The Un-Homed Iranians in Canberra

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Master of Anthropology Thesis
The Australian National University 2013
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I, Sanam Seghatoleslami, hereby declare that:

to the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis.

On this date February 2013

Signed Sanam Seghatoleslami


**Declaration**

This research is solely for anthropological purposes. Although there are remarks regarding the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the current regime, this thesis contains no political weight and perspective. The aim of this research is to anthropologically examine the effects of change on homemaking and delineate the entailed modifications of the daily mundane emotional and bodily performances.
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The Unhomed Iranians in Canberra

Introduction

The group of Iranian migrants who are the subject of this study left Iran subsequent to the 1979 Revolution. This migration was in response to the post-Revolution regime’s restrictions on societal participation, and its demands of the population to ‘perform’ a new kind of Iranian-ness in their bodily and emotional comportment. The restrictions on the public performance of emotion, the State’s insistence on particular forms of embodiment, and narrowly defined social participation style, did not allow these Iranians to feel completely at home in the Iranian State (also see Dennis & Warin 2007; Warin & Dennis 2005). Behaviour and comportment in private spaces also became subject to the ideological restructuring of the regime. This included rules about dress codes, mixed gendered interactions and the consumption of alcohol at private gatherings in homes and venues where weddings or parties might be held, and extended to the publishing of certain books and music.
While Iranians could express themselves in public when participating in one of the highly regulated celebrations still permitted by the regime, such as *Nowrooz*\(^1\) and *Charshanmehsoori*\(^2\), and while they could continue to hold mixed gendered gatherings, such as weddings, or watch satellite television behind closed doors, as long as they were not discovered doing so, many felt the kind of unhomeliness that Veness (1993) described as besetting her own informants, who were poor, disadvantaged Delawarians living in government shelters. Veness referred to these informants as the ‘unhomed’, a term she used to capture the purgatory of being neither homed nor homeless; while her informants had a place to stay, they did not have the kind of ‘home’, a physical space, a structural ‘house’ that one either owns or rents. This thesis also makes use of the notion of ‘unhomed’.

However, I deployed differently from Veness in that I argue that while the Iranians I studied lived in their home State of Iran, they nevertheless felt that they were not at liberty to be ‘themselves’ there, in public, political or social terms, and could only act, dress and speak as they wished in private. Even here they ran the risk of being discovered in breach of the regime’s strict codes for behaviour. In this sense, they shared that purgatorial feeling that Veness tries to capture—they had somewhere to be, but not somewhere to be themselves and so, for them, it was not home.

\(^1\) *Nowrooz*: Persian New Year, which is an ancient celebration and occurs on the first day of the Spring equinox on 20-21 March (see also Koutlaki 2010).

\(^2\) *Charshanmehsoori*: literally means Red Wednesday and is an ancient festival dating back 4000 s from the early Zoroastrian era. It is still celebrated the night before the last Wednesday of the year (Arab 2007).
For some Iranians, including those in this study, the disjuncture between the secretive private life people might lead behind closed doors and their public life, and the burden of having to perform State-mandated bodily and emotional conduct, as against the accustomed and familiar modes of moving, feeling and being they could engage in prior to 1979, proved problematic. The group of Iranian men and women I spent time with to produce this thesis felt this burden so keenly that they resolved to move away from Iran, where they had been born and raised, in a bid to feel more at home. For the people in this study, this meant being able to comport themselves, and being able to express feelings and thoughts beyond those mandated by the State, without fear of repercussion. That is the freedom to be themselves, without having to perform to the standards of comportment and emotional demeanour demanded by the Iranian regime. The migrants in this study, who now all live in Canberra, hoped that Australia would present such an opportunity for freedom of expression, freedom of comportment and freedom to be oneself. Thus, they, as Hage argues of other migrant communities, engaged in a kind of physical mobility that defines them as migrants because they felt that another geographical space would be a better launching pad for their ‘existential selves’ (2005: 470).

My study has revealed that Australia indeed affords Iranian migrants just these sorts of freedoms: women can choose to wear or not wear head coverings without fear of repercussion from the State; men can wear ties if they like; men and women can gather together if they so
choose without fear of being arrested, and they can read whichever books, or listen to whatever music, takes their fancy—these are all freedoms that were unavailable to them in post-Revolution Iran, which kept the people in my study from feeling ‘at home’ in Iran.

However, while the freedoms Iranians enjoy here in Australia are those extended to citizens living in the Australian democracy, living in Australia has not meant that these Iranian migrants are free to express themselves however they choose. They cannot, in particular, express what people in my study referred to as their Iranian-ness however they like. Indeed, many felt that there are expectations of how Iranian-ness should be performed in Australia. While these might not manifest as State decrees, and are indeed known to Iranians as expectations that ‘Australian people’ have of them, they are keenly felt, and heeded. Thus, while they may pursue private and public life as free citizens of a democracy, the migrants in my study continue, paradoxically, to feel compelled to perform within very narrowly defined parameters, in emotional and embodied terms, a modified version of Iranian-ness they perceive as suitable to the State of Australia, just as they had been required to do in Iran.

Specifically, Iranian people in my study feel it necessary to appear ‘happy and grateful’ to Australia for providing them the freedom denied them back in Iran, and to appear ‘civilised’ and ‘safe’ to Australians. This was indicated in their public performances in Australia, intended to portray the persona of ‘the good Iranian’ who is
‘happy’, not a burden, and is not a threat. Thus, while the migrants in this study were free from the performance expectations imposed on them by the regime in Iran to perform a State-mandated version of Iranian-ness, they still had to perform within narrow expectations in Australia, albeit in a different register. While they might not be at risk of arrest for appearing in public in mixed gender company, none felt they could really be their Iranian selves as they felt they wanted to be—each had to perform a variety of Iranian-ness acceptable to their Australian hosts. This led to the feeling, shared by all my informants, of not being at home, just as they had not felt at home in Iran.

Ethnographically, this thesis examines the emotional and embodied registers of performances that the migrants felt compelled to give in Australia, and argues that the movement out of the Iranian borders has not led, simply, to the freedom that it may seem to have, on the surface. Analytically, this has implications for what ‘being at home’ means for Iranian migrants, as it was this feeling they sought in their existential and physical movement away from the Iranian State. In this thesis, I conclude that this perceived pressure to perform Iranian-ness in certain ways is at the very heart of ‘unhomeliness’, as it was experienced in the home State, and as it is experienced in the new place, Australia. While it may appear that performing Iranian-ness in Australia is very different from performing it in Iran, since the Iranian State removed the sorts of freedoms that are available to migrants in Canberra, I argue that both in Iran and Australia experiences of unhomeliness are rooted not so much in the
availability of freedoms, as they are in *being at home in one’s own body and feelings, to the point that one does not have to perform the self, but is simply and unreflexively his or herself*. Here I include the feeling of being at home among a community of ‘like’ bodies, who act relationally to one another in unreflected-upon ‘homely’ ways—if it is anything at all, perhaps feeling at home persists in not having to perform a required identity in any highly reflexive manner. This is, indeed, precisely what was lost in Iran—the old, familiar and *unreflected upon* ways of being Iranian, so small they remain unspoken, but so important that they together constitute what it means to be at home in one’s own skin.

It is equally what is lost in Australia; people are acutely aware of the ‘middle eastern-ness’ of Iran, and how it is perceived in Australia, especially since the events of 9/11. This thesis concludes that ironically, despite acquiring the liberties unavailable to them in Iran, the Iranian migrants I spent time with must yet give narrowly defined emotional and bodily performances in Australia. Thus, a feeling of being at home here is not accomplished for them. My thesis shows that being at home may be fruitfully examined in terms of being free to unreflexively ‘be’, in this case, Iranian, without having to carefully construct performances that will meet host (or indeed Iranian regime) expectations.

Thus, homeliness might not be accomplished by becoming at home in the story of one’s own life, as Rapport and Dawson(1998) insist, nor
might unhomeliness be brought on primarily by the sensory difference of a new place, as Thomas (1999), and Warin & Dennis (2005) argue. Indeed, disrupting the story of one’s own life might be just what is needed, if that story is one of political repression. Being involved in a new sensory regime may be just what is required, if it brings one the freedom to experience new sensory worlds hitherto closed off. My contribution to this area of anthropological inquiry, dealing with migration and identity, is that unhomeliness may be fruitfully examined instead by examining the conditions for being unreflexively at home. In my argument that Iranians have to perform a certain kind of Iranian-ness here, just as they do in Iran, lies the possibility for examining homeliness as the absence of the conscious performance of self and identity.

**Structure**

In the first chapter of this thesis I will direct the reader’s attention to the methods I used in conducting this research. I particularly elaborate on my position as a researcher investigating her own community while herself being an immigrant as well. This unique positionedness provided an insight into the Iranian conceptualisation of home that otherwise might have been missed ‘behind the mask of gratitude’, as expressions of unhomeliness to a non-Iranian researcher could have been shadowed by the effort to appear happy and grateful for living in Canberra. Being an immigrant also situated me as a ‘like’ body, as an Iranian self, like my participants. This
chapter also discusses my data, its collection and the methods I used to source it, as well as relevant details about the participants.

The second chapter of this thesis is about how home is a manifold notion for Iranians of this study. In this chapter, I expand on three facets of home-conceptualisation in an Iranian context and how these conceptualisations are interwoven to create the sense of unhomeliness that my informants experienced in Iran and in Australia. In this chapter, I argue that the unhomeliness they felt has its genesis in the rupture of social norms in Iran after the event of the 1979 Revolution. It was this rupture that caused Iranians to conceive of home in three ‘layers’: first, one’s domestic home; second, a nostalgically remembered and longed for Homeland Iran, which denotes a better time and space than here and now; third, the here and now of the ‘Third Iran’—the theocratic social order developed by the new regime.

