

MY FLAG, MY IDENTITY

**MY FLAG, MY IDENTITY:
FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES IN IRANIAN DIASPORA**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in
Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree in
Doctor of Philosophy**

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October 2019**

McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, Ontario
(Hamilton)

TITLE: My Flag, My Identity: Fragmented Identities in
Iranian diaspora

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PAGES: xi, 226

LAY ABSTRACT

The Iranian diaspora is a young and growing community that came into existence after the Islamic revolution of 1979. In this diaspora, there are three different flags on display, and each flag represents a socio-political ideology. The symbolic application of the flag facilitates this research in exploring the social interaction among the Iranian diaspora residing in the Greater Toronto Area and York Region. Through the examination of the flag debates, I investigate the significance of community building in the new host nation. I critically analyze the communal divide existing among the Iranian community and the flag debate that is a symbolic representation of Iranian group dynamics. The discussion of the flag for many starts a conversation about community development and socio-communal hierarchy. While the different versions of the Iranian flags bring the diasporic communities together, they also indicate social segregation caused by religious, gender, and sexual hierarchies existing among the Iranian diaspora.

ABSTRACT

A diaspora's flag is the symbolic representation of that community. The Iranian flag, however, is a contested symbol among the Iranian diasporic community. As this research shows, the Iranian diaspora exhibits its cultural, political, and religious identities through three different Iranian flags. Through qualitative research, entailing months of participant observation and a series of semi-structured interviews, I investigate the underlying reasons for this flag disagreement. Through this research, I argue that an Iranian diaspora's pre-migration communal history and post-migration environmental factors influence its establishment and maintenance in the host nation.

In this study, I revisit the diaspora literature to argue for the complexity of the concept of diaspora. I demonstrate how a diaspora assists the community in restructuring its lost cultural identity and establishing a social space to belong, in the time of the spatial and cultural dislocation. The Iranian diaspora's flag selection is a symbolic representation of communal establishment and identity formation for the community. The Iranian flag debate indicates a communal divide; it is also an instrument to set social boundaries to develop a community under the symbolic representation of the ancestral homeland.

Furthermore, this research explores how the Iranian diaspora uses the Iranian flag as a proxy to indicate socio-communal expectations and intersectional social hierarchies that already exist among the Iranian community. When discussing the flag's symbolic significance, the respondents relate the flag with three recurring themes of religion, gender, and sexuality. The association of the Iranian flag with these three social factors

indicates the communal dynamics of the Iranian diaspora. These communal dynamics establish certain norms and values, but they also redefine each flag based on its socio-political history. The attached meaning to each flag consequently causes tension and disagreement among the Iranian community, which is not solely political.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While my dissertation appears to be a solo project, it would not be complete without the tireless effort and never-ending encouragement of a great community, who supported me through every step of the way.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wonderful supervisor, Professor Vic Satzewich. While he gave me space to be creative with my ideas, he was the sound of reason who kept me grounded and focused. I am truly honoured to be one of his many students. Professor Satzewich, you are my role model and the inspiration I needed to grow academically and professionally.

I genuinely appreciate Professor Dorothy Pawluch for being part of my committee. Her positive criticism taught me to question every assumption in my analysis and interpretation. Professor Pawluch taught me to be a more effective researcher with an eye for details.

I would like to thank Professor Jeff Denis, who indeed helped me through the steps of the way. He introduced me to many novel ideas to reshape my theoretical background and reformulate the trajectory of my definitions and perceptions.

I would like to include my greatest thanks to Corinne Jehle, the wonderful Graduate Program Administrator. Corinne always had the answer to questions that I did not even know I had. I am genuinely grateful for her continuous support through every step of the way.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all the administrative staff. Danielle Stayzer, Jennifer Nettleton, and Olga Cannon, your never-ending support helped me through the completion of my graduate degree.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all the Graduate Program Directors during my time in the Ph.D. program in McMaster for their support and guidance: Professors Gregory Hooks and Tina Fetner. Also, I would like to extend my thanks to all the professors I met along the way to completion of my dissertation, as well as my colleagues. This project was a long journey but it was filled with amazing people who helped me through challenges and difficulties.

While this journey was an academic one, I would not have been able to complete it without the help and emotional support of my family. I would like to thank my parents, Mina and Rahmat. Their support strengthened me through this process. I know they were worried about my progress, sometimes even more than me.

I want to say thank you to my younger brother, Shahbaz, who helped me through this research by reading my work with a magnifying glass. Shahbaz, you certainly have an eye for grammar, and I still owe you a little Finland.

I am truly grateful to my sister and my best friend, Shila. Shila, you spent so much time criticizing and arguing about every point in my work. You listened to my insecurities and doubts through this process. You empowered me when I was the most fearful. Most importantly, you gave me a shoulder to cry on, every time I was ready to give up. Thanks, Sistra, for being there!

I would also like to thank my wonderful family and friends, who opened their hearts and their doors to me. My dearest Shabnam, Ali, Shuka, Sam, Pooneh, Ali, Kimia, Zari, Mansour, Donya, Arvin, and Mona, I could not have done this without your help and support.

And last, but not least, the Iranian community, who supported me in completing this project. This project came to existence because I knew my community would assist me in creating an image of the Iranian diaspora. While some agreed to participate in interviews, others provided me with a holistic representation of the Iranian diaspora. I am grateful for their support and insight.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND SYMBOLS

GTA – Greater Toronto Area

YR – York Region

ICSCCO – Iranian-Canadian Senior Citizens Center of Ontario

YUISA – York University Iranian Student Association

IR Flag – Islamic Republic Flag

IRI – Islamic Republic of Iran

INTRODUCTION

At the Coppa grocery shop on Dufferin, a Coca-Cola display exhibited the flags of the nations participating in the FIFA World Cup, one of which was the Islamic Republic of Iran's official flag. Among all the flags, the Iranian flag was the only one vandalized and defaced. The vandals used a simple ball-point black pen to scratch out the Islamic Republic Emblem in the middle (Fieldnotes, June 2018).

“That Allah in the middle. Hah! It is just like a big black spider. It is knitting a web for those misfortunate Iranian people.” (Fieldnotes, January 2017)

The Iranian community is one of the youngest and most rapidly growing diasporas. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, many Iranians departed their home country and spread around the globe from Oceania to North America. The 1979 Islamic revolution became the historical foundation of the Iranian diaspora, or what Robin Cohen (2008) calls the ‘traumatic dispersal from a homeland.’ While most migrant and expatriate Iranians appear to share a similar socio-political struggle under the new Islamic regime, their diaspora does not provide a unified experience for all its members. I selected the Iranian flag as a tangible and visible representation of the Iranian diaspora's intersectionally socio-political fragmentation. The Iranian diaspora does not have one singular flag to represent the diverse Iranian bodies abroad. The flag debate, which is the representative of national identity among the Iranian diaspora, exposes divides along the lines of gender, religion and sexual identity. This research seeks to understand community members' narratives to comprehend the post-Islamic revolution socio-political divide within the Iranian diaspora. To understand this

social phenomenon, I analyze the social interactions of members of the Iranian diaspora to understand their interpretation of each flag and their justification for their flag selection.

In the diaspora, the three predominant representative Iranian flags include the lion-and-sun flag, the Islamic Republic flag, and the white flag. The lion-and-sun flag is the flag of the monarchist era, which was prominent in the diaspora after the Islamic revolution of 1979. The Islamic Republic flag is the current official flag of Iran, which constitutes a contested political and religious symbol for the members of the diaspora. And lastly the white flag, which for some, is identified as the flag of ‘the people’, is inclusive of all diversities. Many community members argue that the white flag ought to be the Iranian diaspora’s flag. These three flags symbolically represent the ongoing tensions and contestation within the Iranian diaspora. While each flag represents different sets of political ideologies, each one entails an internalized social and cultural interpretation tailored for the Iranian diaspora.



FIGURE 1: LION-AND-SUN FLAG 2019



FIGURE 2: ISLAMIC REPUBLIC FLAG 2019



FIGURE 3: THE WHITE FLAG 2019

IRANIAN FLAGS IN GREATER TORONTO AREA AND YORK REGION

In 2010, the student centre in York University exhibited the Islamic Republic of Iran's Flag to represent the Iranian student body. This exhibition caused outrage among Iranian students at York University. In her blog, Sayeh Hassan (March 28, 2010) emotionally pleaded for change and expressed anger and frustration toward the Islamic Republic (IR) flag, which she equated to Nazi Germany's flag and the Swastika symbol. She claimed the Iranian diasporas to be an exile diaspora, originated in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. She boldly stated that exhibiting the IR flag is intended as an intimidation tactic by Iranian spies and government agents to silence members of the Iranian community. Her advocacy led to the replacement of the IR flag with an Iranian flag known as the white flag, which includes the three colours with no emblem in the center. This example is from nearly a decade ago, but the Iranian diaspora's relationship with the flag has not changed. The disagreement and stereotyped political and social associations of each flag fuel the ongoing socio-political dispute among the Iranian community living in GTA and YR.

While the debate appears to be over the flag preference, the socio-political interpretation of the flag is the underlying dividing factor among the Iranian diaspora. The meanings and interpretations attached to a flag are what split the community into many groups. Iranian history, culture, religion, and politics implanted the socio-political interpretations of the flag. The meaning associated with a multitude of Iranian flags is a concrete example of how the selection of an artifact reflects historically negotiated norms, which evolve temporally and spatially. A national flag is a political artifact, which represents

a nation's government, its legal system, its citizens, and the dominant social and ethnic group, in general. This piece of cloth sets boundaries that exclude and includes social bodies. The reaction to the flag is a response to the entity that the flag represents and sets exclusionary boundaries (Knowlton 2014, 57). The relationship with a flag is representative of a collective national identity, which indicates conformity and transgression. Therefore, social attachment to the flag and flag debates are not uniquely specific to the Iranian diaspora residing in Canada.

Flag debates have surfaced and resurfaced throughout history within different societies and nationalities. The association of the flag with national identity and politics of belonging creates a void for some minority members of a nation. The Vietnamese revolutionary flag (Vu 2015), the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers flag (Godwin, 2012), the United States' ongoing white supremacist Confederate flag controversy (Webster and Leib., 2001), and even the Canadian flag debate of 1963 that symbolically separated Canada from the United Kingdom (Champion 2006) are just a few global examples. In each case, the flag debate stems from the association of the national flag with nationalism and the concept of belonging. Thus, disagreements about flags signify communal divides and social contestation over the reconstruction of national identity and inclusion. While flags seem to have a specific and consistent interpretation based on national constitutions, I argue that the flag has a different meaning based on a multitude of social factors. Spatial and temporal influences reconstruct and renegotiate the meaning of this national and cultural artifact. A flag represents nationality and pride for some, while it represents oppression and marginalization for others.

The flag debates within the Vietnamese and Tamil diasporas are symbolic representations of both resistance and community development. The Vietnamese communist regime, similar to the Islamic republic regime of Iran, redesigned the original South Vietnamese flag to represent the new government's principles and values. Anna Vu (2015) describes the flag debate among the Vietnamese community by differentiating the communist flag (red flag with a yellow star) from the original Vietnamese flag (The yellow flag with three red stripes). The original flag commemorates the lives of those who were lost and dislocated as the result of the communist takeover (ibid).



FIGURE 4: PRE-COMMUNIST MOVEMENT VIETNAMESE FLAG



FIGURE 5: OFFICIAL VIETNAMESE FLAG

In the diaspora, the original Vietnamese flag is a symbol of communal identity, which is inseparable from the diasporic norms and values. Vu (ibid) argues that the original Vietnamese flag represents the symbolic boundary that influences the diasporic membership. On the other hand, the Tamil's tiger flag is not a national, but a communal flag of freedom. The Tamil's tiger flag is a "red banner featuring a growling Tiger's head flanked by AK-47 assault rifles"(O'Neill 2015).



FIGURE 6: LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM FLAG



FIGURE 7: OFFICIAL SRI LANKAN FLAG

Tamil's tiger flag is a revolutionary representation of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is a militant organization that seeks liberation and independence from the Sri Lankan Government (Amarasingam 2015). The Tamil diaspora, which differentiates itself from the notion of a 'Sri Lankan diaspora,' claims their national and diasporic identity through the public exhibition of the Tamil's tiger flag. While the civil war came to an end in 2009 with the defeat of LTTE, their diasporic community involvement has continued to support the Tamil population around the globe both socially and financially (Amarasingam 2015; O'Neill 2015). By displaying the LTTE flag, Tamil people exhibit their communal support internationally, while raising awareness about the ongoing human rights violations against the Tamil population in Sri Lanka (ibid; O'Neill 2015). Tamil's tiger flag, similarly, acts as symbolic boundary between the Tamil and Sri Lankan diaspora. The aim of the Sri Lankan government and their associating diaspora is to redefine the LTTE as a civil disobedient terrorist organization. The Tamil diaspora, however, is trying to disassociate their human rights movement from the terrorist meaning attached to them by demonstrating the effect of the caste system, as well as, the

systematic abuse of Tamil community in the hands of the Sri Lankan government.

Therefore, the Tamil diaspora flies the LTTE flag as a symbolic communal unification, which reminds all of the oppression of Tamil bodies under the Sri Lankan regime of governance. (Godwin 2012; O’Neill 2015).

While the previous examples are from diasporic communities, sometimes the flag debates are homegrown and do not necessarily represent diaspora politics. In this case, the flag debate represents a historical disagreement regarding a communal cultural heritage. In 1964, when the Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson submitted a proposal to redesign the Canadian flag to embody Canadian solidarity and independence, it generated considerable debate across Canada, from members of Parliament to ordinary Canadian citizens and various organizations (Albinski 1967). The Canadian flag debate was sparked by an attempt to emancipate Canadian identity from British identity. Fraser (1990) explains the Canadian flag debate by indicating that “the sole function of any flag is to send a message. A national flag sends the message of nationality”; therefore, the Canadian flag was redesigned to represent “Canadian unity” (Hillmer 1999: 82). The Canadian flag debate of 1963 was a symbolic separation of Canadian nationalism from British imperialism (Fraser 1990).

On the other hand, while the Canadian flag debate attempted to create unity, some of the heritage flag debates reflect concerns about continued segregation under the banner of heritage preservation. The confederate flag debate is an example. Although many White Americans argue the confederate flag represents cultural heritage and southern unity, the flag has also been a continuous symbol of white supremacy in the United States

(Thornton 1996: 233). Several instances of white supremacist acts of terrorism committed against non-white Americans under the banner of confederate flag. It is important to mention that the association of white supremacy with the confederate flag entails a historical relationship. The confederate flag appeared during the 1860s during the American Civil war, which symbolizes Southern racist ideology that “valued the rights of the slave-owners above those of the slaves” (Trenticosta and Collins 2011: 126). Later, some white American politicians employed the confederate flag to resist racial integration in defence of Jim Crow (Cobb 1999; Webster and Leib 2001, Moeschberger 2014). Therefore, for non-white Americans, this flag represents a disregard of their identities and their rightful place in American society. The symbolic definition of the confederate flag continues to divide the country along racialized lines and is representative of ongoing racial tensions that continue to exist in the United States.

Similar to all the above cases, the Iranian diaspora’s flag debate stems from the community’s existing intersectional social tensions. The Iranian flag debate, similarly, is an attempt to establish a community identity by setting social boundaries to unite and separate. The Iranian diaspora has attached various meanings to different versions of Iranian flags, which are influenced by socio-political ideologies. While the flag is assumed to be a political artifact, the relationship with the flag is profoundly communal and affective. Therefore, the community’s intersectionality influences its interpretation and social negotiation in the diaspora. As a result, the Iranian flag debate is another instance of using a flag as a social artifact to define a community and set social boundaries.

DIASPORA: A SPACE TO MEDIATE

The diaspora's locational social environment provides a space for the revival of historical and political debates. Diaspora becomes a space to merge the past with the present, when the communal past is culturally different from the host's culture, and the host society is culturally unfamiliar. While the culture is evolving and the identities are reshaping temporally, diaspora assists the identity development as the mediator for those whose customs and immediate social group differs from dominant social discourse. Diaspora is the mediating ground for the culturally diverse bodies to reconstruct their identities in this third space (Bhabha 2004). When used by groups to define themselves, the concept of diaspora might appear as an excessive and unnecessary step in the natural process of identification and cultural evolution, but for the dislocated others, the concept provides linguistic and practical accessibility to maintain a spatial and temporal locality to connect the cultural and spatial past with the present. Diaspora offers the opportunity for those sharing a collective history or a collective identity to adjust in the new host society, which in case of Canada is culturally diverse one. Diaspora is also quintessential in the maintenance of the racially post-modern multicultural system. The idea of multiculturalism is the modern state of rationality that celebrates the racially and ethnically heterogeneous nation-state. Each ethnic diaspora introduces a new colour into the Canadian mosaic. Therefore, knowing the origin and the definition of the diaspora will help to explore and clarify the flag debate in exile.

The current definition of diaspora produces an ideal type to explain the experiences of those whose experience varies from the dominant discourse (Satzewich 2003). This definition is not culturally and ethnically exclusive, and it aims to produce an overarching

definition for those sharing similar experiences. The current definition evolved drastically over time to be an inclusive theory for all ethnic bodies. The concept of diaspora originally comprised of the experience of exiled and dislocated Jewish population, which made the definition ethnically limited (Safran 1991; Cohen 2008). Safran (1991) restructured the concept to signify the location of the homeland and the linkages applied by those living in host countries. He argued that the idea of the diaspora is not culturally or religiously specific, and there is a continuous relationship between the home and the host nation. He conceptualized diaspora by focusing on the legitimacy of it as a label with a set of boundaries to define this social phenomenon (1999: 260). Van Hear (1998) continues the works of Safran, Cohen, and many other diaspora scholars. While admitting the broadness of his definition, Van Hear re-evaluates the concept of diaspora, which he prefers to substitute with “transnational community” (5). His definition includes three criteria. First, there is the dispersal of bodies from the homeland to more than one location. Second, while the diasporic experience in the host nation is continuous, it is not perceived as permanent for the displaced community. Lastly, there is always a form of social and political exchange between these spatially separated diasporic bodies. While he agrees that his definition is broad, he remains adamant that political and economic orders deconstructed the concept of diaspora (6-8). The definition has been evolving, and these are some of the trends in this conceptual evolution, which both tighten and loosen the boundaries of this definition.

Based on the perpetual evolution of the concept, three dominant social factors reconstruct the current definition are the diasporic group, the host nation, and the homeland (Shuval 2000). These three elements are in a concurrent dialectical interaction, which makes

the experience in diaspora modifiable and unique. In the reconstruction of diaspora's definition, Cohen (2008) established a typology based on the interaction of these three social factors. His typology indicates the foundation of each diaspora based on nine shared characteristics. According to his ideal type, each diaspora originates in an initial dispersal from the homeland into two or more foreign locations. This experience of dispersion is often traumatic, but the dispersed members build a community based on the collective memory of the homeland, which is idealized and glamourized. Through their diasporic experience, the members form a strong ethnic identity and traditional foundation, which shares a cultural history, distinct to their community. The collective history and culture support the cultural transition and adjustment in the new home state (Cohen 2008, 17). There is a constant desire to return, but the members satisfy this need through a vicarious and virtual relationship with their homeland. Also, the diasporic minority ethnic status and experience of social exclusion create friction with the host nation. The social unacceptability assumes a critical force to bring the community even closer and to encourage an enriching life in the host nation (ibid). The current definition of diaspora bears similarities among all diasporas, but the given characteristics conceptualize diaspora as a distanced and intangible social fact. The current definition disenfranchises the diaspora from its internal hierarchies and merely dismisses the uniqueness of the individual's narratives that shapes the diaspora.

The three dominant social factors in the construction of diaspora—host, home and diaspora—are re-constructed in a complicated and continuous dialogue among identity, culture, and socio-spatial mobility. While the socio-spatial mobility appears to contain objective properties, identity and culture are fluid and dynamic, which are spatially and

temporally adapted. The original exodus lays the foundation for an ethnic diaspora and its cultural norms and values, but the community's exhibition of national and ethnic symbols creates a hub for new members from a spatially diverse and temporal cultural experience to congregate. The problem lies in original members' understanding of their ethnic and national culture compared to different waves of migration, who are joining and relocating among their growing diaspora. The cultural hybridity in the host nation impacts ethnic and cultural identity. While patterns of exclusion within the dominant culture can encourage the construction of diaspora, they do not exist in isolation from the cultural influences of the host nation. Both positive and negative interactions with the host culture and other ethnic groups are critical in the reconstruction of diaspora and its members.

Culture plays a significant role in the conceptualization of diaspora in a multicultural society. Culture, a performative process, is continuously reconstructed through dialogue among the subjective actors with their surrounding social world (Schutz 1967; Heidegger 1962). The forming identity, through interactions with the world outside, incessantly applies signs and modes of communication to create knowledge based on the existing social history of the surrounding world (Blumer 1969). Through the reproduced culture, social discourse integrates with behaviour and social patterns. In colonial multicultural discourse, the definition of culture is a puzzling contradiction. Colonial discourse defines culture according to a set of fixed elements that construct Others because the dominant culture is regarded as raceless and cultureless (Goldberg 2002, James 2003, DiAngelo 2011). The fixity of the culture denotes the historical hierarchy of group positionality founded on stereotypical characteristics given to racial and ethnic minorities by the dominant discourse (Bhabha

2004: 94). While the post-colonial democratic and multicultural system encourages culturally diverse society, the dominant discourse is based on past cultural othering of the ethnic and racial minorities by introjecting group positionality to maintain the fear of the Others' propagation and the ultimate loss of social location in relation to the dominant discourse (Blumer 1958).

In addition to group positionality, the colonial and oriental discourse focuses on the rigidity and permanence of the Other's culture established through the Western gaze. Western societies reduce minority cultures from a source of knowledge to a consumable object of desire. The dominant discourse perceives the ethnic minority cultures in a primitive, beautiful, and exotic state with a complete disregard for the complexity of the historical and social context, which contribute depth to the cultural heritage of each ethnic group (Bhabha 2004). Eurocentric societies place the ethnic minorities' cultures in a perverse exhibitionist diorama, and for it to be appreciated, it must be ostentatious. A combination of diaspora and multiculturalism, ethnic identity is reaching a fallacious conclusion of ethnic essentialism (Satzewich 2003). The assumed fixed cultural identity of the homeland, introduced in the host nation, disregards the dynamic development of the identity and culture (ibid: 16). With the colonial and oriental dialogue dominating the social discourse of Canadian society and the experience of segregation, the ethnic diaspora establishes a diasporic space to experience belonging and inclusion. All the while, the ethnic Others experience an inferiority complex and learn to perceive themselves through the gaze of the dominant class (Fanon). In the colonial and oriental discourse, one can learn to internalize oppression as the hegemonic social norm. The dominant social discourse affects

the process of the diasporic reconstruction of identity because the racialized ethnic body perceives their community not just through the communal point of view, but also through the dominant class gaze. By exposure to the dominant discourse, the personal image of one's ethnic community shatters and double consciousness disturbs the process of identity formation.

OBJECTIVE OF THE THESIS

The objective of this research is to revisit the diaspora theory by conceptualizing the Iranian diaspora and explore the historical and environmental influences that shape Iranian group dynamics. While the topic of discussion is the various flags of Iran, the flag appears to be a proxy, a tangible symbol of in-group contestation of Iranian diaspora. The Iranian's disappointing experience with an Islamic regime of governance and the current rhetoric of war-on-terror create a toxic environment for the practicing Muslim community members of Iranian diaspora. Through this research, I employ Cohen's (2008) ideal types of diaspora to set the skeleton of Iranian diaspora. His nine features might not be exhaustive, but they are visible in all diasporas in varying degrees. Satzewich (2002) states that while Cohen's nine common features of diaspora are a heuristic device, typologies can locate similar patterns existing across the diaspora with a space to reconstruct. Through his exploration of the Ukrainian diaspora, he argues that the history of the Ukrainian diaspora's intercommunal social hierarchy has certainly created a distinct diasporic community (ibid:18). Therefore, by reviewing the concept of diaspora, identity, culture and belonging, I argue that while all diasporas are not the same and Cohen's definition is an ideal type, his nine features are

limiting and incomplete. I aim to revisit the concept of diaspora to evaluate its validity and necessity, meanwhile criticizing its shortcomings.

Through historical analysis and qualitative data, I conceptualize the Iranian diaspora. Using Cohen's typology, I reimagine the Iranian diaspora and its unique properties. Through this research, I explore Iranian history and the factors that led to the construction of diaspora. The Iranian diaspora did not have a recognizable existence until the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Modarres 1998). During the post-revolution's anomic state, the first wave of migration departed Iran to maintain permanent residency elsewhere. During the analysis, I analyzed the multiple waves of migration. Each wave of migration varies politically and culturally. For instance, the first wave of migrants was predominantly made up of "political exiles," which included monarchist officials and political activists and freedom fighters whose lives, along with their families' lives, were in danger if they chose to return (ibid). Consequently, the first wave of migration founded the political and social infrastructure of the Iranian diaspora around the world. After the 1979 revolution, while the Islamic government aimed to restrict the global mobility of Iranian citizens, many left Iran permanently due to war or different forms of civil unrest caused by governmental oppression. Nevertheless, not all self-recognized members of the Iranian diaspora are asylum seekers. During the third wave of migration, a new group of migrants joined their permanently displaced diasporas around the globe. Due to lowered restrictions on international travel in Iran and limited educational and professional opportunities for the younger generation (Kazemi et. al 2018) a new generation of international students and entrepreneur class of migrants from Iran join the diaspora, which has heated the debate of

inclusivity and exclusivity within the community. Due to governmental corruption in Iran, the longer settled members of the Iranian diaspora expressed dissatisfaction with the arrival of the wealthy entrepreneur migrant class to Canada. The Business class migrants are typically associated with the Islamic Republic of Iran and argued to be those benefiting from the Iranian government's corruption. There are documented material suggesting high government official hands in embezzlement and fraud, such as the case of Mahmoud Reza Khavari managing director of Bank Melli, the largest Iranian state-owned bank. This scandal is indirectly related to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government and cabinet (Toronto Star 2011). These new Iranian influencers cause fear and paranoia since there have been many allegations against community members—such as religious figures, business owners, and different community-based organizations— monitoring, reporting, and harassing the members of the diaspora. The socio-economic status of this new migrant group is not the only issue that causes alarm among the Iranian diaspora. There have been official and unofficial cases of International students acting as informants in other parts of the world (Sally Neighbour, April 2010), which makes the Iranian diaspora residing in Canada cautious of this new affluent class. Fundamentally, each wave of migration introduces a new culture and social expectation into the Iranian diaspora.

I also argue that, while there is a communal history of the Iranian diaspora, the diasporic bodies have their intersectional and biographical relationships with their community. Members of the diaspora and their personal narratives reformulate the communal identity in diaspora. The interaction among the members normatively reconstructs the Iranian discourse. The members of the Iranian diaspora shape and reshape

the diasporic discourse in accordance with the diaspora's original narratives of oppression and exile. Since the Iranian diaspora is a political diaspora with victim narratives, the first wave of migrants initially built the diaspora on a foundation that sought a familiar place in unexpected and unfamiliar chaos. The Iranian diaspora was built as a remedy to homesickness, in search of familiarity in the new host nation.

Like the works of Bhabha (2004) and Hall (2014), the diaspora needs readdressing from the members' perception of their global homesickness. When returning to the diasporic community, the definition of diaspora varies, and each diasporic community uses different terminology to explain their life in an unhomey state. Different ethnic diasporas have a term in their mother tongue to describe their experience in diaspora. In Farsi, diaspora is the experience of living in exile. Looking into popular culture from the first wave of migration and the general Iranian media abroad, the experience of the diaspora is defined as *ghorbat* (Moghissi 2009: 71). *Ghorbat* is the subjective experience of taking refuge in a place that is not home, where an individual is a mere stranger. An Iranian diaspora is a gloomy place filled with longing and loneliness. The dispersed people from the self-defined similar ethnic identity share their loneliness in a place that is never home. The reminder that home was unwittingly taken away and occupied by an outlander makes life in the diaspora continue in a state defined by separation anxiety. The never-dying desire for a nostalgic past keeps the Iranian community in a void that blames their community for their misery and misfortune. *ghorbat* is the experience of loneliness when one is living in exile in a stranger's land. Haiedeh, an Iranian singer from the first wave of migration, refers to her diaspora as submitting to the foreigner's land, because she has no home (Bagheri 2006). The song

describes the foreigner's land as an empty house where no one is aware of your experienced pain. The image is melancholic, filled with hopelessness, a desire for change and hope for return. The experience of the diaspora is forced and non-consensual. Diasporic terminology describing the experience reshapes the general experience for each diasporic community.

The experience of members of the Iranian diaspora who are affected by their gender and sexual orientation is another social factor that restructures an individual's experience. Iranian and Persian culture reflects a gendered heteropatriarchal social system. The gender positionality and gender expectation from different Iranian bodies locate women and gender non-conforming individuals within a minority status. The gendered experience of the Iranian diaspora reconceives the diasporic narrative. Gender, alongside the confusion of physical and cultural dislocation, locates the gendered bodies in hierarchical relationships with straight cis Iranian men at the top of the matrix of domination in one's community and others in subordinated axes varying by intersectional factors. Moghissi (2003) argues dominant gender dynamics affect the gendered relationship among the diasporic community and eventually heighten the tension among gendered bodies. The tension in diaspora and the communal gendered interactions will affect communal association and diasporic ingroup dynamics. In Iranian diaspora, gender and sexual orientation influence the interpretation and attachment to varying Iranian flags.

Lastly, the experience in the Iranian diaspora has a religious and cultural element to it. Religion and culture appear to be in polar opposition to one another. Many perceive the separation of religion from the ethnic culture as a sign of nationalism and ethnic superiority. To be specific, separation of religion from Persian and Iranian identity means the separation

of Islam from Iranian ethnic and national identity. Iranians, unlike the widespread representation, are not all Shi'a Muslims. Iranians include a wide range of indigenous and non-indigenous religious followings, such as Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews, and other religious sects (McAuliffe 2008). However, due to Islam's unique history in Persian and Iranian culture, the majority of religious identity in Iran is Shi'a Muslim. While Islam has been a prominent part of Persian and Iranian culture, the transformative history of Islam and Iranian nationality creates a hostile environment for religious community members in the diaspora. The contested history of Iran with Islam locates Islam in an undesirable state. The Iranian diaspora's religious beliefs are individual's spiritual freedom and religious restrictions on Islam and those practicing it.

Gholami (2014) explores the religious interactions of the Iranian diaspora residing in London, UK, by focusing on Iranian Shi'a Muslims and "non-Islamious" Iranians. Gholami defines the religious experience of Iranian Shia Muslims residing in London, UK, as an Islamious experience. He argues that, due to constant pressure from the "non-Islamious" Iranians, many devout Shi'as choose to practice their religious preference in accordance with "non-Islamious" codes in a confused and unsatisfactory way. This study, although completed in the UK, reflects the experience of a globally linked Iranian diaspora. The disapproval of the current regime and, in extension, Islam as the religious ideology of the new regime has become established within the Iranian diaspora. Gholami (2014) adds that many Iranians see Islam as "essentially un-Iranian in nature,' which makes Islam and Iran forever irreconcilable" (74). The association of spirituality and politics of Islam leaves the devout Iranian Muslims in need of explaining their religious practice and renaming it as

spiritual and non-religious. To be a devout Iranian Muslim is difficult and stressful for a practicing individual. The stigma associated with Islam among the Iranian diaspora strengthened and became validated in the post-9/11 era. In the case of Iranian diaspora, the experience of islamophobia becomes the connecting social factor that brings the Iranian diaspora closer to the dominant host nation. The collaboration of the diaspora with the host nation over social unacceptability of the community's religious characteristic questions the validity of Cohen typology and his common features.

Through the critical analysis of ingroup interaction, I revisit the concept of the diaspora to conceptualize the Iranian diaspora and reconstruct their experience. The ingroup social contestation addresses the complexity of the Iranian diaspora. Since culture is fluid, which changes temporally and spatially, there is a question regarding the relevance and necessity of diaspora as a concept, and whether other existing concepts can fulfill the experience of those crossing national and cultural boundaries. Transnational groups, migrant groups, or ethnic identities limit the experience of those living in a diasporic community. Transnationality and globalized cultural development leave the diasporic bodies in limbo, and diaspora becomes the mediating ground for the community to congregate and construct a sense of belonging. Similarly, it is fallacious to assume that each diasporic community is one cohesive community. While there is a communal experience, there are internally fragmented hierarchies that complicate the relationship of diasporic identities. With exploring the flag debate, I will explore how sexuality, gender, and religion influence the interpretation of each flag.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

This thesis initially solely criticized the concept of diaspora, but as the research developed, the focus slowly changed its original trajectory to address the ingroup friction in a multicultural society. The theorization of diaspora along with the Western Muslim question eventually led to other issues, such as the ongoing tension existing between the Muslims and Others in western societies (Kazemipur 2014), ingroup gender segregation, and existing Islamophobia among a globally recognized Muslim diaspora to also become the focal point for this research. I argue that the social interaction between the diasporic community and the host nation's dominant religious hegemony produced a complex and unreceptive environment for the religious members of this diasporic community. The culture evolves, and social groups morph into each other, but the ethnic history and social stereotypes maintain an essentialist ethnic identity that forges the future of an ethnic diaspora. Through qualitative and interpretive fieldwork, I reformulate my questions to explore the significance of the flag in the social reconstruction of diasporic identity. Members of the community tend to address the flag as insignificant in their social association and community development, but after hours of discussion, it was apparent that the flag is indicative of ingroup frictions. My questions explore the ingroup friction among the Iranian diaspora and attempt to understand its temporal and spatial influences on the reconstruction of the diaspora.

Through this research, I introduce the colonial and orientalist discourse into diaspora studies by exploring the inter and intragroup conflicts in Canadian multicultural society. The research explores the influences of westernization and the inferiority complex imposed on

non-European ancestries, and how the colonial and orientalist gazes disrupt the cultural reconstruction process. Most importantly, the group's historical background and cultural ancestry influence the cultural and diasporic reconstruction in a multicultural society. These are the focal questions asked throughout this dissertation:

1. How do different waves of migration, gender, religion, and different political associations affect flag selection among the Iranian diaspora residing in the Greater Toronto Area and York Region?
2. How is gender negotiated among the Iranian diaspora? Moreover, how do the sexual divisions of labour and gendered identities of the Iranian diaspora reconstruct their sense of belonging with their diaspora and their association with the Iranian flag and its representation?
3. How is the flag selection indicative of religious identity among the Iranian diaspora? More importantly, how do the Iranian religious history and the western post-9/11 discourse of Islamophobia affect the Iranian diaspora's religious identity?
4. Lastly, how can the concept of diaspora be restructured to pertain to the complexity of the experiences of those identifying with it?

Through the exploration of these questions, I aim to conceptualize the Iranian diaspora through individual narratives and personal experiences in the diaspora.

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

The first chapter explores my methodology and the reasons for my methodological selection. In this chapter, I discuss my qualitative research process and the rationale for selecting participant observation and semi-structured interviews in examining the social interactions among the Iranian diaspora. In this section, I explore the methodological techniques employed toward the completion of data collection and fieldwork. Based on the general findings of the data—collected during interviewing and participant observation—I indicate the considerable gap existing between the theory and practice. As part, I indicate the shortcomings and the limitations of the selected methods; this, however, does not limit the productivity of the process or diminish the quality of the collected data. In this chapter, I examine and explain the research steps taken toward the completion of this research. Also, I introduce the readers to the detailed description of my research techniques, which includes the preparation, fieldwork, coding data, and writing process that followed.

The second chapter explores the theoretical background guiding my research. The main theoretical field guiding my research is the controversial field of diaspora studies. While I review some essential steps of Cohen's typology of diaspora, the post-colonial and post-orientalised literature and the cultural rhetoric in the multicultural global setting are perhaps more significant in exploring ingroup contestations in the diaspora. In addition, I explore the reconstruction of identity in a multicultural society that is dominated by the white framing of culture. For this purpose, I visit the works of Said, Feagan, Bhabha, and Fanon to indicate influences of the colonial and oriental discourse in imposing a static state on ethnic culture and identity. Lastly, I analyze the multicultural system, which commodifies

the concept of culture and redirects the idea of belonging for the ethnic minority into an ethnic and racial state. Therefore, I revisit the politics of belonging and boundary works in the diaspora. I review the works of Anthias and Yuval-Davis to examine the reconstruction of belonging in the diaspora. While belonging might appear as an internal affair, it creates a boundary that practices inclusion and exclusion through the symbolic language of the social group.

