IRANIAN IDENTITIES IN VANCOUVER: CONTESTING ETHNIC AND RACIAL SIGNIFIERS THROUGH SITUATED PERSPECTIVES PRODUCED USING METHODOLOGICAL TRIANGULATION

by

DANIEL JAMES SWANTON


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Department of Geography
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 24th August, 2003
Abstract

Recent intellectual enquiry into ideas of identity has emphasised that individuals are neither determined by the structures of racialisation, class, gender, and bureaucracy, nor are they fully outside these processes. Identities are continually produced, contested and negotiated through the categories by which we come to be known. A triangulation of research techniques, integrating critical analyses of official statistics with deconstructive readings of media representations and interpretations of semi-structured interviews, generates three situated and partial perspectives through which I examine Iranian identities in Vancouver. Via critical engagements with, and interpretations of, official statistics and media representations, I elucidate the markedly limited repertoire of narratives, images and ideas through which Iranian identities are both negotiated and popularly imagined. My situated interpretation of my participants' responses underscores the diversity and heterogeneity of Iranian affiliations, disrupting and unravelling ethnic boundaries and stereotypes performatively reproduced through the enclosing categories of official databases and the reductive Orientalist imaginaries that pervade media portrayals. The productive tension generated by this innovative coupling of situated perspectives works towards a nuanced and richly textured understanding of the identities and experiences of Iranians in Vancouver.
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Introduction

1.1: Representing Iranian immigrants

"I talk about identity here as a point at which, on the one hand, a whole set of new theoretical discourses intersect and where, on the other, a whole new set of cultural practices emerge."

(Hall, 1991, p.42)

Identities, and theoretical constructions of identities, are central motifs in my project. By drawing on the complex, and frequently ambivalent, ways in which theoretical discourses and cultural practices are knitted together in identity politics and the politics of identification, I provide three situated readings of Iranian immigrants in Vancouver, British Columbia. An innovative triangulation of methodologies that combines critical analyses of official statistics, with deconstructive readings of the media representations, and situated insights produced through qualitative interviews, generates three critical and distinct perspectives, each of which is held in a productive tension with the others. The knowledge produced through this triangulation not only underscores the diversity and heterogeneity of identities and experiences that are enclosed, stabilised and maintained through the imposition of ethnic and 'racial' signifiers, but also, on an epistemological level, demonstrates the distinct, situated and, most importantly, partial knowledge constructed through each of these 'ways of seeing'. In this introductory chapter, I place recent migration from Iran in context, and then move on to an abridged survey of a more general literature on Muslims in 'the West', as well as academic writing on Iranians in particular, before finally sketching my methodological strategies in greater depth.

1 I shall stress that both 'Iranian' and 'immigrant' are historically constituted, geographically specific and culturally constructed categories, that may or may not overlap with multiple, and mobile individual identifications.

2 My triangulation, through the combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques with critical discourse analyses, works against the seemingly ingrained myth within human geography that epistemology equates to methodology – a myth that appears, for example, in representations that imply all quantitative geography equates to logical positivism.
1.2: Placing migration in context

Histories of migration from Persia, and later Iran\(^3\), are longstanding and diverse. The exile of Zoroastrians to India in the 8\(^{th}\) century, for example, is often cited as one of the earliest religious migrations from Persia, whereas more recent movements have included labour migrations to the Baku oilfields of Russia in the 19\(^{th}\) century, migration of Christians and Jews to the United States at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century, and the relocation of Jews to Israel after the Second World War (Amanat, 1993). As Iran was drawn into the United States’ sphere of influence in the dichotomous division of global space under the ideologies of Cold War geopolitics, and neo-imperial relationships were activated through ‘modernisation’ and ‘Western-style’ development, increasing numbers of Iranians migrated temporarily to the US, primarily for professional and technical education. The late 20\(^{th}\) century, however, marks a sea-change in migration from Iran.

The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran has become an iconographic event in the contemporary geopolitical discourses, emblematic of the ‘resurgence of Islam’ and the imagining of alternative modernities defined, in large part, in opposition to the hegemony of ‘Eurocentric’ cultural and economic imperialisms (Sayyid, 1997). On a more human scale, the revolution precipitated massive displacement through both voluntary and coerced migration. The revolution itself emerged from growing demands for social and political changes from a broad range of social constituencies. The dogged pursuit of programmes of modernisation and secular nationalism by Shah Reza Pahlavi’s regime had exacerbated socio-economic inequality in Iran and, coupled with conspicuous opulence\(^4\) and brutal political repression, had catalysed increasing political unrest throughout the 1970s. The Shah’s regime had little tolerance of political opposition, yet had — paradoxically — permitted some extreme political organisations (namely Leftist and Islamist groups), which increasingly came to be seen as the only legitimate voices of political opposition in Iran throughout the 1970s. Specifically,

\(^3\) In a remarkable ‘re-narration’ of nation, the adoption of the name Iran in 1935 was an attempt to cultivate geopolitical support from Nazi Germany, and sever colonial dependence on the British and Soviet Empires, through an explicit identification with the so-called Aryan ‘race’ (Amanat, 1993).

\(^4\) One of the most fantastic displays of opulence and wealth in recent history was the Shah Reza Pahlavi’s celebration of 2500 years of Persian civilisation in Persepolis, which was reported to cost approximately $25 billion (Amanat, 1993).
Islamic nationalism, standing in stark contrast with the Shah’s advocacy of secular nationalism, became an obvious point of convergence for political opposition, and Khomeini – constructed as the embodiment of the holy man – came to symbolise a unique indigenous identity marginalized and exiled under the Shah. The proximate conditions for the revolution in 1979, however, stemmed from a crisis within the state, from the fear that US support of the Pahlavi government was wavering (Khosrokhavar, 2002), thereby creating the instability and uncertainty that was exploited by a broadly supported revolutionary movement.

Migration in anticipation of, and response to, the revolution, and the highly fluid political situation that ensued (Said, 1981), marked a transformation in histories of movement from Iran. At first, migration predominantly involved affluent, urban upper and upper-middle classes that had been associated with the Shah’s regime, as well as a number of political and religious exiles (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, & Der Martirosian, 1993) – including Baha’is who were subjected to both government persecution and mob violence, and after the initiation of purges against Leftist political organisations as Islamists attempted to secure their grip on power, a number of Leftist political activists (Khosrokhavar, 2002). Later, the 1981-2 Cultural Revolution in Iran witnessed the closure of universities and the exclusion of many highly skilled professionals from the workforce, forcing many to confront the possibility of seeking opportunities outside Iran. Migration from Iran continues to be sustained by transformations in the social and political landscape, as well as flows of information from those Iranians resident outside their homeland. In particular, political alienation of the ‘generation who made the revolution’ appears to have become more widespread, with increasing political repression (and particular interference in private lives in the name of morality), the Iran-Iraq war, declining economic power, increased barriers to education, and political corruption contributing to a general denuding of revolutionary zeal (Khosrokhavar, 2002).

Western Europe and North America have been significant destinations for migrants, refugees and exiles from Iran, who now constitute diverse and fragmented ‘ethnic’ populations in ‘the West’. Koser (1997), for example, indicates that in 1992 Iranians composed the 6th largest non-European nationality in the European Community, accounting
for 164,200 residents. In the United States, Los Angeles has emerged as a major centre for Iranian exiles and migrants, with South Westwood being referred to by some Iranians, and the local media in particular, as ‘Little Tehran’ (Kelley, 1993). Alternatively, in the Canadian context, migration from Iran has produced significant settlements in the metropolitan regions of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. However, surprisingly little academic attention has attempted to elucidate the diverse and complex migrations from Iran – surprising, not only in terms of the dramatic and rapid migrations, but also in light of the prominent positioning of the Islamic Republic of Iran in contemporary geopolitical discourses and media representations of ‘Islam’. In the remainder of this chapter I situate my study of Iranian identities in a broader, interdisciplinary literature on Muslims in ‘the West’, before surveying the limited production of knowledge on Iranian immigrants, and introducing the methodological triangulation employed in my study.

1.3: ‘Muslims in the West’

My research on Iranian identities can be broadly situated within an interdisciplinary, and growing, literature on the migration and settlement of Muslims in ‘the West’. Although this work overlaps and intersects with important threads in this literature – most notably work on the contested and negotiated politics of identity (Dwyer, 1999; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002) as well as ‘Islamophobia’ (Dunn, 2001; Halliday, 1999; 2002; Vertovec, 2002b), it also diverges in important ways. For example, the contested cultural politics of Iranian identity, and significant religious heterogeneity enclosed in the designation ‘Iranian’,

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5 Individuals documented as Iranian are, of course, diverse in terms of both their ethnic and religious affiliations. The cultural politics of race, ethnicity and nation are complex and chequered in Iran. Despite the explicit promotion of a Persian national identity by the Pahlavi dynasty, through, for example, the institution of a universal education system with Persian as the sole language of instruction, diverse ethnic and tribal affiliations remain important in everyday identifications. Moreover, although Iran is a predominantly Muslim country (98% of the population is Muslim, the majority of whom are Shi’a), there are a number of important religious minorities (including Baha’is, Jews, and Armenian and Assyrian Christians), who are over-represented in the Iranian diaspora.

6 The very imagery of ‘Muslims in the West’ conjures a sense of being ‘out of place’, the anomalous and expanding existence of ‘Islam’ in the seats of ‘Western civilisation’, and plays to racial/spatial anxieties (Ang, 1999) stemming from an imagined ‘clash of civilisation’ and perceptions of increasingly porous boundaries between the imaginative geographies of East and West.
resists the assimilation of this study into a broader literature on 'Muslims in the West'. My research is also indebted to broader literatures on migration, transnationalism and diaspora, and reflects these conditions of its production. Finally, the epistemological tone and methodological ambition of this project sets it apart from both much of the literature both on 'Muslims in West' specifically, and migration and immigrant reception more generally.

Representing Muslim immigrants

The project of purporting to represent the experiences of 'Muslim' migration and settlement in 'the West' assumes precarious proportions, and in a similar vein any attempt to survey this literature inevitably fails to communicate the diversity and breadth of knowledge production. Firstly, the very meanings of the term Muslim are highly contested, with diversity and heterogeneity fracturing the imperial and stabilising ambitions of the category. The category Muslim conveys a unitary identity that can contribute to the 'civilising of global space' (O Tuathail, 1996; see Huntington, 1997) as well as failing to communicate diverse sectarian interpretations of the Quran and the hadith, the different incorporation of religious practices into the everyday lives of those identified as Muslim, and changing religious ideologies and practices over time (Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Dwyer, 1999). Putting an alternative spin on the meanings invested in Muslim identities, Bobby Sayyid (1997, p.2) has alluded to the 'hollow nature of Muslim identity', in a depiction of 'Islam' that borrows from Richard Rorty's notion of final vocabularies – personal identities and the destinies of communities are, he argues, narrated through language derived from what is understood as 'Islamic heritage'. 'Islam' is, therefore, a signifier mobilised in multiple ways by diverse constituencies to ground identifications and imagine communities. Beyond the problematic constitution, and reproduction, of the category 'Muslim', Metcalf (1996) has also commented on the tendency of academic narratives to 'objectify diasporic Muslims' either as the proletarians of late capitalism, Third World immigrants in need of modernity, or materialist professionals complicit in the brain drain, and signals counter-narrations of migration. In juxtaposition to academic constructions of Muslim migrants she cites the counter-narratives promulgated by Seyyid Husain Nasr, who invokes the power of the Islamic concepts of hijra (migration) and da'wa (mission) to re-imagine migration in terms of the defence and spread of 'Islam' (Metcalf, 1996).
The academic 'coverage' of 'Muslims in the West', particularly in the North American context has been notably sparse, where efforts have been disproportionately directed towards studies of migration and settlement of East and South Asians and Latinos. That said, the appearance of increasing numbers of edited volumes with the expressed purpose of surveying the breadth of Muslim experiences in 'the West', are beginning to redress this oversight (see for example Haddad, 1994; 2002; Metcalf, 1996; Vertovec and Peach, 1997). Moreover, in the political and intellectual climate after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, and the increased problematisation of Muslim presences across Europe and North America, it seems highly probable that academic production will proliferate.

