

A route to roots:

The negotiation of identity, sense of home and belonging throughout second-generation Iranian immigrants' homecoming trips and ethnic returns

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the narratives of identity, home, and sense of belonging of second-generation Iranian immigrants. Despite the current economic and political situation in Iran, second-generation Iranian immigrants yearn for moving to Iran. Hence, their migration decision is associated with more than solely economic drives and is best explained by their narratives of identity and self. Relying on narratives of identity, my aim is to explore the extent to which their homecoming trips could influence their identity, sense of home and belonging and find its link to ethnic return decisions, which so far has been studied implicitly rather than explicitly. Using a qualitative research design, 14 second-generation Iranian immigrants were interviewed. Out of the 14, some actually migrated to Iran and others were considered potential returnees. Five themes were identified from semi-structured interviews: VFR experiences, socio-cultural and political differences, language, life stages and transnational ways of being and belonging, and dichotomy of ethnic return. VFR experiences were found to be the main influence in creating a feeling of being at home in Iran, at the same time a feeling of being an outsider in Iran. Besides, traveling back to parental homeland (Iran) also encompassed experiencing unfamiliar socio-cultural and political encounters, whereby the pre-existing sense of belonging to Iran was either dampened or created curiosity to exploring this unfamiliarity as second-generation immigrants. Proficiency in their Persian language was found to be one of the main causes of feeling as an outsider in Iran, yet also as a source of attachment and identity. Meanwhile, second-generation Iranian immigrants' sense of belonging and home towards Iran was not only derived from their homecoming trips, but they also (re)constructed emotional attachments to Iran by engaging in activities that helped them (re)connect to their roots. Finally, the ethnic return decisions are a multi-layered phenomenon caused by feelings of having hybrid homes and identities. Therefore, they are not necessarily a temporary decision and they indirectly relate to homecoming trips, as homecoming trips contribute to building hybrid senses of home and belonging.

Keywords: Return mobilities, ethnic return, homecoming trips, second generation, Transnationalism, identity, sense of belonging, home

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1. Introduction

“Traveling to Iran was really like homecoming. It was weird because I was traveling to a place I wasn't born in, but it was like going home again. It was this weird double feeling, it was like going home, going in a place that I felt really at home” (Rita)

Rita is a second-generation Iranian immigrant who has been traveling to Iran about once a year since she was born. She defines her travels to her parental land as a “homecoming”. It is not a coincidence that she uses this specific word. In fact, “the idea of a homecoming is considered central to diasporic identification and a meaningful model of resettlement” (Yang, Lee, & Khoo- Latimore, 2018, p.25). Diasporas is a term I will utilize throughout this thesis, and it refers to groups of people (including both first and later generations) scattered across the world in places other than their places of origin. Regardless of the forces underlying their dispersion, diasporas share strong ties with each other and with their places of origin (Cohen, 1997; Coles & Timothy, 2014). New researches related to social, cultural and physical ties of diasporas borrow theories not only from migration and diaspora studies, but also from studies on transnationalism (Coles & Timothy, 2014; Etemaddar, Duncan & Tucker, 2016; Huang, Ramshaw and Norman, 2016; Kebede, 2019). Transnationalism is a process by which migrant populations maintain their social, cultural and economic ties across geographical boundaries (Huang et al., 2016). The transnationalism paradigm in diaspora studies has added new perspectives to studying diasporas’ identification processes, as it contributes to studying the complex ways in which diasporas, and especially second-generation diasporas, tend to identify themselves with both their settlement countries and their countries of origin (Somerville, 2008). This identification gives them a feeling of belonging to both places and thus having hybrid homes (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Nevertheless, this hybrid sense of home and belonging can also turn into seeking a more stable identity, and a desire to return to places of origin/home (ibidem).

A return that derives from a quest for feelings of homecoming and sense of belonging could lead toward multiple short trips that can eventually turn into a form of definitive return migration to the migrants’ origin country (Wessendorf, 2007 ; King & Christou, 2011). These short trips and the intimate experiences they can produce in the person taking them, could change personal dimensions of kinship, ethnicity, culture, and

identity (Yang, Lee & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018). In this thesis, I will focus in particular on second-generation immigrants who have been born in a country that it is not Iran but who, through their parents and in some cases, the ethnic communities they grow up in in their country, still have a link with their parents' country of origin. When second-generation immigrants take part in homecoming trips, they could (re)construct social ties and senses of belonging (Huang et al., 2016; Pelliccia, 2016), just like Rita who feels at home in Iran even if she was born and raised in Italy. The other form of this broader phenomenon called 'return mobilities' that involves second-generation immigrants, is their stable relocation to their parental homeland, termed as "ethnic return" (King & Christou, 2011). Ethnic return is described as a situation where the desire for a stable home of second-generation immigrants encourages a potential relocation to their parental homelands (King & Christou, 2011; Jain, 2013). Eventually, "return as a corporeal event can be a fleeting visit, a languid summer holiday, an extended stay for a few years, or for good. The intention may not match outcome: a temporary return may turn out to be permanent, and vice versa" (King & Christou, 2011, p.453). Therefore, homecoming trips and ethnic returns not only relate as they both negotiate the diasporic identity and homing desire, but they are also two components of the mobility spectrum that can "act in a complementary, symbiotic relationship" (Bell & Ward, 2000, p.104). In other words, homecoming trips could lead to ethnic returns and thus studying any of these inextricably related types of mobilities should not happen in isolation (Bell & Ward, 2000; King & Christou, 2011).

There is still limited academic work on the topic of second-generation immigrants and their transnational ties, homecoming trips, and potentiality for ethnic returns. Although Bell and Ward's (2000), and King and Christou's (2011) studies endeavoured in incorporating different kinds of return mobilities, their attempt was based on critical theory analysis and did not incorporate case studies that they conducted themselves. Besides, case study based researches that suggest the existence of a link between homecoming trips and ethnic returns (Wessendorf, 2007; Shani, 2011; King & Christou, 2014; Sala & Balssadar, 2017; Kebede, 2019) are confined to either trips or migration as their core research question. As a result, my research aims to fill in the aforementioned gaps in the literature by attempting to answer the research question: *What is the role of second-generation Iranian immigrants' homecoming trips in deciding to migrate to Iran?* In addition, since what primarily concerns me in answering this question is how place-identity is (re)constructed through homecoming

trips to fit second-generation Iranian immigrants' return narratives , I address the sub-question: *What is the influence of second-generation Iranian immigrants' travel experiences on their identities, sense of home and belonging?* I hope insights to this question will assist the exploration of second-generation Iranian immigrants' identification and thus clarifying the possible links between travel experiences and ethnic returns.

In order to link homecoming trips of second-generation Iranian immigrants and their relocation to Iran, I try to unravel their narratives of returns (trips and migration) and the meanings they attribute to such practices through in-depth interviews (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, I analyse the various ways in which second-generation Iranian migrants describe their connection to Iran in terms of identity and self throughout their narratives. Based on these findings derived from interviews, I set out to gain a deeper understanding of the social and psychological processes that these groups of immigrants go through, particularly the complicated nature of transnational identities, sense of belonging and home.

For first-generation immigrants, individuals who have memories of their homeland and often have familial ties back at home, their social, cultural and physical localities crosses nations and borders and thus transnationalism becomes a conventional part of their lives (Coles & Timothy, 2014). On the other hand, transnationalism does not come naturally for first-generation immigrants' children (second-generation immigrants), as their ties to their parental homeland is based on narratives of home and not actual social, cultural and physical everyday local experiences (Coles & Timothy, 2014). In the face of the difference between first- and second-generation immigrants' transnationality, studies suggest sparse research has been made solely on second-generation immigrants' transnational behaviors (Pelliccia, 2016; Rehman, 2018; Kebede, 2019). Hence, my thesis focuses only on second-generation immigrants' narratives of return to understand the dynamics of their transnational behaviors and the meanings they ascribe to their practices to identify themselves.

Moreover, to find the link between homecoming trips of second-generation immigrants and their decision to migrate to their parental homeland, I ground my research in the specific empirical case of second-generation Iranian immigrants. According to Jain (2013), prior research on movement of people from developed countries to developing countries (like Iran) is scarce, and primarily includes mobility patterns of second-generation immigrants from developed countries to developed countries or from developing countries

to developed countries. However, return decisions, which in this thesis imply, in most cases, a movement from developed countries to developing countries, could also closely associate with identity issues rather than just economic incentives (Jain, 2013). Moreover, Iran's data on net migration indicates that more people are emigrating from Iran than immigrating to it (Macrotrends, n.d.) due to its unstable political and economic situation ("Iran's Migration Profile", 2016). Therefore, firstly, Iran being a destination for migration of second-generation immigrants coming from developed countries would fill the study gap for developing countries as return destinations. Secondly, second-generation immigrants' returnees being part of the few people to migrate to Iran make them a compelling testing ground for research on identity narratives, as their reasons of migration most probably is not dependent on economic incentives (Sala & Baldassar, 2017).

Ultimately, the general structure of my paper is as follows. In the subsequent section (Chapter 2), I outline the theories underpinning my thesis with special focus on the diaspora studies and transnationalism. After describing the key terms of diaspora, transnationalism and shifting the focus on the second-generation immigrants' transnationality, hybrid identities and notion of home, I provide explanation of homecoming trips and ethnic returns within the diaspora studies. Moreover, I finish Chapter 2 with an overview on Iranian diaspora as a case study of my thesis and an explanation of the research question. In Chapter 3, I will demonstrate the methods used for data collection and analysis. The findings of the research and a comprehensive analysis of the data by comparing it with existing literature and previous studies are provided in Chapter 4. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides the reader with answers to the research questions, discusses the limitations of my thesis and suggests future research directions.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical section, I will describe the emergence of transnational perspective in diaspora studies. After a general overview, I discuss transnationalism of second-generation immigrants. I will move on to the definition of 'home' and 'place identity' and show how transnationalism could contribute to create hybrid identities, and shape the senses of belonging and home in particular in second-generation immigrants. I then outline homecoming trips and ethnic returns as the ways for negotiating hybrid homes and senses of belonging. Eventually, I introduce the Iranian diaspora community and before discussing the methodological approach, I formulate the research question and sub-question of this study.

2.1. Diaspora in a transnational perspective

In the extremely globalized world we live in nowadays, the flows of people, information, and objects have become an important topic for research. Human migration as a form of mobility has broad social consequences and thus is of significant importance in academia (Cohen, 1997; Sheffer, 2006; Castles & Miller, 2009). Humans' reasons to leave their home to relocate temporally or permanently differ extensively. These reasons have been the basis of many classifications used to define different migrant populations (Cohen, 1997).

Particularly, the term "diaspora" historically refers to the Jewish population, who was forcibly dispersed from its lands (Cohen, 1997; Coles & Timothy, 2014). However, over the years the definition of diaspora has grown to include any kinds of groups who leave their origin country, regardless of the forces underlying their actions (Cohen, 1997; Braziel & Mannur, 2003). Researchers believe associating the definition only to forced migration could overlook the substantial experiences associated with various migration patterns (Cohen, 1997; Sheffer 2006; Braziel & Mannur, 2003). Moreover, there is academic consensus on the fact that, despite different intentions people hold for leaving their countries, as long as they tend to maintain connections with their homelands, they could be defined with the term diaspora (Sheffer, 2003, Reis, 2004). Generally then, diasporas are defined as groups of people scattered across the world but sharing strong ties with each other and their places of origin (Coles & Timothy, 2014). In my thesis, I will correspondingly

employ the broader framework of diaspora studies, and in particular its sub-field of diaspora tourism.

The transnationalism paradigm is used in relation to diaspora studies to focus on the connections diaspora communities cultivate to link their origin countries and their settlement countries (Castles & Miller, 2009). Diaspora communities' social, cultural, and physical locations are neither at their place of origin nor in their host country. Therefore, their social, cultural, and physical localities cross national borders and are rather fluid (Brazier & Mannur, 2003; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). In this regard, 'transnational ties' is a definition often used to describe the links and social relationships that immigrants maintain with both their origin and settlement societies (Castles & Miller, 2009). To do so, they carry out transnational ways of being and belonging. "Transnational 'ways of being' refers to the actual practices and social relations individuals engage in" (Wessendorf, 2007, p.1090). Moreover, transnational 'ways of belonging' encompasses "emotional connections to persons or localities that are elsewhere, and practices that signal a conscious connection to, or identification with, a particular group" (Wessendorf, 2007, p.1090). Notably, not all members of a diasporic community share the same transnational way of being and belonging, especially taking into account generational differences (Vathi, 2015).

2.2. Transnationalism in a generational perspective

According to Somerville (2008), contemplating different immigrants' generations and their transnationality, scholars have paid more attention to first-generation immigrants. Therefore, studies on second-generation immigrants are sparse, even though an analysis of their transnational identity is as important as their parents' because their transnationality actively shapes their identity and their perception of self (Somerville, 2008). To cover this gap in research, my thesis focuses on transnationality in second-generation immigrants.

