapter 6 Forging and Sustaining Multi-stranded Social Relations: Practicing Transnationalism

Introduction

Theories of transnationalism and more specifically women ‘immigrant transnationalism’ assume a category of migrants who not only ‘live dual lives’ in the sense of living in more than one country, but who also engage in long-distance, cross-border activities including migrant labor, involving ‘back and forth’ movements and interactions (Lentin 2006:1-4). This chapter focuses on how they forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations on a transnational basis. It also tries to understand the nature and extent of their present feelings of being connected with Iranian women.

‘Transnationalism’ is the process through which diaspora women create social fields while cultivating socio-economic, cultural and political relationships (Basch et al. 1994:27). Regardless of the condition or rationale of relationship, the diaspora stay connected with their families back home. The interviewees in this study demonstrated similar situations. All of the respondents, directly or in-directly, utilizing different mediums of globalization such as the Internet, social media or some other medium of correspondence, retained such connectivity.

6.1 Interrelationships with Communities: ‘As a social practice’¹⁹

Ghorashi and Tavakoli (2006:91) state that transnational exchange is based on the construction of a ‘common identity’. It was observed that the interviewees

¹⁹ Dufoix (2008: xi)

living in different host countries have different levels of relationships according to their 'identity'. While language might be a barrier that could limit interaction with people in the host lands, most of the respondents in this study were able to communicate in the languages of the host lands (especially the housewives).

The activists and students could perhaps be called an 'operative diaspora' (Butler 2001:207) as they have an inter-relationship with communities in both native as well as host countries, and they visit them frequently. As Laleh 65 years old Activist, does not have children but has been living with her husband in Canada since 1983:

"Canada is a land of immigrants and there are a lot of Iranians who are actually activists in their core, therefore, I have lots of friends here who interact regularly and their presence and enthusiasm keeps my hope alive, that one day, be it me or the next generation of Iran will be able to see a liberated Iran." (Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

On the contrary, the housewives shared that they had less interaction with host friends as well as native family and friends. Niloofar, 45 years old, who has been living in NL since 1990, lives an almost isolated life:

"Here I have no family member except for two children. I am separated; the eldest daughter went back to Iran after marriage while other children (daughter and son) are living separately. I am living alone here." (Niloofar, age 45, moved 1990, resident in NL, Housewife)

Mahin, a housewife who has been living in NL since 1998 does not socialize with people of her host land either:

"I have no social interaction with locals. Natives are connected but I have no informal relation with them either." (Mahin, age 50, moved 1998, resident in NL, Housewife)

This situation supports Butler's 'seminal moment' (Butler 2001:207) describing that due to less or no socialization with both natives and host communities, a diaspora group cannot maintain its diasporic identity.

6.2 Diaspora's Reflection on Women in Iran:

All interviewees had more or less a similar understanding on the plight of women in Iran.

"Iranian women deserve much better life than what they are leading at the moment. Despite a long history of the movement of women's emancipation, still common women do not even have any idea what their rights are." (Esfir, age 65, moved 1977, resident in UK, Activist)

Similarly, Roksana also realized this reality and she was convinced that:

"Women aren't given space to realize their faculties; they are forced to lead according to the male defined version of Islam, and if they challenge it, they are sent to jails." (Roksana, age 42, moved 1996, resident in NL, Housewife)

Despite censuring theocracy and patriarchy, interviewees of this study admired the courage of their fellow gender in Iran. *"Iranian women are warriors as they did not surrender to the mullah regime."* (Zareen, age 38, moved 2010, resident in NL, Activist)

Whatever their opinions, it is evident that diasporic women relate themselves with women in Iran and have an informed point of view on women's agenda. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the regime for years has served as the binding factor for the rather heterogeneous Iranian diaspora. The anger against the regime was political as well as gender-related due to gender-specific violence. Hatred and anger towards the Iranian regime was an essential part of the Iranian diasporic identity (Ghorashi and Tavakoli 2006:90).