The majority of academic representations of Muslims in 'the West' are substantive and empirically grounded studies, through which a number of thematic clusters become evident, including discussions of experiences of migration, the cultural politics of 'community', cultural reproduction, and changing gender roles through migration (see for example Vertovec & Peach, 1997; Haddad, 1994; 2002). A significant amount of academic coverage also engages with, and resists fixed, bounded and essential constructions of identities (of both the 'Western' Self, and the 'Muslim' Other) entrenched in Orientalist structures of thought, with emphasis on the construction, contestation and negotiation of cultural practices and identities (see among others Sayyid, 1997; Dwyer, 1999; Dunn 2001; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002). For example, in a study of young British Muslims, Dwyer (1999) illustrates how women's dress, the veil, and other bodily markers become one of the 'battlefields' on which a postcolonial cultural politics of identity and 'community' are enacted, arguing that hybrid forms expressed through dress negotiate what are popularly imagined as bounded, fixed and unchanging cultural boundaries. With these reflections and caveats in mind below I sketch some of the key characteristics of this limited, but growing literature.

*Enumerating the Muslim presence*

In the immediate post-war period, the labour demands of Western Europe, particularly in Britain and France, precipitated reterritorialisations of colonial relations through an attenuated migration and settlement of 'the corporeal edge of empire' (Jacobs, 1996).
Significant migration to the UK occurred from the ‘New Commonwealth’, including a significant relocation of Muslims from the Indian sub-continent, while in France there was considerable movement from the predominantly Muslim North African colonies of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Alternatively, large-scale labour migration of Muslims to Germany was initiated through a bi-lateral agreement between the Turkish and German governments, although Bosnian and Iranian gastarbeiter also constitute a considerable proportion of the Muslim presence (Peach and Gleber, 1995). Movement of Muslims to Europe is prominently scripted as labour migration, although the Muslim presence in Sweden, which has a constricted immigration regime but liberal refugee programmes, illustrates the significance of asylum and refugee migrations (Pred, 2000; Roald, 2000). An estimated 6 million Muslim migrants (and their children) are now resident in Western Europe, exceeding the indigenous Muslim population (Vertovec & Peach, 1997). In much of the literature the presence of Muslims in Europe is situated within broad structural contexts of migration, but largely fails to articulate either the diverse and complex histories and compositions of migration, or the embeddedness of movement in social networks.

By contrast academic representations of the Muslim presence in North America tend to emphasise the migration of professionals (Metcalf, 1996), and the temporary relocation of students for professional and technical education (Kelley, 1994). Metcalf (1996) estimates the Muslim population of the United States and Canada at 3-4 million, although such monist representations belie complex and heterogeneous realities of the Muslim presence. For example, the politically engaged Nation of Islam, associated with an oppositional American identity that is both Black and Islamic, is depicted as sparsely supported, although the organisation’s controversial leader Louis Farrakahn and media discourses ensure that the movement commands an extremely high public profile (Kelley, 1994; Nimer, 2002). More detailed research on Iranians has also demonstrated the heterogeneity of Muslim immigrant populations, which include significant numbers of refugees and asylum claimants alongside

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7 The 2001 UK Census documented over 1.5 million Muslims in England and Wales; estimates from 1990 suggest that there were 2.6 million Muslims resident in France, and approximately 2 million ‘Muslims’ living in Germany (Peach and Gleber, 1995; Vertovec and Peach, 1997).

8 Indeed Iranians, Afghans and Pakistanis – all predominantly Muslim – are the three largest asylum groups in Western Europe by nationality (Koser, 1997)
professional and student migration. The contexts of migration and settlement for Muslims in the United States have changed drastically post-September 11th, as their presence in the United States has become increasingly problematised by both the media and the practices of the state. In the Canadian context the 2001 Census documented 579,640 ‘Muslims’, making ‘Islam’ Canada’s fastest growing religion (Karim, 2002a), with the majority being of South Asian ethnic origins (Peach and Gleber, 1995).

Religious practices

Themes of cultural reproduction are discussed in many academic representations of ‘Muslims’ in diaspora (see for example Dahya, 1974; Ballard, 1994; Vertovec, 2002b; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Glynn 2002). Deploying Clifford’s ideas on ‘travelling cultures’, Vertovec (2002b) suggests that these concerns with cultural reproduction emerge from an intellectual interest in the unsettling experiences of travel and dwelling and the reconstitution and reinvention of cultural and religious practices in new contexts. A central motif in this literature has been the cultural politics of ‘community’ and religion, which although important to my research on the everyday identifications and experiences of Iranians in Vancouver (Haddad, 1994; 2002; Ballard, 1994; Metcalf, 1996; Vertovec and Peach, 1997; Glynn 2002; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002). Particular emphasis has been placed on how experiences of displacement, and processes of ‘Othering’ and being constructed as a ‘minority’, have shaped the reconstitution and adaptation of cultural practices, directed communitarian politics, and informed shifting religious affiliations and practices. For example, Dahya’s (1974) seminal work on Pakistani immigrants in Bradford, England, diagnosed a process of ‘fusion’ to ‘fission’ in religious affiliation, with initial religious institutions serving broad religious constituencies, with affiliated sectarian, caste and kin differences gradually transforming the landscape of religious affiliations as the Pakistani presence grew. More recently, Vertovec (1994) has commented on the re-establishment of homogeneity among Muslims in Leicester through umbrella organisations, which ‘interface’ with local government.

Academic writings have also identified the increasing currency of revivalist appeals to strip the cultural and traditional elements from religious practices, which, protagonists argue,
obscure the real importance of 'Islam', and fracture Muslims along cultural and linguistic cleavages (Glynn, 2002; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Vertovec, 2002a). This process appears to be particular prevalent among younger generations, whose attachment to distinct cultural inflections on religious practices is, perhaps, more oblique (Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002). Linking less culturally inflected religious practices with the imagining of the ummah, a global and inclusive 'Muslim community', some commentators have situated the reconstitution and reinvention of religious practices and ideologies in the globalising and transnational processes of what is commonly diagnosed as the age of post-modernity (Metcalf, 1996; Vertovec, 2002a; Harvey, 1989). Communication and transportation technologies have transformed religious transnationalism, enabling the real-time flow of ideologies and information (Vertovec, 2002a), and sustaining new imaginative geographies within the 'Muslim diaspora', tying multiple identities and 'communities' to larger common constituencies through 'global' networks of institutions and media (Metcalf, 1996; Werbner, 1996); transnational narratives also shape sub-cultural commonalities (Vertovec, 2002a; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002). However, religious transnationalism does not only contribute to the project of ecumenism, but has also been co-opted in the maintenance of distinct, culturally and linguistically embedded religious practices, that resist the global ambitions of the imagined community of the ummah (Vertovec, 2002a). Technological innovations have also facilitated the development of the 'decentred networks' of extreme politico-religious organisations, which are multiple and fluid, rapidly forming and disintegrating (Vertovec, 2002a), and are of increasing interest to political elites and intelligence communities.

**Politics of recognition**

Academic coverage of a broadly contested politics of recognition has also been relatively extensive (see for example Vertovec, 2002a; 2002b; Metcalf, 1996; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Karim, 2002a). There has been significant, and often well-documented, political mobilisation by Muslims, initiated to ensure the accommodation, and tolerance⁹, of

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⁹ In his critique of White multiculturalism in Australia Hage (1998) provides a pointed critique of what it means to practice tolerance. The main thrust of his argument by asking those who are intolerant to be tolerant, is that the power to be intolerant is not taken away. The advocacy of tolerance reproduces existing power relations in
religious practices (including *halal* slaughterhouses, sensitivity to religious practices and teachings within the education system, the allotment of cemetery space, mosque development and so forth) and to counteract discrimination and prejudice (particularly in response to specific instances such as the 'Rushdie affair' in the UK) (Metcalf, 1996; Vertovec, 2002a; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Dunn, 2001, Haddad, 2002).

In particular, the development of mosques has initiated highly contested cultural politics of identity and belonging (Eade, 1996; Eade, Fremeaux, & Garbin, 2002; Dunn 2001; Naylor and Ryan, 2002). The symbolic and visual claim on the built environment articulated through the 'exotic architecture' of mosques 'incongruous' amidst the urban landscape of 'Western' cities (Naylor and Ryan, 2002) heightens the sense of an encounter with the 'Other,' inciting racial/spatial anxieties and impassioned reactions from some members of the dominant White cultures, who perceive such developments as alien, and a threat to 'indigenous community and culture' (Eade, 1996; see also Dunn, 2001; Ang, 1999). Another conspicuous example of the heightened politics of recognition among self-designated representatives of 'Muslims communities' has been the emergence of 'national' umbrella groups such as the Muslim Parliament (which was established in the wake of the 'Rushdie Affair') in the UK, and the American Muslim Council in the United States, both of which advocate political engagement and model themselves as interlocutors between the state and Muslims residents and citizens (Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Nimer, 2002). Alternatively, the establishment of the Islamic Party of Britain presents an alternative mode of political mobilisation that adopts the proselytising tones of *da'wa* (mission), and advocates the 'Islamicisation' of Britain (Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002).
"The Islamic peril is now seen by many as the greatest threat to the West, beside which the Red and Yellow perils pale into insignificance”

(Ahmed, 1992, p.3)

Relatively little attention has been paid to the processes and practices collectively referred to as ‘Islamophobia’, a significant interest in my research on Iranian identities in Vancouver. My emphasis throughout on the intersection of multiple and mobile identities (Hall, 1991; Jacobs and Fincher, 1996; Pratt, 1996), for example, works against the enclosure, stabilisation, and containment of heterogeneous and diverse individual identifications through the uncritical imposition of the ethnic signifier ‘Iranian’. ‘Islamophobia’ is a form of cultural racism (Blaut, 1992), an ideology of ‘inherent’ cultural difference that attributes negatively evaluated characteristics in an essentialist and deterministic manner, and provides the theoretical underpinnings for prejudiced and discriminatory practices (Anderson, 1991; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; 2000).

These prejudices are grounded in culturally constructed differences between the abstractions ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ (Halliday, 1999), which have gained remarkable durability in the popular imagination through their repetition, such that they have, to a considerable extent, become accepted as unproblematic and naturally given (Butler, 1990; Dunn, 2001). Considerable effort has been expended in demonstrating the extent of negative, derogatory and vilifying media representations of ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’ (Said, 1981; Karim, 2003; Vertovec, 2002b), the ‘canonisation of fundamentalist icons’ through Hollywood depictions of Muslims (Sayyid, 1997), and the exploitation of popular ‘anxieties’ by popular intellectuals.

10 Halliday (1999; 2002) cogently contests the use of the term ‘Islamophobia’, arguing that it misidentifies the processes, arguing that the term actually refers to prejudice practiced against Muslims as people, rather than ‘Islam’ as a religion. This misidentification indulges ‘conformist and authoritarian interpretations’ of ‘Islam’ and perpetuates an imagined clash between ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’.

11 Chapter 3, in particular, resists bounded, essentialised constructions of Iranians through critical readings of dominant narratives of ‘Islam’, Iran and Iranians circulated through the Canadian print media.
(for example, Huntington and Naipaul) (Halliday, 1999; 2002) and by some authors publishing in the growing genres of travel writing and cultural biography. In a project that parallels one of my primary objectives, Dunn (2001) underscores the intertextuality of contemporary representations of ‘Islam’, and how national and local media discourses in Australia ‘become knitted together in a symbolic web’, that reinforce and reinvent essentialised, ossified and Orientalist constructions of ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’. Dunn (2001) argues that these pernicious representations circulate globally, but impact locally, illustrating how Orientalist constructs and discourses resurface in a contested cultural politics articulated around the use of local space in Sydney, that was initiated by plans to build a mosque. My thesis recognises that culturally constructed differences, grounded in the abstractions of ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’, and routinely promulgated by cultural essentialist and demagogues on both sides (Halliday, 1999; 2002), sustain racial/spatial anxieties and propel discriminatory and prejudiced practices through the discursive production of ‘undesirability’ (Hage, 1998). Therefore my research seeks to illustrate the processes through which such representations are manufactured by holding enclosed, bounded and essential conceptions of identity in a productive tension with the manifest heterogeneity and diversity of identities and experiences of individual Iranians.