Studies claim transnational ties and practices of second-generation immigrants are instilled through family and community socialization (Levitt & Watters, 2002; Coles and Timothy, 2014; Wessendorf, 2007; King & Christou, 2011; Huang et al, 2016; Pelliccia, 2016; Sala & Baldassar, 2017; Yang et al, 2018; Kebede, 2019). Parents are their children's primary source of information about their ancestral lands. They narrate stories of their homelands to their children and often talk about returning there (Coles and Timothy, 2014). In most cases, the narratives and images projected by families, establish a sense of nostalgia and

emotional attachment within the second-generations (Coles and Timothy, 2014; Wessendorf, 2007; Pelliccia, 2016; Sala & Baldassar, 2017; Yang et al, 2018). Moreover, immigrant parents could deeply involve their children in transnational activities. For instance, they teach them their homeland's language, take them on trips to their homeland or provide their kids with routines of communications with their relatives back home via the Internet or phone (Levitt & Watters, 2002; Somerville, 2008; Coles and Timothy, 2014). Besides the importance of family habitus in building transnational ties, there is the effect of shared ethnic communities. Similar ethnic groups tend to create communities away from home to maintain their cultural identity (Levitt & Watters, 2002). They share narratives of homeland and retain cultural ties through shared social, cultural, religious or political activities (ibidem). Second-generation immigrants who grow up in these communities develop transnational ties to their parental homeland and its culture (ibidem).

Despite parents' and communities' influence, global communication and information flows have a primary role in determining second-generation transnational ties. Due to the increasingly globalized world we live in, second-generation immigrants can communicate easily with family and friends in their parental homeland and build fluid social and spatial ties (Somerville, 2008; Etemaddar et al., 2016; Cohen & Yefet, 2019). Albeit, their ties could be contingent on the media's representation of their parental homeland. For instance, when the projected image is negative, it promotes social stigmas toward parental homeland of second-generation immigrants (Vathi, 2015; Kebede, 2019). Then, being bullied by their original home country could invoke either anti-transnationalism and dampen second-generations' connections to their parental homeland (ibidem), or, on the contrary, reactivate their transnationalism (Kebede, 2019). Eventually, media discourses could undermine some of the practices and beliefs related to transnationality that were instilled by their families.

Maintaining transnational ties for second-generation immigrants does not mean a lack of integration in their home country or detaching completely from their parental homelands. Indeed, being transnational means being floaters who have a pluralized sense of identity and home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

2.3. Place-identity and home: Hybridity among second-generation immigrants

Home is a multi-dimensional term in humanistic research that could be understood, experienced, and discussed in various manners (Mallet, 2004). Home is more than a physical place: it is a physical place in association with human relations. In other words, home is existing in virtue of individual and social construction (ibidem). Hence, it is a fluid place signified by humans' lived experiences (ibidem).

To better comprehend the meaning of home, it is important to grasp the relationship between places and people. Rather than a fixed natural setting, a place is a multi-layer composition of human experiences and emotions (Christou, 2006). It exceeds geographical, historical, political, and cultural boundaries as various genders, ethnicities, and classes associate feelings and meanings to it (ibidem). This process of formulating the notion of place by humans' emotions and meaning-making directs us to the relationship of place-identity (Christou, 2006; Graf, 2017). Places are shaped by the individuals and groups living in them and experiencing them, and humans can identify themselves with places (Christou, 2006). Therefore, places and identities have influence on each other, which makes existing of one of them essential of the other's being (Christou, 2006). This connection to a place is defined as "place-identity", a "symbolic or psychological attachment to a place that reflects one's self and socio-cultural identity" (Huang et al., 2016, p.63). Place attachment is subjective and emotional and thus it could cross geographical boundaries (Graf, 2017; Huang et al, 2016). In this sense, home which is constructed through place-identity (Ibidem): "is not simply a person, a thing or a place, but rather it relates to the activity performed by, with or in person's, things and places. It may be an emotional environment, a culture, a geographical location, a political system, a historical time and place, a house etc., and a combination of all of the above" (Mallet, 2004, p.80). In fact, home is a fluid model of identification rather than a fixed physical place (Christou, 2006; Mallet, 2004).

For second-generation immigrants, the perception of what home is might be even further complicated by their transnationality, as it creates more fluid and varied ways of belonging. Being involved in transnational activities has been part of their lives since their childhood (Levitt & Watters, 2002). They mostly have been surrounded by stories about their parental homeland (Coles & Timothy, 2014) or have been able to communicate with their families in their parental homelands thanks to new communication technologies

(Somerville, 2008). As a result, they might have developed emotional attachments to persons or places that are elsewhere (Wessendorf, 2007). Further, their transnational ways of belonging “allow for a fluid model of identification with various places, various homes” (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p.521) and creates ambiguities regarding their idea of self and identity (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). While they feel at home in the countries they reside in (the country of residence for second-generation immigrants will be henceforth described in this thesis as ‘home country’), they could feel emotionally attached to their parental homeland (ibidem).

Meanwhile, some of the second-generation immigrants who deal with these fluid senses of home, identity and ambiguities of self, have a desire to stabilize their sense of self and home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). One of the tools that could contribute to this identification process and homing desire is trips to parental lands (Cater, Poguntke & Morris, 2019), which the literature on it is examined in the following section.

2.4. Homecoming trips

According to Pelliccia (2016), visit of diaspora communities to their homelands has been defined using terms such as diaspora tourism, root tourism, ancestral tourism, ethnic tourism, legacy tourism. No matter the name, the notion of homecoming is central to different models of trips done by diasporas (Pelliccia, 2016; Huang, King & Suntikul, 2017; Yang et al., 2018). Diasporas undertake journeys to their homeland with the aim to maintain familial ties, reaffirm their cultural roots and identities (Coles and Timothy, 2014). In this way, these tourism practices contribute to the identification of the diaspora by providing them a sense of home and place-attachment (Cater et al., 2019). Relying on the sense of home and place-attachment that coincides with diaspora trips to homelands, the notion of homecoming is recurring in defining these trips. Therefore, I adopt the concept of “homecoming” introduced by Yang, Lee, and Khoo-Latimore (2018) to refer to these tourism practices.

The homecoming trips are different from the journeys of ordinary tourists in terms of lived experiences of tourists before, during, and after the journey (Pelliccia, 2016). They are somewhat transformative tourism experiences that contribute to identification process of diasporas (Maruyama, 2016). Homecoming trip experiences are sometimes considered a kind of pilgrimage, a rite of passage that could be experienced differently by different

members of diaspora communities (Yang et al., 2018). Yang, Lee, and Khoo-Latimore (2018) introduced a conceptual model that divides the transformative journeys of diaspora communities to their ancestral land into three stages of travel experiences, with the aim of shedding light on the continuous transformation of identity through “lived experienced of tourists before, during, and after the journeys” (Yang et al., 2018, p.27). The first stage is the pre-liminoid phase which consists of images, expectations, and motives that diasporas hold prior to their travels. The second, the liminoid phase, includes the period of time that diasporas spend in their ancestral lands. Finally, post-trip feelings and reflections constitute the third and last phase- the post liminoid phase (ibidem).

Understanding the pre-liminoid phase of diaspora travels is important in terms of motivations and expectations, as these elements play a crucial role in grasping the complexities and development of diaspora communities’ homecoming experiences (Yang et al., 2018). According to Yang, Lee, and Khoo-Latimore (2018), desires for homecoming trips could fall into three different categories of personal, social, and spiritual motivations. Personal affinities for second-generation immigrants are closely related to their family’s dispersion history, the narratives they hear regarding their parental homeland, and projected images of these homelands in the diaspora communities they thrive in (Huang et al, 2017; Yang et al, 2018). Growing up with stories of their parental homelands, second-generation immigrants develop ties to places they have never been before, therefore they establish a sense of self-discovery which drives their journeys (Graf, 2017). Furthermore, spiritual affinity could be considered as a desire for authentic experiences such as traditions and rituals (Yang et al, 2018). Finally, social affinity includes motivations for establishing social ties and kinships. “It is likely that homecoming trips of second-generation immigrants will be more influenced by familial connections and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) than by genealogy or pilgrimage” because “the migration history of their family is fairly recent” (Huang et al, 2017, p.421). Moreover, during childhood and teenage years, trips with family are obligations or encouragements by parents who desire visiting their family and relatives when going back (Shani, 2013; Yang et al, 2018; Kebede, 2019). Therefore, this thesis follows the idea , as suggested by Shani (2013), Kebede (2019), Graph (2017), and Huang, King and Sunitkul (2017), that trips to their parental homelands for second-generation immigrants are primarily based on VFR/social affinity.

During the homecoming trips, second-generation immigrants' intimate or external experiences determine their identification process. Through experiencing their parental homelands, they could confront bewildering and peculiar situations that lead them into a phase of transition (liminoid phase) (Maruyama, 2016; Yang et al., 2018). They "oscillate between being an outsider and insider. Further, their gaze may shift from a tourist lens to that of a local, influenced by the social-cultural interactions, relationships with people and other barriers and constraints confronting them" (Yang et al., 2018, p.27).

VFR travel experiences can create multidimensional feelings of home and away for second-generation immigrants (Shani, 2011; Uriely, 2010). In other words, VFR tourists could feel at home while being away from their home countries (ibidem). At the same time being limited to family-oriented activities could give them a sense of being trapped in a "family bubble" (Huang et al, 2016). Uriely (2010) in his study endeavored to conceptualize the feeling of being at "home" and, at the same time, "away" for VFR tourists. In this regard, he introduced a model with three dimensions of "familiarity with a place", "situational control and privacy" and "sociability in associations". Firstly, familiarity with a place defines the level of understanding of the language, food, and cultural norms of the homeland. Depending on the level of familiarity, VFR tourists could grow a feeling of being an insider or outsider (Uriely, 2010). For instance, if the tourists do not fully understand the spoken language at host places, they could feel alienated from their parental homeland (Uriely, 2010; Shani, 2011; Huang et al, 2016). Moreover, situational control and privacy could be hindered as a VFR tourist stays at the host place and is highly dependent on the host's schedule. So, while home encompasses the notion of privacy and social control, being a VFR tourist could weaken the feeling of being at home and direct the person toward a feeling of being away from his/her home country (ibidem). Finally, social interactions labelled as sociability in associations determine the feelings of being at home and away (Uriely, 2010; Shani, 2011). Social interaction with equal participants is part of the sense of being at home (ibidem). For having less situational control, VFR tourists could face a situational inferiority challenge where they could not carry out equal interactions with people around them and thus feel excluded and generate a feeling of away (ibidem).

The dimensions of the conceptual model suggested by Uriely (2010), nevertheless, could apply to experiences happening outside the VFR context. Second-generation immigrants who travel to their parental homelands, tend to participate in touristic activities

and explore outside the family environment (Yang et al, 2018). This tendency stems from their desire to examine the images they have of their parental homelands and seek their cultural roots through experiencing the place as a local (Huang et al., 2017). However, their experiences may feel overwhelming in situations where they encounter social, cultural, and political differences between their parental homelands and their home countries (Maruyama, 2016; Huang et al, 2016; Yang et al, 2018). For instance, regarding cultural encounters when second-generation immigrants are not familiar with the norms and language of their parental homeland, they could be treated as an outsider (Levitt & Waters, 2002; Yang et al, 2018). These experiences can impact the identification process. In a sense, persistent unfamiliarity with the parental homeland throughout homecoming trips could develop a swinging feeling between being at home and away or being an outsider and a local (Yang et al, 2018).

Depending on the modes and arrangements of second-generation immigrants' homecoming trips, their transnational identities could be challenged (Maruyama, 2016; Huang et al., 2017). For visitors who have experiences that make them feel like an outsider in their parental homelands, ties to their parental homeland could diminish and ties to home countries become stronger (Maruyama, 2016). On the other hand, participating in local activities in their parental homeland and having a sense of familiarity with the local culture could strengthen second-generation immigrants' ties to their parental homeland (Huang et al., 2017). Ultimately, in the post-liminoid phase, homecoming trips could fail to fulfil the yearning for a stable identification with what they believe is home and (re)construct senses of hybrid identity and dynamic home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

Despite the different identification outcomes from the homecoming trips, "some migrants do desire to pin-down their identities in a discretely defined home" (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p.522). Indeed, reaffirmed transnational ties through homecoming trips could lead up to relocations of second-generation immigrants to their parental homeland (Wessendorf, 2007; King & Christou, 2011; Sala & Balssadar, 2017), a process encapsulated by the concept of 'ethnic return' (King & Christou, 2011) which I briefly touch upon in the section below.