6.2.1 Diaspora as Voices for Women Rights in Iran

The exile combined by cultural suffocation and consequent suffering has transformed the Iranian diasporic community into a 'vibrant and highly politicized émigré community' (Moghissi 1999b:189). It was observed that the women living in the West are concerned and care about women's rights in their homeland. Esfir, an activist from the UK, denounces the conventional notion that a person who cares should be directly engaged with the cause:

"This is not necessary to have any connection with any political or rights' movement, women in West, be they housewife, they concern themselves for the women in Iran,

and they participate in activities for the rights of Iranian women as much as they can.” (Esfir, age 65, moved 1977, resident in UK, Activist)

But on the other hand some interviewees like Laleh gave a different insight:

“To me, those who migrated either were the weakest of all or were fortunate to have an opportunity, we cannot feel or be equal to those who are still in that hell. It is easy to sympathize but to do anything for them or struggle for their rights is not as simple as anyone could claim. To some extent those who are still active in the movement, they do care a lot.” (Laleh, age 65, moved 1983, resident in Canada, Activist)

Surprisingly, during the discussion, a polarization of opinions about hijab was unearthed. This division is said to be very critical among diasporic women. Whether their logic lies in culture or religious obligation, this difference of opinion is considered as issue that is harmful for the cause of women rights.

“I observed that critical issues are covered behind the non-issue of observing hijab or not. Unfortunately, women here are divided between two extremes.” (Esfir, age 65, moved 1977, resident in UK, Activist)

Anahita was also concerned on this polarization:

“Hijab has created a gulf among women living in West; they blame each other for observing or not observing hijab. Similarly those who do not observe hijab support women’s struggle against hijab in Iran, and the other favors women who observe hijab.” (Anahita, age 40, moved 1996, resident in US, Student)

6.2.2 Becoming Transnational Network: Link with women’s rights movement in Iran

Scholars (De Tona and Lentin 2011:486) have defined network and association as different patterns of connectivity, where network is more flexible but has a complicated form of connectivity with organization. This section examines the respondents’ links with women’s rights movements in Iran and whether as diasporic women they organize activities for advocating the rights of Iranian women in the host lands. Interestingly, despite being concerned or associated with the situation of women in the homeland, most of them were not directly connected with any women’s movements in Iran.

Some were cautious of the fact that their political participation or activism might affect their families in Iran. As Parvaneh, a student in Netherlands

shared; *“Because my family still resides in Iran, and I don’t want to create problems for my family.”* (Parvaneh, 35, moved 2009, resident in NL, student)

Only some activists have been organizing, while most participate in activities organized for advocating the rights of Iranian women in host land/s. Activists Esfir and Gulbahar, who were born in host lands, organize and participate in such activities:

“Since my childhood I have been participating and organizing cultural and political events. Since long I’ve been organizing 13 days feast on New Year in Iran. Still I organize political events all over the West.” (Gulbahar, age 34, born and resident in France, Activist)

Jasmine, a 39 year old activist, volunteers her services to facilitate Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, including having them over in her home. *“I am a volunteer of an NGO who takes care of refugees from Iran. At times, refugee women gather at my house to seek guidance in matters related to naturalization.”* (Jasmine, age 39, moved 1999, resident in NL, Activist)

Likewise, some students are also active in organizing and participating in activities for the rights of women in Iran. As Bahar, a young Activist responds:

“I have established a group in my university, it holds different activities for human especially women rights in Iran. This students’ group organizes activities in Canada and also participates in different fora abroad.” (Bahar, age 22, moved 2003, resident in Canada, Student)

Taking a further step, Zareen is using social media for advocating rights of women in Iran:

“I organize women rights event and also participate in international events. I am a regular contributor to both electronic and social media, in French, English and Persian languages.” (Zareen, age 38, moved 2010, resident in NL, Student)

Concluding Remarks

Forging and sustaining multi-stranded social relations are the main components of transnationalism process. And as scholar (Ben-Rafael 2013: 844) ad-

mits that transnational and diaspora are such notions which keep the diaspora close with their homelands and among their native communities. This chapter covered the connection that the Iranian women diaspora have with their family and friends, as well as their links with women's rights networks in Iran. It revealed their perceptions about the situation of women's rights in Iran and that many activists not only have links with networks and movements in Iran, but they are also active in organizing activities for raising voices for women's right in Iran. In contrast, the housewives appear to be a passive diaspora.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The author cannot agree more with Nancy Fraser (2005) that scholars are not only divided over the definition of diaspora but also over the association between diaspora and transnationalism. In this sense, they can be seen as being split into two main groups, divided over the extent to which transnationalism and diasporas are new or not. Perhaps more importantly, a few scholars point out that the term diaspora has sometimes been used to depoliticise discussions on migrant populations. One author warns: “Diaspora studies are in danger of becoming a servant to global political forces, as anthropology was once in danger of serving imperialism” (Tölölyan 2012:12).