1.4: Iranians in the literature

Scholarship on Iranian immigrants in North America and Europe is both sparse and limited in its objectives. Neither the iconographic position of the Iranian revolution in the re-orient-ation of geopolitical discourses, nor dramatic and sizeable migrations from Iran, have translated into sustained academic interest in Iranians living in ‘the West’. Many representations place Iranian immigrants within larger constructed constituencies, such as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Middle Easterners’, in discussions that inevitably objectify diverse immigrant experiences, and elide the heterogeneity of everyday identities and experiences (see for example Roald, 2002; Takim, 2002; Pred, 2000; Sabagh & Bozorgmehr, 1994). *Iranian: the Iranians in Los Angeles* (Kelley, 1993), an edited volume that combines academic commentaries with photography presented as both artistic and ethnographic is, however, an exception, providing an extended profile with synoptic ambitions. Taken with other contributions – which emerge from a number of political and theoretical perspectives – this
body of academic knowledge begins, nevertheless, to communicate the diversity and heterogeneity of identities and lived experiences within the 'Iranian diaspora'.

_A fractured population_

The sheer breadth of coverage in the ambitious volume *Irangeles* animates some of the internal heterogeneity that is elided through uncritical recourse to ethnic signifiers. For example, Kelley's (1993) abridged profiles of religious affiliations, and the partial reconstitution and reinvention of religious practices in Los Angeles, suggest some important internal differences. Lower levels of religious practice and affiliation among Iranians who are nominally, at least, Muslim grounds Kelley's (1993) depiction of a 'cultural religion', that informs a 'system of morals, values and mutual expectations' even for individuals who do not practice. The diversity of religious practices among Muslims is contrasted with higher levels of religious observation among Jewish, Baha'i, and Christian (both Armenian and Assyrian) Iranians, although religious practices continue to be embedded in family networks and Persian cultural traditions, and minimal intra-faith interaction is documented (Kelley, 1993). However, these profiles of different religious affiliations only emphasise the diverse contexts of migration in passing — dwelling briefly on the wide-spread political and population persecution of Baha'is in post-revolution Iran, and the accusations of political and Zionist activities levied against some Jews — and fail to disentangle the important practical implications of differences in the context of movement and displacement for lives lived in 'diaspora'.

The relocation of considerable numbers of Iranians to Los Angeles after the revolution, including some central members of the Pahlavi dynasty, has meant that Los Angeles holds an important place in the imaginative geography of the Iranian diaspora (Kelley, 1993).

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12 _Irangeles_ first contextualises migration through a discussion of political events in Iran, before engaging in wide-ranging discussions that touch upon religious diversity in the 'Iranian diaspora', the economic performance of Iranian immigrants, processes of cultural change (related in particular to changing gender roles) and cultural reproduction (Kelley, 1993).

13 Noting that many Iranians who express affiliations with 'Islam' in Los Angeles do not practice, Kelley (1993) also underscores that religious affiliations are diverse, with some groups politicising religious practices and ideology in support of the revolutionary government in Iran, with others organising religious gatherings in private homes to maintain practices away from the politics.
Indeed, Los Angeles has been central in constructing and imagining a symbolic diasporic community, circulating and reinventing representations of the past through a variety of media\(^{14}\) (Nificy, 1993). It is therefore not entirely surprising that disproportionate attention, both in the media and among academics, has reproduced overworked stereotypes of affluence, decadence and conspicuous consumption among Iranian immigrants, even in the face of manifest heterogeneity – expressed not only in terms of religious affiliations but also in the contexts of migration, differential possession of human and financial capital, and so forth (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh & Der Martirosian, 1993; Kelley, 1993; see also Chaichan, 1997).

For example, Kelley (1993) is careful to deconstruct representations of this admittedly 'strata-conscious community', arguing that many Iranians merely maintain the 'illusion of affluence', and that many more are barely surviving in Los Angeles. However, the overall tone of *Irangeles* reinforces stereotypical representations that emphasise the transplanting of an ‘urban cosmopolitan culture’ (Tahidi, 1993) from Tehran to particular Los Angeles neighbourhoods, in the process marginalizing other, more prosaic, narratives and lived experiences of displacement and diaspora.

Juxtaposing some of the representations in *Irangeles* with Koser’s (1997) discussion of Iranian asylum seekers in the Netherlands is illustrative, underscoring the diversity in experiences of migration, through an elucidation of what are, perhaps, two extremes in movement from Iran. Contesting the analytical separation of refugees and migrants in academic discourses, Koser (1997) demonstrates how the movement of asylum refugees is embedded – in complex and partial ways – in social networks, but more importantly he also reveals the central role of human smuggling networks in asylum migration from Iran to Western Europe, and provides some texture to the experiences of recent Iranian asylum claimants in ‘the West’. On the other hand, Kazemipur’s (2003) ongoing work on pre-migration experiences of Iranians applying for Canadian visas uncovers some of the complex and embedded negotiations of ‘regimes of governmentality’ (see Ong, 1999) that inform eventual decisions to migrate, and defy the linearity, reduction and determinism endemic to many theories of human migration. Moreover, Dossa’s (2001; 2002) innovative research with

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\(^{14}\) Iranians in Los Angeles have been prolific in the production of television programmes, with the second largest output after 'Latino' productions (Chinese and Korean networks import the majority of their programmes). 'Magazine formats' are standard, with programmes covering political news about Iran, Iranian entertainers in exile, anti-Khomeini commentaries and so forth (Nificy, 1993).
Iranian immigrant women in North Vancouver has provided valuable insights into the gendered experiences of migration and integration into the Canadian labour market. Dossa (2001) resists narrating labour market experiences, and specifically the 'erasure' of immigrant women's professions through migration, simply through paradigms that emphasise the 'interactive oppression of "race", gender and class' – narratives that contribute to the victimisation of immigrant women, and marginalize the possibility of agency – by embedding the 'lives told' by her participants in larger political and social contexts.

1.5: Situating triangulation

My research, organised through three readings of Iranian immigrant identities and everyday experiences of migration to, and settlement in, Vancouver, aims to draw and expand on these emergent themes of diversity and heterogeneity (Haraway, 1991). Through a methodological triangulation that generates three perspectives surveying Iranian immigrants, this research produces situated and partial insights that overlap, often in complex and ambivalent ways. Maintaining these three ways of seeing in a dynamic tension resists the enclosure, bounding and fixing of identities and experiences by signalling to the 'irretrievable heterogeneity' that is suppressed through ethnic and 'racial' signifiers (Spivak, 1988). Each of these 'lenses' exploits differences in the theoretical construction of identity. For example, chapters 2 and 3 examining the hegemonic representation and production of Iranian identities deploys tempered, yet admittedly strong, social constructionist arguments (Said, 1979). Alternatively, chapter 4, which re-presents the identifications articulated in semi-structured interviews, draws on a literature that emphasises the profound uncertainties and tenuous constitution of identities, thereby opening up more space for human agency (Butler, 1990).

Chapter 2 discusses the enclosure of identity through state funded statistical databases. Prefaced by a critical introduction to the practices of categorisation and the statistical construction of identities, this chapter provides a profile of the migration and settlement of Iranians in Vancouver based on statistical representations produced by the Longitudinal Immigration Database (LIDS) and recent Canadian censuses. These detailed profiles
provide some broader context for the more richly textured re-presentations of Iranian identities, as well as generating some compelling distinctions in their own right.

The analysis in Chapter 3 highlights the Orientalist imaginaries that pervade many media representations of Iranian immigrants, overlapping considerably, therefore, with a growing academic engagement with 'Islamophobia' (Dunn, 2001; Halliday, 1999; 2002). After emphasising the distinct contexts through which media realities are constructed (Said, 1981; Appadurai, 1996; Herman and Chomsky, 2002), and recognising that the media produce a cultural framework that makes 'powerful statements about the legitimacy of diversity in a multicultural society' (Fleras, 1994), this chapter explores the implications of the disproportionately negative representations of 'Islam', Iran and Iranians in the Canadian print media. My central argument is that these representations are intertextual, and impact locally through the contested cultural politics of identity, 'race' and national belonging (see Dunn, 2001).

Chapter 4 presents situated and partial insights produced through 28 semi-structured interviews conducted with Iranian immigrants, and generates a different kind of knowledge that resists both the enclosing categorisations of statistical databases and the negative, and homogenising, discursive constructions of Iranian identities circulated by the print media. Outlining some key theoretical concerns stemming from the politics of re-presenting the Other (Spivak, 1988; Said, 1989), I draw on Haraway's (1991) ideas of 'situated knowledges' to place myself within the research process, before entering a substantive discussion of the diverse experiences and fragmented identities of Iranian immigrants communicated in these interviews.

In the concluding chapter I return to the theme of triangulation, underscoring both the substantive insights into Iranian immigrant identities and everyday experiences in Vancouver produced through each individual perspective, while reflecting on the epistemological value of maintaining these three critical perspectives in a productive tension.
Chapter 2.

Enclosing identities: categorisation, counting and the statistical construction of Iranian identities

“No administrative system is capable of representing any existing social community except through a heroic and greatly schematised process of abstraction and simplification”

(Scott, 1998, p.22)

“Individuals are seen as obedient, silent passengers moving across a flattened moral landscape toward the fixed destinies to which their essential identities, their genes, and the closed cultures they create, have consigned them once and for all”

(Gilroy, 2000, p.104)

2.1: Introduction

Numbers have historically played a central role in the production of knowledge about immigration and immigrants and despite trenchant critiques of the epistemological and methodological practices of quantification from diverse philosophical and theoretical perspectives the commitment to numbers within some academic disciplines, and policy circles in particular, is unwavering. In this chapter I present a critical reading of the categorical enclosure and statistical construction of Iranian identities through data from the census of Canada and the Longitudinal Immigration Database (LIDS), both state funded and institutionally managed population databases. Some commentators have critiqued what they perceive as ‘facile quantification based on standard categories and problem definitions derived from bureaucratic and technocratic institutions’ (Rocheleau, 1995, p.461). However, I maintain that there are spaces for critical engagement with quantitative practices and their necessarily fixed categories. The use of large, institutionally embedded statistical databases, and the brutally simplified categories they distil, is far from problematic, yet quantifying practices can empower progressive anti-racist and anti-discrimination activism, inform policy decisions, provide powerful insights in the operation of power relations, as well as situate qualitative research (see Holloway and Wyly, 2002; Lawson, 1995; McLafferty, 1995). Before engaging empirically with the data I sketch some reflections on the implications of depending on official statistical databases – and one’s complicity in structures of
power/knowledge – as well as the problematic enclosure and fixing of essentialised identities through categorisations.

2.2: Statistics and power: an imperfect panopticon?

“The scale, complexity and ponderousness of the instruments (censuses; social science; bureaucracies and policy-making bodies; legislation and executive decisions) are of a whole different order [from Bentham’s carceral panopticon], but their functioning in a logic of social control remains analogous to the workings of the panopticon.”

(Hannah, 1997, p.177)

Foucault’s work on power/knowledge and governmentality has clearly influenced recent scholarship excavating the relationships between the compilation of official archives and statistics and the exercise of state power (governmentality). Indeed, some commentators have argued that official databases, including the census, were instrumental in the development of the modern nation state:

“In a real sense, modern nations have only existed and been governable as nations to the extent that the people, activities, and resources that make them up have been gathered together in the form of statistics and other surveys, and these representations collected at what Latour calls ‘centres of calculation’.”