2.5. Ethnic returns

Second-generation immigrants' transnational ways of belonging encompasses more than just the process of homecoming. Not only their homeland is a physical place to return for homecoming trips, but it is also an emotional place that conveys their desire for return migration (Wessendorf, 2007). "Ethnic return" is a term used by King and Christou (2011) to refer to return migration of specifically second-generation immigrants to their parental homelands. Return migration is a broad concept that includes the physical relocation of migrants to their origin countries, regardless of their generation and it being permanent or temporary (King & Christou, 2011). Ethnic return explores the relocation of second-generation immigrants with the realization that their returns do not necessarily close the migration cycle (King & Christou, 2011; Jain, 2013).

Although second-generation immigrants maintain transnational ties to their parental homeland since their childhood, the longing to return to these lands usually develops when they go through a transition in their life courses (Jain, 2013; Sala & Balassadar, 2017). For example, the early years of adolescence are critical years for the identification process. Teenagers often go through a phase in which they yearn self-discovery and independence (Vathi, 2015). Particularly, second-generation immigrants' self-discovery is associated with reconnecting to their ethnic ties (Jain, 2013). Therefore, ethnic returns are assumed to be a potential consequence of entering the adulthood years where second-generation immigrants could shape new ties with their family members in their parental homeland and become independent from their immediate families (Sala & Balassadar, 2017). Moreover, as second-generation immigrants grow up, they realize their homecoming trips do not necessarily provide them unfiltered and actual experiences for ethnic exploration. Therefore, they develop a desire to return and have real-life experience as they get older (Jain, 2013).

The motivation of second-generation immigrants who pursue an ethnic return are complex, mixed, and could be determined by structural factors, experienced or perceived discrimination, and transnational connections (Jain, 2013). Within these factors, the theme of transnational connections is central to my thesis. As explained in previous sections, the collective memory of migration produces a sense of identity within the immigrant communities (Coles & Timothy, 2014). Dealing with a fragmented sense of home initiates a desire for a stable identification with home in some second-generation immigrants.

Therefore, they long a return to their parental lands to attempt to pin down their identities (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Christou, 2006). According to King & Christou (2011) “return as a corporeal event can be a fleeting visit, a languid summer holiday, an extended stay for a few years, or for good. The intention may not match outcome: a temporary return may turn out to be permanent, and vice versa” (p.453). Then, acknowledging the ethnic returns as ongoing mobility within the transnational paradigm instead of a discrete event rejects its confinement to a particular category of studying (King & Christou, 2011; Wessendorf, 2007). In this regard, Bell and Ward (2000) and King and Christou (2011) suggest, homecoming trips and ethnic returns as two interrelated components of the mobility spectrum should be studied in association with each other and not in isolation. However, the relationships between these two types of mobilities have been studied implicitly rather than explicitly within mobilities studies (Bell & Ward, 2000; King & Christou, 2011). As a result, my thesis aims to cover this gap by focusing on a specific diaspora community which in the following section is introduced.

2.6. Iranian diaspora community; origin and transnational connections

The Iranian diaspora community is a result of two main waves of migration. The first wave started after 1979 following the Islamic revolution in Iran. The second wave happened during the eight years’ war (1980-1988) between Iran and Iraq. Nonetheless, since 1988 there has been an on-going flow of migration dictated by reasons such as the economic and socio-political situation of Iran, search for a better life in other countries or continuing education outside Iran (Cohen & Yefet, 2019; Shoamanesh, 2019).

The concept of homeland plays an important role in the construction of the diasporic identity. However, the Iranian diasporas deny Iran’s national politics centrality when defining their identities and develop a transnational identity based on the pre-Islamic Iran (Cohen & Yefet, 2019). Since 1979 Iran has been associated with negative images in media such as religious radicalism and terror (Shoamanesh, 2019). In response to these negative images, Iranian diasporas have tried to build a positive image of Iran in their home countries. They have chosen to cling to Iran’s pre-Islamic cultural identity (choosing to refer to the nation as Persia) and redefine homeland as a cultural centre instead of a national/political centre (Cohen & Yefet, 2019). Therefore, “Iranian immigrants are redefining Iran as a ‘referent-origin’ in a manner that maintains diaspora(s) cohesion and

solidarity and meets their emotional needs, the transnational environment, and the actual reality of the host countries” (Cohen & Yefet, 2019, p.1). Although this selective interpretation of Iranian identity differs from the contemporary Iran (a nation centralized by national and political issues), it helps the Iranian diasporas to free themselves from identification with social stigmas (religious radicalism and terror) (Cohen & Yefet, 2019).

2.7. Research question

Drawing on the above-mentioned theoretical approaches, this paper aims to answer the research question: *What is the role of second-generation Iranian immigrants’ homecoming trips in deciding to migrate to Iran?*

To do so, I employ a transnational perspective to investigate the narratives of homecoming trips and ethnic returns of second-generation immigrants. As discussed in the previous sections, academic studies suggest that regular trips to the parental homeland can have an impact on the decision to relocate to these lands (Bell & Ward, 2000; Wessendorf, 2007; King & Christou, 2011; Jain, 2013; Sala & Baldassar, 2017; Kebede, 2019) and thus future studies should focus on exploring this relationship (King & Christou, 2014).

Building identity (and identification) is central to transnational studies of second-generation immigrants (Somerville, 2008). Second-generation immigrants go through an identification process to make sense of their transnational self, home, and sense of belonging (Rehmen, 2018). One of the tools that they can use to negotiate their plural identities is homecoming trips (Maruyama, 2016). Therefore, to investigate the effect of homecoming trips on their identification subsequently their desire for ethnic return, the sub-question addressed is: *What is the influence of second-generation immigrants’ travel experiences on their identities, sense of home and belonging?* To answer this sub-question, I analyse the various ways in which second-generation migrants describe their travel experiences and relate to their transnational ways of being and belonging. I examine feelings, imaginations, and memories that are expressed in their narratives and the ways in which these may influence how they emotionally connect to their parental homeland in terms of identity.

Ultimately, the questions are addressed to second-generation Iranian immigrants because of the following reason. There is little research on the movement of people from developed countries to developing countries in humanities (Christou, 2006; Wessendorf,

2007; King & Christou, 2014; Jain, 2013; Sala & Baldassar, 2017) whereas their return decisions could be connected to identity issues rather than economic (Jain, 2013). Meanwhile, Iran is a developing country with an unstable political and economic situation which makes it an undesirable place for even its citizens to live in ("Iran's Migration Profile", 2016). The data of net migration announced by Macrotrends (n.d.) affirms that the net rate of migration has been negative since the year 1992 which affirms that more people are immigrating from Iran than migrating to Iran. Therefore, Iran being a destination for migration of second-generation immigrants coming from developed countries would fill the study gap for developing countries as return destinations and might shed light on interesting aspects of identity narratives.

3. Methodology

3.1. Approach

This thesis aims to investigate the links between homecoming of second-generation Iranian immigrants to Iran and their decision to return to their parental homeland. Moreover, it takes a closer look at how homecoming trips of second-generation Iranian immigrants have influenced their sense of belonging and home. To do so, I aim to understand and interpret feelings, imaginations, and memories second-generation Iranians express in their narratives and the ways they define their parental homeland in association with their identity and self. Therefore, an approach is needed to probe the identification processes and patterns of second-generation immigrants in their social lives. The approach adopted for this purpose is qualitative research because firstly, qualitative research provides a deep understanding of humans' experiences and decisions (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, it is founded on the constructivism epistemology, an epistemology that affirms reality is socially constructed and thus dynamic (Bryman, 2012; Mathews and Ross, 2010), and it "tends to view social life in terms of processes" (Bryman, 2012, p.402).

To achieve the research objectives, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted by me. I adopted a constructivist perspective, whereby reality is constructed by individuals (Bryman, 2012; Mathews and Ross, 2010). Therefore, to investigate how second-generation Iranian immigrants narrate their identification process I must create a reflexive dialogue with the target group to understand the meanings they attribute to their identities and home. An interview gives the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into someone's interpretation and attitudes. Moreover, it allows participants to narrate their individual experiences as freely as possible (Kvale & Brinckmann, 2009; Mathews and Ross, 2010; Bryman, 2012). By doing semi-structured interviews, a researcher is able to adapt the questions and expand on certain topics if needed, during the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Similarly, I was able to explore more aspects that contribute to my investigation as my interviewees gave me new insights. However, in-depth semi-structured interviews are time-consuming and as they limit the number of interviews in a certain time span, they could affect the generalizability of the research (Adler & Clark, 2007).

3.2. Sampling

My sample includes thirteen women and one man, whom I found through convenience and snowball sampling. I found my initial sample through a personal connection. Further, I posted calls for participants on online forums which had members of the Iranian diaspora. I chose my participants by looking for three characteristics in order to provide in-depth insight regarding the research question: First, they had to be children of at least one ethnically Iranian parent who migrated from Iran. Second, they might have been born in Iran, but they had to have grown up and undergone the major part of their socialization outside Iran. Henceforth, I use the term 'second-generation' for individuals who are either born or principally raised in the diaspora (Graf, 2017). Third, they have had trips to Iran (potential returnee) or migrated to Iran after their travel experiences (actual returnee). Nevertheless, my respondents were not easily accessible through only convenience sampling, therefore, I adopted snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012). My interviewees introduced me to people whom they fit into the criteria above. Nevertheless, both convenience and snowball sampling could affect the generalizability of the research. In other words, the sample could not be representative of the whole population (Mathews and Ross, 2010; Bryman, 2012).

In order to ensure the anonymity of all the research participants, I do not provide their first and last names. However, information such as their pseudo name, age, gender, education, occupation, country of birth, home country, ethnic return age (actual returnees), and the period they lived/ have been living in Iran (actual returnees) are listed in table A1 (See Appendix A for the overview of the interviewees).

3.3. Data collection

Interviews took place via Skype because field trips to Iran or the current settlement country of participants was not possible. Conversations were conducted in either Persian or English according to the interviewee's preference. As a result, five interviews were in Farsi and nine in English. The average length of the interviews were forty-five minutes and in total ten hours and a half of interview were conducted until the data reached theoretical saturation.

I recorded the consent of the participants for participation in the interview. Before starting the interviews, I explained the basic aim of the research. Participants were informed that they would be mentioned through-out the research anonymously, our conversation will

be recorded and used for research purposes and since their participation is voluntary, they have the right to withdraw at any point in the study. Then, their consent was recorded orally and sent to them as proof.

3.4. Operationalization

During the interview, open-ended questions were accompanied by follow up and spontaneous questions. Follow up and spontaneous questions are advantages of a semi-structured interview since they enable the researcher to cover the topic more profoundly (Bryman, 2012; Kvale and Brinckmann, 2009) (See Appendix B for the interview guide). Not following a strict structure, semi-structure interviews enabled respondents to talk freely (Kvale and Brinckmann, 2009) about different aspects of their experiences and identities. Despite the different structure interviews had for actual and potential returnees (See Appendix B for the interview guide), the questions fell under two themes of imagining Iran and experiencing Iran. The latter theme consists of homecoming trips and living experiences (only for actual returnees).

3.4.1. Imagining Iran

Second-generation immigrants have a collective imagination of their parental homeland either because of their own memory of migration or their parents' narratives of parental homeland transmitted to them (King and Christou, 2011; Coles and Timothy, 2014). These collective memories/images can create transnational ways of being and belonging, which initiate homecoming trips (Coles and Timothy, 2014) and potentially ethnic return (King & Christou, 2011). Therefore, the questions under the theme of imagining Iran tried to probe the fundamental sources of homecoming trips and ethnic return by covering questions about their transnational ways of being (activities) and belonging (emotions).

3.4.2. Experiencing Iran

During the interview, much focus was on the interviewees' experiences of Iran. I investigated the homecoming trips, the influence of such trips on the second-generation identification process and their link with the decision of possibly or actually migrating to Iran. According to Yang, Lee & Khoo-Lattimore (2018), homecoming trips are considered a rite of passage, a transformative experience that contributes tourists to explore their

identities. Moreover, they suggest a three-dimensional model for studying these transformative experiences, that divides into three stages of experiences; before, during, and after the journeys (Yang et al., 2018). Since the previous theme covered the first stage of this model, the questions under this theme investigate the 'during' and 'after' stages of homecomings by asking questions such as destination activities and experiences, highlights and dislikes of trips, post-trip feelings and reflections.

Fluid identities and senses of belonging can create a desire in second-generation immigrants to establish stable identities in relation to their parental homeland, and this desire could occur as a desire for ethnic return (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Therefore, regarding the potential returnees, they were questioned about their perception of ethnic return and for the actual returnees the question focused on their process of migration to Iran. Only for the latter group, in order to complete their migration narratives, questions about expectations of return and their post-return experiences were added.

