DISPLACED DISPLACEMENT: AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE OF EXPERIENCES OF BEING UNHOMED

by

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Abstract

This study is an a/r/tographic living inquiry that investigates the theme of displacement through visual and textual performances of my experiences of being un/homed. It is an aesthetic (and not anesthetic) self-exploration of my struggles of in-betweenness and unbelonging through and with/in multiple layers of my identity as a Persian-Canadian, and emigrant/immigrant artist, researcher, learner, and teacher. Additionally, this work draws on post-colonial literature to analyze the journey of an artist, researcher and teacher sharing her personal experiences as an emigrant/immigrant struggling with absence and loss, trying to make a place to belong. In the pedagogical process/product of this living performance, I revisit, and re-member my lived and living struggles with the concepts of home, language, Othering, invisibility, exoticism, pain and ethics, and critically analyze those struggles through a post-colonial lens. What is re-presented throughout this dissertation is a critical self-exploration through art creation (photographs and video installations) and writing.

I suggest that through the process of visually/textually writing about home one can create a home for oneself in the spaces of one’s creation. I highlight the significance of the pedagogical moments of being together, with pain and I call for a sensitive pedagogy of representation in art education.
Preface


Figure 18 in chapter 4, Mootoo, S. (2000) It is a Crime .... In M. Gagnon (Author) *Other conundrums: Race, culture, and Canadian art* (p. 146). Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press has been reprinted in this dissertation with permission of the artist.

Figure 26 in chapter 6, Abramovic, M. (1975). The Lips of Thomas (Performance). 7 *Easy Pieces*. Solomon R. Guggenheim, Museum, New York, 2005, photographer: Kathryn Carr, has been reprinted in this dissertation with permission of the artist.

Additionally, two of my own artworks, figures 32 and figure 34 in chapter 6, both photographs titled *Pain*, which grew out of my a/r/tographic self-inquiry in the process of writing this dissertation, were exhibited in a group exhibition in Zagreb, Croatia in November 2010. The exhibit was titled Feeling of Pain in Artwork of Women Artist-Educators. Figure 32 in chapter 6 was also published in the exhibition catalogue: Golparian, S. (2010). Pain. In M. T. Dancevic (Ed.). *Pain: Feeling of pain in artwork of women artist-educators expressed in the medium of digital photo* (p. 22). Zagreb, Croatia: InSEA.
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“I am part of all that I have met” wrote Tennyson in his poem Ulysses. Likewise, this living inquiry has taken form through my exchanges and interactions with many people whose presence and absence have influenced the folding and unfolding of this research. I am especially thankful to my sister Eila, and my uncle Hassan and his family for their encouragement and support, and to my friends: Lissa, Steven, Shalini, and Christelle for their pearls of wisdom and words of encouragement.
To my parents

Thank you for giving me wings.
Chapter One: Introduction

This research is an a/r/tographic performance of my struggles with “unhomedness”\(^1\) (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141) and an artistic representation of my experiences of unbelonging which draws on a post-colonial framework. It is equally an analysis of a journey through the critical lens of an artist, researcher and teacher – a sharing of personal experiences of an immigrant struggling with absence and loss, trying to make a place to belong. Immigration, as Hron (2009) explains, “involves many losses, including the loss of home, familiar food, native music, accepted social customs, maternal language, childhood surroundings, and loved ones. Immigrants mourn for these objects of loss, and also grieve lost aspects of their own selves” (p. 29). This mourning for loss and absence, and the struggles involved in trying to transform them into presences is at the very core of my art creation and research as it constitutes my life and my identity.

Drawing on my own lived experiences as an immigrant artist and researcher in academia, in the following chapters I will explore these absences, losses, and struggles, and other emerging themes (i.e., home, memory, language, Otherness, exoticism, invisibility, and pain and ethics of in-between), links and connections embedded in my art, research and life. In doing so, I attempt to make sense of my new place in the world by “telling and retelling ... stories [and histories] about [my] former place, the re-creation of familiar features from [my] lost environment, the transportation of familiar objects and personal mementoes, and the maintenance of social links to ... ‘[my] imagined place of belonging’” (Turton, 2005, p. 276). This research is therefore an artistic/creative dwelling in my struggles in-between cultures.

\(^1\) Bhabha (1994) identifies “unhomedness” in the experience of immigrants and post-colonial people, for whom geographic or cultural dislocation are defining traits either because they have been uprooted
What will be presented is a post-colonial arts-based re-presentation of my lingerings in the moments of trying to find a place to land in the troubling “unhomely” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141) spaces of the in-between².

Context

I was born in Iran two years before the Islamic revolution and lived and studied there until after I graduated with a bachelor’s degree from the school of graphic design. During the two decades of my life in Iran I lived through a national revolution, the years of chaos that followed after that, and the horrifying air-raids of Iran-Iraq war. Despite this colonial context, I always remember my life in Iran as a peaceful life. I was born into what I can now call an a/r/tographic way of living. With both parents, artists, researchers and teachers, the only life I have ever known has been a life of an a/r/tographer. I was brought up to value education and sharing of knowledge and to learn and appreciate art, music, poetry and people. I would definitely not think of myself as a ‘typical Persian woman’. In fact I feel quite privileged for the family I was born into and for having had art and education as a constant in my life.

At the age of 19, I made the decision to apply for immigration to Quebec and continue my education in Canada. Four years later, I left my home in Iran to move to the city that became my home for the next six years of my life. There I began my journey of translating

² In my discussion of the unhomely and unhomedness I do not address all forms of marginalization and diversities (i.e., sexual orientation, disabilities, etc.) that exist among immigrants. My self-exploration of the unhomely and unhomedness is geographical, psychological, historical, cultural, social, and linguistic, and also includes an engagement with my personal experiences with certain forms of exclusion and marginalization (such as racialization).
myself in/to the new (Francophone/Anglophone) culture and translating the culture back, so I
could try to find a way to be, and to be with.\footnote{Being with includes being with art and language, text, images, thoughts and feelings as well as being with others with/in the world.}

Leaving Quebec was more of a forced choice as I was only beginning to feel a sense of belonging with the streets and the people of Montreal. Nevertheless, among other more personal reasons, I was admitted to a Ph.D. program in B.C. that encouraged me to leave home once more. I found the experience of leaving Montreal more difficult and painful than leaving Iran. Perhaps because I knew what was waiting for me. Perhaps I was already dreading the loss of yet another home-in-becoming. Or perhaps I did not want to find myself in another in-between, having to re-negotiate, re-translate and re-make sense of my (already in-between) self for myself and others. Nonetheless, some years ago, I found myself here, in B.C., and to this date, I am still trying to make sense of my place in the world, in and through the rainy weather of Vancouver.

Consequently, having lived a life trajectory of passages and positionings in in-between spaces – Persian, Quebecois and Canadian, Francophone and Anglophone, emigrant and immigrant – throughout this dissertation, I bring my experiences into an a/r/tographic study of my struggles with unhomedness, and displacement, and negotiation in the space that inhabits both difference and its generative possibility.
Research Questionings:

Having had to define myself in-between different and often contradictory cultures, over the last decade, my life, including my art and research, has been focused on my struggles to belong. It is through this struggle that I have been communicating and creating both textually and visually: a struggle of an ontological, epistemological and ethical kind that has placed me in an unsettling (and at times paradoxical) space, mourning for the kind of peace I used to live. As a result it has left me in pain of “absences and losses” (Bammer, 1994, p. xiv).

It is with/in this struggle that I have taken on this research project and I am writing my way as insider/outsider of cultures through a path that I have already begun walking – creating art and constantly revisiting the memories and experiences embedded in my creation, questioning and analysing the emerging thoughts and images, and making new meanings and understandings for myself and for others who might find resonances feeling isolated and alone in their struggles while walking similar paths.

This way of writing, creating and investigating as an insider/outsider of cultures is also an announcement of who I am: an announcement of the very struggle that constitutes my life and my identity. Like de Cosson (2004) “I want to be in that which cries out from deep within” (p. 140) and engage in the kind of re-search that is also a part of who I am and what I live. I want to “(re)search the process of my own doing” (p. 150) and in that re-learn and re-know myself in becoming, and also re-present the new understandings that emerge.

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4 I have changed the traditional dissertation space of the “Research Question” into a verb in order to make it more consistent with the living space of a/r/tographic methodology.

5 My discussion of pain is located in the emotional, psychological, and traumatic suffering connected with in-betweenness, immigration, separation, and a sense of no longer having a place. Pain for me, is extreme emotional suffering that comes from never being able to land or to belong.
Part of the inspiration for this research comes from a yearning “for enhanced meaning, [I] wish to create, and [a longing] for [my] own self-expression of certainty and ambiguity” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29) through my praxis as an artist-researcher-teacher. However, there is also inspiration that comes from the need and responsibility to voice and share (through an investigation and interpretation of the feelings, thoughts, ideas, images and readings that emerge from my artwork) a personal struggle with communities of emigrants/immigrants/artists/researchers and teachers.

There can of course be no single question to explore from my standpoint – amidst all the spaces that make it hard to define me and my struggles. For in this state of in-betweenness narrowing anything down to one has become a very difficult task (and in itself a painful struggle), if not close to impossible. However through my visual/textual performances, my inquiry involves a dwelling in the following questions:

How does an immigrant negotiate the struggles she⁶ goes through as a result of having to live in-between (in my case often contradictory) cultures (including ways of being and communicating with/in the world, knowings, and value systems)? How and in what space can an immigrant define herself, her place in the world, and her actions when her previously structured frameworks become questionable or fall apart in and from the perspective of different cultural experiences? How does an immigrant negotiate the pain of isolation that is caused by reduced means of communication (language: verbal and non-verbal)? How does an immigrant deal with the different and at times contradictory frameworks for values and ethics? How are the struggles of immigration

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⁶ Throughout this dissertation I will be using one gender pronouns in order to avoid distraction, and to encourage flow and sense of attachment to the ideas.
communicated through art, in-between cultures and to an audience of many different cultures? And how does cultural difference/contradiction affect the voicing and sharing of one’s struggles and hardships?

From this dwelling within the spaces of my a/r/tographic self-exploration, I reframe the above questions in a more meaningful way for my own lived experiences. In doing so, I remain consistent with a/r/tographic methodology which states that: “a/r/tographic inquiry does not set out to answer introductory research questions but rather to posit questions of inquiry that evolve over time ... from within the a/r/tographic process” (Irwin, 2008b, p. 77). Further that a/r/tographic inquiry is an “ongoing inquiry through an evolution of research questions ... [which] entails living and inquiring in the in-between, of constantly questioning, and complicating that which has yet to be named” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, pp. xxix-xxxi). In this spirit I begin with the following questioning on which I build throughout this living inquiry process:

How do I experience, understand, negotiate and share my struggles of in-between through and with/in all these layers of my identity: a Persian-Canadian, and emigrant/immigrant? artist, researcher, learner, and teacher?

For the purpose of this research, I will therefore begin by looking more closely into my struggles in relation to relocation and emigration/immigration and examine certain recurring

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7 I use the term emigrant/immigrant in reference to Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) who identifies immigrants as both immigrant and emigrant, who remain both in their former home and the new one, and constantly have to negotiate the terms of their existence using principles from one or the other culture.

8 An investigation of the struggles and the experiences of absence and loss involved in the process of emigration/immigration is of course possible from many different perspectives and theoretical frameworks, and within many different fields and disciplines (i.e.: psychology, anthropology,
themes in my life such as displacement, home and unhomedness, in-betweenness, language and identity, invisibility, Otherness, insider/outside, exoticism, ethics of in-between, etc. that have been constantly present in my life and therefore also in my art and writings.

Overview of Chapters

In the following chapters I will explore my personal lived and displaced experiences as an emigrant/immigrant, in order to foreground the importance of acknowledging the struggles of (learning to cope with) the frustrating state of displacement (of thoughts and ideas, values and beliefs, language and culture and meanings, and consequently the displacement of one’s identity).

In my investigation of the theme of displacement throughout this interpretive journey, I will explore the concepts of “unhomedness” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141), cultural differences, self-transformation, invisibility, Othering and Otherness, and exoticism and pain by drawing on my own lived experiences. I identify these concepts not as motionless, fixed and isolated but as “centers of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, cited in Irwin, in press, p.3). Always rhizomatically connected.

While chapter two will be a short literature review that looks into the main themes and ideas that relate to the identified path of research questioning, chapter three is an overview of sociology, cultural studies, linguistics, and so on). There is therefore extensive literature that investigates immigration. The purpose of this a/r/tographic self study is not to include all the literature that investigates the experiences and impacts of immigration (which is of course also impossible to achieve within the scope of this dissertation) but to draw on scholarly work that is most relevant to/for my personal lived/living experiences as a Persian-Canadian emigrant/immigrant artist/researcher/teacher. The literature I frame my self-inquiry around includes (but is not limited to) studies on displacement, immigration, acculturation, home, the Other, and of course a/r/tography.
a/r/tography as living inquiry, my chosen methodology. Chapter three leads me to my first major chapter on un/homedness. In this chapter I investigate the themes of displacement, in-betweenness, home and language. I visually and textually theorize and explore the above concepts in relation to my own personal experiences of un/homedness. This artistic exploration leads me to/through the creation of a video installation called Be-longing, and two series of photographs called My language, my identity and My language, my outfit.

While investigating home and longing, some place in the middle of the Un/homed chapter, I found myself needing to take a different path and explore the concept of memory. Although this section might seem displaced at times, I found it to be significant to all aspects of this lived research. Additionally, in not being firmly placed, this section is also a representative of my own experiences of being displaced. Moreover, this displacing of memory as a chapter also fits well with the definition of memory as “the process of displacement itself” (Baronian et al., 2007, p. 12).

This displaced mini chapter, somehow hidden and invisible in the middle of the Un/homed chapter, will be marked by a symbol of a blue tile and my choice for this symbol comes with a story – a memory:

Some years ago, during one of my very first graduate courses in Canada, I handed in a work in progress for a term paper. When I was discussing my professor’s comments with her, she questioned my purpose for a certain paragraph in the middle of my paper. I remember explaining that the paragraph was important to every section of the paper but that it would actually not quite fit anywhere in the text. Her response to me was that I could not have a
floating blue tile in the middle of a wall that is tiled all in white. She argued that if the tile is not well placed, it does not belong there and it could fall and break.

Looking back, I find that the metaphor of the floating blue tile resonates very well with me and my vulnerable displaced self. In fact, the presence of such vulnerable and not quite placed text has become so vital to me that unknowingly I found myself resisting by writing a “floating blue tile” chapter in the middle of one of my chapters. And of course it seemed quite fitting that this floating chapter, which is a chapter on memory, would physically reside in the middle of my un/homed chapter. This not only implies that the chapter itself can have many homes within this dissertation where it simultaneously will and will not feel at home, but also implies that memories themselves reside in more than one home where at the same time they do and do not belong.

Consequently, in spite of its physical location, being a floating chapter, this section of the dissertation can be read with/in and in relation to any other chapter in this dissertation and does not have to be read (only) where it is located.

The following icon will mark the physical location of the chapter in the dissertation.

Figure 1: Floating Chapter Icon

The chapter following the Un/homed chapter, chapter five, is an exploration of the forces from the outside that have contributed to my experiences of unhomedness. In this
Chapter I will investigate the concepts of the Other, and the exotic in relation to my own personal experiences. This exploration of the themes of invisibility, Othering and exoticizing takes place through the creation of the performance/video installation named *In/visible*.

Chapter six looks at pain, relationality, relocation and ethics through a series of photographs called *Pain* and a video installation called *Other-ache*. And the last chapter, chapter seven, highlights my reflections.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Ever since World War II, the combination of colonial and imperialist practices around the world, and discriminations (religious, racial, ethnic, etc.) practiced in most nations worldwide, has caused mass immigration in every corner of the world (Bammer, 1994). As a result of immigration, “radically new types of human beings” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 124) have been created or forced into being who have had to root themselves in ideas and memories rather than places and the material world. People who come to be the fusion of who they were and where they find themselves to be (Rushdie, 1991). People who can only make sense of themselves in-between cultures, languages, and ways of being in the world (Bhabha, 1994) and “speak from the in-between of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of the other, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and different from the others amongst whom they live .... They represent new kinds of identities” (Mills, 2005, p. 261). These are the types of people who have had to consciously define themselves as a response to the way they have been and are defined by others and their otherness (Rushdie, 1991).

As a result of immigration a large population of people have found themselves having to live in spaces/places where they do not feel a sense of belonging. They find themselves, not in a right place, a place they would fit, and therefore they feel displaced. Bammer (1994) defines displacement as “[t]he separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture” (p. xi). For Bammer, displacement is the loss of one’s place in the world. Bhabha (1990), however, defines displacement as not only physical but also, and more so, contextual (and specifically political). He defines displacement in
relation to the state of hybridity – a “third space” which “displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211). This state of displacement and hybridity, Bhabha further explains, “demands that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them” (p. 211). It even sometimes demands a completely new set of principles because as Rutherford (1990b) states, “[one] cannot read a new situation in terms of pre-given model or paradigm” (p. 211). Consequently, displacement equals not only the loss of one’s physical place but also the loss of one’s life principles and ways of being and acting in the world.

When someone leaves her original home and consequently finds herself in that space that Bhabha (1994) calls the “in-between” (p. 2), the concept of place gains more importance than ever before. Away from home, the experiences of not belonging and/or not being in the right place, and the feeling of loss of one’s place – the feeling of being displaced (Bammer, 1994; Bruner, 1996; Cotanda, 2001; Sayad, 2004, p. xiv; Turton, 2005) accentuates the longing for the home one has left behind. Home for an emigrant/immigrant therefore becomes “the past place from which [she] comes and to which [she] desires to return” (Sabra, 2008, p. 93). This desire to return, which is often referred to as a nostalgic longing for home is also the result of the inaccessibility of that familiar physically protective domestic dwelling (Terkenli, 1995), and the impossibility of returning to that physical and psychological “place of safety and belonging” (Sabra, 2008, p. 79). Sabra (2008) explains: “The notion of nostalgia often points to a longing for the lost object, the place from which we have been exiled, whether because we can no longer inhabit it uncritically, or because we have been excluded from it” (p. 96). Consequently, emigrants/immigrants live in a constant tension that
is created as a result of “the experiences of separation and entanglement of living in one place and remembering/desiring another place” (p. 94). Home, for an emigrant/immigrant is therefore often an ambiguous irresolvable place. One they can’t forget and leave behind, yet they can’t return to either.

There are, however, a group of emigrants/immigrants (often referred to as migrants in the literature) who identify themselves, or are identified as transnational. Transnationalism has been defined in many different ways by different scholars (Darby, 2010). Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) explain that transnationalism involves multilayered and multi-sited interactions that occur within fluid social spaces characterized by migrants’ “simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society” (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 131). Basch et al. (1994) explain that transnational social, political and economic exchanges have engendered a perception among migrants of the nation as deterritorialized, unbound from the geographic and political boundaries of the nation-state. However, they further argue that in spite of the fact that transnationalism allows migrants to construct identities that stretch across state boundaries, ultimately these identities are rooted in particular nation-states. Some scholars maintain that transnationalism is anchored in connections and ties back to particular nation-states and indeed cannot exist without the nation-state (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Castles, 2004). Other scholars even argue that transnationalism is synonymous to diaspora (Castles, 2004; Vertovec, 2009) and therefore also includes the feelings of displacement and longing for a home or an imaginary homeland (Rushdie, 1991) that often immigrants experience.

I would like to note that I find the use of the word ‘migration’, instead of ‘immigration’ in the transnational literature interesting to say the least. It leaves me to think that perhaps the emphasis on the ‘to’ in the word immigration and the idea of permanence in the move from a place to another are closely linked to the feelings and experiences of longing for a place or a home, and that
Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) formulates the immigrants’ state of displacement as a double absence. He refers to immigrants as both immigrant and emigrant, who remain both in their former home and the new one, and constantly have to negotiate the terms of their existence using principles from one or the other culture. Consequently, they are always also partly absent in the context of one and/or the other culture. Sayad identifies the emigrant/immigrants’ ambiguous state of double identities and binary thinking as the greatest challenge facing emigrants/immigrants, leaving them in a troubling state of suspense – a virtual existence in between two worlds.

This constant state of limbo is not one that can be resolved in a short time or perhaps ever in the life of an immigrant. The process of acculturation, “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698), or “the process of coping with a new and largely unfamiliar culture” (Taft, 1977, cited in Dow, 2011, p. 221), is a long term process that can take years, generations, or even centuries. It is hard to say if an immigrant will ever really be able to call herself as the one knowing or belonging to the culture to which she has immigrated. To highlight this irresolvable state of non-belonging and outsideness that is experienced by immigrants, Leontis (1999) recounts a section of Axioti’s (1986) Novel, My Home, where a young engineer from Athens is having a conversation with his Greek guide, a museum worker, about building the city of Mykonos. The guide persuades

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transnationalism, defined as not belonging to a geographical place is perhaps the result of constantly moving from one place to another rather than a permanent move to another place. Although I share the experiences of “unbelonging” (Gill, 2003, p. 40) with those who identify themselves as transnational, I do not identify with the concept of rootlessness or complete borderlessness that exists in certain transnational literature. The unbelongingness that I experience and address throughout this dissertation is an “unbelonging belongingness” (Gill, 2003, p. 40), still quite rooted in both the cultures of my past homes and the culture(s) of my present home. And although for me the borders are fuzzy and not fixed or clearly defined, they nonetheless exist and define my place and/or my longing for it in each specific moment.
him to put off his decision to build and develop Mykonos: “[F]or you to come to know our topos, you would have to witness birth and death, that is to say follow the lives of two generations. Naturally, this is entirely impossible for a foreigner” (Axioti, cited in Leontis, p. 10). Some years later, still in doubt about committing to building the city, the engineer explains:

I can’t build, I can’t. I didn’t stay here long enough. The museum worker himself told me, to come to know our topos, I’d have to see people born and die. I’d have to know the Island’s winds, the people and the birds that endure the winds, how the dead are buried, how children are born; I don’t know their anger, their stones, the wells of stones that divide their fields, where the returning seafarer sits when he comes home soaking wet. (p. 11)

In order to really belong to a culture, one needs to embody that culture, its sounds, colours, shapes, and the practices that distinguish it from other cultures. Something that according to Axioti, is not possible unless one grows up with and in a culture.

Having been brought up in a different culture from the one she lives in, an emigrant/immigrant embodies all the differences and even contradictions that come with that culture. She is therefore always caught up in between her sense of longing for, and belonging to the culture she left behind, and her efforts to belong to the new culture, the one that she now lives in. Immigrants, Friedman (2004) explains, are “suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denies them the right of entry” (p. 198). As a “stranger” (p. 198), Friedman further argues, an immigrant is always an anomaly. Always standing between here and there, order and chaos, friend and enemy.
Consequently, although the concept of acculturation and its four strategies of assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization\textsuperscript{10} “assumes that all immigrants linearly go through these stages and can achieve a happy, balanced blend that entails ‘becoming effective in the new culture and remaining competent in his or her culture of origin’” (Bhatia, 2002, p. 69), they do not necessarily offer a ‘successful outcome’ in the life of an immigrant (Berry, 2005; Dow, 2011). According to Dow (2011), immigrants “undergo a tremendous amount of psychological change and stress in the process of adapting to the new host country” (p. 225). However, in spite of all the emotional and psychological stress that they experience, there is no guarantee that they will ever be able to adapt to the new culture. As Bhatia (2002) explains: “[T]here can be no blissful marriage or integration of cultures” (p. 71). There is always conflict, confusion and chaos in the space where two or more cultures meet. Consequently, as Dow (2011) argues: “[The] migration process … is highly disruptive…[and] under the circumstances of having to abandon what is important, lose what is familiar, and accept what is contrary to their beliefs to conform to the rules of the host society, immigrants may be prone to experiencing deterioration in their health and mental health” (p. 225).

When faced with cultural conflict, immigrants often experience anxiety, confusion and helplessness (Berry, 2005; Dow, 2011). Berry (2005) and Dow (2011) refer to these

\textsuperscript{10}Berry (2005) defines: Assimilation as a “melting pot” where immigrants are expected to strip themselves of their cultural identity and take on the new culture; Separation as the experience of those who hold on to their original culture and avoid interaction with/in the new culture; Marginalization as exclusion, where there is little possibility or interest in heritage cultural maintenance and little possibility or interest in having relations with others in the new culture; and Integration as maintaining one’s heritage culture while in daily integration with others in the new culture.
experiences of anxiety, confusion and helplessness as acculturative stress. Acculturative stress, explains Berry (2005), “is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation” (p. 708). This form of stress is often the direct result of what Friedman (2004) explains as “being forever marked as the stranger who doesn’t belong” (p. 198). It is a direct result of the sense that “no matter how hard one tries, it is not possible to succeed or change the situation” (Dow, 2011, p. 221). That no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to belong.

Ward, Fox, Wilson, Stuart and Kus (2009) argue that: “[A] sense of belonging and meaning within society are considered key to well-being” (p. 29). When an immigrant is marked as a “stranger” (Friedman, 2004, p. 198) or an outsider in the place/country where she lives, and consequently finds herself unable to maintain a psychological balance, she inevitably fosters the dream of home; One that she left behind. The social, cultural, linguistic, political, religious, etc., challenges that immigrants face on a daily basis are the very issues that both provoke and strengthen their desire for the home that they left behind. The encounters and circumstances where immigrants are pointed out as strangers and outsiders, which is what Bhabha (1994) refers to as “unhomely spaces” (p. 15), specifically awaken the immigrants’ longing for home – a place in the past where they belong(ed). A place where they were not (would not be) considered as alien strangers. A place whose sounds and sights, colours, and smells they embody. A place where they had witnessed the people and birds endure the wind (Leontis, 1999). A place whose words they can speak. Whose words they can understand.

Dow (2011) prefers to use the term acculturative stress as opposed to the commonly used term culture shock in order to highlight cultural interaction/negotiation as a process.
Language and a sense of belonging are very closely tied. Understanding and meaning-making are embedded in the idea of home and culture. When we move to another country and need to communicate and function with/in a new language, we are forced to face the fact that the terms and expressions that represent us to ourselves and to others are no longer available to us (Rutherford, 1990a). It becomes difficult, and at times impossible, to understand others and to make others understand us. As a result, we become isolated in our thoughts and feelings and lose our functionality within the world. Although in time many immigrants learn to function with/in a new language, the problem with meaning and understanding does not seem to ever get resolved. Meanings not only shift and transform within one language but they also differ between languages (Papastergiadis, 2000). This creates an everlasting challenge of translating oneself from one language to another.

As Dow (2011) maintains, the immigration process, whether for political, economic or social reasons, is highly disruptive. Immigrants experience an extreme amount of hardship upon their arrival to the new country in order to get used to the environmental, social, and cultural differences or in order to deal with certain adversities such as economic hardship, racial discrimination or social tension arising from linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences (Hron, 2009). “When people move from one culture to another, they frequently find the experience bewildering, confusing, depressing, anxiety-provoking, humiliating, embarrassing, and generally stressful in nature” (Bochner, 1982, cited in Dow 2011, p. 221). Dow (2011) explains: “This stress can have disruptive effects on their psychological and physiological well-being” (p. 221). Upon their arrival in a new country, immigrants find themselves all of a sudden transplanted into a different, unfamiliar space where they often need to negotiate themselves and their lives in-between two different cultures, languages and
ways of being in the world. Being able to function in this space of in-between entails many
different kinds of (emotional and even sometimes physical) struggle for immigrants. To
begin with, when immigrants arrive in the new country, they unexpectedly lose their sense of
“readiness-for-action” (Varela, 1999, p.9) that makes it hard for them to act and/or react.

As Varela (1999) explains, we all rely on our idea of what can happen next, in order to
function on a daily basis. He describes how one’s mood can be shattered as soon as one’s
idea of what is going to happen next is disrupted. We are all accustomed to these transparent
activities we are engaged in on the daily basis. This transparency is often created through
recurrence (or repetition) which then makes it easy for us to take appropriate actions.

We have a readiness-for-action proper to every specific lived situation. Moreover we
are constantly moving from one readiness-for action to another. Often these transitions
or punctuations are slight and virtually imperceptible. Sometimes they are
overwhelming, as when we experience a sudden shock or come face-to-face with
unexpected danger. (p. 9)

When in a foreign country for the first time, we lose this sense of readiness-for-action
and we have to face this new space empty handed. “Many simple social interactions have to
be done deliberately or learned outright” (Varela, 1999, p. 10). This is when functioning in
even simple day to day activities becomes a struggle and life can become overwhelming and
painful because one is constantly receiving unexpected shocks in even very simple
interactions.

The literary texts and life writings on immigrant life and experiences are “laden with
suffering, tragedy, and feelings of alienation, anguish and loss” (Hron, 2009, p. x). But these
themes, as Hron goes on to explain, are often dismissed or “only briefly acknowledged with
concerned nods and uneasy silences” (p. x). Most cultures are not accustomed to sharing their
own or other people’s experiences of pain and suffering. Americans for example, “traditionally tend to ignore pain, avoid talking about it, keep it a private matter and minimize its significance when forced to admit it” (Annus, 2008, p. 111). Pain in general, is considered to be a private matter (Grabher, 2008). It is, especially in the American culture, “a very personal experience, undesirable, socially insignificant, and economically dangerous, and thus its public expression is regarded, overall, as inappropriate” (Annus, 2008, p. 111).

Even immigrants themselves might feel compelled to play down the stress and suffering they experience as a result of immigration, both in front of others in their new country or their family and relatives in their home country, so as to measure up to the stereotypical fictitious image of “a successful immigrant” (Hron, 2010, p. xiv). This, as a result, leaves them isolated in the experience that is considered to be the very definition of who they are. Consequently, they experience a double-suffering – they experience suffering discomfort, anxiety, stress and pain and they undergo additional suffering created as a result of having to shut down and ignore (and sometimes censor and filter their experience of) their suffering and pretend to be the successful immigrant who has been able to adapt and integrate into the new (physical, environmental, social and cultural) surroundings. They can, as a result, become isolated in this double-suffering, deprived of their voice, deprived of any form of empathy12 from the world outside and also deprived of a sense of support and “togetherness” (Grabher, 2008, p. 72) in the sharing of their suffering. In this sense an immigrant’s pain can be turned invisible when their suffering is invalidated in their home country as well as in the host country. And because this experience of pain is embedded in

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12 From the Greek *em-pathia*, which literally means being in one’s *pathic* state of suffering.
the identity of the immigrants (Hron, 2009, p. xix), turning (and having to turn) their suffering invisible, consequently turns them invisible.

When this sense of invisibility isolates immigrants from the community they live in, it does not allow for the ethical relational act that Levinas (1985) calls “being with” (p. 58). Because being with can only be strengthened through the moments of caring, sympathizing and sharing emotional struggle, which Levinas (1988) refers to as moments of “love” and “compassion” (p. 164). The act of empathy “as a powerful emotional bond between individuals that counteracts destructiveness, aggression, emptiness and despair” (Pascual, 2008, p. 8) is an ethical human exigency that can create a bond between human beings and give them a sense of belonging – a belonging of a sort for which an immigrant is already in longing.

For many immigrants, any sense of belonging becomes close to impossible (or very difficult) to attain as a result of the “unhomely” spaces that surround them (Bhabha, 1994, p. 15). The unhomely spaces where an immigrant is considered (or considers herself) an outsider or an Other (Said, 1996, 1978). This is where, as Said explains, immigrants are treated as different and are pushed to the other side of imaginary borders we sometimes create in our minds based on the assumptions we have about the places/spaces they occupy or have to occupy. This is how immigrants can be pushed to the margins as ‘different others’, which significantly adds to the pain they suffer as a result of relocation. Leaving them isolated and invisible, suffering on the outside of this imaginary borderline that is created based on no more than difference: the difference that positions them on the side of
intellectual inferiority\textsuperscript{13}, appropriating their voice within certain restrictions and/or depriving them of the very voice that can give them agency. As outsiders then immigrants suffer the pain of not being accepted: the pain of being exiled and having to choose their place in the world only within the framework that has been chosen for them as outsiders.