(Hannah, 2001, p.517, emphasis in original)

Alternatively, Appadurai (1996) argues that the embeddedness of numbers in the languages of the political imagination is a matter of conjecture, contingent on the confluence of ‘numeracy, literacy, state fiscalism and actuarial thinking’ with the rise of the modern state. Official archives, records and statistics clearly play what Bhabha (1994) would characterise as a pedagogical role, fundamental to the imagining, and narration, of the nation. Moreover these archives and statistics, through processes of categorisation and enumeration ‘simplify’ society, rendering it more amenable the regulatory regimes of the state. Recognising that ‘all statistics should be treated as social artefacts, and the embeddedness of state practices of simplification and enumeration in networks of power, it is also important to see governmentality as ‘partial and problematic rather than totalising and accomplished’ (Ley, 2003, p.427).
Metaphors of visibility and legibility figure prominently in writing on the imbrications of official records, databases and statistics with the exercise of modern state power. Hannah (1997) characterises the census as an ‘organ of observation’, which, informed by an epistemology and ideology of panopticism, provided the state’s disciplinary apparatus with an ‘imperfect normalising vision’ and the potential for regulation and social control. In a similar vein Scott (1998) reflects on how the modern state’s demands for synoptic vision necessitated enterprises of translation and legibility in the production of ‘abridged maps’ of society through simplification and abstraction. In Scott’s (1998, p.3) words, modern statecraft was ‘devoted to rationalising and standardising what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format’. The census, therefore, became central to the practice of bureaucratic power, and its simplifications through categorisation and enumeration rendered complex, local, and ‘illegible’ social relations and practices susceptible to measurement and calculation (Scott, 1998; Appadurai, 1996). Discussing the role of the census and enumeration in the colonial imagination, Appadurai (1996, p.123) depicts the census as a technology of observation and control that ‘domesticates’ the narrative clutter of prose descriptions into ‘the abstract, precise, complete and cool idioms of numbers’.

In many ways the metaphor of enframing (Demerritt, 2001; Sparke, 1998) provides a neat way of summarising the processes through which the census and other state-sponsored inventories of populations transform heterogeneous identities and experiences into “an apparent calculable quantity available to new disciplinary forms of state power that Foucault argues are characteristic of modern governmentality” (Demerritt, 2001. p.431). Moreover, a critical reading of the practices of enframing expose the processes through which statistics are made to appear as ‘(self-)evidence’. Statistics are presented as data – secondary symbols passively reflecting a pre-existing quantity – and consequently practices of enframing produce the powerful effect of ‘objectivity’ and create a ‘tremendous certainty of representing’ (Demerritt, 2001).

1 The prominence of ‘ocularcentrism’ (Jones III, 1995) and metaphors of visibility testify to the significance of Foucault’s history of ‘disciplinary power’ and its emphasis on regulation through literal or metaphorical visibility. Foucault’s memorable use of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon and its supposed ‘normalising surveillance as a concrete manifestation of the exercise of disciplinary power’ (Hannah, 1997) reinforces this tendency.
Through these conceptualisations the census and other official enumerations of ‘identities’ are theorised as contributing to a ‘statistical panopticon’. They are technologies of surveillance and regulation designed to construct ‘legible people’ through categorisation, and ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ therefore become central visible cultural markers, forming the basis of ‘regimes for surveillance’. These broadly Foucauldian analyses underscore the embeddedness of official enumeration in the operation of state power, and the ways in which complex, diverse and heterogeneous population become ‘available’ to forms of disciplinary power. However, these theorisations also overplay the omniscience and omnipotence of the state (which is itself too often reified). Indeed, Hannah has attempted to deconstruct monolithic representations of ‘disciplinary power’, arguing that while the coupling of instruments of governmentality (such as the census) with the disciplinary institutions at the national scale is analogous to the workings of the panopticon, the proliferation of ‘anonymous spaces’ in the absence of geographical confinement means that “engagement with mechanisms of surveillance becomes more voluntary, individual (if not visibility) surveillance becomes more occasional, and the constellation of authorities more fragmented” (Hannah, 1997, p.178). Foucauldian readings also overemphasise ‘ill-intentioned and incessant’ surveillance (Caplan and Torpey, 2001; see also Scott, 1998) and it is important to underscore the emancipatory and progressive applications of identification and recognition through technologies of observation (for example the liberal institutions of citizenship and social welfare). That said, Hannah (2001) argues that by tying social spending and service provision to particular publicly recorded features of individuals’ lives redefines what is important in their lives and thus renders them more amenable to government.

2.3: Categorisation and documented identities

“Though boundaries, through a process of hegemony, may appear as rigid and hermetic, the differences so sorted are never neatly contained: they are only maintained, and this is through the force of the category itself”

(Natter and Jones III, 1997, p.146)
The construction of official archives and statistics inherently involves practices of categorisation and enumeration that enclose, fix, and essentialise identities. These problematic processes of definition and categorisation, which can be seen as institutionalising a ‘racialising gaze’ and performatively entrenching ‘race thinking’ (Gilroy, 2000), introduce a seemingly inevitable ambivalence into the use of official data in contemporary discussions of identity and identification. Recognising that the categories ‘Iranian’ and ‘immigrant’ are historically constituted, geographically specific and culturally constructed, I want to sketch some of the implications of depending on, and reproducing, these artefacts of ‘race thinking’.

The quantitative picturing of identity requires the dissolution of difference, diversity and heterogeneity into homogenous and bounded social constructs through a coupling of categorisation and enumeration. For example, Doel (2001) depicts the number ‘as the most brutal of levelling devices’, while Appadurai (1996) contends that the number ‘flattens idiosyncrasies’ as it recuperates the ‘unruly body’ into regimes of governmentality via categorisation. These characterisations speak to the inability of quantitative picturing to convey the multiplicity, mobility and nuance of individual identities and identifications, and the epistemological violence endemic to the construction of categories. Categorisation necessitates the fixing of social relations and processes (gender, race, ethnicity, and so forth) in order to stabilise categories for analysis (Lawson, 1995) and enable communication. These purifying technologies also deny the possibility of cultural entanglements, powerfully naturalising differences and divisions imagined through hermetically sealed categories. The processes through which identities are represented in official archives and statistics reproduces, to paraphrase Paul Gilroy, the idea of ‘common, racially indicative bodily characteristics’, which offers a ‘welcome short-cut into the favoured forms of solidarity and connection, even if they are effectively denied by divergent patterns in life chances and everyday experience’ (Gilroy, 2000, p.25). The opening quotation in this section (Natter and Jones III, 1997) summarises my argument succinctly. Stable, fixed identities are an effect

Indeed in the Canadian context the distinction between ‘immigrants’ and ‘non-immigrants’ in official archives and statistics appears paradoxical. The designation ‘immigrant’ communicates the sense of an ‘unnatural, anomalous place in the nation’ (Nash, forthcoming), even though the Canadian nation is narrated (with increasing vehemence) as a ‘nation of immigrants’. These discourses are so pervasive that Sparke (1998) even identifies this national pedagogy in representations of First Nations peoples, who are, for example, depicted in the Historical Atlas of Canada as ‘Canada’s first immigrants’.
produced through powerful and performative forms of hegemonic representation based on official databases and statistics. The categorisation ‘Iranian’ or ‘Iranian-born’ in the census or other institutionally managed databases, performatively reinscribed through representations based on this data, produces the effect of homogeneity through the suppression of diversity and heterogeneity. Moreover, the repetitious use of categories and names in official archives and over time produces the effect of stability. Representations of ‘Iranians’ through official statistics, for example, suggests stability over time and space, even though everyday meanings and understandings of the identification ‘Iranian’ are highly dynamic and contingent. This is perhaps illustrated most starkly by the contrast in the different meanings popularly invested and inscribed in the designation ‘Iranian’ before and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Another important critique of practices of categorisation and enumeration is that through abstraction they wrench individuals (or their attributes) from their local embodied realities and knowledge (Scott, 1998). The process of categorisation subsumes individual particularity in the ‘production of equivalence’, with the enframing of identities through categories reducing an individual to their publicly recorded attributes by which s/he can replace everyone else (Natter and Jones III, 1997, p.143). Each individual becomes interchangeable, a copy. These practices divorce individuals from their embedded local relations and insert them in ‘virtual categorical communities’ on the basis of their documented attributes (the data) (Hannah, 2001). The exclusive classificatory logic of official statistics therefore erases the diverse realities of individuals embedded in contingent and heterogeneous social networks through the assumption that documented identifications (Iranian) produce ‘digits’ in an aggregate series of replicable (‘Iranian’) identities (see Anderson, 1991).

The practices of categorisation and the production of fixed and closed identities out of ‘the multiplicity of unnamed alterity’ (Natter and Jones III, 1997) has a proleptic effect, for they contribute to the construction of society and social divisions that later they only seem to represent (see Sparke, 1998; Hannah, 2001). Identities are not the raw material of categorisation, but the product of categorisation (Dixon & Jones III, 1998). Technologies

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3 See, for example, my participants’ discussions of the shifting symbolic value of the Iranian passport.
of observation and control are reified and refracted in the social imaginary, inscribing categories onto the bodies and into the minds of individuals, producing group consciousness, and rendering certain social attributes meaningful in their remaking of society. 'Race' or 'ethnicity' differentiated data powerfully shape the ways in which social variability and difference are imagined, produce the logical basis for minority and majority groups, and set the stage for group 'differences' to be central within the political landscape (Appadurai, 1996; Zuberi, 2001). The productive potential of categories raises fundamental concerns about the ways in which 'race differentiated data' are used, and should lead to close consideration of our motivations for using such data, and evaluations of the implications of calculating, analysing and interpreting disparities and differences when such practices reproduce the pernicious effects of divisive 'race thinking'.

2.4: Towards a progressive politics of counting

"Genuine refutation must penetrate the power of the opponent and meet him on the ground of his strength; the case is not won by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him where he is not"

(Adorno cit. Sheppard, 2001, p.549)

Foucauldian readings of information gathering and surveillance tend to disproportionately focus on the pernicious consequences of state practices, frequently eliding or downplaying their emancipatory and progressive potential. Moreover, the centrality of official archives and statistics in bureaucratic discourses and practices provides the analytical space for progressive politics of 'counting'. Sparke (1998) has contrasted the intensity of academic interest in the hegemonic effect of national mapping with an apparent lack of interest in the counterhegemonic effects of cartographic negotiations, and I think the logic of his argument might be extended to much of the literature on the use of official statistics.

Deconstructing arbitrary, colonising and exclusivist constructions of identity produced through categorisations is an important enterprise, but it can also blind us to various negotiations and subversions of categories. At first, 'being counted' appears to be a passive form of representation, but Hannah (2001, p. 516) has recently argued for a
conceptualisation of ‘statistical citizenship’ that involves “strategic and active participation in the construction of statistical representations by which individuals are constituted as political actors, objects of social policy, and/or consumers”. Recognizing that self-identification is the normal procedure for gathering information, Hannah (2001, p.516) argues that in its fullest sense statistical citizenship is the ‘self-consciously political management of individual information’\(^4\). Two recent examples from the Canadian census, while not necessarily engendering the progressive political engagement outlined by Hannah, certainly demonstrate the potential for active participation and negotiation of categories imposed by the classificatory logic of the census. ‘Self-enumeration’ was introduced to the Canadian census in 1971 and in recent years there have been two conspicuous examples of subversion or resistance to confining census categorisations. Firstly, Hiebert (1998) remarks how many individuals in Vancouver appeared to selectively interpret the 1996 census question on ‘ethnic origin’, identifying as ‘Canadian’ (in 1986 less than 5000 individuals in Vancouver were documented as ‘Canadian’ in their responses to a similarly worded question, the number rose to 125,000 single responses and a further 188,000 multiple responses in 1996) and thereby ignoring the ‘ancestral’ component of the census question (Hiebert, 1998). Alternatively, in response to the question on religion in the 2001 census 20,000 Canadians identified in the in the census box entitled ‘Other’\(^5\) as ‘Jedi Knight’ in a blatant subversion of state practices of documentation and enumeration.