The third chapter of this dissertation addresses the history of the Iranian flag and its association with Iranian history and culture. In this chapter, I examine the historical evolution of the flag, both in Iran and in the diaspora. Through a historical analysis of Persian and Iranian history, I explore the reconstruction of the Iranian flag into a debated nationalist symbol of Iran. This historical background will provide the reader with the fluidity of this tangible object, leading to a better understanding of the current flag debate in the Iranian diaspora. While the current Islamic Republic of Iran redesigned the flag, the Iranian flag evolved overtime with its features continually changing. The relevance of the flag with Iranian identity, inspired by Iranian mythology and history, indicates socio-cultural influences—including religious inspiration—that design and redesign the Iranian flag. In this chapter, I analyze the history of the flag to explore the evolution of its symbolic definition and the underlying reasons for the occurring debate within the Iranian diaspora regarding this matter.

Chapter four deconstructs the foundation of the Iranian diaspora based on the current sociological definition of diaspora. This chapter attends to similarities and differences of the Iranian diaspora with the current definition of diaspora based on Cohen's "nine common

features of diaspora.” While Cohen suggests his typology to be an ideal type and diasporas varies culturally, I argue that, based on my collected data, his typology disregarded the ingroup interaction. While Cohen’s typology is useful in explaining the experience of diaspora, it fails to include the individual narratives in its definition. Cohen’s description of diaspora argues for a harmonious relationship within a diaspora, which becomes stronger when it encounters the rejection of the dominant host society. In this chapter, I argue that, depending on the ongoing politics of belonging within every diasporic community, the host country’s understanding of the group could actually further divide the social group and encourage contested identities. The Iranian diaspora’s communal divide after the 1979 Islamic revolution will influence social interaction in the diaspora. The ingroup tension reflects an ancient cultural identity revived in the diaspora, due to the shattered sense of belonging in the dominant society of the receiving nation. However, the Iranian history of trauma can bring the diasporic community closer to the host nation. The host’s stigmatization of one aspect of the community can coincide with the diaspora’s historical ingroup tension. Therefore, the diaspora can embrace that unacceptability by separating their dominant discourse from the unlikely characteristics. The dominant culture’s unacceptability might be the bridge that brings the diasporic community closer to the host nation. This chapter conceptualizes the Iranian diaspora and indicates the gap between the current theory of diaspora and the experience of the Iranian diaspora.

Chapters five and six focus on my fieldwork findings, which involve the analysis of social media, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. These two chapters draw upon the analysis of collected data during the fieldwork and interview process. In

chapter six, I review the historical and contemporary representations of gender in ancient and modern Iran. I explore the Iranian view on gender positionality and analyze the culturally and biologically determined gender and sexual identity among the Iranian diaspora. Based on current literature, Iranian patriarchal culture maintains a gender dichotomy that locates female and femininity at lower strata compare to the male and masculinity hierarchical position. While gender is fluid in Iranian culture, the fluidity maintains a dichotomous gendered value system. In this chapter, I argue that Iranian gendered history and culture subjugate women and dismiss the reality of queer bodies and their experiences. Through my research, it is visible that gender and sexuality play a significant role in flag selection. Women's traditional gender roles as mediators to revive and maintain the culture and men's traditional gender roles as the rigid boundary builder influence their flag choices, respectively. In this section, I also explore the experience of the Iranian queer community and their social association with the community and the flag. While the Iranian queer community has been silenced and isolated, their sexual identities are at the center of gender discussion as the transgressive and undesirable abnormality. For the queer community, their flag selection directly relates to their experiences in both Iran and Canada, which is affected by their gender and sexuality.

In Chapter seven, the analysis focuses on religious tension among the Iranian diasporic community. While the Iranian population is a religiously diverse one, Iranian history shows different dynasties' preoccupation with Islam after the 7th century's Muslim takeover. During fieldwork, the Iranian diaspora tends to redirect all discussions to Islam. The reason for this obsession is the complex religious history of Iranian culture. The origin

of this discussion is the Persian empire's Muslim invasion during the faith-based colonial conquest, dated back to the 7th century. Iranians accepted Islam as their religion, but they rejected the Arab culture that accompanied it. The acceptance of the faith was due to its similarities with the indigenous religions of the time. Besides, based on Zarathustra's prophecy, Persians viewed Muslims' violent arson of cities and villages as a religious prediction of a new prophet. The variation of religious faiths has always been part of Iranian culture, but after the Muslim takeover, Islam became the dominant religion in Iran. While Islam has been a dominant part of Iranian culture, the Islamic revolution of 1979 caused hatred toward this religion. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the religious leaders of this movement left their promises unfulfilled. This betrayal became the underlying source of hatred toward Islamic ideology, which Iranians assumed to have established the system of governance. This chapter focuses on the foundation of this religious animosity and discusses how the anger influences the flag selection and, ultimately, the maltreatment of Iranian Muslims in the diaspora.

In the last chapter, I will conclude my research by bridging the current literature with my findings to address the shortcomings and suggestions for future research in the field. I will review my questions and, in a concluding remark, I will redefine the concept of diaspora through the Iranian flag debate. I will indicate the significance of communal and individual narratives in the shaping of each diaspora.

CHAPTER 1 – METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

For this study, I am conducting qualitative research to inquire about the ongoing flag debate among the Iranian community. To explore the chaotic political climate and its effects on the development of the Iranian identity, I am examining the interpretational definition of the flag through social interaction with community members. My preconceived notions led me to a unidimensional path, which was fueled by the assumption that each wave of migration will identify with different flags determined by Iran's temporally cultural alteration. Through exploring the Iranian diaspora, I realized the flag debate is more complicated than I initially expected. In this research, I am exploring the political and cultural interactions among the Iranian community surrounding their flag selection. I question how the flag's interpretation by different migratory waves causes friction and division among the community. The flag, as a symbol of national linkage with the home country, is an omnipresent source of friction among the Iranian community, which many refuse to accept as a communal problem. To understand a community's social interaction and power structure in relation to an object, a researcher must investigate and acquire access to a community's interpretation of that object. The symbolic interpretation of any object is formed through social interaction at the community level to establish a dominant discourse. In order to access the Iranian community's interpretation of their national flag in the diaspora, an interpretation closely associated with communal boundary work and community

establishment, I need to investigate the diasporic community's interpretation of the flag. I apply three qualitative methods of data collection, which are interlocking and complementary to one another. I originally selected focus groups, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and visual analyses of images and videos available on social media. Due to a lack of interest, unwillingness, and general insecurity among the Iranian community, I discarded the focus group method and replaced it with community participant observation.

METHODS, APPLICATION, RE-EVALUATION

I initiated my research process with confidence that my methodological approach is operational and practical. Through focus groups, I was confident that I would determine the meaning construction process by inviting members of the Iranian diaspora to interact among themselves about the Iranian flag selection in the diaspora. I aimed to interpret their flag selections based on their ongoing group interactions in a safe space. Through focus groups, I was planning to create an artificial environment resembling a natural social space, which was accessible for observation and measurement of day-to-day social occurrences. I agreed with Liamputtong's (2016) claim that "focus groups represent the processes in which people construct meanings collectively in their everyday life" (3). The main purpose of the focus group is collecting qualitative data based on the individual's group interactions in "real life," and to analyze how meanings are shaped based on environmental factors caused by others because participants are "influencing and influenced by others" (Kruger 1994: 19). Unfortunately, my experience with the focus group was disappointing, since I was

unsuccessful in enticing subjects into focus group participation. I used this failure as an opportunity; after all, Barthes (1988) proclaims that the lack of data is data. Recruitment for a focus group was a challenging task. I ascertained the idea of politically charged group discussion was not welcomed by the Iranian community. Research recruitment must ensure the participant's anonymity and confidentiality to avoid unwilling participants, but anonymity is impossible in a focus group, especially when dealing with a small ethnic community, i.e. the Iranian diaspora. The interactive nature of a focus group might be intimidating and disconcerting for participants who are from a similar community, sharing a discussion on a topic that is controversial. A researcher must be aware of the severity of the social stigma or socio-political retribution one might encounter, which causes insecurity and vulnerability when dealing with the politically derived sensitive topic. The stigmatized individual might encounter ostracization from their community based on their point of view (Liamputtong 2016) or fear of delayed disciplinary action. In the case of this research, the ongoing flag debate in the diaspora is highly politicized, polarized, and emotionally charged for the Iranian diasporic community. The community members did not anticipate exploring their flag preference with other Iranians in a group setting. There was a general collective paranoia experienced by community members, who feared to have their personal and political beliefs exposed to others. A reasonable fear was experienced by many, especially those who have a transnational life abroad. The fear of the Iranian government intelligence services and Islamic Republic secret police among the Iranian diaspora residing around the globe prevents many from discussing their flag selections. The fear is founded in Iranian national sanctions on political expression and punishments that affect theirs and the safety of

their loved ones. However, the fear was not just about the Iranian government's justice system; many fear being labelled as a supporter of the Islamic Republic for agreeing with the current official flag. Therefore, the sensitive political topic of the flag discourages many from participating in a focus group, as they fear being exposed and losing face in their social groups, jeopardizing their safety and security when they go back or endangering the safety and security of their loved ones in Iran. The group vulnerability experienced by many created an ethical dilemma for me and discouraged me from pursuing the focus group as one of my methodological approaches.

I re-evaluated my methodology and chose to replace the focus group with participant observation. Based on my academic knowledge of participant observation, I, as the researcher, am able to observe the social interaction in a natural setting (Berg, 2004: 129). Through participant observation, I developed a multidirectional long-term relationship with the Iranian community in their socio-cultural setting to understand the community's social interaction and association (Lofland and Lofland 1995). To conduct participant observation, I, as the researcher, needed to be aware of developing a relationship with the subject of study, because the researcher's position is not of a passive observer, but as a member of the community (Cohen 2011). The community membership, however, is debatable because the social status of the researcher is different from the society they are studying, and the researcher does not share a similar socio-cultural relationship and history with their subject of study, even when one is conducting research in their own community (ibid).

Regarding this research, my experience was exceptionally different, since in many cases, the researcher is required to cross cultural barriers to gain access from the gatekeepers

to acquire membership within the community. My association with the Iranian community was as a member first and a researcher second. Prior to my research, I had the opportunity to discuss the selection of flags in gatherings with friends, which often igniting heated arguments. During participant observation, I was a community member who asked a general question about the politics of my community. I did not have the experience of an outsider, and I shared a well developed social and historical relationship as a member of the community. The community members were aware of my project, and there was no deception in exploring the Iranian flag debate. Many willingly shared their opinions without participating in semi-structured interviews. I attended Iranian events, watched people and struck up conversations with different community members. When participating in a community event, it was easy to take notes of my observation. The notes tend to include the events' communal dynamics, my discussions with the general population, and the position and selection of the flag during different events. Lastly, I took advantage of these events as recruiting opportunities to seek and invite willing participants for face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

The face-to-face interviews were the next step in the linked process of data collection. Semi-structured interviews are another ethnographical technique of data collection, which provides researchers with primary and in-depth data (Prus 1996: 20). I recruited colleagues, family members, and friends who were willing to be interview participants. I approached relatives, whom I had a chance to discuss my research with before or during the participant observation. These relatives showed interest in my study, and they were eager to participate. In addition, during participant observation, I approach individuals,

who were standing close to either one of the flags, or carried a variation of it on their body (such as flag in any size or wearing a flag pin). The original recruitment was then followed by snowball sampling through the existing interviewed participants. As a part of snowball sampling, I encouraged my participants to introduce and connect me to their friends and families. Some of my participants introduced me to their friends and relatives via email, Facebook Messenger, text message, telephone, or during face-to-face meetings. Through interviews, I encouraged members of the community to share their narratives regarding Iranian flags and their relationship with their flag of choice. The data that I was unable to collect during the participant observation of daily social interactions, I sought in detailed narratives of the interviewees. For face-to-face interview methods, feminist and postcolonial scholars and researchers challenge the power imbalance between the researcher and interviewee. These scholars encourage a non-hierarchical space for the exchange of personal accounts and decolonized language to avoid unidirectional researcher's gaze and the exclusion of the subject of study (Lund et al. 2018: 281). The issue of power relations in regard to the interviewer and interviewee is intricate.

According to the current understanding of interview techniques, there is an intersectional power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee (i.e. the “researcher and the gate-keeper” (Lund et al. 2018; Silverman 1998; Torngren and Ngeh 2018; Lund et al. 2018). The power dynamic between the researcher and the subjects is transactionally gendered, racial, social, and cultural. Torngren and Ngeh (2018) argue that anyone outside of one’s racial group can enforce a dominating gaze, which is biased and questionable. Although I am a member of the Iranian diaspora, I bear the gaze of a researcher from a

different social and educational stratum (Lund et al. 2018). I encountered difficulties because of my currently existing relationship with the community, challenges which I will discuss in greater detail in the segment on the limitations and shortcomings of my methods. I had access to the community and understood the community's language, but I still needed to gain the respondent's trust and to establish rapport (Fontana and Frey 2010: 655). Through my interview experience, I learned semi-structured interviews facilitate the creation of a safe environment for the interview subjects. I attended each meeting with my prepared, ethics-approved set of questions, but I did not comply with the list of my questions verbatim. Instead, I asked each question as a part of the conversation about the interviewee's experience with the flag, even if it meant digging for some of my answers in other questions' responses. I provided each interviewee with full agency over the trajectory of the interview. By minimizing the status difference and the general empirical hierarchy between the interviewer and interviewee (ibid: 658), I aimed to create rapport, seeking accurate and valid data. With the given volition to the interviewees, many interviewees felt confident enough to disclose private and personal accounts of their experiences in the diaspora, which created an emotional bond between us and provided me with fertile and insightful data.

For the last method, I conducted the sociological visual methodology and content analysis of images and moving images to explore some of the unexplored tensions existing in the community. I used Reddit, Facebook, and Google Images to explore the flag contradictions and community tensions. Images and audiovisual materials present a visual narrative, which produces empirical data on a community's cultural and social environment (Harper 2002; Weber 2008). However, an image is “re-presentation, which is to say

ultimately resurrection, and, as we know, the intelligible is reputed antipathetic to lived experience.” (Barthes 1977: 32). Each image produces a “literal reality,” but cultural and social analogical properties augment the literal reality, which makes the message of the image direct but debatable depending on the image maker(16). The continuity of an image and the polysemous meaning existing in any image might misguide the meaning production and create a biased interpretation by the viewer, i.e. the researcher. That is why the title of the image and the comments following must accompany each analyzed image to capture the distributor’s meaning.

In addition, I believe social media is necessary for ethnographical data collection to fill up the observational gap because social media’s archival images record a glimpse into the highlights of daily social interaction. Barthes (1977) argued that a “press photograph is a message” (15) with the photographer aiming to convey a message to the general audience. In the post-internet era, the location of the press photographer is more fluid because the position of professional journalism has been muddled by amateur journalism (Allan 2009). For the sake of earning a virtual reputation through online exposure, the Redditors and Facebook users aim to produce original materials from their immediate environment (ibid). When some issues are not perceived as newsworthy by the press, each social media reporter evaluates, produces, and distributes the news based on their ethnic cultural knowledge, community involvement, and social availability. People record and store every aspect of their lives, thanks to the invention of digital photography (Sontag 2004). In social media, the credentials of the image producers become trivial and insignificant, but the content remains viable. As Susan Sontag (ibid) contends, “photographs are us,” which indicates that

photographs are more than objects because they reveal a narrative that exists within the social realms. Therefore to capture a holistic image of the Iranian diaspora, I believe social media provide the missing data from participant observation and interviews.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Fieldwork: expectation and reality

After receiving my research ethics approval, I was ready to head to the field and begin my community involvement and data collection. My first step was to distribute my recruiting materials. During my advising session with a member of the ethics board, I was advised to include pictures in my recruitment posters and flyers to make them more appealing and enticing. The idea of colourful flyers and posters appeared to be a plausible design technique. To be in accordance with my research, I decided to include pictures of the lion-and-sun flag, Islamic Republic of Iran flag, and the diasporic white flag, which is popular in the diaspora. This idea made my flyer appealing and presentable, but I did not realize these colourful images might miscarry and backfire. I did not realize the negative connotation that the current regime's flag carries among the lay population of the Iranian diaspora. It was perceived by many as an attempt to normalize the current regime, and therefore the recruitment flyers and brochures were counterproductive. I decided to redesign my recruitment material by removing the pictures, but my flyer was already associated with the current regime's flag, and the idea of a recruitment poster and brochure were deemed inadequate. Therefore, I decided to redirect my recruitment technique and approach people during my participant observation in person to explain my project and avoid misinterpretation.

Participant Observation

Entering the field is a unique experience since the researcher is spontaneously involved with a multiplicity of methods (Kathleen and Billie Dewalt 2002). In part, I had to admit my introversion and challenge myself to start a random conversation with complete strangers. At points, it became difficult to start, but people were friendly to a community member. At times, they would not be willing to do a one-on-one interview, but they would discuss their opinion regarding the political climate and flag selection. I always carried a pen and a booklet, but eventually, I decided to upgrade the note-taking method by using my cell phone's text messages. Other than taking notes on my cellphone, after each community attendance, I spent half an hour to write down what I remembered from my interaction with others.

During my fieldwork, I attended a total of 10 different community events and family gatherings, using any opportunities to discuss the flag debate with anyone identified as a member of the Iranian diaspora. I began my preliminary participation in mid-November 2016, during a family gathering hosted by my aunt. I initiated conversation with different people attending the party. The discussion of the flag did not come up until friends and relatives asked about my life, which was my cue to explain my educational process and its reliance on the research focused on the Iranian community and their interpretation of the flag. I collected much useful data during these short interactions. After dinner, my aunt approached me to ask about my progress in the doctorate program, and when do I want to start my life. As usual, I discussed my research plan and asked for her opinion. Instead, she

stopped me and asked for the attention of the attendees. She continued by asking me to repeat my question for everyone in the party, which caused me to freeze in my seat. The experience was extremely uncomfortable and unsettling, but it gave me an opportunity to start a discussion about the Iranian flag and to witness this heated debate in action. As mentioned by many of my interviewees, the tension is omnipresent, but no one acknowledges it. The dinner party attendees were a group of people from a similar circle of friends, but their views of the flag were disjointed and contradictory. While all the attendees agreed on the same flag of Lion-and-Sun, the debate about the symbolic definition of the sword in one variation of the flag took a harsh turn. One believed the sword was representative of Islam and Imam Ali, while the other believed it to be a symbol of monarchy and military. The monarchist woman loudly expressed herself by saying, “why do you mix everything with Islam? How does the sword on the national flag represent Islam?” To which the other replied, “have you forgotten Ali’s sword? The sword is Imam Ali’s Sword”. The discussion had to be stopped by my uncle when the two women lost their temper and changed their causal friendly tone to unfriendly politeness. (Fieldnotes, 2017) During my participant observation, I attended four more gatherings of family and friends. Each gathering included around thirty to forty attendees. While friends and relatives hosted these parties, I did not know all of the attendees, which helped me to access a larger sample of the Iranian population.

After preparing myself in a familiar setting, I widened my field of research. During the Iranian diaspora’s preparation for *Nowruz*, I attended different social gatherings, such as the Persian New Year Bazaar, alongside different local markets, such as Super Arzan and

Red Rose Patisserie. The Bazaar and the Iranian market tend to be crowded during the Iranian New Year. When noting non-verbal cues, social hierarchy and racial divide were omnipresent in different markets. In addition, I participated in *Sizdah beddar*'s annual picnic in Earl Bales Park. Unfortunately, the location I attended was not as crowded as I had hoped, but I located a car overtly covered in Iran's lion-and-sun flag. I approached and introduced myself to the group. Unbeknown to me, the president of the Iranian-Canadian Senior Citizens Center of Ontario was among the group. I introduced myself to the organization's president. After handing me a small pin with a crossed Canadian and Lion-and-sun flag, he invited me to attend their organization's weekly events. I decided to attend ICSCCO's weekly gathering as one of my observation sites. Their event was graciously opened by everyone standing, while the event's organist played the Canadian national anthem and the Iranian Monarchist national anthem. The event was relatively crowded with seventy to one-hundred participants, and enough lion-and-sun flags to go around. The President of the organization gave me a flag as a gift for participating in the weekly ICSCCO's community gathering. Lastly, I spent an hour with York University's Iranian Student Association (YUISA), as they voted on which Iranian flag to represent them. The choices were between the IR flag and a white flag with IRAN written in the middle; also, their options did not include the Lion-and-sun flag. It was a *deja vu* for me since almost ten years ago a similar vote took place. YUISA had internal friction because of the selection of the Islamic Republic of Iran's flag. Many students expressed anger and dissatisfaction, and the Association was forced to remove the IR flag after the news reached social media. They replaced the Islamic Republic flag with the emblemless white flag. That is why it was

interesting to see the results of the vote almost ten years after the first flag disagreement. The Iranian Student Association's members voted to have the Islamic Republic of Iran flag as their representative.



FIGURE 8: STUDENT ASSOCIATION IRANIAN FLAG



FIGURE 9: STUDENT ASSOCIATION SELECTED IRANIAN FLAG

During each event attendance, I surveyed the location to check for the visibility of different Iranian flags. While it was challenging to start a conversation with random strangers during each event, I would approach the person closest to the flag. I generally complimented the raised flag and asked if my companions or I could take a picture with it. This approach helped me to feel at ease to strike up a conversation, especially with those who used the flag as a sign of pride. Many were open to unofficial dialogue, and they felt at ease to discuss the flag during the community gathering but did not feel comfortable, secure, or even safe to discuss it in the private official setting of the interview room. Many were polite enough to accept my interview invitation, but those meetings rarely happened.

One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews

I sampled the population of Iranian diaspora residing in GTA and YR through participant observation and family connections, as well as snowball sampling. To have a fuller representation of the community, I selected a diverse sample of respondents for the interview process. I conducted a total of 27 official and non-official interviews. The interviewees included 11 females, 15 males, and one gender non-binary individual. Most of my respondents identified as heterosexual, except for two men, who self-identified as “gays.” The majority of the respondents were above 30 years of age, but I managed to interview five people under 30, three of whom were second-generation Iranian-Canadians and under the age of 20. Other than the three second-generation Iranian-Canadians, the rest migrated to Canada at varying waves of migration. After a close consideration and careful analysis, I selected five interviewees, who fit the characteristics of 1.5 generation Iranian-Canadian. Also, I attempted to include a diverse sample from different migratory waves.

Based on social availability and accessibility, most of the respondents were from the third wave of migration, followed by the second wave, and subsequently, first waves. While the respondents were all from Iran, their places of birth were diverse, which is a testament to Iranian cultural diversity. I interviewed ethnically diverse Iranian people, who were originally from different regions in Iran. The diversity of identity was represented in religious identity as well. While Iranian identity is associated with Islam, only three of the respondents self-identified as Muslims. The rest, other than two who were practicing Baha'is, did not identify with any religious beliefs. There was a variety of non-practicing Muslims, agnostics, spiritual religiosity, or simply none. More than half of the non-religious respondents identified their religion as none, which is non-atheistic non-religiosity. One respondent identifies her religious association as Love. The political diversity of the sample group spread evenly, which extended from far left to far right, with a small percentage categorized as apolitical. During the interviewing, I interviewed three community leaders. I also, strategically and conveniently, selected a wide range of occupational groups. My sample included two professors of social sciences, three people in finance, two filmmakers, one aesthetician, one mechanic, two retirees, and one homemaker. The rest of the respondents were students, with more than half from higher education, acting as teaching assistants in different universities and colleges.

Each interview was expected to last between 30 minutes to an hour. I used my LG4 cellphone's voice recorder to record the interviews with the permission of the respondents. I offered to meet with the respondents at their most convenient time, which made the scheduling difficult at times. I offered to meet with willing respondents in a public place of

their choosing. Due to the bilingual likelihood of the Iranian community (Farsi and English), I provided the respondents with a choice to respond with the language that is most comfortable for them. Prior to an interview, I would have a short chat in Farsi to settle in and get comfortable and provide an opportunity for respondents to choose Farsi if they are more comfortable with it. Many respondents, although uncomfortable with the English language, opted to answer in English. At times, rusty and broken English led to my confusion, in which I asked for clarification in Farsi, but to my amazement, the respondent chose to clarify their answers in English. While Farsi appears to be the familiar language for the members of the Iranian diaspora, the English language of the consent forms and my social location as an interviewer, who has access to the Canadian higher education system transformed my location as a community member and shifted the general atmosphere of the communal interaction. While I aimed to deconstruct social boundaries, the participant did not perceive me as an average community member. For many of the respondents, the interview experience was participating in an anglophone encounter. I believe my location as a researcher and the existence of legal documents created a hierarchical relationship that encouraged Anglo culture to intrude on this ethnic location. I had few who chose to answer in Farsi, but knowing the respondents' language of choice remains unpredictable. Another common lingual response was the familiar diasporic mix of English and Farsi or Persianglish or Finglish, in which the respondent uses both English and Farsi in a unique grammatical style. This linguistic approach was commonly used among those who came to Canada at a younger age.

During the interview process, I encountered a common ethical dilemma. For a meetup location, most of the respondents invited me to their place of residence to spend an evening for tea and sweets. At first, I explained I would prefer to meet in a public place as requested by the ethics board, but the respondents perceived my rejection as a sign of disrespect and were hesitant to continue with the process. I weighted this ethical dilemma from my ethnic community's standpoint. I needed to be respectful of my diaspora's cultural and social norms because accepting the invitation is proper etiquette in Iranian culture. However, the research ethic guideline disregards the cultural norms of ethnic groups in multicultural Canada by strictly advising against selecting a private location for interviewing, which appears to be for the safety of involved parties. I revisited my methods and, to eliminate the colonial and orientalized hierarchy, I chose to respect the norms and etiquette of my diasporic culture. By inviting me to their homes, the respondents displayed their courtesy and trust toward me, and I was expected to behave properly by accepting their invitation. Also, the respondents were comfortable to discuss the flag in their place of residence, which provided me with a quiet environment to record the interviews. When I interviewed people in their homes, they tended to share a tangible artifact that assisted them in clarifying their responses. They felt at home to rummage through their long and isolating biographies in a safe place without prying ears in close vicinity. In their homes, I had the opportunity to dig deeper into questions, since many began to share a detailed account of their hardships and the long journey, they took to escape oppression under the current regime. They expressed their experience in Canada and their experience with their diaspora.

Some respondents invited me to meet with them in their workplace. They participated in the interview process while carrying on with their daily tasks. I had the opportunity to meet with social activists, professors, and doctors during their work hours. The respondents casually carried on with their daily tasks while carrying a conversation about the Iranian flag. The experience was rather different when I was interviewing an individual in their office in comparison to their home. At home, the respondents tend to share the entire history of their migration to this point, the ways they travelled, their decision-making process, and their personal preference of a certain flag. At the office, considered a secure and private environment, the respondent's voices tend to be quiet and whisper-like at points, the reason being unwanted visitors, and interruptions by clients, colleagues, and supervisors. The use of Farsi was more common to hide certain information from the Anglophone coworkers. The office environment made the interviews more focused on the topic instead of an individual's personal experiences in the diaspora. The professional space of the interview encouraged the respondents to explore their understanding of the flag, its history, and the general climate of the Iranian diaspora. The respondents rarely shared their affective account with members in the diaspora. Instead, they focused on the socio-political relationship with the flags and other community members. If a respondent shared a personal account of their experience in the diaspora, it was to explore the topic of the flag, and not just to share the untold account of their personal experience.

Other than residents and offices, some respondents offered to meet with me in coffee shops, but it was not the most popular option. In all cases, I offered to pay for their coffee, but all rejected the offer. One respondent even paid for my coffee before my arrival. The

casual atmosphere of a coffee shop created a comfortable space to share personal information, but not as much as interviews that took place in the respondent's residence. The participants appeared to manipulate their public visibility as a cloak of invisibility because other coffee shop patrons were busy with their daily tasks and routines. The interviews that took place in the coffee shops produced the ideal interview practice, but I could not create the bonds with the respondents in a way that I made in their homes. The interviews that took place in the coffeeshops had the balance of the personal account and socio-political elements. The data produced was productive, but the transcription became a nightmare. Two interviews became indecipherable due to the noise of the coffee shop masking the respondent's answers.

Sociological Visual Method

In this method, I used social media images and audio-visual materials. Facebook and Reddit posts were the dominant sources of data. I focused on the videos and images on the discussion of the flag. The questions and comments following each image were complementary to the visual data. The images and videos were carefully selected based on the appearance of the flag, and the general discussion following it. I regularly visited the r/Iran subreddit, which is a diasporic virtual community with 16,388 members all around the globe. The subreddit's profile picture is the white flag, and there have been several discussions surrounding the flag debate. One of these discussions instigated with a readjusted picture of the Islamic Republic of Iran flag to resemble the queer rights movement's rainbow flag. The image received a great backlash since many Redditors disregarded the image as Islamic and non-national. They argued that the Iranian flag is not

the Islamic Republic flag, and the designer needs to remove the emblem from the middle. Another discussion instigated after a music video was shared, which was in admiration of the lion-and-sun flag. The discussion was in favour of the lion and sun and vitriolic toward the Islamic Republic flag. The discussion's foci were the experience of isolation and disappointment in the Iranian flag's religious implication. On Facebook, I followed the Iranian Senior Club page, since the community was extremely involved with the acknowledgment and recognition of the lion-and-sun flag. The page's administrator regularly shared images of the lion-and-sun flag. There were a few videos depicting tension surrounding the flag selection, with one video showing a physical altercation among the Iranian diaspora's members. I also conducted searches on Google with keywords like Iranian flag, Iranian diasporic flag, Flags of Iran, the Iranian flag in GTA, and the Iranian flag in York Region. I collected a total of 9 pictures from the GTA and YR, including images of desecrated Islamic Republic flags, overexposure of women with lion-and-sun and white flag, Toronto based demonstrations in support of Iran's civil unrest in Iran under the lion-and-sun flag, and representations of the Islamic Republic flag during Toronto's Pride Parade. Among these images, I have included two pictures, which are not from the GTA and YR, but the symbolic representation of these images is analytical. The first image is from Rio Olympics in August 2016, in which a female protestor is carrying a lion-and-sun flag and demanding Iranian women freedom to attend sports stadiums among the sea of Iranian audiences waving Islamic Republic flags. The second image is of Shirin Gerami finishing the Kona Ironman Triathlon in October 2016, while carrying an Islamic Republic flag.

Data analysis: Transcription and Approaches to analyzing spoken discourse

After each interview, I would listen to the collected data to assess the interviewed questions and the participant's responses on a pair of headphones, which maintained the confidentiality of the responses. By listening to the interviews prior to their transcription, I had an opportunity to review my questions and interview techniques. Through listening to each interview, I would assess technical errors in my interviewing style. During the listening process, my focus was on the alteration of questions and my interview techniques for future interviews, rather than the content of the collected materials. In the majority of cases, I transcribed the collected data immediately upon arrival in my home office. The immediacy of transcription aided me in accessing the unaltered, yet vanishing memory of the interviews. I could even include notes about verbal and non-verbal cues, such as physical gestures, which were not accessible through recorded materials on the voice recorder. The transcribed data was eventually saved on my personal laptop and backed up on an external hard drive, which is both passwords protected and accessible only by me.

Recruitment is a daunting task when seeking appropriate and willing participants. Months may pass with no one interested in being a research participant. I used this opportunity to begin the next step of my research. Since I completed the transcription of recorded interviews, I began analyzing and coding the collected data to that point. To analyze my collected data, I decided to upload the data to one of the qualitative data analysis software. Due to accessibility and pricing, I avoided the well-recognized options. Dedoose.com is an online application, which applies similar analysis techniques and record-keeping as other qualitative software, such as ATLAS or NVivo, while being the most

accessible and financially reasonable mode of qualitative data analysis. My data is available to me from any computer with an internet connection for a reasonable monthly fee. The application is also safe for my archived data because the application is password-protected, and I am the only one who has access to the collected data.

Coding process

Coding is a calculated procedure. It requires multiple assessments to produce inclusive and direct, but specific and detailed codes. The primary coding produced multiple pages of codes, which only relates to one or two interviews and not the whole collection. I originally coded for manifest and latent content simultaneously, which caused confusion in the original set. During the interview process, some respondents were reflecting on their observation of tension in the community, while others were reflecting on their account of stressful incidents during community-based events. While coding the interviews, other inter-communal issues surfaced that were related to the ongoing tension among the Iranian community. Issues such as Islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, or racism were either directly expressed and reflected on, or hidden in the language or the tone used by the participants. Some participants shared their experiences with in-communal injustice and oppression. Some would not admit to their biases and prejudices, but their language and tone revealed their senses of entitlement and oppressive behaviours. These accounts and responses were not mutually exclusive, since some respondent recalled community-based tension, and used biased or oppressive language. Each one of these expressions needed to be coded properly, which turned into a lengthy list of codes.

During my second coding process, I reread each interview and reduced the quantity of the codes by merging two or more codes together. I narrowed down the codes based on an expressed general theme. During the second coding process, I had the opportunity to read the transcribed interviews side by side, which gave me an outlook on the Iranian community's internal tension and conflict. The codes were narrowed down to fifteen recurring themes and later classified into four groups for analysis. The four overarching categories are consensus and social integration, nationalistic pride, in-communal divide, and diasporic community development. Each category includes three to five codes, which I will unpack in the following paragraphs.

The first category is consensus and social integration. Acceptance, the first code, is the agreeing with the Islamic Republic of Iran as the current regime of governance in Iran but simultaneously challenging it. This code focuses on the bureaucratic and official representation of the Islamic Republic flag at an international level. Apolitical and cultural code indicate the Iranian community's attempt at maintaining an ethnic group away from the community's political disagreement. This code focused on the cultural aspect of the Iranian diaspora, which helps to establish the community as a diasporic ethnic group. The hybridity of the identity was explored by many respondents, whose experience is uniquely related to their diasporic community and their relationship with the dominant class. There was an experience of frustration, which coincided with a sense of belonging to a familiar group. Lastly, loyalty to the last regime is perceived by many as a glue that keeps the Iranian diaspora intact, and it is accepted by many as an unquestionable foundation of the Iranian diaspora. It is important to mention that the original exodus took place due to the loss of the

monarchist regime, leading to a desire for the good-old-days regulating the foundation of the Iranian diaspora.

Nationalistic pride includes the three codes of building boundaries, cultural pride and nationalism, and resentment toward the current regime. Building boundaries includes codes indicating a lingual separation of one's culture from another, either through the praise or ridicule of other cultures. The community participates in an inclusionary and exclusionary practice. This boundary building has a strong orientalized undertone, which affects the general themes of the code. Cultural pride and nationalism refer to borderline prejudicial cultural praise, since the respondents' pride in their ancient history and cultural practices cross the lines of cultural superiority using colonial and orientalist discourse. Lastly, resentment toward the current regime is an expression of anger to the Islamic revolution, the Islamic republic, and criticism of the current regime due to their destruction of an ancient culture. The last code explores the bitterness, sadness, and disappointment, which is fuelled by the experience of dislocation. The last two codes are interrelated. Due to the current regime's cultural disruption and imposed integration of what is re-perceived to be an Arab colonial religion into a system of governance, the Iranian diaspora bears the responsibility of restoring their ancient culture.