While Iranians regard their domestic home as their private space where they can be free to express their selves existentially, Homeland Iran, their vatan, is related to the land, history, and the ancient past of Iran, a realm that is less ‘real’, in that it cannot be experienced now, owing to the political and social conditions ushered in by the regime, but strongly felt and understood. The Third Iran that was articulated through this project, was referred to as the Iran which emerged and came to life after the Revolution and the constitution of the theocratic regime. This Third Iran imposed new social orders and
enforced specific ideological standards, in emotional and bodily terms, which created an alien, unfamiliar Iran in which people were compelled by the State to give performances of proper, State-mandated Iranian-ness which led the people in my study to feel very much not at home in Iran.

The third chapter of the thesis examines the impact this specific and multilayered conceptualisation of home has on Iranians’ daily, mundane performances. This chapter is about expressing Iranian-ness, emotionally and bodily, in the shadow of the Revolution in Iran, and in the shadow of perceived Australian expectations of the good and grateful migrant. As will become clear throughout the thesis, a sense of being at home is accomplished for my informants when these shadows disappear, and when one can simply ‘be’ without planning and adjusting for a watchful audience. The Iranians in this study were always aware of their performances and took great care to appear and to express themselves properly, as they thought they must, in Canberra as they went about the most mundane and unreflexive actions of social life here.

In Iran, they had to design their performances in accordance with the regime ideological requirements to be safe. In Australia, they feel forced to calculate each move to portray the good Iranian, who is happy and far from the Iranian middle-eastern typified image. This is also related to feeling safe—to fitting in, to being not cast out, even to avoid harm that might come from appearing to be a threat, in a post-
9/11 world. The Iranians of this study performed to impress their audiences. They modified their Iranian-ness to build a positive ‘self’ for the perusal of others, to shake off their otherness, carefully watchful of their speech, appearance and demeanour. This continuous reflexivity, I argue, is not at all dissimilar to what my informants had to do in Iran. In Australia, just as in Iran, having to perform an acceptable version of oneself all the time creates the state of unhomeliness, a state where one is not home-less, not without shelter, but yet not at home in one’s own body, talk, and behaviour. While we all have to deliver acceptable performances in one way or another— at work, at a dinner party, in public contexts of all kinds—it seems that there is a difference between *being* in public and *performing* in public. The first may become unreflexive—you know how to behave and simply do. Iranians in my study perform. Thus, they dwell in the purgatorial space between having a place to call home, but not actually being able to feel at home there.

Clearly this is contra to Rapport and Dawson’s (1998) claim that one feels at home when one knows oneself the best. In order to deliver compelling performances to their ever-watchful audiences, Iranians in this study had to know themselves very well indeed. This knowledge was essential for re-designing themselves to appear and to be recognised in a particular way—that is, to be ‘good’, happy and grateful, and so to be accepted by their Australian audiences.
In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I will discuss how unhomeliness is embodied. Just as for the theatrical stage, Iranian performances of the good and grateful migrant came to life on different stages, and in and through the use of particular sorts of language, as well as in wardrobe and makeup, and props. Familiarity with these crafts of the stage—customs, language and communicative skills—was key to delivering the right performance. My informants thought unfamiliarity with language and other communication skills caused uncompelling performances revealing ‘the other’.

I bring this thesis to a conclusion by suggesting that home is where you know your lines, but you don’t know that you know them or that you are delivering them. The ‘knowing’ happens unreflexively. Being at home persists when one does not have to perform the self, but can unreflexively be the self. The thesis concludes that this was not possible in Iran or in Australia. The Iranians in my study take conscious care to design, modify and plan their performance as Iranians in both contexts, to protect themselves in Iran and to ‘be’ suitable in Australia. The Iranians of this study are so aware of the fact that they must give good performances that they relinquish feeling at home.
Chapter One

Methodology

Reflexivity and Positionedness

This thesis has grown out from my personal experience as an Iranian migrant being among and then researching fellow Iranians living in Canberra. In this respect, my thesis has been developed in alignment with Michel Foucault’s (2000) remarks about personal experience. As McLean and Leibing note, Foucault undertook theoretical work on the basis of his own experience and always in connection with the processes he saw unfolding around him (2007:6). This statement is especially relevant for those who study the community that they are from.

Through this project I experienced challenges similar to those faced by other anthropological researchers when studying groups or communities from which they themselves come. For instance, I faced the same challenge of setting the border between self and other as Shahram Khosravi, an Iranian, faced while studying Iranians living in Sweden:
...the distinction between ethnographer and ‘others’ is unclear. Similarities between informants’ subjective experiences and my own blur the distinction between anthropologist and informants. [...] it bridges the gap between the anthropologist’s reality and the reality of others (2011: 5).

Further, in conducting this research as an Iranian, I was placed in a particular position. I had the advantage of being able to understand the expressed views concerning Iranian culture, language, beliefs, standards and emotions, and my experience of migration also created a close and intimate understanding of the subject group’s similar experiences in many aspects of migration’s emotional and practical implications.

However, this thesis is not an auto-ethnography; I have, rather, used my own Iranian-ness as a resource of understanding:

Anthropologists working at ‘home’ or in realms of the familiar often share a considerable sense of connection with participants. In these contexts, the researcher’s potential position as an ‘insider’ offers particular opportunities for utilising self as a key resource (Voloder 2008: 27; see also Bourdieu 2003).

I was also careful to recognise that my story was not a metanarrative through which all other stories might be told, and into which they each might fit. I was cautious, as Voloder asserts one needs to be, not to rely solely on common familiar assumptions, so to distinguish the analysis from identification:

...the insight gained from ‘insider’ research need not rely on assumptions of shared experiences and identifications between oneself and participants, but rather that it is in the exploration of the convergences and divergences in these experiences and
identifications that the researcher’s experiential self can be used as a key heuristic resource (2008:27).

Data Collection and Participants

This research is based on narratives given by informants through the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. As a member of the Iranian community in Canberra, I had access to participants through my social networks of friends. Forty-five participants were initially engaged through the Iranian community network in Canberra. Thirty seven Iranians agreed to participate in this research project. Besides the thirty-seven official participants, the narratives of the members of my family, including my husband and mother-in-law, were considered in this research. I have not conducted interviews similar to ‘official participants’ with these two, but regarded them as people with whose life stories I am familiar. Therefore, there is no direct quotation from them in this thesis. My husband also participated and assisted in the flow of group interviews.

The data was collected through one-on-one interviews and focus groups. The interviews ran from two to four hours and were conducted in venues of the participants’ choice, mainly in their own houses. Two focus group discussions were also conducted. Bearing in mind that while one-on-one interviews would yield in-depth data from the perspective of individuals, focus groups (of which there were two, one

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3 The rest were not available due to vacations and other personal commitments in the period that the interviews were conducted.
4 Twenty-two individual interviews and two focus groups.
with three participants and one with five) allowed participants to interact with one another as they thought through issues related to home and identity, both in terms of language and the expression of emotions. These two groups also provided the opportunity to explore how the discussion of home and identity might change when discussed in a group of different generations, genders and ages.

The participants in this project were aged from 24 to 75 years. There were 24 females and 13 males. Both focus groups in this study were mixed-gender. The participants consisted of 32 married and five single; of those single, only one was male. The participants’ date of migration was also a decisive element for inclusion in my study. This is because the date the participants left Iran would have significant impact on the construction of self and the narrative of home. People who left Iran closer to the occurrence of the Revolution might, for instance, have a totally different image of home than those who came to Australia recently after having experienced post-Revolution life in Iran.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews rather than unstructured or structured interviews, because this format would provide a form and frame to the interviews and maintain an outline for the discussion. It also allowed the participants to depart from the set questions and feel free to disclose or to elaborate their thoughts. This is important because the concepts of ‘home’ and belonging’ and ‘identity’ are nebulous and individuals have various ways of expressing them.
All interviews except three were conducted in Persian/Farsi and notes were taken in Persian/Farsi, later translated into English as field notes. The main challenge was that meanings, especially those associated with emotional expressions, could easily be distorted in translation. To minimise this problem, during the course of the interviews I sought my informants’ opinions of the equivalent English expressions for specific Persian words expressing emotion.

Words and phrases such as *ghorbat, ergh-e-melli, avareh*\(^5\) do not have exact English equivalents that carry the same emotional weight. In these instances, the potential English equivalents that could be assumed to fit were suggested to the participants but it was left to the participants to choose the expressions they believed would best describe their intention.

Interviews were not recorded except for three English-spoken interviews, and then after obtaining the participants’ permission and consent in advance. This was primarily due to the insufficient speed of my writing in English and the potential risk of missing noteworthy comments.

\(^5\) The closest equivalent in English: alienation, patriotism, displaced.
Chapter Two

Home, Homeland, Third Iran

This chapter articulates the conceptualisation of the notion ‘home’ among Iranians. This home-conceptualisation is the bedrock of homemaking after the changes of Revolution in Iran, and migration to Canberra. There was a unanimous approach among the Iranians of this study in dividing the concept of Home in Iran into three levels or layers. The domestic home in Iran referred to as my home, was the space—sometimes confined to a house, sometimes not—where family members reside and intimate emotions are produced and shared. Iran as the Homeland was associated with the soil, the land. The articulation of Homeland through the interviews was emotional—sobbing agitation and tears accompanied words such as ‘roots’, ‘soil’, ‘history’, ‘glory’, ‘ancient’ and the idea of patriotism. The participants of this study referred to another Iran too, the Iran that emerged from the Revolution of 1979, which I have called the Third Iran, to differentiate it from the two Iranian homes my informants identified as existing prior to the Revolution. This Iran, the Third Iran, was associated with political and ideological characteristics that provided the genesis for flight from one’s Iranian home and Homeland to Australia.
The 1979 Revolution resulted in the rupture of social norms for many Iranians. For the people in my study, it led to the loss of their sense of homeliness in Iran. I quickly realised that ‘home’ and ‘Iran’ as my informants deployed them were complex and multilayered concepts, only one layer of which referenced the fact that their flight from Iran had meant the loss of the opportunity to dwell in the physical site of home. The Revolution was experienced as an historical event that ‘sliced time into two parts: the time before the Revolution, and the time after. It made the difference between being at home a possibility and an impossibility’ (Dennis and Warin 2007:3).