From a different perspective, there is also suffering that is caused when an immigrant is exoticized as a strange or mysterious \textit{Other} – the charming unfamiliar \textit{Other} that is consumed by other cultures as the Oriental object. This is in fact an indirect way of what Said refers to as exercising authority over different (oriental) cultures by organizing and classifying their culture, traditions and knowledge in a voyeuristic way. Within the contemporary art world this voyeuristic appreciation for the exotic and Oriental seems prominent. And oftentimes (i.e., in case of Shirin Neshat’s art works), the artists’ works are interpreted in the media in the way that it would promote the stereotyped perspective of the Western world about the Other, Oriental culture. Voice is therefore given to those who can facilitate the global domination of American imperialism (Dabashi, 2011) affirming the stereotyped image of other cultures (even when that is not the intention of the person speaking). And because this affirmation is supposedly coming from an insider perspective to those cultures, it is then taken and promoted as a fact rather than \textit{an} interpretation. This can be an especially painful experience for an immigrant who \textit{does} want to be seen, understood, accepted and appreciated but for who she really is as a person, and not as an Oriental, exotic \textit{Other} (Said, 1978).

\textsuperscript{13} Said uses the term “intellectual superiority” (Said, 1996, p.109) to talk about the other side of this imaginary borderline.
Struggling with misrepresentation and/or the misrepresentation of one’s struggles is therefore another form of struggle that an immigrant can experience. In this sense, the immigrant is not empathized with and understood, and suffers additionally for having been used to serve other, often political, purposes.

As Hron (2009) explains, “Our cultural understanding of [struggles of] migration is largely shaped by definitions, stereotypes, popular assumptions, and generic narrative structures that demarcate and describe the immigrant” (p. 5). What then becomes crucial is becoming aware of these cultural representations, stereotypes and popular assumptions, etc., in order not to commit what Levinas (1995) refers to as dévisager or murder in our encounters with others. What becomes important is not to emphasise Otherness, but “togetherness” (Grabher, 2008, p. 72). And in doing so, avoid leaving immigrants “forever ... shut –‘a stranger’” (Hron, 2009, p. 5), enduring perpetual pain of isolation in suffering.

Desai (2000) specifically emphasizes the importance of being attentive to the political nature of representation and the ways it helps create stereotypes, popular assumptions, and generic narrative structures about people of other cultures and races within educational settings. Although representation as a meaning-producing process is a pedagogical process, it is also “a site of struggle for different racial and cultural groups” (p. 114). This struggle is often about how the images of their culture, history and experiences are shaped in various institutions and then accepted and reproduced as the truth about who they are. Representations are not only partial truths but also “‘positional truths’ ... which are linked to history, power, and dominance within a global context mediated by economic, political, ideological, and cultural processes” (p. 115). Desai highlights museums and art classes as two institutions that help shape a public image of other cultures and calls for “an awareness
about the political nature of how we choose to describe and present another culture in art classes” (p. 115). Learning about other cultures and races is what I think of as a sensitive pedagogy that needs to be tended to with specific attention and care. If we as educators are not attentive to the risks involved in representing others, we are merely nourishing and broadening the grounds for their exclusions rather than inclusion. We are unintentionally causing pain and suffering by and through a misrepresentation of others.

It is with the above literature in mind that I am taking on this a/r/tographic project as a way of sharing my personal experiences and struggles of unhomedness and Otherness, and strengthening the moments of togetherness and being with (being with that includes being with art and language, text, images, thoughts and feelings as well as being with others with/in the world). What I am hoping to be able to accomplish throughout the living inquiry is to raise awareness of the sensitive pedagogy of representing others, and to create an inviting space for pedagogical moments of empathy, love and compassion – Moments of togetherness.
Chapter Three: The Methodology of In-between

There is a table with several round holes almost the size of my fist all around it, in the middle of my parents’ living room back home in Iran. The holes are reminders to me, of how that one table has lived and performed the life of a tree, a chair, a bookshelf, and a speaker, before it temporarily settled into its present form as a table. This is how I have lived my life, growing up with both parents who are artists, researchers and teachers continuously re-forming and transforming materials, objects, art forms and concepts into unexpected new things. A life where the same materials are dissembled and used over and over again in order to make new forms, meanings, and understandings. A life where knowing, making, and doing are always in the process of becoming.\footnote{The concept of becoming is based on the philosophy that nothing in the world is constant except for change and becoming. According to this philosophy actions and “encounters are processed and made sense of through certain knowledge frameworks that [...] have been introduced to, and to which [we] become attached over time. But, of course, those frameworks are never fully formed, always in}
The table, its life as I witnessed it as well as my always already transformed memory of it, is my metaphor for the a/r/tographic research methodology, creative practice and performative pedagogy that now guides my art creation, research, writing and learning. It’s my metaphor for a living inquiry “in the rhizomatic\(^\text{15}\) practices of the in-between” (Irwin, in press, p.2). It’s a metaphor for the kind of inquiry where not only the data but also, people and methods are recognized as “becoming forms”, “making themselves what they are not and becoming\(^\text{16}\) ‘a portal to a world experienced differently’ by moving beyond the already-familiar to affirm the actuality of what is yet unknown” (Triggs, Irwin & O’Donoghue, in press, p. 8). The table is my metaphor for “living and inquiring in the in-between, of constantly questioning, and complicating that which has yet to be named” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxxi). It is a representation of a living aesthetic inquiry where knowledge creation and understanding take place through the acts of theorizing as complication. The kind of theorizing as complication that takes place in relational practical and artful ways of creating meaning through “recursive, reflective, responsive yet resistant forms of engagement” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. xxix).

\(^\text{15}\) Irwin explains that drawing on practices of artists, researchers and teachers, a/r/tography entangles and performs rhizomes, which she defines as “assemblage of objects, ideas, and structures that move in dynamic motion performing waves of intensities that create new understandings” (Irwin, in press, p. 3).

\(^\text{16}\) Irwin (in press) explains that “[t]he subject-in-process, that is, as becoming, is always placed between two multiplicities, yet one term does not become the other; the becoming is something between the two, this something called by Deleuze as pure affect. Therefore becoming does not mean becoming the other, but becoming-other” (p. 8).
Both in being a narrative and a re-visit to my past, and in the way the table has changed and transformed in time, the story of the table equally becomes a metaphor for the autobiographical writing in which I will engage: an engagement in “an ongoing performance in my writing [and art creation], a performance that informs me, on the one hand, and then transforms me, on the other” (Leggo, 2008, p. 9) while also (in)forming and transforming itself in the process. Additionally, the story also stands for how in writing and art making, I am “always improvising in creative ways, never satisfied that what I know is all there is to know, never convinced that I understand all there is to understand” (Leggo, 2008, p. 9). It represents how I am always guided by my desire to “follow the ways of the world, to unfold with the intensity of the movement in each event, ‘to join with the World, or to meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune’” (Irwin, in press, p. 14). Moreover, like any other story, the story of the table is open-ended with unlimited potentiality for future directions. This is a representation of how “autobiography can never be finished. ... is always partial and incomplete, halted mid-sentence”, leaving the story open, as an invitation to readers “to continue the experience into their own lives” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 28).

With that metaphor in mind, throughout this a/r/tographic project, I will dwell in and explore my art creation that represents my lived experiences, stories and struggles of being unhomed. In doing so, I acknowledge that my past knowledge and experiences have already set a certain framework for this self-exploration. I have therefore already started this research from a position that Irwin and O Donoghue (in press) refer to as the position of “being with”. This position of being with:

does not imply that one is closed to experiences that have the potential to shape, extend, confirm, problematize, undo or make uncertain the knowledge that one has.
Rather, ‘being with’ recognizes that encounters are processed and made sense of through certain knowledge frameworks that ...[we] have been introduced to, and to which [we] become attached over time. But, of course, those frameworks are never fully formed, always in the process of becoming something else through interaction with other knowledges and knowledge formations. In processes of undoing, making uncertain, or extending knowledge there is always the potential for other ways of knowing to emerge. (Irwin & O’Donoghue, in press, p. 11)

This a/r/tographic research will therefore be an inquiry into my past and present but more importantly, it will also be an inquiry into “that which is not already known” (Triggs et al., in press, p. 6) – a “different difference” (p. 6) that will emerge throughout the process of the research itself. I will let myself be guided by my aesthetic and artistic sensitivities and sensibilities in an exploration of the self through/in creation, critical analysis and interpretations of text and images that co-emerge. It will be “an interstitial process, where encounters between subjects, thoughts, and actions propose new assemblages and situations” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. xxxi). Through these encounters, I perform both as the artist/researcher/teacher and the medium of my own learning17 (See Irwin et al., in press), becoming both the subject and object of my own aesthetic investigation. Consequently, in the process of this study, my creations, reflections, and interactions, and myself become both the product and the process of the research. The research will therefore position me as “the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 283). The emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, and embodied ways of knowing that will unfold through the process of creating, as I revisit and linger in my life experiences and write, make art, and at the same time analyse, interpret and re-interpret various layers of this experiential process. The research will put me in the presence of what Irwin (in press) calls

17 I define learning as “folding and unfolding ideas recursively evoking new understandings.” (Irwin, in press, p. 9)
an “unfolding to the possibilities of knowing in the movement and intensity of the events” (p. 5).

This study is then one that has been, and will be lived (Porter, 2004) where the research, the researched and the researcher are in the (continual) process of becoming in an aesthetic encounter with words and images. “This becoming is ever on the move from situation to situation, always retaining a sense of openness, always willing to surprise” (Triggs et al., in press, p. 14). The study is therefore equally the process of living and critically engaging in the form of research where, according to Carson and Sumara (1997), “who one is, becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does” (p. xvii). This, they further argue, “suggests that what is thought, what is presented, what is acted upon, are all intertwined aspects of lived experience and, as such, cannot be discussed or interpreted separately” (p. xvii). A/r/tography, explain Springgay, Irwin and Wilson (2005) is a “living practice; a life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspect of one’s life. Through attention to memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, storytelling, interpretation, and/or representation, artists, researchers/teachers expose their living practices in evocative ways” (p. 903). It is a commitment to learning through an embodied, active, performative living inquiry in and through time – a “becoming pedagogical” 18 (Irwin, in press, p. 9).

Although a/r/tography privileges the identities of artist, researchers and teachers within its name it does not require an equal engagement in the above roles, nor is it limited in the

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18 Pedagogy, explains Irwin (in press, p. 13-14), “is no longer about what is already known but instead creates the conditions for the unknown and to think as an experiment thereby complicating our conversations. Pedagogy, is therefore an “experimentation in thought rather than representation of knowledge as a thing already made” (Ellsworth, 2005, cited in Irwin, in press, p. 14)
way these identities can be conceptualized. The definitions for art and teaching in a/r/tography are left open and broad in the way that art includes any form of commitment to “acts of creation, transformation, and resistance” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. xxv), and teaching as commitment to acts of “learning, understanding and interpretation” (p. xxv). However, as a/r/tographers, both artists and teachers need to be concerned with “learning, change, understanding, and interpretation” (p. xxv).

As someone who is concerned with learning, creating, understanding, interpreting and transforming, I also define myself as an artist, teacher and a researcher in academia. My research is my art and my art is equally my research\(^\text{19}\) (Sullivan, 2005). It is the interconnectedness of these aspects of my identity that situates me well within the a/r/tographic methodology. Consequently, this study will be a simultaneous unfolding of the visual and the textual: a process that will consist of imagining, narrating, interpreting and analysing myself in becoming both “a flow out of layers of [my] experiences and time, and a continual surprising emergence in actual contact zones of interrelatedness” (Triggs, Irwin, Beer, Grauer, Springgay & Xiong, 2010, p. 301). It will be writing and creating beyond simply expressing myself, which is what Springgay et al., (2005) define as “writing to become” (p. 907). This ‘writing to become’ takes place through a coming together of artwork and text recounting stories not in the way that one will merely explain or describe the other, but through reaching new meanings and understandings in their own language and image qualities, and together as a whole. This research will therefore be an inquiry in the world through:

\(^{19}\) Drawing on Sullivan’s (2005) book, *Art practice as research*, I define both research and art as the process of a critical engagement with a concept, an idea, a problem, and/or practice in order to gain “new insight” (Sullivan, 2005, p. 220).
a process of art making and writing. ... a process of double imaging that includes the creation of art and words that are not separate or illustrative of each other but instead, are interconnected and woven through each other to create additional meanings. ... A doubling of visual and textual wherein the two complement, extend, refute, and/or subvert one another. (Springgay et al., 2005, pp. 899-900)

A /r/tographic research becomes a lived endeavour through this contiguous interaction and the movement between image and text. It becomes a lived endeavour also through living a contiguous life that dialectically moves between connecting and not connecting the three identities of artist, researcher and teacher. “The dialectical in/between spaces amid these roles are dynamic living spaces of inquiry: Spaces touching at the edges, then shifting to be close, adjacent, but not touching – only to touch again” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 901).

In this a/r/tographic research, I (will) move from one identity to another, learning through the uniqueness of each one, in the awareness that as performances of my identity, there can be no line that would separate the identities of artist, researcher and teacher. That each one identity is always already affected by, connected to and affects the other, as is and will be the textual/visual process and/or product of this lived inquiry. I will be trying to find a textual/visual place (or home) for myself by learning through one material and another, and the overlapping spaces of both, while attending to my feelings, ambiguities, memories, temporal sequences, blurred experiences and struggles of my displaced self.

Sullivan (2005) maintains that: “[W]e create to understand. We imagine as we come to know” (p. 65). Thus it is through creating and imagining that I will be making meaning of my life experiences both visually and verbally. And so this study will consist of a life of relational imagining, creating, understanding and knowing that emerge and co-emerge.

It is not only because artist, researcher and educator are integrated aspects of my identity, but also because a major component of this research is the co-emergence of creation
and understating through text and images, a/r/tography as a methodology where “knowing, doing, and making merge” (Pinar, 2004, p. 9) in a métissage existence and which aims to “constructs the very ‘thing’ one is attempting to make sense of” (emphasis in original, Springgay, 2008, p. 159) seems the most suitable methodology for my research.

The context of my research also sits well within a/r/tography inquiry. A/r/tography inhabits borderlands – Spaces where one constantly re-creates, re-searches and re-learns perceiving, re-presenting and making meanings and understandings. As an immigrant I have found myself transplanted into this thirdness. And consequently, although partly consciously but mostly unexpectedly and all of a sudden, I have also found myself having to re-learn to negotiate my identity, my knowings and my beliefs and values in this space of in-between – The space and a “third world” where “cultures conflict, contest, and reconstitute one another” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29). It is therefore with/in and from this space that I am, and I will be constantly “re-thinking, re-living, and re-making the terms of [my] identities as [I] confront differences and similarities in apparently contradictory worlds” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29).

My life, my culture (one that is presently a melange of the three cultures I have lived with/in), my language and ways of communication, and my identity as well as my ethics can be defined in no other space than in-between, and therefore a/r/tography as a methodology that emphasises and values the in-between, borderlands and overlaps of media, research, meanings and identity is the methodology space that does not contradict my very being as a Persian-Canadian (emigrant/immigrant) artist and researcher in academia.

What I am after in this exploration of the self is an artistic wondering and wandering in the pages of my life over the last decade: a dialogical thinking, relating and perceiving, a form of critical questioning that would open up new ways of seeing and understanding
myself (in relation to others) through markings and scratching of my art and my words onto uninviting, unhomely spaces, and from the perspective of an emigrant/immigrant positioned simultaneously inside and outside different cultures. This study, therefore, “arises out of a ‘desire and daily life’ to make sense and create meaning out of difficult and complex questions” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). It arises out of the necessity to make sense of the difficult and complex experiences that I live, absorb, resent, reject and transform in an aesthetic re-creation. What I (can only) envision is a creation of new experiences by revisiting myself and recounting my past experiences with/in one culture and an other, both from the perspective of an insider and an outsider, a creation of presences through wondering and wandering in my experiences of loss and absence. A/r/tography, as Pinar (2004) explains, provokes this kind of “questioning, wondering, and wandering that brackets the conventional as artist-researcher-teacher study and perform knowledge, teaching, and learning from multiple perspectives” (p. 23). As a result, as Pinar goes on to explain, one is enabled to emerge from submerged realities and to look at and see oneself and art “as if for the first time” (p. 23). This seeing as if for the first time is what I intend to engage in throughout this research project.

The process/product of this lived research exists as the conceptual practices of a/r/tography: contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess, (Irwin et al., 2008; Springgay et al., 2005) as well as other renderings that will emerge. These renderings will guide my “active participation in making meaning through artful, educational and creative inquiry” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. xxviii). They provide me with possibilities for relational engagement. The renderings Springgay et al. (2005) highlight, are “methodological concepts of what research should be when a relational aesthetic inquiry
approach is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text and between and among the roles of artist/researcher/teacher and the viewer/reader” (p. 900). Springgay et al. (2005) further argue that: “[T]o render research as evocative does not necessitate the inclusion of these renderings as facts or procedures. They are intended to perform alongside each other as provisions of immense opportunity for re/writing research and culture that exists as the intersections of knowing and being” (p. 900). Renderings are therefore not simply about research findings in the form of captured static visual or verbal concepts; rather, they are possibilities of creating meaning, possibilities of what is, is not and what might be through “visual, aesthetic and textual performances that dance and play along each other, reverberating, in excess and as openings” (p. 908).

Consequently, philosophically I position this research in phenomenology, hermeneutics and post-structuralism where a/r/tography defines itself as a methodology. A/r/tography “is about deep meaning [which is a] phenomenological phrase and preoccupation” (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). It is equally a methodology that acknowledges the importance of self and collective interpretation in a hermeneutic circle where “the intention is not to explain (flatten out) for control purposes, but to reinterpret in order to provide greater grounding for understanding” (Irwin, 2004, p. 34). Within the hermeneutic circle of action-reflection-action-reflection and so on (and therefore in a/r/tographic research), interpretations are considered as always being in a state of becoming and never fixed into predetermined and static categories. A/r/tography is a methodology of inclusions and not exclusions. It is a methodology that invites “pluralism of vision” and “multiplicity of realities” (Pinar, 2004, p. 23). It is where one does not see lines that separate but overlapping and in-between spaces. It is a methodology where the focus is not on the product. It considers the product and the process as deeply intertwined.
And it is also a methodology where the aim is not certainty or claiming factual evidence. Rather, it is a methodology that is “concerned with creating the circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding though artistic and educational inquiry-laden processes” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxvi). All of the above also emanates out of the postmodern philosophy.

A/r/tography also includes post-structural elements (Pinar, 2004) as it entails “knowing by unknowing” (Wilson, 2004, p. 48) where one deliberately defers meaning in order to re-know and re-learn while revisiting previously made understandings and meanings throughout the infinite process of the hermeneutic circle. From this philosophical perspective, life writing is considered “an invention of the self” rather than an endless search for it” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 33). It is a transformative process where selves are in the forever process of becoming through their encounters with themselves (their identity, their memories and their analyses) and others.

Positioning myself within these philosophical grounds (poststructuralism and hermeneutic phenomenology), defining myself as an a/r/tographer, and also taking a post-colonial stance, I already find myself in the middle of a hermeneutic circle of research where I am continually “living [my] practices, representing [my] understandings, and questioning [my] positions as [I] integrate knowing, doing, and making through aesthetic experiences that convey meaning rather than facts” (Irwin, 2004, p. 31). It is also from and with/in that space that I find myself already in the process of “imagin[ing] what I hope to achieve” (Irwin, 2004, p. 36) through perceptual and creative practices.

My preoccupation throughout this lived inquiry is/will therefore be the relational construction and understanding of art, text, culture as well as the research itself (as both a
process and a product) within the context of community, which according to Irwin (2008a) is the very thing that shapes the methodology of a/r/tography. “[A]/r/tographic practice begins in relation because the living of a practice cannot be anything other than a living ‘with’” (Triggs et al., in press). An a/r/tographic process is marked by social engagements. As a methodology that both interrogates and celebrates meaning a/r/tography, explains Springgay et al. (2005), “never isolates in its activity but always engages with the world” (p. 899). Meaning making which is an important component of a/r/tographic research never takes place in isolation. As Nancy (2000) maintains, meanings are always constituted between beings. They are “negotiated by, with and among a/r/tographers as well as their audiences. It is in these conversations that multiple exchanges co-exist and reverberate together” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. xxx). A/r/tography is a form of living research that both breathes and listens. It is as much concerned with self-study as it is concerned with relationality and being in a community. After all, as Leggo (2008) notes: “The self does not exist in isolation ... . To know the self is to enter a social process. One does not know oneself except by being mirrored” (pp. 15-16). In a/r/tographic inquiry, this mirroring takes place in conversations with others that take place in a continuous remaking of the textual/visual a/r/tographic product/process. The a/r/tographic product/process is “in fact made not twice, but hundreds of times, thousands of times by all those who have an interest in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, decoding it, commenting on it, reproducing it, criticizing it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it” (Bourdieu, as cited in O’Donoghue, 2008, p. 109). And in that constant re-creation, the way we are mirrored and represented by others also re-shapes our experiences, our stories and our identities. A/r/tographic research is therefore always relational for being an embodied process of exchange between and among mind(s) and body(s), theory and practice, text(s) and image(s), artist(s), researcher(s) and
teacher(s), self(ves) and other(s), within social, cultural, economic and political contexts. A/r/tographic research emerges through our interactions with/in the world. It emerges in affecting and being affected “through the dynamic movement of events with learning to learn”, which is what Irwin (p. 4) refers to as “becoming intensity” that takes place through and alongside “becoming event”\textsuperscript{20} (Irwin, in press, p. 15).

As highlighted in the concepts of becoming intensity and becoming event, this study which is about my personal experiences and stories, as Naths (2004) portrays it, is always already also “connected to the larger tale of human culture” (p. 122) and it is also only through revisiting, recounting and interpreting those stories that I will be able to point out and foreground those connections. Any form of self-study is as much personal as it is relational both in the way it is experienced through re/visiting the past and in possibilities it opens up for dialogic conversations with others. In fact there can be no self without the other. Each person is brought into being through encounters with other selves (Nancy, 2000). Therefore, there can also be no such thing as merely a personal experience. The person is always a self-in-relation, and a part of a community. From this perspective, experiences are all shared experiences, and the meanings and understandings that emerge throughout any study of those experiences are also relational and can have both personal and public (or shared) value. Therefore, as Leggo (2008) highlights: “Autobiographical writing is always both personal and public, and ... we need to write autobiographically in order to connect with others” (p. 4). Telling stories, “in its connection to the other, in its request for recognition from the other, compels us to move beyond what we have been and to encounter a new

\textsuperscript{20} ‘Becoming event’ refers to the dynamic nature of events. It “does not reside in a single personal encounter: it resides in a multiplicity of events that are social and collective. Becoming-event runs alongside becoming-intensity as affect resonates, reverberates, echoes across time and space within and beyond the event” (Irwin, in press, p. 15).
possibility for collective exchange” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 33). This by no means implies that this study is or will be a study done by a community of artists/scholars, but that this artistic self-study is/will be shared beyond the limits of (the process/product of) this research. As Leggo (2008) continues to explain: “There can be no understanding of the self-in-relation without attending to the study of the self” (p. 5). What counts as personal is always braided with all other relational aspects of life. What is personal is then also public and shared, social and political, professional, philosophical and also pedagogical (Guyas, 2008; Leggo, 2008).

The creative practice of this a/r/tographical engagement is therefore precisely meant to evoke and provoke conversations (with the self and others) on personal experiences of struggling with/in the in-between (the struggle that comes with the experience of relocation). And through critical engagements and conversations with my art, I hope to make peace between the individuality of my subjectivity and the intersubjective and public character of meaning (Grumet, 1990) and to share that peace with others. In addition to that, in this sharing, I hope that my audience (readers and viewers) “can [also] remember their own stories, gain the courage to tell them, ... address the complicated issues of living ethically and with empathy among all our relations” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 14), and make and express their own peace with “intersubjective and public character of meaning” (p. 14).

 Unlike conventional research, the value of a/r/tographic research cannot be measured based on factual findings or generalizability. The criteria for the measurement of a/r/tographic inquiry needs “to be organic and changeable, not realist and stilted” (Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 225). As Triggs et al. (in press) explain:
What concerns a/r/tography more than the epistemological work of distinguishing truth from opinion is the ongoing of practice. Rather than attempting to do away with other methodologies or fix its own, a/r/tography recognizes … that no single logic or theoretical framework is flexible enough to encompass the concrete abstractness of experience. Practices of art making, researching, teaching are technologies of movement functioning concretely/abstractly to varying determinations of potential experience. They are not containable and not spaces of measure. Instead, practice coincides with its potential: never all and only what practice is. It is continually coming out of what it is just ceasing to be, into what it will already have become by the time it registers that something has happened. (p. 20)

An a/r/tographical act, Irwin et al. (2008) explain, “is its own possible measure” (p. xxxii). This means that the way “the research is assessed (both in terms of validity and impact) is generated during the a/r/tographical process [itself]” (p. xxxii). “An assessment of any a/r/tographic work will depend upon its compelling ability to provide access to, and new insights about, a particular phenomenon” (p. xxxi).

The Process/Product

Having identified this research as a living inquiry, it is so much caught up in my identity, my life and lived experiences with/in the world that I cannot really pinpoint the beginning (or an ending) to this a/r/tographic project. Perhaps, however, I can state that the troubling experiences of displacement that necessitated this self-exploration have been a present aspect of my daily life ever since I first left my home in Iran. It is therefore only fair to acknowledge that every encounter, every conversation, every presence or absence, every tension or moment of struggle and discomfort, as well as every attempt at self expression and communication that has occurred after my immigration to Canada has helped create the urge to pursue this research project. Nonetheless, I resist calling the event of my immigration to Canada the beginning of this research project because the foundation of this research is also
very much rooted in my memories and understandings of place, home and belonging as well as in my identity. Therefore, it feels as if I took on this research years before I left home, perhaps even in the very moment I stepped into the world. It feels as if this research and I have been together in the process of becoming, ever since I was born.

However, what followed after identifying a path of research questioning and methodology for this project was an in-depth research study of the themes of displacement and home within a post-colonial context. The process involved reading, thinking, note taking, sketching, visualizing photographing, performing, videotaping, writing, editing and then re-reading, re-thinking, re-visualizing and so on (and not necessarily in that specific order). Being a visual artist, I am always creating images in my head, and making sketches as I read. This is how I make sense of and retain information. For me, words are always already also visual presences. Meanings do not exist outside and away from visuals for me. And this is also how I make art. I make art while reading, conversing, thinking, theorizing and making meanings, and I think, theorize and converse as I make art. This is the never ending hermeneutic cycle of reflection, action, re-action in visiting and re-visiting the text and images as data in the process of becoming, and creating meaning in and through, and in-between those re-visits.

The art pieces and my written reflections in this project have therefore co-emerged in this dissertation as both the process and product of my self-exploration. They are ongoing performances of my dwelling with the fragments of my past and present life. They are a putting together of the “fragments of narratives out of the fragments of memory I cherish” (Leggo, 2008, p. 20). I have re-lived those fragmented narratives by giving them a new life in a new present context. And in doing so, I have also re-written, re-created and transformed my
experiences and my understandings as well as who I am and what I believe. I have engaged in a kind of performance that has both informed and transformed me and will continue doing so.

The product of this research therefore exists in a never-ending process of living inquiry through my ongoing engagement with text and images as an artist and/or researcher and teacher as well as through the engagement of its viewers and/or readers. Like any other a/r/tographic project, there is no ending to this project as “the viewers/readers take up where the artist(s)/authors(s) left off, continuing the complex and multifarious act of meaning making” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 903). The meaning is therefore not inherent in images and texts but is “co-constructed in the encounter between a/r/tographer, reader/viewer, and the image/text” (p. 906). These different forms and layers of exchange “unsettle, create movement, collide, and nestle side-by-side as meanings are negotiated in relationship to other meanings” (p. 906).

The purpose of this a/r/tographic research which is the process and product of imaging/writing is therefore “not to inform – as in to give information – but to open up to conversations and relationships as ‘a researcher conducts research with, through and in the company of others’” (Springgay et al. 2005, p. 906). It is to open up a space for sharing of what often represents itself as unshareable, to let it echo with/in the world and come back as yet again another yet-to-be-named transformed representation of itself. Like Leggo (2008), I do not perform my stories and experiences “in some kind of egocentric, narcissistic self-obsession, but out of a conviction that by writing about myself in process, with all the hopes and joys, as well as the struggles and disappointments, I can enter into a dialogic conversation with others” (p. 12).
Furthermore, I have taken on this a/r/tographic research as a responsibility. A responsibility that Jean-Luc Nancy defines as being engaged by one’s Being to the very end of this Being, in such a way that this engagement is the very essence of Being (Irwin et al., 2008). A responsibility that resides in-between my ways of being with others with/in the world. Or what Kennedy (2000) refers to as a “total engagement with the molecular forces of being in the world” (p.31). Responsibility defined as such, sits at the very core of the living inquiry of a/r/toography. Irwin et al. (2008) argue that in an a/r/tographic inquiry, responsibility is not defined in relation to us and our actions or others, in a separate and passive approach. Nor is it defined as some sort of accountability before a normative authority. “[O]ur very Being, our subjectivities, identities, and ways of living in the world are gestures and situations that struggle with, contest, challenge, provoke, and embody an ethics of understanding and a responsibility” (p. xxxii). Such is the responsibility that has urged me to engage in the a/r/tographic living inquiry that follows.
Chapter Four: Un/homed

I believe the first time I ever consciously recognized myself as a stranger on a strange land was the same moment I felt a longing for my home. Home in the sense of familiar grounds, the space where I knew how to make sense of myself and my actions, and the context in/against which I was able to define myself. It is in finding myself displaced that I started longing for that place where I was already able to make sense of who I was.

Displacement, the Definition

The verb displace comes from the French word: displacer: des- ‘dis-’ + placer ‘to place’ (Harper, 2001-2010) referred to the state of the refugees. Displace is made of the prefix dis- and the verb place. Dis- as a prefix to English words means ‘the lack of’ or ‘not’; ‘do the opposite of’; or ‘apart’ and ‘away’ (Harper, 2001-2010). To be dis-placed therefore can also mean to not have a place, not placed, or be away/apart from a place.

Place is a term that seems to speak for itself, but it is in fact just another word, open for infinite definitions. It can refer to a space with a definite or indefinite extent. It can be an area meant for a particular purpose. It can refer to a position, a job or a location. And metaphorically, it can have as many definitions as one would imagine.

To me, place is a defined space. A space that is made familiar. A space that carries the big burden of be-longing. A place is a space where someone belongs or does not belong.

21 The verb “to belong” originates in the mid 14th century. It originally meant “to go along with” and “to relate to”. It consists of the intensive prefix of be and the Old English verb “langian”, meaning “to pertain to” or “to go along with”. The meaning “to be the property of” was first recorded in late 14 c. (Online Etymology dictionary). I use the word be-longing with a hyphen to also talk about being in longing for.
It’s a space one can feel connected to or disconnected from. We can be rightfully placed or feel completely displaced. We can even feel displaced in our rightful place! “All over the world people are engaged in the place making activity” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 5). We are all constantly trying to turn spaces into places where we belong. But sometimes we are forced to, or just end up having to, occupy a space where we do not belong. And some other times, we are believed to have occupied a place/space where we do not belong. In those instances we often find ourselves displaced.

Displacement can also be thought of as an instance of the practice of “dissing”, which as a Black American slang popularized by hip hop, is used as a way to insult or ignore, instead of longer words such as disenfranchised, dismissed or disrespected, etc. referring to the loss or absence of something (Harper, 2001-2010). In the case of an immigrant: the loss and absence of a place.

Displacement, however, is not only about a loss and absence of a place, but also, most importantly, a loss of context. This context is one that is physically and temporally situated in our history and culture. One that we rely on in order to interact and communicate with the world outside. “[We] all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context’. Positioned”, Hall (1990, p. 222) explains. It is exactly the loss of that positioning, both in the physical and a non-physical sense, that creates a sense of displacement.

Anthropologist David Turton (2005) also argues that: “displacement is not just about the loss of place, and the pain and bereavement this entails. It is also, and inevitably, about the struggles to make a place in the world, a place which makes action meaningful through shared understandings and a shared interpretation of action” (p. 278). He uses the term
emplacement to refer to place-making practices whereby displaced refugees constantly tell stories about the former place, maintain links to imagined or actual places of belonging, and re-organize the new places according to familiar categories (for example by decorating their homes with the objects they brought with themselves from their hometowns). For Turton, “displacement is the ‘flip side’ of emplacement” (p. 278).