The next category of codes focuses on ingroup conflict, which includes five codes. The diversity of Iranian identity arrived out of responses focused on Iranian diversity in ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and other social factors. Each respondent shares their personal account with challenges of diversity in the Iranian diaspora. This leads to the next code, which is ingroup segregation and conflict. The interviewees discussed tensions among

the community members, which ranged from tense situations to actual arguments or physical altercations among members caused by political diversity. This ingroup segregation leads to two of the dominant codes in this research: insecurity in the diaspora, and Islamophobia. Resulting from experiences with the historically oppressive Islamic Republic of Iran's international intelligence services, many Iranians experience insecurity in the diaspora, because of the fear of secret police and Iranian intelligence agents. The insecurity roots in the safety of the individual and their family if they express their political beliefs in front of the wrong member of the community. Therefore, members of the Iranian diaspora create a stereotypical characteristic of the Islamic Republic's supporters in order to protect themselves and their families. The search for symbols of the Islamic regime propels the community to follow a misguided search, which associates Islamic symbols with the government agents. Many Iranians perceive their Islamophobia as a rationalized prevention tactic. Weak communal ties, the last code of this category, is the result of the in-group tension and orientalized practices. Many were unhappy with disjointed Iranian relationships and suggested ways to mend this broken community. The last category of codes includes codes that address diasporic community development. This category includes nostalgia, segregation in the host nation, and uniting diaspora. The last set of codes relates to the foundation of diaspora and its evolution in the host nation. Nostalgia was omnipresent in all interviews. The interviewees focus on memories of the past, which they experienced firsthand or through the oral history of the older generation. These nostalgic images brought the community closer and solidified the foundation of this community. The remembrance of the home that was left behind encouraged the members to maintain their community in

diaspora. Another common theme is the communal segregation of the Iranian community in Canada. The community development is important since the diaspora experiences unacceptability by the host nation and other ethnic groups. Therefore, to have social capital, a community needs cohesion — many expressed dissatisfactions in communal fractures of the Iranian diaspora. Next, uniting diaspora coded any suggestions for stronger community relations. Respondents express their dismay in community fragmentation and propose different culturally inspired community building projects to create consensus among the Iranian diaspora. According to the respondents, a cohesive Iranian community strengthens inter- and intracommunal relationships.

TABLE 1: THE FOUR CATEGORIES OF SELECTED CODES

Consensus	Nationalistic pride	In communal divide	Diasporic Community development
Acceptance	Building boundaries	The diversity of Iranian identity	Nostalgia
Apolitical and cultural	Cultural pride and Nationalism	Ingroup segregation and conflict	Segregation in the host nation
The hybridity of the identity	Resentment toward the current regime	Insecurity in diaspora	Uniting diaspora
Loyalty to the last regime		Islamophobia	
		Weak communal ties	

SHORTCOMINGS AND LIMITATIONS

While the qualitative research method produces rich and fertile data, the method does have technical and interpretational limitations and shortcomings. There are sampling biases and a problem with the representativeness of the population, alongside the issues with methodological reliability and validity. I was aware of these shortcomings, but qualitative methods were the most appropriate methodological approach for this population of the study. However, I did not anticipate the disparity between the theory and practice of fieldwork. I encountered unforeseen challenges, such as difficulty in the recruitment of willing and consenting participants, scheduling fiascos, language challenges, and communicational barriers. I learned that qualitative data collection and its fieldwork are spontaneous and messy.

Sampling Bias of Small Iranian Community

I employed nonprobability sampling through convenient and snowball sampling techniques. These sampling techniques made my data collection a possible process. Due to the sensitivity of the research topic and the community's power dynamics, however, probability random sampling is practically impossible. The community members were not available to answer political questions to someone who they were not familiar with in fear of secret agent and informant working for the Islamic Republic of Iran. By using nonprobability sampling, I was exposing myself as a neutral researcher. By accessing familiar community members and getting a referral for other community members, I was aiming to secure my position as a non-political researcher. I still had difficulty accessing

community members, even after ensuring my lack of association with any political party. Nonprobability sampling is appropriate for studying the Iranian diaspora, but sampling bias and limitation of representativeness of data will affect my analysis. Nonprobability sampling will not provide equal opportunity to all members of the Iranian diaspora living in the GTA and YR to be represented indiscriminately. While probability sampling provides equal opportunity to the population as a whole, the non-probability sampling method is the only essential sampling method to access a vulnerable community and recruit willing participants to discuss such a sensitive topic.

For this research, I need to be cautious about generalizing my findings to analyze the entire Iranian diaspora based on the recurring themes discussed in my small sample. The generalization of collected data influences the validity of the research's results. To limit issues of data validity, I meticulously collected a diverse sample of Iranian diasporic community in GTA and YR. While applying snowball sampling to recruit, I selectively interviewed people from different social classes, genders, Iranian regional ethnicities, sexual orientations, and other social characteristics to reinforce the validity of my data. By diversifying my sample, I accessed a wider sampling range for a more accurate representation of the study population. A diversified sample was not as easy to find as it appeared to be. I had to control for different descriptors of each individual and search for specific characteristics among my available sample to access the subgroup's interpretation of the flag. The practical aspect of sampling and recruiting willing participants was difficult. A larger sample may have generated more data, but given the range of opinions and views captured in my interviews, I feel confident that I have a reasonably accurate picture of how

various segments of the diaspora interpret various flags that represent Iran and the Iranian diaspora.

Challenges of a sensitive topic

One of the challenges of sampling the Iranian diaspora is in the political nature of the Iranian flag debate. As mentioned earlier, I was forced to change my methodological direction by discarding focus groups from my methodological approach. The focus group was not an ideal data collection method for this research. The idea of a group coming together to discuss the flag debate instigated a sense of insecurity, uncertainty, and an unwillingness of the subjects to participate. Respondents were not willing to expose their political views in front of other community members in fear of exposure as the Islamic Republic sympathizers or the unknowing participation of intelligence agents in the group discussion. Therefore, I was ethically obligated to eliminate this method from my methodology, and only focus on face-to-face interviews, but my experience with face-to-face interviews was as difficult and uncertain as to the focus group.

Recruitment for the semi-structured interview was intricate. I was confident that the Iranian diaspora is an accessible community since I am a member, and I do not need to access through the gatekeepers of the community. As a community member, I am knowledgeable and fluent in inter-communal verbal and non-verbal symbolic interaction. The recruitment started easily since friends, family, and colleagues were receptive to my work. I was received with enthusiasm and support. My family, friends and colleagues expressed interest in the research, and they willingly volunteered to share their knowledge about the flag and its political association. The first set of interviews gave me a short-lived

confidence to widen my sample. The difficulties surfaced as I contacted those referred to me through snowball sampling, as well as to social and political leaders of governmental and non-governmental sectors. The unwillingness of the community members surfaced as my links weakened. The community members were insecure about discussing a political topic with a stranger.

Political dynamics, community accessibility, and the scheduling conflict

After the preliminary interviews with personal contacts, I contacted a series of community leaders via email. The email included a short introduction about my research and PDF attachment of an informational brochure. I do believe that the original brochure with the representation of the current flag of Iran attached to these emails was significantly discouraging for these community leaders. One of the few community leaders who responded to my email was an Iranian Member of Parliament. Their assistant responded to decline my offer because the MPP is unable to answer any question according to protocols for MPPs and ministers. I reassured that their involvement is strictly confidential and anonymous, but they rejected my offer again. Knowing this MPP's political views and their critical view of the Islamic Republic system of governance, I should have anticipated their unwillingness when seeing the brochure and assuming the association of the research with the current regime in Iran. I did eventually manage to persuade two community leaders to participate, but I had a previous personal relationship with both community leaders either through school or volunteer work.

My recruitment experience was contradictory to what I imagined it to be, in comparison to my community involvement and my experience with the first set of

interviewees. My community involvement decelerated the data collecting process, and I was not ready to handle it properly and immediately. Initial contact with the community members was effortless since many were eager to participate. The enthusiasm, however, faded away rather quickly, either out of insecurity, inability to say no to a community member, or mere scheduling conflict. The first reaction to an interview was enthusiasm, but when contacted to schedule a meeting, the responses were drastically different. My communal, cultural and lingual access into the community fuelled community members' original enthusiasm, but many changed their mind after assessing their position, the political nature of this discussion, their schedule, and how it would affect their relationships in Iran and Canada. Being a member of the community, other community members felt obligated to support a community member in Canada. During a telephone conversation with an elderly man, he praised my success in higher education and expressed how fortunate he felt to be a participant in this project. Upon his enthusiasm, I felt confident to request a meeting with him, which he agreed to. However, he changed his mind on the day of the meeting, because his friends advised him not to get involved in such political matters.

Another obstacle was scheduling an interview appointment. In some cases, the problem was scheduling conflicts and participants' difficulties in making time for an interview. In these cases, I offered other modes of communication. I interviewed two people who were unable to speak in person via email correspondence. On the other hand, some respondents did not want to participate in such political debate, yet they were unwilling to reject my offer. They would provide me with their phone number but were not expecting my call. They either would not answer my call, or they assured me that they could not talk, and

they will call me back, which they never did. Some offered to meet with me in a couple of months and, even then, they would postpone. One respondent called me at noon to cancel the meeting we had that same afternoon. He offered to call me back to reschedule. He then requested that I do not call him because he will call. At the time, this became frustrating, because I was never certain if the scheduled meeting would happen or not. I was not sure if the subject will show up or cancel at the last second while I am dressed and sitting in the car ready to head out. The older man mentioned earlier is a community leader and an avid supporter of the lion-and-sun flag. He agreed to meet with me on several occasions, and I attended every scheduled appointment. In all occasions, he had an excuse to reschedule the meeting for another convenient time. Finally, during one of his events, he started to explain his choice and his passion for the flag. I stopped him to get his signature on the consent form, at which point he requested to stop the interview and to reschedule again. When I called him back, he did not answer. Instead, he texted me back to let me know that his friends advised him to decline the interview. The political climate of the Iranian diaspora and the fear of secret agents was discouraging people from participating in such political debates. Another older woman who agreed to read over my questions invited me to her place of residence to let me know that she cannot help me since she travels to Iran often. She felt insecure in associating herself with the issue of the flag and supporting an idea that might cause her trouble back in Iran. She praised my bravery and argued that I could never go back to Iran with this research, and that is why she did not want to be associated with the project. Even after I explained the entire process and the oath of confidentiality and anonymity, she felt too insecure and unsafe to continue with her participation. Since this

woman was a family friend, it felt disrespectful to leave immediately. I ended up spending forty-five minutes with someone whom I barely knew.

In addition, the interview sessions were unpredictable because many of the interviewees were more interested in sharing their untold personal experiences in the diaspora. Their accounts made the interviews lose focus, but they provided me with valuable data. I had an opportunity to understand an individual's experience before and after migration, as well as their history and its relation to their experience in the diaspora. One of the male respondents I interviewed was in his mid-fifties. He was an active member of a People's Mojahedin Organization. He talked about his prison break, and the cyanide pill he kept under his tongue in case of his arrest. During the interview, he would carefully listen to every question I asked him and proceed by saying, "let's come back to this later," which he never returned to it. I did not have the chance to ask him most of the questions on my list, but I had the opportunity to explore his narrative and how it relates to his political location and identity development in the diaspora. Therefore, some of my interviews were not the semi-structured interview I anticipated. Instead, they resembled an oral history. Those interviews produced fruitful data, but not in an expected manner.

Transcription, technology, and language

One of the limitations of my methodology surfaced during my transcription process and difficulties with the voice recorder. For example, during one of my office interviews, I collected more than I bargained. Mid-interview, the respondent stopped to answer her phone, and I unknowingly recorded her entire conversation. The recording was extremely problematic because she was providing highly confidential information to the person on the

other side of the phone. Upon listening to my recording, I contacted the individual to inform and ensure her that her phone conversation is off the record and disposed of immediately. This was a unique experience, but the voice recorder caused detrimental problems. Based on the environment of the interviewing location—usually in a public setting—I encountered low sound quality or complete loss of data. During coffee shop interviews, the surrounding noise left the recording inaudible or sounding like gibberish. For instance, while interviewing a respondent in a quiet coffee shop, a large and loud group of teenagers unexpectedly arrived. My interviewee continued louder, but the recording predominantly was masked by the noise of teenagers, who took over the entire café. Transcribing that interview was one of the toughest tasks I had to do. Lack of a voice recorder, however, created a different challenge. One respondent requested for no voice recording or other computer technology during the interview, which I complied with it. During the interview, I lost valuable data while speeding through and summarizing the subject's responses. Taking notes by hand was not a habit for me. I needed to stop her more than once to catch up, and I still managed to miss some of the data. Later, when I transcribed the data into a word document, I had a difficult time reading my squiggly handwriting that was trying to catch up with the respondent's spoken words.

Lastly, one of my main challenges was doing qualitative research in a bilingual environment, where the native language is secondary to the official language. When I was interviewing members of the Iranian community, I needed to translate my data to use for analysis. In cross-cultural research, Philip Larkin, Bernadette Dierckx de Casterlé, and Paul Schotsmans (2007) argue translation and the techniques used for translating, subsequently,

affect the produced data and findings. While I am fluent in both Farsi and English and acting translator of collected data, I struggled to find a translation that captures the true essence of some of the respondents' ideas. Some terminologies are not translatable through other languages. During analysis, I aimed to use the original audio data alongside the transcribed works to maintain the authenticity of the responses. Other than the issue with lost data during the translation, I interviewed many who were adamant in being interviewed in broken English. There was an unwillingness to participate in Farsi, which was more familiar to them. I believe my data would have been richer if those respondents chose the language, we chat in before the interviews. Lastly, the use of Persianglish or Finglish became an unexpected challenge since I am most comfortable with this grammatical style. I was comfortable with it and did not realize how challenging it is to translate into English. Finglish is the language of diaspora, used by the younger generation and a true representation of hybridity of identity. When translating it, however, I had to switch back and forth several times in one sentence.

CONCLUSION

During the data collection, I encountered many challenges, which evolved into a fertile learning opportunity. The greatest challenge I encountered was my detailed planning and my assumption of impenetrable strategy. During my research fieldwork, I realized my planning expectations must be flexible and accessible. Fixed strategies for fieldwork lead to stress because the researcher is not prepared to encounter the spontaneity of human subjects.

I should have been prepared for the uncertainty and insecurity of the fieldwork. When in the field, the researcher is more than an individual or a community member for the participants, and the participants are more than just a subject of the research. Each individual enters the field with their biographical narrative and personal history, but there is always a power dynamic in effect that is multi-directional and socially constructed in the daily interactions. Qualitative research is a complicated method of knowledge production analysis. While my personal account with other's narrative and the power dynamics between the researcher and the subject influenced my interpretation of collected data, the qualitative methods determine the process of knowledge production through the individual's reflection on others, and self-reflection in the day-to-day interaction with other social actors. In qualitative research, an individual's account is the focal point, which is attainable during fieldwork, be it in an event or the solitude of the interview room. A researcher must acknowledge that fieldwork is founded in the day-to-day interaction and is, therefore, unpredictable and spontaneous.

CHAPTER 2 – DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

When pursuing the concept of diaspora, its image has been romanticized. Diaspora is imagined as a refuge to secure the lost sense of belonging and to rebuild an identity that is vanishing upon contemporary relocation, or cultural relocation caused by ancestral exodus. Different diaspora scholars delve into the concept, but the theoretical exploration of the group experience has conceptualized the diaspora as a distanced and intangible entity. Diaspora is separated from its internal hierarchies and forgiven for the in-group's power imbalances. Different scholars define diaspora according to three dominant actors: the diasporic group, the receiving nation, and the homeland (Shuval 2000). There is a dialectical interaction among these three groups. Cohen's (2008) diaspora theory, which includes nine common features, focuses on the dialogue among the dispersed bodies, receiving society's response to them, and the significance of home culture in the revival of diaspora. His nine features argue that the originator of the diaspora is in dispersal from the homeland into two or more foreign locations. This experience of dispersion might be traumatic, but those living in diaspora build a collective memory about the homeland, which is idealized and glamourized. Through their diasporic experiences, the members of a diaspora build a strong ethnic identity according to their ethnic identity, whether it is based on a communal history, a religious commonality, or sharing of common heritage. There is a frequent desire for return, but the members are satisfied by their "vicarious relationship with homeland" (ibid, 17). Lastly, the relationship of the diaspora with the host nation is perceived as troublesome, which is fuelled by the social exclusion of their ethnic community. Feeling of being

excluded from the larger society is an important force to bring the community closer and to encourage an enriching life in the host nation. The reimagined idea of a home, where your experience is understood, is heartwarming and promising, but is this the reality of each diaspora? The lack of members' narratives limits the definition and leaves a void in the general diasporic experience.

Diaspora is not a fixed concept in a vacuum sealed space, alienated from all other social factors. The convoluted dialogue among culture, identity, and mobility reconstruct the concept of diaspora. Coexistence of these three social elements produces transformative and fluid characteristics for each diaspora. It is rather challenging to define diaspora solely based on a series of ideal types that are expected to be encompassing of all dislocated groups from a diverse national and international historical background. While the original exodus lays the foundation for an ethnic diaspora, the diasporic community establishes a location, which is a shared space for all new members from diverse cultural experiences from the culturally and socially evolving homeland.

Meanwhile, the founding members have a distinct expectation of the home culture, which is extensively different for each wave of migration departing the home to join their growing diaspora. Besides, to the evolving culture of the homeland, the experience of cultural hybridity reconstructs the culture and identity of the community members differently in different receiving countries. While the construction of diasporas is in response to the dominant culture's segregation, they are not surviving in isolation. The exposure to cultural segregation from the dominant culture and other ethnic communities influences each diaspora's cultural formation. While the desire to return wains as life goes on, the cultural

attachment remains strong. In the case of exiled diasporas, the new growing population in the homeland seems as homegrown enemies. For the exiled diasporas, the myth of the past keeps the diasporic identities connected and involved with their community; therefore, the new members' social narrative is required to correspond with that of the exiled diaspora. The new members' narratives are expected to include a transactional experience of oppression under the new regime. If the narrative does not relate to maltreatment, the existing community labels the new members as disgraceful for being financially advantageous or for their willingness to be brainwashed by the nation-state's propaganda or to act as informants living among the diasporic community. The experience in the diaspora is complex based on the social agents, the history, and the new environment where the diaspora is shaping.

IDENTITY FORMATION IN DIASPORA

Identity is a significant part of the understanding diaspora, but the current typology separates the concept from the subjective experiences of its members. The definition of the diaspora is incomplete when the process of identification is left unnoticed. Identity is a transformative concept, influenced by temporal and spatial social factors. The identity construction happens at the local and global level with both collective and subjective influences. Identity is the process of becoming, which is shaped based on local, cultural, developmental and global social changes. Identity, which is not a fixed entity, adjusts based on cultural norms and social mores. Identity formation in the diaspora is not selectively a diasporic experience; it is the continuing process of self-reconstruction initiated at birth. The fluidity of identity is not constructed in an amnesiac state either. The personal and collective

histories influence the reconstruction of self as a by-product of an individual's participation in social interaction. Social interaction is the foundation for the social reconstruction of identity and culture. It is in this dialectical approach that the individual's self takes shape and, as Hall states, "Identity emerges in the centrality of agency and politics" (1996, 2). The individual's subjective experience with their socio-political environment shapes their identity. To sum, identity has a selective historical past, which influences the spontaneity of the present self-reconstruction and sets paths for the future of the self.

In the diaspora, diasporic bodies experience an unhomely state. In this unhomely state, individuals rely on a traditional interpretation of an evolving culture. Bhabha argues, "Past-Present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (2004, 10). Bhabha indicates the diasporic body's detached roots seek a place that bears the cultural resemblance of the individual's experience. In the diaspora, identity reconstruction, although never stopped, is disturbed. The disturbed identity reconstruction relies on an ancient culture seeking to strengthen one's communal roots in a space that alienates their ethnic status. The first-generation diasporic identity discerns itself as an unclaimed foreign particle. In this spatial and temporal experience, the only option to reclaim a sense of belonging is to latch onto a history, buried in traditions and static cultural values. In his colonial discourse, Fanon refers to this state as a state of occult instability that the diasporic body dwells in (1963, 226). He argues that this cultural reliance might be a source of empowerment, but the lack of balance keeps one in an imaginary society that is spatially-specific and builds on the myth of one's cultural identity. Fanon's colonial definition of this state share similarity with the experience of many diasporic groups. For instance, while the Iranian diaspora latched to

cultural identity frozen in the time of their departure, the culture of the homeland has evolved. Simultaneously, while the homeland culture has evolved, the experience of host land remains uninviting. The cultural dissonance in diaspora disturbs the reconstructed diasporic identity, which is the foundation for the future generation.

DIASPORA FROM INSIDE TO OUTSIDE

Each community defines their diaspora differently through ethnic terminology, which is related to their communal narrative of their dislocation and unhomey state. The Farsi term widely used to define this experience is *ghorbat* (Moghissi 2009). *Ghorbat* is the experience of being a stranger or living in exile. The experience of the Iranian diaspora is a gloomy state filled with the narrative of homesickness and loneliness. *Ghorbat* is a subjective experience of separation and taking refuge in a place where the exiled body remains a mere stranger. Construction of a diasporic community is finding the familiar in the unfamiliar, as a remedy to homesickness. The discourse of *ghorbat* is part of the Iranian diaspora's popular culture, which was established during the first wave of migration and continued as a part of the general Iranian media abroad. As an example, Haiedeh, an Iranian diva from the first wave of the Iranian diaspora, refers to the diaspora as living in dismay and being forced to accept the stranger's land as the new home, since the old home is the remaining ruins of past (YouTube channel Bagheri 2006). Since the 1979 Islamic revolution is the origin of Iranian dislocation and their global migration, the Iranian diaspora blames their nation for their dispersion and depression, which feeds into the communal divides. The dominant narrative

of the Iranian diaspora founded on national betrayal alongside the experience of *ghorbat*, which is deteriorating the Iranian diaspora from within the group.

The reminder of Iranian occupation by Muslim fanatics who betrayed their people keeps the community in a state of separation anxiety with a never-dying desire to return, but fearing the return. The Iranian in the diaspora, or Persian, as they define themselves, relies on a nostalgic past that freezes the Iranian community in a void, blaming their community for their misery and misfortune. Anyone resembling or carrying symbols of the current regime that caused their exile is the enemy. While for many the feared in-group enemy is real, in many cases the fear is based on randomly-selected stereotyped characteristics. Construction of diaspora is to bring community members together to soothe their aching hearts, but the politics of belonging refuse membership to some. The existing norms and values create and maintain the boundaries of belonging within and without one's diasporic community. One is expected to follow the norms and values presented by their diasporic community to fulfill the emotional attachment lost upon dislocation in the dominant society. The weak ties with the dominant society encourage the diasporic identity to build strong ties with their diasporic community. The already existing ethnic and racial belonging creates a vulnerable state for members of the diaspora. Lack of social access to the dominant class forces many to submit to the diasporic power imbalance of the sub-oppressive class – when oppressed class encounters struggle, instead of liberating their community, they become oppressive (Freier 1999). The sub-oppressive class forms in a misguided attempt in response to the existing oppressive isolation in the dominant society. The sub-oppressive class is the ethnic and racial minority's response to a lack of social equality and acceptance. In the new

society, the only model for the subordinated ethnic and racial minority group is the white frame founded in the Eurocentric hierarchy and acceptance of the “attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor” (Ibid, 45-46). Similarly, the dislocated bodies who once had social autonomy use this opportunity to reclaim their lost social power. The aim is to gain the lost social location during the process of cultural dislocation. Therefore, the ideas of equality and equity juxtapose the idea of union with the dominant class. Therefore, in-communal contestation encourages separation among community members.

For instance, the current Islamophobia existing within the Iranian community living in the diaspora is the by-product of social unacceptability and an old wound left untreated for those who were forced to flee the country. This poetic analogy is internalized by many. The civil political setback for Iranian identity instigates a fit of anger directed toward the governmentally-sanctioned religion. Based on the religious foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Islam becomes an unlikely companion in this political battle. Forced religious identity replaces the Iranian religious autonomy under the new legal system, where the non-Muslim defined behaviours encounter severe punishment. The growing religious animosity toward the disappointing new regime, and the anomic state caused by the 1979 Islamic revolution, in effect, followed the Iranians into the diaspora. The forced exile caused by Islamic revolution founded an Islamophobic discourse, which blames the origin of Islam in Iran during Arab colonization of Persian empire. An orientalism style definition of Islam resurfaced, which divides the members of the diaspora and damages their relationship with the Muslim communities who are not part of the Iranian diaspora. While the symbols integrate social actors, it can be the source of group division. The symbolic interpretation of

what relates to the Islamic government of Iran becomes the source of anger and hate, turning all that symbolizes Islam into the representation of hate and dislocation in the diaspora.

DIASPORA AND MULTICULTURALISM

The receiving nation directly influences the construction of different ethnic diasporas. Since this research explores the Iranian diaspora residing in Canada, the Canadian cultural system is relevant to its construction. What defines Canada other than the maple leaf, hockey and Tim Horton's? The answer is multiculturalism. Canada's multicultural national identity sets an ideological environment for the formation of different ethnic diasporas. While the concept of diaspora is rooted in a history of migration and transnationalism, it gains a fresh success in modern society that encourages multiculturalism and celebrating one's culture in the host nation. The idea of multiculturalism for a post-modern democratic nation is the sign of modernity and rationality. Multiculturalism is the expectation of recognizing the diversity of a racial and ethnic heterogeneous nation-state.

Multiculturalism is a celebrated system for its politics of recognition of different ethnic minority groups (Taylor 1997). Multiculturalism, according to Taylor (ibid), exists because withholding recognition to ethnic and racial minorities is form oppression (36). Through multiculturalism, individuals can be recognized based on their unique identity and celebrated for their differences, be it ethnic or racial, and simultaneously benefit from the similar right and equality in accordance with the "politics of equal dignity" (ibid, 38). Kymlicka (2011) defends multiculturalism by referring to it as multinational citizenship, which is a familiar model in promoting inclusivity for the immigrants and other culturally

and socially dislocated groups. The concept of multiculturalism aims to encourage equality for racial and ethnic minorities by focusing on differences. When reviewing the concept, multiculturalism provides a space for racial and ethnic minorities, especially new migrants, to reproduce their cultural practices in a new environment. However, one question is whether multiculturalism fulfills its promises?

Each nation's racelessness is designed based on their "social, political, legal and cultural conditions peculiar to their historical context of articulation" (Goldberg 2002: 220). The Canadian multicultural principles model following the settler's race-less ideals, in which whiteness is the normalized and the dominant racial discourse (ibid: 224). Multiculturalism, however, through the exhibition of cultural diversity, renounces the history of genocide, exclusion, and ghettoization of racialized bodies originated in colonization and orientalization (ibid: 203). Multiculturalism, while advertising for diversity, perversely allocates the racial identity in the middle and centre. The focus of multiculturalism adamantly remains on the concept of difference. In this isolating state, the diasporic community forms a shelter for ethnic minorities living there. The existing colonial and oriental discourse in the host nation, however, influences and dominates the developing diasporic discourse. In Canada, the framing of white Eurocentric norms establishes the hegemonic knowledge production of the dominant class. The dominant Canadian discourse normalizes and maintains a racial structure, in which the white race is the expected and invisible social norm (James 1999; DiAngelo 2011). In this racial dialect, the ethnic Other experiences an inferiority complex, and a self-perception of oneself painted through the gaze of the dominant class. The ethnic and racial Others internalize social oppression as the

hegemonic social norm. The white framing of the dominant class directly influences the process of diasporic reconstruction of identity. The perception of one's community in comparison to the dominant class and the imposed experience of cultural inferiority disrupts the healthy continuity of culture and identity reconstruction.

In a multicultural society, the white framing of culture negotiates ethnic identity in a colonial and orientalist discourse. The dominant narrative of ethnic identity and culture is contradictory and limiting. While the colonial and orientalist discourse represents Others as individuals with a fixed backward culture, the Others continuously maintain an exotic sexual property in the dominant culture of the host nation (Said 1978). The mythical characteristics associated with the ethnic and racial bodies commodify their culture and identity. Under the guise of multicultural celebratory practices, the dominant discourse reinstates a historical and traditional perception of the cultural identity of ethnic bodies. Based on a series of superficial cultural traits, the concept of cultural difference feeds the multicultural system's requirements and situates the dominant culture in the position of authority, in comparison to other cultures, which sit tightly in their subordinated positions.

Diasporic narratives and multicultural discourses establish a multi-level hierarchical system for the diasporic identity to reconstruct, wherein diasporic bodies experience the dominant culture's framing and counter-framing within their communities. Eventually, the normalization of a universal association between secularity and western civilization affects their experiences. Adamant that monarchy will return, the Iranian community still compares the experience of Iranian life before the 1979 Islamic revolution to a European experience. The discussion does not argue that the religious government disrupted Iran's progress, but

rather that it destroyed the path to European civility. This comparison restates Said's orientalism of the East and the impact of western superiority and the counteracting inferiority complex of the rest of the world. The constant referral to the current regime's political regression of the country and allowing the Arab Muslims to take the country back to the dark ages intends to separate the Iranian identity from the "backward" and "held back" Arabs. The Iranian experience with Islam sets in colonialism and imperialism. The original colonization of Iran took place in the 7th century through indoctrination and acculturation of Iranian culture. While the process was not devoid of colonizing the culture and identities, Iranians reclaimed their Farsi language and their Persian culture. After mass religious conversion, the Iranians reclaimed their tarnished cultural identity by rejecting the cultural chauvinism of the Arab world. While the relationship between the Arab Muslims and Iranian Muslims maintained equilibrium through different Persian and Iranian dynasties, the recent failures of the 1979 Islamic revolution revived an old religious animosity, and Orientalist rhetoric replaced the dominant discourse of the time.

The colonial definition of ethnic culture is contradictory to the definition of culture. The ethnic culture sets on fixed elements that construct Others because the dominant culture is perceived as raceless and cultureless (James). The fixity of the culture denotes the historical hierarchy of group positionality. For the groups in higher positions, their survival depends on stereotypical characteristics given to racial and ethnic minorities by the dominant culture (Bhabha 2004: 94). The assumed rigidity of the Other's culture authorizes the Colonial and Oriental discourse, which originates in the Western gaze. Culture, a performative process, is continuously reconstructed through dialogue among the subjective

actors with their surrounding social world (Schutz 1967; Bhabha2004; Heidegger 1962). The forming identity, through interactions with the world outside, incessantly applies signs and modes of communication to create knowledge based on the existing social history of the surrounding world. The produced knowledge is the foundation for the culture that integrates behaviour and social patterns. Therefore, the views on ethnic groups' cultures, consisting of things like clothing, dance moves, and food, are appalling, but limited. The limited perception of culture reduces it from a source of knowledge into a consumable object of desire. In the host nation, representations of diasporic cultures are primitive, beautiful, and exotic with a complete lack of acknowledgment of the complexity of the historical and social contexts which contribute depth to their cultural heritage (Bhabha 2004). The ethnic cultures are appreciated based on the diversity they provide the multicultural system. "Appreciation of culture is a kind of Musee imaginaire, as though one is able to collect and appreciate them" (Bhabha 1990: 208).

In multicultural societies, while different cultures apply their cultural differences as a form of symbolic capital, the superficiality of ethnic cultures serves a national purpose for the dominant class. The display of ethnic culture is a symbolic resource for Canadian Multicultural survival. The symbolic resources are culturally oriented, and they help to establish, contest and maintain the existing and current social factors (Lamont and Molnár 2002). These symbolic resources are the foundation for the symbolic boundaries, which categorize and separate diverse populations into specific social groups. Lamont and Molnár (2002) states people employ their symbolic boundaries to "acquire status and monopolize resources" (168). In a multicultural society, these symbolic boundaries of cultures provide an

important neoliberal purpose for the dominant class. The collection of diverse ethnic cultures is a sign of civility and higher social strata of post-modern societies (Bourdieu 1991), which parades the nation as modern and democratic. Multiculturalism's cultural diversity, however, refuses to challenge the historical and cultural hierarchy and matrix of domination that frames a society based on Eurocentric values. The assumption that all these consumable cultures are cohabiting side-by-side in peace and harmony, alongside the dominant culture is disingenuous. Diasporic identities exist with a nagging reminder that they do not belong. To be an established social group, one's community must compete with other ethnic communities to gain national recognition. National recognition does not assure social power because social hierarchies are set based on Eurocentric symbolic power. While the ethnic diasporas establish Canada as a Multicultural system, the original reason for the formation of diasporic communities is to challenge the unacceptability of the dominant culture and to strengthen their lives in the host nation (Cohen 2008: 17).

The cultural difference ensures an intricate experience for the racial and ethnic minority groups, who are attempting to negotiate a cultural identity while adjusting to their cultural hybridity within the dominant society (Bhabha 2004: 3). The cultural difference is encouraging an essentialist approach to culture (Cohen 2008), which ignores the temporal and spatial transformation of an ethnic society (Hall 2014; Bhabha 2004). Multiculturalism encourages and celebrates the ethnic communities' traditional dependencies — the celebration of cultural diversity diverts the focus from cultural inclusion to the distinction of differences. The construction of the diaspora relates to this assumed celebration of differences, and it is an attempt to escape the experienced isolation and subjugation of ethnic

and racial minorities. The colonial discourse reappears in this limited perspective of cultural differences (Bhabha 2004: 3). The concept of culture has transformed from the source of socially constructed knowledge reproduction into a source of consumable objects, which is translucent in the state of misguided cultural diversity (Bhabha 1990: 208). Multiculturalism continues to build on the colonial discourse that focuses on differences to maintain the social hierarchy of the West over the rest. This socially and culturally fragile cultural state shapes and establishes the diasporic experience. While an ethnic culture's exoticism is desired and required for the national identity, they are separated and isolated.

POLITICS OF BELONGING IN DIASPORA

The reminiscence of belonging echoes through each diaspora. While belonging encourages construction of a space for community development and cohesion, it also reinforces conformity and punishes transgression. Belonging is a relational concept, after all; identities are fluid, and therefore, everyone has multiple ways to belong, which are spatially and contextually formed (Anthias 2009: 20). A social group's affective properties define communal belonging (Yuval-Davis 2016). Belonging is a state of emotional attachment to a place and situation that responds to longing for stability and safety (Leong 2009). The diasporic community's sense of belonging weaves a safety net to fall back on when seeking a place to call home. Affective dimensions of belonging construct social bonds with all that is familiar, but the collectivity of familiarity disregards the border and boundaries that separate the members from non-members and transgressors. Anthias (2006) argues that by

“imagining” through internal and external dialogue, identities construct and reimagine belonging, which then normalizes the concept and regulates it into a social fact. “Such constructions produce a ‘natural’ community of people and function as exclusionary borders of otherness.” (ibid: 21). Thus, belonging is in an interplay of inclusion and exclusion of bodies according to the social group’s norms and mores. She further argues that social inclusion does not translate into social cohesion. The concept of belonging is puzzling because belonging means there are ranges of space, location and bodies to which one does not belong. The bordered interaction is the basis for the politics of belonging, which built on the affective deficiencies in diaspora and political demand for norms and values. According to Yuval-Davis (2016), the politics of belonging maintain the reproduction of hegemonic communal boundaries within and outside of the community, which also sustains “contestation, challenge, and resistance by other political agents” (3). The concept of belonging is different from the politics of belonging, but they thrive in the same social and mental environment. The politics of belonging refers to the application of affective belonging to establish and maintain communal boundaries. For instance, the construction of a diasporic community through ethnically oriented advertisement and public displays of cultural symbols create a sense of familiarity and safety. That sense of belonging is achievable if the individual is well versed in the ethnic rhetoric of the displayed symbols.

In diaspora studies, many scholars focus on the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities and address their challenges in the construction of social belonging within the dominant society. In the host nation, the sense of belonging is tarnished when the diasporic body is punished for being an outsider socially, culturally, and legally (Cohen 2001; Yuval-

Davis 2006; Anthias 2006; Kazemipur 2016; Walia 2013). Therefore, the tarnished sense of social acceptability and a longing to belong become the dominant reasons that diasporic communities come together (Cohen 2008). The belonging within one's diaspora, however, requires following the communities' norms and values according to the diaspora's set values. Boundary building becomes an important part of a diaspora's development. It is the "...rites of the institutions to suggest that all rites tend to consecrate or legitimate an arbitrary boundary by fostering recognition of it as legitimate..." (Bourdieu 1991: 118). While boundaries are a basis in community development, they shift based on internal and external forces (Anthias 2006). The boundaries of the diaspora do create a safe space for many seeking a familiar space, but the boundaries divide us from them, and the others (Winter 2014), which are changing simultaneously. The "Us", "them" and the "Other" is a triadic, triangular relationship, which begins with social interaction of two hierarchical groups of "us" and "them". This existing relationship to give meaning to their dyadic relationship requires a "real or imagined outsider" to confront, which is "them". This relationship creates complex space to create a sense of belonging.