The dramatic change of the social order in post-Revolution Iran has, for my informants, resulted in three categories of Iran in which one might dwell, and in which home (or its loss or absence) is implied⁶. The first is the domestic Iranian home, the private space in which most of my informants said they could be free to express how they felt, with bodily actions and comportment—listening to music, watching television, drinking alcohol, being in mixed gender company—and feeling reasonably safe from what seemed to my informants to now be the all-seeing eye of the post-Revolutionary regime.

⁶ Mark Graham and Shahram Khosravi affirm the Iranian home as a multilayered concept. They suggest that there are four levels of home in a diasporic Iranian context. First homeland, a place of nostalgia then it is the home in the sense of a place which ‘fulfills a person’s practical needs such as education or a place to bring up children’. Third is the ultimate home which is the ‘preferred final destination whether it be the original homeland of Iran or another country’, and last, home as the place that ‘best expresses Iranian culture as people remember it before they were forced to leave Iran’ (1997:130). Although there is no doubt of the manifoldness of the conceptualisation of home, for Iranians of my study, there were no references to the ultimate destination as home.
The second ‘layer’ is something my informants called ‘Homeland Iran’. Homeland Iran captures the land, history and ancestry of an Iran the migrants in this study could no longer actually find as a real, live-able present space or time in Iran; it persisted instead as ‘a strong mental connotation’, as Herald Runblom describes it (2000: 10). My informants spoke nostalgically and sadly of this Homeland Iran in terms of ‘the land lost’ (Runblom 2000: 10; see also Medved’s work, 2000: 74–97). As Graham and Khosravi (1997) note, the concept of Homeland is salient for immigrants, those in exile, and diasporas because it manifests as the original homeland, which no longer represents a home one can dwell in, but instead represents a better time, prior to present conditions (see also Gupta & Ferguson 1992: 11, who note that Homeland ‘remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced peoples’).

For the Iranians in my study, Homeland Iran (vatan) was expressed in metaphors of natural connection—people were, for instance, as ‘roots’ in the Iranian ‘soil’. I found that ‘Homeland Iran’ was a collective concept among my informants that was very frequently associated with Persian culture, ancient history, Persian Empire, the human rights declaration of Cyrus the Great⁷, authenticity, glory, progression and so forth, and

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⁷ In 539 B.C., the armies of Cyrus the Great, the first king of ancient Persia, conquered the city of Babylon. But it was his next actions that marked a major advance for Man. He freed the slaves, declared that all people had the right to choose their own religion, and established racial equality. These and other decrees were recorded on a baked-clay cylinder in the Akkadian language with cuneiform script. Known today as the Cyrus Cylinder, this ancient record has now been recognized as the world’s first charter of human rights. It is translated into all six official languages of the United Nations and its provisions parallel the first four Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (http://www.humanrights.com/what-are-human-rights/brief-history/cyrus-cylinder.html).
that remained untouched. One of my informants, Nava, explained that Iran is ‘the Homeland’, to which she would always be linked. ‘I stretch myself in any direction possible to feel closer to Iran. I always want to be Iranian, to never lose my roots’, she said (notes 17). These metaphors of soil and roots are commonly used; as Graham and Khosravi (1997: 115) note, Iranians ‘live in an era of the ‘national order of things’, in which ‘rootedness’ in a culture and a geographic territory is still conceived of as a ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ feature of humanity and as a moral and spiritual need’. This sort of deep patriotic connection to Iran is dissimilar from the kind of loyalty to the post-Revolutionary regime that Iranian people were forced to express under the current Iranian regime. Thus, for the Iranians in my study, Homeland Iran was tied to the ‘Iranian Nation’ as it manifests in ancient history and the glorified past, rather than in its form under the theocratic political regime which people in my study associated with backwardness, terror and fanaticism, and which led to their decision to leave Iran (see also Runblom 2000). One of my informants, Minoo, felt very emotional about this Homeland Iran, and described her attachment in terms of the now unofficial national anthem, *Ey Iran*, She said:

> When I hear the Australian National Anthem, I stand up respectfully but nothing happens in my heart. But when I hear *Ey Iran* [the unofficial anthem used before and after the Revolution\(^8\)], I feel my heart pounding, I cannot help but sobbing (notes: 68).

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\(^8\) Since WW2 Iran had three national anthems: *Ey Iran*, the Shah’s anthem, and the Islamic Republic anthem. The first one is referred to as the *unofficial* national anthem, both before and after the Revolution. The other two anthems were about the rulers, the Shah before the Revolution and Islamic
As Minoo’s and many other stories I collected from my informants indicate, in the specific Iranian case, Homeland Iran is conceptualised as the land where one could feel at home, share collective history and belong to the nation. The longed for time-place of the Homeland is, of course, longed for because the events of 1979 consigned it to the realm of the nostalgically remembered.

After the Revolution emerged a Third Iran, as my informants called it, an Iran known in and through the establishment of the regime. This Third Iran is the theocratic regime which endorsed a particular performance of Iranian-ness characterised by specific religious and ideological themes and imposed on the comportment of Iranian bodies and the expression of emotions in public. This Iran—an alien Iran to much of the population—was repeatedly referred to by the group I studied in this project as the part of Iran that is not Iranian, not familiar, and that did not represent ‘home’.

In this Third Iran, the comportment of Iranian bodies came under the specific attention of the regime, a particular emotional register, which

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Republic after. *Ey Iran* appeared to be silent in remaining Iranian for the participants of this study who took Iran as an invaded land, matching the stream of this anthem:

*EY IRĀN, EY MARZ-E POR GOHAR* (O Iran, O bejeweled land), is the title of an ardently patriotic hymn of praise to the land of Iran. Its lyrics were written by Ḥosayn Gol-golāb (q.v.) and were set to music by Ruḥ-Allāh Ŋāleqi (q.v.). First performed in 1944, its stirring music and emotionally charged lyrics ensured its immediate and continuing popularity. The hymn, especially its first stanza, is still recited and held in great affection by Iranians at home and abroad, almost like an unofficial national anthem. [...] Its origins date back to the turbulent days of World War II, when the Allied troops invaded the country in September 1941[...]. For three decades the hymn was used to herald the start of the early morning transmission of Tehran radio’s daily broadcasts. Its popularity increased even further after the Revolution of 1979 when it became a favorite anthem for those opposed to the new Islamic regime’s over-reliance on religion rather than nationhood as the communal bond. It was subsequently banned by the Islamic regime (Encyclopaedia Iranica n.d.).
forbade those expressions outside State-mandated demeanour. As Warin and Dennis note:

In post-Revolutionary Iran, bodies became markers of political loyalty as the Islamic State mandated sadness, grief and mourning as the appropriate demeanour of its citizens and the paradigmatic emotional tone for contemporary public life (2008:104; see also Good & Good 1988). Iranian bodies also came under increased scrutiny in other ways that reached into the realm of what, prior to this time, had been the ordinary and taken for granted realm of habitual life, including dressing one’s body, socialising amongst friends and acquaintances, eating and drinking, and driving a car⁹. For instance, in post-Revolutionary Iran, men are forbidden to wear ties or shorts, as these are symbols of western lifestyle, and women have strictly regulated choice of colour schemes for their outfits in public and must wear head-coverings. Mixed gendered parties, gatherings and weddings are forbidden and breaches are punishable by flogging and fines. Consumption of some foods, such as pork and alcohol, are declared unlawful and attract severe legal consequences. Males and females interacting, dining and even driving in the same car if not married or mahram¹⁰ is questioned, investigated and prosecuted and in some cases may result in

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⁹ As far as gender is concerned, driving is not problematic in Iran—both women and men are permitted to drive. However, the relationships and code of conduct between those in the car may come under scrutiny, as these should be in accordance with regulations implemented by the regime.
¹⁰ It is permissible for a woman to take off her hijaab in front of her mahrams. A woman’s mahram is a person whom she is never permitted to marry because of their close blood relationship (such as her father, grandfather, great-grandfather, etc., and her son, grandson, great-grandson, etc., her paternal and maternal uncles, her brother, brother’s son and sister’s son), or because of radaa’ah or breastfeeding (such as the brother and husband of the woman who breastfed her), or because they are related by marriage (such as the mother’s husband, the husband’s father, grandfather, etc., and the husband’s son, grandson, etc.)(Al-Munajjid n.d.).
imprisonment or flogging. Such scrutiny and punishment of deviation from State-mandated behaviour came as a shock. After the Revolution, Iranians realised that they were alienated in their own home due to the unfamiliar social order in place and most of their actions and performances—what they ate, drank, wore, listened to, read, and watched—were suddenly illegal, making them criminals in their own homes and Homeland\textsuperscript{11}.

Before the Revolution, Iran was a relatively prosperous, modern society (see Basmenji 2005; Ebadi 2006; Isfandiyari 2009; Mobasher 2006; Nafisi 2004; Rahimieh 1993; Sullivan 2001; Tehranian 2009), in which women, at least from State’s perspective, enjoyed high status, as indicated, for instance, by their presence in corporate roles and as judges, and were free to choose their clothing and make interactions with whomever they saw fit. This does not mean that pre-Revolutionary Iran was a free-for-all in which people could behave however they desired. Instead, the daily lives and beliefs of Iranians were regulated and guided by tradition, regional culture, ethnic background and family customs and norms. Iranians adhered to the familiar ‘ways of life’ that they had followed for generations, in which the regime did not interfere.

When I asked Afrokhteh, who had lived in Australia for thirteen years, how she felt about Iran, she described Iran as ‘home’, and as a place of

\textsuperscript{11} Quoted from Touka Neyestani (born 1960 in Shahrood, Iran), an Iranian political cartoonist who lives in Toronto, Canada. He wrote a note two years ago that was circulated via the internet, describing the reason he left his homeland. Most Iranians who left Iran due to social and political restrictions rather than economic hardship relate to his expression of ‘I was tired of criminality. Whatever I do, watch, read, eat, wear is a crime in Iran’(Neyestani 2009, translation mine).
solid, unconditional love; a land that would always be hers, and to which she could return as she still had family members living there. She also explained that the homeland she loved and yearned for, however, is different from the Iran under the current regime:

The yearning for Iran as my Homeland is always raw, fresh, just like the minute I departed from Tehran some 13 years ago. I will carry the regret that Iran was once mine and I was proud of it, but it is not any more. It is not my home, more or less, any more. It is so painful that I cannot bear it. Why me? Why am I in this position? [very agitated, sobbing] (notes:2).