Official statistics can also form the foundation of informed social policy, effective citizenship and progressive political activism. Charles Taylor (cit. Sayer, 1992, p.12) argues that identities are constituted dialogically within social contexts, requiring recognition from others and that misrecognition or the withholding of recognition is a form of oppression. Documented identifications through categorisation and enumeration provide one possible conduit to recognition by the state, albeit confined by the strictures of the classificatory logic of bureaucratic power. Moreover, while employing problematic practices of definition and

\(^4\) ‘Statistical citizenship’ would require considerable knowledge on the techniques of information gathering and local socio-economic and cultural contexts and Hannah (2001) registers a concern that ‘statistical citizenship’ might appear to be a ‘game’ for the educated classes, while those with the most to gain from the strategic engagements lack the resources to effective participate.

\(^5\) Anderson (1991, p.184) remarks the “comic classificatory and subclassificatory census box entitled ‘Other’ concealed all real-life anomalies by a splendid trompe l’oeil”
categorisation, ‘race differentiated data’ can inform and empower anti-discrimination and anti-racist political activism, although one must also be aware of the potential cooption of such statistics by reactive and racialised political discourses, as well as the ways in which they entrench ‘race thinking’ (Gilroy, 2000; Zuberi, 2001). ‘Counting’ can also reveal broad contours of difference, and situate more qualitative approaches to research. McLafferty (1995) argues that even recognising the fuzziness of the boundaries of culturally constructed categories, the particularity of individuals, and the diversity and heterogeneity of ‘groups’ does not negate the analytical value of social divisions, or their existence: “Social practices, attitudes, and institutions are far from constant, yet neither are they mere ephemera of a researcher’s imagination” (Code cit. McLafferty, 1995, p.438)

These introductory comments underscore the necessity for greater reflexivity and political awareness in research (McLafferty, 1995). Reactions to the quantitative revolution within geography, and the limited political engagement it often represented, have sustained trenchant critiques of counting from disparate political and theoretical perspectives. However, the conflation of epistemology with methodology (quantification equals positivism) and the dichotomisation of qualitative and quantitative research, both in academic debates and practice, appears disingenuous, particularly when accompanied by an outright dismissal of quantitative techniques and denying the potential for progressive and politically engaged quantitative picturing.

2.5: Situating migrations

Migration and exile have been evident features in Iranian and Persian history (Amanat, 1993); however, the 1979 Islamic revolution heralded a sea-change in the scale and intensity of migration from Iran. Recent migration from Iran is embedded in complex transformations in the Iranian political landscape, Iran’s shifting positionality in geopolitical discourses and a globalising political economy. Moreover, decisions to migrate must also be situated within social networks, as well as incorporate broader family motivations and goals, and diverse cultural logics. At the other end of the migration chain, changes in the Canadian immigration regime have important implications for establishing Canada as a destination for immigrants. Immigration reform in 1967 ended a stable and overtly racialised immigration
regime in Canada characterised by European preference (Green and Green, 1996). This legislation transformed the composition of immigrant origins truncating migration from Europe and the United States and increasing migration from other continents (Ley, 1999). Overhauls to the Canadian immigration regime in the 1980s were similarly transformative. The 1990s were the heaviest period of immigration in Canada since the first two decades of the 20th century, following the introduction of 5 year immigration plans, which replaced the annual revision of targets tied to the performance of the Canadian economy and were designed to stabilise annual immigration to Canada at above 200,0006. In 1996 the number of international arrivals to British Columbia exceeded 50,000 – for the first time since 1912 (Ley, 1999). Legislation in the mid-1980s led to greater emphasis on economic migration, particularly with the introduction of a new business class of migrants designed to attract immigrants with considerable endowments of human and financial capital. The changing accents of Canadian immigration policy have led to reductions in the relative significance of humanitarian and family reunification programmes, but have also increased the diversity of immigrant status (Ley, 1999).

2.6: Profiling immigrants

The Longitudinal Immigration Database (LIDS)7, compiled and managed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) produces considerable knowledge on new immigrants through the documentation of particular attributes of all international arrivals to Canada. The data represented through LIDS necessarily reflects the practices and priorities of the state through the questions asked and the categories constructed8. However, the database also provides significant potential for ‘profiling’ immigrants, introducing a number of other complexities. The particular construction of categories in LIDS requires that the ‘country of

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6 Landings in the 1990s fluctuated around 215,000 immigrants per annum (Hiebert, 1999)

7 I would like to thank CIC and the RIIM, the Vancouver Centre of Excellence for the Metropolis Project for access to LIDS.

8 The state’s demands for legibility are evident in the construction of LIDS. The primary attributes of documentation include immigrant category, levels of education and educational qualifications, ‘native language’, Canadian language ability, city of destination and intention to work. LIDS provides no means of gauging the number of undocumented Iranian-born immigrants – that is those who enter Canada without documentation or overstay visas.
birth' attribute be employed as a proxy for 'Iranian immigrants'. The utilisation of this imperfect proxy involves a homogenising performance through which mobile and multiple individual identifications are reduced in an imputed attribute constituted through an accident of birth. The 'country of birth' attribute fails to communicate the multiple and often ambivalent positionalities of individuals in relation to the state, the significance of marginalized identities (particularly given histories of ethnic and religious prejudice in Iran), and the birth of foreign nationals within Iran (potentially significant given the number of North American and European citizens in Iran under the neo-colonial relations that characterised the Shah's regime). Alternatively, my primary interest is in migration to Metropolitan Vancouver; however, the documentation of immigrants on their entry into Canada only records their intended destination, and can therefore merely suggest the geographical distributions of immigrants and provides no means of determining whether individuals settle in their stated destination. With these caveats in mind, and in the recognition that the categories produced and data manufactured through this database reflect the state's demands for legibility more than the meaningful identifications and experiences of individual immigrants, I provide a 'profile' of immigrants born in Iran and who migrated to Canada between 1980 and 2000.

Immigrant Category

Statistics published by CIC in their Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview for 2001 provide an illustrative snapshot of the recent immigration of those individuals recorded as Iranian-born within a broader context, situating a closer profile of Iranian-born immigrants destined for Metropolitan Vancouver between 1980-2000. In 2001 Iran was the seventh largest 'source country' of immigrants to Canada, the 5,736 immigrants accounting for 2.29% of all immigrants (250,346) (CIC, 2002). Of this number 1,227, or 21.4%, stated that their intended destination was the Vancouver census metropolitan area (CMA), where Iran was the sixth largest 'source country', constituting 3.59% of all international migration to the CMA (CIC, 2002). In 2001, Iranian-born immigrants entered Canada through a number of

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9 The time period is arbitrary determined by the availability of data through LIDS (compilation began in 1980 and data was available until 2000 at the time of analysis), fortuitously, however, it coincides with the period of more intense migration from Iran, and therefore the data represent the majority of Iranian born immigrants to Canada who are recorded as stating Vancouver CMA as their destination.
immigration programmes, although they are particularly prominent in the refugee class (Iran was the fifth largest source country with 1,474 entrants accounting for 5.28% of all refugees) and the business class (Iran was the fifth largest source country with 737 immigrants, or 5.05% of all business immigrants) (CIC, 2002).

This statistical snapshot from 2001 suggests Iranian-born immigrants were prominently represented in a number of immigration programmes. Over the 1980-2000 period the majority of Iranian born immigrants entered Canada through economic immigration programmes (either as principal applicants or their dependants), with a significant number documented as refugees (Table 2.1). Although a crude and imperfect comparison given the differences in time periods over which the data was collated, the profile of Iranian-born immigrants by immigrant class between 1980 and 2000 (Table 2.1), is quite distinct from the profile of all immigrants to Canada, and all immigrants destined for Vancouver, in 2001. For example, 26.6% of all immigrants to Canada and 26.8% of all immigrants destined for Vancouver CMA entered as family class immigrants, compared with only 11.1% of Iranian-born immigrants. Alternatively, while the number of economic class immigrants is comparable, the number of Iranian-born refugees destined for Vancouver CMA, accounting for 24.0% of all Iranian-born immigrants\textsuperscript{10}, appears disproportionate in contrast to the 2001 profiles of all immigrants to Canada (11.1%) and Vancouver (5.8%). These divergences suggest that Iranian-born immigrants intending to settle in Vancouver have a distinct profile in terms of immigrant class, contingent in large part upon transformations in the political landscape in Iran after the 1979 revolution, the Iran-Iraq war and the perennial displacement and oppression of the Kurds.

\textsuperscript{10} At a national level 29.4% of Iranian-born immigrants entered Canada through humanitarian programmes.
The construction of LIDS, a longitudinal database, also allows for detailed profiling of changing immigration trends over time (Figure 2.1). Immigration of individuals born in Iran rose from almost non-existent levels in the late 1970s, in anticipation of, and later in response to, the revolution. Throughout the 1980s levels of immigration for those destined for Vancouver remained relatively stable reflecting continuing migration from the inchoate Islamic Republic, although the composition of the ‘cohort’ by immigrant class varied significantly from year to year. Although initially high, the number of economic class immigrants born in Iran falls during the early and mid 1980s, reflective in part of an immigration regime that closely tied targets to the performance of the Canadian economy. Over the same period, however, there were marked increases in the proportion entering as refugees, most probably reflecting the Canadian state’s response to political upheavals and reports of persecution in Iran. However, in 1991 the confluence of rises in both the number of refugees and economic migrants born in Iran to Vancouver produced a sharp,  

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11 The proportion of Government Assisted Refugees born in Iran and destined for Vancouver rose dramatically between 1986 and 1990, peaking in 1988 where they accounted for 31.4% of all Iranian-born immigrants to Vancouver. This relative figure should be situated in the context of relatively low absolute numbers of Iranian-born arrivals, which totalled 548 in 1988.
albeit unsustained, increase in the total number of arrivals\textsuperscript{12}. From the mid 1990s the total number of Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver correlates extremely closely with the number entering through economic immigration programmes (Figure 2.1), and is associated in particular with increases in the number of skilled workers. Although the absolute numbers of Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver increased sharply between 1995 and 1997 before tailing off at the end of the decade, the number of individuals entering Canada via other immigration programmes other than the economic programmes appears to stabilise considerably.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant Class</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>9418</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>3929</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Other&quot;</td>
<td>1181</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16351</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Iranian-born immigrants (1980-2000) recorded as intending to settle in Metropolitan Vancouver by immigrant class. (Source: LIDS)

The broad categorisation of immigrant class provides limited insights into the diversity of the composition of a ‘cohort’ constructed on the basis of country of birth. However, these broad strokes also occlude the complex composition of these categorisations, and below I want to sketch some of the salient features that emerge from a closer examination of immigrant categorisations, before concentrating on a more focussed profiling of economic and refugee class immigrants.

Levels of education among Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver over the 1980-2000 period appear to be comparable, if marginally higher, to all Iranian-born immigrants to

\textsuperscript{12} This marked peak is coincidental with changes in the Canadian immigration regime, which became orientated towards sustained high levels of immigration in the early 1990s. However, this anomalous rise appears to suggest different causality. The rise coincides with over 10 years in government for the Islamic Regime, and the furore over the publication of The Satanic Verses, and may reflect individuals evaluating their situation and looking for a 'better life' outside of Iran. Alternatively, by this time there is a considerable, and relatively established Persian population in Vancouver, and this might represent, in part at least, the activation of chains of migration.
Canada, reflecting perhaps differences in the relative composition by immigrant class (fewer refugees intend to settle in Vancouver). Alternatively, the educational profile for all Iranian-born immigrants to Vancouver between 1980 and 2000, appear to be distinct from annual profiles produced for all immigrants to Metropolitan Vancouver at the turn of the century. The distinctions are worth noting, despite the contrasts of a 20-year period with snapshots of individual years, and particularly given significant changes in Canada’s immigration regime that has increasingly orientated it towards ‘economic’ immigrants. That said the heaviest immigration of Iranians to Vancouver occurred in the years after these policy changes, and the distinctions produced for the 1980-2000 period are replicated in the data on Iranian-born immigrants in the individual years 1999 and 2000 (Figure 2.1). Between 1999 and 2001 approximately 15% of all immigrants to Vancouver CMA had less than 9 years education, with about a further 15% receiving less than 12 years of education, compared with 31.6% and 24.0% respectively for Iranian-born immigrants (CIC, 2002; LIDS). Alternatively, between 32% and 36% of all immigrants to Vancouver had Bachelor degrees, and a further 8-9% had Masters between 1999 and 2001, whereas over the 20-year period only 19.2% of Iranian-born immigrants arrived with a Bachelor’s degree and 5.6% with a Master’s degree (CIC, 2002; LIDS). These broad contours of difference should not obfuscate the highly uneven levels of education within this virtual and homogenised statistical ‘community’. For example, beyond striking differences in the levels of education between and within immigrant classes elucidated below, there are important gendered disparities in the levels of education, which Iranian-born female immigrants consistently having lower levels of education than their male counterparts.