Freud (1989), on the other hand, looks at displacement in relation to dreams. For him, displacement or Verschiebung, (which literally means pushing aside) is central to the operation of dreams in “dream-work” (p.154), which he defines as the process by which uncomfortable thoughts and feelings (latent dream-thoughts) are transferred to the safe remove of the representational symbols (manifest dream-content). In the course of the dream-work, he explains, “the physical intensity passes over from the thoughts and ideas to which it properly belongs on to others which in our judgments have no claim to any such emphasis”22 (pp. 154-155). Freud, therefore, sees displacement as being almost similar to repression. The only difference is that in the case of repression the ‘pushing aside’ seems more forceful and permanent.

Derrida (1983) sees this ‘pushing aside’ in the interpretive (or meaning making) process. For him the pushing aside is in the deconstruction. The de-sedimenting of the layers of meaning during which meaning becomes infinitely dispersed, indefinitely deferred. Displacement as Derrida sees it is “an exile from older certitudes of meaning, a possibly permanent sojourn in the wilderness” (Hirsch, 1994, p. 71).

22 In dreams, feelings are often removed from the situations that cause/create them and will be attached to other situations and settings. They are therefore displaced.
For both Derrida and Freud, what is displaced is not replaced but becomes and remains a source of trouble, the shifting ground of signification that makes meaning tremble. It is in both Freud and Derrida’s definitions that I see an immigrant’s experience of displacement, once faced with the unfamiliar. For immigrants, both the thought process (prior to, or during every action) and the meaning making (of everything they face from moment to moment) become indefinitely deferred and suspended. For them, every thought and every belief is a source of trouble. In fact, one may even say, immigrants themselves (their identity) become the source of trouble as they permanently try to make sense of themselves in the “wilderness” (Hirsch, 1994, p. 71).

There are many ways to look at and research displacement and, in different fields throughout the history of research, the word itself has been defined very differently. Drawing on all of the above definitions of the word displacement and relying on my own lived experience, for the purpose of this research I will define displacement as the unsettling state of thought and meaning making that is caused by “the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture” (Bammer, 1994, p. xi), and the struggles to repair or re-establish some sort of continuity with that native culture and/or a place of origin. In this sense, I look at the state of being displaced as being closely related to the feeling of being unhomed, becoming invisible or finding oneself as (or turning oneself to) an Other.

23 In Physics the term is used in Newtonian mechanics, Wien’s displacement law, etc. In Computer Graphics it’s a technique in creating 3D images. In chemistry it’s a term used to talk about chemical reactions, and in Psychology, displacement refers to a sub-conscious defense mechanism. The term also appears in Engineering, Sport, Medicine, Geology, and Linguistics.
In-between

The effect of mass migration has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. (Rushdie, 1991, pp. 124-125)

Ever since World War II, the combination of colonial and imperialist practices around the world, and discriminations (religious, racial, ethnic, etc.) practiced in most nations worldwide, has caused mass immigrations in every corner of the world. In a general sense therefore, as Bammer (1994) also explains, we are all, as people of the twentieth century, marked by the experience of displacement.

Immigration often leaves immigrants lost in-between the place they left behind and the place they live in. When people move to a new country, they rarely immediately (or sometimes never) feel at home in their new environment and they constantly try to make sense of things within the context of the home they left behind. They are placed in an in-between, an unsettled state of discomfort and displacement. This in-between space, in many cases, is such a huge space with no clear landing place that it can cause a loss of emotional stability, personal values, self image, and one’s way of being in the world.

As Bhabha (1994) explains, in this space of in-between, immigrants find themselves belonging and at the same time not belonging to two often different cultures. In-between, as Bhabha explains it, is an ambiguous and shifting ground where immigrants often find themselves as simultaneously insiders and outsiders to two (or more) cultures. In-between, can be a very troubling space for an immigrant to have to negotiate her identity. In this space of in-between, we immigrants sometimes even find ourselves having crossed uncrossable
(cultural, political, religious, etc.) lines. We are sometimes “Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. ... Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 15).

As an immigrant, I too feel this tension of being pulled back and forth between different countries, cultures, and lives. Belonging to neither of the (often contradictory) cultures I have lived in, I cannot position myself anywhere other than the space in-between. Always at least partly an outsider in either one of these places, in-between is the space where I struggle to define myself. I hold on to the pieces from here and there, I am now this new and different person who can only belong somewhere in the space that is created in-between cultures, languages and lives.

The in-between is a space (not a place) with no (or very little) framework, no clearly defined boundaries. It is a space where good and bad and right and wrong become relative. It’s a space outside of one’s familiar context and yet where one finds oneself still thinking and acting through (more or less) connections to that familiar context. It’s a space where one finds oneself with one foot on the inside and the other on the outside, bouncing back and forth. Struggling to land. Struggling to be found. Struggling to belong! And struggling to turn this undefined space into a familiar place. A place of comfort. A home. Someplace with at least a little bit of light, where every single thing that can happen next won’t be far from one’s imagination.

As Varela (1999) explains, we all rely on our idea of what can happen next, in order to function on daily basis. He describes how one’s mood can be shattered as soon as one’s idea of what is going to happen next is disrupted. We are all accustomed to these “transparent”
activities we are engaged in on the daily basis. This transparency is often created through recurrence (or repetition) that then makes it easy for us to take appropriate actions.

We have a readiness-for-action proper to every specific lived situation. Moreover we are constantly moving from one readiness-for action to another. Often these transitions or punctuations are slight and virtually imperceptible. Sometimes they are overwhelming, as when we experience a sudden shock or come face-to-face with unexpected danger. (p. 9)

When in a foreign country for the first time, we lose this sense of readiness-for-action and we have to face this new space empty handed. “Many simple social interactions have to be done deliberately or learned outright” (Varela, 1999, p. 10). This is when functioning in even simple day to day activities becomes a struggle. It’s when one is constantly receiving unexpected shocks, and everything in life becomes overwhelming.

When moving to a new country, one has no choice but to adapt to the new space, culture, values and beliefs. But because of the sudden changes in the living context, she might find herself lost, unable to make decisions or to move forward. When one is placed outside of one’s own cultural context, one becomes unable to decode cultural ‘forms’ or ‘construe the characteristics of a culture,’ and therefore becomes “disenfranchised” and will become “unable to be proactive in determining the conditions of one’s personal life or in the goals and values of one’s community” (Eiserman, 2005, p. 120). To be able to take control over the conditions of one’s life, one then needs to come to terms with what Bammer (1994) calls absence and loss (of a place as it is implied in the act of dissing), and transform that to some sort of a presence.

As an immigrant, I see myself questioning my values and beliefs on a constant basis. Everything is fragmented. I am faced with contradictions every single day of my life. I ask myself again and again: “What is the right thing to do?”
To fall in place in any of the cultures would give me a different answer. I am being pulled to different directions in every decision I make. And I question: Where is my place? My place is not a clearly defined place. It’s a cloud-like space where fuzzy boundaries constantly shift, appear, disappear and reappear. It is an imaginary land defined by “doublings” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 58). And by doublings I do not mean dualities or binaries but a living interaction and movement between all elements of both of the cultural contexts I have experienced. I am not only double-voiced and double-accented but also double-languaged (even triple-languaged). For in this space of in-between,

there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents as there are doublings of socio-linguistic, consciousnesses, two epochs ... that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance ... It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in [this space of in-between]. (Bhabha, 1996, p.58)

And I sometimes find myself helplessly struggling for reconciliation in this collision of my differing and/or contradictory points of view.

In-between is a space where nothing is determined. Nothing is settled. Thoughts, meanings and ideas are never resolved. There are times that everything seems relative. There are times that I have no clarity, and I am wandering/wondering in the ambiguous, unsettling space of in-between while I constantly rethink, relive, and remake the terms of my own identity as I confront difference and similarity in often contradictory worlds (Rogoff, 2000).

This is a space similar to what Irwin (2004) calls a borderland. A space where an immigrant is “living a thirdness, a new third world in which tradition no longer constitutes true identity: instead, there are multiple identities” (p. 29). This is where one’s identity, as it was formed in one’s culture, gets shaky and broken. It’s also a place where the broken pieces of one’s identity come together in new and different ways. This borderland is a land where
what Foucault calls self-transformation (Butler, 2002) becomes an obligation. A transformation that is no longer a matter of choice but one of survival. It is because one is faced with differences and contradictions and is forced to rethink her way of living. This self-transformation, therefore is as much a transformation in one’s beliefs and values as it is a transformation in one’s way of thinking and being. It is about questioning one’s frameworks. It is about questioning the ‘reality’ and what one considers to be ‘true’. And in all that, it is also about questioning right and wrong. It is not only in the physical space that an immigrant becomes displaced. This is as much a displacement within, as it is a displacement without. It’s a displacement in every aspect of a human being. It is an ontological, epistemological and ethical displacement where one questions:

Who am I?
Is what I know and accept as truth, really true?
What/ which context should I choose to define right and wrong?

This is where self-transformation becomes the only way to survive. And as one goes through this process of self-transformation by questioning her whole being, her identity also becomes more and more borderless. Or the borders to her identity become more fluid and change from one moment to another. As an immigrant, defining a line around who I am would alienate me from both my native culture and the one in which I live. It is for this reason that I oftentimes find myself having to hold multiple identities in order to be able to relate both to the world I left behind and the one I have chosen to live in.

To be an immigrant is to be positioned in-between, to become borderless and/or to have to come to terms with multiple realities, uncertainty and ambiguity. To be an immigrant is therefore perhaps also being forced into relativity and having to constantly resist absurdity.
This state of in-betweenness can of course also open up a space for new and different possibilities. An immigrant becomes, at the same time, an insider and an outsider to two cultures and this enables her to see and analyze things not only from inside and outside but also from the space in between. This puts her in a position where she can have a “stereoscopic vision” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 19), and look at things though a wider or a differently angled lens. It gives her a kind of “double perspective” (p. 19) which enables her to move “in-between cultural traditions and reveal hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete worlds of any single culture or language” (Bhabha, 1994, p. xiii). This space of in-between therefore opens up a new world to an immigrant where, if she is able to live with the uncertainty and contradictions that the in-between creates, she will be enabled to break out of norms and to also encourage others to question those norms as well. As Grosz (2001) explains:

The space of the in-between is the locus for social, cultural and natural transformation: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place—the place around identities, between identities—where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrip the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity. (pp. 91-100)

The in-between is indeed a space of possibilities for self and social transformation. It is a space of poetic and artistic inspirations. However, this does not mean that we should ignore the painful experiences it also entails. Because in spite of all the possibilities it can offer, this state of in-betweenness remains an unsettled/unsettling and troubling state where the idea of belonging becomes hardly reachable and the longing desire for home becomes just that: a constant unfulfilled desire!
Home

“Home”... , I repeat to myself as I crumple a piece of daily newspaper. And then I crumple another around it. And then another. And then another. “What does this mean?”, I ask myself. “Why does home make me feel like crumpling pieces of newspaper?” I don’t yet know what this means or where this new crumpled object is taking me but I know it is taking me somewhere. I know it means something. And that knowing is enough for now.

Home is often thought of as a place of safety and belonging (Kabachnik, 2010; Sabra, 2008). It is a constant everyone needs in order to strive, to go through the ups and downs of life, or to hold on to, when hope fades away. It’s a place of comfort where we can find ourselves in harmony with the surroundings that we create from things that give us peace and make us happy. Home “is dense with sensual experiences: specific sounds, colors, smells, shapes, conversations, and practices that distinguish it from other places” (Leontis, 1999, p. 14). Home is said to be where the heart is. It does not have to be reduced to only a place of residence. One can also find oneself at home away from one’s place of residence, among a group of people or with one person.

Home is the place one makes one’s own. A place one feels a strong connection to, and a place whose culture one understands. Home does not have to be a place of immediate origin or where one begins. “One might find one’s home years after her birth” (Sabra, 2008, p. 91). Home is also “a place in the world in so far as such a place makes ... action meaningful through shared understandings and a shared interpretation of action” (Xenos, 1996, p. 243). It is a place to which one feels a strong sense of belonging. It is “an inner geography where the ache to belong finally quits, where there is no sense of ‘otherness’, where there is, at last, a community” (Friedman, 2004, p. 195).
To be/feel at home, according to Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2011), is to be on familiar ground; to be at ease; to be relaxed and comfortable. Friedman (2004) explains that “[h]ome comes to being most powerfully when it is gone, lost, left behind, desired and imagined” (p. 202). When a person is/feels displaced, she is no longer on familiar ground and therefore her sense of belonging to a place becomes troubled and shaky. Consequently, her desire for a home accentuates.

Many scholars identify a close and vital connection between place, specifically home, and identity (Contanda, 2001; Hall, 1990; Kabachnik, Regulska & Mitchneck 2010; Kibreab, 1999; Ray, 2000; Rushdie, 1991; Turton, 2005). Kabachnik et al. (2010) argue that home is a combination of spatial, social, psychological, and emotional elements and as such, it plays an integral role in identity formation. They highlight that “the identity of the displaced is often grounded in the places they were displaced from, their old homes, even after many years” (p. 316). Identities, they further argue, are challenged once there is “an overt severing of continuity with places” (p. 316). When a person feels displaced she loses the shared context that gives meaning to her thoughts, her actions and her identity. She is faced with the sudden loss of her “collective one true self” (Hall, 1990, p. 223) – her cultural identity. When a person is displaced and thus no longer feels at home, she has lost the place where her thoughts, actions, interactions, and her identity make sense.

This is not at all to say that identity is fixed and stable. Drichel (2008) highlights “the strange double logic whereby identity is both self-identical and forever different from itself; identity emerges from (identical) repetition, but in that repetition identity is no longer self-identical” (p. 601). Identity is a process, always in becoming and always changing and moving like a river and in fact a river “needs to flow, to change, to stay a river” (Anzaldua
Identity is brought forth in the conversations between the river and the sand, the river and the wind, the pebbles, the storm, a passer-by, and so on. “Identity is brought forth in conversation with others” (Cotanda, 2001, p. 68). However, even though a river needs to change to stay a river, it is still also always defined in between its two banks. And although the banks can shift and move, those movements take place very slowly and over a long period of time. A river won’t be a river without its two river banks and it cannot just all of a sudden move to a different and distant place either. Even though the river flows, there are still certain rules and structures holding the river together, and those rules and structures as well as the context of the place where the river is situated are also what makes a river a certain kind of river – one that can then be identified and distinguished from other rivers. If we take away those structures and contexts the river would either lose its riverness – the very nature of being a river, or it would become unidentifiable. Similarly, when relocated into a completely different place and context, a person can easily lose the structure for her identity. She can lose the very context in which she makes sense of herself and her actions and she can no longer be and (re)act as she did before she left her original home. She therefore becomes vulnerable to an identity displacement.

It is because of this vulnerability to an identity displacement and the fact that the new world most immigrants move to is constituted for them as,

a place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’, ... to go back to the beginning... . Yet this ‘return to the beginning’ ... can neither be fulfilled nor requited and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery – in short, the reservoir of our cinematic narratives”. (Hall, 1990, p. 236)
Such symbolic representation is prominent in the works of many diasporic artists including the artworks of African-Cuban-American artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons. Her 2008 piece titled *Dreaming of an Island*, as an example, represents her dreams of a place – a home that is ultimately inaccessible and perhaps even fading from sight in distance. In this painting Campos-Pons, painted herself staring at a land in the horizon, an island that represents her home in the distant past. She has portrayed herself as not rooted in a land but in an ocean – a forever changing context in-between the land of the present and the home of the past.

![Figure 3: © Dreaming of an Island (Campos-Pons, 2008)](image-url)
Kaplan (2007) argues that home, for a displaced immigrant, becomes “a mode of interpretative in-betweenness” (p. 91) where she constantly needs to draw on contexts from one place/home and/or another, in order to understand the meaning of every word and action, and in order to act and react. Maintaining this in-between space of constant interpretation and negotiation can of course be very exhausting. And it adds up to the desire for one’s home in the past where meaning making and understanding was not always a struggle. This is why immigrant artists such as Campos-Pons are so preoccupied with the ideas of home and roots.

Campos-Pons’s artworks represent the experiences of many other displaced immigrants who long for the home they left behind. Immigrants like myself who find that in spite of their great effort to try to make themselves feel at home in their new environment, there is almost always something that does not feel quite right or ‘normal’. There is always something in the memory of the home one leaves behind that brings a sense of comfort one can no longer feel. “The past is a foreign country” is the famous opening sentence of Hartley’s (2002) novel The Go-between. But like Rushdie (1991) I too often feel the urge to invert this idea. The past is sometimes the only space that seems familiar. And in going through the pages of my memory I am also constantly reminded “that it is my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (p. 9).

I have sadly come to the realization that my home is lost in the unreachable past. I have come to the realization that sometimes home cannot be found again, even if one decides to return to the place one left behind. Sometimes home is a space that cannot exist but in memory.
But what is memory then? And what is this existence of a home in memory? How does this sense of belonging to/from a memory live on in the form of longing and a desire? And why does it so persistently represent itself as a possibility?

Bernecker (2009) argues that “[r]emembering is a fundamental cognitive process, subserving virtually all other important cognitive functions such as reasoning, perception, problem solving, and speech. Since without memory one couldn’t think, some philosophers go as far as to claim that memory is the mark of being human” (p. 1). It is undeniable that memory plays an important role in the lives of human beings. The significance of memory is, perhaps more clearly, highlighted in experiences of someone who is suddenly deprived of it. Depending on how bad the person’s condition is, her daily routines could be partly or completely disrupted. She could forget her family and other important relationships in her life, she could forget how and in what capacity she used to function in the world, she could lose the means to communicate with/in the world, or she could completely forget who she is.

Given the obstructive-ness of not being able to remember, memory is obviously a central component of the mind (and body) of human beings. It is therefore no surprise that it has been studied in many fields and disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, neurology, cognitive sciences, social sciences, etc., throughout the history of mankind (Bernecker, 2009; Sutton, 2007). However, as Bernecker (2009) points out, although memory has been studied
and theorized in relation to and/or within variety of contexts such as personal identity, epistemic justification, the experience of time, collective memory, the hypothesis of extended memory, non-conceptual memory contents, ethics, etc., the fundamental philosophical question of what memory is seems to have been mostly neglected. There are however many different and at times competing taxonomies for the categorization of memory. The four most common ways by which memories are categorized are based on: the kind of information that is stored, the kind of prompt (internal/external, selective/non-selective) that triggers the retrieval of the information, the degree of awareness the person has of the stored information, and the length of time the information is stored.

Drawing on the above classifications, we can argue that memories are dependent on their own content, (environmental, spatial, sensory, internal/external, etc.) triggers, time, and awareness. Memories always have content and are therefore always relational. This relationality is historical, inter-personal (and therefore social and cultural), spatial and temporal. Memories are understood as “the complex relation of personal experiences, the shared histories of communities and their modes of transmission” (Baronian, Besser, & Jansen 2007, p. 11). Consequently, memories are not merely personal and/or autobiographical but can also be shared and/or social.

Memories, says Campos-Pons (2007), “are circuits of the past as they weave themselves on the present” (p. 79). They are not separable from present or future. They are braided into our lives through and across time. There is a material aspect to memory whereby it is inscribed on objects, places, performances and recollections. In fact memories live on those very objects, places, performances and recollections. Memories draw their existence not only from the material forms but also sensory forms. They are triggered by visuals,
sounds, and smell as well as taste and touch. Memories live in the traces that the river leaves on the land and the traces that the land leaves on the river. They live in the marks that the river leaves on the pebbles, in how it shapes and reshapes them, and in the directions it takes because of them. Memory is inscribed in the traces and footsteps of one’s identity which is rooted in the past yet is forever in the process of (trans)formation. This process of (trans)formation negates the idea that memory can be fixed and unchanged and only located in a frozen distant past. Memory is a creative force that reconstructs (past) experiences rather than repeating them. Memories take a new course, a new direction and a new meaning with every (re)visit and recurrence. The traces and footsteps of one’s history are forever affected by the conditions of the present. They change with every blow of the wind and every new twist to the river. We can therefore never assume that we know everything about our memories or our past based on our memories. As McCreden (2009) reminds us, we cannot play God in relation to our memories. “[W]e cannot and should not invoke it as completely known” (p. 64). Karen Armstrong once wrote: “[W]e should probably all pause to confront our past from time to time, because it changes its meaning as our circumstances alter” (as cited in Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 17). The past lives in the present through memory and is therefore always in the process of becoming. Derrida (1986) explains: “[T]he rhetoric of memory ... recalls, recounts, forgets, recounts, and recalls forgetting, referring to the past only to efface what is essential to it: anteriority” (p. 82). Every time we re-live our memories we live them as nuances of the older versions of the same memories – similar in the way they appear and in the feelings and emotions attached to them, yet never exactly the same. Additionally, memories oftentimes become fragmented through time. Sometimes in looking back we are merely “putting a jigsaw puzzle together with most of the pieces to the puzzle long lost and no longer recoverable” (Leggo, 2008, p. 20) or in Rushdie’s (1991) words, in
looking back “we are reflecting the past through broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (p. 11). This is why, as Bernecker (2009) points out, “it is a well-known fact that memory is fallible [and that] people who attempt to remember the past may inadvertently and unknowingly misremember events” (p. 140). I would even argue that in re-membering you are always already misremembering.

Nonetheless, memory is oftentimes our only means of acquiring knowledge about the past, and we do, unavoidable, rely on it for making important personal, relational and ethical decisions. One common example would be our reliance on eyewitness testimonies in order to determine if someone is or is not guilty of a crime that has been committed. It is doubtful that what the eyewitness remembers is ever exactly what has happened, yet we still rely on her memory to make important judgments and decisions about someone else’s life.

Memory is also sometimes the only means to maintaining connections with one’s history, culture and past. For the immigrant population, memory plays an important role in maintaining a sense of personal and cultural continuity. By remembering the past, immigrants can get a sense of situatedness within a context. Memory then becomes the site from which culture is still familiar: the site whose culture one understands. Although fragmented like reflections through a broken mirror with missing pieces, memories are valuable for giving us access to a place that no longer exists. In fact, “[t]he shards of memory [acquire] greater status, greater resonance, because they [are] remains; fragmentations [make] trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane [acquire] numinous qualities” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 12). The retrieving of pieces of one’s memory then becomes like an archeological excavation whereby one re-discovers valuable pieces of one’s past, which then one can put together to re-create and re-live a story. Memory pieces are treasures. They are
precious remains of the past. Footsteps on the path we took to get to where we are now.
Footsteps we are often tempted to trace back to see where we started from – where we come from.

It might be argued that that re-experiencing of the past through fragmented memories is not something only experienced by immigrants, exiles, and people away from their homelands. “It might be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the [person] who is out-of country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 12).

Memory, for immigrants can be the only place they can feel a sense of belonging – belonging and yet also in longing. Ironically, however, this sense of personal and cultural continuity is maintained by a constant re-membering and (trans)forming of the past. The past that is no longer identical to the one that an immigrant has actually lived. Consequently, this sense of connectedness to culture is not necessarily a connectedness to a culture that was (although it is and will always be rooted in memories of that culture). The culture that immigrants feel connected to is one that has taken on a life of its own away from the past culture that they actually lived: a culture constantly being re-created in re-memberings. This connectedness and belonging is therefore not a belonging to a past but a belonging to a past in present.

Memories, for an immigrant, disrupt the common order of time. For immigrants past and future take precedence over present through memories. Cotanda (2001) highlights this
different orientation of time by referring to his personal experience as a Cuban exile living in the United States:

What was there then becomes what is here now, a cultural now always present, the one that traveled with me constantly permeated by the one I now geographically inhabit... . What might have been and might yet be takes precedence over the actual that could possibly be. For [an immigrant] it is an ever changing cultural present – the tension of the past that might have been and the future that might yet be against the actual that could not possibly be but is – deeply embedded in her that provides an orientation to inhabit meaning in a world of might be: a dream where the future is behind and the present we live is the past we face that cannot be but is. (p. 71)

However, for an immigrant, it is not only the temporal that is disrupted by memory. Memory also disrupts the spatial and territorial by creating patterns of attachment across space and by spinning threads of continuity through a re-creating of spaces. This recreation of the past places in the new places makes memory important in immigrants’ relationship with (their construction and understanding of) place and belonging. Memory, though time and place based, is not time and place bound. In other words: one does not lose one’s memory of a place even if one permanently moves to another space/place. It is therefore for this very reason that memory becomes the principal ground of identity formation for immigrant communities.

Additionally, movement and mobility are not only the characteristics of immigration. They are also constitutive of memory as “something that is always in flux and notoriously unstable” (Baronian et al., 2007, p. 12). It is therefore important to “acknowledge that the ‘ground’ of memory can be rather unstable and shaky itself, in particular if one conceives of memory not as a stable space of identity but as a process of displacement itself” (p. 12). Memories depend on re-interpretation, re-articulation and re-enactment. Their contents are modified and (re)invented as they are remembered. “Shaped by the responsibilities of bearing
testimony as well as by the normalizing forces of amnesia and forgetting and all forms of political interests, memory is a performative process, a ‘process of linking’ rather than a secure space of identity. ‘Recherche rather than recuperation,’ its temporal status is always the present” (p. 12). As a result of their temporal and performative characteristics, memories are an ambiguous and/or problematic site for an immigrant’s sense of self. Identifying both immigration and memory as a process of displacement means that immigrants are not only spatially and physically displaced but also psychologically displaced. This psychological displacement takes place as a result of the performative (and therefore also fallible and unstable) characteristic of memory, and the dependence of immigrants on that performative memory as a site for their sense of selfhood – their identity. This however also means that there is a crucial link between memory, the experiences of immigration, and the concept of displacement. Memory process turns the experiences of immigrations into some kind of double displacement whereby physical and spatial displacement is also psychologically displaced through re-membering.

The immigrants’ experiences of double displacement are heightened as the spatial and temporal gap between the content of their memory and what they re-member gets bigger and memory displaces the displaced experiences of the past over and over again. Whether one is conscious of this physical and psychological double displacement or not, because of the fact that memory helps build a bridge across and reduce the gap between two lived spaces and cultures, it can actually also work as a form of coping mechanism. By trans-forming the lived past within the context of present, memory creates a space where one’s self-in-the-past and self-in-the-present can live together as one. This is perhaps one reason why this longing for a home-in-the-past lives on through memories. Because in one’s memories of home-in-the-
past, one does not need to face the differences and/or contradictions between one’s self-in-the-past and self-in-the-present. Memories can therefore create a safe place where immigrants do not need to struggle a sense of split selves, multiple identities or what Bhatia (2002) refers to as multiplicity of positions.

In his memoir, *Out of place*, Edward Said (1999) talks about his personal struggles with this sense of split selves that was created as a result of different and at times contradictory layers of his identity. Said, who identifies himself as a Palestinian-Egyptian-Christian-Arab-American post-colonial theorist who has lived as a non-Western immigrant in the US for more than four decades, explains how his name alone represents a conflict whereby the American ‘Edward’ part of his self often feels disconnected from the Arab ‘Said’ part. He also further articulates his despair in having to constantly negotiate the complexities of his many identities in the following statement:

> I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all Arab, or all European and American, or all Orthodox Christians ... . (as cited in Bhatia, 2002, p. 65)

This sense of conflict and despair between one’s multiple hyphenated selves that Said talks about often loses colour in one’s memories of the past as the past is transformed in the context of present, and the present is transformed in the context of the past. The experience of double (physical and psychological, temporal and spatial) displacement in immigrants’ memories of the past-in-the-present creates a space for possibilities for harmony between multiple layers of one’s identity.

There are however other culturally rooted aspects of memory which can equally cause experiences of double displacement. Sutton (2007) highlights the important role that
language plays in re-creation of shared memories. He argues that “it is through joint reminiscing that one comes to have a personal past” (p. 83). This means that memory has a narrative and social context. Social memories are created when narratives of the same memory are jointly attended to in order to create a sense of shared belonging to the same history. This way an individual’s memory of an event is enriched when different perspectives of the same event are shared. Within the context of immigration this sharing, of course, gets caught up in-between the always changing context of languages. Especially in the case of those immigrants who left their original hometowns years ago and have lived in-between two languages for a long period of time, language can create a barrier to this collective re-membering of the past. It can create a disconnect with other people who have experienced the same past events and consequently, it can create a different kind of psychological double displacement. Without the ability to articulate and share one’s memories, one can psychologically become an exile to social memories of one’s own past. In this sense, double displacement is no longer a positive experience as it creates a sense of exclusion from one’s familiar spaces of belonging.

Whether social or personal, memories, Campos-Pons (2007) argues, are selective recollections. To me, however, they do not always seem so consciously selective. There are times that memories are triggered by unexpected encounters and incidents and without us consciously choosing to remember them. Memories of home sometimes seem as such. To me, every unexpected encounter with a photograph, an object, a word and an image from the past can be a trigger for my memories of home. My memories of home are not always selective and conscious. They also feed on those unexpected encounters with objects and places as well as sensory forms, and feelings and emotions that are attached to them.
Additionally, every cultural, linguistic, and social struggle that is rooted in my being an immigrant also acts as a trigger to those same memories of my familiar place in the past. Every time my way of being and acting in the world creates a contradiction to the culture of my day to day life here in the West, I turn to and remember the past in longing. Every unhomely encounter and/or space unexpectedly awakens this desire, this longing for a home that I instantly pull out of my memory and hold on to as my peace. This is where I draw my strength from – from my “‘residence in an imaginative world of pure feeling’ drawn out of memory” (Cotanda, 2001, p. 71). It is therefore not so much that memory as a site for belonging is a choice for an immigrant but that once displaced and separated from her geographic residence and significant others, memory becomes “a site that an [immigrant], an Other, must visit” (p. 71). It is a site an immigrant feels the need to visit because it is where she is not labeled or treated as an outsider, different, inferior or exotic. It is a site, and perhaps sometimes the only site, where she can still see herself as the one who belongs. Memory is then the space an immigrant can call her own. A place where she is not in constant contradiction with her surroundings and herself. Memory is a site an immigrant must visit because it is where her past-in-the-present and present-in-the-past identity is rooted. And once one’s identity becomes fragmented and/or stops making sense within the context of a new place, memory is a place where one feels the necessity to turn to in order to establish a sense of personal continuity.

Moreover, memory is also an important site because remembering the past can equally represent itself as a right, a responsibility and an obligation for an immigrant. This is an instance where memory is a conscious choice and an act of agency. Baronian et al. (2007) highlight “the right to remember, the responsibility to recall and the ‘sense of the dangers
involved in forgetting” (p. 12) as central issues and concerns of immigrant communities. In Baronian et al. (2007), memory is pointed out as being both a cultural and a political responsibility. I therefore remember because I have a right to remember, because I have a right to my history, my culture and my past. I remember because as a member of a culture I feel responsible to remember who I am and where I come from. And I also remember because if I forget, I risk losing a big part of who I am. I risk losing fragments of my fragmented self. And I also risk losing the community of people with whom I share a history. I remember and therefore in remembering I maintain a sense of situatedness – a sense of belonging.

It is true that there can often be nostalgia, mourning and loss associated with memory whereby one wishes to regain and/or re-live something one has lost. But memory cannot be thought of only in terms of longing for what is desired. Ghosts and traumas of the past sometimes haunt our present through memories as well. Those memories, I believe, are rarely selective ones.

I am still sometimes haunted by my childhood memories of air-raids. Sometimes, even the unexpected sound of the fireworks startles me. And just for a split second, I re-live the horrifying moments of waking up in the middle of the night, running for shelter and waiting ... . I remember crawling under the tables in the complete dark and listening to the sounds of explosion. I remember the heavy silence in the room. That no one would speak a word until we could hear the second siren – the announcement that it was over. For a little while that is... . And I remember rushing back home to call everyone we knew to make sure they were all ok.
Today, many years later, those seemingly endless moments of horror are still awakened by what’s supposed to be the sound of celebration. And although still terrifying, I no longer only remember those experiences from a child’s perspective. These horrifying memories are now layered with my re-memberings of them as a child, a teenager, a young adult and an adult. There is no melancholy or nostalgia in how I remember those days. There is no longing involved in re-living those traumatic memories. Those memories are not selective recollections. They are traces of my past that I unwittingly embody which haunt me against my will.