3.5. Data analysis

The interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed verbatim (See the attached file to the thesis for the transcriptions). Conversations were conducted in either Persian or English according to the interviewee's preference. For the Persian interviews, a three-hundred-word English summary of each interview is provided (See the attached file to the thesis for the transcriptions' summary) and the quotations used in the analysis chapter were translated into English as accurately as possible.

A combination of narrative and thematic analysis was used to investigate the identification process of respondents throughout their homecoming trips and how it links to ethnic return decisions. First, I used thematic analysis to extract the themes my respondents used to describe their identification process. In order to do this, the transcripts were fully read and coded manually. The codes were categorized, and the most appeared categories comprised the themes of VFR experiences, Socio-cultural and political differences, Language, transnationalism and life stages, and dichotomy of return (See Appendix C for the Codebook). Second, to analyze the interconnections of the participants' homecoming experiences with their ethnic return decisions, I used narrative analysis. The narrative analysis seeks individuals' experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, it "relates not just to the life span but also to accounts relating to episodes and to the interconnections

between them” (Bryman, 2012, p.584). To this extent, narrative analysis enabled me to investigate how respondents expressed their feelings, imaginations, and memories of Iran and the ways in which their narratives influenced their emotional connection to Iran in terms of identity, sense of home and belonging.

3.6. Reflexivity

Indeed, me being Iranian and being a first-generation migrant has an impact on the data collection and the analysis of the data. Coming as an immigrant from Iran could result in a biased view on narratives from Iran or influence the conversations. However, I maintained a neutral view throughout the process of data gathering and analysis and tried to use my background for a better and unbiased result. In terms of data gathering, I used my background to build trust and comfort throughout the interviews. In other words, because participants knew I come from a migration background, they felt comfortable opening up about their experiences. Moreover, as I am a woman, this might have had an impact on my respondents, as the ones who accepted to be interviewed were ninety percent women. I can presume that having me as their interviewer (a person who might have had the same gender-related experiences in Iran) allowed for a better connection between me and my interviewees and consequently have favoured openness in the interview. In terms of analysis, as an immigrant, my familiarity with the meanings and experiences of migration allowed achievement of an ‘emic’ perspective in association with the narratives of respondents (Etemaddar et al., 2016). In other words, my personal migration experiences and homecoming trips, helped me understand diaspora and transnationalism related theories and attributing my data analysis accurately to these theories.

4. Analysis

Based on the collected data, this chapter presents the relationship between homecoming trips and ethnic return decision of second-generation Iranian immigrants (both potential and actual). Besides, it captures how their travel experiences to Iran have influenced their identity, sense of home and belonging. The processed data discusses identification process of second-generation immigrants while covering previous academic findings in diaspora and transnationalism studies. The respondents' narratives of their identification process outlined themes of VFR experiences, language, transnationalism and life stages and the concept of dichotomy of return relating to the temporary or permeant state of migration to Iran. These themes accompanying their sub-themes are outlined in the following sections of this chapter.

4.1. VFR experiences

Since VFR experiences could create paradoxical feelings of home and away, they have come to be one of the important tools for negotiating identities among second-generation immigrants (Shani, 2011; Uriely, 2010). VFR tourists could on the one hand feel at home in their parental homeland (ibidem), while, on the other hand, being limited to family-oriented activities could give them a sense of being trapped in a family bubble (Huang et al, 2016). These seemingly contradictory feelings related to home and away were mentioned extensively by my respondents and orient the way they experience VFR experiences and their identity as second-generation immigrants.

4.1.1. Feeling at home and belonging in Iran

When respondents were asked to talk about their first travel experiences to Iran, their stories usually revolved around the theme of trips to visit families and relatives. Such trips, according to my respondents, normally followed a pattern of gathering around with the family, sharing huge amounts of food, dancing, and playing with cousins. Mariola who is half Iranian and an actual returnee, took her first trip to Iran when she was fourteen. Her family decided to travel to Iran after his dad got his residency from the US and could travel more easily. So, their trip was in some ways a celebration, as her father could reunite with his family in Iran. She remembers fondly how her relatives organized lots of parties and trips to

other places in the country. In some cases, like Mariola, these experiences of family gatherings were recalled as one of the highlights of the trips:

“I think (...) the best part was really just staying at home and getting to know all my cousins that were my age. But I remember we traveled up to Shomal and then we went down to Shiraz and Takht-E-Jamshid and then we went to Kerman and stayed in the village that my father grew up in. And so, I think the nicest part was maybe...Actually, I really don't know. It was all very nice, but I think the best part was really just staying and...Maybe it was Shomal that we were in a house for a long time and we (...) just did family stuff.” (Mariola, 29 y/o¹, 2G²)

Like Mariola, other respondents' travels to Iran predominantly meant spending time with their extended family, which was something novel for them, as they did not have an extended family in their home country. Their VFR experiences were significant for them as they had the chance to spend time with people they feel emotionally attached to and strengthen their family ties (Pelliccia, 2016). Sophie was born and raised in the US and moved to Iran five years ago (she now lives in Iraq). She used to visit her relatives every two years before moving to Iran, and when I asked her about the highlights of her trips back then she said:

“(...) it was just like weddings, parties. Just being with family. It's just everyone living in the same apartment building and always seeing each other. I really just loved it.” (Sophie, 30 y/o, 2G)

The main feeling she remembered about these experiences highlights her need to belong:

“It's amazing when you have a community of people” (Sophie, 30 y/o, 2G)

According to her, what made VFR experiences unique was the sense of belonging to a community. This community reflects Sophie's self and identity as she expressed her belonging to it. And when places mirror one's identity this feeling of belonging concerns that specific place too (Christou, 2006). This “symbolic or psychological attachment to a place that reflects one's self and socio-cultural identity” is called place-identity (Huang et al., 2016, p.63). Place-identities are subjective, emotional, could cross geographical boundaries and create sense of home (Huang et al, 2016). In this sense, home becomes a fluid model of identification rather than a fixed physical place (Christou, 2006; Mallet, 2004). Therefore,

¹ Years old

² Second-generation

my respondents' sense of belonging to their family community could develop Iran into their home. About sense of belonging and home in VFR experiences, Rita's quote renders the subject effectively:

"I have all my cousins and childhood friends and my aunts and uncles there. So, Iran means family for me. So, going back to Iran for the holiday, this was really homecoming for me. So, it prevented me from detaching myself from Iran (...) it was weird because I was traveling to a place I wasn't born in, but it was like going home again. It was this kind of weird double feeling, but it was most like going home, going to a place that I felt really at home." (Rita, 29 y/o, 2G)

Rita is the only child of a family of three in Italy. She lived in Iran for one year and is now back in her home country (Italy). For her, just like for Sophie and most of the other respondents, the notion of homecoming was central to her VFR experiences. As previously mentioned, VFR created strong family bonds in my respondents. Their family ties gave them a sense of belonging to Iran and transferred their trips to homecomings. Hence, they felt at home in Iran while being away from their home countries.

Further, the more attached and connected the second-generation immigrants feel towards their relatives, the more they visit their parental homeland country. And the more they visit their parental homeland country, the more they feel attached not only to their family there, but more broadly to their ancestral lands (Rehman, 2018). In some cases, these reaffirmed ties could encourage relocations to parental homelands (Wessendorf, 2007; Shani, 2011; King & Christou, 2011; Sala & Balssadar, 2017; Kebede, 2019). Similar to the previous studies, my respondents noted the strengthening of their emotional attachments to Iran throughout their consecutive VFR experiences. Arial who was born and raised in France and had VFR experiences before moving to Iran (three years living experience in Iran and now back in her home country) expressed her desire to migrate to Iran a result of reaffirmed ties:

"...the travel that we had with my father was, for me, very emotional. And, for me, it was not clear that I wanted to go to Iran and live there. But I think it was a starting point. Due to the fact that my grandfather passed away, my grandmother passed away and I felt like I was losing everyone one by one. And I didn't have the opportunity to meet them, to know them a bit more (...) And I also wanted to have this opportunity to be more with the family and spend more time with them." (Arial, 32 y/o, 2G)

Arial's narrative of return is quite unique among the responses gathered from my interviewees that are actual returnees, because she was aware and explicitly mentioned her family bonds as a starting point for her return decision. In the other interviews, such bonds were expressed and their role in the returned was hinted at, but never with such clarity. Attachment to their parental lands did not seem to be a primary reason or theme in the narratives of VFR experiences made by the potential returnees I interviewed. For example, Veronica, an Australian born girl still living in Australia, illustrated her family ties throughout the years:

"...more extended family (...) like cousins (...) your great uncle (...) There were more of those people [in Iran] and they had kids and stuff. So that was nice. And then eventually just most of them left. And now anyone who's left is very old. And the kids, maybe one or two were there, but they're much older and they don't want to hang out (...) It's like everyone has disintegrated." (Veronica, 25 y/o, 2G)

Like Veronica, other potential returnees have had their extended families dispersed from Iran throughout the years. So, drawing on the studies by Sala and Baldassar (2017) and Rehman (2018), I argue that having fewer family members at the destination would impact the level of attachment to the parental homeland. As I stated before, returning to family could be an explicit motivation for ethnic return (Sala & Baldassar, 2017). Therefore, as in Veronica's case, when these family ties become fewer, the VFR experiences could consequently feel less impactful. The potential for ethnic return, thus, could be associated with the number of relatives second-generation immigrants have left in their parental homeland. Eventually, VFR experiences played an important role in building family ties, a sense of belonging and home in my respondents, and therefore indirectly influenced the final decision of migrating to Iran, or conversely, deciding to settle in the country where they were born.

4.1.2. Feeling away from home in Iran

Most of my interviewees have been traveling to Iran since they were very young. Of course, at the beginning they did not have any agency in the matter, as the decisions to travel to Iran was made by their parents. Some participants went back to attend family events like weddings, some for a family reunion, and in many other cases visiting Iran was a holiday trip. Despite the different motivations underlying these trips, they all included spending

most of the time with family and relatives. As Sophie illustrated in the quote below, when she traveled to Iran before the age of twenty:

“It wasn't very touristic. Because, in Mashhad, I spent so much of my time at my grandmother's house and at my relatives' house. I think the first time I was a tourist was probably (...) when I was twenty. And I really felt like there was a lot about Iran that I didn't know.” (Sophie, 30 y/o, 2G)

What she experienced during her homecoming trips with her family is an illustration of a “family bubble”. This term refers to a subtle or overt prohibition from venturing outside the supposedly safe borders set by relatives and the wider circle of family members (Huang et al., 2015). While family bubbles can be a place of comfort for VFR tourists, they can at the same time create a feeling of being a stranger in a place that emotionally should feel like home (Uriely, 2010). Second-generation immigrants who travel to their parental homelands and visit relatives can have the feeling of being trapped in the aforementioned family bubbles. One of the main reasons for this feeling is the perception of underlying situational control and privacy control enacted by the members of the family (Uriely, 2010; Shani, 2011). The analysis of the interviews I collected confirms this, and strongly indicates that respondents felt, at times, uneasy and almost trapped in the family bubbles during their VFR travels. This feeling got even stronger as they grew older. During their adolescent years, most interviewees felt their experiences in Iran were sheltered, although they still enjoyed their family reunions. They yearned to venture out and experience a more unfiltered Iran, explore more, and know more. However, family restrictions and constraints made it very difficult (if not impossible) for them to do so. Nirvana, who was born and raised in the US and lived in Iran for almost three years, depicts her family bubble as following:

“I remember being really uncomfortable as time went, because I was so much more frustrated by how I felt. We were so confined because we went back for weddings, we would go in the summer and we would go for two weeks at most. And there was so much I wanted to do and to see. And I remember it every time I would say can we not just stay in Tehran? Can we go see other cities and other sites? They'd always say it's too hot and we don't have time. So, we always would just go and stay inside a lot, which was really frustrating doing it and do the whole ‘Mehmoonī’ [visiting friends and families] thing. And when we could go out of the city, it always was with my

parents, always in a taxi, like get out of the taxi, go to the spot, get back in a taxi and go back home.” (Nirvana, 26 y/o, 2G)

In her experience and most of the other respondents, their situational control and privacy control was hindered, causing frustration and detachment from their experiences. Similar to Uriely’s (2010) and Shani’s (2011) result which show how dependency on the relatives’ schedule plays a significant role in hindering situational control, my interviewees’ experiences, because of their young age (and thus being dependent on their family for transport and money) and because of their family’s idea of what was safe and appropriate, were also confined to pre-approved touristic experiences. Moreover, Uriely (2010) suggests that the culture of the VFR hosts might impact VFR tourists’ sense of privacy and has a strong role in determining their familiarity with their parental homeland. Sarah and Rita’s narrative of their family’s culture confirms Uriely’s (2010) statement. As Sarah, a girl from Qatar who now lives in Iran and used to travel to Iran for visiting family and relatives, said:

“Maybe this is a personal sort of experience. My family is super protective of me (...) So for me, the experience of coming to Iran, I felt quite restricted because I couldn't leave the house without my parents taking me to place. Like I couldn't go to a museum with another cousin, (...) my parents had to come with me, or my grandma had to take me. So, for me, I knew that Iran had so much to offer. I knew that there are so many beautiful places not only outside Tehran, but in Tehran as well. So, for me, having that restriction from my family, they just made Iran seem scarier than it actually was in my opinion.” (Sarah, 26 y/o, 2G)

Not having privacy and being controlled by her family made Sarah a stranger to Iran, and made Iran a place to be scared of, certainly not like a potential home. So, while there is an underlying pattern that shows how the presence of family in Iran can make the country feel like home, at the same time feeling at home can encompass the notion of privacy and social control (Shani, 2011). Specifically, the narratives I collected show that when one’s privacy and social control are limited by external factor (in this case, the family) it could lead to a weakened feeling of being at home, and direct a VFR tourist toward a feeling of being a stranger at home (Uriely, 2010; Shani, 2011; Huang et al, 2016).