The statistical profile does not suggest any sharp distinctions in the documented attributes of Iranian-born immigrants to Vancouver over time. However, the statistics appear to suggest a number of more subtle trends. Although there are major disparities in the levels of education both between and within the categorisations of immigrants (see below), there also appears to be some temporal variations in levels of education for all Iranian-born immigrants. Levels of education fluctuate annually, but in the period immediately after the revolution the levels of education among Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver appear to be relatively high. For example, in 1981 and 1982, 32.3% and 33.3% of Iranian-born immigrants had at least a Bachelors degree, compared with 26.5% for the 1980-2000
period. This period coincides with a significant numbers of Iranian-born individuals migrating to Canada from ‘world regions’ other than the ‘Middle East and Africa’, as well as with the Cultural Revolution in Iran that witnessed the closure of universities and the exclusion of many professionals from the workforce (Amanat, 1993). In the 1981-83 period between 64% and 69% of Iranian-born immigrants migrated from the ‘Middle East or Africa’ compared with 85.2% for the entire 1980 and 2000 period. In this brief period after the 1979 revolution the majority of these twice migrants\textsuperscript{13} came from Europe or the United States, suggesting that these were individuals who were either working or studying abroad at the time of the revolution and had decided not to return to Iran, or they fled Iran to a third country before migrating again to Canada. Statistics produced on Canadian language ability also suggest that Iranian-born immigrants in the early 1980s had higher competencies in English, and a higher proportion of bilingual immigrants than later years. These subtle differences begin to bring together a profile, I think, of a more educated and cosmopolitan ‘cohort’ in the period immediately after the revolution, members, perhaps, of what had been self-styled as a ‘Westernised’ elite under the Shah’s regime in Iran.

Returning briefly to the educational profile of Iranian-born immigrants, there is a marginal, but noticeable, increase in the levels of education of immigrants in the late 1990s. Although the proportions of Iranian-born immigrants entering between 1996 and 2000 have with less than 9 years of schooling are comparable to the statistics for all Iranian-born immigrants, the figures also document that the proportions with at least a Bachelor’s degree are relatively higher in these years. For example, the proportion of Iranian-born immigrants with at least a Bachelor’s degree ranges from 30.1% and 33.6% between 1996 and 2000, while the proportion for all immigrants over the entire 20-year period is 26.5%. These changes might indicate that a number of highly educated individuals have become disenchanted and alienated in Iran over recent years, perhaps with the failure of the Khatami government to deliver promised political reforms.

Ability in an official Canadian language is another documented attribute that might have significant implications for individual experiences of immigration and settlement. Ability in

\textsuperscript{13} It is of course possible that a number of these individuals were foreign nationals born in Iran, who later migrated to Canada.
official Canadian languages is uneven among Iranian-born immigrants. In terms of temporal variation, I have already suggested that among earlier immigrants destined for Vancouver, ability in English was markedly higher than succeeding years. Moreover, there are compelling correlations between levels of education and ability in one or more official Canadian languages. For example, 68.9% of Iranian-born immigrants with less than 9 years of education spoke neither English nor French. Conversely, in excess of 80% of Iranian-born immigrants with a Bachelor's degree or higher spoke English, and the proportion of bilingual immigrants also appears to increase markedly with education. Ability in official Canadian languages also appears to be gendered among Iranian-born immigrants, with 62.8% of male but only 50.8% of female immigrants able to speak English – a disparity also reflected the relative proportions of males and females who speak neither English nor French. More generally, as a constructed ‘cohort’ Iranian-born immigrants to Vancouver appear to have relatively low competencies in English, with 39.2% of individuals between 1980 and 2000 unable to speak either English or French at the time of their arrival.

Economic Immigrants:

Below I continue with a focused analysis of data produced on economic and refugee class immigrants born in Iran and intending to settle in Vancouver. Legislation in the 1980s transformed both levels of immigration and the programmes through which individuals were able to enter Canada (Green and Green, 1996; Ley, 1999). Decisions to migrate are complex, yet it is probable, in part at least, that these changes influenced the decisions of some immigrants as they opened up new and expanded channels for negotiating the regulatory regime of the Canadian state. Relatively low levels of immigration through economic programmes in the early and mid 1980s may be suggestive of the downward pressures of immigration targets conditioned by a deep economic recession in Canada. Alternatively, shifts in immigration policy that uncoupled immigration targets from economic performance as the government pursued policies of economic growth and demographic ‘rejuvenation’ through immigration, may have contributed to elevated, if

\[14\] This analysis excludes closer profiling of family class immigrants, although their statistical construction suggests notable similarities with the dependants entering through economic immigration programmes.
fluctuating numbers of Iranian-born economic class immigrants intending to settle in Vancouver\textsuperscript{15}.

In the year immediately after the revolution, a significant proportion of Iranian-born immigrants entered Canada via the 'self-employed' categorisation, particularly when compared with later years. Although Vancouver was the destination for a small absolute number of Iranian immigrants between 1980 and 1983 (ranging from 271 to 394 per annum), the relative number entering through the self-employed categorisation (either as principal applicant or their dependent) accounted, on average for these years, for 15.5% of all Iranian-born immigrants, in comparison with 3.6% for the 1980-2000 period. I think these figures are strongly suggestive of the characteristics of a significant component of the early Iranian-born migrants to Vancouver, particularly when coupled with the documented attributes discussed above. These movements, soon after the revolution appear to have included relatively affluent individuals who had decided to flee Iran and had been able to transfer considerable endowments of human and financial capital. Additionally, between 1980 and 1982 a significant number of Iranian-born immigrants also entered Canada as skilled workers, or their dependants, although the relative levels are not quite so dramatic because the number of Iranian-born immigrants entering as skilled workers is consistently high throughout the 1980-2000 period.

The expansion of Canada’s business immigration programmes – made with a ‘definite eye toward Hong Kong’ during the negotiations over the repatriation of the former British colony to China (Ley, 1999) – and subsequent migration trends has stimulated considerable academic, political and media interest in business class immigrants, particularly from Hong Kong and Taiwan (see Ley, 1995; 1999; Li, 1994; Hiebert, 1998; Waters, 2002). However, these business immigration programmes have also provided an avenue for a limited cohort of Iranian-born immigrants possessing considerable amounts of human and financial capital (Table 2.2).

\textsuperscript{15} Of course these changes in immigration policy intersect in complex and dynamic ways with a variety of factors. Thus, elevated numbers of economic migrants may also reflect the activation of chains of migration, changing political and socio-economic contexts in Iran, access to education, personal and family strategies and so forth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Class Immigrants</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (principal)</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (dependant)</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (principal)</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (dependant)</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (principal)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (dependant)</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (principal)</td>
<td>2906</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (dependant)</td>
<td>4036</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total economic class</td>
<td>9418</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all classes</td>
<td>16351</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.2:** Economic class immigrants born in Iran destined for Vancouver CMA, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)

Individually, business immigrant categories account for a relatively small proportion of all Iranian-born immigrants, but taken together they represent 15.1% of all Iranian-born immigrants between 1980-2000. To place this figure in context (albeit imperfectly) in 2001 business class immigrants constituted 5.8% of all documented immigrants to Canada and 10.0% of all immigrants to Vancouver CMA (CIC, 2002). These figures are even more remarkable as Iranian-born immigrants only began to enter Canada through the investor and expanded entrepreneur classes in earnest in the late 1980s.\(^\text{16}\) The requirements of Canada's business immigration regime necessitate that the entrants (or at least the principal applicant) possess substantial human and financial capital. The arrival of business class immigrants (associated in particular with recent immigration streams from Southeast Asia) has been widely related with changing cultural landscapes and social geographies of immigrant settlement in Vancouver (Ley, 1995). Although Ley (1999; 2000; 2003) has challenged popular and bureaucratic imaginings of an immigrant 'overclass' or the coming of *homo economicus*, demonstrating the modest economic performance of many business class immigrants in Canada. There is a evidently a number of extremely wealthy Iranian-born immigrants in Vancouver, many of whom have become established in the "stratospheric...

\(^\text{16}\) Immigration of Iranian-born individuals did, however, accelerate from the late 1980s, with the 1990s being a much heavier period of migration than the proceeding decade (Figure 4.1).
property market' of the British Properties in the municipality of West Vancouver (Hiebert, 1999). However, official statistics can only produce partial accounts of these individuals' experiences of migration, and rarely communicate the considerable social and psychological costs of migration particularly when it engenders modest economic performance in the Canadian context or the assumption of 'astronaut strategies' that stretch family relations across continents and oceans.

LIDS is restricted by state priorities, but it does allow considerable cross-tabulation of those attributes it documents, producing partial and homogenising knowledge through the categories it constructs. Unpacking the data produced through LIDS on the composition of economic class immigrants born in Iran by gender produces some remarkable, and powerful, statistics (Table 2.3). Statistics on the principal applicant in all four categories of the economic class reveal a highly uneven, and unequal, gendering of immigration. This unequal gendering is most stark in the investor and entrepreneur categories and even in the skilled worker category males are disproportionately represented as principal applicants (Table 2.3). Inevitably, these statistics depict, to some extent, uneven access to education and employment opportunities by gender in Iran, and reflect patriarchal assumptions about gendered responsibilities within the family. However, I think they are also indicative of gendered biases in the bureaucratic construction of immigrant classes (Silvey and Lawson, 1999). Skills base and other forms of points systems employed by immigration regimes are ostensibly neutral in terms of gender, 'race' and ethnicity, although in practice sexist and racist stereotyping persists (Silvey and Lawson, 1999). For example, the administrative definition and interpretation of 'skilled workers' imply male labour, effectively according preferential status to men of working age\(^{17}\), contributing in the process to the gender differences among economic class immigrants.

\(^{17}\) The scripting of 'principal applicants' and 'dependants' similarly reflects gendered inequality instituted through assumptions of patriarchal relations and heteronormality in bureaucratic categorisations.
Economic Class Immigrants | Male | %   | Female | %   | Total |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (principal)</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (dependant)</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>1188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (principal)</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (dependant)</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (principal)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (dependant)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (principal)</td>
<td>2390</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>3134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (dependant)</td>
<td>1667</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>2696</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>4363</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: The unequal gendering of economic class immigrants born in Iran and intending to settle in Vancouver CMA, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)

The age profiles of business class immigrants born in Iran and destined for Vancouver are also interesting. Principal applicants are over-represented in the 40-64 age range, which accounted for 79.5% of the entrepreneur class, 71.4% of the self-employed class, and 84.3% of the investor class. Meanwhile, this age group category constitutes only 26.4% of all immigrants born in Iran and intending to settle in Vancouver. This profile undoubtedly reflects the significant capital assets required to enter Canada through its business immigration regimes. The age structures for the dependants of business class immigrants are also noteworthy, with in excess of 50% of dependants in all classes in the 0-19 age group, and approximately equal numbers in the 20-39 and 40-64 age categories. These figures provide limited insight into business immigration among individuals born in Iran and are suggestive, I think, of family migration, a situation that begins to deconstruct the categorical construction of these immigrants. Although principal applicants are scripted as 'business immigrants', their movement should be situated within a broader family strategy of relocation that, in many cases, is often motivated by the desire to enable their children to receive education in Canada rather than economic betterment per se.

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18 The age structure of principal applicants in the entrepreneur, investor and self-employed classes are comparable for all Iranian born entering Canada, although the proportion in the 40-64 age groups is higher for those immigrants destined for Vancouver.