By relying on the five dimensions of diaspora analysis as recommended in Butler’s (2001) pioneering study, this study sought to avoid depoliticizing the Iranian women interviewed, and used a definition of transnationalism that allowed for their individual agency as actors to be the main focus. By analysing and comparing the lived and fluid experiences of specific women, the aim has been to ‘repoliticize’ the discussion around migrant women (Basch et al. 1994:8). Iranian women living in different diasporic communities shared three key features that informed this data collection: i) they lived in diverse host countries, ii) their age and marital status differed, and iii) they self-identified in three main categories (Activist, Housewife, Student) that nevertheless overlapped. This study finally adopted transnationalism as a way to better understand the ‘processes’ of relationship construction by women from Iran living in the diaspora. In retrospect, the three categories of housewife, student and activist could have been supplemented with a fourth ‘other’ category.

The emotions reflected within interviews were also expressed by Ghorashi (2003), whose work has been important for this study. It has also helped author to understand a great deal more about women’s struggles for rights in Iran among the transnational diaspora. For her after leaving Iran:

“The painful consequence was that I was banned from the only country that I considered my homeland. A sense of emptiness shadowed my life in the Netherlands, a life that in no way was an isolated one, because I was quite successful here. However, this feeling of living between spaces (there and here) and time (past and present) created the unsatisfactory situation of longing for my sweet homeland. So I retreated to the stage of ‘a tender beginner”.

(Ghorashi 2003: 4)

The reason for using this quote was that after done with analyses of interviewees and listening to the tapes of interviews, the author felt the same reflection in all the respondents’ responses. Activists, students and housewives all had same passion and pain for Iran, but this relation shaped new formations the day they left Iran. As in Chapter 3, this study illustrated their pain, sorrow and even joy as they recalled from their memories. It also showed that women, who were political forced to exiled, missed their activism and housewives missed their siblings and homely environment more. This difference became more explicit after revealing the reasons and conditions of interviews in Chapter 4, where the women were divided by their choice of education, forced and voluntarily exile. It is evident that all respondents faced difficulties either political, economically or socially they all were forced to exile. It was observed that students faced less trouble than the housewives or activists due to support from their host country. It is difficult for women in the cases of forced exile where they are expelled from the country. As discussed in Chapter 5, housewives endured more difficulties to settle in their host countries.

However, it is clear that the Iranian women in diaspora create different levels and kinds of transnationalism. As mentioned earlier, transnationalism is a process and TFN, ICT or transnational networks and even kinship networks are aspects of it. Social media is a key factor that cannot be ignored as I also contacted three interviews through Skype and Facebook. As mentioned in chapter 1 that, during a conference the author attended, was also result of transnational organization’s activities.

7.1 Key Findings of the Study: Reconnecting with Theory

This study shows that transnational practices of Iranian women involve both construction and deconstruction of their identity and sense of belonging (Basch et al. 1994:104). In connection with the individuals and the community they represent or feel they belong to, it emerged that relationships – and the lack of them – are vital to understanding the individual identities of women in the diaspora (Dufoix 2008:107). None can deny that income levels, economic opportunities and class can also be reasons for dispersal and for weak or strong relationship networks, but to do this would have required mapping many more ‘layers’ of the interviewees identities than was possible in interviews that lasted between 30 minutes and a couple of hours.

Though I am not an Iranian, I am a Muslim and a woman, and often during the fieldwork I sensed the pain and suffering of my interviewees at the hands of patriarchy. I would have liked to conduct a comparative study of diaspora women living in different communities, as Ballard (1994) has done. The mirroring effect of life stories certainly felt like a reflection of my own life at times. It is clear that the status of Iranian women after shifting from migrant to diaspora, are still rooted within their national identity, whether they wish this to be the case or not (Ghorashi 2003). Narratives are useful since they can draw attention to how different groups feel about their homeland and also their relationships in the host lands. These narratives clearly varied from person to person and group to group.