Furthermore, by virtue of having less situational control, VFR tourists could face situational inferiority, meaning that they cannot carry out equal interactions with people around them, and thus feel excluded. This, consequently, can generate a feeling of away

while at home (Uriely, 2010; Shani, 2011), which translates in a process through which the limitations imposed externally foster a sense of detachment from a place that should feel like home. Similarly, in most of the narratives of my respondents who going to Iran was perceived as homecoming, whenever it came to participating in their families' or friends' conversations they felt like an outsider. While still part of the family, in several, subtle and not-so-subtle ways, their families and friends reminded them they were not a resident who lived in Iran and experienced the social life there. Shani who was born in Iran and immigrated to Germany at age of three used to express her love for living in Iran (before she moved to Iran and lived there for one year). However, she was constantly reminded by her family *"you just love Iran because you have never lived in Iran, you just come here for fun and go"* (Shani, 27 y/o, 1.5G³). Reminders gradually created a hybrid feeling for my respondents. They became hyper-aware of their dual nationality and lack of knowledge and experience about Iran throughout their travels. In some cases like Sarah, this feeling was associated with frustration:

"I felt like I sometimes I couldn't voice my opinion in certain conversations (...) I couldn't really contribute much to it even if I had read about it. And people had told me their opinions; Because you're an outsider, you actually don't have an experience of what we're going through (...) So I felt like I couldn't contribute to conversations because I've not experienced full-time life here (...) It made me feel like I just couldn't contribute to discussions of the country I'm originally from. And this is annoying because I couldn't contribute to the discussions of the country I lived in [Qatar] as well (...) So I was I was not part of a society to contribute there. But the same time, I wasn't part of a society to contribute in Iran as well. So, I felt like I was in a limbo, like I'm not of either place but from both places at the same time." (Sarah, 26 y/o, 2G)

Sarah's frustration was due to dealing with paradoxical feelings of being at home and away in Iran at the same time, and being, as she herself described it, "in a limbo". Generally, the respondents referred to their VFR experiences as homecoming while emphasizing on them being sheltered. Which is in line with Uriely's (2010), Shani's (2011), and Huang, Ramshaw and Norman's (2016) studies; VFR tourists that are also second-generation immigrants live with a complex and fragmented identity, in which they can feel at home at their parental

³ One-and-a-half generation

homeland, paradoxically feel like a stranger at the same places because of the external confinements imposed by their family and the reminders that they are, indeed, not fully part of their parental homeland.

Drawing on the data I collected, I argue the complex and paradoxical feeling of home and away experienced by my respondents allowed some of them to realize that Iran is more than they experience through VFR (Maruyama, 2016), making it so that they could not rely on a fixed identity, but live and experience a changing, fluid notion of self. A case in point is Veronica who said:

“So, when you're younger, it's so exciting because of family (...) I probably haven't seen much of Iran to be able to say I know it very well. And I I'm more aware of that as I get older, that I'm only seeing a tiny slice.” (Veronica, 25 y/o, 2G)

Her realisation led her to undertake more independent trips to explore the country, which, according to Kebede (2019), should be considered as a real transnational practice of second-generation immigrants. The ability to gain independence in how to experience one's home country is crucial, as shown by the following quote by Nirvana. She described her initial three months stay that led to three years of living experience in Iran. Moreover, her quote indicated the transformation processes of her short stay to her definite relocation to Iran:

“I started to make friends and meet people, I was able to take trips to different places outside of Tehran. And those are the things that were really exciting, that I can make these things happen for myself and I can finally see all these places that I wanted to see and learn. More about the history, but also more about what life feels like when you're going down the street and observing people and making small, broken conversation with people.” (Nirvana, 26yr, 2G)

In the case of Nirvana, who decided to turn her short stay into an ethnic return because she found out there is a lot about Iran that she did not know, her narrative shows how her independent trips unfolded opportunities such as exploring the everyday life of Iranian (which she missed through her family bubbles). As she noted, her temporary trips turned into an actual migration because she was given privacy and situational control and could freely find more things that she could explore (Sala & Baladssar, 2017) in Iran independently.

To summarize, VFR is a core phenomenon in how second-generation Iranian immigrants shape their identity, sense of belonging and home. Building family ties

contributes to maintaining sense of belonging to Iran and developing it into home (Uriely, 2010; Shani, 2011). Further this feeling of having a second home could create a desire in second-generation immigrants to take more homecoming trips or eventually relocate themselves to Iran (Sala & Baladssar, 2017). At the same time, I argue being limited to just visiting family and having controlled and supervised experiences promotes a desire to take independent homecoming trips to Iran or in some cases independent living experiences in Iran. Henceforth, in second-generation Iranian immigrants' identification process, VFR plays a significant role.

4.2. Socio-cultural and political differences

Homecoming trips can be overwhelming for second-generation immigrants when there are socio-cultural and political differences between home countries and parental homelands (Yang et al, 2018). When second-generation immigrants travel to their parental homeland, their notion of the homeland is mostly abstract and not based on living experiences in their parental homeland (Coles & Timothy, 2014). Therefore, encountering actual social, cultural, and political situations while traveling to parental homelands can challenge their senses of belonging and home (Yang et al., 2018). Correspondingly, my respondents' homecoming trips narratives demonstrated overwhelming social, cultural, and political encounters which negotiated their identity, sense of home and belonging.

4.2.1. Gender structure

Second-generation immigrants, when visiting Iran as tourists, may experience socio-cultural differences such as gender structure, manners, norms, and socio-cultural class between their home and their origin country (Yang et al., 2018). Since my respondents were ninety percent women, the most common socio-cultural difference that they experienced was gender structure which refers to subordinate status of women compare to men in private and public lives in Iran ("Beyond the veil", 2019). They have experienced catcalling and being touched by strangers in public areas which are not common in their home countries. When I was interviewing Kelly, she confided that she had more unpleasant encounters than just catcalling. Kelly, who was born in Iran but has been living in the Netherlands from age two, has traveled to Iran four times. However, during her last trip, her experiences regarding

gender structure in Iran, in comparison to what she experiences in the Netherlands, left her upset:

“I went there to do some administrative work, the person in charge didn’t even look at me. Not that he just doesn’t look at you, he pretends that you don’t even exist, like you are talking to a wall. These things were really strange for me and really disappointing. Well it’s not unusual to see a difference in a country you are not familiar with, but this is just really disappointing. Especially when men do this, you think that it is because I’m a woman that they treat me like this (...) they don’t have any respect for women. Not even because I’m a woman, I’m a human being and I’m talking to you [The man](...) after my last trip to Iran, I don’t want to have any connections with Iran.”
(Kelly, 31 y/o, 1.5G)

According to Kelly, her unpleasant encounters in Iran were disappointing and gave her a feeling of socio-cultural alienation from Iran. In cases where second-generation immigrants have challenges with adjusting themselves to unfamiliar cultural encounters in their parental homeland, they could redirect themselves toward their own home countries and dampen their ties to their parental lands (Yang et al, 2018). Similarly, the negative gender structure encounters in Iran made my respondents (here Kelly) realize that they do not want to identify themselves with a country where women are the minority in society (“Beyond the veil”, 2019). Moreover, a few respondents pointed out the effect of entering the adolescent years in realizing the gender structure differences. Bianca is half Iranian, she was born and raised in Iran until the age of ten and migrated to Iran for a one year living experience later in her life. Considering, for example, her experience:

“(...) because I was getting older and becoming like a woman in society, my relationship to everything started changing. So that was something I noticed (...) yeah, it was like becoming a woman changed my relationship to Iran because of the pressures and the controls that are put over you and they just became so much more or I was aware of them a lot more.” (Bianca, 29 y/o, 1.5G)

Pressures that Bianca talked about included the mandatory Hijab, which is inevitable for every woman in Iran. When migrants have continuous homecoming trips, they could develop confusion about the sense of belonging they feel toward their origin countries (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Huang et al, 2013; Maruyama, 2016). This ambivalence comes from their realization that their views on the places they once identified themselves with has

changed for they have changed and/or the places they identified themselves with (Ralph & Staeheli). Similarly, as my respondents grew older and felt the gender structure in Iran, their fun experiences accompanied a taste of bitterness. The culture they always inclined to identify themselves with and feel connected to, provoked them into disappointment at the same time.

4.2.2. political of duress

Yang, Lee, and Latimore (2018) suggest that safety, security, and sources of duress such as corruption and behavior of government officials, inconveniences, and inefficiencies of infrastructure and political conflicts, could create a feeling of disappointment and alienation from the parental homeland for second-generation visitors. These issues were mentioned by a few of my respondents. For instance, Kelly, who dealt with ambivalence about her sense of belonging and home towards Iran, linked her conflicting feelings to the safety and security issues she encountered during her trips to Iran:

“Home is where (...) I feel safe and calm. Maybe that’s why I don’t get a feeling of home there [Iran], because I don’t have any safety there or I don’t have any rights there. I think that every second there is the probability that someone bothers you for your Hijab (...) Even when I obey the rules, they [the governmental authorities] still could bother me and that is not pleasant for me. Here [the Netherlands], I always have had my own rights (...) but there, I feel like there is no rights and that makes me sad.” (Kelly, 31 y/o, 1.5G)

Kelly’s definition of home is in line with the definition of home as a place that one feels safe and secure (Mallet, 2004). Therefore, when she experienced political duress during her homecoming trips, her homing desire toward Iran redirected her toward her home country (the Netherlands).

Also, for Sheena, who was born in Turkey and currently lives in the Netherlands and is politically conscious, political duress comprised a great share of her homecoming narratives. For instance, she described the following situation that affected her sense of belonging toward Iran:

“(...) the last time with my sisters, the security called them, and they got their passport and we were scared that this will happen again. So, we didn't go back anymore. And after that I also didn't want to go, because I wanted to freely participate in political

movements. I wanted to (...) talk about Iran freely (...) my home is the Netherlands (...) Here is where I will be able to do my social activism and I have this feeling of being at home.” (Sheena, 36 y/o, 2G)

As mentioned earlier, challenges that second-generation immigrants face to adjust themselves to their parental homeland during homecoming trips play an important role in orienting them toward their home country (Yang et al, 2018). Moreover, while homecoming trips could reinforce homing desire for some, for others it could reinforce hybrid senses of home and belonging (Maruyama, 2016). Likewise, for Kelly and Sheena, their trips to Iran created a sense of ambivalence in them to identify Iran as their home and redirected them to their home country.

4.2.3. Cultural encounters

Kelly amongst my respondents was raised within a big Iranian diaspora community from childhood. When she was talking about her cultural encounters in Iran, she felt disappointed. As Kelly expressed in the quote below, she felt unfamiliar with the local culture in Iran:

“(...) the Iranian culture that I learned here from my family, relatives and from the Iranian community that I’m surrounded by...no matter what generation, the Iranians that I was in contact with, I always felt close to them culturally. But when I went to Iran, I felt the culture that I’m familiar with is not the culture that Iranian people have in Iran now. Well, this was really disappointing for me because I thought all the people had a really low cultural status” (Kelly, 31 y/o, 1.5G)

Family habitus and diaspora communities are important sources in building familiarity with parental homeland for second-generation immigrants (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Regarding second-generation Iranian immigrants raised in an Iranian diaspora community, their familiarity with Iranian identity is based on narratives of pre-Islamic Iran. Therefore, it instills the idea of a pre-Islamic Persian identity, which is in contrast to the contemporary Iranian society (a society centralized by national politics revolving around Islam) (Cohen & Yefet, 2019). In this case, since Kelly’s images of Iran were not based on the contemporary Iran, her real cultural encounters in Iran felt unfamiliar for her. Consequently, drawing back on Yang, Lee, and Khoo-Latimore (2018) findings, unfamiliarity with local culture of parental homeland could reinforce a sense of alienation from the parental land.