The desire to belong is not only an affective experience since the emotional aspect of the concept serves political purposes. The concept of belonging is necessary to establish boundaries and maintain symbolic cultural borders. Politics of belonging are closely related to the concept of the nation-state, which in effect will continue onto the diaspora. A nation-state is a socially constructed concept, built on the interaction between historical and political borders and emotional attachments to those boundaries. The experience of nationalism is an emotional response to these interactions. These emotional responses are

not a self-conscious awakening to love one's country, but a method to invent and reconstruct the concept of the nation by interacting with the emotional concept of belonging (Anderson 1983: 6). The sense of belonging becomes a political concept, since it is through the interplay of politics, belonging, and the emotional responses to them, which produces concepts such as national values and citizenship. Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that the politics of belonging produce certain norms and values for membership and membership rights. She argues that there are several levels of belonging, which include "social locations, identities and ethical and political values" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 209). In the diaspora, the national belonging is highly racialized and challenging to permeate. In a democratic society, the consensus of "democracy" and "human rights" are assumed to introduce a flexible and tolerable set of boundaries to bring all citizens together, and to reimagine "belonging ... as having the most permeable boundaries of all" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 209). Yuval-Davis (2006) argues democratic norms and humane social values are superficial, because the subjective experience of belonging continues to be limiting and impermeable. The juxtaposition of the politics of belonging and emotional vulnerability caused by a lack of social attachment encourages the ethnic and racialized bodies to retreat to their ethnic and racially familiar communities. The diasporic communities are a response to these limitations, but again, are these diasporic communities cohesive spaces for their members to feel fully belonged?

Belonging is a manifold, identified based on its spatial and temporal existence (Anthias 2009). Therefore, it is wrong to assume belonging is experienced only through ethnic and racial relations. In the diaspora, however, the limited political and social rights eliminate the racial and ethnic minority's sense of belonging. In the diaspora, racial and

ethnic minorities seek their sense of belonging elsewhere. The post-modern multiculturalism with its perverse obsession with racial structures pressures people to allocate utter significance in their race and ethnicity above all other social factors; thus, many take shelter among their ethnic/racial diasporic communities. Ethnic belonging stems from the framing of whiteness as systematically institutionalized in society's infrastructure (Feagin 2013: x). Colonial and orientalised mentalities frame the white identity as the mainstream, taken for granted social norm with access to social and political capital (ibid: 3).

In the white racial framing, the experience of non-white social members influences their sense of belonging, when the social hegemony limits their membership. In this state of undesirability, the question of racial and ethnic belonging remains in the limelight. Anthias' (2009) trans-locational theory, which focuses on the group composition of the diasporic body, is significantly related to the experience of belonging in a diasporic community. While the boundaries for belonging are diverse and translocational, it is difficult to focus only on the spatial and temporal identities, when some of the identifying characteristics are more dominant than others. In the case of diasporic identities, with darkening of the skin and thickening of the accent, the racial identity becomes the prominent signifier of one's identity above all other social factors (i.e. gender, sexuality class). Therefore, the sense of belonging becomes predominantly defined by racial and ethnic markers. In that ethnic belonging, hierarchies play a key role in the sense of inclusion/exclusion and social and cultural capital. Therefore, within that diasporic community, a new set of boundaries and borders are created that affect the sense of belonging for the segregated members.

CONCLUSION

While the concept of diaspora is fragmented, and its definition has flawed features, it is a necessity for socially and culturally displaced bodies. While their displaced experience can be defined based on its emigration status or cultural and physical markers, the complexity of their experience will diminish. Based on its complex characteristics, the concept of diaspora transcends the experience of emigrant and ethnic minority status. Diaspora explains the holistic experience of dislocation, whether it is culturally or spatially. The concept of diaspora captures the multidimensional experience of those who cross national and cultural boundaries. Diaspora becomes a safe space for displaced communities to revive their lost sense of belonging. The definition requires further examination and investigation. When reviewing the concept of diaspora, it is problematic to assume a diasporic community provides a cohesive experience for all its members. The experience of the diaspora cannot be homogeneous and cohesive because there are intersectional social factors that influence and alter the experience of each diasporic community's membership.

CHAPTER 3 – IRAN’S FLAG: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

In diaspora, the flag is a symbolic representation of a community. Diasporic bodies seek out their ethnic identity through cultural and national symbols, which includes one’s national flag. The emotional attachment to the homeland’s flag redefines one’s cultural identity and origins in the diaspora. The flag is a symbolic ambassador that designates a public or private space for a diasporic community in the new home. For many, the flag is a bridge that connects one’s identity in the host nation to their ethnic community. The country of origin’s flag is expected to unite each diaspora. However, the symbol of national unity for some diasporic groups acts as a dividing agent in the case of the Iranian diaspora.

As explained in earlier chapters, each wave of migration is associated with different social, economic, and political affiliation with different symbolic representations of their movement. Similarly, the Iranian diaspora includes several of these socio-political affiliations, which are symbolically and discretely associated with different versions of the Iranian flag. One of the most prominent symbols of any political movement is the official flag, which is designed to correspond with the nature of the movement. Accordingly, the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran was designed after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as a part of the cultural reform. Before the Islamic revolution, Iran’s flag incorporated the traditional symbol of lion-and-sun, which was rooted in the long history of Iranian literature, astrology, and culture (Najmabadi 2005; Babayan 2002). After the Islamic revolution, however, the Iranian regime attempted to exhibit its Islamic affiliation by changing the cultural lion-and-sun emblem into the circular symbol of Allah, written in Arabic (Babayan 2002). The

Islamic government defended the flag's new design by arguing the old flag associated with an oppressive monarchist regime. Since lion-and-sun was the flag raised during the Pahlavi dynasty, the monarchist supporters associate the lion-and-sun with Pahlavi's reign. Members of diaspora, simultaneously, argue that Pahlavi's dynasty is close to Iranian cultural ancestry, and the new regime's cultural reform is supporting colonization and imperialism.

The various Iranian flags become a representation of different political affiliation since each iteration of the flag expresses a different political ideology. The lion-and-sun flag and the Islamic Republic of Iran flag represent the political position of the flag carrier in rejection or support of the Islamic Republic of Iran, respectively. These, however, are not the only flags representing the Iranian diaspora. In the diaspora, some community members choose to raise a flag with no emblem (also known as a white flag), a flag that is assumed to be apolitical and diasporic. For example, in the case of York University's Iranian Student Association and their controversial flag debate, they chose to raise the white flag to avoid further disagreement. However, one can argue that raising the white flag is as political as the other two flags because those who erect the white flag reject both the previous and current political regimes of Iran.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE ORIGINAL FLAG

The significance of Iran's flag for Iranians is rooted in its history and mythology. After the Islamic colonization of Iran, Abu l-Qasim Ferdowsi, in an attempt to reclaim Iran's history and emancipate it from the chauvinism of Arab, wrote Ferdowsi's Shahnameh (The Book of Kings)(Ravandi 1975). To revive Iranian culture, he recited the mythologies about

the creation of Iran's original flag inspired by the earlier texts of the Zarathustra (Bokhtourtash 2017). The first Iranian flag was made by the people for the people. The first Iranian flag came from a long history of oppression and upheaval. The mythical story of the flag, which loosely related to the historical events, originated in the battle between the good and the evil. In this story, King Zahhak was a tyrannical ruler of the Persian empire. He ruled his empire in accordance with the needs of two serpents growing on his shoulders, which were bestowed upon him by Ahriman (the Zoroastrian version of the devil) in exchange for his immortality. These devil-spawned serpents fed on the brain of the young Iranians. This story narrated the bravery of a blacksmith named Kaveh, who lost his children to this monstrosity. After losing his last child, Kaveh could no longer assume inaction. In this narration, the prophecies foretold of a hero, named Fereydoon, who would eradicate Zahhak's reign of terror. Therefore, Kaveh used his apron as a flag to ignite an uprising to search for Fereydoon. The blacksmith's black leather apron was raised on a spear and carried around as a sign of revolution. While the story resembles other narratives of battle between good and evil, the flag of Kaveh and his followers named *Darafsh-e Kaviani*, is fundamental in the reconstruction of Iranian identity.

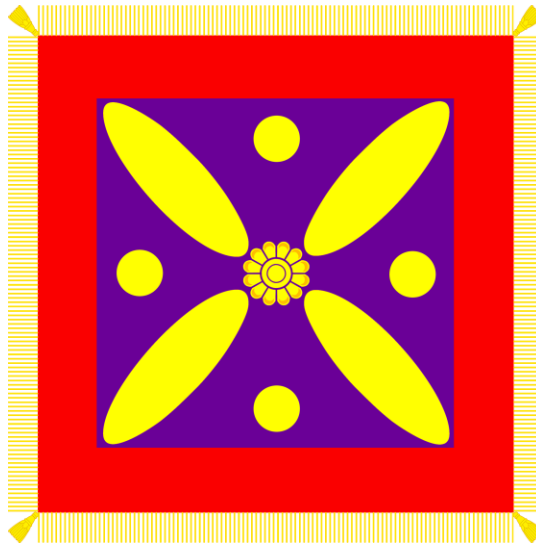


FIGURE 10: DARAFSH-E KAVIANI

In this narration, the flag becomes not just a symbol of an uprising, but also the symbol of a nation. The first Persian empire flag is a sign of resistance toward the king of the time, further evidence of the complicated matter of nationalism in Iran. A nation-state's foundation is on socio-political interaction among the members to build and strengthen emotional attachment to the boundaries set to define one's nation. The experience of nationalism is a real emotional response, which is not a self-conscious awakening to love one's country, but rather a method to invent and reconstruct the concept of a nation by appropriating the emotional concept of belonging (Anderson 1983: 6). Based on this story, the politics of resistance and the identification with the oppositional revolutionaries founded the Iranian nationalism. According to Iranian mythology, the flag of the nation is created not by the government officials, but by the people resisting those government officials. *Darafsh-e Kaviani*, the representation of the Iranian identity, was raised on a spear, which again symbolizes the revolution and the willingness to shed blood for the oppressed. Above all, the

flag is a canopy that covers subjugated masses and unites those who are in search of the liberation. Kaveh was a vessel for revolution, but he was not a leader. He was in search of a leader who could overthrow the current tyrannical regime. So the aim was not to instigate a state of anarchy, but rather to start a revolution that would in effect overthrow a corrupted government and replace it with a just system. According to this mythology, a nation requires a governing system, but a system of equity that provides to all citizens equally. “*Darafsh-e Kaviani* is not the King's flag, it is the flag for people and nation in the history of Iran.” (N. Bokhtourtash, 2017: 36)

The story demonstrates a distinct role for the flag in Iran's history and culture. The flag belongs to the people. This representation of the flag is reflective of the current debate, which ultimately argues over which flag stand for the people in diaspora. In the story, the flag is not the representation of Iran's borders or the nation-state. The Kaveh raised the *Darafsh-e Kaviani* to raise awareness, which was a warning sign for the Zahhak's corrupt government. The Iranian flag represents the banner of resistance, which provides a voice for the masses. Therefore, Iranian identity does not abide by the national state and based on the government that rules it. Instead, the people construct its foundation. The Iranian mythology is not about an omnipotent hero, but the story is the narration of the uprising of the people against the oppression. That is the reason the flag contains such symbolic existence in the story of Kaveh, Fereydoon, and Zahhak. The flag is the representation of the underdogs, the mundane heroes who lack the power to overthrow the corruption, but who use whatever they have to resist it. The mythological narrative of *Darafsh-e Kaviani* is the historical foundation of Iranian culture and its nationalism. This mythology is valued in the diaspora because the

diasporic communities rebuild their lost identity based on these mythologies and the cultural foundations. It is comprehensible when members of diaspora revive the lion-and-sun flag. This flag has attained the symbolic representation of resistance to a corrupt government that forces many out of their motherland. The Iranian diaspora political resistance toward Iran's current Islamic government is one of the many explanations for the ongoing flag debate in the diaspora. The lion-and-sun flag is an attempt in the revival of a culture which many Iranians fear its vanishment at the hands of a corrupt system of governance. The history of the lion-and-sun flag and Iran's history merge together as a sign of ethnic revival for many diasporic bodies.

HISTORY OF THE IRANIAN FLAG

Apart from the rationale offered through Iranian mythology about the origin of the Iranian flag, ancient and modern histories of Iran have produced an archival record for each one of Iran's flags. Iran's flag has evolved over time based on the socio-political climate of each dynasty from *Darafshe Kavian* to the modern flag. The genealogy of the flag, leading to the origin of the modern flag, has several narratives. These narratives range from flag's roots in ancient Iranian history with cultural evident and artifacts found in ancient remains of the Persian Empire to its religious roots in Zoroastrianism, Mithraism and Islam, with specificity in the Shi'ite faith in Ali as the original successor of Prophet (Bakhtourash 2017, Najmabadi 2005).

The Iranian flag is as old as the Iranian empire and experienced as many changes as the Persian and Iranian dynasties that ruled over Iran. Each Persian and Iranian dynasty had

a different flag, which dates back as far as Achaemenid dynasty from 550 to 330 BCE.

During Achaemenid dynasty, historians recorded multiple flags associated with the Persian empire, but one flag resonated as the dominant flag. This dominant flag's design included a golden eagle with open wings carrying three circles. The eagle symbolized the king of all flying creatures, which signified the king's strength and prosperity (Bokhtourtash 2017). The three circles, however, were not fully explained, but one of the many interpretations has been the symbolic representation of the three tenets of the Zoroastrian religion. These three tenets are good thoughts, good words, and good deeds (ibid).

The symbolic emblem of the lion-and-sun has been exhumed in the ancient history of Iran and predated the existence of the Iranian flag. Different representations of lion-and-sun existed in the ancient Persian Empire, and the remains of these representations have been found in the ruins of ancient archeology and cultural artifacts. In Persian culture, the lion represents valour, strength, pride, and greatness, and the sun represents birth, life, and growth (Bakhtourash 2017). Historically, the first time the lion-and-sun appeared on the flag as the emblem was in 1836. Muhammad Shah Qajar from Qajar dynasty approved the image of lion-and-sun emblem to represent the Qajar dynasty. The Qajar dynasty, however, introduced the original lion and sun emblem with different variations, such as the lion carrying a sword or an overarching olive branch, and red and green triangular designs on the four corners of the flag (ibid).

From the early variations of the lion-and-sun emblem, the Iranian heteronormativity exhibited itself. The lion-and-sun represents Iranian identity with the lion representing male and masculinity and the sun representing female and femininity (Najmabadi 2005: 63). The

gender positionality of the emblem, which the active lion in the forefront protecting the Sun, demonstrates the cultural hetero-patriarchy existing in Iranian socio-political history.

However, the increasing Iranian patriarchy gradually limited the femininity of the flag. The facial features of the sun, gradually, faded and disappeared into a genderless circle and lost all personification. Meanwhile, the lion's masculinity grew bolder and emerged as the flag's centrepiece. (Najmabadi 2005) While the lion-and-sun predated the Islamic colonization of the Persian Empire, the Safavid dynasty reimagined its meanings. The Safavid dynasty came to power after the Islamic colonization of Iran. Based on their religious and political association, they reinterpreted the flag as the king and the holy man (Babayan 2003). The Safavian's proposed version of the lion-and-sun includes the mytho-history of the modern Iranian flag (Najmabadi 2005), which is based on the mythical exploration of the Persian Empire from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and Islamic religious figures. In this version, the sun represents the king, the originator and the lion was the holy man. Here, the king was Jamshid, the founder of the Persian empire, and the holy man was Ali, who according to Shi'ite beliefs, was the original Khalifeh. The lion represented Ali, to whom Iranians have referred to as the "Lion of God" (ibid: 73). According to Babayan, the redefinition of the flag brought the ancient Iranian culture and the Islamic religion closer than ever (Babayan 2003: 352).

After 1836 Qajarian approval of the lion-and-sun emblem on the flag, the emblem became an essential cultural representation in Iran. The image of lion-and-sun, ultimately, became Iran's official national symbol, when the emblem was stamped on Iran's official coins in 1838, and later again, when it adorned the official military uniform in 1894. Qajar

Dynasty used different varieties of this emblem to represent different branches of government. While the emblem was officially a national symbol, Iranian did not have an officially recognized national flag until the Constitutional revolution of 1906. Due to the Qajar dynasty's tyrannical dictatorship and reckless international agreements, the Iranian people revolted against the monarchy and demanded national economic independence, equity, and justice to replace the "arbitrary rule of absolutism" (Vanessa Martin 2013: 1). The constitutional revolution of 1906 or *Enghelāb-e Mashrūteh 1285 (based on Iranian calendar)* was the beginning of the secular system in Iran, which was highly entangled with the Islamic Shi'a religion (ibid). Many of the movement's leaders were religious figures, who used their religious status to inspire the masses and encourage uprising to fulfill Iran's secular freedom (ibid; Ravandi 1975). The main aim of this movement was to approve a national constitutional law to limit the Qajar dynasty's absolute power over Iran and establish a parliament to protect Iranians and their national resources and assets. The Qajar government, on the other hand, attempted to persuade the revolutionary leaders to compromise and employ an Islamic constitution rather than a national one to protect their social and political power. The government advocacy for the separation of the church and state aimed to represent the movement's leaders as simple and superstitious religious figures. The movement's leaders rejected the Qajar proposal for an Islamic constitution. They argued that although the movement's leaders were religious figures, this movement was for civil rights and social and economic independence of Iran (Ravandi 1975). During the constitutional revolution, the tree-coloured Iranian flag formed, with the three horizontal colours of green, white, and red from top to bottom. Under article 5 of the Iranian

constitution, the image of lion-and-sun codified as Iran's national flag's emblem. Article 5 also established the design of the flag, which located the emblem in the middle with specified measurements and position of the colours and outlines (Najmabadi 2005: 86). The three colours of the flag existed before and during the Qajar dynasty, but the measurements and designated position of each colour and the emblem were approved during the constitutional revolution (Bakhtourash 2017: 417)

The three colours of the flags are as significant in defining Iranian culture and identity. As I mentioned earlier, the variation of the three colours existed prior to the constitutional revolution of 1906. The three colours were applicable but through different designs and measurements. It was during the constitutional revolution that the colours and their positions were officially selected accordingly (Bakhtourash 2017). There are different interpretations of the three colours of the flag. There is a cultural, religious, and political association with each colour. Based on the religious and cultural interpretation, the colour green was commonly interpreted as growth and revival, rooted in the Zoroastrian religion, which was the founding religion in Iran and part of the Persian empire's moral philosophy (ibid). Some, however, interpreted the green according to its association with the Shi'a religion, which signified the religious exclusivity of the Iranian identity (Shahbazi 2012). The colour white symbolized freedom and peace, which was again a favoured colour by the Zoroastrians; on the other hand, white represents the industriousness and productivity of the nation (Bokhtoursh 2017; Farrokh 2009). Lastly, the colour red was not a prominent colour in the flag prior to the Qajar dynasty. It only gained its significance after the constitutional revolution. The red represented the courage and the blood shed by the martyrs of the

revolution, which was a commemorative symbol for those who lost their lives for Iran's freedom and democracy (ibid). The colour red gained its solitary representation as to the martyr's blood after the 1979 revolution, in a propagandist approach to encourage martyrdom among the youths, especially during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq.

The constitutional revolution was not the end of the Qajar dynasty. Ahmad Shah was the last Qajar king before the birth of the Pahlavi dynasty. The Pahlavi decided to make their own changes in the flag. While the Pahlavi dynasty kept the official flag of Iran the same as the constitutional revolution's official flag, they introduced two new flags as the extensions of the official flag: one was the national flag, and the other was the military flag. While the national flag still had the three colours of the other flags, unlike the official and the military flags, it bore no emblem in the middle, which is the unrecognized white flag in the diaspora. On the other hand, the military flag, in addition to the lion-and-sun emblem, carried a date wreath around the emblem, which was adorned by the Pahlavi Crown (Bokhtoursh 2017). In Pahlavi dynasty's flag, the sun lost its femininity and her anthropomorphic figures completely turned into dots and lines, and the lion became more realistic and ferocious (Bokhtoursh 2017; Shahbazi 2012; Najmabadi 2005). During that time, in addition to the introduction of two new flags, the Persian/Iranian phrase of *darafsh*, which means flag, was replaced by the Turkish phrase *parçam*, meaning tassel or hair (Shahbazi 2012). The new foreign vocabulary caused a controversy, as many Iranian scholars perceived this as deculturation of the Iranian nationality. This debate not only was over the use of foreign vocabulary but also it discussed how the use of non-Farsi terminology caused a threat to cultural values, specifically damaging for the flag as its global representation (Shahbazi

2012). As a form of protest in 1929, Mustafa Minuvi expressed his dissatisfaction with the term, *parčam*, and suggested to discard the official flag and reintroduce the original Iranian flag, *Drafsh-e Kavian*, to revive Persian culture, but his suggestion was denied (Najmabadi 2005: 87).

Iran's flag remained the same until the 1979 Islamic revolution of Iran. After the revolution, the new government introduced new policies and procedures to the political and legal systems in order to match their Islamist agenda. The flag design was among these policy alterations. One main aspect of the political changes was the readjustment of the flag as the representation of Iran's Muslim state (Bokhtourtash 2017; Shahbazi 2012). Historians and artists expressed their disagreement with the emblem change after the revolution because they argued the flag was a cultural and national symbol of the nation-state (Bokhtoursh 2017; Najmabadi 2005), but the new Muslim regime associated this cultural emblem with the monarchy that ruled over Iran for centuries (Najmabadi 2005). Despite the ongoing debate for and against the flag alteration, the lion-and-sun flag remained the same until Ayatollah Khomeini's historic speech on 10th of *Esfand of 1357* (1979, March 13), when he condemned anything that belonged to the previous monarchist regime, which included the flag. He stated:

The flag should not be the monarchial flag; the emblems of Iran should not be the monarchial one; they should be Islamic. The despicable "lion and sun" emblem should be removed from all ministries and offices. The banner should be Islam. The remnants of the *taghout* should be effaced. All these are vestiges of the *taghout*; this crown is a symbol of the *taghout*. Islam must be our emblem. (Khomeini's speeches in crowd 1979).

Ayatollah Khomeini invited all Iranian citizens, from around the country, to submit their design for the flag. Many submitted their designs, and Dr. Hamid Nadimy's design was eventually selected to be Iran's new flag. According to the official constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the flag's design must present the three colours of the original flag and an emblem in the middle. Also, the flag must contain Allah-O-Akbar slogan, which was chanted during the revolution (Kimia Maleki 2009; Bokhtourtash 2017). Prophet Muhammad's signature on the sand after each conquest inspired Dr. Nadimy's winning emblem design. Through the use of geometrical shapes, his work included and combined Islam's five pillars of faith in the flag (interview with Dr. Nadimy. Dana'i, 2008). According to Dr. Nadimy, he aimed to portray all the five principles of Islam in the Islamic Republic's flag. When asked about the controversial question of the resemblance of the Allah emblem to the Sikhist emblem of Deg Tegh Fateh, he denied any cultural appropriation. He argued his design was original and a product of his creative mind. He defended his design by explaining the design's basis and the elements of the proposed flag. He said,

The crests embedded in this logo are rooted in a holy practice, which has been signed by Prophet Muhammad repeatedly on the sand with his blessed sword. It [the emblem] has five sections that represent the five principles of religion. The principle of monotheism is in the vertex of two main branches. In addition to the word of Allah, which is seen in its original composition, *La illalah ilallah* is also included in it. The middle vertical component in combination with the form of exacerbation (الله) which is a sign of intensity in Persian and Arabic language. This is the interpretation of the word of Hadid (Dana'i, 2008).

The revolutionary debates over flag redesign gave birth to the current flag of Iran. This current flag carries the same three colours of green, white, and red, but the emblem is a unique design of Allah written in Arabic, which is also the condensed form of *La illah a*

illalah (Arabic phrase meaning there is no god but Allah). This circular Allah is designed to be sword-shaped, symbolizing strength and valour. The bottom edges of the green rectangle next to the white rectangle and top edges of the red rectangle next again next to the white area contained a geometric Allah-o-Akbar design. This Arabic phrase, meaning God is great, was the revolutionary chant during the revolution of 1979, written 22 times in the remembrance of the 22nd of *Bahman* (11 February); the day that Ayatollah Khomeini became Iran's supreme leader (Shahbazi 2012). The Iranian parliament accepted the current flag of Iran in 1979 (*1358 Solar calendar*). Article 18 of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution states, "Iran's official flag constitutes three colours of green, white, and red with the Islamic Republic emblem as Allah-o-Akbar Slogan." The selected design became the final form of the flag that was officially accepted by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

THE CURRENT FLAG OF IRAN: ITS CREATION AND ITS EFFECTS IN DIASPORA

The controversy of the Iranian flag in the diaspora was rooted in its origin in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The complexity of the flag debate among the Iranian diaspora was due to the Islamic influences on the transformation of the flag, as well as its connection to the new religious regime and its undesirability among Iran's political predecessors. These defying factors eventually led to future disagreement and tension in the diaspora. Iranians, who believed in the revolution, designed the current flag pattern. A designer was selected democratically through a nation-wide contest, while it was supervised closely to match the new regime's ideals. The 1979 Islamic revolution, similar to the 1906 constitutional

revolution, was led by religious leaders, who promised political emancipation from Western influences. However, while the constitutional revolution's outcome was national independence, the outcome for the 1979 revolution was drastically different. The promise of freedom from dictatorship was never fulfilled; instead, new restrictions were put into place to limit the citizens. The flag that once represented democracy became the dark symbol of betrayal. The promises, which were given during the revolution, and then ignored and sidelined, in return, ignited a grudge towards the new government and the flag that represented it. The national grudge was intense and unforgiving since Iranians revolted against the last government to revive an Islamic democracy to bring equality and equity for all. Even the designer of the flag, Dr. Nadimy, did not wish to be known as the designer of the Islamic Republic of Iran's flag, because he believed his flag originally meant to represent sacred ideals. He even refused to be photographed, stating that he may want to "become anti-revolution in the future" (Dana'i, 2008). The current flag, which was raised as the symbol of democracy, became known as the symbol of oppression and restriction for all minority bodies in Iran.

The evolution of the Iranian flag through Iran's ancient and modern history explored a social dialogue incorporating gender, religion, and politics. This dialogue carried over to the diaspora, and it shaped the social location of the members of the diaspora. The idea of the flag was recontextualized after the 1979 Islamic revolution since it became associated with the betrayal and insecurity. In the diaspora, the exiled bodies intended to reclaim their national flag and return to a history that maintained the image of the flag as a national identifier, which was made by the people for the people. The Islamic Revolution's broken

promises under the guise of theocratic democracy caused an antagonism toward the associated religion. Therefore, in the diaspora, the image of the Islamic republic, the flag, and other symbols of Islam joined together to ignite friction among the Iranian community. While the behaviour was perceived as deeply seeded Islamophobia, the rationale behind it defined the Islamophobic attitude as to avoid the agents of the Islamic regime of governance. Iranian diaspora instigated to scrutinize any symbol that associated an Iranian community member with the Islamic republic. I will discuss this diasporic Islamophobia in detail when I explore the religious diversity of the Iranian community and ongoing Islamophobia among the Iranian diaspora. In addition, the evolution of the flag represented the culture of patriarchy and traditional masculinity, which did have a direct effect on the diaspora. The flag might seem like a piece of cloth, but it is the product of the culture and symbolic representation of the nation. The Iranian flag's contested meanings cause dissonance among the member of the diaspora. While the flag as a national representation supposes to unite its members, the Iranian flag produces conflicting messages for its members and separates them. The history of the flag and its location among the Iranian diaspora further separated the diasporic members of the Iranian community, who had religious and historical disagreements and who had different social experiences of the flag's demarcation.

CHAPTER 4 – A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF IRANIAN DIASPORA

از من نپرس خونم کجاست تو اونهمه ویرونه
ای هم قبیله چی بگم قبیله سرگردونه
ما دریدر تر از همیم هم خونه بی خونه
غربت ما دیار ماست خونینترین ویرونه

Do not ask me where my home is among all these ruins.

My travelling companion, what should I say? My tribe is lost.

We are more homeless than each other, my stateless fellow traveller.

Our diaspora is our home now, while our home is a blood-soaked ruin.

Haideh

Cohen's (2008) definition of diaspora involves the construction of an ideal type, which includes "nine common features." He deliberately uses ideal types to exhibit commonalities and inconsistencies in diasporic experiences of diverse backgrounds. These common features, however, tend to exist in all diasporic groups in varying degrees. To conceptualize the Iranian diaspora, I argue that Iranian diaspora exhibit the main features of the diasporic ideal type, which I will explore in extensive detail through this chapter. For example, the Iranian diaspora experienced an original exodus upon the Islamic revolution of 1979 (Modares 1998) to multiple foreign countries around the globe (McAuliffe 2008). The experience of the Iranian diaspora is of a victim and of a political experience (Gholami 2014,

Cohen 2008), which is significant in the reconstruction of diaspora's group dynamic. Moreover, idealization of the homeland's literature, art, and a shared history of struggles and oppression, encourages scholars and community leader to reconceptualize the Iranian identity in diaspora (Najmabadi 2005; Babayan 2002; Moghissi 2010). For many, the victim narrative of their diasporic experience encourages them to remain faithful to helping the underprivileged in Iran through transnational organizational links while protesting the current state of Iran and rejecting the national authorities (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009). Through virtual connections and socio-cultural blogs, the second-generation Iranian residing in diaspora connects with their roots in their ancestral homeland and challenge Iran's Islamic state (Alinejad 2011). The vicarious relationships with the homeland satisfy the transnational connections and a global attempt to maintain the homeland (Cohen 2008). As it shows, Iranian diaspora appears to exhibit many of these common features, and they accurately describe a broad experience of Iranian diaspora. The last three features limit the experience of diaspora because the features assume a unified relationship among the members. The Iranian diaspora is an intersectionally diverse community, which include a multiplicity of genders, sexual orientations, religions, ethnicities, regions, political beliefs and socio-economic backgrounds. While the community manages to congregate, they maintain an internal hierarchical relationship among the members. A transnational study of Iranian diaspora conducted in Sydney, London, and Vancouver. Through this study, McAuliffe (2008) reported that the Iranian diaspora experiences a class segregation among their community members. The older and dominant classes of the Iranian diaspora often disregarded and disparaged the new residents of the Iranian diaspora (ibid). The established

members tend to ridicule and criticize the new members' conspicuity and transparency in their effort to appear as established members of the community, and not a new arrival. This study might have only addressed the class experience of the Iranian diaspora in three global cities, but the result is a common and familiar one for Iranians residing around the globe.

Diasporic bodies shape and reformulate their ongoing identities through their biographical relationships with their community and their personal history in the diaspora. For Iranian expatriates, a revolutionary victim narrative politically moulded Iranian diaspora, where unexpected and forced mass dislocation originated its establishment. Iranian diaspora expresses this experience of mass dislocation in terminology that is familiar to them. As mentioned in the "introduction," the Farsi term *ghorbat* refers to the experience of the diaspora. In one of her popular songs, Haideh (1991), an Iranian diva, describes diaspora as being a foreigner, where the only familiarity is the never-dying shadow of sadness. *Ghorbat* is the subjective experience of taking refuge in a place that is not home, and an individual remains a mere stranger. The dispersed bodies from a familiar national identity gather to share their loneliness with those who share their experience. The shared experience of loneliness and dispersal maintains the never dying desire for a nostalgic past, which in effect keeps the Iranian community connected. However, the same never dying desire to return keeps the Iranians hostage in a void that blames their community for their misery and misfortune.

A diaspora is built upon the fragmented memories and nostalgic images of a land that was once recognizable as home. Cohen's typology of the diaspora established on the concept of dislocated national identity, which is spatially and temporally diverse "ideal type." Cohen

(2008) states his nine common features of the diaspora are ideal types, which means ideal types are not objectively “real” (17). When Satzewich explores the Ukrainian diaspora (2003), he re-evaluates Cohen’s ideal types. He argues while diaspora is a heuristic device, typologies can locate similar patterns existing across the diaspora with a space to reconstruct. As he cross-references the Ukrainian diasporic experience with nine common features introduced by Cohen, he argues that the history of the Ukrainian diaspora's intercommunal social hierarchy has created a distinctly different diasporic community (ibid:18). His analysis bears a resemblance to the experience of the Iranian community.

While the Iranian diaspora establishes a community to soothe their collective aching heart, not everyone belongs. Upon crossing borders, the national identity of the home nation loses its social location in the host nation. To construct a new home after one’s original home was invaded by religious politicians, unofficial norms and values are introduced to maintain the boundaries of belonging within and outside one's diasporic community. Boundaries and borders of nationalist identity build the Iranian diaspora. The multiplicity of migratory waves feed into the communal divide and contested views on who is included and who is not. The gendered, social, political and religious communal gap feeds into anger toward one's own community members. For example, the omnipresent Islamophobic sentiment existing among the Iranian community living in diaspora is a by-product of an old wound left untreated for those who were forced to flee the country. This poetic analogy is internalized by many. I examine the construction of the Iranian diaspora based on Cohen’s existing nine common characteristics while arguing that his analysis entails certain assumptions. The typology is justifiable, but Cohen does not delve into subjective

perceptions of diaspora, as well as generational and intercommunal interactions, divides, and challenges sourced in both the motherland and diaspora.

Cohen examines the characteristics of victim diasporas through the comparative analysis of African and Armenian diasporic narratives. He demonstrates the experience of the different African and Armenian subethnic groups and how each one experienced their landing differently. His analysis investigates the diversity of experience among each diaspora upon their original relocation, but their original exodus appears to remain singular and unchanging. According to the current definition, the experience of the diaspora is immutable, as though no one joins the diaspora after the initial departure from home. It is irrefutable that the experience of a new African joining their diasporic community is different from those who are multi-generationally self-defined members of the African diaspora. The concept of diaspora fails to address the complexity group dynamic in the diaspora, which is intergenerational and intersectional. To understand the Iranian diaspora, I explore the history of Iranian identity and the reason for the original and consecutive waves of migrations. However, I will first need to revisit Cohen's nine common features of the diaspora to conceptualize Iranian diaspora based on the current definition of diaspora.

THE NINE FEATURES AND THE IRANIAN DIASPORA

Cohen (2008) charted nine features of the diaspora in continuous segments. He aims to create an ideal type to have a better understanding of diasporic experience. He begins defining diaspora as a mass “dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to

two or more foreign regions.” The modern Iranian victim diaspora does have an originating event that coincides with the revolution of 1979. The global mobility of Iranian nationals originated with the Islamic revolution; however, this global movement has continued after the revolution and it has been reshaped by its more recent history and its international relationships. Other than Zoroastrian Persian community (known as Parsis) who were forced to flee Iran and permanently seek refuge in India after the Muslim takeover (Amulya B, 2017), the Persian and Iranian diaspora did not have a recognizable existence until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Prior to the revolution, many travelled abroad for education, leisure, and business, but after 1979, the pattern of international mobility for Iranian nationals transformed into a unidirectional destination of migration (Modarres 1998). It was during the mid- to late-70s that non-immigrant travellers turned into permanent settlers outside of Iran, because of the revolutionary civil unrest and the eventual restrictive political regime (ibid). The first wave of migrants was predominantly made up of "political exiles," which included monarchist officials, political activists, and freedom fighters whose lives and families' lives were in danger if they chose to return (ibid). In addition, religious minorities, such as Baha'is and other religious-ethnic minorities, experienced exclusion in a Muslim state, where their religious beliefs and identities were persecuted (Hakimzadeh 2006). One can argue that the first wave of migration founded the political and social infrastructure of the Iranian diaspora around the world, predominantly in Europe and North America, where Iranian nationals had a previous international relationship (Hakimzadeh 2006).

The second characteristic entails “the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of a trade or to further colonial ambitions,” (Cohen 2008) which indicates the

future waves of migration. After the Islamic revolution, the current regime in power attempted to halt the international migration of Iranian citizens. Due to different political sanctions and the acrimonious relationships between Iran and other countries, the Iranian borders limited the citizens' international mobility by placing restrictive laws for crossing national borders. The restriction did not completely stop emigration; in fact, emigration increased during this time and years following it (Modarres 1998). In this era, the second wave of migration took place. This wave comprised of those fleeing military services of the eight-year-long war with Iraq and its following civil and economic unrest. Due to the consecutive revolution and war, the economic state of Iran was in decline (Graham and Khosravi, 1997: 118). The economic decline encouraged a "brain drain" because the younger generation was in search of a financially prosperous life unavailable in Iran (Hakimzadeh, 2006). In addition to the economic and international crisis, gender became a key factor for many to leave Iran. Other than the forced hijab, which was a symbolic representation of the control and segregation of women, quality of life for women was on a decline — the educational possibilities and dependency on the male kin located women in a vulnerable state (ibid). Being a woman or having a daughter was a push factor for many families.