Moreover, this study gave attention to the process of transnationalism and how it both affects the lives of Iranian women in diaspora and is created by them. Viewing diasporic women as individuals and examining their connections and relationships helped to see how they might influence events in the homeland, though this was not the main focus of the study, and has been done elsewhere (e.g. Clifford 1994:311). The position of Iranian diaspora women as “being here and there” (Vertovec 1999a:8) and their potential to empower groups through generating their ability to mobilize international support and influence

around women's issues both in the homeland and in the host country (Butler 2001). Hence, this new positioning meant that the transnational diasporic network became more of a network of activities with pragmatic aims. Iran has now greater influence in online and offline transnational networks as well as the kinship network, vibrant through the use of social media which has transformed the actualization of global village.²⁰

It was found out during the study that three groups of Iranian women diaspora are similar especially in their connection with Iran and concern for women rights living there, however their individual agency has been influenced by the culture of the host lands. The change in the social status of the 'Housewives' (Iranian women as diaspora) in this study has been observed as they were influenced by the Western society's value of protecting and promoting women rights and their individuality. Therefore, those who followed their husbands in migration somehow had left their husbands and leading an independent life.

Undoubtedly, Iranian women have been fighting both with regime and household to regain their position confiscated by these institutions and always have direct impact on women living in diaspora (Gerami and Lehnerer 2001). This impact when combined with Western approach amplifies their voice. Besides it also makes complicated to examine differentiating their connection and the reasons of dispersal as well as their relationships with host country and interrelationships of diaspora.

7.1.1 Questions that could be considered in future research

1. In terms of transformation, deconstruction and construction of the identity of Iranian diaspora, what are the avenues to retain that cultural

²⁰ Global Village is a term closely associated with Marshall McLuhan, popularized in his books *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964).

residue? And how many generations it might take to total transformation?

2. Explore the homeland attitude towards the diaspora, as Butler indicates that after the global intervention, how Iran perceives its diasporic women (Butler 2001:206). How much of the middle or lower class amongst the diaspora, who are stuck in their own survival economically, can retain that identity and are concerned or active in the battle for rights of women in Iran?
3. Whose voices are missing in the transnational connection and network? Another factor could be the influence of Western culture on the Muslim Iranian identity that they are retreating from in Western diasporic communities, new challenge for the diaspora (Gholami 2014:67; Langer 2013).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Guiding Questionnaires

Iranian Diaspora Women

Q. No.	Inquires/Questions
1.	Name
2.	Age
3.	Education
4.	Resident
5.	Profession
6.	Marital Status
7.	How would you like to identify yourself (Activist, Student, and housewife)?
8.	Do you have children? If yes how many?
9.	How many members of your family living with you?
10.	When did you and/or your family migrate?
11.	Why did you and/or your family migrate (Reasons)?
12.	How did you and/or your family migrate (Conditions)?
13.	Do you have relatives living nearby?
14.	Do you have native friends here/living nearby?
15.	What are the status and/or profession of your native friends here?
16.	What is the frequency of meeting your native friends here?
17.	Do you have non-native (host land) friends?
18.	What is the frequency of meeting your non-native (host land) friends?
19.	Are you connected with common Iranian women living in host land?
20.	How do you feel here about your homeland?
21.	Do you maintain contact with family and friends in your homeland?
22.	Have you ever visited your homeland since your migration?
23.	Where do you prefer to live rest of your life, host land or homeland, and why?
24.	What is your opinion about women living in homeland? (related to

	their position and condition)
25.	Are you connected with Women Rights Movement in homeland?
26.	Do you organize and/or participate in the activities here for women in homeland?
27.	Do you think that such activities are different from the activities of other diasporas, if compared?
28.	What is your opinion: are diaspora women concerned about women rights in Iran?
29.	Do you think that you have sacrificed anything due to migration?
30.	Do you think that you are benefited by the migration?
31.	How do you compare homeland and host land?
32.	Do you face/feel any barriers and/or discrimination in host land? And what is the nature of such an issue?
33.	Any other comments/ Quotes