On the other hand, respondents like Sophie, who did not live in a big Iranian diaspora community, found the unfamiliar Iranian culture they experienced during homecoming trips interesting and fascinating. As Sophie described:

“I was taking a ‘Hafez’ class and I was just like, oh, wow, he is so dead-on about all the superficiality and the hypocrisy and (...) double faced-ness. And I was like, oh, wow. Look at all these problems. Maybe Iran...Iranians have problems. And it's not just the government. Maybe people too. And I think that was very interesting for me. So that's why I stayed. Yeah. Because I wanted to learn more” (Sophie, 30 y/o, 2G)

Drawing back on the earlier arguments, the pre-existing image of Iranian culture plays a significant role in influencing the sense of belonging and identity of second-generation immigrants (Cohen & Yefet, 2019). Here, for Sophie who did not have any expectations prior to her cultural encounters in Iran the unfamiliarity was seen as an interesting aspect of Iranian culture and provoked her sense of curiosity to explore the Iranian identity (which appeared as a living decision in Iran). As a result, in my research, the social, cultural and political differences during homecomings trips created two different types of reactions. Some participants showed interest in unfamiliar aspects of Iran and planned further trips for exploring these aspects which in the case of Sophie and Nirvana was extended to a temporary relocation (actual return). On the other hand, others experienced a sense of ambivalence depending on their life stages and instilled images and have been oriented toward their home country.

To summarize this theme, besides the VFR experiences, socio-cultural and political encounters during my respondents' trips to Iran worked as a domain through which they negotiated their identity, senses of home and belonging towards Iran.

4.3. Language

Preserving the Persian language in Iranian diaspora communities is a powerful tool for preserving the Persian identity abroad (Meybodi, 2014). Similarly, most of my second-generation respondents who were accustomed to Iranian culture, expressed their ability in talking Persian next to the language of their home country. Notwithstanding some cases like Tara, Persian language is a language that my respondents associated themselves with. Tara, who moved to Germany at the age of seven with her family, travels to Iran occasionally.

While she was telling me her story, she often referred to Iran as her home. When I asked her, what is home to you, she said the *“culture and language I have been raised with”* (Tara, 24 y/o, 1.5G). Also, when I asked Kelly why she travels to Iran she came up with the following answer:

“(...) a search for home... And a lot of people don’t get it. They say what are you exactly looking for? I cannot explain it (...) well maybe it’s the language. Language is very important for me. Maybe that’s the reason that I have a lot of Iranian friends. I really prefer Farsi.” (Kelly, 31 y/o, 1.5G)

For them, notion of home co-exists with Persian language. Considering language as a marker for both individual and group identity (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010) explains its role on building home for second-generation immigrants. Language is an important tool for communication and thus social inclusiveness (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010). Moreover, it “may foster the transmission of ethnicity and ethnic socialization from the parent generation to that of their children” (Levitt & Waters, 2002, p.90). So, it directly coincides with ethnic identities (Hoare, 2000) and is central to providing a form of belonging (Levitt & Waters, 2002). As a result, it could be interpreted that speaking Persian helps second-generation Iranian immigrants connect to the Iranian society, build connections with their ethnic roots and shape sense of belonging and home to Iran.

On the contrary to respondents who felt a sense of belonging to Iran because of their high proficiency in Persian language, respondents who were not highly skilled in Persian language felt socially excluded or alienated in Iran during homecoming trips. Their foreign accent greatly influenced their experiences of Iran’s local culture. According to them, whenever they spoke, Iranian locals would easily pick on them and treat them as foreigners. Next to having an accent, which is a common issue, they suffered from low skills in speaking fluent Farsi or understanding complicated conversations. As Nirvana described her experiences, she labelled them as frustrating and sad:

“(...) I was so frustrated every time I went that the fact that I couldn't talk to people, that I couldn't understand a lot of things (...) it was just like a long build up of frustration over years and years that I couldn't speak the language (...) So then I came up with the idea of going there [Iran] for just three months to spend time with family and to try to learn Farsi by immersing myself there.” (Nirvana, 26 y/o, 2G)

The inability to speak and understand fluent Farsi took the opportunity from her to communicate with people in Iran. According to Huang, Ramshaw and Norman (2016) and Yang, Lee and Lamore (2018), lack of language proficiency could mark second-generation immigrants as an outsider and create an ambivalent feeling in them. Moreover, they could lose their chance of having experiences as a local person and this dampens their sense of belonging to their parental lands. As a result, it could be interpreted that respondents' low proficiency in Persian language have negatively affected their travel experiences and challenged how they negotiated their identity. Considering participants like Nirvana and Bianca, their aim for ethnic return was mainly in virtue of improving their Persian language skills. Bianca noted:

“(...) I felt shy to even walk on the street because my language skills had gotten so weak. And that was part of why I went back. Because I wanted to improve my language skills, especially writing. It's strange that I could speak Arabic and write Arabic fluently, but not Persian, and I'm Persian! So that was part of the draw to want to go back.”
(Bianca, 29 y/o, 1.5G)

Drawing back on how language skills could potentially make them feel alienated from Iran, their sense of being an outsider subsequently could intensify their sense of hybridity (Yang et al, 2018). And in response to the sense of hybridity, one could generate a quest for return (Ralph & Sahetali, 2011). Therefore, their aim of improving Persian language skills could have been an attempt to reaffirm their sense of belonging to Iran. What is more to Bianca's narrative is that she considered language as part of her ethnic identity. A point that was also made by Mariola who did not have Persian language skills prior to her ethnic return:

“I felt like I couldn't really say that I was Iranian without having at least a grasp of language and culture. And since I didn't have those things, it was always like (...) I couldn't really identify with the community (...) And I really wanted to identify with them. I couldn't, because I felt I was basically in a way blocked from being able to integrate myself into that common identity.” (Mariola, 29, 2G)

Similar to Bianca, Mariola hinted at the fact that Persian language is a tool for her to grasp the feeling of belonging to Iran's culture. Language is a marker for both individual and group identity, it fosters social inclusiveness (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010) and thus could be considered an important aspect of the Iranian identity to grasp for second-generation Iranian immigrants who do not speak fluent Persian.

In a nutshell, whether they have a high or low proficiency in it, Persian language is a significant part of second-generation Iranian immigrants' identification. According to the data collected from the interviews and analyzed, language is considered a tool to build connections to Iran and influences the motivation for ethnic return. Besides, it has been one of the major influencers of second-generation Iranians' homecoming experiences and their sense of identity, home and belonging.

4.4. Life stages and transnational ways of being and belonging

The identification process of second-generation immigrants is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Rehman, 2018). While homecoming trips are helpful tools for second-generation immigrants' identification (Maruyama, 2016), there are more transnational factors that can shape their identification (Levitt & Waters, 2015). Hence, Rehman (2018) suggests, to unravel the influence of homecoming trips on identity, sense of home and belonging of second-generation immigrants, studies should take into consideration other factors that influence second-generation immigrants' identification. Meanwhile, coding the narratives of my respondents demonstrated the recurring subject of transnational ways of being and belonging of my respondents in their home countries throughout their different life stages. Therefore, I defined the theme of life stages and transnational ways of being and belonging to enrich second-generation Iranian immigrants' identification analysis.

4.4.1. Transnational ways of belonging

When respondents talked about their childhood connections to Iran, in most cases these narratives involved familiarizing with Iranian food, Persian language, and Persian celebrations, through their immediate families. In addition to this, some had memories of growing up within diaspora communities. Finally, a few were accustomed to the arts, culture, and history of Iran. Nirvana is a case in point for all the above-mentioned and she described her transnational ties as following:

"I guess a lot of it felt natural because a lot of it was just based on family and our home life" (Nirvana, 26 y/o, 2G)

For her and respondents like her, growing up in a family that always talked about their homeland helped her build transnational ties (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Meanwhile, families

who have a history of dispersal narrate stories of their homelands to their children and often talk about returning there (Coles and Timothy, 2014). In most cases, the narratives of return and images of the homeland projected by families, establish a sense of nostalgia and emotional attachment within the second-generation immigrants (Coles & Timothy, 2014; Yang et al, 2018; Kebede, 2019). Sheena was one of my respondents who grew up surrounded by narratives of return and therefore have felt emotionally attached to Iran especially during her childhood. She explained her loyalty toward Iran a result of family habitus:

“You know! when something is important for your family, you will learn to love that thing too (...) I don't know where this love came from, but I had this concern that people don't offend Iran. But if you have this feeling since you are 4 years old, it's something that your family gave it to you, because a four-year-old could not think like this” (Sheena, 36 y/o, 2G)

The above quote from Sheena reaffirms the role of family in building transnational ties and a sense of attachment towards Iran in second-generation Iranians.

Nonetheless, for most of my interviewees, their transnational ties were based on their assimilation in their home countries. Most of my respondents grew up in their home countries as ethnic minorities, they were treated differently because of their appearance, different names, and their Iranian roots. Therefore, integrating in their home societies as an originally Iranian kid during their childhood years seemed a significant topic. Sophie states her experience as an Iranian-American in her hometown in the quote below:

“I grew up in a very white town, so it's very Irish, Italian, Catholic, and it's very conservative. Not a lot of diversity. And the way that they treated me was they treated me like I didn't belong (...) I thought they were right (...) I was like, OK I guess I don't belong here ...And I didn't realize exactly where or to which community. But I thought that I, I must have belonged somewhere else.” (Sophie, 30 y/o, 2G)

Here, for Sophie, being an ethnic minority created a sense of alienation from society. This sense of alienation in the country where she grew up could indeed have the side-effect of strengthening her transnational ties with her parental homeland, the somewhere else where she could belong. This process of looking at parental homelands as a source of identification due to feeling alienated in their home countries (Kunuroglu et al., 2018)

affirms fluid senses of belonging and home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011) among second-generation Iranian immigrants.

The feeling of being different from the major ethnicity of their home country encouraged respondents like Arial and Rita to conceal their Iranian roots. For instance, Arial describes living in France as an originally Iranian person as following:

“...I was like, okay, I'm this and that. I didn't present myself as my origin or anything. And it's only after a few questions, if people asked me where I was from that I answered. But I never said it before. (...) for me it was a shame because people didn't know about Iran.” (Arial, 32 y/o, 2G)

For her and Rita who was always questioned about her root in school, integrating during childhood and youth meant pushing their Iranian identity aside; a strategy for assimilation that is often referred to as anti-transnationalism in the field of migration studies (Kebede, 2019). Through anti-transnationalism, second-generation immigrants dampen their connection to their parental homeland in order to blend in into their home country's society (ibidem). The anti-transnationalism strategy among my interviewees was not only a consequence of being an ethnic minority but also a consequence of negative images of Iran projected by media. Active transnational social fields and the flow of information in the globalized area we live in makes transnational identification inevitable for second-generation immigrants (Somerville, 2008). For instance, media could create social stigma of political unrest regarding countries in Africa. Being constantly fed these social stigmas by media, second-generation Africans could develop traits of anti-transnationalism (Kebede, 2019). Similarly, most of my respondents revealed the inevitable social stigma of terrorism toward Iran following 9/11. They were increasingly exposed to racism or asked questions about Iran in their teenage life course. As a result of being bullied, Rita tried to hide her origins. She narrated her story in the following quote:

“(...) I remember that I was, I think, 10 years old when the terrorist attack to the Twin towers happened. So, I remember clearly that at school everybody was talking about terrorism and Iraq and of course Iran. So, for me, it was really embarrassing. And in high school this was even worse because it was a really different time. It was difficult for me to be a teenager and try to integrate. Of course I was Italian, I speak Italian. But there was always this Iranian side that haunts me (...) And I clearly remember that once I was in high school and a schoolmate said racist things towards me, things like

you have to go back to your country or something like this. And I was like, what? I was born here (...) It was a time when I tried to integrate myself to be part of something. And I always felt that being Iranian was a challenge to this process.” (Rita, 30 y/o, 2G)

Opposite to the anti-transnationalism strategy to overcome social stigmas is the concept of reactivated transnationalism (Kebede, 2019). According to this idea, second-generation immigrants become more aware of their transnational identities and try to take great pride in their roots despite the negative images of media (ibidem). In this regard, Sophie’s experience is noticeable:

“Before 9/11, I thought I wasn't as aware of being Iranian. I was aware of not being white, but I wasn't aware of being Iranian (...) I think for me, it was just my level of consciousness changed.” (Sophie, 30 y/o, 2G)

Sophie started to recognize the negative image Iran has in the western world, this resulted in her growing an interest in knowing more about Iran as she grew older and gaining an interest in politics. Similarly, Nirvana went through the same process of identification during her teenage years. As she described:

“(…) I felt the sense that I needed to learn as much as I could and understand as much as I could, and especially when I was in college, I'd liked to be armed with that” (Nirvana, 26 y/o, 2G)

According to Nirvana, her college years were the time when she began to refine her Iranian identity instead of rejecting it. Besides Nirvana and Sophie, this transformation happened gradually to most of my respondents as they step into adolescence. Shani notes in this regard:

“My feeling has changed. As a seven-years-old kid I didn’t want to be different. I wanted to be like others. But now I love that I’m Iranian.” (Shani, 27 y/o, 1.5G)

Besides the family habitus influence on second-generation immigrant’s identification, “the second-generation’s identity is mostly focused on age related emotions and activities” (Vathi, 2015, p.70). Teenage years are crucial years in a second-generation immigrant life as they start to have agency for determining their ethnic identities (Vathi, 2015). Therefore, as my respondents grew older and dealt with reconstructing their identities on their own, their attitude toward being discriminated and categorized as an ethnic minority altered to retrieving senses of belonging to Iran.