McCredden (2009) states that “[p]ast present and future are haunted, because individuals, communities and nations are memory animals. But memory does not offer stability and solidity. It cannot simply be relegated to a closed page or a dusty vault” (p. 66). Memory is the living experience of forming and transforming past experiences. It “works through a haunting, a melancholy which moves beyond merely ‘wound culture’ it is an honouring of ‘that love which we do not want to relinquish’” (p. 66). This is also how I would like to define memory within the context of immigration and displacement: an honouring of love for a home that I do not want to relinquish. A ruthless and loving poetry of destroying home while simultaneously re-writing it into being\(^2\). And an honouring of my only means of returning to the lost past – returning home.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{End of Floating Chapter}
\end{figure}

\footnote{Here I am mirroring Sean Wiebe’s (2008) words in defining autobiography and the writing of the self. In doing so, I would also like to highlight the similarity between memory and autobiography in both being acts of re-membering.}
Like many other immigrants, in desperate need to re-find the physical place I could still call home, I went back a year and a half after I left my childhood home in Iran to move to Canada, hoping I would find the home I left behind. My journey home, however, was also what Hall (1990) calls, a “displaced ‘homeward’ journey” (emphasis added) (p. 232). I found myself as much displaced in the place I once took refuge in when things got rough, as I do now in my new place in Canada. I went back to feel rooted, yet I was hit with the same realization as Lavie (1996) when he stated: “I’ve come back to the village, but it feels like a hotel, not home” (p. 55). Like him, I too now no longer feel grounded anywhere. Nowhere, except perhaps in my memories and reminiscences of the past. And “everything I [create and] write now propels me forward to a place I left long ago, never left, can’t return, can’t remember, won’t forget” (Leggo, 2008, p. 7).

I am not homeless. I have now in fact two homes in neither of which I feel at home! Being placed in-between two different and at times contradictory cultures and spaces, I think about home and I feel... not homeless but “unhomed” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141). The feeling that is intensified as I find myself surrounded by “unhomely” (p. 141) spaces. Spaces where I cannot find home (comfort, ease, place of refuge) as I did before I left my home. As a result I am forced to constantly re-negotiate my place in the world.

Bhabha (1994) identifies unhomedness in the experience of immigrants and post-colonial people, for whom geographic or cultural dislocation are defining traits either because they have been uprooted from former places of identification or because a familiar place has undergone radical change as a result of its colonial past or present. Unhomedness can then be looked at as the direct result of cultural dislocation where one’s culture as one knows it, is perturbed and displaced.
Culture is often looked at as only an outside force, but in fact it also acts as a force from within: something carved (and being carved) into one’s soul that gives one a sense of identity and is not easily changed or transformed (at least in a major way and in a short period of time). This embeddedness of culture creates a resistance from within an immigrant facing “cultural dislocation” – the kind of resistance that is very much rooted in the fear of having to go through an (of course often already in place) identity crisis. The result is a different form of struggle than the one in relation to the outside world. It’s a struggle with oneself. A self that both wants to conform in order to (desperately) belong, and resists letting go of its cultural structure in order not to fall apart. A paradox that perpetuates the feeling of unhomedness.

To be unhomed then, is to be in a constant battle with oneself in order to have some sense of being in the world. It’s the state of becoming overwhelmed with the unfamiliar because you, your culture, your values and beliefs and all that defines who you are, can no longer fit in a single place. It is as if you are a piece within a game of Tetris, and you find that there is a part of you that will never fit because you belong to, and fit in, another space, perhaps even another completely different game. So you deform, re/form (from within) and transform in order to fit better and no matter how much you try to adapt yourself to your surroundings, the pressure (or the contradictions, and the desire to maintain connections with one’s history) which is coming from within will not let you fall in place. And so, all the pieces around you overwhelm you more and more. Until perhaps you find yourself with no choice but to go back to the space where you once used to fit. And even then you find that not only the space and the rules of that game have changed but that your new trans/formed self (or shape) does not belong there either....
Then you hopelessly run: from here to there and there to here. “Living in a state of psychic unrest” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 73), for what seems like forever, and ever....

I am unhomed. What I look for is gone. And what I find, no matter how valuable, does not give me the lost peace I desperately need. I can only partly ease my pain in recollection. In memories of home, place of refuge and comfort. Memories of a home long changed.

Kierkegaard (1983) distinguishes repetition from recollection in relation to returning to the same places (i.e., home). According to Kierkegaard, in fact, we never repeat anything in the exact same way. Every time we return home, both we and the conditions of the place have changed. Therefore it is in recollection that we find home to be the same place we left in the morning. But the changes we experience in ourselves and the place we call home are not so significant when the gap between the repetitions is not that big. In this sense the bigger the temporal gap between leaving home and returning, the easier it is to feel the changes.

“[W]e can’t literally go home again” states Stuart Hall (1990, p. 232). When people leave their original home to live in a different country, the conditions of their life change greatly and so do they. At the same time the conditions in the place they used to call home change from day to day. Therefore when/if they return home, they find themselves estranged in the familiar place they used to feel comfort. They become an outsider to their own home and culture while still and perhaps never an insider in any other place or culture. It is then only in recollection that they can find that sense of ease in belonging. Home becomes a place to which they have no physical access. A place that can exist only in one’s memory of the familiar past. A place where one used to identify oneself, a place where one used to make sense and make sense of the world.
Here I would like to highlight that by delving into my desire for home I do not intend to idealize the notion of home or insist on the illusion of stability as critiqued by feminist scholars (Rose, 1993; Sabra, 2008). Nor do I intend to erase “physical and historical negative events associated with [my] past/distant place” (Sabra, 2008, p. 95), such as religious and/or political exclusions. What I have been trying to foreground instead is the sudden loss of a context (culture, history, language, place, community, etc.) with/in which I define my very existence, and the struggles involved in trying to re-find and/or re-create this context with/in the double political, social cultural and/or linguistic limitations. This sudden loss of context is the very thing that enforces my nostalgic longing for a past-in-the-present home – A place that simply no longer is.

… this is where I pause to look at the huge ball made of crumpled newspapers that is now sitting in the corner of my room and I try again to understand what it means and why it is that I felt the urge to make this object as I started thinking and writing about home. I wonder if it was out of frustration, anger or even pain that I started crumpling pieces of newspaper. Or did it maybe have anything to do with the need to toss away all my experiences of unhomedness and my frustration with the unsettling idea of home, just as one crumples unwanted paper to throw away into a garbage bin … . Or was it perhaps the written words that I needed to toss away? Maybe that was my way of showing my frustration with unhomely words and the impossibility of really conveying what home means to me. Or maybe the words, and the way they were so neatly printed on the newspapers were contradicting the now ambiguous concept of home.
Figure 6: Underlying Layers of Belonging
Strangely, I even found myself wandering around in the streets of North Vancouver looking for Persian newspapers a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps my crumpled expression of home was too overwhelmed with English words and was in desperate need of a different language: one that my sense of home is mainly rooted in. What seems strange to me though is how important language has become in spite of the fact that the words in the newspaper are not quite readable on the surface of this object I am building. The words are buried in the curves and creases of the paper. But then again maybe that’s what made me crumple a newspaper. Because my readable words have now become unreadable. Because home is also no longer easily readable to me. Because the home I left behind is buried in curves, creases and layers of my memories and experiences, heavy with the weight of language(s). Like this crumpled ball I have been making over the past few weeks, my home is crumpled into a knot the centre of which seems forever physically unreachable. That centre belongs to some place in the past. A point of no physical return. There are now so many layers covering that centre. Layers that have been created through time and experience. Layers that complicate and disturb the feeling of at-home-ness that I can only re-member. With every new layer, more distance is created between me and home. And the distance takes me to a place of constant longing for that old sense of belonging. My belonging is rooted in the past. Past is present in my memories – the only place where I ever fully belong. So where shall I call home?

My home is, and is not, here. My home is, and is not, there. “Home is ‘NoWhere’ – that is, ‘now here’ and ‘no where’, everywhere and always elsewhere” (Friedman, 2004, p. 197). Home is a memory. It’s a notion I carry within myself. Home is a house in a photograph. It’s the fenced window of our old living room. It’s the tree my father planted in the yard when I was young.
I was 6 years old when my dad brought home that berry tree. He told me the tree was 6, just like me. I watched him plant it in our yard. It became my tree. She and I, we grew up together. When I last visited home, it was still there, growing tall, though it never again felt like we were growing up together after that first time I left home. Now, I have not been back for the past 5 years. And I was told that my tree had grown too tall. And they had to cut it down ...

The berry tree is symbolic of the ever-growing, ever-changing context – the culture within which I made sense of who I was. It’s a representation of all the objects, thoughts and ideas that together created a collective culture within which I could understand myself-in-the-world. It’s a representation of my home: a home that for so long was growing and changing with me. A home that simply ceased to exist, except in my memory. This is how I choose to visually and textually translate the feeling of unhomedness that surrounds me, this longing for what is not, and how I start visualizing this translation from my in-between self into a space of possible shared understandings.

In this city where I struggle to redefine myself, trees are everywhere – trees are home. In my ‘NowHere’ home trees are the constant and it is through that constant that I find the language to communicate my feelings and experiences of unhomedness.

I envision a sphere hanging from the ceiling – a big round sphere constructed of crumpled pieces of paper. The sphere is the earth. Earth is home. Home for me. Home for you.
Figure 7: Be-longing
This sphere is the same huge ball that I started making out of crumpled pieces of newspaper, the surface of which is now carefully covered with crumpled white sheets of paper. Those neatly typed words of the newspaper are no longer out in the open. They belong to another time, another life, another home. If you look closely, however, you can see parts and fragments of words in Persian, French and English revealing themselves through the creases of the paper. It’s a meshing of three languages and yet no words are recognizable. This is the representation of how these three languages are so inevitably embedded in my understanding of home. Partly absent, partly present, becoming one, every once in a while – a mixture of languages, a new language that would only make sense to me, or sometimes not even to me. Sometimes this new language confuses me. Sometimes even I forget what language I’m speaking.

Figure 8: Be-longing
And then the trouble is ... I can no longer answer what the language of home is. The trouble is that the answer to that question is now buried in the creases and shadows of what and where home is.

In search for the image of my home, I envision a hand sketching a tree with a piece of charcoal— sketching my tree. The same tree my dad brought home and planted in the yard, under my window many years ago. This drawing I make, is a recreation of that old memory— that old friend. A coming into existence of the past – A past in present. This is a representation of a home I now hold on to. A physical presence that can now also exist outside of my memory.

The videotaped drawing of the tree, however, is not fluid. Like my memories of the past, this video is also fragmented – missing pieces of how it comes into being. In fact, the video only reveals snapshots of the tree in becoming. It is missing pieces of the process, yet is still able to provide a whole picture. I project this fragmented video of the drawing onto the crumpled surface of the sphere that is hanging from the ceiling as I recite the story of my (berry) tree. The tree takes form and comes to life on the surface of the sphere as my voice breaks the silence and I tell the story of my home in the past. Without even a pause, however, I continue with my story of loss as the video plays backwards and the completed drawing of the tree quickly disappears from the surface of the sphere, the earth, leaving the viewer to stare at the crumpled surface of the sphere in the spotlight.

The sphere and the tree both represent my longing for a shared context where I can make sense of myself, my identity and my existence. They also represent my longing for a space of shared contexts where every conversation would not automatically position me as
both an insider and an outsider in relation to myself and other people, and in relation to my present home.

Figure 9: Be-longing Video Installation
I see shared understanding of home – the sphere, the earth – as crumpled and creased. Home as a concept commonly used in mundane day-to-day conversations is no longer a smooth concept for me. A simple overused statement of “I’m going home” now always begs the question: “and where is that?” Home is full of curves and creases that hide or reveal themselves in the presence of light and in-between shadows. Home looks different from different perspectives. Home is always the sight of multiple complexities, raising many questions: Home for whom? Where? In what context? What is the language of that home? What power relations are there? Who would be an insider/outsider? Who is un/invited? Home carries along a big dark shadow – A hollow. A space void of image, representing a loss. Home changes every time the sphere turns. The shadow too changes with every turn of the sphere. Its form, however, always mirrors the shape of the sphere from the perspective of the source of the projection. The shadow is an absence that takes form by a performance of what that absence represents. It is outlined and surrounded by the fragmented memories that represent it in the present. The shadow represents a longing – Longing for what no longer is.

The tree is home. The sphere too is home. This is a projection of a home-in-becoming onto an existing crumpled and disturbed concept of a home. It’s a re-creation/re-presentation of my home in-the-past that is projected onto my ‘NowHere’ in-between home. Affecting and being affected, my past and present homes and the conditions that surround them constantly shape and reshape what home means in each moment. Never the same, always changing. Always troubled. And never erasing that longing I feel for the home I left, yet can never leave behind.

This installation, named Be-longing, is therefore a translation of my longing for home. An artistic sharing of a memory. It’s a representation of the pain I endure in longing for the
presence of my culture, the pain I endure for the loss of the familiar context of my identity, my home. Be-longing is equally my metaphor for how I feel the need to hold on to that context by re-creating and re-building that home from parts and pieces of memory. Making this new imaginary homeland (Rushdie, 1991) where fragments of my past and present live together in one space. A “third space” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). The space in-between where my home in-the-past is re-created while creating and re-shaping, at the same time, my home in the present.

This artistic re-creation of home is therefore a need, a necessity. It’s a voice screaming out from inside of me, begging to come out and to be heard. I need to re-create home because I am haunted by its loss. I am haunted by the “urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 10). I am aware of the risks, of the impossibility of documenting the past exactly as I have lived it. Yet I need to look back. I need to look back as Rushdie (1991) looked back at his home in India realizing that:

... if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (p. 10)

I knowingly choose to mourn the loss of my home through re-creating my “homes of the mind” in a visual and textual art form and turning it into a physical presence. I re-create it knowing “that [I] shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute” for what I have lost. I re-live it knowing that “[n]o matter what will fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else” (McCredden, 2009, p. 61) – something different. Nonetheless, I still need to re-live this different representation in order to keep the image in my memory alive and present. And this is actually how Freud (as cited in
McCredden, 2009) believes mourning for loss should be. This is the only way to commemorate something so close and dear to us. “It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish” (p. 61). And I most certainly do not want to relinquish the only known context where I have ever felt the sense of belonging. By creating Be-longing therefore I represent my mourning of a loss of a home while also perpetuating my love for it in its re-creation. Be-longing is an honouring of my personal experiences of un/belonging through a documentation, or rather a representation of a re-created always in transformation memory.

Through the process of this artistic and scholarly honouring of my home in the past, I have also learned something unexpected about myself. I have learned that memories work their way through our minds and bodies connecting past and present in strange ways that oftentimes we do not even notice. In writing and re-creating my home in Be-longing, while reading, theorizing and writing about memories, I have come to the realization that I have embodied and performed the memory of my berry tree and my attachment to it, and I have been reliving it through some sort of transference for years without even consciously knowing it.

For about three years now, I have been feeling attached to a tree in front of my building. I can see it from my apartment window. I have been looking at it and photographing it from season to season, even calling it my own without making any connections between this tree and the one that was actually named as mine many years ago. I’ve even been re-visiting all my feelings of attachment to home by visiting and photographing this tree over the past three years, and by naming the photographs accordingly: attachment, longing, counting, frozen, illusive warmth, hoping, dreaming,
rationalizing, etc. Although the recent physical death of my berry tree turned it to a present and conscious memory which triggered the creation of Be-longing, it now seems that I have been re-membering that tree, its significance to me, and my attachment to it through re-creating its memory in writing and in photography within a different context. I have been unconsciously displacing that most probably already displaced memory in order to recreate that same sense of belonging I used to feel before I left home.

The constant displacements through attachment, art creation, and writing, are re-visits or recursions through time which highlight what I believe Triggs et al. (2010) would refer to
as a temporal space of pedagogical becoming. This temporal space, Triggs et al. explain, is a space where:

the delay between sensation and cognition is not a pure, still space in which we wait for consciousness to kick in. Instead, there are intervening stimuli that affect the outcome of each prior stimulus, again and again. And again. The recursions meld together, creating ... a ‘relational time-smudge’. The smudge suspends continually – sensation, awareness, past and present, self and other, here and there—all doubled over, recursive, elaborative, fractalized. Whatever we pull out of this suspended, wandering stain is not in a linear hurry to race on but instead, folds back on everything else, wrinkling more time and space dimensions into the ever-increasing complexity of newness. (p. 308)

This new recursion, discovery, and/or a moment of pedagogical lingering, “a pause on the wheel of becoming” (Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 222) opens up a whole new window of understanding into how I have been trying to find my place in the world. It leads me to wonder how much this longing for home has been directing my other encounters and engagements with/in the world. How many of my new roots are actually the re-imagined, relocated, reassigned and displaced old ones. And how many of my present attachments are rooted in the older ones. It therefore turns all my new attachments and places/contexts of belonging in the world into new spaces of a/r/tographic inquiry and urges me to yet again engage in mapping the roots within the rhizomes of my experiences of being with/in the world, continuing my journey of pedagogical becoming.

A/r/tographers, explain Springgay, Irwin and Wilson (2005), commit to deep inquiry into their lives, making meaning though their sense, bodies, minds and emotions. Through this way of living inquiry, meaning is not only understood at that instant but rather, that new meanings continue to surface with time:

The significance of the discovery appears only in retrospect, because insight is never purely cognitive; it is to some extent always performative (incorporated in an act, a doing) and to that extent precisely it is not transparent to itself. Insight is partially unconscious, partially partaking of a practice. And since there can never be a
simultaneous, full coincidence between practice and awareness, what one understands in doing and through doing appears in retrospect. (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908)

This understanding, this new meaning, would not have resurfaced had I not taken on this a/r/tographic living inquiry into my experiences of being un/homed. I might have never noticed how I have always been in the process of making home, my place in the world, through connections to my attachments to the past, had I not engaged in this a/r/tographic research, and more importantly, had I not mindfully and/or artfully engaged with “the leftover” or “the unseen” that Springgay et al. (2005, p. 907) and Irwin et al. (2008, p. xxx) define as the rendering of ‘excess’.

Here, I would like to create a loop by going back to the beginning of this chapter where I quoted Cresswell (2004) who stated: “All over the world people are engaged in the place making activity” (p. 5) and rephrase that statement to say that all over the world, people are engaged in the process of home making, bringing past and present together, building nests out of the fragments of their memories that represent their losses, their mournings, their loves, and sometimes even their pains. We do this by consciously and unconsciously re-creating moments, feelings, interactions, relationships, values, etc., in visual, textual and relational languages.

**My Language, My Identity, My Home**

What became evident in creating and theorizing Be-longing is the importance of language in my understanding of home. Within the context of unhomedness and the shock of “unbelonging” (Gill, 2003, p. 40), what represents itself quite prominently is a struggle with meanings and understandings – a struggle with language. This is the struggle that emerges
when the meanings we have culturally and historically assigned to words become displaced or in Derrida’s (1983) words: get indefinitely deferred. In a new country, as immigrants we are often “confronted by a dominant culture whose discourse and language do not allow [us] to articulate fully [our] experience” (Rutherford, 1990a, p. 22). We suddenly find ourselves stripped of our ability to express ourselves. We find ourselves unable to interact or build new connections with the outside world as we used to within our familiar context. It comes as a sudden shock when we realize that all “[t]hose necessary words that will represent us both to ourselves and others are not quite in our grasp” (Rutherford, 1990a, p. 23). It’s an emotionally painful experience to know what we think and experience, and to know what we want to say, yet realize that there is simply no (easy) way to express it. Things we want to say don’t always come out quite the right way. We misunderstand and are quite easily misunderstood. This is an isolating and painful space where one becomes vulnerable and can be easily pushed to silence.

Language, Mills (2005) states, “both mediates and connects the individual identity and social identity” (p. 259). It enables a person to build connections and interact with the rest of the world. Simon (2001) argues that: “dislocation creates distance between languages and mind-sets, and enacts an economy of loss – the loss of spontaneous contact with one’s inner self, of emotional immediacy and wholeness” (p. 221). This is an experience similar to an experience of someone recovering from stroke who is faced with a shock of loss of access to a big part of herself and is forced to re-learn meanings and words that are assigned to objects, people, places, and ideas. For an immigrant, however, there exists an additional struggle of having to let go, and to resist the pull towards the familiar: a struggle of having to ‘push it aside’, to displace the familiar meanings and to (often) rebuild the meanings anew. As for a
stroke survivor, having to function with/in a new language also creates an emotional crisis for an immigrant. And in fact, “There is no language change without emotional consequences. Principally: loss”, writes Kaplan (1994, p. 63). “Language equals home. ... language is home, as surely as a roof over one’s head is a home, and that to be without a language, or to be between languages, is as miserable in its way as to be without bread” (p. 63).

My language is my home... but what language is that? After all the years of trying to re-find/re-create myself in this new context, and with/in two new languages, I still feel a great deal of intimacy with my native language. It is so much a part of who I am, how I think and how I interact with the world outside. I have been fortunate enough not to be expected to forget “the sights and the sounds” of my native language in order to be accepted as a member of a community²⁵. I feel lucky to have had the choice to maintain those connections to myself through the language (and consequently the history and culture) that was for so many years my main means of communication. This connection to the language I was born into is significant because on the one hand it has helped form my identity and on the other hand it supplies the terms by which I can express that identity. How do I then tell you who I am and what my experiences are without using the words and familiar terms of that language? Words and terms whose sounds and stories are etched into my very being. Without those words I am at a loss. Without those words, I am an image one can’t quite grasp the meaning of. Those words are within me. I am inseparable from them. They are a part my skin, my outfit, my surroundings. We belong to the same picture and yet, there are also moments when it feels like the words are merely projected onto me, that I have now stepped into another space, and

²⁵ In Learning to forget: Reflections on identity and language, Baez (2002) explains how he was expected to forget his language in order to be accepted within his new American community.
that I also mean something in spite of them.

My language is with/in me, yet today I am so often without it.

*My language, my identity,* and *My language, my outfit* are series of self-portraits which represent the embeddedness of Persian language in my identity – who I am, and how I conduct myself in the world. They represent the inseparability of culturally assigned meanings from my sense of self in the world. Be it in mourning or celebration, be it out here in the West, or back home in Iran, Persian language is a big part of the picture that represents me and my ways of being with/in the world.

In my *language my identity,* I have photographed myself in a high contrast setting where black and white separate me and at the same time show me as inseparable from my surroundings. This play with black and white represents my sense of conflict in relation to language and place. It highlights the always present contradictions that are created in-between the spaces of different cultures and languages, and it equally represents my experiences of being simultaneously an insider *and* an outsider within the spaces of the same picture.

Additionally, black and white put the contradictory concepts of mourning and celebration within the same space. My language is both a source of mourning and a source of celebration for me. It is a source of mourning in representing a loss. It is a source of mourning because it is not available to me in the context of my social life. And it is also a source of celebration because it provides me with a gateway to my past and my past self. It is a source of celebration because it gives me access to a part of my history and culture that would otherwise be forever lost to me.
Figure 11: My Language, My Identity
Figure 12: My Language, My Identity
In *My language, my identity*, the words and phrases that are projected onto me and the spaces around me also represent themselves as insiders and/or outsiders, visible and/or almost invisible in relation to me and my surroundings. They are a contrast to the white space of the wall while almost unnoticeable on the black colour of the couch where I am sitting. They equally represent inner conflict in the way they are organized in the picture. They are represented as strangers to their own context because they are written from left to right or top to bottom, as well as right to left which is the only way we read and write in Persian language. This represents how I constantly need to reorient myself in relation to language and meanings. It also captures how I now need to read three languages from two opposite directions and with/in three opposite contexts. This difference in orientation also represents how other people sometimes read and/or hear me from a different perspective and place than the one I speak from, and therefore can easily misread and/or misunderstand me.

For years I was taught to write and read my identity (and other people’s identities) from right to left. Then all of a sudden I found myself having to not only read from a different orientation but also write and read my right-to-left self from left to right. Ten years later, I now have a right-to-left self *and* a left-to-right self and I have to be able to write my difference selves both from left to right and right to left. There are at times so many orientations and reorientations within the same picture that I no longer know where to look first, where to start, or where to stand. I constantly have to evaluate my words both from my own perspective and the perspective of the person I am interacting with. No matter where the person I am communicating with is coming from, I am always, at least partly, forced to translate my thoughts and myself from one language to another as I am always both speaking from the same place as the other *and* from a different place, unknown to the other.
Figure 14: My Language, My Identity
Figure 15: My Language, My Identity
Figure 16: My Language, My Identity
The self-portraits in these series are filled with spaces of oneness and alienness. It would however, be difficult to identify these spaces looking from only one direction and one orientation. These spaces of conflict are highlighted once viewed and interpreted from a linguistic and cultural in-between space. Zooming back and away from the contextual in-between, these photographs visually hold everything together through a balance of those very conflicted spaces – black and white, straight and curved, upside down and right way up, visible and invisible.

The words and phrases in these series are not just typed or handwritten words. They are calligraphed words. And unlike English words that are, to my knowledge, almost always meant to be read verbally, Persian calligraphy is not always meant to be read only verbally. Most of the time Persian calligraphy is mainly appreciated as a visual art form. And although certain words or phrases are sometimes purposefully made readable, the meanings in the calligraphed pieces are often not only in the words but also in the visual shapes. In My language, my identity, within the context of Persian calligraphy, the visual composition of the words are chaotic. To someone familiar with Persian calligraphy, this could seem as if an explosion has taken place that has thrown these words into disorderly positions. This represents the same explosion that has displaced the meanings of my familiar words and has consequently pushed me into this space of constant re-orientation and re-translation.

In My language, my identity series, the words and/or phrases that are calligraphed are not easily readable. However, looking closely, we can make out a few words such as love, drunken, need, knowledge, writing, alone, intense and pain on the walls, the floor, on my body and my clothing. These words refer to my ongoing struggles and conflicts with and in relation to language. They refer to the constant tension that I experience for having to draw
meanings out of similar, yet always different words in different languages. In writing these words, however, I have been aware that they might not be readable to most of the people viewing them and that the verbal meaning of these self-portraits will be unavailable to most of their viewers. This, once more, highlights my personal experiences of always somehow missing information in-between languages.

In the following photograph (Figure 17), one of a series called *My language, my outfit*, the Persian words are all written only from one orientation: right to left, and the positions of the words are not as chaotic as it is in *My language, my identity* series. The words are designed in a way that they form the shape of my body and my outfit. In this particular photograph, they words emphasize the shape of (the bottom of) my skirt. The photographs in this series speak to how I embody the Persian language – how I *wear* it, how it is represented in my facial expressions, my body language, my clothes and in all the ways that I conduct myself in the word.

The physical composition of my body in the pictures represents mourning and pain. Pain for knowing that the words that pour out of my body have nowhere to go. Pain for knowing that the words that come from my heart cannot be understood. Pain for the fact that my language represents me as a stranger, an Other – an alien Other, an exotic Other. And pain for the loss of the context where my words, my language used to belong.
Figure 17: My Language, My Outfit
Having to communicate in a language other than your own is a loss on many levels. It’s a loss of meanings, histories, links and connections and as such it is the loss of one’s voice. Bhatia (2002) explains that: “individual voices are influenced by the culture of institutions, groups and communities. The speaker’s social languages (professional jargon, authorities of various circles, socio-political ideologies, national language) consciously or unconsciously influence the content of individual voice” (p. 67). We carry our social languages with us and bring them into the spaces of the new culture, but with the loss of our familiar context, we also lose the meaningfulness and the functionality of our social languages. We lose our voices.

How does one re/find one’s voice when all of a sudden one has to use a different language to function in a new society? When words have lost their usual meanings and the familiarity of the words, the history that comes with them, and the depth in their meanings (all the moods, emotions, histories and cultures that are associated with them) have vanished? How does one deal with the loss of those expressions and feelings that may no longer be expressed because there are simply no words to express them in another language\(^26\)? How does one deal with the new words that barely make sense because there is no (cultural/historical) point of reference to understand them?

Kilito (1994) argues that “[w]hen two languages meet, one of them is necessarily linked to animality” (p. xxvi). By “animality”, of course Kilito is referring to the inferior state of animals in relation to humans, as well as their inability to communicate verbally. He continues by stating: “Speak like me or you are an animal” (p. xxvi). Although it is not

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\(^{26}\) To give one example, there are two words for freedom in Persian language and one of them specifically means inner freedom while the other one means physical freedom.
explicitly mentioned in the phrase above, it becomes apparent in Kilito’s later statements that
the language that he thinks a person has to speak (well) in order to not be considered “an
animal” is one of the dominant superior culture.

Kilito (1994) explains that when a person finds herself in a place where she has to
communicate in a different language the strangers whose language she does not speak
mistake her for an animal and that animal, he states, is not just any animal but a monkey. For
as long as she does not speak like them, she is considered a monkey – one that merely
imitates the other. This imitation will always be apparent in the effort she has to make in
order to speak as every time that she opens her mouth, she must exert a significant effort to
speak and this effort sets her apart from others who speak comfortably. “[Sh]e imitates
because [s]he is not those that [s]he imitates, [s]he imitates what [s]he cannot be, a fact of
which [s]he is well aware” (p. xxvii). An imitation, however, he further explains “even if it
attains perfection, will never abolish the difference that occasions it in the first place” (p.
xxvii).

This struggle with language through what Kilito (1994) calls a forever state of imitation
is what Baez (2002) also describes in his personal struggle with language even decades after
moving to and living in the States. He explains that even though he is now no longer even
capable of communicating in his mother tongue and English is his main means of
communication, he still occasionally finds himself pronouncing English words and sentences
in his head before saying them out loud, just to make sure that they will come out right.

I share this experience with Baez and most probably many others, as I too sometimes
catch myself checking the pronunciation of words in my head before saying them out loud. I
even sometimes hear the sound of my own voice echoing endlessly in my head, right after speaking a word I am not sure I have pronounced quite the right way.

I am always haunted by the looks on people’s faces on those occasions when I have pronounced a word not quite as I should have. Always haunted by my own feelings of embarrassment and disappointment, and the desire to be able to take the words back and get a second chance at speaking them the right way. I also always feel responsible, and perhaps also guilty, for having exposed myself as an outsider – an Other. These feelings of embarrassment, disappointment and guilt make it difficult to break the silence, to speak my thoughts as I think them, and to risk exposing myself again as the one that does not belong. Silence sometimes seems like a more comfortable space than breaking it.

Whether completely silent or making the effort to speak, a monkey, explains Kilito (1994) is always looked at as a hypocrite. There is an entirely disavowed shadow zone that goes with him wherever he goes representing him as one who is always hiding something. He is therefore never accepted as one of the others whose language he tries to speak. He is always “lost among people ... because he is a mimic, because he dissimulates” (p. xxviii).

How many, I wonder, would make the effort to break the silence under the above circumstances? How many would risk speaking their minds? How many would dare to expose what they really think and who they really are, only to be exposed as outsiders?

In addition to the above risks, Elmarsafy (1994) explains that: “the act of speaking a different language threatens to strip the speaker of his or her self” (p. xxi). This happens not only as a result of all the obstacles that exist in expressing oneself in a new different language but also because of the gradual loss of one’s original language. As years go by and more physical and temporal distance separates a person from her native language, she finds herself
at a loss for words and expressions, or unpleasantly finds that she can no longer utter the words that she could once pronounce quite well. Consequently, Kilito (1994) explains, “opening one’s mouth amounts to self-betrayal, the revelation of one’s difference and one’s lack. It would be much simpler to walk on in silence with clenched teeth wherever people are to be found” (p. xxix).

Shani Mootoo, Irish-Trinidadian poet, writer and visual artist, expresses frustration with the loss of her language – her voice – and her pain of having to use another language to express herself, in one of her artworks. She writes: “It is a crime that I should have to use your language to tell you how I feel. That you have taken mine from me” (Mootoo, 1995, cited in Gagnon, 2000, p. 146).

![Figure 18: © It Is a Crime ... (Mootoo, 2000)](image)

The inability to fully express one’s experiences of an emotional and psychological distress and/or one’s experiences of identity crisis is a very painful and isolating experience.
In addition, finding one’s (new) voice within a new language is not a short-term process. It is not quite enough to know the words and be able to put them together and form sentences. “There is a huge difference between floating on the surface of a culture [through a language] and being able to chart its depths” (Simon, 2001, p. 221). You can only fully find your voice when you have “moved past speaking foreign words to taking them into your body – absorbing their meanings into who you are – feeling the grain of the language against your skin” (p. 221). It can take years, even forever, to embody a language to that extent.

For me this struggle with language has become more and more prominent with time. The more socially active I become, the more I feel the limitations that language creates for me. It happens often that I find myself at a loss when following a conversation, because at a certain point I can no longer see the link between what was said, and what was unanimously concluded from it! And no matter how many times I review the conversations in my head they still don’t make sense! It always feels as if part of the conversation is missing. For a while I used to question my knowledge of the language (the meaning of the words and the structure of the sentences). But I have come to the realization that what I miss is not words or expressions but a history, a part of a culture. A culture that is embedded in words and sentences. The culture of a language. The culture I am still (and perhaps forever will be) trying to familiarize myself with.