When people came to Australia, they did not think they would find here a new homeland. As Daniel Miller suggests, migration ‘brings into focus the potential gulf between home and homeland’ (2010: 99). Indeed, there was a common realisation among the Iranian migrants in my study, that they had to ‘understand and accept the splitting of Iranian “nationhood” between its “authentic” past and modern Westernized of the Shah era and its post-Revolution fragmentations entailing traditionalist and ideologist themes’ (Sullivan 2001: 11). What they strove to find in Australia was the sort of freedom that comes with being at home in one’s own body and emotions, of not having to perform to the standards set by the new Iranian State. Nader was one of the few participants who found this. He said he felt completely at home in Australia. After living here for 30 years he highly cherished the freedom and political stability of Australia. But he also said:

I try to preserve some sense of my homeland. I want to keep that narrow thread left connecting me to that land. The name Iran still echoes in my head and heart. It takes me to my childhood, to all the wonderful memories I have. Then the sadness and grievance hits
me for what happened to Iran, what happened to my prosperous homeland, what replaced that glory (notes: 82).

Indeed, the yearning for Homeland, and the unwelcome development of the Third Iran that caused this group to leave in the first instance, have had a profound impact on their perceived opportunities to express their Iranian-ness in the new place of Australia and, thus, on the possibilities for feeling ‘at home’ here, in their own bodies and feelings—the kind of feeling ‘at home’ they sought to find on leaving Iran.

The yearning for Homeland Iran has a profound impact on how migrants can express themselves, precisely because, they explained, the pain of yearning and longing for their Homeland must be concealed behind the mask of appreciation which must be worn in Australia, lest one seem an ungrateful migrant. Homeland inherently has a nostalgic imaginary nature (Alinejad 2011: 45; Runblom 2000) with strong ties to history—the past and memories—and was expressed, in emotional specifics, throughout the course of the interviews of this study. However, as Graham and Khosravi argue, this sort of nostalgic remembering is ‘never only about ‘the past’ as it was. The past is actively created in the attempt to remember it’ (1997:128).

The development of a Third Iran that displaced a fondly recalled Homeland that people could no longer find in Iran itself, and about which one cannot fully express one’s grief in Australia, nevertheless formed an important, unifying platform for the people in my study, in the sense that they could all relate to it as the historical event that
shaped the Iranian diasporic community in the new place—Australia (see also Adibi 2008; Aidani 2010; Khosravi 2011).

Thus, this catalytic political event that ushered in the Third Iran and the fondly recalled Homeland that preceded its reign continues to provide an important basis for thinking about and performing Iranian identity, and is connected with a ‘feel for a lost home’, the kind of feeling that Abbas El-Zein calls a ‘mutilation or amputation’ (2002: 226). He asks, specifically, what exactly has been lost? Reframed for the ethnographic circumstances of this study, what sense of homeliness has been lost that cannot be (re)gained in Australia?

‘Uprooting and regrounding’ (Ahmed 2003) might occur for a number of reasons such as war, revolution, poverty, famine, natural disaster, or by the quest for new opportunities, freedom and political stability. This latter reason was the main push factor for the Iranian migrants in my study. These stories indicate that such quests do not always yield the rewards one might wish; it is possible to leave a country with limited public freedom and political stability, polluted air and a chaotic social situation, and arrive in a free country, have a great job and educational opportunities, be safe and yet ‘not feel at home’. The answer I put up in this thesis is that what has been lost has been lost both in Australia and in Iran—the opportunity to unreflexively be Iranian, in either place. Instead, Iranians have to perform the State version of Iranian-ness in Iran or suffer the consequences; in Australia, they must perform according to what they feel is expected of them as good, grateful
migrants, or run the risk of social exclusion and its consequences, as they saw them (and which I detail in the following substantive chapters of this thesis).

Iran’s present regime—the Third Iran—and how it is seen in the West play a major role in how Iranians differentiate between the people and the Iranian State, and how they perform their Iranian-ness in the West—with great care—since being associated with the State can place Iranian migrants in difficult situations with their western ‘hosts’:

The Iranian Revolution has been the most important historical event in shaping Iranians’ collective memory and ethnic identity in exile. Although not all Iranian immigrants suffered from the post-Revolutionary changes and experienced anti-Iranian actions [...], there is a notion that every Iranian living abroad is a political or economic refugee who has been a victim of political relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mobasher 2006:115).

The effects that both the Third Iran’s restrictions and the inexpressible longing for the lost-place Homeland have on Iranians, and how they feel they are able to express their Iranian-ness in Australia, are profound. The Iranians of this study articulated a kind of ‘ambivalent attachment’ to Iran, which endorses associations with Homeland Iran but shuns the characteristics of the Third Iran (McAuliffe 2007: 307). In short, they mean that a narrow performance range is left to Iranians—they must perform in a manner which distances them from a regime regarded with fear and loathing in the West, and they must not weep for an Iran lost, since this might make them seem ungrateful. People in my study were acutely aware of the narrow space left to them, and that they must
perform within its parameters or suffer the negative judgements of their Australian hosts. In the end, what is important is that they felt that they had to perform and they could not simply ‘be’ Iranian. This, I argue, is at the heart of the unhomeliness that most people in my study still suffer, even as they live lives free of political repression in Australia.

Another way of putting this is as Sara Ahmed (2010) has, that the ‘promise of happiness’ beckoning from the ‘free world’ is a conditional one. She argues particularly that happiness in multicultural countries is conditional, as it is promised in return for integration and that the cost of not meeting this condition is unhappiness. I have put these conditions in performative terms, since it is this pressure never to fail in the task of performing the expected role of the grateful Iranian who presents no threat that is so similar to the conditions placed upon bodies in post-Revolutionary Iran itself, and because awareness of the requirement to perform is what keeps an elusive feeling of homeliness from being accomplished.

Let me return to the purgatorial quality of life that links the two experiences of being unhomed in Iran and unhomed in Australia. It is the latter kind of purgatory which I will detail in the remainder of this thesis.

The work I undertake in the rest of the thesis adds to existing arguments about the liminal conditions under which migrants often live when they arrive someplace new. Mark Graham and Shahram Khosravi argue that ‘exiles are often seen as existing in a permanent state of ‘in-
between-ness’, a liminoid condition’ (1997:115). In her book of *Exiled Memories, Stories of Iranian Diaspora*, Zohreh Sullivan (2001) states that the Iranians who participated in her study, including herself, experience ‘a sense of living halfway between here and there, cherishing and fearing fragments of the past and yet always negotiating a space that kept [them] slightly outside its embrace’ (2001:2). Her book is about mutilated memories, ‘negotiating the troublesome boundaries between home and not-home’ (2001:2). Exiles are people living between two worlds, in limbo, waiting for their fate, similar to the ‘halfies’ of Abu-Lughod’s (1991) work. Some of my participants readily called themselves exiles and there were some who did not use this term but spoke in similar terms of their situation. If we take being in exile as to be ‘deprived of a land and the temporal rhythms of life appropriate to it’, then the Iranians of this study felt ripped away from their ‘temporal rhythms’ (Graham and Khosravi 1997:115), both in Iran and Canberra.

I add something new to these existing works: a focus on reflexive performance and its relation to being and feeling at home, and a sense that being unhomed is not simply a condition of the difference one encounters in moving away from some place. Feeling un-at-home, in this ethnographic case, is not so much about place, movement and material memories as it is about performance and being aware that a performance must be made if people are to survive here in Australia and there in Iran.
Chapter Three

Performing Iranian-ness

In this chapter I will show that Iranians in my study intended to perform the role of the happy, grateful, migrant who is not a threat, is polite, civilised and kind. In doing so, they carefully chose how to ‘act’. Part of this performance involves presenting Iran as a civilised place with a long and proud history, which produces citizens of fine upbringing and solid family background. But one must not be seen to long for this place—one must instead appear very happy to be in Australia. Simultaneously, they are wary to specify they are not representatives of the Third Iran, the Iran that caused their unhomeliness in their own Homeland and led to their displacement in the first place, the Iran alien to their ‘existential self’ (Hage 2005). This Iranian-ness that must be performed—not melancholy and nostalgic for the Iran lost, not associated with the Iran of the regime, is a new Iranian-ness indeed. However, it emerges ‘out of a preservation of the essential and central imagery of their old selves’ (Rapport & Dawson 1998: 81).
I asked my informants how they felt they could express their Iranian-ness in Australia. There was great consistency evident in the answers I received; every interviewee talked about hospitality, one’s physical appearance, the proper use of manners, and sharing food. All of these were considered performance opportunities, chances to perform Iranian-ness to an Australian audience to confirm to it that the Iranian migrant belonged.

Shereen answered my question about how she felt she could perform her Iranian-ness first of all by referring to the way she dresses and in and through demonstrating her fine manners. This was because she believed appearance and manners to be foundational to how well she could get along in Australia. She said:

My appearance shows that I am not religious. I smile, dress properly, I am neat, clean and follow the dress codes of each occasion I attend. It indicates I am different from that government [of Iran]. I try to be polite to show I have been brought up properly, that I am civilised and cultured. I have tried to tolerate differences, even rudeness, to show Iranians have a high capacity for growth and progress and that I am mature. I try to be helpful and caring to show Iranians are kind and human. I never take my responsibilities recklessly to demonstrate I am reliable and trustworthy (note: 60)

Here, Sheeren reflexively and very carefully performs her distance from the Third Iran, the Iran of the post-Revolutionary regime, by the considered selection of an outfit that will indicate her distance from religion, and particularly from the State mandated version of fundamentalist Islam that so terrorises western observers. She knew, as
Shahram Khosravi describes it, that she would be read as a ‘particular type’:

After crossing many physical, national borders, I found myself facing other kinds of borders in Sweden: those in the minds of people [...] These borders are intangible and elusive, yet powerful and deep rooted. The invisible border keeps immigrants strangers for generations [...] the border exposes me to a gaze that does not see me as an individual but reads me as a type (2011:76).