After the second wave of migration, emigration from Iran relatively slowed down, but many asylum seekers were still fleeing Iran in large numbers. Due to a multitude of governmental regulations on private and public expressions of gender, sexuality, religion, and socio-political ideologies, and the severe punishments levelled towards any transgression from the instated laws, many chose to seek refuge in other nations. The slow process of emigration drastically evolved into the third wave of migration in the late-90s to

late-2000s. During the alleged presidential electoral fraud of 2009 and the green movement's civil unrest, there were many seeking asylum in European and North American countries (Chaichian 2012). The political and human rights activists who were involved with the movement were using both legal and illegal means to escape prosecution in search of sanctuary. During the third wave of migration, a new group joined the international mobility caused by a lowered restriction on international travels in Iran. Not all self-recognized members of the Iranian diaspora are asylum seekers. A new generation of entrepreneur class migrants moved from Iran and joined the Iranian diaspora, which caused a debate about inclusivity and exclusivity within the community. Different waves of migration spread and began to strengthen existing diasporas in new nations. The spread of the Iranian diaspora extends from North American to Oceanic nations. The Iranian diaspora remains connected through familial links or the general movement from one host nation to the next. A few of my respondents resided in various Iranian diasporas in Germany, the United States, Kuwait, Sweden, India and other global locations before making a semi-permanent residence in Canada. All the while, they are maintaining their links with friends residing in those countries.

The concept of home did not change for the travelling diasporas, even though their residences changed globally. "A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering, and achievements" (Cohen 2008) is what connected the community together. The continuous pride in ancient culture and history secured and preserved an incestuous relationship with the motherland. The concurrent memory of a home that was taken away by the hands of invaders keeps the diaspora faithful to Iran. Most of the

respondents took pride in the history of Iran. One of the female respondents even argued that “When we talk about Iran ... [and] you hear the name Kourosh, Dariush and our ancient history, we will feel proud to be Iranian.” The remainder of the Persian Empire’s ancient history with its realm that covered most of Asia causes pride and feelings of superiority among the Iranian diaspora. This historical memory of the traditional and cultural superiority of Persia speaks to what Cohen calls diaspora collective myths and memories about an ancestral homeland, and in part, can explain why some members of Iranian diaspora choose to identify as Persian rather than Iranian. Ancient history and cultural pride keep the community intact.

Basically, the Iranian flag, which is a national birth certificate or identity card. It should be in a way that Iranians can relate to, and it should represent the entire history of a nation and the national pride in it. (C)

The concept of national pride coexists with the collective memory of the 1979 revolution, which some lived through, and others experienced through their parents’ memories of the movement. While many of the respondents did not live through the revolution, they felt nostalgic when there was any mention of pre-revolution Iran. Many of the post-revolution generations reminisce about the monarchist era, but they rarely question the underlying reasons for the revolution. There is diasporic amnesia regarding the monarchist era and their broken system of governance that led to the Islamic Revolution. The myth of the good old days remains the dominant discourse in the diaspora.

M: lion-and-sun is more fair.

I: why?

M: it represents a good time, and therefore, everyone accepts it more.

I: so, is it because of the memory that comes with it?

M: not memory. The lifestyle, all together the life then was cooler. And based on that they like that more.

The revolution of 1979 happened, according to the collective memory, not by the hands of the oppressed working class, but rather orchestrated by the hands of religious fanatics who planned to destroy Iranian culture. The Iranian community is building its national identity through this pride in ancient history and a revived anger toward Muslim clergy. While Iranian practiced Islam as a part of their normal cultural practice during the monarchist era and throughout all of the dynasties after the Muslim colonization Sasanian dynasty, it only legally became a state religion after the 1979 revolution. Many diasporic members revert to the origin of Muslim colonization of Iran and express their anger toward the religion that justified the 1979 revolution.

The oral history reminiscing about the pre-revolution era feeds into future generations to reconstruct the lost beautiful image of the homeland. The memorandum of a mythical flawless monarchy cultivates an urgency to restore the abandoned ancestral homeland. Cohen (2008) argues that is a common characteristic of the diasporic community. “An idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity, even to its creation.” The political involvement within the Iranian community—including groups, such as different student association and community organizations and even the Iranian Congress of Canada, which is a non-political social group—aims to bring political changes to prepare Iran for the eventual return. As it was explored in older diaspora media, every Nowruz, there was a wish to

celebrate the next new year in Iran (Tanin media). During my semi-structured interviews, every respondent suggests ways to make Iran better.

Many disclose their charity donations to support different community-based organizations in Iran. The respondents argue that by bringing the Iranian community together and helping those in Iran, the diaspora liberates Iran from the current regime and the “Mullahs’ claws.” While some members of the diaspora have Iranian passports and financial investments in Iran, they supported the American and Canadian financial sanctions on Iran because they believed that sanctions would challenge the Islamic Republic of Iran. Many of the respondents perceive the Iranian diaspora as an unofficial organization to assist Iranian citizens and change the oppressive Iranian system of governance. The anti-oppressive and anti-Mullah sentiments among the Iranian diaspora causes a heated Islamophobic movement. The association of the hijab with the current regime in Iran provokes many to express aggression and violence toward this symbolic display. The public shaming and verbal abuse of practicing Muslim Iranian women who wear the hijab is an attempt to unite the Iranian community against the oppressive regime of the Islamic Republic. In my fieldwork, I observed a disgruntled Iranian woman shouting and cursing at a group of veiled women in their car at a red light because she blamed them for the murder and execution of innocent people in Iran. While unorthodox and inhumane, for these people, the heckling of practicing Iranian Muslims is a way of protesting the Islamic Republic of Iran and rejecting supporters of that regime. This practice is to limit and ostracize those who are assumed to be supporters of the current regime.

Iranian global diaspora maintains its mobility nexus by constant international mobility among the home, host, and diasporas in other nations. Basically, as Cohen (2009) states “the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland.” Iran is perceived as a popular vacation destination for Iranians since many travel back and forth to visit family and friends. However, it remains a vacation destination, which fulfills the vicarious relationship between Iran and diaspora. In addition, Iranians travel between different diasporas, either to relocate or just for a visit. A young man describes his travels and residency in different countries as a second generation Iranian-Canadian. His family decided to move back to Iran to raise their children in Iran, but their experience was abysmal, and the period of readjustment seemed never-ending. His family decided to move to the United States before their recent resettlement back in Canada. In each global state, he described the diversity of his relationship with the Iranian diaspora in global spatial locations. He expressed an immense joy to be back in Canada because he argued he is most accustomed to the Iranian diaspora residing in Ontario. While the Iranian diaspora is a mobile group, to travel back to Iran is difficult for many. During an interview, an interviewee expressed sadness and depression during her last visit to Iran. She argued that going back home was filled with melancholia. She experienced a detachment which caused her to feel lonely and not belonging to either space.

You are born in Iran. You spend half of your life there. You know that is your home, but at the same time you live half of your life here, you are established here. Your everything is here. You always feel belonged to Iran, but to live there? No, I don't think I can ever do that. Never ever. But here I am comfortable. But I cannot call here my home. I can't call there my home. Like I am stuck in between.

... That is what I think. You are not Iranian. You are not Canadian. What the f*** am I? (MO)

The state of homelessness and in-betweenness of migration, alongside cultural and linguistic similarities, persuade the homesick diasporic bodies to form a community. Cohen is accurate when he states that diasporas originated on “a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate.” The commonality and similar history of migration create a safe space among one’s common groups who each have a story of their journey and those they left behind. Knowing others, relating to their historical accounts, and the hardships of migration and adjustment and re-adjustment in a new space beget the Iranian community to converge. When in a diaspora, the Iranian community relates to their Iranian ancestry through diverse cultural practices—such as Nowruz—where they congregate as a community to celebrate. The Iranian new year was praised by many as one true element of being Iranian, where they celebrate centuries of Iranianism. The hustle and bustle of new year excited the community, despite the common argument that Nowruz is not the same in Canada. The shared disappointment is a common ground for the Iranian community. Members were irritated by the disjointed Iranian diaspora while comparing the Iranian community to other diasporas with great disappointment. Many expressed dismay with westernized community members and blamed them for weak ties in diasporas. Two famous Iranian pop singers, who were second-generation Iranian-Canadians, lost their entire fan base overnight when they self-identified as Canadian and failed to include their Iranian/Persian identity during a red carpet event for an undisclosed American

TV show (Lulu 2009; ghalandar49 2008). Iranian diaspora established on the ground that aims to maintain Iranian national and cultural history and identity.

In addition, Cohen suggests that diasporic community encounters “a troubled relationship with host societies, [which] suggests a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.” This lack of social acceptance causes the diasporic body to feel like an outsider, an individual that does not fully belong in the new host nation. The reminiscence of belonging echoes through the diaspora. The complexity of diaspora surfaces in the concept of belonging. The concept of belonging is overused and underexplored because what seems to be a space to rebuild community cohesion can be a space to reinforce conformity. Belonging can be defined based on its affective properties (Yuval-Davis 2016), as a place that responds to a longing for stability and safety (Leong 2009). Affective dimensions of belonging construct a general social bond, but the collectivity of this concept disregards the borders and boundaries that separate the members from non-members (Anthias 2006). Anthias (ibid) argues that, through internal and external dialogue, identities construct and reimagine belonging. “Imagining” then normalizes the concept and regulates it into a social fact. “Such constructions produce a ‘natural’ community of people and function as exclusionary borders of otherness” (ibid: 21). Belonging is an interplay of inclusion and exclusion of bodies according to a group of social norms and mores. She further argues that social inclusion does not translate into social cohesion, which is related to the experience of the Iranian diaspora. The affective experience of their deficiencies and political demands for norms and values build and maintain the politics of belonging.

According to Yuval-Davis (2016), the politics of belonging maintain the reproduction of hegemonic communal boundaries within and outside of the community but also sustain "contestation, challenge and resistance by other political agents" (3). The politics of belonging are the application of affective properties of belonging to establish and maintain communal boundaries. For instance, the construction of an Iranian diasporic community is achievable through familiar and ethnically oriented advertisements and public displays of cultural symbols. The Iranian diaspora constructs a familiar space in the land of strangeness. In the host nation, the sense of belonging is tarnished. The diasporic body is punished for being an outsider socially, culturally, and legally (Cohen 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006; Anthias 2006; Kazemipur 2016; Walia 2013). Therefore, the tarnished sense of social acceptability and a longing to belong become the dominant reasons that diasporic communities come together (Cohen 2008), but the belonging within one's diaspora requires following communities' norms and values according to the diaspora's set values. Boundary building becomes an important part of diaspora development. It is the "...rites of the institutions to suggest that all rites tend to consecrate or legitimate an arbitrary boundary by fostering a recognition of it as legitimate..." (Bourdieu 1991: 118). The question of boundaries of diaspora does create a safe space for many seeking a familiar space, but the boundaries divide us from them and the others (Winter 2014).

To unfold the Iranian diaspora, belonging becomes an important social factor. And as mentioned earlier it is fallacious to assume belonging is constructed based on ethnic and racial relations, but in the diaspora, the limited political and social rights eliminate the racial and ethnic minority's sense of belonging based on their ethnic and racial identity. In

addition, ethnic belonging is deeply rooted in the framing of whiteness, which systematically institutionalized society's infrastructure (Feagin 2013: x). That is one of the underlying reasons for construction of different diasporic communities. The experience of limitation encountered by the Iranian diaspora follows its members in every step of their lives, because, in a white settler society, a racial or ethnic body is a form of transgression.

In the case of diasporic identities, with the darker skin and the thicker accent, the racial and ethnic identity becomes the prominent signifier of one's identity above all other identity signifiers (i.e. gender, sexuality, class). Therefore, the sense of belonging becomes predominantly defined by one's racial and ethnic markers. The unacceptability from the host nation encourages the community to come together, but the way to create and reconstruct a space becomes a problematic experience. For a diasporic body to belong, the individual requires to get closer to one's traditional and cultural backgrounds. A young man argued that he refuses to see himself as an Iranian. In great length, he explained how the ancient history of the Persian empire defined his ethnic identity. The host's unacceptability of his diasporic body encouraged a cultural pride to reconstruct an ethnic identity.

This is where my identification as Persian came into existence as opposed to Iranian... As soon as you say that [being Iranian]. It is such a negative environment. People try to offend you to outshine you. It is all about who has what and who gets the most respect out of the most people. When I did say I am from Iran and only in grade 8, I said I am Iranian. I started getting slurs like the terrorist, bomber and I remember it pissed me off and I was like you have no clue about my country... And I would explain what Persian is and they would be like wow you are from this kingdom.

He identified with his ethnic identity and chose to settle in ancient history to regain his social status when encountering a troublesome relationship with the host nation. Pride in one's

ancient history bring the individuals closer to their ethnic identity. The diasporic bodies readjust and get closer to their ethnic identity. Thus they become more dependant on their community to strengthen their social status.

The commonality of the official language and culture pushes the Iranian diaspora to move among their diasporic communities in other countries and keep a transnational relationship with other Iranian diasporas. Members of diaspora experience "a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial." The communities around the globe are either related by kinship or friendship that was left behind after migration from one country to another. The global movement and chains of migration connect the Iranian diasporas transnationally. With modern technology, friends and families have easier access to maintain their transnational kinships. Through the modern use of different social media networks, such as Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Reddit, the Iranian diaspora created a virtual community that connects the members. The diaspora employs social media to stay connected and informed about daily life in Iran and abroad. Social media makes the news more accessible, especially when the broadcast is not readily available through the diasporic mass media. The news about civil unrests, protests, and the local movements are reported live from involved parties residing in Iran and shared by those living abroad. It was during the most recent civil unrest in Iran that members of the diaspora took action by actively occupying Iranian embassies and consulates in Europe and Canada or choosing to wear white—specifically the women of the international Iranian diasporas—to support the unnamed protester in Iran who removed her mandatory scarf to wave it as a white flag.

Iranian diaspora argues that the global support of Iranian national movements as a way to restore Iran. Similarly, mass media and social media are also used to celebrate national achievements. During FIFA 2018, people circulated pictures of Iranian fans from around the world waving different Iranian flags in celebration of Iran's win against Morocco. While the new generations are raised in diverse cultural settings, their Iranian identity remains intact, and families have an opportunity to see their future generate on growing around the globe.

Lastly, diasporas are assumed to provide the community with the “possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.” The last point focuses on the creative and scholarly works undertaken by members of the diaspora in the host nation. In the case of the Iranian diaspora, scholars, authors, artists, and academics aim to both reinforce and restructure Iranian identity in diverse host nations. Iranian diaspora scholars attempt to explore the Iranian experience to paint a wholistic picture of what it means to be part of Iranian diaspora around the globe. Similarly, diasporic artists and musicians aim to reclaim, establish, and maintain the experience of their diasporic community. These artists and scholars establish the hybridity of Iranian identity in the host nation by maintaining Iranian cultural ancestry and history (Mino Deraya, Saghi Ghahraman, Abdie Kazemipur, Haideh Moghissi, and Saeed Rahnema). Also, Iranian artists and comedians infuse the Iranian experience with the dominant host nations narrative to create the unique diasporic media representation of Iranian community (Gholshifteh Farahani, Max Amini, Maz Jobrani to name a few). The unique narrative of Iranian diaspora has become subject for members of the diaspora and the host nation to explore Iranian history which is impossible to recreate in Iran due to political restrictions; alternatively, it

helps establish new meanings to Iranian identity in diaspora. Films like *Under the Shadow* (2016), *Paterson* (2016), and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014) are just some examples of diaspora's growth into the mainstream culture. While creativity in the Iranian diaspora flourishes in host nations and helps promote a positive outlook, this is not a complete representation of this diasporic community.

While the Iranian diaspora is considered a diaspora with members who loosely share the diasporic characteristics, their experience is fragmented internally. The racial and ethnic characteristics of belonging are prioritized in the receiving nation, which is challenging to permeate. The diasporic communities are built to respond to these limitations, but are these diasporic communities a cohesive space for all members to feel belonged? The current definition of the diaspora is incomplete because it needs to explore diaspora inwardly from the daily experiences of its members. Identity is a significant part of the diaspora. The definition of the diaspora is partial when the process of identification is left unnoticed. The process of identification is a never-complete cycle and is in constant reshaping. Each identity entails local and global properties. It is collective and subjective. It is temporal and spatial. The concept of identity is a process of becoming, which is in constant change based on cultural and social development. Identity is not a fixed entity that can easily be adjusted based on a series of historical and cultural norms. Identity in the diaspora continues the process of reconstruction initiated at birth. Identity is not amnesiac either. The experienced collective history will be part of this ongoing process. The individual reconstructs one's identity based on the past, which is founded on experience, subjective memory, nostalgia, myth, and collective history. Hall (1996) states, "identity emerges in the centrality of agency

and politics" (2). The identity is in an unstable and complicated environment that has past, present, and the hope for the future. For an individual residing in a diaspora, where they encounter an unhomey state, "Past-Present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living." (2004:10). The identity's process of reconstruction, although never stopped, is disturbed. The diasporic body perceived one's as a foreign particle in the receiving country, and the only way to reclaim a sense of belonging is to latch onto a past, which buried in traditions and static cultural values. This experience is similar to what Fanon (1963) refers to as an occult instability. This cultural state might be a source of empowerment, but the lack of balance keeps one in an imaginary society that is spatially specific and nothing more (ibid). The culture of the homeland has changed, while the culture of the host land is not as inviting. The diasporic identity is reconstructed in the state of confusion.

The Iranian diasporic identity is formed in a multi-layered environment, which presents different sets of hierarchies. The idea of secularity and European civilization as the socially accepted norm among the Iranians affects their diasporic experience. Orientalism and colonialism construct the post-modern society's tolerance to pluralism. The Iranian community, who remain adamant that the monarchy will revive, compare the experience of Iranian life prior to the 1979 revolution to a European experience. This western comparison restates Said's (1978) orientalization and impact of the western superiority on the inferiority complex of the rest of the world. Occidental desirability is not the only source of this western framing. The experience of Iran with Islam, which is associated with Arabic stereotypes, has a history of colonization and violence. There are two dominant instance of undesirable Muslim experience for the Iranian and Persian ancestry. The first undesirable

Islam and Persian relationship took place during the 7th-century's Arab colonization of the Persian Empire that led to Muslim indoctrination and forced acculturation of Iranian culture (Amulya 2017). Second unlikely relationship with Islam happened after the 1979 Islamic revolution, which led to theocratic government. Despite public approval of the religious government, the new regime failed to carry on its promises of equality for all. The Islamic revolution created a victim narrative for the Iranians who were forced to join their diaspora (Shahidian 2007, 104). The by-product of the Islamic revolution was the replacement of subjective religious spirituality with forced religious governance that controls daily practices. The forced religious imposition of 1979 is the account of nightmares of "daily harassment, purges, persecution, imprisonment, torture and mass executions" (ibid), which created deep-seeded hatred toward the current regime and, consequently, toward Islam. The experience of the Iranian diaspora conceives a layer of anger toward the religion that was the foundation of the revolution and remained a justification for the government's brutality. The anger toward the government has been redirected to the religious aspect of the government and made Islam an unlikely counterpart in this civil battle.

In the diaspora, religious animosity does not disappear. In opposition to popular belief, not all Iranians are Shi'a Muslims; the Iranian diaspora is a religiously diverse community with a wide range of religious groups such as Baha'i, Christian, Jewish, Sufis, and Zoroastrian people (McAuliffe 2008). The long history of Iran with Islam, however, locates Islam in an undesirable state. The religious element of the Iranian diaspora is of spiritual freedom and religious restrictions. Gholami (2014) explores the religious interaction of the Iranian diaspora residing in London, UK by focusing on Iranian Shi'a

Muslims and “non-Islamious” Iranian. He argues that, due to constant pressure from the “non-Islamious” Iranians, many devout Iranian Shi’a Muslims choose to practice their religious preferences in accordance with “non-Islamious” codes in a confused and unsatisfactory way. This study, although completed in the UK, reflects the experience of the linked Iranian diaspora. The Iranian diaspora is based on disapproval of the current regime and, by extension, the religion of Islam. Gholami (2014) adds that many Iranians perceive Islam as “‘essentially un-Iranian nature,’ which makes Islam and Iran forever irreconcilable” (74). This leaves the devout Iranian in need of explaining their religious practice and renaming it as spiritual and non-religious. To be a devout Iranian Muslim is difficult and stressful for the practicing individual. In addition, the undesirability of Islam among the Iranian diaspora is justified by post-9/11 Islamophobia. During participant observations, a community member sided with Trump’s Muslim ban and Quebec’s niqab ban. This individual predicted a brighter future for Canada with a complete ban on Islam and practicing Muslims. His perception is extreme, and his ideology misguided and misinformed, but his account draws upon a communal hatred which is justified in the host nation.

While religion fractures the community, it is not the only dividing factor in the diaspora. As mentioned earlier, gender was one of the deciding factors for familial migration; despite this, gendered segregation still exists in the diaspora. Moghissi (1999) argues that experienced cultural pride and misguided communal perceptions can lead the community to perpetuate traditional gender roles and revive patriarchal ideologies and power structures. Even though the experience in the diaspora is different from the lives in

the home country and the home country's evolved culture, the segregated gender roles are reintroduced to maintain the community's unity. In the diaspora, the revival of a cultural gender segregation affects the experience of Iranian women. Members of Iranian diaspora tend to practice the traditional gender roles; while women are expected to participate in the labour force, their identity as a domestic caregiver has not transformed. The labour of love and cultural preservation is heavily on women's shoulder, while masculinity remains in public affairs with dominating socio-political power. The traditional gender roles have a negative effect on the queer community. The Iranian diasporic community is sexually diverse, especially due to the severe punishment of queer bodies in Iran. Homosexuality is a crime punishable by death or voluntary gender reassignment surgery (Jafari 2014). Since the Islamic Republic of Iran punishes Queer bodies, the Iranian diaspora accepts the community with open arms, but if they transgress from the communal socio-political norms and mores, their sexuality becomes their main point of criticism. While the queer community is accepted, the Iranian diaspora perceives the queer identity as abnormal. One member of the queer community expressed with bitterness, "at the end of the day, you know you are just f** to them." I will discuss this further when exploring the queer community's relationship with the flag.

In addition to gender segregation and religious animosity, there is a lack of trust among the Iranian community. The Iranian diaspora is suspicion of anyone who bears a symbolic representation of the Islamic republic, which includes anyone who wears a hijab, wealthy new immigrants, or anyone who accepts the current regime as the official regime of Iran. The anger has deep roots in fear and paranoia based on the history of the Iranian secret

police and their ongoing activities and their global surveillance of human rights and political activists to collect information and report back to Iranian authorities. One of the interviewees recalled his political activities in India and his naivete in trusting his community. Someone he trusted reported him to authorities in Iran. He claimed “Hezbollahies” caused great hardship for him and his family. The only way that he could protect his family and himself was to never return. Another community member protested that he has been unable to talk to his family over the phone for the past thirty years since the Islamic government tapped his family’s phone, and their phone conversations were recorded and interrupted. The Iranian community are afraid of their own community members since anyone can be an informant and cause one’s disappearance, simply by sharing information on their political beliefs to Iranian authorities.

In Iran, during and after the revolution, we didn’t have any police on university campuses, and students could practice their freedom of speech, but they would disappear the next day. Iranian don’t have the immunity to express themselves freely in fear of exclusion or worse. The fear of expressing ourselves politically, because we lack political stability. We fear if we say something political with the wrong crowd and decide to travel back to Iran, we will be stopped at the border and imprisoned by the Iranian government. (L)

This fear is not hidden in the state of the paranoia of imaginary secret police. Their fear has been proven multiple times. When reviewing Iranian, Canadian, and international news, there are stories of expatriates, who never returned from their short visits to Iran. The fear lies in tangible evidence of disappeared journalists, scholars, and activists who were last seen imprisoned in Evin prison. One of the most famous cases was of Iranian-Canadian photo journalists, Zahra Kazemi, who was arrested while taking a picture of grieving mother

near Evin Prison. While under the custody of Iranian officials, she died, which was ruled as suspicious (Zerehi 2014). The fear causes rage to turn inwardly toward the members of one's diaspora who have any signifier relating them to the Islamic Republic of Iran. A queer rights activist even argued that the community does not need a secret agent because there were many cases of community members acting as informants for their own safety and security if they chose to go to Iran. The communal fear, hand-in-hand with the need for a sense of belonging, creates an insecure community where members need one another, but fear each other.

Ethnicity and social class are other dividing factors in the diaspora. Iran does not have a caste system, but the Iranian community is divided based on kinship, ethnicity, and social class. The members of the Iranian community refer to themselves as Persian and Iranian interchangeably, but the Iranian diaspora is ethnically diverse. The Persian identity is only one of the many Iranian ethnic identities. Persian, derived from Parsi, constitutes of people residing in the central provinces of Iran, specifically the Pars province. In addition, since Tehran has been Iran's capital city for many centuries, Tehran is commonly referred to as a city, while other provinces referred to as counties, which locates Tehran's residents hierarchically higher in the matrix of domination. In this linguistic allocation of regional significance, Tehran is the norm, and other provinces are the exotic ethnic others, which carry different ethnic stereotypes. Even the residents of Pars are not safe from these stereotypes. Jokes and anecdotes normalize stereotypes of different ethnic groups, but the humour in the stereotypes becomes the identifying traits of each ethnic group.

The Turks, Kurds, Baluch, Gilakis, Mazandarani and Lors are the other indigenous ethnic groups living in Iran, and they are an integral part of Iranian diaspora. The ethnic minority groups are targeted by the current government to avoid uprisings and demands for equal rights. In addition to indigenous ethnic groups, Iran has other ethnic diasporas who self-define as Iranian or hyphenated Iranians. These individuals are involved with their cultural community, but they are involved with the Iranian community as well. The Arab, Afghan, and Armenian diasporas resided in Iran for generations and, while they speak their own languages and participate in their cultural practices, they are part of the Iranian diaspora. Their experience with the Iranian community, however, is segregated and ranked. While the Persians and other ethnic communities rely on each other for communal support, the Persians maintain their dominating class. Alongside ethnicity, different social classes are in play. The social class is closely related to one's ethnic background. The social class might not be as significant if it intermixes with the individual's kinship and ethnic background. An individual's ethnic identity is significant among the Iranian community, and it surpasses social class.

CONCLUSION

Iranian diaspora shares common characteristics with Cohen's definition of diaspora, but as it shows, there are gaps between the theory and practice. While I believe that diaspora theories are significant in exploring the complexities of racial and ethnic minorities, I believe the theory requires further inspection. As it shows when conceptualizing the Iranian

diaspora, while the Iranian diaspora is a global community, their community is fragmented and hierarchical. To enrich the definition of diaspora, the theory requires to be revisited to investigate the significance of the ingroup dynamic and intercommunal interaction. In the case of the Iranian diaspora, to explore the communal separation, I investigate the community's social interactions and intercommunal conflicts through microanalysis. The following chapters aim to reconstruct the concept of diaspora and to address the intercommunal conflicts among the Iranian diaspora.

CHAPTER 5 – GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FLAG

DEBATE IN DIASPORA

At a community centre senior event, an older gentleman passionately expressed his rage toward the IR flag, which destroyed Persian ancestry. While praising the Lion-and-sun flag, he unexpectedly put his hands up in fists. With a wide grin on his face, he maintained a fighting posture and said, “I will defend my flag no matter what.” He then threw two air punches and sat back in his chair with his smile still intact (Fieldwork ...).

Like any other diaspora, the Iranian diaspora negotiates their cultural and political identity through their social location and their relations with others (Hall 2014). Gendered identity is part of this negotiated cultural existence. The concept of gender becomes an essential factor in the community’s definition of the flag and their selection of it. To grasp the underlying reasons for Iranian diaspora’s flag selection, the history of gender and sexual identity becomes an essential part of this equation. While the topic of discussion was the Iranian flag, during each interview the subject of gender was commonly brought up either directly, or indirectly through use of dichotomous gendered language, tone, and expectations. The Iranian diaspora’s gender segregation is embedded in Iran’s unique history and culture of patriarchy and traditional masculinity. Iranian scholars, such as Afsaneh Najmabadi (2005), Minoo Derayeh (2006), Haideh Moghissi (1996), Guity Neshat (2004), and many more, explored the concept of Iranian patriarchal genealogy and the historical evolution of Iranian-style male-centric social norms.

Binary characteristics of gender positionality are the foundation of the dominant Iranian gender ideology, which represents femininity as an object of desire for a male subject. The desirability associated with feminine qualities is bestowed upon both male and female bodies, which is a testament to a denied culturally-fluid gender identity and sexual orientation. The historical Iranian hegemonic masculinity objectifies dependant femininity under the independent male gaze. The orientalist narratives assume gender positionality in Iran from a Eurocentric ideology, which was influenced based on a series of preconceived ideas about the Iranian identity and its direct association with the Muslim worlds. The Pre-Muslim Iran, the post-Muslim Iran, the post-Qajar Iran, and lastly post-Islamic revolution Iran each experienced a different gender positionality with a slow and aggressive evolution of non-binary gender performativity to an exclusively dichotomous social reconstruction of the female and the male gender. The narrative of gender, however, closely juxtaposes with violence and victimization of femininity and the feminine body. In the ancient Iranian Empire, the gender dichotomy was stricter among the lower caste and kinship, while the higher caste and kinship enjoyed the privileges of gender equality (Derayah 2006). Not only did the dominant gender narrative never progress for the lower social ranks, but it also slowly regressed into prevalent male chauvinism, which ultimately became the dominant narrative of the political and legal language of post-revolutionary Iran.

GENDER THROUGHOUT IRANIAN HISTORY

Gender before Islam

For Iranians, the legal system, moral values, and religious teachings are inseparable. The spiritual teachings are the answers to all existential questions and the foundation of social norms and values. In Pre-Islamic Iran, the dominant religion was composed of the teachings of Zarathustra, which were based on equality, harmony, and peace. While Zarathustra preached that women and men are equal and praised them for following Zarathustra's wisdom—"good thoughts, good words, and good deeds" (Avasta 8)—patriarchal gender norms were ubiquitous in ancient Persian history. The patrilineal expressions expected a woman to be obedient to her husband and for a man to be a moral being to help the world flourish (Avasta). The gender roles were instrumental for child-rearing and social reproduction, which encouraged the father's involvement in raising their sons from the age of 5 and preparing them to be a proper patriarch. Children aged 7 to 15 started their educations, which was the teaching of religious texts, moral and ethical studies at the local temple or the family's home, and caste, kinship and gender-based preliminary occupational skills. In Avasta, while there is gendered language, there is no specification on professional gender exclusion or segregation (Derayeh 2006). The gender segregation of the profession, however, lays in the normative internalization of what professions were known as feminine or masculine.

While women from higher caste or kinship could participate in non-traditional gender roles, those from lower kinship or caste followed socially specific gender roles and

gender occupations (Derayeh 2006). After the age of 15, children began their private education based on their parents' caste membership. Many girls were trained in home economics and child rearing because the sociocultural norms of the time attributed domestic labour as a feminine domain. However, female children of the higher caste could choose to participate in male-dominated professions. Women in the upper social caste or from high-standing kinships had the opportunity to be part of the political system, as well as the military forces. Iran before Islam had two reigning queens, whose gender-neutral title of Padishah validated their social positions (ibid). While their terms of government were short-lived, it was not impossible for a woman to have a high-ranking position (ibid: 44-47). In Iran's pre-Islamic era, Iranians practiced patriarchy, but women had opportunities to be politically involved in introducing policies for the betterment of women's lives. In the mid-600s, at the end of the Sassanian dynasty, the Muslim Arab invaders colonized Iran's religious ideologies (Lewis 1989).

Muslim Takeover of Iran

The global rise of Islam in the 7th century influenced the structure of religion and gender in Iran. The newly established religion of Islam aimed to convert as many followers as possible because spreading the words of Allah is more valued than one whole month of fasting and praying (Ravandi 1975; 11). The Muslim missionaries planned to convert and unite the newly expanding Muslim world, which is arguably an act of colonial conquest (ibid). The Muslim Arab attack on Iran and the religious colonization of Persian civilization allowed the Iranian and Arab men to subjugate Iranian and Arab women. While women accepted the religious status and the social restrictions that came with it, due to the existing culture of

patriarchy, the religious, political leaders failed to fulfill their promises for gender equality and the emancipation of women. While Islam's advocates were primarily women, who financially and socially supported its expansion, future male religious figures' interpretations of Quranic verses introduced male-dominated religious laws and regulation on gender roles and sexual conducts. These religious laws and regulations limited women's social growth. The Muslim imperialism and religious wars encouraged male chauvinism and indicated the perception of Iranian women as lower species under the name of Islam (Derayeh 2006). The religious leaders' interpretation of Islam tarnished Iranian women's spiritual and religious identities, and women have been in a constant war to regain their lost social status ever since.

Many Iranian women relate the Islamic revolution to the 7th century Persian Islamic takeover, especially since the Islamic revolution of 1979, under pseudo-religious laws, legally limited women's livelihoods. While some Iranian women blame the religion for their loss of social status, looking through the Persian empire and Iranian history, it is evident that many Iranian Muslim women fought for Islam to maintain their religious and national identity. One of these examples is the woman-led protests that took place during the Tobacco Protest of 1891, when the religious leaders passed a fatwa to ban tobacco. Women, under the name of religious morality, participated in civil disobedience by breaking windows of tobacconists and shisha places. This civil disobedience and vandalism were in support of the religious ban on tobacco to prevent the British monopoly of tobacco in Iran (Keddie 1966). Then again, the constitutional revolution 1906, which is known as *Enghelāb-e Mashrūteh*, provided Iranian Muslim women, mainly from the middle and upper classes, an

opportunity to demand legally binding laws to protect women's autonomy and social emancipation through political reform. While Iranian Muslim women participated and led these revolutionary movements, their demands were left unnoticed when the Iranian governmental policies were established (Moghissi 1994: 29-31).

Similarly, after Reza Shah's overthrow of the Qajar dynasty, he aimed to make Iran modernized, but specifically westernized. In 1936, as part of this modernization, he imposed a non-consensual unveiling of Iranian women to free them from the claws of religious patriarchy (Najmabadi 1991). Meanwhile, he never entertained women's demands for a safeguard in marriage and, more importantly, divorce rights or disposing of polygamy (Ettehadieh 2004; 95). The systematic victimization of women left them exposed and vulnerable. Women fought to keep their hijab, even if it meant being tortured and disrespected by the police and being prisoners in their homes. Women, with the help of religious leaders, reclaimed their freedom to wear hijab until Reza Shah's resigning in 1941(Najmabadi 1991).

While the Pahlavi Monarchy promised independence for women, women's experience tended to be one of subjugation under cultural patriarchy. Women had the right to higher education, but it did not guarantee employment opportunities. They bear no equality in the public sector and private settings, and their social status remained as second-class citizens. It was during Muhammad Reza Shah's reign that he made some social reforms as a part of the White revolution. The White Revolution was instigated by pressure from US President John F. Kennedy during the cold war to limit the communist threat. The white revolution granted many social rights to women, including the right to vote, legal and

social emancipation, as well as new proposed Family Protection Law (FPL). Religious clergy strongly opposed the Iranian suffrage movement and the newly proposed Family Protection Law, as they argued these are signs of westernization (Keddie 2000). In 1963, Muhammad Reza Shah opposed the religious clergy to gain public support and proposed a referendum for women's suffrage. The women's right to vote was followed by FPL, which provided women with social support and equal rights in marriage, custody battles over the children, the abolition of polygamy, and unequal divorce settlements. In legal terms, women appeared to have social rights, but the culture of patriarchy did not cease to exist (ibid).

Contrary to the legally binding policies for gender equality, Iranian women remained in an uncertain location with limited cultural rights. Many women began supporting the Islamic revolution to resist the existing cultural gender positionality and to reject the westernization of Iranian women's experience. Women welcomed the Islamic revolution because Ayatollah Khomeini promised women social equality, autonomy, and gender liberation. In his speeches, Khomeini persistently addressed the location of women as equal status to men. He always encouraged education, social activism and participation in political affairs (Khomeini 1979). The new government did not pursue the given promises, and the current status of Iranian women is the evidence of these failed agreements.