How do I survive this struggle and back and forth between languages? How do I ever give myself the illusion of a shared meaning/understanding when even simple words have now become a source of my confusion and misunderstanding?

In her 1989 novel Lost in translation, Polish-Canadian writer, Eva Hoffman, expresses her struggle and frustration with language by explaining how, when she found herself having
to learn and speak a language other than her native language, she felt like all objects were suddenly disconnected from their original meanings. She wrote:

The problem is that the signifier has become severed from the signified. The words I learn now don’t stand for things in the same unquestioned way as they did in my native tongue. ‘River’ in Polish was a vital sound, energized by the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of being immersed in rivers. ‘River’ in English is cold – a word without an aura. (p. 106)

She further explains: “I am becoming a living avatar of structuralist wisdom; I cannot help knowing that words are just themselves. But it’s a terrible knowledge, without any of the consolations that wisdom usually brings. It is the loss of living connections” (p. 107).

I share those same feelings and experiences of loss associated with language and meaning with Hoffman. New words in new languages often do feel like lifeless cold words, missing all the colourful stories that they carry along with them in my native language. However, now that I have also lived and written in two languages other than my native language for over a decade, I find that there are new feelings and stories attached to these no longer completely new words. My relationship with language has become way more complicated than a severance of a single signified from a single signifier. Each signifier is now layered with three different signifieds, not completely inclusive/exclusive of one another.

My struggle with languages is not at all a simple one. The more I have learned of and in a language, the more complicated it has actually become to translate my thoughts and feelings and put them into words. Each language has given me new and different possibilities and contexts. It is impossible, I have found, to replace one language with another. It is even impossible to replace a word in one language with the same word in another. When I think of the same word in any of the three languages I speak, I find that even words as simple as the
names that are assigned to the same things in different languages do not really mean the same to me. It’s a strange revelation that keeps me wondering: What is it that makes a sheep different from “un mouton” or a "گوسفند"?!

Kaplan (1994) similarly explains that when one finds oneself having to live with/in another language, one all of a sudden discovers that a “‘chat’ is not a cat at all, but a new creature in new surroundings” (p. 59). It does not matter that those two words are assigned to the same object. How those words are defined depends on so much more than just what they are assigned to, and how they are written or pronounced. They bring their culture with them. Their context, their history, and all their stories are constructed within that one language and culture. This significantly complicates meanings, understandings, communication and living, for an immigrant trying to make home in a new space.

These complications in communication and understanding have become part of my everyday life. I now know three of each object that I can relate to, that I have a history with, and that I need to communicate that history through. The I who speaks Persian does not have the same experiences with objects as the I who speaks French or the I who speaks English. Additionally, the I who speaks Persian does not have the same experiences with an object named in Persian, and the same object named in French or English. The language I speak places me in a context while the words in each language come with their own contexts, stories, feelings and meanings. I therefore always find myself at a loss for words because communicating though each language, I, as an immigrant, am limited to my experiences with objects only within the context of that one language. And my experiences with the same object in the two other languages I speak are often inaccessible to me.
Interestingly, in spite of the sense of loss, frustration and confusion that I am faced with in my interactions with others on a daily basis, through time I have also built a special personal relationship with each language I now speak. Each language has a different function for me. To the extent that sometimes I find that the only ideal way to communicate my thoughts and feelings verbally would be by speaking an amalgam of the languages I know. That the only way I can really say how I feel is by putting words together that are not really supposed to be together, and speak a strange language that only a few can really understand. This leaves me to wonder, with all the layers of meaning that are now available to me in-between words, expressions and contexts from three different languages, how much more do I lose in trying to convey my thoughts, my ideas, my understandings and my feelings to others using only one of those languages?

Languages, like people, have special personalities that develop differently for each (second language) learner, and based on that personality each language will have a different functionality. “There are languages in which we feel our mother’s heart beating; other languages in which we feel distant and safe; other languages – jargon languages in particular – are the language of professional ambition and achievement; others the language of pain” (Kaplan, 1994, p. 63). As immigrants learn more about the culture of the new language, they develop a relationship with/in that language and that relationship defines and creates a specific, and often a new function for that language. In addition, immigrants who can speak more than one language can find themselves having to “draw upon a rich diversity of linguistic and cultural repertoires which construct their sense of self, to the extent that they feel as though they are different persons as they manage a range of registers across their different languages” (Mills, 2005, p. 259). Consequently, in order to feel and/or communicate
a sense of wholeness, they often need both (or all) languages to express their thoughts, ideas and emotions. As a result, they can find themselves needing to use a combination of words and expressions from different languages in order to fully convey what they mean to say. And when their audience is not familiar with all the languages they know, they are left with no choice but to choose, translate, filter and sensor. They are left with no choice but to often resort to silence.

How can an immigrant ever fully say what she means? How can she ever understand and make herself understood? Yes, indeed, it can be argued that one can never really fully understand another. Shared understandings are merely common illusions. However, like Baez (2002), I too believe that:

Once one refuses to believe that one can actually understand another person, one easily can learn to discount that the person has significant needs, or even that our social world involves the oppression of individuals by others. One may never fully understand another person, but even partial understanding may be enough to understand what oppresses another. (p. 131)

I choose not to be oppressive towards others and/or be dismissive of the oppressions that are experienced by others by simply dismissing the possibility of shared understandings. And I also choose not to be oppressive towards myself by using the impossibility of common understanding as an excuse to be dismissive of the pain I experience as a result of having lost my voice, my language — the ability to make myself understood.

Additionally, this loss I am constantly referring to is not the loss of an idealistic shared understanding with an other, but the loss of the ability to express and share feelings, emotions, experiences and thoughts through a language as I was used to at home, the loss of shared words, expressions, and sayings that always tend to say more than just words, the loss of that sense of belonging through language that does not pinpoint me as a stranger or an
outsider, and the loss of that comfort in “partial understanding” (Baez, 2002, p. 131) of people that are familiar with my culture, my history and my words – people that know me.

Nowadays when I write, like Richard Rodriguez (1983) I too oftentimes find myself writing “graffiti” – writing for “a public that does not know me” (p. 188), in a context where I feel that I do not belong. I find myself fearfully writing in the spaces where my words do not seem to belong. Where they always risk being completely misunderstood and/or dismissed. I find myself writing in spaces where my words can be uninvited and will risk being removed and turned into silences. Other times, I find myself having to use words that do not represent me. Words that are strangers to me. Yet I find myself having to use those strange words because I need them to communicate. I need them to be part of a community – I need them in order to at least try to belong. However, in using either or both the uninvited and strange words I find that I am scratching my displaced thoughts, ideas and dreams onto surfaces that surround me, as in writing of graffiti. Writing the kind of writing that perhaps from the outside perspective might be perceived as defacing the walls and the public spaces of a different culture with words and images that do not quite fit their surroundings – Words and images that are even displaced before they become a part of the physical space. Sadly, it feels that language is now yet another criterion for my sense of inclusion and/or exclusion. That it is the criterion that has simultaneously turned me into an insider and an outsider.

As an emigrant/immigrant, I am writing for, and communicating with a public whose (verbal, visual, social, etc.) culture(s) are different from mine. And a public for whom, my very thoughts and ideas may seem like, perhaps not so much an act of vandalism (as it is sometimes assigned to the writing of graffiti) but uninvited and/or unexpected disturbances, alien to the space that they (will) inhabit.
I take ‘writing graffiti’ as *a metaphor* for the kind of writing I am doing, because it seems to conceptually fit well with the kind of *a/r/tographic* research that I have been engaged in. It is not that I have been or will be creating graffiti as it is commonly understood or defined. It is the *artistic process* of (writing and creating) this research within post-colonial philosophy that makes my research metaphorically a kind of graffiti writing. It can perhaps be thought of as more of a methodology than a (visual or verbal) form – A methodology coming out of *a/r/tography* that is also very much situated in post-colonial theory.

As some graffiti writers do, I too have used and will use *both* visual and verbal languages throughout the process of this research to convey certain messages\(^27\). These messages, in my research, can be read personally and socially, as well as politically, depending on the point of view and the historical and cultural context of the reader/viewer. The interpretation of graffiti is also dependent on the cultural and historical context of the graffiti, the graffiti writer/artist and the viewer. The form and content of graffiti has helped historians, sociologists and anthropologists gain understanding into the lifestyle and language of the past cultures that left them behind (Ancelet, 2006). I too am hoping that the process/product of this research will provide deep meanings and understanding about my experiences and myself in relation to others in the world.

\(^27\) There are many different kinds of graffiti, visual, textual or both, and more or less artistic in form. And there always seems to be a personal, social or political message that the graffiti writer and/or artist is trying to convey. Although ancient graffiti mainly displayed love declarations, political rhetoric, and simple words of thought, more contemporary graffiti contains popular messages of social and political ideas (Ancelet, 2006).
There is much controversy regarding the writing of graffiti. Some people disapprove of graffiti because of the social/political messages that are often embedded in them. Some simply see them as eye sores – damaging the image of their town or city. Many city officials and/or law enforcement do not approve of/appreciate public display of graffiti. Graffiti writers can be sentenced to having to remove their own graffiti or they might be sentenced to jail time (Abel, 1977). There are people however that appreciate (often more artistic forms of) graffiti aesthetically and analytically and pay specific attention to the social, cultural and political messages that lie underneath the often metaphorical surface of this form of public expression.

Historically graffiti writing belongs to classes of the society that were not allowed to publically express themselves in more culturally accepted ways (like in journals, books, newspapers, etc.) (Abel, 1977). It belongs to the culture of the different Others (Said, 1978) and the excluded. It can therefore be questioned and analysed from a post-colonial perspective. With these insights and tensions in mind, I think of writing graffiti – writing in/on the space where I do not belong – as a metaphor for the way I investigate my experiences of loss and pain of displacement and the way I communicate those experiences to the world outside. Knowing well that I too will sometimes “use words that [only] someone from home can understand” (Rodriguez, p. 188), or use words, images and expressions that have come to exist in-between cultures and so perhaps I will be the only one who can see or recognize them. The graffiti that I write will be the process/product of my translation and

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28 Graffiti, as Abel (1997) explains, “are a form of communication that is both personal and free of everyday social restraints that normally prevent people from giving uninhibited reign to their thoughts. As such these sometimes crude inscriptions offer some intriguing insight into the people who author them and into the society to which these people belong” (Abel, 1977, p. 3).
interpretation of my struggles and experiences as an immigrant. And they have been, and will continue to be presented to the world as such, only to be yet again translated and interpreted by an audience of different cultures.

As for most graffiti writers/artists who mark their messages and their “frustrations, hatreds, fantasies, desires, wit, wisdom, their innermost secrets” (Abel, 1977, p. 3) etc. on public spaces, my project is also a risk. A risk that can involve resentment, rejection, dismissal, or merely lack of empathy. A risk that can equally involve being objectified and/or misinterpreted. But it is also “an announcement of my identity” and a “testimonial to my existence in the world” (Abel, 1977, p. 16) and as such, it allows me to have a voice and a place of sharing.

I am, however, also aware that by intentionally or unintentionally using words and expressions that only someone from my past home can understand, I too am taking part in the inclusionary/exclusionary practices of a language. “Language normalizes”, explains Baez (2002, p. 129). It establishes permitted and prohibited spaces. It sets up the condition for right or wrong, “belonging and not belonging, success and failure” (p. 129). To live successfully out here in the West, to go to school, have a job, make friends and interact with others, one needs to know English. One needs to know and speak “proper English” (p. 124). As a result we immigrants learn English. We learn it to be accepted, to be included. “We use language to belong ...then, language sets the stage for inclusions and exclusions” (Baez, 2002, p. 125). We learn to speak a new language and by just doing that we too are taking part in excluding those others who do not yet speak that language “properly” (p. 124). Indeed as we define the criteria for belonging are we not also defining the criteria for unbelonging, the criteria for Othering, and the criteria for Otherness?
Chapter Five: The Force from Outside: Othering

It is often in ... in-between spaces that power is played out, contested, and takes form; where identities are formed, reformed and transformed; where an othering takes place. (O’Donoghue, 2008, p. 120)

An Invisible Other

The feelings of unbelonging experienced by immigrants, exiles and refugees are not merely the result of the loss of a familiar context (home, language, connections, etc.) that acts as a force from within and through one’s embodied and performative memories. Another one of the consequences of displacement and immigration is the painful experiences of being labelled and treated as an Other and/or being pushed into invisibility as a result of exclusionary practices and forces. An immigrant becomes an Other, or an invisible Other, when she finds herself in unhomely spaces. That is, when she is treated differently and as an outsider and is excluded from social, cultural and professional practices, or is ignored and pushed to the margins, labeled as a stranger or an Other for being different. An immigrant also experiences being Othered when she makes herself invisible for the fear of not being accepted or not being good enough in the context of her new culture.

To be innvandrer or immigrant, as Marianne Gullestad has pointed out, “is always to be non-Norwegian” (as cited in Razack, 2004, p. 145), non-European, non-American, non-Western, “a stranger”, “a foreigner”, and the “unassimilable minority” (p. 140). To be an immigrant is to always be seen as “different” and “this difference is usually translated as less than” (as cited in Uchida, 1998, p. 171). To be an immigrant often means to be an inferior or a not-quite-good-enough Other. An immigrant is almost always considered a different, an outsider the conditions of whose life is to be determined by the citizens of the host country. Razack (2004) adopts Gullestad’s host and guest metaphor to talk about how immigrants are
often expected to conform to the ways of the host country and follow instructions as to how they should live their own lives. She explains:

A host has the right to control the resources of the home, to decide on the rules of the visit, and, accordingly, to ‘put the foot down’ when the guests do not conform. A guest, on his side has to be grateful for the hospitality received by not provoking the host by calling attention to his own difference from the host. (p. 145)

An immigrant, this different Other (Said, 1978), is therefore expected to hide the conditions of her Otherness – her difference, upon her arrival in her new country as a way of showing her gratitude for having been invited as a guest. She needs to act as other-than-herself in order not to overstay her welcome. An immigrant is expected to become invisible so that the conditions of the host country won’t be disturbed!

In addition to the exclusionary practices and experiences that take place as a result of this host/guest dynamic, whether intentionally or unintentionally, we also sometimes have presuppositions about the places/spaces that others (and ourselves) occupy or should occupy (Said, 1978, 1996). As outsiders or insiders to other cultures, societies, or communities, we have certain assumptions about the places that people in those cultures, societies or communities occupy. With those assumptions we create borders in our mind and push people (away) to the other side of the border where we treat them as different and/or as invisible. We create boundaries and see those boundaries as lines and borders that separate two spaces based on their differences.

According to Said (1978), with those lines and boundaries we automatically put one side of the border in power and make it dominant in relation to the other. This creates a sense
of “intellectual superiority”\(^{29}\) (Said, 1996, p. 109) on one side of the border, in relation to the other. As a result of this, when these “different Others” immigrate to the place that is defined and considered as superior and powerful in relation to them and their culture, they are often pushed to the margins as invisible Others. And in that margin they often become deprived of their confidence to function the way they used to function in their home environment.

These different Others – these “aliens”, Rutherford (1990a) also argues, represent the site of difference and the repository of fear and anxieties in the hierarchical language of the West. He states: “what is alien represents otherness” (p. 10). An Alien is an undefined and unknown Other, and in that unknown-ness, she can represent a threat and therefore needs to be stripped of its difference and/or be pushed to the margins where she will be closely watched.

This image of an alien Other as a threat is clearly reflected in the way immigrants, and specifically Muslim immigrant communities, are treated in the West. Western countries, Razack (2004) explains, believe that “Muslims come to the West drawn to its superior wealth. They bring with them a hopeless feudal culture and must either be stopped altogether or be forcibly ‘deculturalised’ before they multiply and contaminate the superior civilisation into which they have immigrated” (pp. 131-132). This assumption, of course, has resulted in the strict policing of Muslim communities in the West.

From the perspective of a new (Muslim) immigrant, it is such a big shock to all of a sudden find oneself under surveillance like a criminal! To realize that you are being followed

\(^{29}\) Said (1996) talks about “intellectual superiority” in relation to the West and East where the Occident becomes empowered by defining the Orient as “different Other” and sees itself as “the spectator, the judge and jury of every facet of Oriental behavior” (Said, 1996, p. 109).
around in a store by a sales person thinking you might steal something, just because you look different and foreign. Or to be interrogated every single time you are crossing the US border simply because you are a Muslim, come from a Muslim country, or bear a Muslim name. Sadly, nowadays and specifically after the September 11 events, if you are identified as a Muslim you are automatically considered a threat. This, Thobani (2004) argues, is racial profiling and as such, it “singles out individuals as suspicious on the basis of their ‘race’, subjecting them to increased surveillance and control” (p. 597). As an accepted political technique of governance, racial profiling (which, I would like to point out, is not only directed at the Muslim communities) “inscribe[s] suspicion and illegality onto the bodies of people of colour, making it possible, in this case, to round them up on the basis of nothing more substantial than their ‘looking’ like Muslims” (p. 598). These legally justified forms of Othering are humiliating, exclusionary, hurtful, and insulting.

Razack (2004) also brings to our attention a different (disguised) form of Othering that takes place in the lives of Muslim men and women in the West. She explains how a Muslim woman’s body is often used to articulate Western superiority. She argues that “Europe has long held a ... fascination with the Muslim woman’s body as a culturally different body” (p. 149) which is a victim of violence. The West uses the image of Muslim women as victims of their own culture to “preserve its appearance of generosity through saving non-Western women from the perils they faced in their own cultures” (p. 150). Consequently they, the “civilized citizens” (p. 148), are portrayed as the saviours of these “barbarian Others” (p. 147). This popular image of the violated and oppressed Muslim woman has been taken so far that “perfect strangers stop young immigrant girls on the street and ask them anxiously if they are being forced to marriage” (p. 163). Razack (2004) refers to this as a form of “racism
masquerading as respect for culture” (p.167) whereby the “culturally advanced” (p. 168) racializes the so called “primitive culture” (p. 168) by showing an act of care or generosity. In doing so, Penuel (1995) argues, the West gets to identify itself as a better and superior culture. Penuel explains this as a representation of cultural identity in terms of a “serviceable other” (p. 349) which he then refers to as a “strategic identity formation” (p. 349). Penuel goes on to explain that “to create a serviceable other ... is to use a representation in a powerful manner designed to accomplish desired qualities for one’s own group by constructing a contrasting other who will be serviceable to that mission” (Penuel, 1995, p. 349). Friedman (2004) also agrees by stating that “[t]hose who feel at home in the world need strangers to remind them of who they are” (p. 199). In other words for the West to identify itself as a superior and more civilized culture, it needs to define other cultures as less civilized (or uncivilized) and inferior. The racialization of Muslim women in the West not only serves to this end but also “serves to reinforce the threat that the Muslim man is said to pose to the West and is used to justify the extraordinary measures of violence and surveillance required to discipline him and Muslim communities” (Razack, 2004, p. 130).

These painful exclusionary racializing experiences are, however, not limited to occasional encounters with the authorities or random discriminative acts by people in public spaces. Sometimes, as an immigrant, you are pushed to the other side of the border even when it is not intended. You are made aware that you are different, and you are made to feel like an Other every time you are simply asked where you are from, by a stranger. You are reminded over and over again that no matter how hard you try, you simply can’t belong just because you look different. You painfully realize that your body has become the sign and
symptom of foreignness. Your face, your features, your colour, they always give you away as a stranger – as different. As Friedman (2004) highlights:

The body as a site of cultural determination first marks someone as ‘the stranger’ – it might be the skin, the eyes, the hair, the shape, the sex; it might be the walk, the posture, the angles of movement; it might be the clothes, the jewelry, the shoes, the decorations, adornments, and accoutrements of the body; it might be the sounds that come out of the mouth, off the pen or keyboard – the cultural materiality of speech, accent, rhythm, style, writing. (p. 198)

One is always and forever marked by one’s body and “[t]o inhabit the body of the stranger is to be never at home” (Friedman, 2004, p. 199) – to always find oneself treated as an Other. This is even true in the case of second generation immigrants who have been born and raised here, yet their body carries their parents’ features. It doesn’t even matter what your ID card says about where you were born or which country you call your home. “No matter what passport one carries, the body that looks ‘foreign’ is subject to a variety of gazes – from the curious and rude to the dangerous and violent” (Friedman, 2004, p. 191).

How is one to see oneself as belonging to a culture when one is always the subject of the gaze (Bruner, 1996, p. 159) – a constant reminder of how one is always an outsider, different, an Other? The cruel reminder that pushes one back to that state of nostalgic longing for the home that no longer is – that one familiar context within which one is not an outsider. The context where one does not so often need to define and justify oneself to another. This gaze is indeed a cruel reminder of how one is, and will be in an infinite painful state of “unbelonging” (Gill, 2003, p. 40).

These experiences of being Othered or racialized, Bhatia (2002) explains, “is part of many non-European/Western immigrants’ acculturation experiences, and these experiences are tightly knit with their evolving conceptions of a selfhood that is hyphenated, fractured
and in-between” (p. 71). These experiences create an uninviting space for interaction and negotiation which then consequently very commonly push immigrants into a space of invisibility where not only they are perceived as invisible Others (or sometimes expected to be such), but oftentimes they also see themselves as invisible Others.

I too am an invisible Other and I am very much aware of my state of infinite Otherness. The way it is marked on and perceived through my body, my face, my name, my voice, my accent and how I pronounce certain words. No matter how long it has been that I have been reading, writing, teaching and living with/in this new language, no matter how long I have been living this new culture, my body will always give me away as an Other. And though I have been fortunate enough to be able to surround myself by people who often disregard borders and lines and try to find similarities and build understandings instead of focusing on boundaries and differences, I have nonetheless become invisible by making myself invisible, through my fears and anxieties, in my struggles to fit in this new context.

I see myself struggling to be seen, to fall in place in all these new spaces I encounter. I learn new ways, learn new words, yet I find that the real me, the me I know, is turning more and more into a shadow of who I used to be… I am becoming invisible as I try to make myself more visible. I bury myself inside and find more and more discomfort as I put this new me in the spotlight. And eventually, with so much effort I do find myself in that spotlight, only to feel exposed as an outsider (A feeling that is rooted as much within me as it is rooted in the context that surrounds me. A feeling that is coming from the exact same place where my home and my culture are carved into my soul). And even then, the feeling of discomfort resulting from this exposure, makes me run and keep away from the spotlight and
make myself invisible. Another struggle, another unsettled state, another back and forth, and another battle between the states of visibility and the invisibility.

I share the experiences of turning myself invisible with Cary (2007) who talks about unhomely spaces in reference to her teaching practice in the US after the events of 911. She explains how her being a foreigner and therefore an outsider caused her to silence herself within the space of her own class. Cary’s experience is an example of how one (an immigrant or an outsider) can often push oneself into invisibility out of the fear of being confronted with outside forces, even if the outside forces might not necessarily cause conflict.

As an immigrant, I feel the effect of cultural change from within as well as from outside and often create unhomely spaces for myself as I silence myself because of the fear of facing certain contradictions or confrontations. It is perhaps also the fear of the unexpected and the unknown that pushes me to invisibility. But most importantly, for someone who is considered an outsider, remaining visible becomes a challenge and a risk and taking it would also put her identity at risk. An identity which (in the case of displaced immigrants) is often already shaken and/or fragmented and broken as a result of “culture shock” (Berry, 2005, p. 708) or in Berry’s words “acculturative stress” (p. 708). Would one (on unfamiliar grounds) be stable enough to take that risk and avoid making oneself invisible by exposing oneself to the possibility of getting hurt (emotionally or otherwise)?

I struggle with in/visibility on a daily basis. And in trying to find peace through that struggle, I have become an Other to myself. I am no longer who I used to be. I am different. I am different in this context that has driven me to invisibility, and I am different when I take the risk to make myself visible. I am no longer able to define myself.
Who is this Other I cannot define yet recognize as myself? I have lost the home with/in which I used to make sense of myself. I have lost the me I used to define in my familiar context. And I keep asking myself: Where is the place where I (all of who I am) can make sense?

I find myself in an unstable state, looking for myself, looking for my home, a place to belong, trying to make peace with the spaces in-between. I have long let go of certainty yet still yearn to land every once in a while just so I can catch my breath and be able to keep going. My existence is now all about this state of in-betweenness. I am an Other on each side, and an Other-to-myself on both sides. In fact I am now myself, an Other, and an Other-to-myself no matter which side of the border I stand on. I define myself in a “third space” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211; Rutherford, 1990b, p. 207). Many third spaces, in fact — these new different spaces where an Other can only momentarily belong. And I struggle to find and hold on to these moments of belonging in-between all these states of Otherness. Placing myself anywhere other than the third space, would turn me into this immobilized outsider. Consequently, as the literature expects (Hron, 2009), I glorify the in-between. I focus on all the possibilities opening up: the opportunities to learn differently and to see differently. Yet the weight of uncertainty, suspense, confusion and loss, takes away so much of my energy and in running from place to place the pressure often overweighs all the new possibilities and leaves me suffocating – in need of air!

In/visible

A Stage

I am deep in my thoughts about dis/placement and unhomedness, as the music is playing loud in the little space where I work. I visualize myself moving to a Chopin prelude,
pulling back the curtains on a stage, only to find another set of curtains to pull back. One after another. I am looking for something – a coherent story that would allow me to make sense of my life. Every single time I am drawing back the big white curtains, I envision finding a lost piece (one that could always bring everything together and take me home again) presenting itself somewhere on a stage. Yet every time I find myself disappointed. All I find is another set of curtains. The stage – my place, is nowhere to be found. Up until the last chord plays, all there is, is a repetition of my hope and despair through and in-between the curtains. And so as the last chord plays I draw back another set of curtains before I give in and kneel down in exhaustion and despair, coming to this knowing that the stage as I knew it, is nowhere to be found. All there is, is layers and layers of curtains. I am but forever in in-betweens. And I will have to make peace not only with my lost pieces but also with the missing stage.

**Redefining Stage**

How do I perform my lost and found pieces without a stage?

What is my performance?

My performance is the dance of moving through and in-between the curtains. My stage is not a defined space. My stage is the undefined, unsettling space that can only momentarily rest in-between my constant re-memberings of the past in the present. It is the layers and the in-betweens that synthesize my boundless stage. It is the seemingly permanently undefined space of the stage that I have to make peace with. I have to constantly re-evaluate and re-determine where I stand in order to be able to keep standing. In fact, standing is only possible if I am standing in motion: Standing yet never in a restful and undisturbed manner.
I am the unhomed who is restlessly performing her ephemeral moments of hope for at-homeness.

Figure 19: In/visible Video Installation

*In/visible* is a video installation/dance performance about my struggles with having to redefine the stage where I perform myself and my hopes and despair. It’s about struggling to find a place of belonging, a place I can call home. It’s about trying to re-find and re-create myself and my place in the world. And it is equally about re/defining myself and how I am able to live in the world and in the (unhomely) spaces that surround me.
The stage of my performance is metaphorically translated into three vertical curtains that hang parallel to and in front of one another, the wall behind the curtains and the spaces that are created in-between. The words dis/placed and in/visible are cut into these three curtains and as a result of that, the words can be read on the back wall when the video is projected onto them. The spaces between dis and placed and in and visible, open up the possibility for different readings (different interpretations): Displaced and invisible; displaced in the visible; displaced in-between the visible, placed in the visible …, re-presenting my multiple states of being, throughout this performance of my existence.

![Figure 20: In/visible. Installation Sketch](image)

My sense of in-betweenness is translated into the physical spaces created between the curtains, the wall and the words. However, this installation is as much about visibility and invisibility as it is about the spaces (of) in-between. A shadow is my portrayal of what is both visible and invisible at the same time. A shadow can be an identifiable presence. Yet it highlights, at the same time, a hidden presence. It’s a space in-between two worlds. It’s a
representation of an existence in a dream – an illusion and a place that merely draws its existence from memory. A shadow is a confirmation of an existence, yet in the shadow alone, that existence remains partly or perhaps mainly undefined.

It is thus the video of my identifiable yet undefined shadow dancing that I project onto the curtains of *In/visible*. My shadow dances on and in-between the spaces of the curtain, the wall, and the words that mark the curtains and the wall. My dance is an expression of my struggles, formulated through movements that are representations of my history and my present (a combination of the Persian traditional dance and an expressive contemporary dance with glimpses of the mystical whirling dance of dervishes).

*Figure 21: In/visible. Video Installation*
As you step into the spaces of *In/visible*, you will find yourself alone in a desert listening to the howling sound of the wind. You are left wondering in that un/familiar and (possibly) foreign state for a few seconds before you are introduced to a shadow dancing on and across the curtains. Appearing and disappearing to the falling and rising sound of the wind. The dance is then accompanied by the voice of a woman singing which vulnerably echoes in the open space of the desert. The naked sound of her voice breaks the silence once and again as the shadow moves from one curtain to another. The familiar sound of the wind, the natural and open space of the desert and the fact that you can only see a shadow of the dancer makes it possible for you to imagine yourself in the place of the dancer and to dream along as you observe and walk through the installation.

*Figure 22: In/visible Video Still*
*In/visible* is a play with curtains and layers and all the in-betweens that come to exist as a result. Apart from the physical space that is divided by curtains, there are several layers to the video itself: The desert, the shadow dancing, the wind and the singing voice. *In/visible* is layered with audio, visual, textual, contextual and metaphorical in-between spaces. The dance takes place in and in-between the spaces of the installation. My shadow dances from one place to another and appears and disappears on each curtain and on the wall, which represents my personal state of being pulled between histories, places, cultures, languages, and so on, in my moment to moment of decision making, negotiating and being with/in the world.

My shadow is in fact another in-between on its own. It’s a part of me that is placed between me (my physical presence) and the desert. I myself am yet another in-between in this installation as well. I, my identity, is an in-between existence that is blocking the light and therefore blocking the kind of clarity and certainty I used to find before I left home. I (my history, my culture, my language) am an obstacle to my visibility. I have become an in-between with/in the in-betweens where I struggle for clarity and light. My shadow has now also become a big part of my identity. My shadow is both me and an Other-to-myself. It’s who I have become yet it also carries all the memories of who I used to be and is marked by the places where I have lived. My shadow is my double and as such, it is never an exact replica or an exact representation of me. The double “is an imaginary figure”. It is never the same as the subject itself and “just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image, haunts the subject like his other, which makes it so that the subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 95). This is how my shadow – my double; my new in/visible identity –
equally stands as a threat to me by representing an other-to-me. And yet, by that logic, I too stand as a threat to this double, this other-to-myself – my shadow. My shadow can only exist if I place myself between the light and the image of the desert. In fact, my presence in the spaces of In/visible depends on this very state of in-betweenness. Placing myself anywhere other than the in-between, would cease the existence of my in/visible identity – my shadow. So I dance the in-between – the dance of my very being, my very existence – and I dance it in in-betweens. Whirling and twirling from one curtain to another. From one layer to another.

I am forever negotiating the different layers of my identity in in-betweens …

Figure 23: In/visible Video Installation

The desert is a metaphor – a representation of my personal struggles for belonging. A desert is often perceived and thought of as a place of isolation. It’s a place distant from the
crowd and civilization. It’s a place of vulnerability, a place where one cannot find the basic necessities on which one survives. In a desert, rules as we know them no longer apply. It’s a place where right and wrong become irrelevant and life becomes all about survival. “[In] the desert one loses one’s identity” (Rutherford, 1990a, p. 10). In the desert one’s history, community, culture, and language are inapplicable. The desert bears its own culture, its own language – the language of survival.

The wind is my metaphor for constant changing conditions and lack of stability. The rising wind is a force that constantly disturbs the balance of the dancing shadow keeping it vulnerable. The dance on the other hand creates a contrast, portraying stability, control and power. When we dance, we often have an audience. Dancing is a performance art that more often than not puts one in the spotlight on a stage, a place/space where one inevitably becomes visible. A stage is at the same time a place of confidence and vulnerability. In *In/visible*, the strength in the dance and the rhythmic rise and fall of the wind represent an ongoing battle between stability and vulnerability that always keeps the dancing shadow on the edge of falling apart.

The physical absence of the dancer in the video is my way of translating the state of invisibility in/to the spaces of *In/visible*. The shadow implies that there exists a dancer but the fact that we cannot see her physical presence reinforces the mystery that is created by the desert and the sound of the wind. A dancing shadow is how I represent visibility and invisibility in a constant negotiation with one another.