The problems related to the invisible borders mentioned above lead to conflicted emotions in performing as the ‘good Iranian’, to be the acceptable other. In this sense, the ‘good Iranian’ faces two emotional dilemmas which cause extractions in their performances: hiding unhappiness behind the mask of gratitude, and aiming to correct the stereotyped negative image of Iranians associated with the politicised Third Iran.

Knowing this, Shereen set out to undo the type and perform an alternative one, one that would, she hoped, be warmly received. The public performance of the intimacies of a family life that left its hallmarks on Shereen’s body— those of being brought up properly, of knowing how to attune her physical appearance and mannerly demeanour towards any social occasion—she hoped, would serve to show that she was not a product of the regime, that it had not impressed upon her its worldview. Her performance of Iranian-ness, rather, was designed—reflexively so—to show that she is an enlightened, modern woman, not someone to fear or worry about simply because she comes from a feared place. She accentuates this sense in
the performance of her caring, her politeness—as she puts it, ‘to show Iranians are kind and civilised’. She performs her Iranian-ness with great care and always with an eye to the audience and its expectations.

The fact that Shereen is so aware of the fact that she is performing an identity that is designed to carefully build in her audiences a positive feeling about Iran and Iranians does not mean she is ‘faking it’. The fact that she is giving a performance designed to show her politeness and kindness does not mean that she herself is simply pretending to be polite and kind, but it does mean that she is fully aware of the narrow performance range open to her, and it does reveal that she also knows just how much is riding on how well she can perform her role as the non-threatening Iranian. It is this awareness that I argue is the basis of feeling un–at-home; Shereen, like most of my other informants, could not simply afford to be herself. She knew her Iranian self must be performed.

This acute self-awareness of and pressure to perform as a good immigrant took particularly pointed form when many of my informants spoke with me about the importance of appearing to be grateful for and glad of the opportunity to live in Australia. As Hage (2002) has noted in his work on Arabs living in Australia, the overwhelming sense amongst my own informants was that some Australians thought they did not deserve the opportunities, freedom and ‘luck’ to which they had access here in Australia. I did not investigate, nor did I want to, the validity of that sense that my informants shared, about how Australians might
think of them. That would be a different project, for one thing and, for another; it is what my informants believed to be the case. Since this was so, and was a key driver that compelled them to perform their Iranian migrant identities in the ways they did, I chose to examine their responses to it as a way of investigating the claims they made, about not feeling at home here in Australia in the way they had wanted to as they fled Iran.

Generally speaking, the performances they gave served to reassure Australians that they were grateful for the chance to live here, that they were happy, but did not display the shattered hope they felt in pursuing a homely space in Australia despite achieving freedom. Rapport and Dowson suggest that home is ‘where one best knows oneself—where best means “most”, even if not always “happiest” ’ (1998:9). The Iranians of this study know themselves very well but, contrary to Rapport and Dawson, are seeking the home where they can be the 'happiest': that is, to unreflexively be. Settling in Canberra might be the best alternative for Iranians, considering the political and social issues present in Iran; however, it is far from happiness.

The performance of happiness came at very great emotional cost to most of my informants. It meant, first, that they were not free to express any kind of emotion about being in Australia besides a veneer of happiness or a mask of gratitude. Operating within such a narrow range in the public performance of emotion, I suggest, is not so very different from adopting the mask of proper emotional solemnity and
sobriety insisted upon by the present Iranian regime. I base this assertion on a theme that cropped up time and again among my informants, across the course of my study: my informants described how they had to don emotional masks to deliver the right kind of performance, just as they had to in Iran, giving the right performance there, no matter how they felt inside. For instance, in a remark that typified the bulk of responses, Laleh said she considered the entrance to her house in Canberra as a kind of border beyond which she had to, in her words, ‘put on a mask’. She said:

In Australia, I feel at home only within the space of my house. The border of home and ‘not-home’ is this door [she said, as she pointed to the entrance of the house]. Outside of this door, I put on a mask. I restrict myself. The way and manner that I restrict myself is different from place to place but I stop being myself outside this house. I know I have to be what they [Australians] expect me to be (notes: 20 & 21; emphasis mine).

And Saeed put it this way: ‘Australia is my house, not my home’ (notes 75).

It is very important to note here that the compulsion to perform ‘what Australians expect’ does not mean that Iranians are not grateful for the opportunities Australia has presented to them. Most, like Atena, felt deep gratitude:

I feel in debt to Australia. This debt happened when I was hospitalised and flown to Sydney for a complication during the delivery of my daughter. She was premature, so she stayed in Canberra Hospital for 40 days. The amount of care, love, and attention I received from the doctors and nurses is beyond words. They looked after me like one of their own. I know they did everything according to their job descriptions and
the system that runs the hospital, but most of the staff went a step further and supported me on a level that transcended their duties.
[I asked for elaboration and what she meant by ‘one of their own’ and why was she this surprised and humbled because of the exceptional service she received.]
I felt that they did not care that I am the other [the exact word she used]. I am a foreigner and they looked after my baby like an Australian.
[I asked whether she felt she did not deserve the service because she was a guest.]
Maybe. I do not know. Maybe. However, what I imagined in those hard days was that if an Afghan in Iran was in the same situation, the treatment would be biased. From those days, I feel more ashamed and guilty for the way the Afghans were treated in Iran. I, as an Iranian, never acted in a racist way, but witnessed, heard discrimination towards them and did nothing. It shows that in my head, I carried the same racist thoughts.
[I asked how this debt makes her feel.]
Because of this debt, I am going to work harder and, gradually, make this country my home both physically and conceptually (notes: 79 emphasise mine).

Roshan felt gratitude, too, saying, ‘I know I am the second citizen here, never considered, not equal as the native, but I have public and private security here. I am grateful for this security, despite the discrimination I see’ (notes: 40).

Sam regarded moving to Australia as the highlight of his life. He stressed if occasionally he feels nostalgic, he reminds himself of the struggle he had for simple ordinary matters of life, like his appearance:

I yearned for the freedom to wear shorts on a warm day without being questioned. Here, I am myself. I do not have to lie to protect myself. I am happy that I do not have to answer questions related to my private life. I do not care about memories, family and other stuff you asked about (notes: 35).
Sam said that he used to take appearance very seriously in Iran to protect himself from the ideological enforcers:

In Iran, if a man had a beard, I would take it as a Revolutionary performance. I would not consider a bearded person as ‘self’. I would consider him out of the circle, the other. But here [in Australia], I look beyond the beard. The Revolution and what it entailed had led me to try to classify people, try to guess who is who because I had to protect myself, because I wanted to perform in a way to prove I was not one of them (note: 36).

Others, like Hoda, a successful young Iranian who has been living in Canberra for seven years, provided stark and frank explanations as to why she did, actually and genuinely, feel grateful: by reminding herself of the brutal political executions she had known of in Iran:

In Iran I grew up in a surrounding of silenced people, the clever, talented and proficient. The best of the best, the ones who were head and shoulders above average. I saw how the Revolution caused their suffering. I witnessed their silencing. I participated in their funerals. Whenever I suffer from discrimination and loneliness here, I recall those horrible memories. It makes me go on. People are not killed in Australia because of their political opinion or sexual orientation; they are valued, even me who is an outsider. I feel grateful for the freedom, security, and the respect for humans that are valued here (note: 40).

Hoda also knew, however, that it would not be possible to perform outside the given range of gratefulness, even if she felt as though that would be a genuine expression of how she felt. In the same interview, she gave me another insight into the performance of her Iranian-ness when she recalled feeling sick during her Australian Citizenship Oath Ceremony. She explained that her sick feeling arose from feeling so bad about taking the oath of another country, over her own homeland.
However, it was a sentiment she could not express; the stage she was performing on would not permit it.

The important thing for Laleh, Shereen and for Hoda, the key thing, was to keep up a happy face in Australia, no matter what—to do otherwise would have unpleasant consequences.

Even during the research I undertook for this thesis, I was given insight into how those consequences might be imagined by my informants. Several days after interviewing Samar, I received a telephone call from her, in which she implored me to change what she’d told me in our interview. She said:

Please change my interview. I do not want to forget the good things about Australia. I am not ungrateful, I am just alone and wounded. What if your supervisor reads my comments? What will she think? That we are a bunch of ungrateful crazy people who cannot live in our own land and disrespect their land (note: 62)

At the time of the interview, Samar had said that when Australians ask, ‘You are happy here, right?’:

I lie and say yes. Because they are not asking, they are assuming that I have to be happy. It is just like a reminder that I have to be happy. In their eyes, why should I not be; I come from a scary, horrible country (notes: 60).

Samar’s response indicates, as I argued in chapter one, that the particular political state of Iran limits her performance register, requiring her to perform her distance from the country—which she dutifully does, she told me, by lying to those who ask her whether she is
happy here. She knows the answer must be ‘yes’, and so gives it because it is what her audience expects to hear.

Some of my informants felt uncomfortable explaining their performance modes to me, telling me that it was not fair to blame Australia for the pain they are experiencing for being unhomed, no matter how often I said that in my view feeling uncomfortable in Australia did not mean that they were being disrespectful or ungrateful. They explained that expressing their pain would be unfair and might even be understood to be indecent, considering all the opportunities they have in Australia. Some feared it would seem as if they felt undeserving of the opportunities they had here, because most of them, deep inside, did not feel Australian, or happy in Australia, but instead felt as though they were unwelcome foreigners from a strange, alarming land.