4.4.2. Transnational ways of being

During their adulthood, while dealing with the identification process, most of my respondents took part in different activities or interests to refine their personal affinity to Iran. For instance, Sophie, Rita, and Bianca decided to focus their higher education on the Middle East. Their effort is similar to what Pelliccia (2016) describes in her respondents' strategy for identification. In her study, she suggests following a professional activity or doing a university study closely related to a second-generation's origin is a gesture from them to (re)affirm their ethnicity at a particular time of their lives. When I asked Bianca why she chose Middle Eastern studies, she replied:

"It brings me closer to my culture. Definitely, it's a way of keeping contact with where I'm from." (Bianca, 29 y/o, 1.5G)

Or when Rita who did her PhD research in Iran talked about her choice of study, she said:

"when I started the university, I started studying political science. So, I really jumped into international politics and Middle East politics. So, I decided to embrace my origin."
(Rita, 30 y/o, 2G)

In addition to this specific transnational way of being, some of the participants joined Iranian youth communities or took courses about Iran's culture and language in their home countries. For instance, Mariola who was not exposed to Iranian culture while growing up narrated her experience of becoming part of an Iranian youth community:

"(...) I had no excuse. I had people around me. I was already independent from my parents. I was living in another city. There was no reason to now say that, Oh, it wasn't them that didn't taught me. And of course, in college, you're starting to discover different things and you want to learn about different aspects of yourself (...) At one point there was already so many people around me that are doing this, and especially with the help of the student group that I was part of (...) I just felt like, they are active and I can also be involved as well." (Mariola, 29 y/o, 2G)

What is noticeable here is being part of an Iranian community helped Mariola negotiate her Iranian identity, a part of her that she was not familiarized with since childhood. The effects that a diaspora community has in building transnational ways of being and belonging for second-generation immigrants is related to the power of socialization (Kunuroglu et al., 2018). Being part of a group forms socio-cultural identities and senses of belonging (Christou, 2006). Therefore, it seems for respondents like Mariola being part of a society

where they could negotiate their socio-cultural identities helped them (re)construct senses of belonging to Iran.

In a nutshell, my respondents' transnational ways of being and belonging in their home countries throughout their different life stages created a sense of belonging and home towards Iran. Navigating between their home countries and Iran made them aware of their dual identities since their childhood. Specially, being discriminated after 9/11 appeared to be an important factor shaping their identification and affected the way they perceived and experienced their identities as they grew older. As a consequence, they negotiated their identities by deciding between ignoring their Iranian identity or retrieving aspects of it. Their attempts resulted in building a hybrid and transnational way of being such as choosing a study field related to Iran and joining Iranian youth communities. Ultimately, I argue that the second-generation Iranian immigrants' transnational way of being throughout their different life stages is one of the dimensions of transnationalism, next to their homecoming trips, that could reinforce their sense of belonging to Iran and contribute to their sense of belonging to Iran.

4.5. Dichotomy of ethnic return: temporary or permanent?

When it came to the decision of migrating to Iran, it is notable that none of the actual returnees looked at it as a permanent decision. A wide spectrum of reasons for staying, from job opportunities to falling in love, has been reported by the respondents.

Respondents who returned due to a job position were offered a temporary position at first. Some respondents who moved to Iran for educational purposes expected to follow just a temporary program. Lastly, returnees who went back to explore more of the culture of Iran perceived it as a long-term experiential tourism experience and not a permanent relocation. So, no matter the reason underlying ethnic return, moving to Iran was not perceived by the sample of participants I interviewed as a permanent decision. Arial, as an example, explained her expectations prior to her moving to Iran as following:

"Honestly, I didn't really know what my expectations of Iran was. I just wanted to go there and see what was happening (...) And I just wanted to get the answers to my question and getting to know Iran a bit more, and I was hoping that not to be disgusted by Iran (...) And I decided to come back to France when I was on top of that

mountain; I was like, okay, now I got everything and I don't want to fall back again.”

(Arial, 32 y/o, 2G)

For respondents like Arial, their relocation to Iran was a temporary decision because it was based on their desire to catch a glimpse of an “alternative universe”. This term was used by Huang, Ramshaw and Norman (2016) to explain second-generations’ parental homeland as somewhere that could have been their homeland. Like Arial, when Tara, who is studying to become a doctor, talked about her possible decision of returning to Iran in future, she pointed out the alternative universe in her narrative:

“I could imagine going back to Iran for some time. I would like to go back as doctors without boarders (...) I think I would chose Iran specifically, because, I would like to return something to my country (...) I could have been in the shoes of many poor people in Iran but I had the chance to grow up here and become a doctor and I want to help people in my country who were not as lucky as me”

When Tara talked about her possible temporary return to Iran, she refered to her future living experience as a way of life that she could have had if she were not raised in Germany. Therefore, this is in line with the notion of the alternative universe introduced by Huang, Norman and Ramshaw (2016). Moreover, when she talked about her ability to return in relation to her hybrid identity, she referred to it as a “privilege”. The privilege of hybrid identity that Jain (2013) suggests is the reason behind temporary decision of ethnic returnees. Second-generation immigrants aim to use their hybrid social and cultural capital to leverage opportunities in their lives (Jain, 2013). Therefore, I argue most of my respondents see their hybrid identities and hybrid homes as a chance to experience their alternative universe or leverage different opportunities in their lives. For instance, Rita moved to Iran to do her PhD research about Iranian society:

“My master's degree was in African and Asian studies. So, I focused on the Middle East. And at the beginning, I focused on the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. But then, of course, I wasn't allowed to go to the country. I tried, but they refused to give me the visa. So, I decided to focus on Iran. I realized that it was really stupid not for me to use this-to use my background-because it really gave me an asset.” (Rita, 29 y/o, 2G)

Eventually I argue, while the hybrid and fluid identities of second-generation Iranians does not motivate them to move to Iran on a permanent bases, it does motivate them to use Iran as a temporary home where they can work, study and explore.

5. Conclusion

This thesis investigates the link between homecoming trips of second-generation Iranian immigrants and their ethnic return decision (both potential and actual) to Iran. The central research question explores how homecoming trips of second-generation Iranians influenced their potential or eventual decision to migrate to Iran. The complementary sub-question refers to the influence of second-generation Iranian immigrants' homecoming trip experiences on their identities, sense of home, and belonging. Based on these questions, the focus of this thesis is to analyze second-generation Iranian immigrants' narratives of identity, sense of home, and belonging (through the process of identification). The main themes for their identification process mentioned by the respondents were VFR experiences, language, transnationalism and life stages, and the concept of dichotomy of return relating to the temporary or permanent state of the migration to Iran.

Moreover, my research aims to fill some of the gaps in academic literature regarding second-generation immigrants return mobilities. First, homecoming trips and ethnic returns inextricably relate to each other, as they both negotiate the diasporic identity and homing desire (King & Christou, 2011). Indeed, homecoming trips could lead to ethnic returns (Bell & Ward, 2000; King & Christou, 2011). However, despite the interrelation between these two kinds of mobilities, Bell and Ward (2000) and King and Christou (2011) state they have been studied separately in academia. Therefore, rather than examining the return mobilities (trips and migration) of second-generation immigrants in isolation, this study pursued the proposal of Bell and Ward (2000) and King and Christou (2011) in studying the return mobilities in correlation to each other. Second, Jain (2013) states research on ethnic returns focuses on second-generation immigrants moving from a developing country to a developed one. So, my case study (Iran) adds to this knowledge by analyzing developing countries as return destinations of ethnic migrants who come from developed countries. Finally, as stated by Pelliccia (2016) and Kebede (2019), although second-generation immigrants' transnational ways of being and belonging differs from first-generation immigrants, much of current literature is based on either first-generation immigrants or a combination of the first and the later generations. Therefore, there is a need for studying second-generation immigrant's narratives and perceptions of transnationality, which this study aims to meet.

VFR experiences were an inseparable part of my respondents' journeys to Iran. Hence it is not surprising that the participants' sense of home and belonging to Iran is closely related to their VFR experiences. VFR is one of the traveling experiences that helps second-generation immigrants build family ties in their parental homelands (Rehman, 2018). Maintaining these familial ties contributes to creating a sense of belonging to parental homelands and as the number of family members increases the stronger the attachments to parental homelands become (Rehman, 2018). Similarly, VFR experiences of my respondents helped them get closer to the extended families they have left in Iran, and as they gradually built family ties through their VFR experiences in Iran, they developed feeling of belonging and feeling of being at home in Iran. Moreover, the actual returnees in my research seemed to have more family members back in Iran than the potential returnees. Therefore, they have created a stronger sense of home and belonging that eventually led to their definite return to Iran. Next to the feeling of being at home in Iran, being limited to just visiting family and having controlled and supervised experiences due to spending time in Iran as a VFR tourist, gradually gave my respondents a not always positive feeling of being in a "family bubble" (Uriely, 2010), which sheltered them from experiencing what they thought was the real Iran. Especially during their adolescence, my interviewees yearned to venture out, explore, as well as know more about the country. However, family constraints made it very difficult (if not impossible) for them to do so. Therefore, some of them narrated how they sometimes felt like a stranger in places that emotionally used to feel like home (Uriely, 2010). In response to this complex and paradoxical feeling of being at home and being a stranger at the same time, most of my respondents took trips to their parental homeland independently from their family. Kebede (2019) notes in his work that these independent trips should be considered as a real effort in building a sense of attachment and loyalty to parental homelands. My findings are consistent with Kebede (2019) study, because they showed how respondents who took independent trips to Iran feel strong connections to Iran, and particularly regarding actual returnees, their independent experiences had a consistent influence in their eventual decision to return. To summarise, VFR is a significant determinant in how second-generation Iranian immigrants shape their identity, sense of belonging and home as its coexisting feeling of being at home and away creates return desires.

Besides the VFR experiences, unfamiliar socio-cultural encounters during my respondents' trips to Iran worked as a domain through which they negotiated their identity, senses of home and belonging towards Iran and made return decisions (potential or actual). On the contrary to first-generation immigrants, for whom their homecoming trips mean connecting to their experienced past, second-generation immigrant's homecoming trips are based at least in part on challenging the pre-existing images they have (Coles & Timothy, 2014). In other words, as the second-generation immigrants' images of their parental homelands are based on stories and narratives of homeland before traveling to the country (Coles & Timothy, 2014), confronting real socio-cultural experiences during homecoming trips could be challenging (Yang et al., 2018). Regarding my research, respondents who had pre-existing images of Iran (particularly an image of the pre-revolution Iran instilled by their families' narratives of Iran) were disappointed by their actual cultural encounters in Iran. Their desires to identify themselves with Iran and search for the feeling of home were significantly weakened in the absence of familiarity with the socio-cultural encounters they were expecting to experience. On the contrary, respondents who were unfamiliar with narratives of Iran developed a desire for return for exploring the unfamiliar sides of Iran. Hence, based on the family habitus of second-generation Iranians, their socio-cultural encounters during homecoming trips could both weaken or strengthen sense of belonging towards Iran.

Moreover, when respondents compared social, cultural and political characteristics of Iran with those of their home countries, they tended to identify more with their home countries, and their sense of belonging to Iran diminished. One of the most important experiences that created a feeling of gratitude towards their home country was the gender structures in Iran. As my respondents were ninety percent women, the gender structure of Iranian society was especially noticeable for them. Iran's national state interpretation of Islam has been justifying discrimination against women, and as a result, women in Iran's society are considered to have a subordinate status in their private and public lives ("Beyond the veil", 2019). Being the minority was also considerably felt by my respondents and thus gave them a feeling of alienation from Iran. In addition to this, the other difference between Iran and their home country that did not make Iran a place like home for my politically active respondents was its non-liberal government (Afshari, 2011). Respondents who encountered political duress due to their political affiliation, felt unsafe and not at

home in Iran. In sum, when second-generation Iranian immigrants make comparisons that usually results in increased feelings of gratitude towards their lives in their home countries, their sense of belonging to Iran decreases.