This play between opposite states (of visibility) is enhanced by the singing of the woman that echoes alongside the sound of the wind. The Persian words she is singing speak of breaking boundaries, facing obstacles, and making it through struggles, difficulties and
hard times. The words speak of conflict and contradictions: night and light, dust and vessels, desert and roads, and they speak of walking with/through disturbances together with others.

Figure 24: In/visible Video Still

In Persian culture, this way of singing without music often takes place in private spaces where one sings alone or among a small group of close acquaintances. From that perspective, the singing voice of the woman creates an intimate space. A space where one comes into terms with one’s own feelings and expresses oneself freely. However, to hear this kind of singing in an open space of a desert represents another contradiction – almost an impossible state of being. When the private is exposed in public spaces, even without a public, safety is placed next to vulnerability, and peace is placed next to fear and war. Alone in the middle of a desert, fighting for one’s life, would one sing the song of hope or the song of death?
The three layers of the video: the still image of the desert, the repetitive hand and body movements of the dancer, and the rhythmic sound of the wind, do not touch or change each other. They leave each other unaffected. The wind has no visual effect on the sand or the dancer, nor does the dancer on the desert where she is dancing. The connection between these three layers is only made through memory and recollection. All the physical and metaphorical spaces in *In/visible* connect through a play between repetition, recollection (Kierkegaard, 1983), and contradiction.

This performance/video installation portrays my feelings of isolation and vulnerability in my private battle with visibility and invisibility. A battle that is a result of my sense of unbelonging rooted in my state of foreignness, and/or Otherness. A battle both within and without, with/in the cultural, social, physical and contextual spaces of my new un/familiar place. The *In/visible*’s representation of this battle is in the moments of weakness and strength of the dance, the sound of the wind and the song. It is embedded in all the contradictory spaces that are created in-between the layers in this installation.

*In/visible* portrays me as both visible and invisible. And although I almost always seem to be present in the spaces of this installation, it is my shadow and not me that is visible. I am invisible. There are signs that I am present: My struggle is visible, my strength and weaknesses, my hopes and despair are visible but I am not there. I am invisible. And in between the layers of the present, the curtains and the wall, and the layers of my past, the desert, the song and the wind, my past-in-the-present shadow appears and disappears in constant repetition as I try to hold on to a memory and as I struggle to make that memory land within the spaces of the present.
The dance puts my shadow in the spotlight – in the visible. But the shadow belongs to a part of me that has become invisible – a part of me that often only exists in my memory. I dream as I dance. Like the whirling dervishes who find a home in the light as they dance, I too re-find, re-create and perform my home – a place to belong, as I dance and become in/visible. No matter how tired I get I cannot stop the dance. I cannot stop this battle with contradictions, this constant state of negotiation. There is no place to land in the desert. To land in the desert is to die. To stop the dance is to disappear. The only moments of peace for me have become the moments in the dance where visibility and invisibility melt together. So I yearn restlessly for that place to land and rest, yet I find myself having no choice but to
make my peace with/in my performance of the dance, the struggles of my in-between self
and by nostalgically glorifying the shadow.

My desert is without end,
My soul, my heart must rend.
The world here out-pictured,
In which picture I descend?
(Rumi, 1998b)

*In/visible* displays my presences and absences. It leaves me affected and unaffected as
my shadow (my absence) dances in the space that at the same time does and does not leave a
mark on me as a person.

The spaces of *In/visible* are equally filled with repetition in the dance movements, in
the sound of the wind and the song. For me these repetitions are moments of struggle, the
back and forth, in what sometimes seems like infinite cycles of trying to find the stability that
only seems achievable in recollection. Survival is an ultimate goal of this struggle that is only
attainable through finding some sort of ground for negotiation.

Like most of my artwork, *In/visible* reflects my personal experiences as a Persian
woman artist/researcher/teacher who immigrated to Canada. The feeling of being placed in-
between two often contradictory cultures and therefore displaced in each one of these two
cultures I supposedly belong to has deeply affected my life and consequently my art. Home, as a source of my struggle, is always (explicitly and implicitly) the object of my search in my photographs, performances and videos.

The desert is the un/homely space where I find myself exposed, unsettled, uncomfortable, and vulnerable to change. In the desert, there are no walls, there is no privacy. This is where I find myself looking for my home – for a place to belong to, as I dance from curtain to curtain, trying to fall in place within each layer and in-between the spaces of the curtains and the wall. I struggle to fit; I bend and turn to the curves of the sand and the sound of the wind. Yet there is never a single connection between the space and my shadow. My efforts remain hopeless, and eventually lose colour on the last layer of the installation where I face the wall. There, my struggle is only visible through the two fragmented words, dis/placed, and in/visible that are cut through the curtains, and mark the wall as I dance.

The belonging of the dance within the space of In/visible is nothing but an illusion. Nothing but an appearance. The world of the dance will always remain but a layer in-between the world of the desert and the world of the wind. A layer in suspense. A layer that never lands. And so “trapped in an impossible in-between” (Lavie, 1996, p. 15), I, my-past-in-the-present shadow, run between curtains, from here to there, from there to here… .An endless, hopeless running, forever in vain.

I’m drenched
in the flood
which has yet to come
I’m tied up
in the prison
which has yet to exist

Not having played
the game of chess
I’m already the checkmate

Not having tasted
a single cup of your wine
I’m already drunk

Not having entered
the battlefield
I’m already wounded and slain

I no longer
know the difference
between image and reality

Like the shadow
I am
And
I am not.
(Rumi, 1998a)

I am unhomed. I ease my pain in the memory of the dance from the place where I once fell in place. The shadow of the dance is my recollection of home, of the strength I used to find in the comfort of that home. It is not an existence. It’s a memory of an existence. I can only settle in recollection. That’s where I find my strength, my peace, my constant. My world
of peace is a world of memories. In loss for that which no longer exists, I settle for a performance of a dance that walks me through the pages of my memory and takes me back to the stage of my life where I felt the sense of belonging I have now lost indefinitely. That same unreachable stage I used to define as home.

Home, in the spaces of *In/visible*, is my momentary settled states on the layered surfaces of the curtains. It is my invisible performance in the in-between spaces of *In/visible*. It is the Othered image of the desert that is unrepresentative, yet still a reminding picture of where and what home is by pointing out where and what it isn’t and didn’t used to be. And home is also in the rhythmic familiar dance of the shadow. A reminder and a performance of a tradition. A representation of a history. It is a performance in-between all the fragments of what home has and has not meant from one time to another. And then again, home is also the very thing that is in the process of becoming what it is not and what it never was, through my struggles and performances in-between all the spaces of *In/visible*. Or maybe there will be nothing to come after my struggles. Maybe home is now just that: pain that can only be transformed into other forms of the same kind of pain.

The curtains in the space of *In/visible*, equally represent Other aspects of my experience of being un/homed. *In/visible* also represents my feelings and experiences of being Othered and/or exoticized. The desert is a popular image of the Middle Eastern countries in the Western media. As someone who now lives in the West, this is the image I am often reminded of, by my new acquaintances. My home was never (in) a desert. In fact I have yet to see a desert in my life! In the new space I now struggle to belong, I find myself unhomed even in the image that people around me portray of the place I once called home. And the frequent repetition of this new image which I constantly oppose has added to my
struggle of trying to bring to life the image that I hold on to in my memory. Rutherford (1990a) explains that “[t]o the Western European eye, the desert seems an uncanny space, its borders making out a margin between the habitable and the inhabitable. Yet despite its strangeness it holds a seductive fascination” (p. 9). This is the image that pushes me to the other side of the border – the inhabitable side. It’s the image that pushes me to the margin as an ‘inferior Other’. It is also the image that makes me fascinating and desirable. The Oriental dance itself, of course enhances this image of the desirable exotic Other, making me the victim of “gaze” (Bruner, 1996, p. 159).

Although I have been thinking of and formulating my personal experiences with/of displacement as I have been living this performance/video installation, I have also always been conscious of the experience of the displaced viewer when she finds herself with/in the spaces of In/visible. The word dis/placed is both physically and metaphorically a big part of this installation and therefore refers to both my own feelings of displacement as an emigrant/immigrant woman/artist/student/researcher and the viewers’ experiences with/in the spaces of this video installation. There are many different perspectives any viewer can have walking through the space(s) of In/visible, depending on their personal experiences, on how much they knows about Iran and Persian culture and also how much they can relate this video installation to the Persian culture. Based on their perspective (history, culture, language, identity, etc.) even they can feel displaced in-between all the layers of this video installation. And through their own experience with dis/placement they can find themselves more or less visible in relation to In/visible through their resonances with my/our experiences. They temporarily become a reflection of myself and my experiences with invisibility and Otherness. Until they resume their position of power again and re-interpret
their experiences in the spaces of *In/visible* from the position of ‘superiority’. Re-Othering my experiences of Otherness, or even exoticizing me, my story, and my artwork.

**Exoticized Other**

International mass tourism has precipitated one of the largest population movements in the world, in which literally millions of temporary travelers from the industrialized nations seek in the margins of the Third World a figment of their imagination – the exotic, the erotic, the primitive, the happy savage. (Bruner, 1996, p. 157)

While on one end of the spectrum, we, the immigrants from the Orient, are often pushed to the margins as ‘inferior Others’, on the other end, we are exoticized as the object of Occidental gaze (Bruner, 1996, p. 159). We are desired and sought after, especially in our own hometowns. They (people from the West) pay to capture us in our place (our hometowns), because in our place, we are no longer a “threat” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 269; Said, 1978, p. 59; Uchida, 1998, p. 170), “a sight of disgust” or “pollution” (Bruner, 1996, p. 160) to them and their culture. In our place, we are “happy primitive” (p. 158) Others, “the so-called pure culture” (p. 159), the “primal fantasy” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 265), the desired “uncontaminated precolonial past” (Bruner, 1996, p. 159), and “the imaginary alternative” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 265) and as such we are “romantic, beautiful and exotic” (Bruner, 1996, p. 160). For the Western world, “the Orientalist stereotype is dominant in the Third World space...[and they] go there to collect souvenirs and photographs to show their friends at home. They go for adventure, for experience, for status, for education, to explore and collect the image of the exotic Other” (Bruner, 1996, pp. 159-161). Otherness is a site for mystery and excitement. It’s a site for difference and as such it can offer the West different
possibilities. It is therefore “sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer” (Rutherford, 1990a, p. 11).

To the Western world, we have become desired objects. We have become “[m]useum pieces, curious, antique, shells under glass. A travelling circus, a floating zoo” (Drichel, 2008, p. 597). We are treasures to discover, to capture and document in photographs. The Western elite pay to go on a sojourn among the “exotic savages of the mysterious East” (Bruner, 1996, p. 172). They pay to “travel to the margins of the Third World, to the end of empire, to the borderzone between their civilized selves and the exotic Other, to explore a fantasyland of the Western imaginary” (p. 161). They embark on a hunt, to look for pieces of our culture, pieces of us, to purchase and bring back as their trophy (Lalvani, 1995) – their “lucky penny”.

Difference is re-located and exploited as they bring back with themselves “a disembodied, decontextualized, sanitized hypothetical Other, one they can possess and control through the stories they tell about how the souvenirs were acquired and the photographs taken” (Bruner, 1996, p. 161). They place this post-colonial subject – the exotic – in a new Occidental framework, and in a new narrative frame, and then within that narrative frame, they fix it in their stories and reduce it to an already discovered and defined exotic object of desire. They exert their power and colonial legacy through narrative mastery by which they fix the meanings, encapsulate, and control the Other in space and time for good.

The women of the Orient have specifically been the target of this form of objectification through exoticism ever since the 19th century Romanticism (Lalvani, 1995). The image of the exotic Oriental Women as being sexually subservient yet at the same time
devious, has long been a source of abstruseness, curiosity, suspicion and ambivalence to white (Christian) men (Uchida, 1998). Sexually desired and sought after as mysterious different Others, the “Oriental women” (Said, 1978, p. 6), have become the object of Western narcissistic gaze – eroticism (Bhabha, 1983, p. 29). To give a few examples: the image of a harem as a space of patriarchal authority and sexual domination has been a source of irrefutable Western desire for centuries. In the story *Gerad de Nerval*, Nerval’s description of his mistress shows this perverse desire for sexual domination: “her multi colored dress, made her seem like a splendid bird in a cage” (as cited in Lalvani, 1995, p. 270). An exotic woman in a cage – an object for the Western consuming gaze. Can there be a clearer image of the Western need to possess and dominate this (sexually) desired Other? The Oriental traditional ceremonies, rituals and dances have also been noted as a source of Western (sexual) desire (Bruner, 1996). The veiled Muslim women have not been exempted. They have been looked at as “concealing a rich and fecund female sexuality” (Said, 1978, p. 182). This imaginary construction of the Other’s sexuality which as Lalvani (1995) explains, “fetishes the Other as a sexual phantasm”, seems central to a Western politics of desire. It transforms and fulfills their desire to experience and colonize the Orient by “their physical and psychological possession of the exotic oriental woman” (Uchida, 1998, p. 171).

In her discussion of “getting a bit of the Other”, Bell Hooks (1992) argues that the seduction by and the sexual possession of the Other is:

A way to confront the Other, as well as a way to make themselves over, to leave behind white “innocence” and enter the world of “experience” . . . [It] was considered a ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference that would transform, an acceptable rite of passage. The direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter. (pp. 23-24)
However, no matter what the original objective, this form of objectification and sexual possession commodifies women. It dehumanizes them and turns them to a means to an end: to serve the white Western man and help them fulfill their desire to colonize the Orient.

Big advertising companies and marketers have taken advantage of this Western (sexual) fascination with the “exotic Other” and have been using it as a means to “create a libidinal economy of desire around commodity” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 274). “[C]apital has fallen in love with difference... [because] cultural difference sells” (Rutherford, 1990a, p. 11). Rutherford goes on to explain that “[i]n the commodification of language and culture, objects and images are torn free of their original referents are their meanings become a spectacle open to almost infinite translation” (Rutherford, 1990a, p. 11). Therefore, “[t]he Other, its threat of radical difference muted, arrives within the discourse of consumption eroticized as the exotic Other. And the fetishization of this exoticism becomes in turn the basis for establishing a commodity fetish” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 274). The market re-deploys this image of the Orient as a mysterious and forbidden sensuality, “so that what is libidinal threat is flirted with at some remove from its source and reassigned as exotic sign to be borne by Euro-American women in their presentation of a commodified sexuality. Difference can now be symbolized and exploited as sensuality and exchange value” (p. 282). This consumption of different other cultures transforms what is supposed to be a human relationship into the relationship of objects and things. It turns it into a quest for possession. And that thing/object to be owned, exchanged and possessed is often (the Oriental) women. In this sense, the exotic from a Western perspective is always associated with women of the Orient who Western men desire to possess. Uchida (1998) argues that “[t]his dimension of difference represented in terms of gender, with the Orient being associated with female and the West with male, is in
essence the dimension of power” (p. 161). This is how this story of exoticization is allegorical to gender relations whereby “the Orient, the geographically distant, foreign land of devious cultural practices is discovered, described, and dominated, just as the woman, different, deviant, and inferior must be dominated and defined by the man” (p. 161). Said (1978) gives an example of a widely influential model of the dominated Oriental woman created by Flaubert, based on his encounter with Kuchuk Hanem, an Egyptian courtesan:

[S]he never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, of history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically Oriental”. (p. 6)

This example stands for the pattern of the power relationship between West and East and how this relationship of domination is mirrored in the Western male fascination with the Eastern Oriental woman. The exoticized images of the non-Western, Oriental women as objects that “cannot represent themselves, [and therefore] must be represented” (Said, 1978, p. 21), also portrays them as fit only for serving Western men. The woman from the Orient is represented as foreign, of a less civilized culture, and a less developed nation. She is represented as “less than the Western White Woman” (Uchida, 1998, p. 172) and therefore less equal to men. She is represented as less liberated, submissive and subservient and therefore only good at/for doing domestic work. This image, Uchida (1998) argues, is both sexist and racist and serves to justify discriminative views and actions against non-Western women. It is used “to exclude them from power and privilege, and to deny their status as ‘subject’”30 (p. 170). It is used as a means to oppression and exploitation.

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30 Uchida (1998) explains that whereas subjects have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, and name their history, those treated as objects have their reality defined by
Othering through exoticization also takes place within the art world and in/through different art forms. This happens when artists (re)create and/or reproduce stereotyped (visual and/or textual) narratives of other (or their own) cultures. Those representations are then purchased and put on a display in the private homes of the West as a primitive, exotic, different object they can now own and show off to the world as their possession. Additionally, those stereotyped representations that are reproduced as art form are also promoted by popular media over and over, printing a permanent, arrested, fixed and unrealistic image of other cultures in the minds of the West. The popular “media’s portrayal and representation of ethnic groups and racial difference works as a powerful means to create something ‘real’ for the white [Western] society” (Uchida, 1998, p. 167), and it helps perpetuate the stereotypes of the Oriental and exotic. Especially in cases where the artist comes from the same culture she is representing in an art form, that representation is oftentimes superficially interpreted, consumed and repeatedly reproduced in the West and the Western media as the one ‘true’ image of that culture. This is in fact how stereotypes play a major role in producing, maintaining and representing an image of non-Western (oriental) cultures as “primitive”, “savage”, and “exotic” (Bruner, 1996, p. 157-158). Stereotype, Bhabha (1994) explains, is “an arrested fixated form of representation” (p. 75). The term stereotype itself “was in the first place taken metaphorically from the trade vocabulary of printing and typography, where it referred to text cast into rigid form for the purpose of repetitive use ... . [R]igid forms – (stereo)types – are designed for producing infinite repetitions with minimal variations” (Drichel, 2008, p. 600). It is through this repetition with minimal variations that other, non-Western cultures become fixed and encapsulated in their others, their history named only in ways that define their relationship to those who are subjects (p. 170).
difference, as exotic Others. Tajfel and Forgas (as cited in Uchida, 1998) identify three conditions under which stereotypes tend to be created and widely diffused: “(i) a search for the understanding of complex, and usually distressful, large-scale-social events; (ii) justification of actions, committed or planned, against outgroups; (iii) a positive differentiation of the ingroup from selected outgroups at a time when such differentiation is perceived as becoming insecure and eroded” (p. 162). The creation and diffusion of the stereotype of the Oriental woman as an exotic Other in the West has also occurred under the above conditions. And whether intentionally or unintentionally, both Western and non-Western artists have helped sustain these stereotypes by reproducing images of the exotic Other.

As a Persian woman artist, I have long been aware of the exoticization of stereotyped images of the Orient and Oriental art in the Western societies. Within the art world, the visual interpretations of the Orient are welcomed, appreciated, desired, and of course exoticized in the Western world. This is to the extent that the non-Western artists who recreate the popular exotic representation of their own culture are mostly the only non-Western artists that are widely promoted in the West and Western media. In this way, whether it is the intention of the artists to reproduce the “the imaginary alternative” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 265), “dream image” (p. 281), “happy primitive” (Bruner, 1996, p. 158), exoticized or even threatening images of their homelands and themselves or not, they help maintain the “‘look’ from – so to speak – the place of the Other, [which] fixes us, not only in its violence, hostility and aggression, but in the ambivalence of its desire” (Hall, 1990, p. 223). This is why exhibiting art for me is now much more complex than just sharing my work and provoking conversations. I now find it my responsibility to be, at the very least, conscious of who is
viewing my art and how my artwork can be perceived or used, and how it can become an instrument to the reification of stereotyped images of my home and my culture. I therefore, find it my responsibility to at least be aware of how my art can possibly be misunderstood and how I can unknowingly end up promoting the very thing I am criticizing. I feel responsible to do what I can to disrupt stereotypes of ‘the exotic’ and ‘Oriental woman’ (Bruner, 1996; Lalvani, 1995; Said, 1978; Uchida 1998), rather than nourishing them because no matter how much I would like my art to be seen, appreciated and understood, I do not wish to promote a fixed exotic image of my home, my culture, my language and myself.

There is however, not much one can do to prevent all the ways in which the Orient and specifically the women of the Orient can be exoticized in the West. In addition to the exoticization of the women in the Orient, and/or the imported and exhibited Oriental art and objects in the West, as a result of massive immigration from Eastern countries to the West, as well as the commodification of ‘the exotic’, what’s Oriental geographically also exists in the West and the image of the exotic is evoked not only by Oriental surroundings, artifacts, photographs, etc. but also by a person’s race (appearance, colour, accent, body language, etc.). In the West, we, as women of the Orient or women of colour, also often find ourselves the object of the Western gaze and this condition makes “the look from the place of the Other” (Hall, 1990, p. 223) an always suspicious look.

I, personally find that my awareness of the Western objectification of non-Western women plays an important role in how I conduct myself in my daily life. It affects my choice of clothing, my choice of friends, my choice of places, and it also affects when and where I feel comfortable to voice my thoughts and ideas. In fact, this issue has significantly contributed to my in/visibility by creating an unsafe space of interaction and negotiation. It
has created a fear in me of a forever present possibility of being objectified, to say the least, as a primitive or exotic Other. Consequently, I am made to think and re-think my words and myself within both my historical context and the Western context before speaking them, so that I do not end up cultivating the objectification of myself and my culture. As a result of that, oftentimes, I also find that I need to resort to censoring and sometimes even silencing myself.

Additionally, as a result of all the conversations surrounding diversity, being different – being an Other – is in fashion these days. More often than ever, big organizations are after hiring people of different cultures, gender, sexuality, etc., and this is merely to present the public image of those organizations as ones that appreciate diversity. We are wanted, not because of our knowledge and capabilities but because we are Others. And once we are accepted as a part of their organizations, we are then expected to conform to their ways of being and conducting. We are expected to assimilate and strip ourselves of our Otherness and become one of them. A different face, different accent with a difference history from them who nonetheless thinks things the same way and does not contradict their codes of conduct. Because of course a different Other is a threat and has to be shorn of its threat – its actual difference.

This is where I find myself caught in-between the Western desire and phobia, narcissism and aggression. Whether I am appreciated or rejected I can’t help but be suspicious of the reasons behind that appreciation or rejection because I not only think and function with reference to a different historical and cultural context but also embody that difference in the way I look, in my face, in my colour, in my language, and so on, and I always fear that it is only a racialized fragment of who I am that is being appreciated, desired.
or rejected. As a result of this realization, I am always conscious of all the different ways I can be Othered. I constantly wonder if I am desired and/or rejected for the way I look, the way I speak and everything I embody, or if I am considered a threat for where I come from, and how I think and how I am in the world as a result of that. I am left to question whether I am ever treated in spite of my race and my culture, and as a whole person. And consequently, when I speak, write, perform and/or create art in the Western world, I cannot help but be conscious of the fact that my words and artworks can also be received/perceived as a threat or that they can objectify me and my culture as an exoticized Other. Therefore unavoidably, as I share my culture and my language in my photographs and my video installation, and as I expose myself in an Oriental dance of In/visible, I also can’t help but wonder how much I am contributing to the objectification of myself as “an exotic” or “the Other woman” (Lalvani, 1995, p. 268-269). Consequently, not only I bear the pain of having been Othered and exoticized, but I also bear the guilt and the pain of having possibly re-Othered myself and through that process also accentuated an essentialized description of my identity as a desired exotic Other that can now be possessed and fixated within the context of my photographs, performances, writings and video installation.

However, I believe that “this risk of re-Othering has to be taken” because as Hannah Arendt once said: “if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man” (As cited in Drichel, 2008, p. 594). The risk of re-Othering has to be taken because in order to reposition oneself from the place of a victim into the place of an active member of the society, one needs to defend oneself and one’s position, history, culture and identity when one is attacked. The risk of re-Othering has to be taken because in order to enact agency one needs to voice
one’s experiences of suffering and pain. And also the risk of re-Othering has to be taken in order to avoid the bigger risk of causing additional pain by dismissing, censoring and therefore also displacing the exclusionary practices and oppressive experiences of displacement.

**Displaced Displacement**

Displacement, unhomedness, invisibility and Otherness, for me, are not simply words to be defined and described, visualized, portrayed and talked about. They are feelings I live every day, images I see or struggle to see, voices I hear or strive to hear from near and far, notes I put together and play, even often silences that surround me. I can only try to put the feelings into words and/or images or movements.

Most academic research leaves the focus on ‘looking at the bright side’ and how to move on from this state of confusion (Hron, 2009). I find that there can be no ‘real’ moving on. Moving on in the sense of only focusing on the bright side would be like pushing aside the sense of loss and absence, and repressing the pain. It would be, displacing displacement! And the result can only be more frustration – more pain.

I see an ‘opening’ here that has emerged throughout this living self inquiry which allows me to look simultaneously forward and backward through the visual and textual patterns of my woven experiences. This backward/forward vision has allowed me to realize

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31 As in Freud’s explanation on how everyday ideas get displaced in or pushed aside in our dreams.

32 Both in the common sense of the word and as an a/r/tographic rendering of “opening” (Springgay et al. (p. 907).

33 Although one might argue that there is in fact no looking backward. That in looking back we are always already looking forward.
that maybe as in dealing with any kind of emotional crisis, the way to avoid additional suffering is by staying with the struggle, living the pain and re-membering it within the context of our present lives through time in order to make it more manageable rather than ignoring it and shutting it out. Maybe by allowing it to take its course rather than denying ourselves of (Or allowing others to deny us of) feeling the intensity of its emotional effects, it will also begin the process of becoming something else – something it is not. And maybe also that will be an important path to learning and growing. Maybe this is the way to finally be able to zoom back and survive amidst the ongoing struggles of displacement. Because what I have also realized is that there can be no moving on without moving through. What I suggest is therefore to embrace this uncertain state, to embrace the pain, to live it, to wear and expose it, to voice and fight the conditions that create it and to be with it. With the discomfort and unsettledness, frustration and confusion. Even ‘give it wings’, as we say in Persian. Perhaps it can eventually help us fly. Perhaps we can then fly high.

For about a decade I’ve been struggling to find my place, my language, my home and my identity in this new place (country, culture, language, voice) through my art and my writings. But for years I have found myself alone in my struggle, isolated and invisible within the walls that others and myself helped create around me. I’ve been suffering not only the pain I endure for having to constantly recreate a context – a home where I will be able to make sense of myself and myself in the world, but also the pain of having to repress the pain and pretend to be doing well and fine. As a result, I have been suffering the additional pain of having to turn my pain invisible – The additional pain of my displaced displacement.

Having emerged as a major component of my experiences as a displaced Persian Canadian artist, researcher and teacher in-between homes, cultures, languages, identities, etc.,
pain\textsuperscript{34} has now unavoidably become the object of my artistic and/or scholarly preoccupation. It has created a need in me to explore and express and converse the suffering that has for so long been dismissed and displaced. It has created the need in me to expose this pain in the ambiguous spaces of in-between and to wait and listen to the sound of its expression reverberate and take on a life of its own.

This investigation of pain, however, is not only a personal quest. The painful experiences of displacement is what I share\textsuperscript{35} with many immigrants. And as an immigrant but also an artist, a researcher, and a teacher living in a century marked by the experience of displacement (Bammer, 1994) I find it my responsibility to research and voice the pain of displacement that I deal with on a daily basis, and to investigate the conditions surrounding the verbal and visual ways of sharing of one’s experiences of pain. And of course because the object of my investigation is pain, and in sharing suffering there is always a risk involved in possibly also causing suffering, I find it equally important to study the effects and the ethics of voicing and sharing one’s pain.

It is therefore from a displaced space of in-between that I will now continue writing, creating and performing through visual and textual means in order to acknowledge, voice and share the struggles, the difficulties and the pain that I, as an immigrant, face in my efforts to find a place in which to belong.

\textsuperscript{34} Although throughout this dissertation I tend to talk more about emotional pain, I do not see a big distinction between the feelings and the experiences of physical and emotional pain. Morris (1991) explains that our widespread cultural assumption that body and mind produce two utterly different kinds of pain is a myth. “Different sources do not necessarily imply different pains” (p. 9) and the division we make between physical and emotional pain is an ‘artificial’ one.

\textsuperscript{35} Both meanings of the word share are intended here: Sharing as in having in common and also as in sharing different parts (divisions) of the same experience.
On November 15, 2005 Marina Abramovic, a Serbian performance artist, performed a piece called *The Lips of Thomas* in Guggenheim museum in Manhattan. The performance started in the morning as she sat on a round platform and cut the first line of a five-pointed star drawn on her stomach using a razor blade. When the first cut was complete she slipped her feet into a pair of boots waiting nearby, put on a military cap and stood there on the platform crying as the audience listened to a Russian folk song. She then lay down on blocks of ice arranged in the shape of a cross, her body shaking; then knelt on the floor and whipped herself; finally sat at the table and slowly ate a spoonful of honey and took a sip of red wine. She repeated these actions, varying the sequence, until midnight as a metronome ticked away.

In 1975, she had performed this piece in a different sequence: she ate a kilo of honey, drank a liter of red wine, broke the wine glass with her right hand, cut the star on her stomach, whipped herself until she no longer felt pain, and then lay down on the ice. During that performance, the spectators in a gallery ended the piece by removing the ice after 30 minutes. In her earlier Rhythm series in the early 70s the audience also had to intervene and rescue her on several occasions.  

Looking back now at my experience of watching and/or witnessing Abramovic’s performance piece which so much revolved around the expression and sharing of pain, I remember how deeply I was emotionally affected, and equally confused about how I was supposed to feel and/or (re)act in the presence of so much suffering. And even though as an audience/viewer in a museum space I was aware of the fact that what I was witnessing was merely a performance of pain, I found myself struggling with having to draw a line between the actual experience of pain and a representation of it. 

Having my experience as an audience/viewer of Abramovic’s performance in mind, I take on this visual, textual and contextual exploration of the pain of in-between, mindful of the complications and the risks involved both to myself and others with whom I share the process/product of this study. I will therefore continue by exploring not only the meanings and translations of pain and how they are shaped both by the space and context where it is

36 Abramovic’s other earlier performances include: Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful (in which she brushed her hair simultaneously with a metal brush and metal comb until her face and hair were damaged); Role Exchange (she exchanged places for four hours with an Amsterdam prostitute); Freeing the Voice (she lay on the floor with her head tilted back and screamed for three hours, stopping when she lost her voice); Freeing the Memory (she free-associated until no more words came to her); and Freeing the Body (she wrapped her head in a black scarf and moved to a drumbeat for eight hours, stopping when she collapsed).
experienced and the space and context where it is shared, but also about the ethics of sharing pain and the responsibility that comes with that, towards oneself and towards others.

Performances such as Abramovic’s *The Lips of Thomas*, which address pain in-between cultures raise and highlight many ethical issues and concerns on many levels and from many different perspectives. It is important for me to tend to those issues in order to at least be wary (and raise awareness) of the complexity of any (textual and/or visual) exploration of pain. It also seems important for this a/r/tographic research to tend to those issues through an artistic lens and within an artistic framework.

The following questions of ethics seem prominent to start with:

Is it ethical to allow an artist to cause herself pain through an art performance to the extent of endangering her own life? Is it ethical to endure pain in order to share pain? Is it ethical to objectify the experience of pain by performing it within an aesthetic framework?

Placing real physical pain within an aesthetic framework also throws the spectator’s ethical relation to the spectacle into question:

What would be considered an ethical response from the audience? Would it be ethical for the audience to walk out on a day-long performance on pain? Would it be ethical to expect them to stay through the whole performance, standing for hours or sitting, unsupported, on the floor witnessing another person’s suffering? What would be the ethically correct response from the audience when they witness the artist’s act of wounding (harming) herself? Would it be ethical not to re/act (or not) to the artist’s act of putting herself in danger?
And then, is it ethical for the artist to expose an audience to such experiences of pain?

But a reverse set of questions would be equally valid and important:

Would it be ethical to prevent an artist from expressing herself? Would it be ethical for an artist like Abramovic not to be allowed to solicit her audience’s emotional engagement by offering up her pain?

Other issues rise when performances of pain get caught in cross-cultural contexts. There are ethical concerns when political, religious, social and cultural differences and contradictions can put the artists in compromising positions. There are equally troubling ethical issues when one (i.e. an artist and/or a researcher) is representing the pain of a culture in a different culture.

How then are we supposed to decide what would or would not be ethical when it comes to voicing, sharing, expressing, and receiving an other in pain? What is it that determines ethics of pain? And what does all this imply in research that will now have as its core the concept of pain?