Other of my informants also keenly felt the Third Iran bearing down on them in Australia. Afrokhteh said she felt that ‘being Iranian’ was problematic to Australians. She explained sadly to me:

When I introduce myself as Iranian, the gazes, the looks, the facial expressions, make me feel bad. I feel alarmed. I feel I am judged based on the stereotypical image of Iranians. That might be true for a very small portion of Iranians. I wish I could represent the part of Iran that I know is wonderful. The part that I grew up with and made me who I am. I consider myself successful and I believe it is because of my strong roots that I am a better person today, that I could use the opportunities that Australia gave me. However, Australia does not validate my roots and makes me feel ‘unbelonged’ (notes: 2).
Feeling what Khosravi (2011:67) describes as ‘the experience of being exposed to the disapproving gaze of others’ made Afrokhteh know the limits of the performance space available to her. Ardeshir, exposed to the same disapproving gaze, said he thought Australians think:

*I have to be head over heels just because I am not in Iran. I understand it is because of the image they have of Iran but they do not take my word for it. They do not want to balance what they think with what they see. They do not want to accept the reality that Iranians are capable, they are cultured, they are not terrorists (notes: 31).

Some, like Shareen and Samar aim to correct the stereotyped negative image of Iranians ushered in with the Third Iran. Laleh said ‘being Iranian’ in Australia pressured her to perform a kind of ‘happiness of escape’ that Australians expected her to feel after fleeing from a terrifying place, but that:

*I am not myself here, either, because I feel I have to be careful because I am an Iranian, because I am the other, the stranger. I *have* to be happy, so I pretend to be happy; I follow these rules here to lighten my otherness (notes: 22).

El-Zein’s (2002) personal experience might be added to the narratives I have reported here. After El-Zein revealed his Arab origins to his Australian doctor in Australia, the doctor declared El-Zein ‘lucky’ to be living in Australia. El-Zein felt that ‘suddenly, unwittingly, [his] country of origin turned into a dark place that one can only escape from’, bringing home to him the narrow range in which it was possible for him to express how he felt about being in Australia, and to express his Arab-ness. It was possible to say only that he was happy, only possible to
appear grateful to be away from the menace of the Arab world. As El-Zein says, however, performing in this expected register does not necessarily gel with how the migrant actually feels—it may be beyond the mask that the migration itself may be regarded ‘in some ways as unlucky’ (El-Zein 2002:236), if the migrant is not in fact happy.

Two things emerge very clearly from the responses given by my informants. First, Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson suggest that home is ‘where one best knows oneself—where best means “most”, even if not always “happiest” ’ (1998:9). In this sense, certainly, the performances Iranian migrants feel compelled to give allow them to know themselves ‘the most’; they are deeply, reflexively, acutely aware of how they are expected to perform, and very often aware of the distance between that performance and their ‘real’ selves; Samar knows she is not really happy, she ‘lies’ and says she is happy when questioned, and this serves, perhaps, to allow her to really know herself, or ‘know herself best’, as Rapport and Dawson might put it. But knowing oneself best, I argue—contrary to Rapport and Dawson—might not, in fact, be equivalent to feeling at home, if feeling at home means, as it does for my informants, unreflexively being themselves. The Iranians in my study are not at home because they are compelled, in the most apparently habitual of embodied acts, like dressing and talking, to perform ordinary talk and appearance. They cannot simply ‘be’, they cannot simply ‘do’; they must appear, as would an actor on a stage, before a waiting audience.
Second, it is clear that the kind of performances Iranian migrants feel compelled to give in Australia are carefully constructed reflexive ones which are not, in fact, dissimilar from those they were required to give, in their comportment, and in their public emotional demeanour, in post-Revolutionary Iran. Is the waiting audience all that different? Is the requirement to perform different? Performances in Iran and Australia require very different expressions. Those in an Iranian context were required to demonstrate loyalty and obedience to the regime, in adherence to the paradigmatic emotional tone set by the State, and in equal adherence to the version of Islam mandated by the State. In Australia, distance from this State, regime, is required, to show that the migrant is not a threat. Also and equally required is the grateful demeanour of the happy migrant delivered by Australia’s willingness to receive them as migrants. But both performances draw on elements of the ordinary—the clothing of the body, the perfect polite bearing of Shereen’s body as she comports herself as expected in any given public context, to show she is kind, polite, civilised, a good, grateful migrant. But what the migrants in my study longed for was ordinary bodies, ordinary social encounters, in which they could be, in which they did not need to perform for an audience carefully watching.

This is exactly what they longed for in Iran. In this sense, these ostensibly very different performances are not different at all. Because they must perform, the Iranian migrants in my study are not at home in Iran or in Australia. The Iranians in this study came to Australia with the hope of being at home and happy, in the sense that their public,
emotional and bodily performances would not fundamentally be in contradiction with their private lives, as was the case back in Iran. However, based on the ethnographic data I have gathered over the course of a year now, it appears that the new arrivals perceive that the public domain in Australia is not free of expectation either, which impacts heavily on their sense of feeling at home. It appears that, notwithstanding the ostensible freedom they have to do and to act as they wish in the context of Australian democracy, emotionally and bodily, Iranians feel they must ‘perform up’ to perceived emotional and embodied standards in Australia, as they had to in Iran. ‘Performing up’ to ideological standards in Iran, with the lack of freedom, led to feelings of unhomeliness in one’s own home country. ‘Performing up’ in Australia equally leads to unhomeliness in the Australian context, due to the feeling of not being able to be oneself, but instead having to perform certain states, such as gratefulness, despite the greater freedoms being in Australia apparently offers.
Chapter Four

Stagecraft

The performances I described in the preceding chapter take place on stages and utilise languages and comportments and objects that may not be familiar to those who must give performances of appropriate Iranian demeanour. These performances, as Shereen indicated, must be masterful, lest Australians think ill of Iran, or, as Samar said, lest they form the impression that Iranians are ingrates, and therefore impose on Iranians whatever social consequences might come from either or both of those impressions. Familiarity and adeptness are thus critical to the success of these performances. When the environment, language, customs and communicative skills of the migrant are unfamiliar, emotional and bodily performances might not deliver the meanings, messages and intentions the actor has in mind. In other words, the line of the story breaks, as El-Zein notes:

If faces and buildings and streets are unfamiliar, it is not only because we cannot recognise them, do not understand their stories and cannot readily incorporate them in our consciousness. It is also because we cannot get them to recognise us and cannot tell them our stories (2002:230).

Laleh described being unrecognised and invalidated during mundane performance in places such as Woolworths and recalled it to be
distressing because the fact that she knew even small affairs (like what a biscuit is) magnified the fact that she was not at home:

One of my early days in Woolies, I was numbed in the supermarket. I could not find the biscuit aisle, so I asked someone. That person looked at me from head to toe and said, ‘Do you know what a biscuit is? If you did, they are right there’. She pointed to the shelf in front of me. I was embarrassed (notes: 23).

No matter how ordinary and insignificant, daily embodiments play a major role in feeling at home or un-at-homed.

**Knowing your lines, and how to deliver them**

One unfamiliar material that must be made use of in the performance of appropriate Iranian-ness is language. However, language is not always deftly deployed; the deficiency of the tongue is like a stigma, marking the ‘other’, the ‘stranger’, the ‘outsider’, indicating to Australians how ‘other’ the user is. This project’s participants indicated that deficient language and other communication skills lead to confidence loss in performing to Australian expectations. Some Iranian migrants in my study found their ‘Australian feet’ as time passed. For these people, performing an Australian identity became second nature, almost unreflexively so—those who felt this way felt more at home than others who, even after a long time of living in Australia, did not become adept at giving performances that could morph into an unreflexive familiarity. For example, understanding jokes, the use of sarcasm, compliments, and daily communal idioms and slang that are essential to a feeling of belonging and to participating as a member of the Australian collective
did not develop so far as to become easefully familiar. Indeed, many of my informants spoke of their feelings of incompleteness about these seemingly small but consequential unfamiliarities (see also Appadurai (2006). They felt, particularly, that it impacted on how they were judged as immigrants: accents, insufficient English and unfamiliarity with other aspects of Australian communication barred them from full acceptance, and marred their performance efforts. Atena articulated this stigmatisation thus:

I think it is because of the shortage of language and not sharing the collective history and memory. They do not know what to do with me. I do not know what to do with them. I have problems understanding the jokes here, the football, cricket, and bushfires (note: 77).

Hoda feels incomplete when expressing emotions in English:

No matter how hard I try, the barrier of language is present. It simply is not my mother tongue. [Her English is above average.] I did not know what some slang or expressions such as bogan or doggy meant. I am still not sure how to use these terms because they are related to a cultural description of adjectives that can be only used in a specific way...or sympathy. I cannot speak English when I am sad, homesick or lonely. I feel my Australian friends do not get the extent of my pain because I do not use proper words to deliver how bad I feel. In a few attempts, the response I received was not satisfying or supportive in any means for me. Again, maybe, because I do not know the words they use to express their sympathy (note: 9).

To improve their performance efforts, some of my informants had to ‘grow new tongues’ (El-Zein 2002:239), something they did because they knew language was fundamental in the performance of the right kind of Iranian-ness for the Australian context. One of my participants, for example, brought a new tongue into life by relentlessly practising so as
to shake off her Iranian accent. This she did to avoid having to explain her Iranian heritage and to escape the uncomfortable queries that questioned her life as an Iranian:

I learnt not to canvass on my origins. I [now] have minimal accent so most of the time it is not picked up that I come from a non-English background. My current supervisor did not know I was Iranian for the first three years that we worked together. I first suffered but then realised if I come from that land [that kills people] and if I want to succeed here, that at least I am safe; it is best if I hide my Iranian-ness as much as I can (notes:43).

Others also hid this aspect of their Iranian selves by creating new tongues. This strategy, they stated, was to protect themselves from questions about their origins, and they preferred growing a new tongue to going through the ‘I-must-be-happy-being-here’ scenario, and the pretence of performing gratitude. This strategic manoeuvre suggests that the ‘body and its senses are socially constructed’ (Synnott & Howes 1992: 164); even, or perhaps especially, when that construction is a purposeful, reflexive one, as it was for my informants.