19 Although it is impossible to discern motivations from these official statistics, interviews with individual Iranians (see below) suggest that business immigration programmes are used strategically by Iranians to enter
Contrasts presented through the categorisation and enumeration of levels of education, intention to work, and Canadian language ability provide some striking distinctions between principal applicants and their dependants within the economic classes of immigrants. The distinctions between the educational profiles, documented through the level of education are compelling (Table 2.4). Principal applicants tend to have higher levels of education, with over 50% of business immigrants born in Iran and destined for Vancouver possessing at least a Bachelor's degree, with even higher proportions of principal applicants entering Canada as 'skilled workers' with a Bachelor's degree or higher (Table 2.4). The profile for principal applicants entering through economic immigration programmes is markedly higher than for all Iranian born immigrants, of whom 26.9% have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Dependants entering through economic immigration programmes have relatively low levels of education by comparison, with the differences between proportions of principal applicants and dependants in the 0-9 years of schooling category providing stark contrasts (Table 2.4). The entrance of families through economic immigration programmes, and therefore the age structure of dependants undoubtedly shapes the relative educational profiles of principal applicants and dependants. Furthermore, data produced through the 'intention to work' category suggests disproportionate proportions of Iranian-born dependants entering through economic immigration programmes intend to study in Vancouver, with over 50% of dependants entering through business immigration programmes intending to study.

At the national scale the educational profile for Iranian-born principal applicants entering through economic immigration programmes are comparably elevated in relation to all Iranian-born immigrants, although they differ slightly to those of immigrants destined for Vancouver CMA. For example, the proportion of 'skilled workers' with at least a Bachelor's degree is 62.4% compared with 71.4% of those destined for Vancouver. Alternatively, investor immigrants to Canada have a higher ratio with a Bachelor's degree or higher, 61.6% compared to 54.7% for those destined for Vancouver, while entrepreneurs have a marked lower proportion with Bachelor's degrees or higher for all Canada (48.2%) compared to those intending to settle in Vancouver (56.2%). Although these levels of education are impressive, these crude measurements of human capital provide no indication of labour market experiences in Canada or the likelihood that educational qualifications will be recognised.

The proportions are: entrepreneur dependants 58.5%, self-employed dependants 53.4%, and investor dependants 62.5%. A significant proportion of dependants entering through business immigration programmes also stated that they had no intention to work with an average of 37.7% of economic class dependants heading for Vancouver stating that they did not intend to work, compared with 26.8% of all Iranian-born immigrants. Alternatively, for principal applicants entering as economic class immigrants the stated intention to work is extremely high, with only 0.03% intending not to work or to study in Canada.
study in Vancouver, compared to an average of 26.6% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver. The distinctions in educational profiles, and statistics produced through the intention to work category, lends additional currency to contentions that immigration is, in part at least, a family strategy employed to give children access to education in Canada.

Statistics produced through the categorisations of Canadian language ability signify a similar polarisation between principal applicants and dependants entering through economic immigration programmes (Table 2.5). Principal applicants in all economic classes exhibit significantly higher competencies in English than all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver, with a remarkably high proportion documented as English-speaking in the skilled worker category (Table 2.5). Alternatively, the proportion of dependants competent in English is markedly lower than that of all Iranian-born immigrants intending to settle in Vancouver, and considerably lower than the principal applicants for all economic classes. Indeed, for all economic classes the percentage of dependants entering through economic immigration programmes that are unable to speak either English or French exceeds 50% (Table 2.5). These documented language abilities partially reflect the age of many dependants, who immigrating, for example, as children may not have had the opportunity to develop competency in English. Limited language abilities may also be suggestive of knowledge about the considerable Persian population in Vancouver and its associated cultural infrastructure and social networks, which means that individuals – particularly dependants not intending to work – feel comfortable settling in Vancouver despite their limited linguistic capabilities.

These statistics, while reflecting the expectations of labour market experiences cannot communicate the actual experiences of Iranian-born economic class immigrants.

22 The documentation of Canadian language ability for Iranian-born principal applicants in the economic class is congruent with that for Vancouver, albeit with marginally higher proportions recorded as francophone or bilingual.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Class Immigrants</th>
<th>0-9 years of schooling</th>
<th>10-12 years of schooling</th>
<th>Some university (13+years)</th>
<th>Trade certificate</th>
<th>Non-university diploma</th>
<th>Bachelor's Degree</th>
<th>Master's Degree</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (principal)</td>
<td>20 4.1%</td>
<td>93 19.3%</td>
<td>47 9.8%</td>
<td>33 6.8%</td>
<td>35 7.3%</td>
<td>173 35.9%</td>
<td>64 13.3%</td>
<td>17 3.5%</td>
<td>482</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (dependant)</td>
<td>553 46.5%</td>
<td>282 23.7%</td>
<td>113 9.5%</td>
<td>63 5.3%</td>
<td>39 3.3%</td>
<td>125 10.5%</td>
<td>11 0.9%</td>
<td>2 0.2%</td>
<td>1188</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (principal)</td>
<td>9 4.6%</td>
<td>27 13.8%</td>
<td>14 7.1%</td>
<td>14 7.1%</td>
<td>16 8.2%</td>
<td>71 36.2%</td>
<td>36 18.4%</td>
<td>9 4.6%</td>
<td>196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (dependant)</td>
<td>207 48.5%</td>
<td>27 6.3%</td>
<td>25 5.9%</td>
<td>34 8.0%</td>
<td>17 4.0%</td>
<td>38 8.9%</td>
<td>6 1.4%</td>
<td>3 0.7%</td>
<td>427</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (principal)</td>
<td>4 3.7%</td>
<td>24 22.2%</td>
<td>7 6.5%</td>
<td>8 7.4%</td>
<td>6 5.6%</td>
<td>41 38.0%</td>
<td>14 13.0%</td>
<td>4 3.7%</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (dependant)</td>
<td>127 40.7%</td>
<td>100 32.1%</td>
<td>36 11.5%</td>
<td>12 3.8%</td>
<td>6 1.9%</td>
<td>24 7.7%</td>
<td>5 1.6%</td>
<td>2 0.6%</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (principal)</td>
<td>40 1.3%</td>
<td>262 8.4%</td>
<td>258 8.2%</td>
<td>138 4.4%</td>
<td>197 6.3%</td>
<td>1490 47.5%</td>
<td>588 18.8%</td>
<td>161 5.1%</td>
<td>3134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (dependant)</td>
<td>2232 51.2%</td>
<td>818 18.8%</td>
<td>250 5.7%</td>
<td>132 3.0%</td>
<td>137 3.1%</td>
<td>626 14.4%</td>
<td>133 3.1%</td>
<td>32 0.7%</td>
<td>4360</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all immigrants)</td>
<td>5540 31.8%</td>
<td>4162 23.9%</td>
<td>1412 8.1%</td>
<td>853 4.9%</td>
<td>762 4.4%</td>
<td>3393 19.5%</td>
<td>985 5.7%</td>
<td>301 1.7%</td>
<td>17408</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.4:** Levels of education among Iranian-born economic class immigrants destined for Vancouver, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Class Immigrants</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Bilingual</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (principal)</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur (dependant)</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>1188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (principal)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (dependant)</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (principal)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor (dependant)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (principal)</td>
<td>2782</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers (dependant)</td>
<td>1743</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2492</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>4363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all immigrant classes)</td>
<td>9724</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>7052</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>17410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5: Canadian language ability among Iranian-born economic class immigrants destined for Vancouver, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)
The economic class constitute the single most significant class for Iranian-born immigrants intending to settle in Vancouver, and with the continuing reorientation of Canada's immigration regime towards those scripted as 'economic immigrants', and coupled with the retrenchment of an historically generous humanitarian programme it appears that this trend will be accentuated in the foreseeable future. Although constrained by many of the inherent limitations of state sponsored and managed databases, the data marshalled into producing a statistical profile of economic class immigrants reveal some compelling contrasts. The data also provide the possibility of deconstructing popular and political imaginings of economic class immigrants as *homo economicus* (Ley, 2000), a myth that grounds, in part, the regulation of immigration as a federal policy of economic growth and development in Canada. Producing a broader statistical tableau that incorporates both principal applicants and dependants underscores that even business immigrants are not ever purely economic actors, but rather economic immigration programmes offer possible routes for negotiating the state's regulation of its borders that are strategically pursued within the broader contexts of family goals and desires.

**Refugees**

Koser (1997 p.591) has questioned the analytical distinction between refugees and labour migration, or what are effectively reduced to the political and economic, or 'forced' and 'voluntary' components of international migration, arguing that the constructed category of 'refugee' screens many empirical similarities between refugees and immigrants\(^23\). Accepting these important similarities, the knowledge disseminated by LIDS about Iranian-born immigrants at their time of entry suggests some significant distinctions between, and within, immigrant classes. Refugees constituted 24.0% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver (Table 2.1), a figure significantly higher, in relative terms, than the proportion of all immigrants entering Canada, and all immigrants destined for Vancouver, as refugees. It is, however, noticeably lower than the proportion of all Iranian-born immigrants entering Canada (29.4%) between 1980 and 2000.

\(^{23}\) Koser (1997) argues that these similarities include the embeddedness of movement in social networks, the structural positions of refugees and other migrants in labour markets, and subjection to restrictive immigration policies and racism.
Unpacking the broader category of refugee class by different humanitarian programmes produces some remarkable distinctions. The majority of Iranian-born refugees destined for Vancouver between 1980 and 2000 were asylum refugees; that is they claimed asylum at a point of entry as they arrived in Canada (Table 2.6). A significant proportion of the Iranian-born refugee class also entered as government assisted refugees, through humanitarian programmes reflecting the Canadian state’s commitment to protecting and resettling individuals at risk from political or religious persecution. A small proportion of the refugee class entered Canada as privately sponsored refugees (Table 2.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee Class</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government assisted refugees</td>
<td>1448</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately sponsored refugees</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum refugees</td>
<td>2125</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Refugees</td>
<td>3929</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all immigrant classes)</td>
<td>16351</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.6: Refugee class immigrants born in Iran and destined for Vancouver CMA, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)

Entrance through different refugee classes varies considerably over time. For example, privately sponsored refugees constituted a disproportionate proportion of all Iranian-born immigrants intending to settle in Vancouver between 1982 and 1986. The number entering through this programme peaked in 1983 when it accounted for 20.2% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver, although the absolute numbers were low, with this proportion representing only 65 individuals. The relative significance of the private sponsorship programme tapers off dramatically, and accounts for a minimal proportion of all Iranian-born refugees throughout the 1990s. Alternatively, the relative number of Iranian-born immigrants entering Canada as government assisted refugees increased dramatically in the mid and late 1980s, peaking in 1988 when 31.4% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver were documented in this category. Throughout the 1990s the number of individuals entering as government assisted refugees has varied annually, with proportions becoming markedly depressed in the mid-1990s but increasingly
significantly at the end of the decade. These temporal variations are indicative of the shifting political landscape in Iran, and I would suggest that the earlier peak in the numbers of privately sponsored refugees is reflective of private organisations and individuals being more responsive than the state to reports of political and religious persecution under the new government in Iran. The temporal variability in the proportion of government assisted refugees destined for Canada speaks in part, I think, to the events-driven character of the refugee and humanitarian resettlement programme. Alternatively, in the 1980s there were no immigrants destined for Vancouver documented as entering Canada as asylum refugees. However, asylum refugees have consistently accounted for between 12% and 19% of all Iranian-born immigrants during the 1990s, coincidentally the heaviest period of immigration for the Iranian-born ‘cohort’.

Further to these broad temporal trends, I sketch a brief profile of some of the more interesting features suggested by the enumeration of state categorisations of the refugee class. Differentiating the refugee class by ‘native language’ begins to suggest some distinctive features. The persecution of political dissidents and some religious minorities in Iran (most notably the Baha’is) has been well documented by humanitarian organisations and in the media. However, using the state’s categorisation of ‘native language’ as a crude and imperfect proxy for marginalized ethnic groups in Iran, it becomes apparent that some of these groups are over-represented in refugee classes of Iranian-born immigrants to Canada. Although individuals who were documented as speaking Farsi or Persian as their native language accounted for 94.4% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver, only 61.9% of those entering through refugee programmes are recorded as speaking Farsi or Persian. The proportion of documented Kurdish speakers entering as government assisted refugees is compelling. Although their absolute numbers are relatively small, over 80% of all documented Kurdish speakers born in Iran entered as government assisted refugees (Table

24 However, it is also probable that the majority of those Iranian-born individuals entering Canada as government assisted refugees would have undergone a refugee determination process in a third nation state before migrating to Canada, therefore introducing a time lag in the state’s response to changes in the political climate in Iran.