It is with these questions and concerns in mind that I continue this journey by looking closely into the relationship between displacement, pain and ethics. What follows is therefore a textual and visual exploration of my experiences of pain of displacement as well as a sharing of my dilemma concerning ethics of pain (and pain of ethics) that is rooted in my own struggle to re/define and voice my pain in-between cultures.
Pain: The Meaning, the Experience

Although this might seem far from the common understanding of pain, the word itself is derived from the French word, peine or the Latin word poena which means punishment and penalty, especially to do with a crime. And it was only in Late Latin language (c.300-c.70) that the word came to also mean torment, hardship and suffering (Harper, 2001-2010).

In Christian medieval ages pain was seen as a way to get close to God. Relating it to crucifixion of Christ, the Christians of the medieval era looked at pain as a process that would lead to transformation and purification. That is, however, not the only way Christianity has been justifying and/or celebrating the experiences of pain. Pain and disease are also understood within the context of trial and punishment in Christianity. Plato, however, viewed pain slightly differently. He recognized the perception of pain as what would lead to self-recognition and the elevation and education of the soul. He identified pain as something to fight against and not endure. Other philosophers like Junger look into the meaning of pain in relation to human existence. Junger writes: “Describe to me your relation to pain, and I will tell you who you are” (as cited in Grabher, 2008, p. 67). Within this context, one’s perception and understanding of pain (of oneself and/or the other) is shaped by one’s perception and understanding of oneself in the world.

Levinas (1988) looks at pain relationally. In his ethics, every time a “moan, or cry, or groan or a sigh” happens there is the original call for aid, for curative help, for help from the other ego whose alterity, whose exteriority promises a salvation” (p. 158). For Levinas, pain37 “in its own phenomenality, is intrinsically, useless” unless it becomes an “inspiration”

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37 Here I would like to note that in the translation of Levinas’s writings (as well as in some other writings) the words suffering and pain have been used interchangeably and I have done and will do the same, throughout this dissertation.
for “compassion” and loses its “uselessness” (pp. 158, 164). For him then, the only value (or use) for pain is in the compassion that one shows when receiving the other who is suffering. However, this focus on the relationality of pain dates back to well before the 20th century. The ancient Greeks and Romans had already recognized the social aspect and meaning of pain when they interpreted it as a plea for help and support and they had differentiated between physical and emotional pain.

In Modern times, however, especially in medical science, there has been more attention given to the relieving and annihilation of pain rather than understanding it (Grabher, 2008). The nature or meaning of physical pain has been diversely understood by religious or secular traditions from antiquity to modern times. Art critics, anthropologists, as well as cultural and social theorists, argue that “pain – its definition, evocation and responses to it – is culturally shaped, often framed by religion, gender or class” (Annus, 2008, p. 109). Nonetheless, regardless of how and within what context it is defined or even where that definition is rooted, pain is a sensation all human beings experience in different contexts and scopes, throughout their lives. As Levinas (1988) explains: “suffering is a given in consciousness, a certain ‘psychological content’, like the lived experience of colour, of sound, of contact, or like any sensation” (p. 156). However, although all human beings experience pain in the course of their lives, our understanding and experience of pain is different from one another and is shaped by our history, culture, religion, etc. (Annus, 2008; Morris, 1991). Studies have shown that cultural differences and the (openness to the) expression of pain are also closely tied. A study done by an anthropologist, Mark Zborowski, in 1969, shows that traditionally, Americans tend to avoid talking about pain, ignore it and even minimize the significance of their painful experiences if forced or provoked to admit to it. They tend to look at it as a very
personal and private experience. And they often consider the social expression of pain undesirable and inappropriate. While other cultures, (i.e., Italians and Jews) tended to be more open and expressive of their experience of pain (Annus, 2008, p. 111).

However, in spite of these cultural differences in the understanding and sharing of pain, most often the actual experience of pain, Bakan (1968) explains, is “utterly lonely, without words of its own to describe it” (as cited in Grabher, 2008, p. 68). It “leads its existence in secret, in silence” (Morris, 1991, p. 3). Communicating one’s experience of pain is not easy because of this very fact that the experience of pain (like other human experiences) is “highly personal and subjective…. Something whose presence and extent can only be known to the sufferer” (Pascual & Gonzalez, 2008, p. 73).

Throughout history, it has been common to hide one’s pain (especially emotional pain) out of fear, shame or as a sign for personal strength. Abuse victims are known to keep their suffering to themselves out of fear and/or shame. Boys, in many cultures, have been commonly encouraged not to show tears (Coon & Mitterer, 2006, p. 433; Frosh et al., 2002). And in some religions (i.e., Christianity, Islam) suffering in silence is even considered a virtue 38.

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38 Although many believe that the suppression/denial of pain is rooted in religion, according to Dormandy (2006), the roots of this belief are not confined to religion and in fact, reach back to Antiquity. The Stoic school of philosophy, founded by Zeno in the third century BC, was a non-religious creed that offered a prescription for a “noble and happy life” and within that philosophy they maintained that pain (as well as certain other emotions and passions) is not important and has to be suppressed. Stoicisms later became one of the most popular philosophies on the Roman Empire offering a guide to happiness in the world. The best kind of education in Europe after the Roman Empire became linked to Latin literature and Latin literature of the imperial period was permeated with Stoic ideas. This is therefore how for centuries, “well-educated Europeans […] have absorbed the Stoic prescription for a noble and happy life without realizing it” (Dormandy, 2006, p. 44), thus suppressing, denying and ignoring pain.
There are so many reasons why the one in pain finds herself alone in her suffering. Oftentimes, cultural norms, gender roles, social attitudes, religious beliefs, power struggles and politics have a lot to do with isolating the person in pain (Annus, 2008; Hron, 2009; Morris, 1991). But this loneliness in the experience of pain is also enhanced as a result of the “unsharability [of pain] through its resistance to language” (Grabher, 2008, p. 73). Physical pain oftentimes has no referential content for the person experiencing it. It is often not of or for anything. And so it “resists objectification in language” (Grabher, 2008, p. 74). The presence and the extent of pain (be it emotional or physical) is difficult to express through any form of language, even when/if one can manage to cross the cultural, religious, political and gender related boundaries that make the expression of pain problematic (to say the least). It is therefore only the person in pain who cannot “doubt the actuality of his or her pain. […] The onlooker can only infer it, perhaps doubt it, perhaps believe it” (Hron, 2009, p. 37).

Expressing pain, though not impossible, is neither easy nor transparent. Language can never fully capture the original feeling and experience of pain. “Pain can never be ‘known’, it can merely be ‘interpreted’”39 (Hron, 2009, p. 38). This difficulty in expressing one’s feeling of pain and being understood is often another reason that leaves the sufferer in isolation.

In our modern world, this isolation in suffering plays out on an additional other level since “emotional distance has become a moral imperative, suffering an object of aesthetic appreciation, and empathy passive voyeurism” (Pascual et al., 2008, p. 4). This creates an un-empathetic environment that makes it uninviting to (make the effort to) share one’s suffering with others. Pain is therefore also lonely because the one in pain is not openly received.

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39 And this interpretation, as Hron (2009) also explains, cannot and does not presume transparency. However interpretation does counter inexpressibility.
Pain, Relationality and Ethics

Although pain is a private matter and it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a referential (verbal or non-verbal) language to convey the accuracy of the experience and the scope of one’s experience of pain, we, human beings, are social beings and therefore long for (in Grabher’s 2008 words) a “togetherness” (p. 72), or in Levinas’s (1985) words a “being with” (p. 58). Togetherness or being with that comes to being, through human interactions and sharing of one’s experiences in life. And oftentimes, it is through the moments of caring, sympathizing and sharing emotional pain (as well as joy) that Levinas (1988) refers to as moments of “love” and “compassion” (p. 164) that this sense of togetherness and being with becomes strengthened.

This need for being with often surpasses the need for (linguistic) accuracy for expressing and understanding pain. When it comes to pain, what takes priority is “communicating the state of being as a whole human being in pain, suffering, decaying and dying, finds himself – or herself in” (Grabher, 2008, p. 74). It is the act of sharing that has significance, as the one in pain opens up a possibility for healing through voicing her suffering and the other (the listener) takes part in a caring, compassionate act of sympathy. Together they make new meanings and understandings as “compassion leads to […] insight into the deeper truth of human existence” (as cited in Grabher, 2008, p. 79). Because compassion, as Levinas (1988) explains, “is a non-useless suffering (or love) which is no longer suffering ‘for nothing’ \(^{40}\), and which straight away has a meaning” (p. 164). A

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\(^{40}\) Levinas (1988) believed that “suffering in its own phenomenality, intrinsically, is useless, ‘for nothing’” (p. 158). Pain remains undiluted and isolates itself in consciousness or absorbs the rest of consciousness. There should be no justification for the other’s suffering, for “the justification of the neighbour’s pain is certainly the source of all immorality” (p. 163).
meaning, an insight, a togetherness that is co-created between the one voicing the experience of suffering pain, and the one receiving the other who is in pain. And thus “the suffering of the sufferer […] opens upon suffering the ethical perspective of the inter-human” (Levinas, 1988, p. 159). The ethical perspective that lies in the non-difference of one to another, in the recourse that people have to one another for help, and in the responsibility of one for another without concern for reciprocity. “It is this attention to the other which, across the cruelties of our century- despite these cruelties, because of these cruelties – can be affirmed as the very bond of human subjectivity” (Levinas, 2008, p. 159).

Levinas calls for this bond of human subjectivity or the “responsibility for the other” (Levinas, 1988, p. 165): “There is present… an exigency to attend to suffering, injustice and violence”. And so Levinas’s account of the ethical becomes a “labour born not only of philosophical interest, but human necessity” (Todd, 2003, p. 2). And attending to this human necessity, the understanding, voicing and sharing, and receiving the one suffering, is what I would call (putting Levinas and Grabher’s words together): a being together, with pain. A state of being that is in every way an ethical concern.

**Pain and Relocation**

Being together, with pain (as defined above), is of course always embedded within the context of culture, religion, politics and any system of (shared) experiences and/or beliefs. Taking into account that our culture, religion and history shape our construction (perception, understanding and experience) of pain (Annus, 2008; Hron, 2009; Morris, 1991), a key concern regarding (experiencing, voicing, sharing, performing and researching) pain, in the present day context, would be the effect that relocation or immigration has on the actual
experience of pain. What happens to one’s experience of pain when one immigrates from one place (culture and religion) to another, then is an important personal, and of course also relational question to tend to on my path of research questioning:

How can one’s pain be defined and understood when one’s place in the world (in relation to culture, language and religion, etc.) can only be defined in an in-between?

Our mind and culture continuously reconstruct our experience of pain (Morris, 1991, p. 2). When immigration permanently defines immigrants in the space of in-between – this unsettling space in relation to culture (Bhabha, 1994, p. xiii), their experience of pain also becomes unsettled! Their definition of pain gets lost in-between the two cultures and then gets re/defined within that space of in-between. Pain as they knew it therefore turns into loss in this unsettling space of uncertainty, and as a result can create frustration and more pain! This struggle with pain begins when the one suffering becomes unable to find a present (cultural and/or social) point of reference that would make her suffering an equally valid suffering (compared to the time before relocation/immigration). As a result, not only does the person continue to suffer the pain, but being placed in-between two (different and sometimes even opposite) socio-cultural norms, she also suffers additional pain of having to see (all or part of) the pain she has been experiencing as being dismissed.

The process of immigration itself involves many painful experiences. It involves the pain of loss, of one’s home and language, of one’s context and social support. It involves the loss of one’s sense of belonging, and the loss of one’s place in the world. Immigration also involves the pain of cultural and linguistic confusion, social embarrassment, humiliation, exclusion, violation and so on. Some psychoanalysts have even described the experience of immigration merely in relation to pain. Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) for example “break
immigrant’s journey into three stages, moving from an acute, explicit pain, to controlled
‘suffering’ in subdued or latent pain, to finally, an absence or loss of pain” (as cited in Hron, 2009, p. 26). This however, as Hron also mentions is a linear look at pain in relation to immigration, presuming progress and ultimate resolution, as well as reflecting the national narrative of assimilation. Other scholars, in more recent research, prefer non-linear descriptions and use terms such as “double absence”41 or the ambiguous state of “in-between”42 or “double impurity”43 to refer to the immigrants’ struggle (with pain of displacement). These less linear descriptions seem to better represent this ever present pain of many displacements in the lives of immigrants such as Edward Said who at one point notes in despair: “To me nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept me in motion all these years” (as cited in Bhatia, 2002, p. 66).

Be it in medicine, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology or cultural studies, pain seems to have also been noted as an undeniable constant in the research relating to the experience of immigration (Hron, 2009, pp. 25-26). Terms such as loneliness, homesickness, fear and confusion, loss, culture-shock, identity crisis, isolation, nostalgia, alienation, diaspora, the exile, unhomedness, etc., (Bammer, 1994; Bhabha, 1992, 1994; Hall, 1990; Hron, 2009; McCarthy, 2009; Pascual et al., 2008; Rushdie, 1991; Said, 1999) which all relate to some form of painful struggle, are replete across the literature on immigration, displacement and cultural in-between.

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41 Abdiemalek Sayad, *La Double Absence*, 1999

42 Homi Bhabha, 1994

43 Gill & Golparian, 2012
Whether the cause of pain is situated within the immigrant’s native culture or is the result of the actual experience of immigration, an additional actively present suffering is caused by the impossibility of situating the pain within the present socio/cultural context. There is therefore a mismatch between the feeling and experiencing of pain, and situating it so that it can be understood both personally and relationally.

What is considered legitimately painful in one culture may or may not be seen as painful in another. And how one’s experience can be felt as painful changes from culture to culture as well. While the immigrant is going through (self) transformation in-between two cultures, that definition of pain and the way she experiences it also transforms for her which then makes it hard to even locate (and understand) that experience within her historical context.

Culture is constantly being trans/formed. Feelings and experiences such as pain are defined within these constantly trans/forming cultures. For an immigrant away from her own culture, the feelings and experiences of pain stop being re/shaped within the native culture and will obviously not conform to the definitions and understandings of similar feelings/experiences in the new (foreign) culture. Their experience of pain therefore becomes displaced and unhomed.

This displaced feeling of pain loses its previous meaning and either augments or reduces in scope and intensity as it gets re/defined in the new culture, while the actual feeling (and/or experience) of it does not necessarily transform towards or within that re/definition. Therefore an experience that is intensely painful in one culture might not be considered as painful in the other (and vice versa) which leaves the immigrant feeling that her suffering is
painfully displaced, dismissed and ignored. And this effectuates a pain that doubles over on itself.

All these issues regarding the displacement of (both the meaning and experience of) pain resulting from relocation or immigration add to its unsharability. In addition to what happens to the actual experience of pain (the trans/formation and re/definition of the meaning of pain, and the cultural contexts where the pain was experienced which makes it harder to position, voice and share such experience with/in another culture), language (both verbal and non-verbal) creates an additional barrier around one’s experience and perception of pain, and between (the experiences of) the immigrant and the world outside.

A large portion of communication is shaped by “the vocabulary of culture” (Hron, 2009, p. 32), which structures the language of social contact and interaction. When in a new cultural environment, immigrants “experience frustration as they attempt to communicate their feelings of sadness or unhappiness through language” (p. 31). This frustration often creates additional unhappiness and/or pain. “In order to express their pain, immigrants must learn to translate it” (p. 32) and this need for “translation”, complicates (even more) one’s means for voicing and sharing that experience with the world outside. As Hron (2009) explains, immigrants experience loss as a result of these communication differences and

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44This translation is not merely a verbal translation but also a cultural one. One in which the content of the message has to be changed in order to conform to the receptor culture (including the language, social expectations, ideological assumptions and literal conventions). It is therefore the receiving culture that determines the nature and the extent of the immigrant sufferings (Hron, 2009, p. 45). And it is also the receiving culture that determines what kind of suffering can be expressed (and shared) and how. Therefore the focus in this moment of being with each other shifts from the sufferer to the target or host culture. The goal becomes only understanding the experiences that are acceptable in the target or host culture, rather than being with the one in pain. It becomes about what can be shared, understood and accepted rather than receiving and being with the one who is suffering. As a result, sharing pain, being a conditional sharing, can be more dismissive rather than relieving.
difficulties. Communicating one’s experience of pain and suffering (hard as it is when dealing with one culture and one language) then turns into a big struggle, as the immigrant also loses the means to share her displaced experiences of pain with the world outside.

For an immigrant, feeling pain is not only suffering as a result of what caused that pain but also suffering a loss. For instance, loss of definition, loss of the means to share, and loss of receiving sympathy (which comes in addition to loss of identity, home, belonging, language, and so on that often cause their original pain). An immigrant in pain is therefore a person in mourning for loss. And since the actual process of mourning itself differs from culture to culture (as it is often embedded in one’s history and spiritual and/or religious beliefs), this displaced mourning for loss becomes itself a painful loss in-between two cultures.

**Relocation, Pain and Ethics**

It is then no surprise that questioning ethics in this state of displaced mourning would only complicate things further, for an immigrant can also only define ethics in that space of in-between (cultures and beliefs). Therefore, so many variables, so much ambiguity, and so few landing spaces make it hard to envision what would or would not be ethical for and/or in relation to an immigrant.

Religion, for example, is an issue that not only affects the experience and feeling of pain in-between two cultures, but also the ethics of voicing and sharing it. Certain rituals related to religion (i.e, Islamic flagellation ritual of ‘zanjeer zani’ during Ashura\(^45\)) which are at

\(^{45}\) Ashura is commemorated by Shia Muslims as a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad 680 CE. Certain rituals like the traditional
the present time performed symbolically in many countries, seem as causing pain or harm from the perspective of other cultures and religions and thus any performance or representation of those rituals could be considered unethical. On the other hand, religious rituals can be seen as aesthetically appreciated, even exotic, in foreign cultures while the act of representing those rituals in an art form could be disrespectful and therefore unethical for the people practicing those rituals.

Politics makes voicing and sharing pain far more complicated in terms of ethics than any other issue. When the reason for pain is rooted in issues related to politics, publically sharing those experiences (if ever permitted) could endanger the life of the sufferer or the life of her loved ones. For immigrants, voicing their pain publically could prohibit them from ever being able to go back to their home countries. Shirin Neshat, an Iranian-American photographer and video artist, who often addresses gender-related, religious and political issues in Iran, is unable to go back home because she fears for her life (Graves, 2010). In some other cases, the relatives of certain human rights activists (i.e., Shirin Ebadi) have been arrested and imprisoned in order to assure their silence.

In addition, immigrants who represent the voice of a group of sufferers are often questioned and criticized in terms of ethics, both in their native country and the country to which they have immigrated. Some immigrants are even ethically questioned and criticized for misrepresenting their native cultures in the West when the sharing of their personal experiences of pain is generalized as experiences of a whole nation and/or culture. The ethical sharing of personal then becomes unethical as an assumed (mis)representation of a flagellation ritual called Talwar zani using a sword, or zanjeer zani involving the use of a chain are performed during Ashura.
group within a different cultural context. Consequently, caught up in-between different contexts, what’s ethical can no longer be simply determined by signing a consent form. Once looked at from and translated in two or more cultural contexts, what is said and how it is said can be simultaneously considered ethical and unethical.

Many questions come to mind in relation to ethics and immigration which are impossible to dismiss, and yet very hard to tend to:

What would be the point of reference for ethics when we talk of pain and suffering within a cross-cultural, cross-religious context? Whose ethics is valid? What of cases where one’s pain gets lost in (re)definition in-between cultures, beliefs and laws? How would that be questioned ethically, and ethical for whom? Who is it that determines the criteria for ethics? And isn’t our idea of ethical, then, always what is considered ethical for (and from the perspective of) the one(s) with power?

From the position of an artist/researcher/teacher and/or an activist, such questions get far more complicated when one is seen to be representing the voice of a culture, or a group in suffering, in and for an audience of a different culture. How would one consider such a task ethically while “[t]here is no completely pure or innocent account of pain untouched by the constraints of writing [or any form of language]” (Morris, 1991, p. 3) and while any re/presentation of pain is just that: a representation which has been reshaped, or in Hron’s words “translated” (p. 32) by the person recounting it? And how would this translation from one culture to another ever be looked at ethically? And would it ever be possible at all to have an ethics valid within one culture and another in such representations?
Ethical Risks of Being Together, with Pain

There is, I would say, always an ethical risk involved in voicing pain and in being responsive to the other in pain. Whether this being together, with pain (as defined on page 152), is taking place in one culture or across cultures, we cannot predetermine how to act ethically or how to prevent what could be considered unethical.

There are too many variables and too many ethical risks in being together, with pain. There is a risk of causing suffering, in sharing one’s pain. There is a risk of exposing the other to more than she can emotionally handle. There is a risk of awakening painful memories in others, when sharing one’s experience of pain. There is equally a risk of exposing oneself to more suffering since the reaction and the response of the other to our experiences is always an unexpected one. And there is a risk of being misunderstood or even dismissed, which can then lead to frustration and more suffering.

There is also a great risk involved in “being with” (Levinas, 1985, p. 58), the other in pain. The risk that lies in the responsiveness, responsibility and act of compassion towards the other. There is the risk of this responsibility becoming the means to one’s sense of betterness and/or superiority – A condescending “suffering of suffering” (Levinas, 1988, p. 159), when one’s act of sympathy and being with and for the other is driven by one’s sense of (or need for) superiority, becoming the savior, the hero, the better person. This is when one takes on the position of power in relation to the other through an unethical act of Othering disguised as ethical compassion. Othering the person in pain can easily be mistaken as being together with the other in pain, and the act of Othering and/or racializing, as Bhatia (2002) explains, “accentuates the pain of dislocation and displacement” that many non-Western immigrants experience (p. 66).
It is not at all an easy task to answer to Levinas’s call and to maintain a place of strength and yet be a “servant” to the “weak” (Levinas, 1988, p. 171) without transference of one’s understanding of the other’s suffering or projecting that understanding on to the other – what Levinas refers to as murder or dévisager. Our understanding, after all, is always limited to our own history, culture and context. And our responses too, will always be affected by our understandings. If not murder or dévisager, we can rarely avoid wounding the other in the moments of sharing their experiences of pain\footnote{I would also like to add that there is more risk in being together, with pain, than what Levinas chose to tend to. When talking about being with, we are always ‘with’ more than one being or in Levinas’s language face, and this being with many faces, makes the risk of wounding, murdering, dévisager much higher.}. How then, with all the risks involved, can we ever predetermine the ethicality of any conversation, performance, research, etc.?

The question of ethics is a very sensitive question. When it comes to ethics, we are always walking on the edge of a cliff. And more often than not, a cliff we have never seen or walked on before. There is always a risk of slipping. And it becomes necessary to be constantly attentive to every single step we take and therefore, every moment of being with.

Here then is the ethical dilemma, especially for researchers and/or artists such as Abramovic who choose to address pain in their work: A research or an art performance on pain cannot be ethical, yet cannot not be unethical at the same time. The bigger the (contextual) gaps between one and one’s research topic and one’s audience, the harder it is to negotiate this space of both ethical and unethical. The bigger the cultural differences, the harder it is to avoid wounding and causing more suffering. It is unavoidable to name this space yet another state of in-between. An ethical in-between – A space where ethics becomes...
unhomed! Where ethical loss and gain have to coexist and where certainty in ethics is highlighted as an *obvious* illusion. The ethics of in-between is indeed an ethical in-between.

In-between is where ethics in any form of it is also unethical. It is unethical for its very act of defining what harm is, and by setting up the criteria for what does or does not cause harm. It is unethical for always taking sides, always excluding, and always prioritizing a perspective, a context and/or a position. Ethics in the in-between is unethical because it is always situated in *one* history, *one* culture, *one* language, and *one* context. This is why what’s ethical is always already political, and therefore also always already *un*ethical for and/or towards someone.

This dilemma with ethics of in-between is multiplied when what’s being investigated, theorized, translated and verbally and visually communicated is pain itself. We can never call a conversation, an art performance, or any form of research on pain ethical from all perspectives. There is, in fact, never an interaction/transaction involving pain that won’t be questioned as unethical. Taking on this perspective then, questioning whether an act (research, art performance, or any act involving an other) would be an ethical act, before the fact would seem like an invalid and irrelevant question. The ethical, as also theorized by Levinas (1985) can never be predetermined:

> Ethics is pre-ontological. There can be no prescription for ethics. Ethics is precisely ethics by disturbing the complacency of being … .Ethics occurs as an an-archy, the compassion of being. Its priority is affirmed without recourse of principles, without vision, in the irrecoverable shock of being-for-the-other-person before being-for-oneself, or being-with-others, or being-in-the-world. (p. 10)

Ethics is living. It depends on all the contexts of the moments of encounter and therefore cannot be predetermined. A living ethics lies in the moment to moment interactions between one person and an other. The ethicality of actions can only be revealed, determined,
known as such, in the moments of being for and with, and not before. Questioning whether an act, performance, artwork or research would be ethical, does not necessarily work toward preventing harm to the people involved. This also clearly and specifically applies to the ethics of in-between because in-between is the space where context is never fixed and can never be predetermined.

A more important question, I would say, should be: what/who is it that determines ethics (when it comes to pain and of course in general) rather than focusing on what acts would or would not be ethical. Ethics is a matter of perspective. It’s a matter of whose position we are trying to protect. It’s about who has the power to speak, to choose and to dominate. Therefore as an artist, researcher and teacher concerned with issues regarding voicing, sharing and even causing pain, I can’t help but highlight the following question: how often do we tend to preventing harm to institutions rather than preventing harm to the people involved, when it comes to research, teaching and/or engaging in public performances of art?

In regards to pain, it is therefore only the position we take in relation to ethics that can be determined before any interaction with an other, and even knowing that, would not necessarily prevent harm to the people involved (including oneself).

When it comes to being together, with pain, our most important ethical responsibility may well entail an openness to sharing with and receiving the other in the very moments of being with, in ways attendant to the possibility of wounding and causing more suffering (even at times when it seems unlikely so).
An Infinite Cycle of Pain: Other-ache

Wa(e)ry of the slippery path of ethics I am walking, in my exploration of pain, I will now circle backwards/forwards in my infinite cycle of pain hoping to unravel and expose the many repressions I have experienced in the feeling and sharing of my personal sufferings of many displacements – my experiences of displaced displacement. Inevitably, on, through and/or alongside this new/old path, I will also be critically circling backwards/forwards in and through my visual/textual dwellings in my experiences and struggles with home, language, Othering and so on.

I will therefore pull certain threads I have woven into the fabric of this self-exploration, only to weave, and (per)form them again, into something new, something different. The following questions resurface in the very act of looking back to identify the structural threads that stand out in this moment of my performance of pain: What/where is my home? What/where is my culture? What/where is the language of my home and my culture? Who and where are my friends, my people? What/where is my place and how does that place define who I am? How do I define my ethics? And what is my pain?

These questions are part of my daily struggles to function, to live, and to be with myself and with/in the world. I cannot avoid them because in order to be active and responsive I need to constantly choose and define contexts and frameworks and find answers. I long for answers. Ones that I can hold on to for just a little while, even sometimes only for a day. Yet no answer would ever suffice. No answer could last without creating a bigger emotional crisis – without creating more pain. I live in forever shifting conditions and contexts that oftentimes contradict one another. Any answer would define me as an outsider to either my history or my present. Any answer would make me an outsider to myself.
Answers seem to somehow always represent some kind of loss. Answers equal pain. Yet in order to claim agency, in order to exist, I have no choice but to choose, to translate, to answer, to define and redefine, and re-define... .

This pain I have been suffering, the pain of loss, the pain of displacement, and the pain of displaced displacement, is a weight I have been carrying around in private for years. It’s a pain I have not been able to feel or to voice, because I have not been allowed to, or didn’t allow myself to do so. It’s a pain I have not been able to share with other than myself because I have been unable to find the means to do so, and/or I have been afraid of the consequences of doing so. It is perhaps also because the very thing that has created my pain is also the means for its expression, and the criteria for its validity that it has immobilized me in suffering it alone. Creating a loop of infinite struggles. Infinite longings. Infinite pain.

The pain I have been carrying around often feels like restlessly running in a revolving door without an exit. Always and infinitely in-between places, cultures, languages, and identities. Always in-between translations, in-between answers, trying to understand and make myself understood. Always equally trying to make sense of this pain I carry around. The pain that also feels trapped in an infinite cycle of translations.

This image of a revolving door without an exit and the metaphor of an infinite cycle of pain translates into a cylinder with the word “infinite” cut out of it that is hanging from the ceiling and turning on its axis. This is how the idea for my video installation about pain started taking form. An installation representing my infinite cycle of longings, exclusions, translations, struggles, and pain. I feel my body carrying the weight of this pain as I sketch what I have in mind for this installation. The surface of this cylinder feels like my body. The body of my installation – the body to carry my pain.
Figure 27: Installation Sketch 1.

I don’t yet know what my *representation of* pain will look like. But I can imagine the play of light and shadows through a projection (or many projections) onto this body. And through this play of light and shadows that I envision, I can already foresee that the concept of inside/outside will be a prominent aspect of this artwork. I can envision that if a video were to be projected onto the surface of this installation, light would mark the word *infinite* on the inside surface of the cylinder and leave shadows elsewhere on the inside, and on the space surrounding the installation. It is therefore important to rethink this visual play with light and shadow on the inside and outside within the context of my lived experiences. With a cylinder as a metaphor for the body that carries the weight of my pain and my restless *infinite* struggles of displaced displacement, what can be read from the play of light and shadows on the surfaces of this installation is that the pain coming from the outside can leave a mark on
the inside, yet the inside cannot have any effects on the outside surface and space. What I need, however, is to create a space where inside and outside will simultaneously affect and be affected. The shape that can represent the body of my pain will need to be a shape that can disrupt the inside and outside spaces. A shape that can create a space where the inside and outside would bleed into each other, becoming inseparable, each being marked by the other and simultaneously leaving a mark on the other. As a result of this thought and with a little twist to the cylinder, I ended up with a mobius strip. An object similar to the symbol for infinity that also melts the inside into outside and the outside into inside creating a visual enigma.

![Mobius Strip](image)

**Figure 28: Mobius Strip**

This visual metaphor can also help me represent my struggles of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider to both cultures/contexts that are now part of my identity. It
captures well my confusion and shock of unexpectedly finding myself an outsider and on the outside surface of a culture when I know I started walking on what seemed like its inside surface, and of course vice versa. It equally shows well how in any given moment I can be an insider from one perspective and an outsider from another, for the inside and outside in a mobius strip is in fact nothing but an illusion. A mobius strip has no inside and no outside. A mobius strip has but a single surface whereby constantly turning the inside to outside and the outside to inside. It’s an enigmatic struggle, my struggle with (oftentimes) contradictory contexts. Enigmatic, confusing, endless cyclic play of contextual inside and outside.

This makes choosing a point of reference for my thoughts and actions a forever present struggle. It creates anever-ending struggle of always finding myself at least partly an outsider no matter where I situate myself and my thoughts. This is a frustrating and painful state where no matter what context I choose as a point of reference, it is impossible for me to ever fully belong. When I am an insider, I am always also an outsider – always an Other, no matter what mypoint of reference. There is simply no place to call home. I am forever an Other. I am forever Othered by the conditions of all the contexts that define my identity. I suffer the pain of always being Othered. I have an Other-ache.

I have an Other-ache
I stare into the horizon
listening to the wind, blowing in the empty bowl of nostalgia
feeling the rain on the eyelashes of memories
...
I ache for an absence
for death in branches of a need
I ache for the lack of vision
where there can be so much to see
I ache for a dream taking off into an infinite cycle of pain

I have an Other-ache
When I am inside, I am out
I do not belong
I am an Other
to me, to you, and to the space I “occupy”

I have an Other-ache
I ache for the Other that I am
I ache for the other that I lost
and I ache for never being able to land
in other than Otherness

I have an Other ache
I am not me,
but the echo of me coming back to me
transformed, and informed by other than me
sounding the same
only different

I have an Other-ache
I mourn an us, in the world that Othering separates us
I ache the forever presence of Other in “each other”
and the absence of togetherness

I have an Other-ache
...

...
Other-ache

Figure 29: Other-ache Installation

*Other-ache* is a video installation that represents the multiple layers of my pain of unbelonging. With the word Other-ache cut out of the single inside/outside surface of the
mobius strip, I share how my soul forever aches my never ending state as an Other on the outside, and an Other on the inside. The mobius strip – this never ending inside outside and outside inside represents my pain. My displaced place – my “unbelonging belongingness” (Gill, 2004, p. 40) – in the world. It also equally represents a (hanging net) trap. A state without a foreseeable exit. A state I have been suffering for years.