Unfamiliarity with the bodily signals that represent intentions causes limitation on performance. The Iranians of this study understood that Canberra demands its own ‘approach’ and expects all members, old and new, to ‘know’ the appropriate performance for a given ‘intention’. This situated them in a constant, structured flux, aiming to deliver their lines, as they knew they had to develop strategies to perform as good fits in Canberra. They were aware that people ‘use, define, perceive, and
evaluate the body, the senses, and the different parts of the body very differently’ (Synnott and Howes 1992:164).

The growing of new tongues was a response made to the stigmatisation many felt they had suffered, and which they told me about during interviews. Many stated, for instance, that that they could see and feel the surprise and the distance in Australians’ eyes and bodily postures on first hearing accented English, and that they could feel the walls go up. While, as I have explained, some Iranians felt they could perform the version of Iranian-ness that would work to get them accepted here, like Shereen, others felt they could not while hampered by an accent. Either choice resulted in what Appadurai calls the ‘anxiety of incompleteness’ (2006:8), since each type of performance—one conducted to show an alternative Iran that is gentle, kind and caring, and one conducted with a new tongue that might belie one’s origins—involves not being oneself, not being at home.

**Wardrobe! Makeup!**

Pari got it wrong. She had intended to show that she would be a good fit in Australia because she understood that people were expected to be laid-back, certainly more laid-back, she thought, than they were expected to be in Iran. She had intended to express this with her body, and particularly with her hair and face—in her hairstyle and her makeup. Pari was already an experienced performer, in that she had carefully used her hair and makeup skills to express her disapproval of the post-Revolutionary Iranian regime, while she still lived in Iran. She
did so adeptly and cleverly, stopping just shy of getting herself into serious trouble, but making sure her point was taken. She explained it this way:

When I was in Iran, I wore heavy makeup to break the dress codes required by the regime. I resisted as much as I could by performing an appearance that did not sit well with them.

Pari wanted to use her hair and make up to express her good fit for Australia—to perform it, just as she had performed her disapproval for the regime in Iran. She tried it out:

Here, I do not wear makeup as much; I do not see any reason. I just make sure to be well groomed and neat. I assumed that Australia had changed me. I thought I am more laid-back and easy going, like Australians, especially in appearance.

But Pari’s efforts were not read as she had intended them to be by her Australian audience. She said:

However, I always hear that I am overdressed and am asked how I find time to wear make-up and blow-dry my hair (note: 10).

The feedback Pari received was common; most of the Iranians I interviewed for this study heard from their Australian acquaintances that they were overdressed, particularly for the workplace. Many tried a costume change, to blend in. Their performances and activities show that even dressing is not neutral, and cannot be regarded as part of habitual life but must instead be treated as part of the serious business of getting into character. Mostofi argues that Iranian immigrants resolve the dilemma of being the ‘other’ by ‘interpreting and transforming their
bodies’ (2003: 695). From the data of this project, I argue that appearance—wardrobe and makeup—utilises this interpretation and transformation.

Such introspection and attention to the details of the self once again indicate that these people with whom I spent time know themselves inside out. Again, I question Rapport and Dawson’s claim that home is to be found where people know themselves best, even if ‘best’ does not mean or is not equivalent to ‘happiness’. The people in my study must know themselves best, as they must see themselves from the perspective of the other, compare that with how they ‘really are’, and then make adjustments to suit the audience to whom they play. Morad, one of the Iranians I interviewed, knew exactly the reasons that made Iran unhomely:

In Iran, I felt insecure and insulted just because of not knowing what to wear. My performance was limited and overshadowed by fear and anxiety. Even now, when I visit Iran, I check what I have to wear. Can I wear short sleeves or not. Is there a new colour ban in place that I am not aware of? It is horrible.

But he reflexively, intentionally, planned and altered his story—by not narrating the whole truth, by masking his emotions and experience—when describing his life in Iran to his Australian audiences:

I never tell my Aussie friends about how we lived under the current Iranian regime. I feel embarrassed and belittled. I feel if I say that I can be arrested in Iran because I wear jeans, it will add to the ugliness of the image illustrated of Iran and Iranians. I do not want to contribute to that ugliness, to that backwardness (notes:85).
These things which many of us might take for granted—knowing with a fair degree of unreflexive certainty how to dress and make up for work, knowing with the certainty available to the native that this or that would be too little or too much—cannot be taken for granted, and so must be examined. These are the unremarkable things that seem critical to being or not being at home. Indeed, I would go so far as to say, in response to Rapport and Dawson’s claim, that knowing oneself too reflexively—knowing one’s own self so well that one can know not to perform it, or that one should perform it differently—is to be not at home.

Props and stage

The performances that Iranians give, of an especial version of Iranian-ness palatable to their Australian hosts, does not stop at the comportment of the body and language, does not stop with wardrobe, makeup and knowing your lines and how to deliver them, to put it into theatre-speak. The materials of domestic life, those furnishings of the house and one’s own possessions, all figure as props—the stagecraft—of the performance of Iranian-ness in Australia. These I have considered as key parts of the emotional performances that Iranians feel they have to give in Australia.

Performing the self through material and props is a public affair. These performances communicate ideas, meanings and intentions for other people to receive, even when displayed in the private space. Buildings, furniture, decorations and materials are accomplices in the
performance of an Iranian-ness that draws on the land beyond the Third Iran, and to portray the home they lost to the Revolution (also see Mahdi 1998) without appearing to mourn for it.

The stuff of everyday life, as Graham and Khosravi (1997) argue, is replete with emotion, and makes the difference between, for instance, occupying a space and inhabiting a space, where the latter entails a set of feelings that are engaged by interacting with materials. The kinds of materials I refer to here are those which the people in my study brought with them from Iran: their Persian music and books of poetry, platters and trays, pictures and rugs. All of these things became accomplices in creating private havens to which the Iranian people in my study retreated to be themselves. Amongst the sounds of their own language, amongst the smells and tastes of their own foods, amongst these things they brought with them, in their private homes they could simply and unreflexively ‘be’, without having to perform their Iranian selves. Nareen believed that having these familiar ‘things’ around her created and objectified (Mahdi 1998) a haven of familiarity:

> When you have these familiar things around you, ultimately they have an effect on your environment. Say this [a platter] from home, every time I look at it, it reminds me of its story, the place I bought it and the memories associated with it. So if I have a lot of familiar things around me, I can effectively create an environment around me that, although I am in a strange country, is familiar and pleasant for me (notes: 117).

Others also referred to the haven-like spaces of the ‘small Irans’ they had made for themselves behind closed doors, creating ‘something
regular about the appearance and reappearance of its furnishings’ (Douglas 1991: 289). Tahereh had retained the same furniture she shipped from Iran over 28 years ago when she left Iran and which has travelled with her from one country to another. She said she wanted anyone who sets foot in her door to know this is an Iranian household, her space. This is where she feels anchored and free to be her Iranian self, as opposed to performing it for others. She explained:

So, I created a small Iran, in all of the countries that I lived in. I started in San Francisco 25 years ago. After we settled in a physical space, our own house, I used Iranian symbols and elements for decoration. I established an Iranian home away from Iran in a foreign land. I followed my mother’s footsteps. I wanted to create a central base for my children, a base similar to the one I had: my parental house in Iran. I wanted my sons to have a solid base that they felt belonged to a specific space they can own. I managed to take my home wherever I go. The elements that make me feel at home are very much tangible. The furniture, music, fabrics of curtains and tablecloths all help create the same atmosphere. The architectural setting of the building is very important for me, too. I cannot feel at home in a modern, washed out, brand new and characterless house. I feel I am in a hotel or on holidays. I cannot claim it’s mine. I need to have that historical, ancient and authentic architecture. My authenticity, identity and culture live through these elements as if they mediate me. This setting gives me the familiarity I need to deal with the unfamiliarities that I can change. At least I have a space of my own to return to from the hassle of the day’ (note: 102).

In Tanareh’s comment, very clearly emerges the presence of ‘Homeland Iran’, which I described in my first chapter. The nostalgic sense of longing for an Iran that no longer tangible, but which is nevertheless preserved in the material memories, as Richard Terdiman (1985) would call them, that were there at the time when this Homeland was made,
or otherwise recall its essence, and which can be re-engaged in the present, irrespective of when or where that present is, by the person encountering them. Material memories thus engage the past in the present, and so they are unloosed a little from the strict temporal confines of what is past. Clearly, they were available to Tahereh and to Nareen, as they engaged with a Homeland Iran that persisted in the things of their private home spaces.

In addition, people are not able to simply unreflexively be themselves without referencing the home they experienced back in Iran, so as to both be their ‘existential selves’ and to indulge the nature of who they are (Hage 2005). However, as I have argued in this thesis, it appears in many cases that migrants perform even these aspects of Iranian domestic life style in their home spaces to others who enter into their private spaces, to make the right impression in Australia.

Intertwined with the freedom to ‘be Iranian’, especially in the home, is Taarof\(^\text{12}\), or Iranian reciprocity, a complex Iranian phenomenon steeped in history, culture, literature, music, customs, mysticism and mythology, and quintessentially Homeland Iran in that it captures a time and a practice of a polite, civilised, generous society. Tooran described it as a kind of politeness:

> In Iran, we bring tea AND coffee, and the guest has to drink it or it is rude. We force people to eat. We

\(^{12}\) The above-mentioned does not mean that the Iranians are not honest or are not genuine in their offering. There are enormous scholarly debates regarding taarof, and there is no consensus on where it came from, or how it developed. Some take it as hypocrisy, some as politeness. Some call Iranians double-faced, and some courteous.
assume they are hesitant just to be polite, so we insist more (note: 112).

While taarof might be best known amongst non-Iranians in terms of receiving food and drink inside the Iranian home, it also extends past this to characterise how Iranian people act relationally to others, whether inside or outside the home, in an all-encompassing code of ritual politeness. Ardeshir explained:

Simple things like smoking. I always offer the whole pack of cigarettes, generously and genuinely, to my fellow Aussie colleagues when we take smoke-breaks. Just like I did in Iran.