The culture of patriarchy gained momentum after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. While Ayatollah Khomeini promised to bring social equality for women through religious ideas, his promises left women legally and socially vulnerable. The pledges for gender equality were unfulfilled, and women's rights were restricted. The new regime immediately removed the FPL, and women were at the mercy of their male counterparts. The assurances

of social equality were only relevant to the male experience, and women lost their limited social independence overnight. The culture of male domination became a norm under the guise of Sharia law and traditional family values. The limited, newly-gained pre-revolution rights for women were discarded legally by making women dependant on their male counterparts. As Moghissi (2008) describes it, the culture of gendered violence became a social norm and part of the Iranian legal system. The legal devaluation of women to half of a man in the judicial system and limitations of social and financial security made women prisoners in their country. The status of women has not changed in the Iranian legal system, because their fundamental human rights remain under scrutiny.

Among legally imposed abuse on women, Iranians are aiming to change the system internally. For instance, the current sexual revolution demands gender equality by shedding traditional and systematic patriarchal family values. The shedding of the hijab and desegregation of genders, predominantly among the higher classes of society, are aiming to bring justice for women living in Iran. But the abusive patriarchal legal system is the opposing side of this equation, which legally and socially positions women in subordination with limited opportunities. Female activists and queer rights activists are facing harsh punishments of imprisonment, torture, and even execution. The legal system in Iran is in place for a cisgender, heterosexual, Shi'a Muslim man, which locates them in the position of privilege, whether they agree with it or not.

HETERONORMATIVITY AND GENDER DICHOTOMY IN IRANIAN DIASPORA

At the party, while it is not deliberately done, off the dance floor women separate themselves from men. Women gather in small groups of three or four. They talk about work and family and sharing anecdotes of their successful lives and their children's progress in the Canadian educational system. In more intimate groups, the women tend to confide in one or two intimate friends about their problems and hardships in both Canada and Iran.

On the other hand, men gather in one large group around the bar to shield others off their alcohol consumption and their "manly" chatters. I approached the circle of men on a different occasion. They would offer to make me a drink and limit my participation in the discussion. The men are interested in two things: soccer and politics. In this specific event, the men were discussing politics surrounding the experience of the Kurdish population in Iran and Iraq. They speak loud enough to be heard from a distance, but I can't wedge myself in their circle.

The younger people practice gender segregation by using a gendered language that separated feminine from the masculine. The teenage boys joined the party, while the teenage girls joined the kids and acted as their supervisor. None of these were assigned to these young adults, but they acted accordingly. (Fieldnotes November 2016)

As a part of the queer movement in the west, the concept of gender is becoming inclusive and accepting of the fluidity of gender and sexuality, which is not based on a distinct dichotomous heteronormative gender characteristic. While the Iranian diaspora has a diverse gendered body, the norm remained a hidden segregated gender binary and exhibited public heteronormativity. During my interviews, I noticed a gendered way of discussing flag selection. Iranian women's flag selections generally leaned toward the lion-and-sun flag based on its cultural significance, or the white flag for its apolitical and communal perspective. The women were the peacekeepers, who aimed to mediate cultural identity in the diaspora. Women's flag selection was closely related to community development and

uniting diasporas. Many Iranian women selected a flag that assumed to unify the community and accepting of diversity within the group. Based on collected descriptive data, male respondents were more likely to select a flag with an ensign based on their political association. Three out of four interviewees who preferred the IR flag were men, and seven out of eleven people who selected the lion-and-sun flag were men, as well. Only two men chose the flag with no ensign, one of whom defends his selection based on the political association of the white flag in its historical interpretation. Men tended to be more rigid on the political aspect of the flag as a way to define the Iranian identity from socio-political boundaries. The gendered flag selection is closely related to the history of gender segregation in Iran's legislative history, traditions, and the current regime of governance.

FEMININITY, ETHNIC COMMUNITY, AND CULTURAL MAINTENANCE IN DIASPORA

Female respondents were more likely to make their selection based on cultural essentialism and community unification. Many interviewed women who selected the lion-and-sun flag reflected on their financial and linguistic shortcoming in exile and their wasted opportunities, which was forced upon them by the Islamic revolution. To rationalize their predicament, they appealed to the ancient history of the Persian empire. When discussing the lion-and-sun flag, the respondents commonly clasped onto their genealogy and the architectural remains of the Persian empire represented in the flag. Z came to Canada more than 20 years ago, but she has been part of the Iranian diasporas around Europe and North

America. She left Iran immediately after the revolution in search of education since the Islamic Government suspended school systems during the anti-western Cultural Revolution. In May 1980, to Islamicize the education system and limit Western influences, under the name of Cultural Revolution, government officials closed all universities (Razavi 2009). The result of the cultural revolution was an alteration of the curriculum, styles of teaching, the introduction of new textbooks, and the increased segregation of female and male students. Above all, it also restricted women's educational careers by prohibiting them from studying in a certain field (Shavarini 2005). When she talked about the lion-and-sun, she spoke with such pride, while she held resentment toward those who do not agree with it. Z argued that pride in the lion-and-Sun flag is pride in the long history of the Persian empire, which helps the community come together. She talked with passion about the symbolic and historical representation of the Lion and the Sun in the ruins of Pasargadae and the Persepolis. "If I can't be proud of my history, what can I be proud of?" she protested. She was enraged by the religious changes and blamed Islam for the downfall of the Persian empire. She remained loyal to the Monarchist regime and argued that if Iranians knew the outcomes of the Islamic revolution, they would never revolt. She expressed her disappointment, not in the government, but the religion that is the foundation of that government. She juxtaposed Islam and Iranian culture in a contradictory fashion, as though one can either be Muslim or Iranian.

Z: The Allah's name on the flag is about the Quran and Islam and Arabs. The Iranians, instead of knowing their Farsi, they are supposed to understand the Arabic language... He [her son] is very proud to be Iranian. But when you say *hazrateh Mohammad*, Islam, Islam religion, he is even like.... Hahaha ... like ashamed a little. It is the same for me. I didn't know it when I was a kid, I didn't know what it was, but when I learned about my history, I was ashamed of us for being people

who let this happen to their country, but I have the right to be proud of my historical background and the good kings.

Z's respect for her old flag is to restore her ethnic identity and separation from the compulsory Muslim identity. While Z never pondered upon the Iranian history of patriarchy, she blamed Islam for her subjugation without hesitation. Her experience in diaspora instigated anger toward Islam as a religion. No matter which flag was selected, most female respondents shared anger toward the current regime and its religious laws for stripping them down from their agency and autonomy. Z, who did not identify with any religion, expressed her most profound sympathy for all Muslim women. She expressed her sympathy in an orientalized fashion that perceived Muslim women as passive victims of Islam. She said, "...it is Islam that destroys and oppresses women from the time that a girl becomes a woman at age 9. All women...all Muslim women are miserable."

Most of the participants who selected the lion-and-sun flag made their choice to distance Iranian identity from the Muslim Arab world. While they admire Iran's superficial secular regime of governance during the Pahlavi Monarchy, they blamed sexism and patriarchy in Iran on Islam and its gender biases. While celebrating Persian culture, many respondents applied an Islamophobic sentiment to build boundaries between the Persian Iranians and the Arab Muslims. Most female respondents reflected on gender inequality from a religious standpoint and rejected the agency of Muslim women. The focus for women was the separation of Iranian culture from Islam, since for many members of the Iranian diaspora, Muslim and Arab identities clashed in an undesirable union. In the reconstruction of Iranian identity in diaspora, the Iranian community builds impenetrable boundaries against both the religious identity and the other ethnic groups that might affect their social

depiction in the host nation. To revive a culture that was interrupted in the wake of a disappointing religious revolution, female interviewees tend to apply cultural pride to beautify the implemented segregation of Others. DO, a second-generation Iranian woman, expresses great respect for Persian culture, while outwardly critical of Islam and the Muslim heritage of Iranian history.

DO: I feel the lion and the sun and the sword represent freedom, that's what it means to me. Then they changed it. They became Muslims, and they wanted that to describe them culturally or nationally, that we are Muslim. I feel the sun and the...old one represents Shiraz and like being a lion there. Not Shiraz, Persian in general.

While she is a Canadian by birth, her diasporic identity builds a strong emotional connection to the city of Shiraz, which is the birthplace of her parents. She argued that the hidden tension among the Iranian diaspora is a religious conflict. Association of Iranian Muslim women with the hijab is unfathomable to her. It was difficult for her to associate the hijab with Iranian identity. She recalled her interaction with a veiled Iranian woman.

DO: First glance; until they start talking to you, you think they are Afghani, mostly because they are religious...sometimes when they are wearing *maghanae*...but if I see someone wearing a *maghanae* outside of Iran, I think it is not Persian outside of Iran. I am not religious at all, and I think it is wrong to force people into a religion.

She rejected the woman's Iranian identity by classifying her as Afghan. The ethnic rejection of veiled Iranian woman indicates not only a tense religious relationship but also the devaluation of other Iranian ethnic minorities. The dominant cultural identity of Iranian diaspora limits the set boundaries of community membership.

Some remained loyal to Pahlavi's Monarchy and supported the flag as a way of rejecting the current regime and in support of his heir. P was the daughter of a high-ranking

military official, who has familial ties with the Pahlavi family. Her experience post-revolution was traumatic since her family's entire assets were frozen, and her father took the option of involuntary retirement. Her family was in disarray and forced into exile. She discussed, in detail, her bittersweet memories of how she became a self-made woman after her migration. She took pride in the lion-and-sun flag and believed it to be the accurate representation of Iran. She felt disdain for the Islamic Republic of Iran. While she attempted to remain open-minded about individuals' flag selections, she experienced what seemed like post-traumatic stress when discussing the IR flag. She was one of the few whose rejection of the IR flag was by social class, rather than religious reasons. She was not so concerned about ancient Iranian history, as she was with the current situation of Iran and the loss she experienced. During her interview, the concept of Islam was brought up as a symbolic representation of the current regime. While she identified herself as a non-practicing spiritual Muslim, she felt threatened by the stereotypical symbols of the IR regime, which includes the IR flag, the hijab, and overt financial freedom of new members of the Iranian diaspora. She stressed that these three are in a symbiotic relationship because wearing the hijab and flying the IR flag are benefiting and securing the social connections of selected individuals who attempt to maintain their social and financial capital in both Iran and Canada.

P: And there are those who are benefitting [as jomhuri eslami noon mikhoran] from the Islamic republic, and their number is growing in a scary way. I don't know them, and I don't believe in them. I am not against it, but that is my preference, and that is what I recognize.

She expresses tolerance toward the people carrying the IR symbols, but her history and experience with the IR government made her acrimonious toward those bearing the IR symbols. She recalled an incident in a mosque.

P: I went to this mosque ... because it was close to me ... for instance, you are there, and you want to meditate, and you want to go there and empty yourself by crying your heart out. Then this lady announced over the speakers, Mr. Doctor Felani, for instance, donated \$5000. Mr. Engineer blah made a \$2000 donation. They collected their money for this! To me, who worked minimum wage to put myself through school, there is no way that I would make a \$2000 donation to a mosque. Religious belief or whatever, that money is not from sweat; it is money that person got for free. I left that ceremony, and I never went back. I don't want to be part of it, and I don't want to be there.

The new wave entrepreneur migrant class from Iran raises a red flag for the existing diasporic community. Existing members of diaspora argue that the social security of recent migrant is a sign of an ongoing system of corruption in Iran, especially at a time when poverty and unemployment are at the highest levels in Iran. Women specifically expressed anger toward a corrupt system that benefits a selected few and caused a divide among the community members.

Another respondent, while hesitant to select the lion-and-sun flag, argued that fairness is in having the old flag. She believed lion-and-sun is representative of something that the Islamic republic seized from the Iranian people. The sources of Iranian exile and hardship are the uprising of the Islamic Republic, which to her is an acceptable reason to be angry toward the current flag. She, who is self-described as apolitical, explained she would never take political sides, and that flags do not matter to her, but she will have her doubt when encountering the IR flag. While many female respondents assume a blasé attitude toward this political chasm, they used religion to redirect their anger symbolically or

literally. These women perceived the symbolic representation of Islam as an alarming sign, which can affect their socio-communal safety and security or their social image in the dominant society.

All women did not share a similar sentiment toward Islam. M., a retired primary school teacher from the Iranian board of education, was raised by progressive Muslim parents. She remained a devout Muslim and took pride in her religious identity, but the idea of a religious government is abhorrent to her. She was disturbed by the concept of the IR flag and instrumental use of Allah's holy name. She believed that Islam, a personal religious philosophy, has been tarnished by the Islamic Republic's capitalist dictatorship. She similarly agreed that the lion-and-sun flag has deep roots in ancient Iranian history, and the new flag is inappropriate and inconsistent with Iranian history.

M: the new flag belongs to the Islamic republic with Allah in the middle. That flag is around for what? ...20...30...No, 40 years...less than 40, about 36 or 37 years now, in contrast to the lion-and-sun, which is around for 700 years now!

I: The flag of the lion and the sun should be representative of the Iranian community because of its history?

M: for its history...but the one that is in Iran is not even acceptable. Because that is something that the Akhunds (Islamic clerics) created. What I am trying to say is the flag in Iran is supposed to be lion-and-sun.

When discussing her support for the lion-and-sun flag, before the revolution she was critical of Pahlavi's Monarchy. Her loyalty to the old flag was not to a political group, but instead to the representation of Persian history, which is the foundation of her Iranian identity. She indicated that she finds the instrumental use of Allah on the flag as blasphemous.

Among all female respondents, only one woman selected the IR flag, although her selection was not devoid of nationalist criticism and community development. L belongs to the second-wave migrants who came to Canada to continue their educations and escape the gendered restriction on women after the Islamic revolution. The socio-economic calamity of Iran during the eight-year-long war between Iran and Iraq also fostered her migration. During her interview, she expressed her disappointment at the harsh realities of Iranian women's lives and their lack of fundamental human rights. In the diaspora, she stated that the notion of the flag is not just a political sign, but also an emotional connection with the motherland left behind. According to her, in the diaspora, "having a singular flag is a dictatorship," because the Iranian diaspora is a politically and socially diverse social group. She believed that, since everyone is connected to the flag emotionally, it is arbitrary to have one single flag to unify the diaspora. Her post-nationalist laissez-faire attitude, however, rationalized her selection of the IR flag. While she argued that flag, nationality, and borders are a symbolic representation of inhumane subjugation from a realist perspective, nation-states draw the political and national borders, and the flags are the official banners to represent a bordered nation. While the concept of the flag might change for diasporic bodies, the nationalist flag remains the same. In the diaspora, she believed that personal and communal disagreement over the flag would not change the bureaucratic reality of Iran.

L: Anything political is emotional. The flag and its emotional attachment are temporal. The meaning of the flag changes in different political climates, and with it, its emotional attachment changes. The flag is not just a piece of cloth; it is a part of me. It is my language, my political stand, my food...the Iranian flag is the current flag. You can't change reality. You can't. Many are separating themselves from the current regime by keeping the old flag, but the old flag is gone. The old flag is not a flag.

L, similar to other women, argued for the prevailing trend of community building and transcending beyond the flag disagreement to seek common ground in search of achieving the community's shared goals and unity. In the case of L, the common goal was Iran's socio-political equality and equity for minority groups of Iranian citizens and expatriates. "Who cares about the flag change, if you have a common goal to change the ongoing political state of Iran?" she protested. She argued by accepting the current reality in Iran; the Iranian diaspora can come together to make Iran a safe place for the exiled bodies to return. L accepted the current flag because she sees the Islamic Republic of Iran as permanent, and her mythical diasporic desire to return and her vision for her home nation's progress and development swayed her selection. The agreement on the IR flag as the globally recognized flag stemmed from a desire to return.

Lastly, many interviewed women selected the white flag with three colours of green, white and red and no ensigns in the middle. The women who chose the white flag tended to argue for its ethnic and religious inclusivity. Many claimed that the white flag is apolitical and representative of all social groups and political backgrounds. T came to Canada when she was 14 as a part of the third wave of migration. She argued,

T: ...[the white flag] is more general, neutral and unbiased. It doesn't represent a specific ideology. ...The current flag represents a religion, Islam, and it represents the current regime but does not represent all Iranians. And the previous flag with the lion and crown represented Monarchy and did not serve the nation's ideology as a whole.

The female respondents selecting the white flag perceive the IR and the lion-and-sun flags as exclusionary flags, which are not representative of the Iranian community in diaspora. The

white flag, on the other hand, is representative of all Iranian ethnicities and religious identities. The general argument is to have a political and religiously neutral flag, which is ethnically and culturally representative.

S: None of them. Because [each flag] came [with different political] parties, and I don't believe in any parties for Iran. In Iran, I think everybody has to have the freedom to talk and to decide what they want. When it comes to flags with pictures on top of them, they belong just to those people.

When it comes to the flag, the compelling political aspect of the Iranian diaspora caused many to decide to be apolitical and avoid the diasporic community's political imbalance. By merely removing the emblem, many argued that the flag becomes a cultural symbol of Iranian ethnic identity rather than a political one. One respondent even argued that, while it is more acceptable to have the lion-and-sun flag for its illustrative purposes, we should raise the white flag to avoid conflict.

Mon: look...not that I don't have a special feeling. It doesn't matter which flag it is. The feeling you have is toward your country. If that flag represents your state, of course, it makes you feel proud.

Mi: They take it apolitically. Meaning it is not political for them anymore, right? When you put the emblem in, it becomes political, when you take it out, is apolitical like mine, it is my national identity...so, I want to be connected that way. I feel attached to the idea of the flag. So the design of the flag is important to me. I was raised with these three colours. I never saw the emblem there. When they started politicizing it, it came to my attention.

While some picked the white flag for its neutral nature, some female respondents chose the flag as a form of political resistance and community based anti-oppressive movement. These respondents resist both political ideologies by making a political stance. According to them, the representation of each flag with an emblem is of oppression and injustice. The white flag assumes an inclusive political identity in the diaspora that unifies community members.

These women argue that a white flag is a form of non-violent political resistance toward all Iranian political parties. The white flag selection is an act of active resistance, which is to exclude both dominant and recognized political parties for the sake of the diasporic cohesion. These women chose the white flag as a symbolic sign of political rejection of Iran's corrupt governments through a peaceful protest. While rejecting the current regime, the white flag excludes other political ideologies from the Iranian community in diaspora.

SH: ... Iran's new flag comes with a lot of oppression, a lot of execution, a lot of death, a lot of wars....so that is not good. The last regime wasn't good either because of the dictatorship behind it...it has been continuous with totalitarianism...it is practical for people like myself that they don't accept either and they are not in the position of putting any symbol there...the only option is to get rid of all the symbols. There is no other way. So it is the void that kind of says a lot, the void is not the void; it is the rejection of two others.

For people like SH, the flag's emblem does not have a cultural significance, only another form of political resistance and rejection of other political ideologies. The void in the flag, as SH put it, is not a void, but a demand for a government reform, which does not concur with the Monarchist oligarchy.

Many female respondents implied that flag selection is a way of uniting the Iranian community. Traditionally, women are expected to perform their gendered feminine role, which is for social reproduction of the next generation (Lasletti and Brenner 1989). After social and cultural dislocation in the diaspora, women are under duress to follow their gender role by maintaining and reviving their ethnic and cultural values. It is a gender expectation from women to preserve the culture and protect it from fading in the host society. One of the responders, who selected the white flag, claimed that the Iranian society must move past their political agenda and come together to form a resilient community for

the future generation. Mi claimed the common ground for the Iranian population is the educational attainment of their children. She believed the community must be open to all religious and political ideologies since religion and politics are inseparable in Iranian history. She suggested having a diverse community gathering to celebrate the children's educational success. Generally, female respondents merged the cultural aspect of the flag with Iranian identity, diaspora development, and community unification, which is why many selected the white flag. The white flag represents the three colours that are culturally significant and lacks the emblems that instigated the community divide in the diaspora.

In all cases, women from different age groups selected a flag based on their effects on community development and community cohesion. Even those who swayed toward the political aspect of flag maintain a view on an ethnic community's stability and connection. Based on the gendered experience of Iranian women in the diaspora, the white flag appears to be the most appropriate flag to represent Iranian community, after all the white flag "represent all ideologies and religions" (T). Community development, and its links to reinvigorate and reconnect the diaspora, motivated majority of the female respondents' flag selection. While many women selected the white flag, their reasoning shared similar premises with those who did not. The female respondents' selection of any flag was for the sake of community development, the removal of politics from the flag, and production of unifying ethnic social body and strengthening communal identity.

PATRIARCHY, POLITICS, AND BANNERS THAT DIVIDE

Iran's history of patriarchy and the post-revolution legalization of gender segregation and devaluation of the female body affect the social construction of Iranian masculinity in Iran and its diasporas. The male gaze is omnipresent in the discussion of the flag, and the community structure and establishment of the diaspora. The political interpretation of the flag was an influential factor in flag selection among the male respondents. Their political definitions reflect the domination of masculine discourse over the political sphere. A historical overview of the Iranian political system demonstrates that male chauvinism and gendered exclusionary practice ward women off politics. Even though Iranian women were active participants in all civil rights movements for their autonomy and liberty, their devalued gendered position muddled their voices in the patriarchal system of governance. The constitutional revolution is a historical example of gendered exclusionary practices of Iranian politics. While the movement and protests were led and supported by women, their demand for social equality and family rights disappeared in ambiguous policies and legal loopholes. In the diaspora, while many female respondents suggested constructive ideas to strengthen the diasporic community, many of the male respondents remained adamant about upholding their political views as the community's point of view. Men assumed their personal political opinion is an all-inclusive and culturally beneficial one. Male respondents were confident in their knowledge about Iranian politics, history, and culture, even when their accounts were historically inconsistent and inaccurate.

The concept of masculinity and desirability of masculine traits was either indicated directly or expressed latently by way of the tone and attitude of the respondents. During

interviews, many male respondents articulated themselves in an internalized and normative sexist language. The historical Iranian gender positionality diminishes femininity in comparison to masculine appreciation. A young second-generation respondent selected the lion-and-sun as the flag for its powerful male symbolism.

The lion and sun in the middle of the flag send a message of masculinity that everybody would like to identify as. In my view, the lion represents masculinity, which is more powerful, because it holds two swords and the sun. (S)

The valued perception of the masculine properties of the flag is an indication of widespread male chauvinism, founded on a hierarchical and traditional gender binary of desirable masculinity and dependent femininity (Najmabadi 2005). To fully comprehend the masculine desirability, we must look into Iran's history of sexual practices, gender identity in its heteronormative properties, and the location of femininity and masculinity. The historical Iranian views on same-sex sexual practices can demonstrate Iranian gender positionality and its heteronormativity. Same-sex relationships for men, similar to Greco-Roman mentorship practices, were an expected sexual norm among Iranian men. The mentor, who possessed higher social status, took the role of the male as an active partner, while the feminine party, who is the younger male mentee, is the passive recipient of the older mentor's desires and affections (Afary 2009; 79). This historical gender narrative assumes femininity as essentially passive and manufactures an infantilized characteristic for women. In this context, femininity lacks social autonomy and personal maturity. During one of my interviews, a male respondent expressed his annoyance toward a woman who did not follow the expected flag selection for a political gathering by pointing out her red lipstick as a sign of her carelessness and immaturity. Another male respondent who experienced social

isolation among the Iranian community because of his wife's choice to wear a hijab tended to feminize his tone of voice to ridicule the community members' perspectives. He made fun of Iranian women's struggle in Iran, their social invisibility, and their limitations in their daily experiences. While discussing the flag, he recalled a televised singing contest with a young Iranian female contestant.

The judges asked her why do you want to win. Everyone was like we want to sing, become famous and wealthy, our mom becomes happy. Our dad becomes happy. [he started fake crying with a feminine voice] I want to sing because my mom wanted to sing in Iran, but she was imprisoned. [normal voice] the Iranian are always full of these pointless and stupid stories...

The Iranian women's experiences of social segregation, their denial of fundamental human rights, and commodification of their bodies are dismissed based on the privileged social status of the Iranian male. During another interview, when a passerby sexually harassed a woman with a hijab, the male respondent sympathized with the woman's husband, because he experienced such humiliation. The interviewee dismissed the woman's experience entirely since her experience was related and secondary to her husband's. It is fascinating to see the few cases of outward sexist language coincided with the selection of the IR flag. Under the Islamic Republic of Iran's legal system, women are legally dependant on their husbands and other male relatives. While many Iranian men verbally advocate for gender equality, they persistently participate in traditional gender roles, which cause communal gaps among the members. While these gender roles appear to exist only in passing comments, the Iranian social norms internalized the hegemonic gender discourse. The assumption of traditional gender expectations produces a heteronormative patriarchal hierarchy. During one of the interviews, an interviewee stated that "Iranian girls are far

worse than the boys because a boy is expected to have sexual desire. It is the girl's responsibility to stop him.”(D) The expectation of the toxic male and the assumption of the passive female gatekeeper creates imbalanced gender relationships, which locate the women as community mediators and leave the men to maintain their patriarchal social locations.

Going back to the concept of the flag, men had a different relationship with it. While the female respondents argue for community union, men remain adamant about having a flag that represents their political views and focuses on the dichotomous political boundary building. While women defend the cultural identity and express anger toward the current Islamic regime for the sake of attaining fundamental human rights, men perceived the flag as a dogmatic political symbol and approved of a politically divided diaspora. For instance, the white flag was not a popular choice among the men. Only two men selected the white flag, one of whom chose it as a sign of his political expression. He chose the white flag because of his loyalty to democracy and socialism, and he assumed that white flag came into existence during the constitutional revolution of 1906. He recalled his political activism during the revolution when he was an international student in India. In his narration, the political leadership during the Islamic revolution belonged to exiled Iranian male students. Based on his political association, he referred to different Iranian political branches with disappointment about corruption existing in each group. He ridiculed each group by sharing rumours of sexual indiscretions and financial corruptions with a humorous twist. Lastly, he mentioned “the white flaggers,” which he was part of, “were those, who didn't bother anyone.” When discussing the flag with Iranian men, there is an ample political divide that is not related to Iranian culture.

Many of the male respondents, similar to their female counterparts, delve into the ancient history seeking cultural pride and celebration of Iranian ethnicities, but they aim to make a case for a historically objective narrative of the lion-and-sun flag. For them, lion-and-sun means being true to their Iranian nationality. For instance, A opposed all political organization that used their party's flag to represent the Iranian diaspora because the Iranian flag is founded on Iranian history and should remain as the symbolic representation of the Persian ethnicity.

A: [the flag] taught the world who we are. And that flag came from there. To change it is to lose our nationality. We are losing our nation. I mean...even I had... as... I was active... politically active with the opinions of Marxist Leninists or whatever. And I was engaged with those groups, but that was one subject that I was very concerned about it. That flag has to stay the same flag, ok because of the left organization in Iran. They believe the red flag with the hammer...that was one of my concerns. No, the Iranian flag doesn't matter which organization is going to run the country; the flag stays the same. That is the nation. That is national history. That is the national symbol.

While A referred to nationalist pride, his language was assertive and patronizing in tone. He avoided any political affiliation, but he expressed the significance of Iran's political history as a reason for his flag selection. A expressed similar disappointment in the "ignorant" masses who select the current flag. A, who was forced to leave Iran because of his Marxist-Leninist political affiliation during the Islamic revolution, was critical of the Islamic Republic, as well as the Monarchist regime. He saw the lion-and-sun flag as a symbol of being Iranian, which has long-standing roots in Iran's history.

A: you don't feel right about it, because you know they are changing history, they try to change the history of Iran, which is our pride. There is a different mind running right down in Iran that doesn't have anything to do with the Persian history or Iranian history.

In particular, the public representation of the IR flag was triggering for many. During the interviews, the male respondents were more likely to be emotional about their flag selection in comparison to the female respondents. They expressed a feeling of disappointment, frustration, and anger toward the IR flag; simultaneously, men focused on the lion-and-sun's assurance of stability and preservation of ethnic lineage. For male respondents, the lion-and-sun selection was to evade political or social associations with the current government in Iran.

As mentioned earlier, while the IR flag is rarely selected, male respondents were more likely to choose it based on its official properties. While the smallest number chose the IR flag, they rationalized their selection by dissociating themselves from the current regime's political system. These respondents argued that their flag selection was not representative of their or their families' socio-political involvement with the current regime of governance in Iran. Men's willingness to select IR flag, yet apologetic attitude and pre-empted rationalization of their selection signifies the current political climate among the Iranian diaspora.

I had a chat with an Iranian international student who was born after the revolution. He said that he doesn't agree with the regime, but the current flag is the only flag he knows. He said, "if I choose the new flag, it doesn't mean I am with an Islamic state." He recounts that, during the FIFA Cup 2014, his friend always carried different Iranian flags in his car, "just in case." He said his friend was avoiding communal friction with random Iranians and vandalism on his car or him. The mere fact that this man felt the necessity to carry the IR flag represents his obstinate political views. (Fieldwork...)

When discussing the flag selection, the IR flag selection is a taboo option for the Iranian diaspora. Among GTA and YR's Iranian diaspora, there is a general paranoia and

lack of comfort toward the IR flag, because of its negative connotation and its symbolic representation of a failed revolution. For the Iranian diaspora, the choice of IR flag is a betrayal of one's Iranian autonomy and ancestry. The community members who choose the IR flag over-rationalize their choice. The few who accept the IR flag profusely reject the government's political positions. Their rationale for their selection focuses on the idea that while the diasporic consensus disapproves of Iran's tyrannical and oppressive system, the IR flag is nationally and globally recognized. The four respondents, who selected the IR flag, concurred that, while the current government's flag is not inclusive, rejecting it does not cease its existence. For some, the idea of the old flag, which is not representative of the Iranian borders, was absurd and unacceptable. The male respondents argue that the last flag is an anomaly that died when the regime changed.

R: This is an imaginary idea. Those in power will choose the flag, and I can't give an opinion about it. This notion is just impossible. This question seems to be inappropriate. The new regime has been around...for nearly 40 years, so we must accept it and move on. The power is in this flag, in any political or global setting you attend, the current flag exists. The last king died!

While the 1979 Islamic revolution was not a joyous event, many argue that the IR flag is a bureaucratic representation of Iranian nationality and a global reality for Iran. The worldwide recognition of the flag is a form of dogmatic perception of the flag and not a fluid entity that is subjected to change according to social expectation. They all explained that by accepting the current Iranian government and its flag, the diaspora could aid to restore Iran in this political and economic calamity. While every interviewee acknowledges the oppressive nature of the current government to distance themselves from the Islamic republic, they defend the international recognition of the Iranian government and its flag.

For instance, R found the idea of raising any Iranian flag other than the IR flag to be abnormal, because the flag is a temporal and political national symbol of an internationally recognized country. Therefore, the diasporic multiplicity of the Iranian flag is a form of delusional denial of the current reality of Iran. After all, R argued the flag of Iran is one. While its political association changes through its emblem, the actual three coloured flag remains. He also added it is the IR emblem that is globally known, and Iranian nationals have to abide by it. It is the emblem that forces many to stay in a state of denial and confusion in the construction of the national identity of the Iranian community outside of Iran. While the flag's fluidity is identifiable by these respondents, many maintained a politically fixed interpretation of the flag.

Male respondents employed the flag as a marker for the in-group boundary building. While the male respondents avoided emotionally-charged discussions of the flag, the emotional response was inevitable. The disappointment with the flag is beyond the flag itself since Muslim ideology and practices are assumed to be in relation with the current regime. Anyone who raises the current flag alongside public religious participation is assumed to be an ally of the IR. D is a Muslim community leader and a prominent member of the Iranian Muslim diaspora in the GTA and YR. He is an active member of the largest Iranian Shi'a mosque in North America. He is an avid supporter of the IR flag as the real national flag of Iran since it is the essentially known symbol of Iranian nationality. He expressed a deep sorrow with the internal maltreatment of practicing Muslim members of the Iranian diaspora, especially Iranian women who wear the hijab. He said, "because they believe if someone is Muslim and prays, that person is collaborating with the Islamic Republic to spy on members

of the Iranian diaspora.” He was adamant to demonstrate that his religious practices and his choice of the flag are not representative of any political association he might have with the Iranian government. During the interview, he recalled an incident when a group of Iranian community members protested his mosque, because of the existence of the IR flag on the mosque and its exhibition during different events. He was disappointed with the internal tension and handling of an Iranian community centre, when “people came to our mosque saying that we are working with the Islamic Republic of Iran and that they should close the place.” He felt the Iranian diaspora vilified its religious community. The mosque, for him, is a community centre where Iranian community members can congregate or even seek spiritual support. He listed the number of services that the mosque provides to the community members, but unfortunately, the association of the mosque with the Islamic Republic discouraged people from participating.

This Iranian male respondent expresses his view from a socio-political perspective, and while he advertised for his mosque as a community centre, he was not willing to make his mosque inclusive and inviting. When he was talking about their movie night, he nonchalantly mentioned that women are expected to follow the mosque dress code and wear a hijab to enter the mosque. It was common to see male respondents make casual social demands based on a privileged position they held. The male respondents commonly perceived their expectation and perception as the dominant discourse. While the female respondents attempt to remain unbiased and respecting of the diverse body of the Iranian community, the male respondents tend to criticize all the opposing views. As expressed by a

male respondent, those who choose anything other the lion-and-sun flag, “carry a flag without knowing why. They don’t know about the flag, and they just carry it”.

While indicating the use of violence and physical force was a rarity during the interviews, my participant observation and visual analysis presented a different narrative. While many respondents expressed a blasé attitude toward the exhibition of the opposition’s flag, the physical narrative of the events was different from their expression. Physical and non-physical altercations were mainly among Iranian men. As previously mentioned, the older man’s smile expressed a sense of joy and pride in fighting for his beliefs.

In a viral video, a group of young Iranian men are seen marching and carrying the lion-and-sun flag next to the IR flag in the streets of Toronto. An older man and his group walk up to them and aggressively grab the IR flag out of their hands. A heated discussion takes place, but the camera operator leaves the viewers wondering (December 2017).

While the portrayed young men assume to be inclusive by carrying the IR and lion-and-sun flags, their action was perceived by the opposing group, as an act of defiance and support for a taboo symbol in the diaspora. The side-by-side exhibition of two flags can also be seen as pursuing a political agenda, which is not accepted by many in the Iranian diaspora. While the side-by-side flag is an act of integration, the action is perceived by community members as a sign of the pro-Islamic Republic of Iran. The image of the Islamic Republic Flag encourages a negative and undesirable reaction caused by insecurity and fear. This state of confusion and lack of trust among the community members lead to an emotional response and a physical altercation, especially among the men.

Other than confusion and distrust, there were also constant mentions of public exhibitions of Iranian identity in the host nation. Unlike the female respondents who argued

for ingroup cohesion, the male respondents were more focused on external representation, mainly when their selection was the IR flag. When one of the male respondents discussed the dictatorship of the governmental system, he accepted it as the norm existing in Iran. His perception of multiple flags was contradictory because it weakens the Iranian community by distancing the members and making the community look bad in Canada. For instance, he protested that, during globally recognized official events, such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, the IR flag is the representative of Iranian identity. The IR Flag at the United Nations and FIFA World Cup was a recurring example used by those who were supporting the IR flag. D argued, “[the IR Flag] is my national flag, because this is the Iranian flag. Everywhere you go. In front of the UN, this is my national flag.” He expressed discomfort with the sight of other flags, and he argued that the multiplicities of flags weaken the Iranian representation in Canada. Multitudes of flags, according to these male respondents, cause public embarrassment for Iranians and confusion for those who are not members of the Iranian population.

I have a Canadian friend, who asked me ‘so, finally, what is the Iranian flag, the one with the lion and the sun, or the one without, or this one?’ But the official flag is this. The rest are unofficial. And therefore, this time around, there was more of the new flag. Because in FIFA, the TV showed the current flag, and then the audience had a different thing. (D)

According to these male respondents, the confusion over the flag makes the community disenfranchised in a Canadian perspective because the members are incapable of agreeing on something as fundamental as a flag. Meanwhile, the male respondents indicate confusion

about the representative effects of Iranian flag in Canada, they reflect firmly on their personal flag selection as the accurate representation of Iranian diaspora.