The finding also suggested that proficiency in Persian language and the ability to involve in the conversations about Iran during homecoming trips affected the sense of belonging and identity of respondents and their ethnic return decisions. According to Huang, Ramshaw and Norman (2016) “one’s level of involvement in the lifestyle and culture of the homeland” (p.73) could create different levels of destination appreciation and thus (re)constructs the senses of home and belonging to the parental land. Likewise, among my respondents, their language proficiency and familiarity with Iran’s lifestyle affected their ability to communicate with their friends, families, and Iranian locals, and thus altered their feeling of belonging towards Iran, and how they identified themselves. First, they were unable to socialize about the topic of Iran as their unfamiliarity with lives in Iran marked them as an outsider and prevented them from having any say in conversations about Iran. Second, respondents’ low proficiency in the Persian language negatively affected their travel experiences, as they were not able to communicate and have in-depth experiences in Iran as if they were locals themselves. Eventually, being marked as an outsider and not being able to have in-depth experiences intensified their sense of hybridity instead of reinforcing their identification (Yang et al, 2018) with Iran and Iranian culture. Nevertheless, the findings also suggest this sense of hybridity motivated them to grow a desire for ethnic return. One reason for the decision to return is to improve their Persian language skills and to gain living experiences, as well as to overcome their negative experience of being perceived as an outsider. As a result, second-generation Iranian immigrants’ return becomes an attempt to reaffirm their sense of belonging to Iran and (re) construct their Iranian identity.

Although findings contributed to linking the homecoming trips to ethnic returns in the aforementioned ways, they also indicated that homecoming trips are one out of many factors influencing the negotiation of identity, sense of home and belonging and thus ethnic returns. According to Rehman (2018), “both the issue of identity and belonging are inherently complex and constructed through multi-layered dimensions” (p.58). One of the dimensions analyzed in this research, that plays a significant role in building homing desires throughout years for second-generation Iranian immigrants, has been their transnational

ways of being and belonging in their home countries. The data collected using interviews indicated that, as a consequence of navigating between their home countries and Iran, second-generation Iranians were forced to be aware and reflect on their identities since childhood. For instance, respondents who grew up in their home countries as ethnic minorities were treated differently because of their appearance, different names, and their cultural roots. After 9/11, particularly, social stigmas against Iranians increased and made negotiations of their identity more urgent and inescapable for them. As a consequence, as they grew older, they were exposed to more challenging situations where they negotiated their identities and had to decide whether to further adapt in their home country or retrieve aspects of their origin country, building a hybrid and transnational way of being (such as choosing a study field related to Iran and joining Iranian youth communities). Ultimately, the second-generation Iranian immigrants' transnational way of being throughout their different life stages is one of the dimensions of transnationalism, next to their homecoming trips, that could reinforce their sense of belonging to Iran and contribute to their identification.

Generally, as the narratives of my respondents showed, ethnic return decision of second-generation Iranian immigrants is a multi-layered and multi-causal process. The direct factors causing the decision to return of my respondents were found to be rather varied. They ranged from job and study opportunities in Iran to personal incentives, such as a desire to explore living in Iran, learning the language and culture. Although these motives did materialize my respondents' returns to Iran, they were indirectly influenced by regular visits to Iran and prior existence of transnational connections to Iran. In addition, the return decisions of both actual and potential returnees hold a temporary state, as experiencing Iran is considered experiencing an alternative universe (Huang et al., 2016) and a leverage in life for the binational second-generation immigrants (Jain, 2013). In a nutshell, my findings showed a causal effect of transnational ties and homecoming trips on the homing desire of both potential and actual returnees (King & Christou, 2011).

To conclude, this study showed how the conceptualization of home and the Iranian identity plays a significant role in second-generation Iranian immigrants' lives, especially in relation to processes of identification through homecoming trips and transition into ethnic returns. Without the repeated journeys to Iran, second-generation immigrants would not have any real experience of where they feel at home and where they feel belonged to.

Hence, for them the journeys to Iran were valuable tools to make sense of Iran as home and as a place of belonging, and ultimately, in few cases, directly affected their decision to return to the parental land.

This study is exploratory, and had certain limitations. First, it examined second-generation Iranian immigrants' narratives of Iran. Its focus on a specific population and the exploratory nature of the research mean that there is need for more work before the findings could be generalized to other migrant generations and homeland destinations. Second, due to the nature of the data collection process, the research is based on selective stories of respondents which could create bias. As the data collection was based on the transnationality of the respondents, their memories of homecoming trips and the narratives of return, they sometimes mixed these different time spans or did not remember much about their preliminary memories of Iran. While this can constitute something not "objectively" true, the nature of narrative analysis and of narratives themselves does not just look for facts, but for how meaning is constructed and shared by the respondents. Third, the sample ended up being ninety percent women, which made the gender structure differences prominent in my thesis, a topic that presumably would be less of an issue for men. Finally, the parental homeland destination examined in this study was Iran. Iran has a radical government and their radical ideals have become part of the everyday lives of people living there (Afshari, 2011). This radicalism negatively influenced my respondent's homecoming experiences, the notion of home and belonging.

Reflecting upon these limitations, some suggestions are provided for future research. First, my findings investigated that for second-generation Iranian immigrants, VFR is significantly intertwined with a sense of connection with Iran and negotiation of home and identity. Therefore, I suggest future research take into consideration the VFR travel niche as an important part of studying second-generation Iranian immigrants' identification process. Second, the Persian language seemed to either directly or indirectly affect ethnic returns. Therefore, policymakers in Iran could examine the possibilities of offering extensive language courses for second-generation Iranian immigrants, whereby they can attract and retain young talents.

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7. Appendix

Appendix A- Overview of the interviewees

Table A1 Overview of the interviewees

Nr.	Pseudo name	age	gender	Education	Occupation	Birth country	Home country	Ethnic return age	Settlement period in Iran
1	Sophie	30	Female	Middle Eastern studies	Researcher	USA	USA	23	5 years
2	Nirvana	26	Female	Literature and Media studies	Student	USA	USA	24	2-3 years
3	Bianca	29	Female	Middle Eastern studies	Consultant	Iran	USA	24	1 year
4	Mariola	29	Female	Environmental studies	Project manager	USA	USA	24	6 years
5	Sarah	26	Female	Business and marketing	Marketing manager	Qatar	Qatar	24-25	Still living in Iran
6	Shani	27	Female	Engineering	Project manager	Iran	Germany	25	1 year
7	Sheena	36	Female	Law	Student	Turkey	Netherlands	-	-
8	Sasha	38	Female	Law	Lawyer	Iran	Canada	-	-
9	Veronica	25	Female	Environmental studies	Marketing executive	Australia	Australia	-	-
10	Tara	24	Female	Medical science	Student	Iran	Germany	-	-
11	Arial	32	Female	Engineering	Engineer	France	France	27	3 years
12	Rita	29	Female	Middle Eastern studies	PhD candidate	Italy	Italy	27	1 year
13	Kelly	31	Female	Law	Student	Iran	Netherlands	-	-
14	Max	44	Male	Law	Business	Iran	Germany	27	4 years

Appendix B- Interview guide

Imagining Iran

1. Could you please tell me about yourself and your connection to Iran? (parents, immigration year, the immigration reason of the parents and to where, place and date of birth, home country, migration date to Iran)
2. Growing up, what did you know about Iran? (in case of respondents who immigrated from Iran before age of 10: What do you remember of Iran?)
 - From where?
3. How did you imagine Iran before ever going there? (in case of respondents who immigrated from Iran before age of 10: How did you feel when you first immigrated from Iran?)
4. How did you keep your connection with Iran while growing up?
5. How did it feel to be originally Iranian living abroad?
 - Could you please give an example?

Experiencing Iran

6. When was the first time you traveled to Iran? Why did you go to Iran? (If it was for tourism: How were your experiences as a tourist?)
 - Could you please give examples of what you did and where you visited?
7. What was the highlight of the trip?
8. What did you dislike about your trip?
9. How did it feel to be a tourist in your ancestral land?
 - Why do you think you felt like that?
10. How do you think people saw you while you were in Iran?
11. How did you feel after your returns to your home country?

- Why do you think you felt like that?

12. If you had to explain your idea about Iran to someone, after your trips, what would have you said?

- Why do you think you would have said this?

13. Did you have other trips to Iran? How did your idea change about Iran?

- How and in what ways did it change your idea about Iran?

14. When did you start thinking about moving to Iran? (In case of potential returnees: What do you think of people who go back to live in Iran?)

- Could you please explain your thought process?

15. What do you think about the current situation of Iran and what is its relation to your decision to live in Iran?

Extra questions only for actual returnees

16. When you moved to Iran, what were your expectations?

- How were they met? Could you please give an example?

17. Now that you live/lived there, if you want to explain to someone who has never lived/moved there, what will you say?

- Why do you think you explain it like this?

Extra questions only for potential returnees

16. What makes you travel to Iran/ What kept you from going back?

Appendix C- Codebook

Table C1 Codebook

Theme	Sub themes (Categories)	Description (open coding)	Example
VFR experiences	Feeling at home and belonging in Iran	Includes open codes such as Family bonds, travel activities in Iran, Family members inside Iran, Family members outside Iran, sense of hybridity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Sense of hybridity</u>: <i>“Traveling to Iran was really like homecoming. It was weird because I was traveling to a place I wasn't born in, but it was like going home again. It was this weird double feeling, but it was like going home, going in a place that I felt really at home”</i> (Rita) • <u>Travel activities in Iran</u>: <i>“I think (...) the best part was really just staying at home and like getting to know all my cousins that were my age”</i> (Mariola)
	Feeling away from Iran in Iran	Includes open codes such as dependency on family in Iran, privacy in Iran, family restrictions, sense of hybridity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Family restrictions</u>: <i>“My family is super protective of me (...) So for me, the experience of coming to Iran, I felt quite restricted because I couldn't leave the house without my parents taking me to place”</i> (Sarah) • <u>Dependency on family in Iran</u>: <i>“We were so confined because we went back for weddings, we would go in the summer, we would go for two weeks at most”</i> (Nirvana)
Socio-cultural and political differences	Gender structure	Includes open codes such as Hijab, sexual harassment in Iran, women discrimination in Iran, patriarchy in Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Hijab</u>: <i>“Wearing the scarf [Laughter] I hated that”</i> (Arial) • <u>Women discrimination in Iran</u>: <i>“as soon as you enter Iranian territory, you realize that you're kind of a second class citizen as a woman.”</i> (Sunny)

	Political duress	Includes open codes such as safety in Iran, political activism, freedom of speech in Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Safety in Iran:</u> <i>"I don't get a feeling of home there, because I don't have any safety there or I don't have any rights there."</i> (Kelly) • <u>Freedom of speech:</u> <i>"I also didn't want to go, because I wanted to freely participate in political movements."</i> (Sheena)
	Cultural encounters	Cultural norms in Iran, manners and behaviors of Iranians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Cultural norms in Iran:</u> <i>"So the fact that we were just going as a group between men and women was also like raising a lot of eyebrows"</i> (Mariola) • <u>Manners and behaviors of Iranians:</u> <i>"And I was like, oh, wow. Look at all these problems. Maybe Iran...Iranians have problems. And it's not just the government. Maybe people too."</i> (Sophie)
Language		Includes open codes such as communication ability in Iran, social inclusiveness in Iranian communities, Iranian identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Iranian identity:</u> <i>"I felt like I couldn't really say that I was Iranian without having at least a grasp of language and culture."</i> (Tara) • <u>Communication ability in Iran:</u> <i>"I was so frustrated every time I went that the fact that I couldn't talk to people, that I couldn't understand a lot of things"</i> (Nirvana)
Transnationalism and life stages	Transnational ways of belonging	Includes open codes such as childhood discrimination in home country, teenage identity crisis, sense of hybridity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Childhood discrimination in home country:</u> <i>"the way that they treated me was they treated me like I didn't belong"</i> (Sophie) • <u>Sense of hybridity:</u> <i>"Of course I was Italian, I speak Italian. But there was always this Iranian side that haunts me"</i> (Rita)
	Transnational ways of being	Includes open codes such as Iranian youth community membership, higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Higher education selection:</u> <i>"when I started the university, I started studying political science. So, I really jumped into international politics and"</i>

		selection, Persian language course attendance	<p><i>Middle East politics. So, I decided to embrace my origin.” (Rita)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Persian language course attendance:</u> <i>“When I was in college, I would like take classes and I took a couple of Persian language classes” (Nirvana)</i>
dichotomy of return: Temporary or permanent		Includes open codes such as hybridity privilege, reasons for migrating to Iran, alternative universe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Hybridity privilege:</u> <i>“So, I decided to focus on Iran. I realized that it was really stupid not for me to use this, to use my background because it really gave me an asset.” (Rita)</i> • <u>Alternative universe:</u> <i>“it almost felt like it was just like a whole other world that I I had access to.” (Mariola)</i>