While informants spoke of their private homes in terms of refuges in which they could be themselves, in which they could dress as they wanted, speak in their own language, cook their own food, and openly mourn for an Iran lost to them without appearing to be ungrateful migrants or being misinterpreted as migrants who were connected with post-Revolutionary Iran, even these private spaces could be drawn into the performance of Iranian-ness they felt was required by their Australian hosts. And, while they spoke of taarof as a code of politeness that typified the pleasantness of relating to others in the Iranian Homeland, this, too, could be misinterpreted. Iranians received Australian visitors in their homes and fell back on the codes of politeness they knew in their private spaces to receive them. But sometimes this did not go well and, when it did not, it brought home to the Iranians in my study just how much they had to mask who they really were in order to get along in Australia, but it equally meant they
could not be themselves, could not feel at home, even in their refuges.

Tooran said:

I learnt that politeness is different here from Iran. To be polite in the Aussie world, one should give choice to the other. Do you want tea or coffee? Do you want to try this Iranian dish? Do you want to come in for a cuppa? And the response is clear and honest.

The ritual code here is lost: straightforwardness triumphs over politeness, honesty and clarity and choice over maintaining relations among one another. As Ardeshir said of sharing his whole packet of cigarettes:

If, and only if they want to do the same (in return for the many times that I have offered and shared my pack), they will reach into their pocket and offer just one individual cigarette in their hand (note: 31)

Such remarks underscore how typical of Iranians it is to praise someone’s new coat, shoes or homeware. In return, the owner of the item would say, ‘Thank you, take it if you like it’, and the first person would say—knowing the game—‘Oh, no thank you, it is nice of you [and for you]. I hope you wear it [use it] in happiness and health’.

Pari learned the hard way that the performance of this ancient ritual code could not be part of the performance of Iranian-ness in Australia when she offered a nice tray of hers to an Australian friend who praised the tray for its prettiness. Unwise to the time-honoured code Pari was using, the friend took the tray home with her, because Pari offered it.

The event brought home to Pari just how much of her Iranian self she was not able to perform, even in her own home. She told me she came
to the conclusion that she should no longer express her Iranian-ness in and through taarof, so that she would not lose items that she really did not want to give away. Instead, she resolved to express her Iranian-ness through other avenues that would not result in such loss. She described this as ‘not being herself’, and said of it, ‘I always have to concentrate on switching from Iranian taarof to Australian straightforwardness, which is killing me’ (notes: 10).

Again, we see the reflexivity that is required of Pari and others. One cannot simply revert to what is known, comfortable, to what has always been there. One must inspect it for its suitability for one’s new role, and perhaps abandon it—or else lose more trays. In keeping her things, Pari loses something else: her ability to feel at home here.

Others take a different approach, but one which still involves the reflexive examination of the self. Vida has kept elements of Iranian taarof. But she has tried to understand the way of life here. She still offers to share her food with her colleagues each and every lunch break as she had in the past, twenty-five years ago. Through trial and error, and time, she has learned not to judge or feel bad that no one offers food to her in return. Now she understands that it is not because of rudeness or that she is not accepted but that it is the Australian way of life. However, she insists on performing her Iranian-ness because she believes it is who she is; it is the easiest and best way to show her generosity, politeness, and accountability. Today, after twenty-five years, her close Australian friends who have understood and accepted
her way of life apply and employ ‘her way’ in their mutual relationship, which she cherishes, every day, as she feels connected, accepted and understood. Vida added that if she were not this lucky to have good Aussie friends, who gave her the chance to show who she really is, life would be miserable in Australia:

I am fortunate to have great friends here. I love my job. These [my job and my friends] make my day; they help me believe that I do belong to Australia. Otherwise, how can I feel belonged when still some people, here, are surprised because I have a dining table in my house? They want to believe that we are backward, and then when they see the photos of our parties, even the ones held in Iran, they struggle to believe their own eyes. The glamour and the formal gowns and all the food and decoration are opposite to what they are told about Iran (notes: 47).

Such accounts reveal that the Iranians in my study learned which kinds of performances of Iranian-ness would go down well with their Australian audience, and which parts would be misunderstood and would even lead to hurt feelings and the loss of items one did not really wish to give away, as Pari learned the hard way. The inspecting, the expert knowing of what is usually habitual, unreflected-upon behaviour is known so well that one is in a position to know all of the benefits and consequences of expressing it, or keeping it under wraps. As I have indicated throughout this thesis, contrary to Rapport and Dawson’s claim, such intimate knowledge of the self has not led to feeling at home, but instead to its inverse.
Conclusion

Iranians in this study perform their *Iranian-ness* in Iran and Australia by ‘performing up’ to the standards required of them, either by the regime in the case of post-Revolutionary Iran, or by what they take to be the expectations of Australians in Canberra. In Iran, the Iranians who participated in this research were forced to perform the State mandated emotional and corporeal demeanour in accordance with a specific, narrowly defined ideological standard and, if they did not do it properly, punishments would ensue, many of them severe. This led most of the informants in my study to feel that they could no longer be at home in Iran, despite the fact that they had been born and raised there. They did not feel at home there because they had to monitor what had once been ‘just the way things were’; they had to check, and check again, how they looked, what they said, who they mixed with.

Is it really so fundamentally different in Canberra?

As I have shown throughout this thesis, the Iranians in my study arrived in Canberra not in search of a Homeland, but in search of the
feeling of *being at home*. By this, as my ethnographic data has indicated, they meant being able to let go of having to inspect their demeanour all the time, in favour of ‘just being’, but this is not what most of them have experienced here.

While the Iranians in my study enjoy the kinds of freedoms that were wholly unavailable to them in Iran, they nevertheless must still, here in Australia, produce performances up to the standard they believe the host community has set for them. They realise, are acutely aware, that they come from a place understood in Australia and in the West generally as a fearsome, terrifying kind of place, an impression particularly pointed in the post-9/11 world we presently live in. They know Australians probably have no sense of the Homeland Iran that characterises what Iran meant to them, how it persists in their own memories, and how it is brought into life in their own homes, amongst their own things, foods, language and company. And so they must perform, to get on here, to fit in, to not be regarded as the dangerous and ungrateful migrant, as the risk of being excluded, of being disliked, is high. They must give good performances.

They give them, as I have shown in this thesis, in the shadow of the Third Iran they assume must dominate what Australians know of their origin country, and they give them in and through the smallest of bodily movements, the most mundane of languages, and even in their appearances. In the third chapter, I showed how important moving and dressing and being manner-able in the right ways is to the performance
of the right kind of Iran for here, the kind that Australian audiences appreciate. In the fourth, I showed that language, things, ritual codes of courtesy and language were also drawn into the performances, even in private spaces which were, when people were alone, little Irans.

Whilst in Iran, my informants shared the sense that they could be themselves only when behind closed doors, away from having to perform up to the expectations of the regime. There, they could drop their guard. Here, it is very much the same, but only until someone drops by—then the performance must again be given.

Rapport and Dawson (1998) argue that one is at home when one knows oneself best. However, my research findings are that these Iranians know themselves inside out, to the point that they know when not to do the most otherwise habitual of things and actions, to the point that they know when to hide aspects of what would ordinarily be their behaviour, to the point that they know that their own tongues won’t be up to the job, and must be replaced with better ones. Like all good performers, they know how to get into character but this entails knowing what one is straying off with—one’s own self—and how it must be adjusted this way, or that, to give the required performance.

It seems as though, for these Iranian migrants, the feeling of being at home is as elusive here as it was in Iran. I have argued that this is because here and there, they must perform the self; they cannot simply be themselves. One thing is certain—they know themselves, they know their audiences.
In this thesis, then, I hope to have cast some doubt on the assertion that one is at home when one knows oneself best. I submit instead that one is at home when it is possible to be the habitual self, rather than having to perform it. In this case, geography has not exerted a force sufficient enough to diminish performance expectations: being in one’s birthplace has not helped in the case of these Iranians when living in Iran. Instead, both in Iran and Canberra, they are in a kind of purgatorial situation, as Veness (1993) would have it. They have a place to stay, but it is not home.

In the end, it is worthwhile reviewing one narrative of this purgatory that seems particularly potent. With it, I close my thesis:

They say I have to be happy because I live in a free country. How can I be happy? I missed seeing my sister grow. I missed being with her when she fell in love. I missed the excitement of her wedding. I did go to the wedding but just like every other guest. I was not there for her. I did not share her feelings, the stress and the dreams. What do I have here? Just silence and loneliness. They [my family] were absent when I experienced motherhood, when I was in pain, when I bought my first house, when my son started walking. Ironically, I said nothing and pretended to be happy, enjoying my freedom. I allowed my gratitude to overrule my sorrow. . . .

The feeling that I do not belong to Iran any more is such a bad one. My image of Iran is frozen in the time that I left. That is ‘my Iran’. It is very different from what I experience in visiting Iran. I have not changed or altered that frozen image. I love it. It is mine, my Iran. I remember all the days and nights that I cried, longed to be in Iran, yearned for Iran and, then, after being there [visiting], I just felt sick. The reality was so harsh, so heavy. I felt alienated, irrelevant not only in public, not only because of the scarf. The only window left to Iran is my family but I said nothing about how I
felt; I was embarrassed to admit that I can no longer live in my own Homeland.

I realised this recently— in my head I am homeless. In the aeroplane returning to Canberra, someone asked, are you going home? I said I do not know where home is. The person looked shocked and assuming, I suppose, that I do not know enough English. *This not knowing* is painful. I am not satisfied with my life here, and I cannot return. I am free here but it is not enough. Something is missing. For me, home is where I share the sadness and happiness of my collective, where I am part of the communal emotions. I do not share any emotions with Australia and, frankly, I have lost touch with Iran, so I do not have a home. I have good Aussie friends, I am free and secure in Australia, but I feel there is a void I cannot fill, no matter how hard I try. But again, I have said nothing until now that you asked (notes: 72-75).
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