Source: author's own elaboration, 2014

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

No.	Original Name	Alias Name and Introduction	Location of Interaction	Interview Location / Medium	Date
1	Ms Elaheh Azimfar	Ms. Esfir <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Activist ▪ Age: 65 ▪ Status: Divorced ▪ Moved: 1977 ▪ Resident: UK 	25 June 2014 Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Skype	5 August 2014
2	Ms. Milicia Favdan	Ms. Fairuza <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age: 31 ▪ Identity: Activist ▪ Status: Living Relation ▪ Moved: Born in Thailand(Parents moved in 1975) ▪ Resident: Norway 	Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Face-to-face at Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	27 June 2014
3	Ms. Elaham Zanjani	Ms. Gulbahar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Activist ▪ Age: 34 ▪ Status: Single ▪ Moved: Born in Canada Parents moved in 1975) ▪ Resident: France 	First met on 8 March 2014 at International women Day Paris and again at Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Skype	16 August 2014
4	Mrs. Alisha	Mrs. Jasmine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Activist ▪ Age: 39 ▪ Status: Married (3 Kids) ▪ Moved: 1999 ▪ Resident: NL 	Zoetermeer in her home	Face-to-face in Zoetermeer	27 August 2014
5	Mrs. Mahnoor	Mrs. Laleh <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Activist ▪ Status: Married ▪ Age: 65 ▪ Moved: 1983 ▪ Resident: Canada 	Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Skype	20 August
6	Ms. Naheed Basri	Ms. Mahin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Housewife ▪ Status: Divorced (2 Kids) ▪ Age: 50 ▪ Moved: 1998 ▪ Resident: Hague NL 	Interaction through a Pakistani Friend at her house	Face-to-face	8 July 2014
7	Ms. Frida	Ms. Roksana <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: House- 	Zoetermeer	Face-to-face at Alisha Home	27 August

		wife <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Status: Divorced (2 Kids) ▪ Age: 42 ▪ Moved: 1996 ▪ Resident: Zoetermeer NL 		(Zoetermeer)	2014
8	Ms. Naheed	Ms. Niloofar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Housewife ▪ Status: Separated (3 Kids) ▪ Age: 45 ▪ Moved: 1990 ▪ Resident: NL 	Zoetermeer	Face-to-face at Alisha Home (Zoetermeer)	27 August
9	In data base (anonymity Requested)	Ms. Banu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Single ▪ Age: 37 ▪ Moved: 2011 ▪ Resident: NL 	Den Haag	Face-to-face in Den Haag	6 August
10	Ms. Metra	Mrs. Shahrzad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Married ▪ Age: 32 ▪ Moved: 1989 ▪ Resident: Belgium 	Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Face-to-face at Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	27 June
11	Ms. Farnaz Alvandi	Ms. Vashti <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Single ▪ Age: 34 ▪ Moved: 2008 ▪ Resident: NL 	Through second reader ISS' student info website	Face-to-face at ISS	6 August
12	Ms. Parisa	Ms. Parvaneh <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Single ▪ Age: 35 ▪ Moved: 2009 ▪ Resident: NL 	Zoetermeer	Face-to-face in Alisha's Zoetermeer	27 August
13	Mrs. Mansoureh Shojaee	Mrs. Zareen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Married (1Kid) ▪ Age: 38 ▪ Moved: 2010 ▪ Resident: NL 	ISS, Den Haag	Face-to-face in Den Haag	13 July
14	Ms. Malika	Ms. Bahar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Single ▪ Age: 22 ▪ Moved: 2003 ▪ Resident: Canada 	Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Face-to-face at Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	27 June

15	Mrs. Mina	Mrs. Anahita <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity: Student ▪ Status: Married (1Kid) ▪ Age: 40 ▪ Moved 1996 ▪ Resident: US 	Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	Face-to-face at Conference, Paris; organized by NCRI	26 August 2014
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Source: own elaboration, 2014

Appendix 3: Types of Diaspora

Types of Diaspora (Cohen 2008: 18)

VICTIM,	Jews, Africans Armenians	Also discussed: Irish and Palestinians. Many contemporary refugee groups are incipient victim diasporas but time has to pass to see whether they return to their homelands, assimilate in their host lands, creolize or mobilize as a diaspora.
LABOUR	Indentured Indians	Also discussed: Chinese and Japanese; Turks, Italians, and North Africans. Many others could be included.
IMPERIAL British	Also discussed: Russians, colonial powers other than Britain.	Other synonymous expressions are
TRADE	Lebanese, Chinese	Also discussed: Venetians, business and professional Indians, Chinese, Japanese
DETERRITORIALIZED	Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis	Also discussed: Roma, Muslims and other religious diasporas. The expressions 'hybrid', 'cultural' and 'post-colonial' also are linked to the idea of deterritorialization without being synonymous.

Appendix 4: Common Features of Diaspora

1. dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
4. an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.(Cohen 2008:17)