QUEER IDENTITY AND COMMUNAL ISOLATION

“While everyone is nice in your face, they call you [derogatory Farsi term for a homosexual man]. I don’t want to be that.” (MI)

A young trans woman speaks softly about her difficulties in finding and securing a job. She mentioned several times, “when your English is not good, you need to work with Iranians.” As a cashier in an Iranian grocery shop, the store owner paid her less than others. She described constant sexual harassment. She recalled brash comments about her physiological appearance and her sexual organs. (Fieldnotes 2016)

While my data is not representative of the queer community and observation is limited, I noticed a trend of social isolation based on gender identity and sexual orientation. The Iranian queer community encounters ingroup segregation and unacceptability. During my interviewing process, I interviewed one genderqueer individual and two gay men. The experience of queer bodies for the Iranian community is contradictory since many defend gay rights, but many laypeople perceive them as flawed based on the medical model. They are the unusual exotic Others in the eye of the diasporic community. The experience of sexual and gender fluidity in a heteronormative diasporic society becomes exceptionally tricky. I interviewed a gay rights activist who is a prominent member of the Iranian diaspora. P described an incident during the Pride Parade when his selection of the IR flag became a source of gay-bashing. The anti-IR flaggers, who were financial supporters of this queer

organization, shouted obscenities and death threats at those marching under the flag. P recalled,

P: ...he was like death to homosexuals, death to homosexuals. The Islamic Republic exports homosexuals. You people are this and that, and suddenly [one of the financiers], and she believes that she is an activist, started saying I hope every single one of you gets executed.

Since homosexuality is a capital crime in Iran (Jafari 2014), such obscenities are disregarding the experiences of queer bodies forced into exile. As it shows, any small public and political indiscretion cause an attack on the queer community's sexual and gender identities. The attack on gender and sexual identity is a direct representation of the current social location of the Iranian queer community in diaspora. The genderfluid individual openly expressed their lack of communal closeness. They had difficulty connecting with most of the Iranian diaspora. They even hide their gender identity from close family, since they knew their narrative is not socially acceptable by the Iranian diaspora. When asked about their association with the flag and the Iranian community, they casually point out,

“I have no relationship...but honestly, I have a few Persian friends, but we are friends despite that...no, no, that sounds bad...we are friends outside of that [the ethnic identity].”

They separated themselves from the general politics of the community due to the weak communal connection. They selected the white flag, which appeared to bring the community closer. On the other hand, the two gay men whom I interviewed both expressed a strong opinion and feeling toward the flag. P argued the current IR flag should be representative of the Iranian community, and M was an avid supporter of the lion-and-sun flag.

Organizing an Iranian event is a stressful experience for P, who self-identifies as a political Muslim. He was forced to leave Iran for his safety during the third Iranian migratory wave. In Canada, he encountered insecurity due to his political activism in Iran and Canada, but he remained adamant on his selection of the IR flag. He was called an Islamic Republic of Iran sympathizer and lost many financial supporters from the non-queer political community members when he chose to carry the current flag during the Pride Parade a few years back. Upon the presentation of the IR flag, P's supporters turned against him and attacked him verbally using threateningly homophobic comments and making allegations about his relationship with the Iranian government. P argued that the IR flag was a political necessity for global awareness about the ongoing social injustices taking place in Iran. He claimed that it is essential to have the IR flag because it is a globally recognized flag, and it has a positive impact on the Iranian queer rights movement.

If I want to talk, I don't raise any flag, but if I must, I would raise the official flag. For instance, if I go somewhere to give a talk, and I am being forced to raise an Iranian flag, I will use the Islamic Republic flag. Because that flag is the official flag of Iran, and in front of the United Nations is that flag, in all maps that is the flag. Google search shows the current flag, and in practice, that flag is the officially-recognized flag globally. Whenever the people of Iran have the possibility of voting for their government and their flag, then I will use that flag.
(P)

He argued the citizens of Iran agreed upon the flag by starting the Islamic revolution. While the IR flag is currently recognized as the symbol of oppression by the Iranian diaspora around the globe, during and immediately after the revolution, it was a sign of pride. He clarified by pointing out that the flag is a national representation and not a personal image which can be changed by individuals as they desire. He believes the IR flag should be used

in all events, especially when addressing injustices committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During pride, when we wanted to carry a flag, the majority agreed to bring the Islamic Republic's flag, because when you bring that flag among the refugees and gay pride, it has a greater reaction and it is a political statement. (P)

For P, the current flag must be used in its political sense to be a symbol of hate and encouraging change in Iran. He claimed his persecution took place under the shadow of the IR flag. Therefore, it is a civic duty to raise the IR flag in symbolic criticism of the Iranian government and their wrongful treatment of queer bodies.

It is interesting when you raise the Islamic Republic flag; it is not social. It is political. When you are carrying the current flag, you are just saying I am here because of this. (P)

He believed if the diaspora does not recognize the current flag, then injustice in Iran is rendered invisible. To prosecute the current Iranian government for their social injustice atrocities, members of the diaspora must publicly exhibit the current flag as Iran's flag, which is a visible symbol of oppression and prejudice.

Another queer respondent was M, who is a member of Iran's Baha'i religious minority. Juxtaposing his religious identity and his sexual identity with his Iranian ancestry, he rationalized his flag selection. While the lion-and-sun emblem appeared on the Prophet Bahau'llah's exile papers, the bureaucratic representation of the emblem later emancipated the Iranian Baha'i group under the Pahlavi regime. He searched into his religious legacy and merged it with his ethnic identity to emphasize the traditional significance of the flag.

I personally saw the first and actual emblem of the lion and sun was in the passport of Hazrateh Bahau'llah when he was being exiled from Iran to Iraq...the

main symbol [on his passport] was the lion, and the sun...this is from 1000 years ago now that has unique symbolism for the Iranian culture. (M)

M described how his blood boils at the thought of the current flag and expressed dismay in community members who “ignorantly” accepted it. For him, the selection of lion-and-sun flag is a rejection of the IR flag, which is a nationalist response to the current regime’s tyranny. During FIFA World Cups, M was irritated and enraged at those parading the IR flag. He claimed the IR flag is discernibly a sign of disrespect for all who were persecuted and oppressed by the current regime. While M is part of a sexual minority group, his religious identity was the reason for his exile as a young child. He argued from a religious standpoint that Iran belongs to all religious groups and not solely to Iranian Muslims. He explained that the IR flag is a symbol of his religious persecution and eventual exile.

Seriously, when I see it, as soon as I see it, I have this rush. This whole emotional thing that is hugely negative. For me, it’s associated with oppression and anxiety, and people treating me like crap and having no rights or anything. Any feeling that I have is negative. Whether it be during FIFA, or doesn’t matter what context I see it in. It symbolizes not Iran, not 10,000 years of different forms of civilization, 2500 of becoming an actual country or whatever; it doesn’t represent any of that. It doesn’t serve the Persian, Iranian people. This is only the representation of the Islamic Republic, which means the regime of the Islamic government. (M)

M, like many of the respondents, described the current flag through its exclusionary properties, which intertwined with the history of the flag, and the biography of individuals who were affected by the revolution. The IR flag for many symbolizes an enforced exclusion based on religion, sexuality, gender, or even economic challenges. Going back to M’s interpretation, the IR flag is not recognized by many members of the Iranian diaspora as the nationalist representation of Iranian identity. For many in the diaspora, the IR flag is the symbol of separation, loss of status, and exile.

CONCLUSION

In the Iranian diaspora, flag selection is a gendered experience. During the discussion of the flag, certain gendered traits surfaced, which represented gender segregation in the Iranian community, instituted in traditional gender norms. While the flag appears to be a political symbol, the discussions unwarrantedly addressed a dichotomous gender experience, which sidelined the queer experiences of Iranian diaspora. A specified feminine and masculine language dominate the flag's discussion. In the diaspora, the binary gendered view leads the flag discussion to a place, where the political arena is served mainly for men, and women are accountable for community development and cultural preservation.

While the Iranian experiences in the diaspora do not correspond with the traditional Iranian societal gender norms or the current evolved gender expectations, my interviewees narrative were of the traditional public and private divide within Iranian diaspora. The women were more likely to discuss the hybridity of their identity and the clash of their ethnic and national identities, and men aimed to maintain a political boundary to separate the Iranian diaspora from non-members. While many women are involved with politics and social justice issues at the community and societal level, most of the female respondents focused on the discourse of cultural preservation, and a few even claimed an apolitical stance. Their apolitical positions did not stop these women from addressing socially unjust practices and oppression existing in Canada and Iran. While most members of the Iranian diaspora are participating in a non-traditional lifestyle, their social discourse follows a

gendered social norm, where cultural preservation is a feminine practice, and the public and political spheres are the hierarchical masculine arenas. The traditional gender roles are the underlying reason that one of my younger respondents associated masculinity with power.

In addition, the heteronormativity of the Iranian diaspora created a secluded location for the queer community, who either remain in the closet, identify with their socially acceptable identities, or accept the abuse directed toward their sexual and gender identities. The experience of the Iranian queer community is segregating. Their social acceptance is conditional on the queer community's social affirmation with the dominant discourse of the diaspora. The dichotomous traditional gender expectations isolate the experience of women and the queer community among the Iranian diaspora.

CHAPTER 6 – ISLAM: AND IRANIAN OBSESSION

While observing interactions at a Persian hair salon, a small group of women were chatting about the life and politics in Iran. In the course of their chat, one of the customers raged at the current regime for ‘ruining’ Islam and tarnishing her identity as a Muslim woman. In return, the hairstylist, who was offended at her outburst over the issue of religion in Iran, accused the customer of being the reason for the Islamic revolution of 1979, implying that she had likely been one of its supporters. The hairstylist continued berating her customer by saying that there might be spiritual feeling in each person's heart, but Islam is the religion of hate. Even though the woman in question was not wearing hijab, and dressed in a western fashion, her public identification as a Muslim made her a target for the hairstylist's Islamophobic language. The hairstylist's Islamophobia was not a random outburst, and it is arguably the dominant discourse among the Iranian community (Field note, March 2017).

While I asked the participants about the flag selection, they were eager to discuss the underlying religious connotations of the Islamic Republic flag design and the longer cultural heritage of the other two flags. In many interactions, the flag debate appears as the symbolic representation of the religious tension within the Iranian community. The Iranian flag debate and the political association relates to a complex and multileveled history of Iran and its relationship with the Muslim colonization of the Persian empire that began in the 7th century. The historical background of the flag is tied with Islam and Iranian/Persian identity. The flag debate is hard to understand without placing it the historical analysis of the Muslim takeover of Persia, which helped generate a dichotomous relationship between the Arab and the Ajam (the Persians). The colonization of the Persian Empire by the Arab empire in the 7th century as a part of Muslim religious expansion planted a deep-seated hatred toward the Arab Muslims. For many Iranians, the Arab, in association Islam, became coupled with ignorance,

barbarism, and regression. The Persian empire did not accept the cultural separation and forced acculturation of the Persian empire by the Arab world. However, the initial willing and forced conversions, and rejection of Arab culture and not their religion coupled with the passage of time institutionalized Islam as a part of Iranian culture, and the image of Islam became part of Iranian identity. Islam evolved through different dynasties and in many cases was the defender of the weak and the oppressed. Islam became a prominent part of Iranian identity and a significant part of Iranian culture. The Iranians accepted their version of Islam as a part of their temporal religious and cultural evolution. Therefore, Islam has always been part of the Iranian flag, which is part of Iranian national identity.

After the Islamic revolution of 1979, however, ancient religious and cultural animosities resurrected. The new regime redesigned the flag to represent the Islamic republic's ideologies. The Islamic Republic of Iran under the name of Islam limited opportunities for many minority groups and silenced any criticism toward the new regime through censorship and the full creative control over the media, and the Islamic republic flag became the symbolic representation of these restrictions. Simultaneously, the current regime's use of Islam in silencing minority identities in the matrix of domination caused the revival of the association between Islam and ignorance. During the Pahlavi dynasty, especially Mohamad Reza Shah's, Iran's global image was progressive and secular. However, religious discourse's juxtaposition of secularity and westernization became the originator of the Islamic revolution. The Islamic revolution resulted in many Iranians leaving Iran, and hence provided the stimulus to the process of diaspora formation in many places around the globe. In Canada and elsewhere, Iranian diaspora displays older Iranian flags,

since the Islamic Republic flag is the current regime's symbolic ambassador. Other than the rejection of the government, the Islamic revolution also contributed to an orientalized mentality about Muslims in general, and Iranian Muslims in particular. Conversely, since many Iranian diasporas associate the Islamic regime with the forced migration and life in “*ghorbat* (Diaspora in Farsi),” they chose to reject Islam that encouraged the revolution and the flag that represents it.

Iran's long and complicated relationship with Islam helped form a distinct theocratic system of governance in the country. Even though the pre-revolutionary Iranian government was claimed to be secular, the strong religious element of Iranian nationality did affect its institutional policies and procedures. While the current anger within segments of the diaspora is toward the religious system reigning over Iran, some community members attack the ancient history of Muslim colonization of the Persian Empire. Within elements of the diaspora Iranian community today, the image of “uncivilized,” “grasshopper eating Arabs” represents an orientalist discourse that creates the Other out of Arab ethnicity. Even some of those who see themselves as ‘spiritual’ refer to Islam as consisting of superstitious beliefs that belong to lower socio-economic classes, and undereducated rural and minority ethnic groups. Some members of the Iranian diaspora distance themselves from being ‘Muslim’ by associating Islam with the Arabic identity. This religious interpretation of Iranian identity is not representative of Iranian heritage. Consequently, in the diaspora, the political-religious history of Iran encourages an ongoing internal religious friction that persists among community members. Consequently the flag, which is the symbolic representation of this

religious government, becomes the symbol of all that is hateful. The IR flag provokes considerable debate in the diaspora.

The flag debate represents underlying religious tensions, which are omnipresent in many diaspora community settings. Islam manages to find its way to any discussion. Due to the current state of Iran, practicing Muslims are pressured to either be silent, or must continuously defend their religion by separating it from their political beliefs. The complicated relationship between Islam and politics in Iran often translates into a reluctance to identify as Muslim in the diaspora. While the Iranian diaspora is a Muslim diaspora, upon revisiting the topic of flag contestation, Iranian diaspora displayed intracommunal Islamophobia. In this Chapter, by analyzing the Iranian flag debate, I am unpacking the Iranian community's ingroup Islamophobia influenced by continuous historical and environmental factors.

HISTORY OF ISLAM IN IRAN

While the political history of the evolution of the Iranian flag is significant in exploring the flag debate in the diaspora, the history of Islam and its relationship with the Iranian government is detrimental in this ongoing debate regarding the Iranian flag. When discussing Iran's history and its relationship with the flag, the religious narrative is omnipresent. During the interview processes, due to the political nature of the flag as a nationalist symbol for Iranian diaspora, I expected the participants' responses to focus on politics and communal boundaries of Iranian identity. My results, however, were unexpectedly at odds with my preconceived assumption. The interview respondents tend to

focus on the religious aspect of the flag, which I assumed to be marginal to the dominant political debate surrounding flag discussion. Throughout the ancient and modern history of Iran, the language of religion has been inseparable from the language of politics. Before the Islamic takeover, Zarathustra's teachings were the moral guidelines for the Persian empire's legal and political system. After the Muslim colonization of Iran, the deep-rooted marriage of religion and culture remained as the dominant pillar of Iranian national identity. Muslim teaching slowly replaced Zarathustra's texts. While some Iranians rejected Islam after the Muslim takeover, Islam was accepted by many people because of its similarities to Zarathustra's teaching. In addition to religious similarities, Muslim missionaries travelled throughout ancient Persia and even produced a Farsi translation of the Quran (Khaki and Hussain 2014). Also, Persians tended to accept Islam since they were suffering from class conflict and heavy taxation of people for the comfort of the secular nobility and religious leaders of the time (Ravandi 1975). Islam, eventually, was internalized by Iranian culture, and transformed into Iran's dominant religious ideology. As stated in an interview by an Iranian-Canadian scholar,

Culture takes religion and manipulates religion. This is what happened to Islam. Islam coming to Iran and Iran takes it and somehow Iranianize it. Ok? So in that sense ... it is problematic to say Shia faith is not Iranian culture. (M)

For parts of Iranian history, Muslim leaders were the revolutionary activists, who on occasion restored Iranian democracy in opposition to the governing system.

While Persians accepted Islam, the process was not devoid of violence. Spreading the word of Islam was part of Arab's colonial conquest. The Arab empire attacked and set fire to villages. The fires, however, were interpreted symbolically and encouraged many

Zoroastrians to convert, because the fire was holy and as predicted the sign of the anticipated prophet (Arnold 1913). While Persians accepted the religion, the Arab Empire's colonialism was violent, destructive and humiliating toward the Zoroastrians, who refused Islam. After a series of colonial battles, the Arab army under the *Caliph Omar's* reign occupied Persia (Hussein and Khaki 2014). The Arab empire intended to colonize the Persian empire as part of their global conquest, which required Persians to shed their language and culture and acculturate with the Arab identity. While the Muslims colonized the Persian's religious ideology, the Persian empire maintained its cultural identity and its language. Since spatial and temporal element influences the reconstruction of culture, it is essentialist to assume one's culture is not shaped overnight and remain unchanging. The social interaction from an individual level and institutional level continuously construct the culture. Consequently, through cultural evolution, the Persians reconstructed Islam to readjust to their cultural identity and rejected the Arab culture from their religious identity.

During the Muslim colonization, the ethnic Arabs ridiculed and berated Persian culture and language to reinforce the process of colonization. For centuries, Persians fought against the humiliation that was brought upon by Arab chauvinism until Persians successfully restored their language in public. During the 9th and 10th centuries, modern Farsi emerged as a response to centuries-old colonial acculturation. Though Arab culture did have some influence over modern Persian civilization, the impact was minimal, and Persians managed to revive their ethnic identity. The combination of ancient Farsi and some Arabic words restructured the modern Farsi syntax in the Iranian Muslim world. Iranian poets, such as *Rudaki*, responded in literary forms to Arab's patronizing and chauvinist treatment.

Through the cultural resistance of these literary figures, the Farsi language regains its strength. The most important figure to maintain the Farsi language was Abu'l Qasim Mansure Ferdowsi. Ferdowsi's masterpiece was an example of socio-political resistance against the Arabic language and the cultural colonization of Iranian literature. In his legendary masterpiece, *The Shahnameh (Book of Kings)*, Ferdowsi helped revive the pre-Islamic Persian Empire's cultural and traditional heroes by merging mythology and history. Ferdowsi poetically reiterated the oral history passed down from generation to generation of the heroism of pre-Arab Persian legends, in his own battle to restore Iranian culture (Zia-Ebrahimi 2014). While Ferdowsi begins *Shahnameh* by praising the Shi'a religious figures, his anthology separates Iranian culture from the effects of colonizer's language. Even through using Shi'a identity, Ferdowsi portrays the Iranians to be different and separated from the Sunni Muslims world.

Despite these tensions, Iran's adopted version of Islam became a substantial part of Iranian identity. As part Iranian fought to maintain their spiritual and religious connection. Post-Islam, dynasties such as the Qajar included Islamic teachings in their government and administration, which normalized Islam as part of Persian identity. Before the Pahlavi dynasty, people practiced Islam freely in both public and private. It was during Reza Shah's reign that the issue of Islam and the hijab became a controversial topic. Reza Shah, inspired by western societies upon his return from Turkey, decided to secularize Iran by following Ataturk's hijab ban in public places and encouraged a broader de-Islamification of Iran (Motamedi and Amini 2016). Islam had been such an essential part of Iranian historical identity that many Iranian women resisted the regime's authoritative gender rule through

civil disobedience to invalidate the veil ban. Many women willingly subjected themselves to police brutality or refused to leave their houses to keep their hijabs. Even the success of the 1979 Islamic Revolution relied on Iranian religious devotion. According to the historical manifestation of Iranian religion, the Persian Muslim identity is a defining factor for many Iranian.

The Muslim religious leaders were at the forefront of all socio-political movements. When there was a threat to Iranian national identity, it was the religious leaders who instigated the movement. The 1891 tobacco movement, the constitutional revolution of 1906, and Coup d'état of 1953 were all lead by Shia religious clergy. All of these important movements were in response to western influences on Iran. One of the most important events, which eventually lead to the Islamic revolution 1979, was the coup d'état of 1953 concerning nationalization of oil and overthrow of Mosaddeq for passing the nationalization law (Gasirowsky 1987). The involvement of the British and the American governments in removing Mosaddeq from office was done to help the regain control over Iran's oil. One of the many supporters of the coup was the religious group, who were arguing that Mosaddeq's government was involved with communists and a threat to Islam (Abrahamian 2001). On Mossadeq's 14th anniversary of his death, Ali Khamenei declared, "We are not liberals, like Allende (and Mossadeq) whom the CIA can snuff out." (ibid, 214) The coup of 1953 became the symbol of the westernization of Iran, and Iran's dire need for reform to limit western influences.

While Islam is historically intertwined with the Iranian identity after the revolution of 1979, an old image of Islam revived among Iranian nationals, which is the image of

colonizing Arabs. After the Islamic Revolution, the political culture changed direction to focus on Islam and to dismiss the uniqueness of Iranian cultural history before the Islamic conquest. Before the revolution, under Mohammad Reza Shah's secular regime, a capitalist-oriented monarchy dominated the political system. Under that regime, diversity was relatively respected, and laws were set based on more 'liberal' social mores and norms. While the Eurocentric ideology influenced the system, policies were established based on socio-legal codes of conduct. Many still compare Iranian culture and their social experiences before the Islamic revolution to that of secular European societies. However, the western influences on pre-revolution Iran's socio-political experiences, especially the events that led to the coup d'état of 1953 (Abrahamian 2001), became a pivotal point in demanding a national reform. The Islamic revolution promised a more authentic Iranian experience by reintroducing Islam back into the Iranian political system. The Islamic revolution presented itself as a system of governance that was not influenced by European and American sources. After each revolution, there is an anomic state of readjustment, reconstruction of power dynamics, and re-institutionalization of the society. It was during the re-institutionalization that the new government's hypocrisies surfaced. The promise of freedom and equality was cast aside by the institutionalization of cultural and religious patriarchy in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Internally religious driven political forces dominated people's public and private lives and replaced the Western political and cultural influences.

INTERVIEW SAMPLE'S RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

During my interviews, only 23 respondents answered my question about their religious identity for undisclosed reasons. Out of these 23 people, nearly half of the respondents described their religious affiliations as '*none*.' This category is a rejection of all that is religious, even atheism. When asked, a respondent clarified the selection of 'none' by explaining, "I am not an atheist. I believe in a god, but not a religion". The second common response was non-practicing Muslims. One of the non-practicing Muslims identified his religious affiliation as a political Muslim. He claimed that his political-religious category was a response to the current Western Islamophobia and war on terror. While he does not practice Islam, he identifies as Muslim to support other Muslim community members. The non-practicing Muslim was followed by practicing Muslims. While the Iranian diaspora tends to be regarded by outsiders as a 'Muslim' diaspora, only three of my participants identified themselves as practicing Muslims. One person self-identified as a spiritual Muslim who perceived her religion as a form of meditation and spiritual connection to the cosmos. Other than the variation of Muslims and ex-Muslim, I interviewed two respondents, who identified as Bahai. Lastly, one person identified her religion as love and drawing on her broader anti-oppression beliefs system, suggested that all organized religions are oppressive.

Within the Iranian diaspora, many people express reservations about Islam and identifying with it, but the obsession with Islam and Muslims is often exhibited in social gatherings. The collected data represent certain trends and themes, which all were related to Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The non-Muslim religious minority did not blame Islam for their maltreatment in Iran; they accused the oppressive political system in Iran for

the violation of their human rights. The people, who selected none as their religious identity tended to address issues surrounding Islam at length during their interview in order to try to dissociate Persian ethnicity from Islam. The more interesting aspect of the result was the three of those, who picked none, are second generation Iranian-Canadian from diverse gender. These people tend to identify with their Persian ethnicity and were adamant about separating Islam from the Persian ancestry.

EXPERIENCE OF NON-MUSLIM RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN IRAN AND DIASPORA

While the Iranian diaspora is considered a Muslim diaspora (Kazemipur 2014, Moghissi pp), not all Iranians are Shia Muslims. The Iranian diaspora is diverse in terms of religion and includes a significant population of Iranian indigenous religions like Zoroastrian, Mitraist, and Bahai, as well as other Abrahamic monotheistic faiths such as different sects of Judaism and Christianity (Tohidi 2009). One of the reasons for the presence of religious diversity among the Iranian diaspora is the religious persecution of non-Muslims after the revolution of 1979. While the Abrahamic religious minorities' rituals are different from those of Islam, and those minorities do not practice a halal diet, their close religious roots with Islam elevates their status in Iran. On the other hand, the Iranian Muslim government perceives indigenous religions, such as Zoroastrian, Mitrarist, and Baha'i, as unholy and sinful because their concept of God is separated from the Muslim Allah altogether. Rejection of Muslim Allah and the prophecy of Muhammad is blasphemous, and the non-believers are Kafirs and sinners. The most common example of the current regime's

hostility toward a traditional indigenous religion is the maltreatment of the Baha'i faith's followers. Iranian Baha'is have no fundamental human rights, such as access to higher education or private property ownership (Momen 2005). The educational system stigmatizes Baha'i children when teachers' expose the Baha'i student's religion, and simultaneously condemn the religion and its followers (Fieldwork 2017). The disclosure of Baha'i students faith juxtaposes the Islamic religious teaching about the impurity of members of Baha'i faith and exposes these young students to bullying by teachers and the entire student body. In Iran, the members of the Baha'i faith are under constant government and police surveillance and live in fear of kidnapping, torture, and imprisonment (Momen 2005). Many within the Baha'i community fled Iran after the revolution for the safety of themselves and their families and became part of the Iranian Muslim diaspora around the globe.

Unfortunately, the religious divides originated in Iran encouraged friction and persisting religious tensions in the diaspora. A recent example of the religious tension within the Iranian diaspora took place in the neighbourhood of Yonge Street and Steeles Avenue in Toronto, which is an Iranian ethnic enclave.

During a gathering, one of the Baha'i attendees recalled a recent controversial hostility toward Iranian Baha'is living in Toronto. While many remembered, he described how the events unfolded. In a predominantly Iranian area of Toronto, an Iranian grocery shop owner posted a sign written in Farsi, in which he denied services to Iranian members of Baha'i faith. He recalled the vehement support from the Iranian community by blacklisting the store owner, even after he was forced by community pressure to remove the hateful sign. While some people within the community boycotted and ostracized the store owner for his actions, the store did not face bankruptcy and closure because his sign did not appear offensive to those who supported his view. (Field note, July 2017)

The incident may not necessarily be representative of broader public opinion within the diaspora, but it is evidence that at least some within the Iranian Muslim diaspora community continue to harbour prejudicial feelings towards Baha'is, which in turn helps nourish religious tensions in the diaspora. Furthermore, the shopkeeper's action deeply impacted the experience of non-Muslim religious groups in the diaspora. While members of Baha'i faith have the freedom of religious expression in the Iranian community and Canada, but the hate experienced in Iran followed them in the diaspora. In the diaspora, their image as the Other, who needs to be rejected or saved, remains intact, and there are pressures on them to remain separated from the broader community.

The flag was an emotional subject for the Baha'i respondents who expressed a mix of longing, isolation and anger in response to the question during the interviews. While asking one respondent about his religious affiliation, he was hesitant to disclose his religious identity out of a concern that I might negatively judge him. When asked again, he quietly whispered, 'Baha'i.' For followers of the Bahai faith, it is a religious obligation to reveal one's faith. When asked about his flag preference, he casually and indifferently chose the lion-and-sun flag. In explaining his choice, he began with a nostalgic reminiscence about the flag that represented his childhood and hometown. He reminisced about the flag as a part of his childhood memory and his school years. With seeming regret, he expressed disappointment in himself for being distanced from his Iranian community. He blamed himself for his isolation from Iranian society. Similar to other the Baha'i participants, he maintained an open mind toward the Iranian Muslims and Islam. He argued that the problem with the Iranian government is its faulty interpretation of Islam. He went as far as defending

the Iranian population's discrimination against his religious group as a sign of their lack of education, and the government's manipulation of religious tensions. He said:

[the government officials] are not real Muslim people, to be honest with you. They are more politicians and what they are doing, they manipulate people. You have Iranian people, simple people, and they all have a religion, and they believe in their religion. What they [the policy makers] are doing is that they are using those people's naiveté and love for their religion, they are using it for their benefits, and they are abusing it to get benefit out of it. Anytime the gov. in trouble, the ruling government need an enemy. So they create these enemies. [While] in Iran that is Shi'a, then again there is Christian, Baha'i, Jewish and everything, but that is how they create the concept out there and use people's simplicity and stupidity for their own good.

This respondent argued that Iran's political Shi'a Muslim religion provides the government with an opportunity to demonize a religious minority and to use them as a scapegoat for national socio-political and economic shortcomings. He argued that this religious 'war' keeps people occupied and angry at each other, instead of focusing on government policies and corruption. He perceived the religious tension within Iran from a political perspective, and not as an indication that different religions were inherently unable to get along with each other. While he argued several times that Iranians in Canada are avoiding tension, the religions and political ignorance follow Iranian community to Canada. He explained his avoidance techniques among the Iranian in Canada. He argued that any political discussion would lead to disagreement and the heated debate.

Another Baha'i respondent, who was born after the revolution, experienced his religious persecution early in life. He talked about the abuse he suffered in the education system and daily social interactions in Iran. Although the IR flag was the only flag that he knows, he associated it with hate and oppression. He selected the lion-and-sun ensign, which branded prophet Bahauallah's exile papers during the Qajar dynasty. While the lion-and-sun

ensign branded the Bahai's early experience with social oppression, he nonetheless maintained a sense of pride in it. He related the image to the long history of Iranian ancestry, which is older than all monotheistic religions philosophies. This respondent defines himself first as an Iranian and second as Baha'i, and he expressed his pride in the ethnic interpretation of the flag before his religious association. He argued that the IR flag rejects his Persian-ness and his ethnic identity. He expressed a sense of anger by seeing the IR flag since it is the image of hate and separation. He acknowledged that Islam has been present in Iran for many years, but the image of the lion-and-sun has been part of Iranian culture and sees it as a flag that transcends different political regimes in power. Therefore, he regarded the idea of the current flag as absurd because it does not represent all Iranians. He believed the change in the flag was a political ploy to segregate people and marginalize the non-Muslim population. His discussion of the flag indicated both emotional and physical response to the current IR flag.

I seriously when I see it, as soon as I see it, I have this rush [emotion inside me]. This whole emotional thing that is hugely negative. For me it is associated with oppression, and anxiety, and people treating me like crap and having no rights or anything. Any feeling that I have is negative. Whether it be during FIFA, or doesn't matter what context I see it in. (M)

During the interviews, Baha'i respondents did not blame the religion of Islam for the general population's misconduct toward Baha'is. They both attributed fault to the current government and its deliberate manipulation of public opinion in Iran. In essence, to them, any religious government is politically non-religious.

MUSLIM EXPERIENCE IN IRANIAN DIASPORA: FROM MICRO-AGGRESSION TO HOSTILE ATTACKS

The interviews were originally intended to direct the discussion toward the flag debate, but the participants' responses tended to point to the deeper significance of the flag's religious connotations. The respondents' answers focused on definition of what being Iranian in the diaspora meant, and its uneasy connection to Islam. Many used prejudicial language to define Islam that is related to the flag, or shared their experience of Islamophobia within the community. In the diaspora, the accounts of Islamophobia range from microaggression and verbal abuse to vandalism, and physical attacks. The experience of Islamophobia is a common part of the diaspora's social experiences. Contrary to what one might expect, though, much of the Islamophobia experienced by practicing Muslim Iranians comes from within the Iranian-Canadian community. While discussing the flag, many expatriates direct their hate and aggression toward their practicing Muslim community members. While the flag was the symbolic representation of Iranian new regime, many respondents relate it to Islam and other Muslim symbols, such as Hijab. These symbolic representations of Islamic Republic of Iran subjected those who publicly represent themselves as Muslim to physical or verbal assaults. As protested by an interviewee, "the hijabi Iranian women don't receive any threat from any community except their Iranian community." (D) The assumption is that practicing Muslims are Iranian government espionage agents intent on causing communal tension and hostility within the diaspora. While the idea that Iranian government agents spying on the Iranian diaspora community members and leaders is a valid hypothesis, the symbolic assumptions of who is an agent do

not bear any veracity. However, the fear of surveillance by Iranian agents encourages the stereotyping of those who identify publicly as Muslims as agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The fear of associating with the Islamic Republic's political system drives many practicing Muslim to strictly reject Iran's politics before expressing their religious and spiritual belief. In one discussion involving the Islamic Republic flag, I observed that many Iranian Muslim-identified members disagree with the current flag and the current regime. As the following field note indicates:

During a family gathering, a distant family friend sat by me and asked about my research. The woman, who is a devout Muslim, expressed such disgust in the current flag since the flag instrumentally applied the name of Allah. She rejected the current flag by stating, "for respect to Allah... Allah is above all discussion. That shouldn't be used instrumentally". She lowered her voice and moved closer to me. While she chose not to wear hijab, she recalled several instances of being ridiculed and encountering angry outbursts from friends and family, when she verbally defended her religious identity. She recalled the last gathering that I brought up the issue of the flag. She was wondering if I remember that how when she related the old flag to Islam, many asked her not to mix Islam with Iran. She was upset as she frowned about the offensive jokes and rude and lewd comment about Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. She mentioned how that she defended her faith sometimes, but mostly she did not perceive the person making those comment as "worthy" of her time. She decided to let these people stay in their ignorance. While this woman was a senior woman, who was liberal-minded in her religious practice, she was not safe from her diasporic community's bullying and disrespect toward her freedom of religious expression.

One of my interviewees recalled an incident in a grocery shop, where two other members of the Iranian diaspora subjected an Iranian hijab-wearing woman to ridicule. They loudly addressed the woman in the third-person pronoun to make remarks about her hijab and her political association with the Iranian government without even knowing the woman. The women loudly wished that "they all go back to hell-hole they came from." Their use of

Farsi kept the torment between them and the woman, and their indirect, passive-aggressive comment left the woman out of their discussion and rendering her involvement. The derogatory remarks were communal communication, which was incommunicable by English speaking shoppers' patrons. The language made her experience inaccessible to the general public, and the linguistic covertness of ingroup bullying prevented outside awareness and support. The observer stated that while the experience was tense, the two community members indirectness made any form of confrontation impossible. Although some community members might intervene and disrupt the Islamophobia, the community's dominant discourse indirectly condones this form of passive-aggressive commentary and behaviour.

The ongoing discourse among some segments of the diaspora reflects the fact that that public and private expression of the Muslim faith does not appear as a personal choice. The practicing Muslims are either part of a deliberate ploy on the part of those individuals to gain and maintain socio-political and financial capital from the Iranian government or as a sign of ignorance and social regression of practicing Muslims. The following field note reflects on this issue:

While I was standing in the line to be seated at a restaurant, a young hijabi woman joined her husband and another couple in the front. The male friend leaned over to hug and made an exaggerated gesture as though he is about to kiss the hijabed woman on the cheek, but he stopped halfway and turned to the woman's husband and announced, "I forgot your wife was like that." The smirk on his face and his sarcastic tone of the voice appeared as dismissive toward the woman. He maintained his discussion with the hijabed woman's husband and jokingly said, "What is the deal with this wife of yours." The men were talking about the woman while she was standing there in silence. The husband laughed, pointed at his head when referred to his wife as "not-all-here." The interaction took about five minutes until the wife finally frowned and said, "the wait is too long; maybe we should come back another

day.” For the first time, the group acknowledged the woman, because as soon as she suggested future plans, everyone agreed, and they dispersed immediately.

During the short interaction, the hijabed woman appeared to be non-existing and with no authority over her choices and decisions. The experience of Iranian woman wearing hijab for whatever reason dissolves her sense of identity and communal belonging. In this case, the men branded the hijab-wearing woman as ignorant and the unstable Other.