In my first few attempts at building the mobius strip on a large scale I found myself helplessly struggling to make it work. The structure of the mobius strip would not hold. It fell apart no matter what material I used, how and where I made the twist, and from which direction I tried to hang it from the ceiling. The Other and the ache sides of the strip kept falling on to one another into a fold and would disappear into unrecognizable shapes as the structure fell apart. The emotional experience of failing to make the installation hold together was quite intense for me. I was devastated. It felt as if this body I had created was unable to bear the weight of my pain. It felt like the body for the language I was translating my pain into was an impossible structure. It felt as if my pain would not hold outside of me. That it was impossible to express my pain. It seemed impossible to be able to re-create the pain I have been feeling in a way that it would be sharable. Watching the structure of Other-ache fall apart was almost like watching myself break down under the heavy weight of the pain that I have been carrying around alone for so many years.

It took me many tries to finally be able to make the structure hold by wiring up the mobius strip and covering the wires with tape so that they would not be visible in the spaces of the installation. Watching the installation hold together was also an emotionally intense experience for me. It was a great relief to finally find a way to be able to re-present my pain in a body that still felt connected to me but was located outside of myself.
However, the process of wiring up the structure that now represented the body of my pain, and then having to cover those wires into invisibility left me wondering: Where are my hidden wires? How am I holding up? What are the wires that help me bear my pain? And what if one day I too lose those wires that hold me together? What if I too fall apart in suffering my pain alone?

It seems to me that the wires that are holding me together to be able to bear the suffering of this pain of ontological, epistemological, and ethical in-between, are those very contexts that are also caught up in an ontological, epistemological and ethical in-between. The same contexts that also build the fluid structure of my identity. My history, my culture, my connections to and memories of home, my language, my values and ethics, in the way I have lived them as well as the way they have transformed with/in me in the context of my new and different culture, these are the wires that have been barely holding me together. With one carrying the weight at one time and another at some other time, these not so fixed or concrete wires have nonetheless not yet allowed me to completely fall apart under the weight and pressure of my in-between pain of in-between. And it is also the same displaced unstable wires that have urged me to translate my pain and transform it in a space outside of me where it might less so threaten the fragile structure of my identity.

The surface of the mobius strip and its surrounding space are now a nest for the translation of my (to be) transformed pain. The pain of never belonging. The pain of exclusions. Exclusions from here and exclusions from there. Exclusions on the inside of a culture and exclusions on the outside of that culture. How do I represent this pain which is trapped in-between cultural, linguistic, social, ethical, etc. contexts? I feel so isolated in my pain. Alone in my struggles with contradictory spaces which force me to make choices out of
necessity and in order to just be – the very act of agency that inflicts more pain on me by creating more states of exclusion.

Figure 30: Pain
Figure 31: Pain
I think of an image rooted in my old memories. A symbolic image that is heavy (and will become more so) with layers of spatially, temporally and culturally transformed pain. I imagine myself sitting in the middle of a room, surrounded by white walls, holding a chain. The same kind of chain that men use back home to symbolically hit themselves during the rituals of Ashura. I remember how I used to go out to watch them as a kid. They all used to dress in black from head to toe and march to a sad song while singing the verses along with a singer and pretending to hit themselves rhythmically on the shoulders with the chain. I remember wondering why it was that women were never allowed to join them. Why it was that we were excluded from what at a time seemed like some sort of an exciting ceremony.

It was not that I was so much interested in what the ritual represented. I don’t think I even knew what it was about, or that it had any association with a religion, but I was nonetheless puzzled by the fact that I could not participate and that I was excluded from it. It seems to me that a ritual that allows a community to express suffering, even though on a symbolic level, moves suffering from its isolating space into a space of collective conversation therefore opening up a space for voicing and/or sharing one’s pain. The exclusion of women from such an experience then would in fact feel discriminatory and painful. Within the context of my childhood memories, and a larger context of my home culture, the image of me hitting myself with a chain therefore represents my pain of having been excluded from a ritual that allows for a shared expression of pain. This image is therefore equally an act of agency whereby I appropriate and recite the very same discourse that brought my exclusion into being through representing myself as a woman taking part in a ritual she is culturally excluded from. It represents my act of resistance to cultural and/or religious and gender related

47 Reference to Drichel’s (2008) definition of agency.
exclusions. Using this image, I speak out that I am a woman, yet I am not weak. I have suffered worse pain and I should be allowed to voice it publicly. Sadly, however, I find myself alone in this act of agency. Alone in voicing my rejection of those exclusions and alone in voicing my pain. Without a community to march with and to mourn with, this image leaves me exposed as a performer on a stage, objectifying me as a victim of gaze, or exoticizing me as an Oriental art form.

How else would this image be perceived out here, in the West? How can I now deal with this symbolic pain being interpreted and translated into something it is not, causing me more pain by yet again leaving me misunderstood, and by possibly representing me once more as this different inferior Other. I create, capture and project resistance to the pain of exclusions yet I am quite aware that for an outsider to my native culture, this representation of resistance would be close to impossible to read. I am quite aware that the surface of this image might not be read as anything other than oppression and/or self infliction of pain. I am therefore conscious of how I am exposing myself in the context that can easily displace my pain, causing me more pain in the process.

The image of me holding the chain on my shoulder therefore does represent pain but not in the literal translation of the image as a physical self inflicted pain. The pain I intend to share here is symbolic and metaphorical. It is embedded in cultural contexts. It’s a pain of multilayered exclusions. It’s a pain of conflict between my inside and outside contexts created by my multi-dimensional positionings. It represents conflict between my in-between self placed on the inside and my in-between self placed on the outside of cultural, historical, linguistic, etc., contexts. It is also a representation of the pain I suffer as a result of my displaced pain.
Figure 32: Pain
Figure 33: Pain
This single image of me holding a chain that I envisioned as I conceptualized and theorized my experiences in-between the pain of in-between, developed into a series of photographs titled *Pain*, all capturing me alone with my pain in an empty unhomely space where I am surrounded by nothing but whiteness. No objects, no sign of anything that could represent a place within a context. Nothing other than sometimes present white walls which translate into an enclosed private place where I find myself alone with my pain. The in-between contexts of pain are uncatchable. Freezing any context with/in the frames of any of these self-portraits would trap pain in that context therefore underrating and dismissing its scope and intensity. The walls however, seemed like important objects to have present. They put private in opposition to public. They contradict the natural open space where the rituals of Ashura take place, and help represent the pain of exclusion that I feel as a result of not being able to mourn my suffering of pain in a public space and among others.

In some of the later photographs in the *Pain* series, what I have captured in a frame is only a body part and the chain. These photographs represent all the ways that the body can become the site for pain when dis/placed in-between two or more cultural contexts. These photographs are my visual metaphors for how the body can become the site for being Othered and/or exoticized. They represent the pain of being Othered as a result of one’s race, gender, religion, etc.
Figure 34: Pain
Projected onto the mobius strip hanging from the wall, the slideshow of the photographs from the *Pain* series followed by the video of me (symbolically) rhythmically hitting myself on the shoulders with the chain as I whirl in place, represents the cycle of my displaced pain as well as the multiple contextual layers of my experiences of that displaced pain. The sound of the chain echoes in the empty place where I am whirling every time I hit myself on one shoulder and comes back to me only to be accompanied by its next iteration. Unreceived, unshared, and unaccepted, my pain intensifies in its loneliness every time the sound of the chain echoes in the empty space of my performance.
Figure 36: Other-ache
The unhomely inside and outside spaces of Other-ache nest the video of my performance creating shadows of the word Other-ache on the inside/outside surface of this installation and the surrounding walls. The shadow of the word Other-ache moves from the inside to the outside spaces of the mobius strip as the it turns both clock-wise and counter clock-wise on its axis. The movement of the word Other-ache in its actual inside/outside place and its shadow which also moves from one inside/outside place to another, represent my constant state of suffering the pain of being Othered in one (spatial, cultural, linguistic, etc.) context and/or in the other. The cyclic movements of me, the surface of the mobius strip, the shadows and the installation itself have developed from my earlier idea of the infinite cycle which I envisioned as I started sketching and creating this installation.

Within the spaces of this installation, the photographs and the video look different every time the mobius strip turns on its axis. The combination of the shape of the mobius strip as it turns, the shadows and the projected images/video offers the viewer infinite visual experiences. This not only represents the forever changing and transforming in-between context of (my) pain but also creates multiple contextual possibilities for interpretations and translations of what is in fact the displaced representation of my pain of displacement. This is how I open up the possibility for sharing, and understanding. This is how I open up the possibility for a being together, with pain, by exposing myself, my experiences, my memories and by re-membering them together with others in the pedagogical spaces of an a/r/tographic living inquiry.
Figure 37: Other-ache
Figure 38: Other-ache
Ironically, however, by sharing my displaced pain of displacement, I am also opening the space for possibilities for further displacements of my pain. This is perhaps part of the reason why I have chosen to present this installation not in an art exhibition but within the context of an a/r/tographic research where it can be shared along with all its layers of text and image, theory and practice, and in-between the spaces of all the different identities, languages and renderings that define a/r/tography. The accompanied textual history, theory, context and stories behind my artwork therefore play a very important role in breaking stereotypes and creating possibilities for a better understanding of a personal recount of my pain in-between cultures.
Chapter Seven: Reflections/Renderings

Renderings

As Patti Penti (2008) stated, bringing closure to a project such as this “would be a theoretical misnomer” (p. 197). And in fact it is not at all possible to ‘end’ a living project that is so much entangled in my identity and life. Such living projects always find ways to live on within and alongside the flow of the river. However, as I am required by the academy to present the process/product of my explorations and dwellings, I will now “pause” – “the hesitation in the continuing engagement we all share with learning” (Pente, 2008, p. 197) – and use the metaphor of whirling in place in-between my backward/forward dance movements to look around the spaces/stages I have created and lived. To linger in-between the spaces of my roles as an artist/researcher/teacher and reader/viewer and look at my textual/visual explorations in order to identify the paths and spaces I have created/walked and maybe also envision others I might create on my way forward. This whirling in place is therefore yet another phase in my a/r/tographic dance performance. The performance of myself and my displaced experiences that I now share in this visual/textual conversation as yet another way of dwelling in its words and images and living spaces.

In performing my pain(s) of displacement, I have also (re)lived the tensions and struggles of having to constantly re-negotiate my identity in the spaces of cultural, linguistic, political, and ethical in-between. The pain I share in this performance is one that I endure as a result of a huge gap that exists in the space in-between the two different and contradictory places and/or contexts where I have lived. It is in fact the size of this gap that has foregrounded and magnified pain, and not merely tension or struggle, as a significant aspect of my life in the spaces of in-between. This magnification has allowed me to notice the
recurrent words, expressions and experiences of tension and struggle that reside in any in-between space. In fact, in spaces where one needs to constantly negotiate mediums, roles, concepts, languages, ideas, places and so on, experiences of tension, struggle and even pain seem inevitable. The intensity and scope of those experiences of course depend on the differences in positionings, values, cultures, perspectives and power positions that exist between one side and the other of this in-between space. Nonetheless, I maintain that tension, struggle or pain are unavoidable thresholds and renderings of any form of a/r/tographic research where choices are to be made about the position(s) to think, interpret, act, speak and create from, about the pieces of collage one assembles, and about the audience one chooses to share one’s conversation with, from one moment to another.

Additionally in the performances of my experiences of displacement, I have also highlighted restlessness as a psychological state of having to live in the spaces of in-between. I have performed this ongoing state of unrest in my constant efforts to re-member home in my creation of Be-longing, in my linguistic struggles in the spaces of My language, my identity and My language, my outfit, in constantly moving from one curtain to another in my dance within the spaces of In/visible, and in an infinite cycle of inside/outside in the body and surrounding spaces of Other-ache. I have equally visualized restlessness in using the metaphors of whirling, an infinite cycle, a mobius strip, and a revolving door without an exit.

A/r/tography, as a methodology that celebrates in-between spaces, is therefore also a methodology that inhabits restlessness – a constant reorienting and repositioning of oneself in-between the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher, the mediums of text and image, the positions of artist/researcher/teacher and viewer/audience, theory and practice and so on.
Restlessness or unrest is therefore another threshold and rendering of a/r/tography that has emerged throughout this research.

Looking around from this place of unrest, I can also identify the recurring expressions of un/belonging throughout the exploration of my many displaced displacements. This struggle with an ongoing state of un/belonging has come forth as a result of the impossibility to fully assume one position and within a single context. An a/r/tographer can also never fully assume only one position and/or one state and is therefore always in the state of un/belonging or what Gill (2004) calls an “unbelonging belongingness” (p. 40) which is simultaneously belonging and not belonging to one role, one medium, one position, one space and so on. Un/belonging has therefore also emerged as a rendering of a/r/tography throughout this lived inquiry.

And last but not least I would like to highlight that whenever there are in-between spaces, there are colonial and power relations in play, and always inevitably one side of this in-between space takes on a more dominant role in relation to the other side. There is therefore always an Othering that takes place in the spaces of in-between whereby one side, one role, one medium, one position, one interpretation and so on, oppresses the other(s), treating it as an inferior Other who needs to conform to the ways and structures of the dominant side, or is even partly or completely dismissed and turned invisible. There is always a taking sides that takes place in the choices that the a/r/tographer makes in the spaces of in-between. An a/r/tographer rarely assumes all roles and positions equally and at the same time, and that is not a requirement of this methodology either. This play with power relations

\[48\] I would like to point out here that there is a huge difference between choosing to linger in an ongoing struggle with un/belonging than to have to live this state out of obligation. An a/r/tographer chooses her medium, role, positioning, etc. in the moment to moment of her research whereas an immigrant is transplanted in this constant state of un/belonging.
is therefore another threshold and rendering of a/r/tographic research that has become visible in the performances of my displaced displacements.

**Reflections**

I wrote a long poem called ‘Ashtamudi Lake’ and later pondered the last lines in the poem... ‘Trying to move between two worlds, the vision ends in a house filled with flames’. Reading the lines again I thought, I can’t bear it, this here-there business. In any case, I would choke in a house filled with flames. So I quarrelled with myself. And out of the quarrel with the self came writing. (Alexander, 1996, p. 143)

This a/r/tographic living inquiry is a process/product of a quarrel with myself: A quarrel that has emerged as my resistance to the state of helplessly choking in the flames of the conflicting and contradictory spaces of in-between. It is through this quarrel with myself in the un/homely spaces between here and there that I have found myself engaged in this textual/visual graffiti writing. This graffiti writing takes place as a performance that is a representation of my efforts to write and create my place in the world from within the spaces of my multiple displacements. In fact, what urged me to write and perform my place in the world is the state of “psychic unrest” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 73) and the pain that I suffer as a result of my experiences of multi-layered (physical, psychological, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, ethical, epistemological, and ontological) displacements. The never ending feeling and experiences of unbelonging which are embedded in all the layers of my experiences of displacement have placed me in a constant motion from one place/context to another, provoking me to scream out loud and speak, create, perform and write. The migratory condition and the subsequent sense of displacement that I have been experiencing is what Friedman (2004) identifies as “a gift to a creative mind” (p. 206). The never-ending state of
re-positioning and re-orienting oneself in the spaces of in-between is what provokes an aesthetic creation. It is “what makes poets write, and artists create” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73). It is what makes a graffiti writer mark her resistance within the exclusionary spaces that surround her. The in-between is filled with exclusions, conflict and contradiction. As poets, writers, artists, intellectuals, and teachers “we feed off contradiction, the space in between. It stimulates us. It engages the heart, even while it tears us apart. It serves as our muse and occasions the words that are symptoms and signs of survival” (Friedman, 2004, p. 208).

My painful experiences of longing for a home in the contradictory spaces of in-between is what stimulated me to put the broken pieces of my memory together in order to recreate and rewrite my home-in-the-past in the spaces of my home-in-the-present. This infinite cycle of pain of never belonging, and of not being able to retrieve all the contexts that I have lost has created the condition for me to “recreate my home using my own words, just as a bird garnishes its nest with twigs and leaves” (Friedman, 2004, p. 206) every time it finds itself in a new place. Similarly, I’ve been carefully picking and arranging my words around my performances of home, and then performing around those words, drawing (on) the broken reflections of my past memories. In this act of writing about and performing the home that I have left behind in-between all the fragmented pieces of twigs and leaves that I have discovered and collected while moving from one place to another, I have somehow been able to bring myself home again.

This home in creation, however, is neither the one I left behind nor the un/homely spaces I have been residing in ever since. Neither of those physical places is homely. This place I now call home is one that I have made (and will continue making) by writing it in the spaces of my visual/textual self-exploration. I have long accepted that a return to the actual
physical home I left behind is nothing but an illusion – A dream. One cannot go home again (Hall, 1990) – except perhaps in “writing home”49 (Friedman, 2004, p. 206).

The process of performing and writing home which I can only identify as such in retrospect has equally been some kind of an unconventional healing journey for me whereby I have been able to transport myself back home by visually and textually expressing my longing for it. This by no means implies that I no longer suffer the loss of the home I have left behind or the pain of the unhomely encounters, situations, and conflicts that are created in-between cultures, languages, and so on. Those experiences are still part of my everyday life as epistemological and ontological wounds (Gill, 2012) marked on my body. What the experience of writing home has meant for me is that it has allowed me to position myself within a space that I have created for myself. It has allowed me to make a place, not so much to replace the loss that I have been experiencing but to be able to ground myself, even if that grounding is only a grounding in (a) process. Rutherford (1990) writes: “home is where we speak from” (p. 24). I have spoken from within the spaces of my visual/textual performances and in the act of performing my experiences and pain of unhomedness I have also made myself a home in my own living creation. I have written a place of my own, a place that belongs to me and that I equally belong to.

Additionally, just as the process of storytelling which draws from traditional art forms helps construct a personal identity (Stokrocki, 1998), sharing one’s personal stories and histories also helps form and transform one’s personal identity within the world. Moreover,

49For Friedman (2004), “'writing home' has a double meaning – writing as a means of communication with home and writing as finding ways to express the conflicted meaning of home in the experience of formerly colonized” (p. 206).
“[w]riting is a means of reclaiming territory”, says Friedman (2004, p. 206). It is an act of agency whereby one claims one’s place in the world; that in itself is a huge privilege. It is privilege to be able to tell one’s story and be heard. Writing about our experiences and stories is a way of “claiming and gaining and nurturing a sense of voice(s)” (Leggo 2008, p. 10).

Claiming, gaining and nurturing a sense of voice has been essential in my journey as an emigrant/immigrant battling with the loss of my voice in-between historically impacted cultural and linguistic contexts and in the unhomely spaces where I am constantly pushed to invisibility. As emigrants/immigrants, “we must continue to tell our stories; we must continue to write ourselves into existence” (Kondo, 1996, p. 116) by stepping into the light and claiming our identities and our places in the world, even at the risk of possibly suffering more pain and more exclusion and having to witness our sufferings dismissed, universalized or hierarchized and relativized by our readers/viewers. Or even if we have to resort to writing graffiti. This risk is worth taking because “[l]ike displacement in our post modern world, being exiled creates a rhetorical exigency that can only be resolved through discourse: we must narrate our identity in order to attach meaning to our lived experiences, we must tell stories to make sense of the world, we must carry on a dialogue to tell us who we are, where we belong” (Cotanda, 2001, p. 72) and we must reclaim our lost voices and lost places in the world through a dialogical engagement with our experiences and stories, and with others.

The immigrant narratives cannot be told often enough, maintains Hron (2009). Immigrants’ sufferings and pain “are often denied, misunderstood, misinterpreted in the public forum (in popular attitudes, public policies, and academic discourses) because in many ways, these immigrant sufferings counter contemporary discourses about acculturation, multiculturalism, social order, integration, and cohesion” (p. 228) and I would add
colonialism. As Bourdieu (2004) explains, “the physical and moral suffering the immigrant endures reveals to the attentive observer everything that native insertion into a nation and state buries in the innermost depth of minds and bodies” (p. xiv). By engaging in my own painful experiences and stories of emigration/immigration with/in my visual/textual performances, I have also confronted and resisted these diverse socio-cultural assumptions and literary and generic conventions. I have therefore engaged in “a performative politics of pain” (Hron, 2009, p. 230) whereby I have resisted to be spoken for and/or to be defined by others on any side of this in-between space. I have spoken my words, my images, and my performances of pain of/in the in-between as I have been experiencing them. Consequently, through this writing of my pain in this scholarly work I have also “created a narrative space in the dominant discourse, a space that could refigure the disciplines as ‘home’ for [me]” (Kondo, 1996, p. 114). This engagement in an explicit, performative rhetoric of pain is what Hron identifies as a necessity for immigrants and “minorities” as it allows them to “affectively and effectively gain a greater role, voice, agency, or mobility in the public forum” (p. 230). It allows them to make a home for themselves in the spaces of the dominant discourse.

This dissertation is therefore a making of homes through a sharing of my artistic wondering and wanderings in moments of struggle in-between different (and/or contradictory) cultures and spaces. It is a sharing of my personal engagement with the cultures that define this struggle, and the struggles that define the cultures – An aesthetic (and not anaesthetic) exploration of the culture of pain and pain of culture. Therefore another reason for having taken on this research is to communicate and share an analytical and interpretive exploration of the kind of (troubling and/or pain-full) experience that is not so
commonly communicated and shared. What I have attempted is a sharing of a physical and psychological human experience that is often considered a taboo and also undergoes censorship and social, cultural and/or political appropriations (Hron, 2009). Even more so, in the case of immigrants who are transplanted into a space where they find themselves having to re-define themselves and their personal and relational experiences in-between cultures, languages, religions, politics and identities. However, in spite of (or maybe precisely because of) the “unsharability” (Grabher, 2008, p. 73) of pain, there is so much to explore and learn about the kinds of suffering that are embedded in the struggles of in-between, and the kind of self transformations\(^{50}\) that can take place through what these experiences entail. I therefore, see much value in revisiting and analysing and sharing such (not so often shared) experiences that inform and transform the identities of a large population of people in the country I now live in. And I believe that the rich investigation of such subjectively lived experiences can enhance our understanding of the multidimensional, complex, social phenomenon of emigration/immigration, and of having to negotiate oneself and one’s life in the in-between.

What is (re)presented in this dissertation is both the process and product of my performative engagement with the multiple layers of pain and struggle that I have experienced as a displaced emigrant/immigrant. It is a putting into words (both in textual and visual forms) of my sufferings in the spaces of contextual in-between. By putting those painful experiences into words, I, the narrator of my story, find myself having emerged as a transformed/transforming person in the process of having a dialogue with and about my own selves. Consequently, this self-inquiry has enabled me to enter into a dialogical reflexivity

\(^{50}\) Here I am also referring to the kind of self-transformations that become a matter of survival for immigrants (and not ones they would necessarily choose if they had the choice) rather than only looking at them as some kind of expected positive outcomes.
with the different parts of my displaced selves, thereby reworking and reconstituting the varied parts of my identity in the way that new meanings about who I am and how I am with/in the word have and will always be in the process of being emerged. In this dialogical reflexivity with the different parts of my displaced selves, I have also been able to put the severed parts of myself and my experiences together and in doing so, my experiences of the pain of in-between have lost the power to hurt me with the same scope and intensity as before. I have re-membered the pain in my conversations and performances of it and in the act of re-membering it, it has changed and become something it was not. And in this process of becoming something it was not, my pain has also unbecome what it was because in every becoming there is always already an unbecoming that takes place. Consequently, I have been able to take the pain (as it was) away, by transforming the infinite cycle of my experiences of it into a spiral where pain too is in motion and in the process of becoming. I have transformed my pain and I shall continue doing so in the process of un/becoming by forever changing my experiences of it in dialogical conversations with myself, my artwork and writing and my viewers/readers – A dialogical process of un/becoming pain.

These conversations with the self and others, the constant re-membering and transforming of my memories of home and belonging and my experiences of pain to the point that they are always becoming something yet unknown has also been a pedagogical process. Pedagogy, not only in the sense of a seeking of “connections from what one knows to what one does not know, but an embodied exploration of what is not yet known” (Triggs et al., in press). This embodied and living exploration of the ‘not yet known’ is what I have been engaged in throughout this exploration of my experiences of pain of the in-between. The visual/textual performances presented here have therefore become pedagogical though my
“lingering in this evolving space of possibility, recognizing that one never ‘becomes’ but rather resides in a constant state of becoming pedagogical” (Irwin, in press, p. 9). In this sense, pedagogy is not about a moment of a peaceful discovery of a straightforward path to an end. Pedagogy is a lived and living process that “does not expect to smooth any disconnect between past and present, here and there, or home and away, but instead, offers patterns of lives lived in relation to time. Locating the force of change in a movement that time carries teaches that difference does not occur only at the surface of our skin; instead, it is a force that is always in the process of becoming” (Triggs et al., 2010, p. 308).

This aesthetic representation of the pedagogical process of un/becoming, un/becoming home, and un/becoming pain however does not merely have a personal value. In fact there exists no personal as what counts as personal is always braided with all other relational aspects of life. The personal is then always already public and shared, social and political, professional, philosophical and also pedagogical (Guyas, 2008; Leggo, 2008). Consequently I would argue that the pedagogical experiences presented in this self-study also have much to offer to the larger field of education precisely because:

[any writing and reading of our lives presents us with the challenge that is at the heart of every educational experience: making sense of our lives in the world. Autobiography becomes a medium for both teaching and research because each entry expresses the particular peace its author has made between the individuality of his or her subjectivity and the intersubjective and public character of meaning. (Grumet, 1990, p. 324)

The embodied living visual/textual pedagogical processes of this a/r/tographic self inquiry have created openings for conversations and deeper understandings of painful experiences of emigrations/immigration. These pedagogical processes have exposed the
meanings of my performances of pain as they emerge(d) in the process/product of my inquiry and through that, they have also been/become a medium for both teaching and research.

Additionally, through the shared process of my a/r/tographic graffiti writing, I have also performed and highlighted the sensitive pedagogy of representation especially when it is concerned with other cultures, races, languages, pain and so on. All forms of representation, be it visual, textual, auditory, etc., play an important role in how we understand ourselves, others and our place in the world. Representation is not merely expressive but also formative as it shapes social relations both at the conscious and subconscious levels. It is therefore essential to be aware of the dominant modes of representation that commodify difference and/or produce and reproduce stereotypes, popular assumptions, and generic narrative structures about people of other cultures and races, and examine and unpack these issues within educational settings. As Desai (2000) argues: a “pedagogical practice needs to address the complex relationship between subjectivity and power in relation to culture” (p. 116). In fact, what’s more important than teaching about cultures is “teaching ... about the ‘culture of power’” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 28) and its exclusionary practices. A mere representation of other cultures, not only risks reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions about those cultures but also leaves the self-Other binary intact and allows the self to remain superior and privileged. What is necessary is not just teaching about the Other but also “about the processes by which some are Othered while others are normalized” (p. 36). Similarly, when it comes to art education an apolitical, ahistorical, decontextualized and uncritical acceptance and reinforcement of the dominant modes of representation (exhibited artworks in museums, popular media, and so on) is problematic. Like Desai (2000) I believe that “it is only by continually emphasizing the relationship between power and representation ... that we art
educators can begin to reduce the epistemic violence to the ‘other’” (p. 128). A sensitive pedagogy of art education needs to raise and critically address important questions such as: who controls the means of representation? What is the historical context of the representation? Who controls the methods of display and exhibiting cultural artifacts in cultural institutions? And how do the politics of representation create spaces of exclusion and/or inclusions and consequently cause pain and suffering to others? As Kimashiro (2000) argues, “[t]he value of lessons about the Other comes not in the truth it gives us about the Other, but in the pedagogical and political uses to which the resulting (disruptive) knowledge can be put” (p. 35). Such as the stepping stone of an anti-oppressive education51 is what I have tried to foreground throughout the process of this artistic living inquiry of becoming pedagogical.

Additionally, in education at all levels from elementary to university, the experiences that students, especially students of colour who are often immigrants bring to the classroom are generally dismissed as irrelevant to the hegemonic spaces of the curriculum and pedagogical practices, if not altogether silenced (Desai, 2010). From a post-colonial perspective, it is crucial to create spaces for counter hegemonic narratives in the mainstream art education space. This, however, must be done thoughtfully and cautiously in the manner that does not further revictimize the Other or tokenistically parade her trauma (Chalmers & Gill, 2007). Including a curriculum of the Other involves critically engaging the political and the historical as well as ensuring that this analysis is central to the art education pedagogy. Art educators, art teacher educators and artist educators need to model and encourage this critical engagement with the political and historical while creating an inclusive environment

51 Kumashiro (2000) defines anti-oppressive education as “an education that works against various forms of oppression” (p. 25).
through education about the Other. Such engagement is what I too have modeled with/in the a/r/tographic spaces of this self-inquiry.

The process/product of this self-inquiry also offers a new contribution to a/r/tographic literature by drawing on a post-colonial framework and by problematizing the colonizing and political spaces in the in-between through my personal visual/textual counter hegemonic narratives, and by highlighting the significance of a critical engagement with the historical and political with/in the visual/textual performative and living spaces of an a/r/tographic inquiry. In doing so, I have also attempted to perform and bring a new perspective to the a/r/tographic process/product of becoming pedagogical by investigating the themes of Othering and exoticising and foregrounding the sensitive inclusionary/exclusionary pedagogical spaces of in-between.

Moreover, in and through the process of becoming pedagogical in this aesthetic self-exploration I have also hoped to provoke moments of sharing, being together with, compassion and empathy. I have hoped that by being in touch with my own being, my own art making and writing resonance, I will also be able to touch others, and become part of their shared space of words and images. A “becoming people” (Triggs et al, 2010, p. 304) that according to Triggs et al (2010) can only take place “[w]here the aesthetics of someone else’s storied image evokes a déjà vu that is not entirely impersonal yet not completely ownable, experience becomes personal socially and generates collective expressions” (p. 304). These collective expressions are not only valuable for creating a sense of belonging to a community and “togetherness” (Grabher, 2008, p. 72) but are also valuable because they feed on moments of compassion which then according to Aristotle can help “cultivate our humanity” (cited in Hron, 2009, p. 233). Empathy and compassion are keys to our sense of community.
and morality. The sharings and representations of pain, suffering and tragedy “should intensify our powers of empathy to the point that we are touched by misfortune experiencing it directly ourselves, and thus serve to further our sense of social responsibility and activism” (Hron, 2009, p. 233). In writing, creating and performing pain, I have started a conversation, a sharing, a potential for moments of compassion with hopes of provoking this sense of social responsibility and activism. Becoming home, becoming pain, becoming pedagogy and becoming people has therefore also become a potential for becoming activism through the openings that have emerged in this a/r/tographic research.

Openings, however are never risk free. In writing and living this dissertation, I do realize that I have left myself vulnerable by exposing myself, my stories, my sufferings and my life in and to an open conversation with the world. But I have done so in the awareness that vulnerability and discomfort are also the conditions for new ways of seeing and perceiving the world. “As all artists know, the greatest challenge to producing works that interrupt normalized ways of perceiving and understanding is to learn to perceive freshly .... Learning to perceive differently, then, requires that one engages in practices that, in some way remove one from the comfortable habits of the familiar” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. xxiii). It requires one to step away from the shadows into the spotlight, exposing oneself, even as an Other, only to provoke conversations about who one is and where one belongs. Because “identity is brought forth in conversation with others. Even when exiled, alone and in pain, there is no self without an other. We are a dialogue” (Cotanda, 2001, p. 66).

The meanings and understandings to be drawn from this critical living inquiry depend largely on each individual’s response to this pedagogy of suffering. The interpretations of my pain of displacement are not merely shaped by my performances of it. As Hron (2009) points
out, “The translation of immigrant pain – in fiction or in real life – fundamentally depends on the target audience, and its affective responses to immigrant sufferings … it is the immigrant receiving country that largely defines the immigrant or generic immigrant story, just as it is the people in the target host nation who mainly read and publish immigrant fiction. It is this target audience that ultimately holds the power to translate the pain of immigration from fiction to real-life action” (p. 230). Consequently, at this point I leave my readers/viewers with a responsibility to engage in a conversation with the process/product of my performance, while I continue re-membering, transforming and performing myself, my home and my pain in un/becoming in the ambiguous spaces of in-between.
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