During my interviews, the practicing Iranian Muslim participants expressed dissatisfaction with how members of Iranian diaspora treat their Muslim community. One respondent argued that his partner’s maltreatment was not about their flag of choice or their political beliefs, instead it was about their public representation of their religious belief, which include the verbal support of Islam and hijab. While they were reluctant to abandon their religious beliefs, they felt isolated and segregated in their ethnic community. For non-publicly identifying Muslims within the diaspora, the sight of an Iranian woman in hijab can result in seemingly irrational, strange behaviours. The Muslim-identified research participants talked about random attacks on their cars, having objects thrown at them, being called names, and sworn at as some of the regular experiences that are brought upon by their community members. The Iranian diaspora uses religious text and rituals to disrespect and taunts the Muslim community. One interviewee recalled a man who was protesting one of the Iranian mosques and chose to relieve himself on the wall of the mosque. It is important to include that the urination on the wall of a mosque is widely recognized as disrespectful and unholy. In the Muslim religion, anything that comes in touch with the bodily excrement is impure and requires a ritualistic religious purification. Another account was of a man belligerently attacking a car driving into the mosque’s parking lot with a hijab-wearing

female passenger. The attacker offered the husband to marry his wife for a couple of hours. This request refers to the controversial concept of *Sigheh*. *Sigheh* is part of Shi'a sharia law, which permits short terms marriages. *Sigheh* is aimed to prevent premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, and the participants are supposed to follow certain religious rituals. The topic is highly controversial. The concept of *Sigheh* subjugates women and position them in a vulnerable state, but most importantly the current Iranian religious legal system uses *Sigheh* as a form of legalized prostitution, which feeds upon the vulnerability of Iranian women and girls (Persson 2004). *Sigheh* is a sensitive topic among many Iranians since the concept equates with prostitution, polygamy, and the idea of broken marriages. The man attacking the car used Islam's religious law to imply that the woman was equivalent to sex-worker and that her husband was her pimp. The attacker's comment stemmed from a patriarchal sexual abuse that devalued women's choices by reducing her into a sexual object. Using vulgar Farsi language, the community member verbally assaulted the woman and the man for their outwardly religious expression.

Iranian Muslim women are abused continuously by sexist remarks and misogynistic comments because of the association of their appearance with state-financed espionage. While the diaspora community punishes these women for their religious choices, the attack is not on their religious beliefs but their sexual identity and their gender. Some narratives within the diaspora about Iranian Muslim women focus on their alleged dependence and their infantile status. In many cases, the complete dismissal of women's experiences forces their husbands to defend their honour, as though they have no control over their mind and body. Juxtaposing a Muslim woman's experience, a practicing Muslim man can easily be

passing as non-Muslim within the community. Muslim men might dress modestly, but their clothing is not religious-specific, and they tend to follow Eurocentric styles and fashions. For men, there is no specific clothing restriction. Therefore, their religiosity is not publicly exhibited. As mentioned by Korteweg and Yurdakul (2014), the hijab received significant attention for their visibility, because it ties into the politics of belonging and the Muslim public expression. In the case of the Iranian diaspora, the hijab stereotypes the woman as a regressive “villager” with probable ties with the Islamic Republic. In this account, the Muslim woman’s narrative with her religion and clothing is absent and invisible. In the Iranian diaspora, there are instances that where the underlying politics of flags are muted because the attention of some community members is preoccupied with the irrational hatred toward a religious ideology.

RELIGION VS. CULTURE: PERCEPTION OF ISLAM AS NON- IRANIAN

During many of the interviews, the dichotomy of Persian ‘civil’ history and ‘uncivil’ Muslim history was a standard part of the discussion. The image of “uncivilized, violent Arabs,” who took over Persian civilization was frequently referred to by those who identified as not having any religion. In my interviews, many first-generation Iranians spent considerable time expressing their pride and joy in the long history of the Persian empire.

I think ... when we talk about Iran, even [her son], or you yourself, who were raised here and were educated here, when you hear the name Kourosh, Dariush and our ancient history. He is very proud to be Iranian. But when you say ya hazrateh Mohammad, Islam, Islam religion, he is even like.... Hahaha ...like ashamed a little. It is the same for me. I didn’t know it when I was a kid, I didn’t know what it was,

but when I learned about my history, I was ashamed of us for being people who let this happen to their country, but I have the right to be proud of my historical background and the good kings that were before us...

This respondent indicated the Muslim takeover was a cultural failure, and that their ancestors themselves were to blame. She took pride in her son's criticism of Islam and his approval of a secular perspective. She defended monarchy as the best form of government without questioning its tenets. She even once compared the Iranian experience before the revolution as a 'European' experience. While many defended Iran's cultural background and history, they maintained a Eurocentric expectation for the future Iranian identity. Some members of Iranian diaspora perceived the rejection of Islam as a movement toward secularity and modernity. The interviewees were rarely aware of the historical context of Islam in Iran and the social factor that encouraged the mass conversion. In the diaspora, the historical Post-imperialist Arab Chauvinism over Iranian identity provided rhetoric for the Iranians to further their cultural segregation, and an opportunity to build boundaries between Iranian identity and the Muslim Arab world.

While socio-cultural pride might appear to be a first-generation experience, the first-generation Iranians living in Canada were not the only ones who articulated a sense of cultural pride. The second-generation Iranians experienced much stronger cultural pride in comparison to the older generation of Iranian diaspora. One interviewee, a 20 years old man, was born in Canada. In his relatively short life, he travelled around the world and experienced life in Iran and the United States. When I asked his opinion about the flag, he expressed pride in the lion-and-sun flag. He said, "Ummmmmm so I was proud to be able to show the sense of pride ... because there is so much culture behind our country." He

expressed gratification in knowing his heritage and understanding of its history. To him, the lion-and-sun flag was the legacy of an ancient empire. He claimed to not believe in borders and nations and argued that the current flag is a political representation of those set boundaries. However, the lion-and-sun flag represented his ancient civilization and was separate from the national politics. He was angry with the IR flag. Even when he was arguing about the current flag, his problem was not directly with an oppressive system. He supported secularism and the separation of church and state. He claimed that religion should not be incorporated in any aspect of politics since religion was a social ideology that has been instrumentalized by those in power in Iran.

The reason I can't show any appreciation for the Islamic flag is not that I don't like Islam. I respect Islam greatly, for sure. It is not that I don't love my country. As I mentioned, I love my country. But it is the fact that religion and nationalism are integrated into one piece of art. And it is the fact that these two are combined together... I believe faith should never be incorporated into a flag.... It kind of hurts that how the leaders abuse social ideology. It is ridiculous. (A)

Another respondent, on the other hand, was born in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. His father left Iran on a student visa, and the family eventually joined him in Canada. This respondent argued that the flag is not only a political symbol, but also a nationalist symbol. Therefore, it must celebrate a nation's culture and traditions.

We never created a flag to be religious. The flag represents the national identity. You can say the flag in Saudi Arabia is *lā 'ilāha 'illā llāhu muḥammadun rasūlu llāhi*, and this is religious... If you have a chat with Arabs, Mohamad is more than a religious figure. [But] For them, it is a nationalist image, and it is natural for them to have the *lā 'ilāha 'illā llāhu muḥammadun rasūlu llāhi*, but it is different for us ... uh.... We didn't gain our national identity through Islam; we had a history thousands of years older than Islam. We had national pride before Islam. Therefore, our national identity does not begin with Islam.... It is way older than that. The Iranian flag, which is a national birth certificate or identity...

uhhhhhh... it should be in a way that Iranian can relate to and it should represent the entire history of a nation and the national pride in it.

This respondent was articulate in his separation of Iranian nationalism and cultural heritage from the Muslim Arab identity. He argued that the current Islamic Republic of Iran's flag was an attempt to force Muslim identity on Iranian bodies. He claimed that the institutionalized Iranian nationalism existed before Islam. Islam limited the national character of the Iranian body because Islam was a religion forced on Iranian during the 7th-century Muslim conquest. Those who argued for religious deviation from Iranian culture tend to point out that they did not have any problem with an Islamic identity but rather argued that Iranian identity was not a Muslim identity. These respondents refuted Islam based on the colonial perspective and rejected the imperial conquest of Iran by Muslim colonizers. However, they indicated an exceptional level of comfort to express their anger toward Islam as a religion, since for many, this was socially acceptable to criticize and dispute with the Muslim belief system publicly. Also, the dominant discussion surrounded the idea of Islam as non-Iranian reject the Iranian history and religious reconstruction of Iranian culture and identity. Since Islam infused Iranian identity, religious identity is part of the Iranian culture. As one of the female respondents, who is a liberal arts university professor pointed out, Shi'a Islam is part of Iranian culture. Therefore, the rejection of Islam as cultural identity is not entirely valid. However, the question remains, why do the criticisms of government become a religious tension?

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN WEST AND IN-GROUP CONFLICT

Secularism is the separation of religious establishment and state, but Islam appears to be the main enemy of a secular system. It is important to point out that Judo-Christian religions have significant influences in the Western secular system of governance (Kazemipur 2014: 21) since Christianity has been influential in Eurocentric North American legislation and policy implementation. The assumption of the impossibility of Muslim secularism is a by-product of westernization and Orientaliazation of the East (ibid), which further validates Iranian in-group Islamophobia. The validation of Islamophobia by West and the ongoing political and civil unrest in Iran indirectly encourages and strengthens the continuing religious tensions within the Iranian diasporic community. Diasporic Islamophobia is a response to Iran's Islamic revolution of 1979 and the loss of secularism in the process. The religious hostility is toward an ideology that assumes to shape the current political system in Iran. This ideological positionality is a permit to express one's anger toward those carrying the symbolic association with the mentioned religious ideology. While Islam merged with Iranian culture for centuries, the recent national upheaval reignited the hatred of Islam. Islamophobia within the Iranian diaspora is to reclaim the lost social power upon dislocation, by limiting social access to those who hold on to their religious identity. The association is identified as a threat to the found freedom in the diaspora.

In 2016, two men randomly attacked an international Iranian student at Western University. He was called an "Arab" and told to go back to his country (London Free press). This random attack reveals the ongoing religious tension existing in the western world, which includes Canada. While the random attack was not on the man's ethnic identity, his

appearance as a Muslim man disassociated him from his Iranian background and solely related him to his religious identity, which in effect subjected him to violence and abuse. While the majority of my respondent argued that their experience with islamophobia was from inside the community, they still argued against the association of Islam with the Arab world. The anti-Arab rhetoric was omnipresent among the Iranian community. One of the respondents protested the IR flag by boldly stating, “Allah is an Arabic name, and it is not supposed to be in the middle of the Iranian flag.” (Ali) While there is a history of the Arab conquest of the Persian empire, the anti-Arab sentiment resurfaces and exhibits elements of the ongoing Islamophobia in the west. Since the Arab and Islam are closely associated, Iranians to avoid being labelled as Arab separated Islam from their Iranian ancestry.

If you tell an Arab, you are not a Muslim any more... the person loses a part of their identity. But tell an Iranian you are not Muslim; they are like well ok I am not. (PA)

Our roots go back to Persia; we were not Muslims. This was forced on us. Our ethnicity is Persian, the old Aryans. We are not Arabs who are Muslims ... Well to Iran, and saying we are Iranian, and we are proud of it. (AA)

The Muslim question and the war on terror stereotype the Muslim world as a war seeking jihadi population, who seek to attack the west to destroy western culture. The prejudice toward the Muslim population around the world hegemonizes the image of the Muslim population as the enemy of the state. The current Islamophobic discourse constructs a Muslim body with one superficial identity. Kazemipur (2014) argues the current discourse does not correspond with the complexity of Muslim experience in Canada since it ignores differences within the Muslim community, which is diverse based on race, nationality, geopolitical location, and religious sect. The current discourse focuses extensively on the

location of women from an orientalised perspective, which takes all agency from Muslim women and vilifies Muslim men.

The slogan “war on terror” resonates through the entire exploration of Muslim identity in the west. This anti-Muslim discourse directly exists among the Iranian community — some of my respondents, without hesitation, associated Islam and Muslims with terrorism. The language employed to describe Islam and Muslim narrative is directly linked to western Islamophobia. The Western validation of Islamophobia permits the existing in-group contestations’ public exhibition. Many experienced a sense of relief, knowing the dominant discourse of the host nation accepts and validates their existing experience with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The rejection of the current flag to avoid the Muslim label expresses the ongoing tension that exists among the Iranian community, which is encouraged and accepted by the current dominant discourse of the host nation.

whenever Iran and the [IR] flag, it is like these countries are filled with terrorist, and we don’t want to be represented on that base. (SA)

They keep saying Iranians are terrorist and they want to start a war. This flag is representative of that you want war. If Iranians say, we don’t want war, your flag shows that you want war. Your flag is your representative. Your Allah is made of three swords (ZA)

When asked about the IR flag, ZA’s agreement with the image of the Muslim terrorist is an attempt to separate herself from that image. She argued on several occasions that Islam is not an Iranian religion, and that she takes pride in her Persian ancestry, which is dominated by kings and monarchy. During her interview, she argued that Muslim women are treated badly under the name of Islam. She sympathizes with Muslim women who she perceives as having no control over their lives and who are abused by the men in their lives. Though she has

personal experience with Islam, the dominant discourse of Islamophobia formed her ideology regarding Muslim identity. Even her application of religious slur of terrorist is her attempt to separate Persian ethnicity and Iranian-ness from the Muslim identity. The language used to describe the hijabi Iranian women is similar to the dominant discourse that describes the Muslim body.

And my hijabi wife next to me. So this woman started banging on my car's hood and swearing. They are the representative of the Islamic republic, and her English was really bad. It was funnier. And yelling they are terrorists and their hands are soaked in blood, and we stood there till the light turned green. (DA)

The examples above demonstrate the current religious tension among the Iranian diasporic community. The behaviour, language, and the response to the public display of aggression encompass both the communal and non-communal factors, which define the ongoing religious and political relations among the Iranian community in relation to Islam from inter- and intra-communal level.

In the diaspora, the cultural discourse about Islam, Iran, and the identity of Iranians is complicated because there are two overlapping layers of discourses: a diasporic discourse and an existing dominant discourse of receiving country. It is in these cohabiting discourses that identities are shaped in a hybrid state of being and becoming (Hall 2014). When the receiving society's dominant discourse encourages group isolation and segregation, the host nation provides a space for compatible communal hatred to resurface. The segregating ideology becomes the commonality that connects the diaspora by receiving the nation's dominant discourse. In the case of North American countries, i.e. Canada, the post 9/11 dominant discourse of Islamophobia becomes the connecting factor between the Iranian

diaspora and Canadian society. The parallel association creates a sense of belonging to the dominant class, which encourages social acceptability and easier access to social capital in a place that is striving to be home. This hatred becomes the unifying factor that creates cohesion between two unlikely companions.

In western societies, the IR flag tends to represent an image of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. To distance itself from this imagery, some within the Iranian diaspora tend to distance themselves from this religious stigma by rejecting the IR flag, and look to their ancient culture and modern history that took place before the Islamic revolution as a source of identity. Since Iranians are forced into diaspora by the Islamic government, the diasporic self aims to distance itself from the government by shedding the country's religious identity. As one of my respondents, a young Iranian Canadian, mentioned, "When I did say I am from Iran I started getting slurs like terrorist, bomber and I will be dangerous, but if I say Persian! People are like the Prince of Persia. That is cool" (A). The rejection and denial of Islam aim to create social bonds with the dominant culture and to distance the group from social stigma. Second generation Iranian-Canadians experience a sense of social acceptability by relating to a far-removed ancient ethnicity rather than the modern Iranian identity, which is affected by post 9/11 rhetoric. Another Young Iranian woman explored Iranian Muslim identity by referencing the movie "Argo" (Affleck 2012), which represented the maltreatment of American diplomats after the Islamic Revolution.

I, kind of, feel the lion and the sun, and the sword represents freedom, that what it means to me. Then they change it. They became Muslims, and they wanted that to represent them culturally or nationally that we are Muslim. I don't know much. It is in the stories in Argo that we watched hahaha, that is how I know. (DA)

DA employed a Hollywood made movie to explore her diasporic community's relationship of Islam, the Islamic Republic, and Iranian identity. For this young woman, the movie *Argo* (Affleck 2012) facilitated in social reconstruction of Islam and its relationship with Iranian identity after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the movie *Argo* (ibid), the Islamic revolution and its association with the maltreatment and abuse of American diplomats reconstitute the current discourse of Islamophobia. However, in the case of the Iranian diaspora, since the Iranian Muslim theocratic regime came into existence with the Islamic revolution of 1979, their political rejection of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the flag that represents it can separate the Iranian diaspora from the current discourse dictating the Muslim body. Since Iranians have a Persian ancestry by separating Islam from their ethnic identity, they can bridge the gap between their community and the host nation. Therefore, rejecting the current flag and associating religious system of governance reconstructs a secular Iranian identity, which is rooted in Persian ancestry.

The Iranian community uses the historical memory of a great Persian civilization to reject the colonization by the Arab empire and to dismiss how deeply rooted Islam is in their cultural reconstruction. The instability cultural past is employed as a weapon to empower the community and justify their communal Islamophobia. In many cases, based on cultural practices and its close relationship with the Islamic religious traditions, many practice Islamic rituals in their day to day life and for certain social events, but they remain adamant about the rejection of their religious association. The cohabitation of Iranian history and the new environment creates an unstable state for the slowly growing Iranian diaspora.

CONCLUSION

Iranian history, individual biographies, and the dislocated environment of Iranian diaspora all help to contribute to the reconstruction of social norms and mores within this small community. When discussing the flag debate, members of Iranian diaspora engaged in a discursive battle between Islam and Persian heritage. Muslim Iranian experiences in their diasporic community is a part of the long history of a complicated and tension-filled relationship between Iran and Islam. For some, the experience of Muslim colonization, the 1979 Islamic revolution, and the persecution and oppression in the past few decades have led to the development of a tense relationship between Iranian identity and Islam. The boundary building and disassociation of Iranians from the Muslim Arab world are an intricate part of an ongoing historical religious limbo which Iranian endure. While the political government of the Islamic Republic of Iran dismissed the people's demand for freedom, Iranians blame Islamic factors for the politician's deceptions. The distorted image of Islam by those with Muslim upbringing has affected the experience of Iranian Muslim bodies in the diaspora. It is fascinating to see that ex-Muslims are adamant to discredit Islam, unlike any other Iranian religious groups. The interviewed non-Muslim religious individuals supported Islam and Muslim people, while they blamed the political system residing in Iran.

While diaspora theory argues that social rejection by the host society can encourage empathetic communal relationship among the diaspora members, the dominant culture's social unacceptability is layered onto pre-existing negative attitudes to Islam among some within the Iranian diaspora population. The dominant culture's Islamophobic discourse provides an opportunity for the diasporic community to reclaim

their lost social location by accepting the host's discourse. The diasporic community gets closer with the receiving countries dominant discourse through an already existing tension among the diaspora. Therefore, the troubled relationship with the host society does not lead to an ingroup communal acceptability. The idea of a cohesive diaspora fails to explore the group dynamics in each diasporic community and the ongoing intersectional power imbalance. While the Iranian diaspora is considered a diaspora with members who loosely share the religious and political diasporic characteristic, their experience is fragmented internally based on their history and current relationship with the host nation.

CONCLUSION

The lion and the sun was... like ... it represents a good time, and all the comfort that people had and the new flag cause all the bad memories and all the hassle and everything negative. Of course, everyone will judge it. Like yeah, it is not rocket science. (Mon)

Because that flag is the official flag of Iran, and in front of the United Nation is that flag, in all maps that is the flag. In Google, the current flag is shown, and in practice, that flag is the officially recognized flag globally. Whenever people of Iran had the possibility of voting of their government and their flag, then I will use that flag. Many times... like if they decide to put a rabbit in the middle, then I will raise the flag with the rabbit in the middle. The one that is in front of the United Nations, if there is a rabbit there. (P)

In this dissertation, I re-examined the concept of diaspora through interpretive analysis of the various meanings attached to the Iranian flag and the interconnecting links founding and establishing Iranian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area and York Region. I employed the Iranian flag as a symbolic representation of Iranian identity and their community association in the diaspora to understand the group dynamic of the Iranian diaspora residing in Ontario. Through my dissertation, I employed the flag as a symbol of national and ethnic identity. Each national flag represents a nation's borders and boundaries. Therefore in the diaspora, each flag becomes the representative of the borders that ceased to exist in the host country. In the case of the Iranian community, the flag has a deep-rooted history in Iranian culture and identity, since the flag changed over time to represent specific political agenda. However looking into the history of the Iranian flag, the flag is for Iranian people and not the government. The Iranian flag is an important

artifact in understanding the Iranian community's divide because while many reject the significance of it, they do not agree with the political view that the flag represents. The discussion over the flag is less about the flag and more about the ideals of the flag. Similarly, discussion about the flag resurfaces in other issues that exist in the Iranian community, which further explores the contestation among the Iranian community.

I explored the history of Iran and Persia to have a clear understanding of flag designs and its location among the Persians and Iranians over time. Since the debate came to existence after the Islamic revolution, I revisited the 1979 Islamic revolution and its influences in the formation of a global Iranian diaspora outside of Iran. I investigated the relationship of Iranian community with host nation's dominant culture, in this case, the Anglo Canadian culture. Most importantly, I focused on the individual narratives and their interpretations of the flag to understand the ongoing flag debate and what it says about the Iranian community living in the diaspora. It is likely that the Iranian diaspora varies internationally, but the exploration of this small community reveals the necessity of diaspora studies, as well as the limitations of the current definition.

After a year of exploration into Iranian diaspora's flag debate, the social interactions of Iranian diaspora surrounding the interpretation of the flag indicate complex and intersectional group dynamics. The flag selection represented a religious, gendered, political, and ethnic subtext, in which group members maintain social boundaries and unofficial social regulation. The political and social implication of the flag set a communal marker that designates the dominant discourse in diaspora. The Iranian diaspora negotiates their social boundaries by contradictory claims such as the

cultural preservation and nationalist defence of the lion-and-sun flag or the socio-political conformity and bureaucratic rationalization of the Islamic Republic flag. The flag selection conceals the historical socio-political and religious divide that constructs the dominant discourse of the diaspora. The marriage of history and communal dislocation redefines the concept of the flag and the community that selects each flag to represent their connection with Iranian diaspora. Due to Iran's historical and current political climate, religion and gender intertwine with this ethnopolitical discussion. The history of Iranian heteropatriarchy and theocracy are inseparable from the flag debate since both concepts were essential parts of Iranian history and nationalization of Iran.

In the diaspora, the Iranian flag is contested among the members. While, in the diaspora, there are various version of Iranian flags, but the one that seems most socially accepted and commonly preferred is that of the lion-and-sun. The rationale for this selection ranges from familiarity and nostalgia to the cultural and political relationship of the flag with Iran's ancient history and Persian ancestry. The lion-and-sun flag ignites a sense of pride and joy for all, who selected the flag. The most common defence for the lion-and-sun flag was the cultural and symbolic connection of the flag with the Persian empire and Persian ancestral culture. The defenders of lion-and-sun flag reject the IR flag following the traditional symbolism of the flag, and they argue that Islam does not represent Persian and Iranian identity, and a Muslim flag is an oxymoron. For some of the interviewees, the lion-and-sun flag signifies the pre-revolution era and the secular monarchy that was reigning over Iran. Many selected this flag as the reminder of the past that was ruined by the revolution. Many grew up at with lion-and-sun flag as a valid

symbol of Iranian nationalism. The secularity and nostalgia of pre-revolution Iran intertwined with lion-and-sun flag reinvigorate a nationalist loyalty to keep the flag of monarchy. It also reinforces what Cohen refers to as the collective memory and myths about the homeland. It signifies a time when Iran was more authentically Iranian than it is today.

For some, the selection of lion-and-sun flag was a political statement. Other than the history and nostalgia of the flag, lion-and-sun defies and rejects the Islamic Republic of Iran. These people argued that the Islamic Revolution forced the mass exodus and the sudden construction and growth of Iranian diaspora; therefore the Islamic Republic flag is a sign of oppression and signals disrespect towards the members of the diaspora. While the Islamic Republic flag is the official flag in Iran, it symbolizes exclusion of marginalized Iranian bodies. For the majority of the diaspora, the Islamic Republic flag questions their ethnic and national sense of belonging among Iranian inside and outside of Iran. One of the interviewees expressed with sorrow, “This whole emotional thing that is hugely negative. For me, it is associated with oppression and anxiety, and people are treating me like crap and having no rights or anything.” (M) The lion-and-sun flag for many represents secularity and tolerance. Therefore the lion-and-sun flag represents Iranianisms for many while rejecting the corruption of the current regime.

A glimpse of the debate indicates the socio-political and religious context and the flag act as proxy to shape patterns of inclusion and exclusion within the diaspora. When interviewing community members regarding the socio-cultural and political interpretation of the flag, respondents tended to react with passion. The political aspect of

the lion-and-sun was apparent among the first and second wave of migration, since, as mentioned earlier, the lion-and-sun flag represents an ordinary life that was taken away from them by the new regime. And in relation to that, the IR flag is the representative of the new government. Juxtaposing the culture, nostalgia and the oppression of the new regime, many expressed concerns that the Islamic system is destroying Iranian culture and identity. The lion-and-sun flag was described by many as a sign of resistance and a hope for a brighter future. In many cases, however, the selection of lion-and-sun flag is in opposition to the current regime, and it rapidly confuses the flag's political association and turns it into a superficial Islamophobic and racist sentiment. The selection of lion-and-sun flag establishes and maintain boundaries separating Persian identity from Muslim Arab identity.

Not everyone supported the lion-and-sun flag in the diaspora. Many respondents defended the Islamic Republic flag as the official national flag. To these respondents, the Islamic Republic flag represents Iranian ambassadors around the globe and is exhibited in all international events. Some selected the Islamic Republic flag as representative of Iranian diaspora. Those choosing the IR flag argued that this flag is known internationally as the official Iranian flag and flying any flag other than the official one is delusional and arbitrary. While bureaucratic confirmation of the IR flag appears to be a direct interpretation of the flag definition, some queer political activists argue against raising any flag other than the Islamic Republic flag during a demonstration for the sake of awareness raising. These activist groups believed they must raise the Islamic Republic flag to remind Canadians and other members of the diaspora of the injustices and

oppression taking place under the shadow of this flag. Since the Islamic Republic flag is officially recognized representative of Iran and its political regime, this flag is interpreted as acknowledging the challenges faced by various persecuted minority groups in Iran. But not everyone appreciated this sentiment. Many political activist groups perceived public exhibition of Islamic Republic flag as a representative of Iranian identity as a sign of accepting the Islamic government's oppressive regime. The supporters of the lion-and-sun flag accused the political activist who raised the Islamic Republic flag of espionage, and referred to people like him as the information agents working for the current Iranian regime.

The affective response to the flag selection among Iranian diaspora tends toward an adverse emotional reaction toward the Islamic Republic flag. Due to the lion-and-sun's symbol of a more authentic form of Iranian historical and culture, community members tend to interpret it with a positive association with Iranianism. The community employs the same historical and social narrative to question the Islamic Republic flag and its political association. During each communal flag debate that I observed, the community's emotions ran high and varied in intensity. For some, the emotional response was of mild disappointment and dismay. Some experienced loss, depression, and discomfort with the IR flag and with those who seemingly support the Islamic Republic of Iran by raising the IR flag. Others, however, expressed rage toward the flag, which they argued represents supporters and benefactors of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The underlying reasons for flag debate branched into day-to-day interaction among the community. Daily

communications exhibit the underlying political, gendered, and religious tension that influenced individuals' flag selection.

[a man] recalled a group of people shouting and cussing out a group of Iranian women, who wore hijab. While remembering the account of the public quarrel, he smiled widely. The attack took place in a coffee shop in plaza south of Persian square around Young street. It seems no one stepped in to de-escalate the situation until the group were forced to leave by the gathering mob.

By the narrator's account and others at the gathering, such behaviour was reasonable and applaudable. There was no remorse in the severity of the group's reaction or regret for the veiled group's embarrassment. According to this participant, the expression of anger was reasonable for the diaspora's transgressors. In this case, the transgression was not specifically flag related; instead, the Islamic religious symbol of hijab and the assumed association of it with the current regime encouraged the reaction.

Based on the collected data on the flag contestation among the Iranian diaspora, the flag debate is a representative of political, religious, and gendered divide among the Iranian diaspora. The communal tension in diaspora reveals itself in the daily interactions among community members. Due to spatial and cultural dislocation, the process of boundary building and ethnic identity establishment is contested among the members of the diaspora. The cultural reconceptualization revives religious and political debate; many even argue that general patriarchal beliefs resurface in this process of cultural formation. The microanalysis of diasporic group dynamics reveals the ongoing group divergence in the process of communal establishment. In addition to an attempt to restructure the cultural identity lost during the social or spatial dislocation, the consequential social unacceptability of the host nation influences the cultural formation of diaspora. Therefore,

it is not just the ingroup divide that influences the ingroup positionality, but also external factors and dominant discourse's gaze on the diaspora that affect the group formation. The interviewees expressed their anxiety over the community's representation in the host nation. For instance, the young man defending the monarchist lion-and-sun flag did so to avoid being tainted by the image of a Muslim terrorist. Or another respondent selected Islamic Republic flag to reduce confusion for "Canadian friends" due to lack of a cohesive flag to represent Iranian nationality. The troubled relationship with the host nation encourages the diasporic formation, but the host's gaze also creates a social competition to be accepted by the dominant culture of the new home. Dominant discourse's social unacceptability of the diasporic community did not encourage group cohesion, and it caused a more significant social divide among the diasporic community. While the lack of belonging in the host nation establishes diasporas, the dominant discourse of the host nation is the silenced partner in shaping the diaspora, since it imposes an inferiority complex on the diasporic bodies.

FUTURE OF DIASPORA THEORY

When revising the concept of diaspora, I began to question the necessities of diaspora as a concept to address the communal experience of dislocation. While the concepts of transnationality and migration can lend insight into the experience of dislocated others, these concepts limit the experience of generationally and culturally dislocated ethnic minority groups, who do not share a similar experience of dislocation.

Juxtaposing the theory and practice, I questioned why employ diaspora to address the experience of cultural and social displacement, and why not use another concept.

However, I would argue that the concept of diaspora helps to capture the multidimensional experiences of those who cross national and cultural boundaries. The concept of diaspora provides a definition that transcends migration and dislocation to paint a holistic picture of those who do not belong in the home or the host nation.

Diaspora becomes the mediating ground for spatially and culturally dislocated bodies. The concept of the diaspora captures the complexity of their experience and a sense of belonging. Therefore, while the theory is a necessity, it requires further exploration and adjustment.

Returning to Robin Cohen's (2008) nine common features along with his definition of diaspora, he provides a useful ideal type in exploring the concept of diaspora, but his ideal types lack the individual narratives and within group diversity, which in effect limits his analysis. His historical analysis of various diasporas and the progressive evolution of the concept produce the set boundaries to construct the foundation of diaspora theory. His definition of diaspora provides a blank slate into an exploration of different diasporic communities. I argue that his ideal types are required to have a foundation for the idea of diaspora because this concept is mediating ground for the culturally and spatially dislocated bodies. His ideal type helps to conceptualize the notion of diaspora, which is significant in defining the experience associated with diasporic identities. His macro analysis of the diaspora, however, produces a cohesive and accepting image for these social groups. The experience in diaspora for establishing

diaspora is not that simple. The within group politics and external relationship with the host nation complicate life in the diaspora. Similar to Bhabha's description of the racial and ethnic cultural reconstruction in post-colonial societies, the experiences of the diasporic bodies reside in limbo or the third space. Diasporic bodies require adjustment to the culture of the host nation, but first, they need to have access to their culture through their diasporic membership. The experience in diaspora wedges an individual among their association with the host nation, the history of the homeland, and slowly evolving culture of diaspora. Therefore, the diaspora might be the mediating ground for the displaced bodies, but there is boundary work involved that includes and excludes individuals based on the diaspora's norms and mores.

The interactional interpretation of diaspora indicates the significance of diaspora in the readjustment process of diasporic bodies. Diasporic identities, be it cultural or spatial, require a space to maintain their unique hybrid identities. In this space, the individual learns to bring ethnic history and environmental social factors to understand one's minority status and build a healthy and well-adjusted ethnic identity. But as Fanon argues, reliance on one's culture can be both empowering and unstable. Diaspora should be a source of empowerment, and not a cultural location for diasporic bodies freeze in. Diaspora provides the dislocated individual to cross cultural boundaries in an unaccepting spatial location. Diaspora is a necessity for dislocated identities to readjust to the new social location, but dismissing its group dynamics does not provide a healthy environment for the preservation of cultural hybridity.

CONTRIBUTIONS

In this dissertation, I attempted to produce an overarching representation of Iranian diaspora based on the community's personal narrative. Through an historical analysis of Iranian culture and identity, along the diaspora's relationship with the flag, I demonstrated how the Iranian diaspora came into existence. Through qualitative research and months of participant observation, I constructed an image of the Iranian diaspora residing in Greater Toronto Area and York Region. It is, however, the Iranian diasporic members' contribution that constructed this image.

This research contributes to the field of diaspora studies by providing an overview of the reconstruction of a particular diasporic community. The Iranian diaspora, which is a young and growing diaspora, provides a venue to observe diasporic development, especially by focusing on historical and environmental factors that influence its establishment. This research provides a holistic image of a diasporic community with its opportunities and limitations. The collection of community members' narratives about their 'take' on the flag lends insight into some of the micro-analysis of the community. Therefore, I argue against some assumptions that were indicated in the previous studies. While a diaspora is a haven in a space that is not home, it does not offer cohesive and inclusive space either. Social dynamics in the diaspora are not devoid of communal fragmentation and hierarchies, but the in-group contestation does not reduce the significance of diaspora in identity and cultural development. A diaspora is fragmented, but also a space that provides a sense of belonging for its members.

Furthermore, the flag debate demonstrates the significance of public displays of a collective symbol in establishing and maintaining a communal identity. The Iranian flag debate is indicative of the community's use of flag in building social boundaries based on dominant social norms and expectations. The flag debate reflects the fragmented nature of the diaspora. The use of the flag is an attempt to mend the broken links with the ancestral homeland, but the definition of homeland varies under different flags. As this research shows, historical and environmental factors construct and influence dynamics within the Iranian diaspora, which affect the image of the diaspora for the members. This image allows the diasporic community to represent themselves however they desire to be seen by the general public.

This research also emphasizes the complexity of a 'Muslim' diaspora and its internal divides. While Islam is a part of the Iranian culture and the Iranian diaspora falls within the Muslim diaspora, their members' experiences with Islam are different. Many Iranians in the diaspora reject Islam and any symbolic association with this religion. The practicing Muslim members of Iranian diasporic community experience Islamophobia at the hands of some of their own diasporic community members. The expressions of Islamophobia within host nations' interact with some Iranian's uneasy historical relationship with Islam and may unwittingly encourage further hostile communal interactions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation is the beginning of a larger future project. The research at hand focuses on Iranian diasporic communities located in Greater Toronto Area and York Region. However, to develop a fuller understanding of this diaspora, it is important to examine other Iranian diasporas in other parts of Canada and around the world. Furthermore, by comparing the experience of patriarchy and Islamophobia among the Iranian diaspora in other global locations, researchers may be able to evaluate the significance of the host country's policies and culture in shaping these instances of in-group tension and their public exhibitions against Islamic symbols. Also, it would be beneficial to explore the Iranian diaspora's relationship to the flag in other parts of the world by comparing flag selection in different countries and their relation to the diaspora's history of settlement. How does their experience in that nation and their historical identity affect their relationship with different Iranian flags? One might even ask if there is any flag debate in other diasporic communities around the globe. How do the host nation's immigrant integration policies and philosophies affect the group dynamic among the diasporic communities in other parts of the world?

To access other Iranian diasporas around the globe, a new study can analyze the diaspora's media and diasporic produced reality television shows. A reality show like *Befarmaid Sham*, is the Iranian version of the *Come Dine with Me* franchise. *Befarmaid Sham* is being filmed all around Europe, North America, and Australia. This reality show introduces the audience to the group dynamics of Iranian communities around the globe and what is considered an Iranian dinner party in different Iranian diasporic communities.

Based on the interactions on this reality television program, I would seek to explore some of the following questions: How do the dominant narratives of the show reflect the Iranian diaspora's expectations and norms? How are various political issues addressed and represented among different Iranian diasporas depending on their history in the host nations? How are religious tensions displayed within the Iranian diasporas around the globe? How are gender and sexuality negotiated and performed in this show and in each diaspora? Do the general rules and etiquettes of socialization remain untouched globally in all Iranian diasporic communities or do these concepts differ based on the host country and the diaspora's newly attained norms and standards? Above all, what is considered an Iranian home in diaspora?

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