25 Farsi appears to have been introduced as a variable in LIDS in 1992, where individuals are asked to distinguish between Farsi and Persian. Until this year the majority of Iranian-born immigrants were identified as speaking Persian as their ‘native’ language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select 'native' language</th>
<th>Government assisted refugee</th>
<th>Privately sponsored refugee</th>
<th>Asylum refugee</th>
<th>Total (all immigrant classes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azeri</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1069</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>1017</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>1128</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Middle Eastern</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                    | 1629                          | 357                           | 2261          | 13.0%                       | 17411                              |

**Table 2.7:** Select 'native' languages of Iranian-born refugees destined for Vancouver, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)
2.7), accounting for 10.1% of entrants destined for Vancouver through this category.

The number of Iranian-born individuals entering through refugee programmes who were documented as stateless is striking, albeit not completely unexpected. In particular, 25.2% of all government assisted refugees were documented as stateless on entry to Canada, accounting for over 60% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver who claimed they were stateless. Perhaps unsurprisingly individuals documented as Kurdish speaking were disproportionately represented in this category, constituting 37.4% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver who identified as stateless.

Elaboration on Canadian language abilities between refugee class immigrants produce what appear to be some fundamental distinctions between asylum refugees and government assisted refugees (Table 2.8). Iranian-born asylum refugees were documented as being highly competent in English, in remarkable contrast to government assisted refugees, over 80% of whom were recorded as unable to speak either English or French. Differing contexts in movement to Canada, partly explain these disparities. Asylum refugees, predominantly migrating involuntarily, nevertheless choose to make a claim for asylum in Canada, and this strategic decision is likely to have been influenced in part by language ability. By contrast, government assisted refugees having undergone a refugee determination process, are then resettled in Canada. At the national scale this distinction between the language abilities of Iranian-born government assisted refugees and asylum refugees is marginally less polarised but remains equally dramatic.

26 At the national scale 83.3% of Iranian-born individuals documented as speaking Kurdish as their ‘native language’ entered Canada as government assisted refugees, accounting for 12.1% of all Iranian-born immigrants entering through this programme. These statistics underline the relative importance of the plight and oppression of the Kurds in Canada’s humanitarian programmes. Individuals documented as speaking Azeri, or captured in the meaningless categorisation ‘other Middle Eastern languages’ are also disproportionately represented in the government assisted refugee class.

27 Those documented as speaking Kurdish as their native language have particularly low Canadian language ability, with only 12.4% able to speak English and 87.6% speaking neither official languages.

28 The decision to place a claim in Canada is likely the outcome of a complex entanglement of considerations influenced variably by social network, imperfect knowledge, accessibility and so forth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee Class</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Bilingual</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government assisted refugees</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1338</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>1629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately sponsored refugees</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum refugees</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>2261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9724</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>7052</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>17410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.8: Canadian language ability among Iranian-born refugees destined for Vancouver CMA, 1980-2000. (Source: LIDS)
There are subtle differences in the educational profiles of the refugee classes. In general, individuals entering through refugee programmes tend to have lower levels of education than all Iranian-born immigrants, although statistics for the smaller privately sponsored refugee category depict a similar profile to this constructed ‘average’. For example, 77.5% of Iranian-born government assisted refugees, and 67.2% of asylum refugees are documented as having less than 10 years of schooling compared with 55.7% for all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver. The educational profiles of government assisted and asylum refugees suggest some differences, although these appear to be less significant than the disparities between these groups and the profiles for all Iranian-born immigrants.

Similarly differences in intention to work between government assisted refugees and asylum refugees are less dramatic than the divergence in language ability. The proportions of both categories intending to work is significantly higher than the proportion of all Iranian-born immigrants intending to work – 73.0% of asylum refugees and 58.9% of government assisted refugees reported intending to work, compared with 46.6% of all Iranian-born immigrants destined for Vancouver. Admittedly these statistics only communicate documented intention to work, but they begin to undermine popular imaginings of refugees as disproportionately dependant on the state.

Data available through LIDS produces valuable and detailed knowledge on a number of documented attributes of immigrants to Canada, albeit constrained and defined by the state’s priorities and demands for legibility. The statistical profiling of Iranian-born immigrants enables a broader contextualisation of immigration, and also produces a number of insights that begin to challenge popular and institutional constructions of immigrants. For example, statistical representations of economic class immigrants underscore the highly unequal gendering of economic immigration programmes, as well as suggesting that despite scripting as ‘economic’ immigration needs to be situated within a broader family context with individuals strategically negotiating state attempts to regulate the flow of bodies across its borders while reconciling family goals and desires. Alternatively, unpacking the broad

---

29 Once again the linguistic category Kurdish stands out, with 83.5% of all individuals documented in this category having less than 12 years of schooling.

30 The relative disparities between asylum and government assisted refugees is accounted for by the extremely low proportion (8.1%) of asylum refugees who are recorded as stating that they did not intend to work.
categorisation of the refugee class reveals some stark contrasts, most notably between asylum and government assisted refugees, contingent in large part on the contexts of movement to Canada. Moreover, the statistics on intention to work suggest that refugees have markedly higher intentions to work than all Iranian-born immigrants, destabilising the popular and media discourses that construct immigrants as disproportionately draining the states’ resources.

2.7: Census Profiles

In this section I sketch a statistical profile of ‘Iranians’ in Vancouver with data generated from the 1996 and 2001 census and available through the Data Liberation Initiative\(^{31}\) and census releases published by Statistics Canada online. As an ‘organ of observation’ (Hannah, 1997) and an important instrument in the production of legibility, the census necessarily reflects the priorities and objectives of government. Furthermore, the census reproduces and entrenches ‘race thinking’ both in policy and academic circles, as well as among the general public, through its categorisation, enumeration and dissemination of data differentiated by both ‘race’ and ‘ethnic origins’ (Zuberi, 2001). With these caveats in mind, I use statistical representations to outline some of the salient features of Iranians in Vancouver, in the recognition that the meanings of this category are historically constituted, geographically specific, and socially constructed, and have the effect of maintaining a veneer of homogeneity over a diverse and differentiated ‘virtual community’ (Hannah, 2001)\(^{32}\). A number of categories manufactured through the census provide imperfect proxies that permit tentative statistical profiles, including data differentiated by country of birth, ethnic origin and mother tongue\(^{33}\). Without denying the epistemological violence reproduced

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\(^{31}\) This data set is purchased by the universities of Canada and is widely available to those affiliated with these academic institutions.

\(^{32}\) Alternatively, the cross-tabulation of census categorisations permits a considerable differentiation of categories, and it is perhaps the uncritical reproduction of categories by researchers that produces the effects of stabilisation and homogeneity.

\(^{33}\) Census categories suggest stability of meaning over time. However, it is important to recognise the phrasing of questions is frequently manipulated, and at time the premises of the questions are radically altered. For example, until 1981 the census question on ethnic origin revealed patriarchal assumptions, the categorisation being based on ‘ancestral roots’ by paternal origin (Hiebert, 1999). The interpretation of, and responses to, similarly constructed questions also vary over time.
through the deployment of these imperfect and homogenising categorisations, I use these categories to suggest some of the identifications and experiences of Iranians in Vancouver. The 2001 census documented 17,620 individuals in Vancouver CMA as born in Iran, constituting 0.89% of the total metropolitan population of 1,967,475, and 2.39% of the immigrant population in the metropolitan area (Profile Series, 2001 Census). According to census enumeration Iran is classified as the 10th largest ‘country of birth’ category for immigrants in Vancouver, and is the 7th largest among recent immigrants (Profile Series, 2001 Census). Alternatively, the 2001 census records 20,485 individuals in metropolitan Vancouver as identifying with the ethnic origin category ‘Iranian’, representing 1.3% of the total population (Profile Series, 2001 Census). Of this number 17,950 (87.8%) identified solely with the category Iranian, with 2,540 individuals (12.4%) claiming multiple ethnic origins. Although it is impossible to unpack these identifications fully, it seems probable that a significant proportion of the individuals reporting more than one ethnic origin categorisation identified as both Iranian and Canadian – a trend suggestive of processes of social and cultural integration. For all individuals who self-identified as Canadian in Metropolitan Vancouver 62.7% (237,430 of 378,545) are documented as claiming multiple ethnic origins, indicating that a considerable number of individuals – possibly ignoring the ancestral component of the ethnic origin question – hyphenated their self-identifications (Profile Series, 2001 Census). Alternatively, contrasts between the significant reporting of multiple ethnic origins among European immigrants and more recent, ‘racially marked’, cohorts suggests, I think, greater degrees of social integration and identification with a national cultural norm that in Canada is implicitly ‘white’.

---

34 Individuals might, for example, have ambivalent positionalities in relation with particular nation states, yet through census categorisations they become arbitrarily identified with nation states by dint on an accident of birth. Alternatively, it is precisely through these processes of categorisation and authoritative representation that constructed ethnic origin categories become reified and rendered meaningful as they become inscribed in the popular imaginary.

35 The profile series is constructed from the 20% sample of the census.

36 The number of individuals identifying as Iranian (both single and multiple responses) is markedly greater than those recorded as born in Iran. A number of individuals who self-identify with the ethnic origin category Iranian may have been born outside of Iran, representing a small ‘second generation’ immigrant population in Vancouver. In a similar vein, a number of individuals may have been born in Iran, yet not identify with the ethnic origin category Iranian, representing foreign nationals born in Iran and other individuals who do not identify with an ethnic identity inferred from allegiance to a particular nation state.
The stabilisation of documented identities is an effect maintained through repeated categorisations that fail to communicate the multiple and mobile identifications of heterogeneous individuals, or the diverse and complex meanings invested in such categorisations. However, a comparison of the 1991, 1996 and 2001 censuses provide the possibility of tracing changes over time. The number of individuals born in Iran increases dramatically between these quincennial censuses, reflecting a heavy period of immigration of Iranian-born individuals (Figure 4.1). In 1991 only 5,305 individuals were documented as born in Iran, compared with 10,060 in 1996 and 17,620 in 2001 (Hiebert, 1999, p.55; Profile Series, 2001 Census), revealing an extraordinary rate of increase (3.32x) over the decade.\textsuperscript{37}

In a similar vein statistical representations of the ethnic origin category reflect these remarkable increases (by a factor of 2.89 over the decade), with the total (single and multiple responses) number of individuals identifying as Iranian rising from 7085 in 1991 to 20,485 by 2001 (Profile Series, 1996 Census; Profile Series, 2001 Census).

\textit{Geographies of settlement}

Census data disclose the clustering of those documented as born in Iran and of Iranian ethnic origin in the North Shore municipalities of North and West Vancouver (Table 2.9, Figure 2.2).\textsuperscript{38} This geography of settlement is reminiscent of broader processes in metropolitan Vancouver diagnosed as the suburbanisation of recent immigration (Hiebert, 1999). Hiebert (1999) has also contended that the concentration of Iranians in North Vancouver is indicative of chain-migration in process,\textsuperscript{39} and the evident Persian social networks and cultural infrastructures on Vancouver's North Shore undoubtedly contribute to a supportive and comfortable atmosphere for recent immigrants from Iran, perhaps accentuating the concentration of settlement.

\textsuperscript{37} The relative rate of increase in the numbers documented as born in Iran was greatest in the 1991-1996 intercensal period with the rate of increase of 1.90, compared with 1.75 for the 1996-2001 period, although the absolute increase in the numbers documented was greater in the latter period. The documentation of identification with an ethnic origin category manifests a similar tendency.

\textsuperscript{38} I would like to thank Cameron McAuliffe for kindly providing me with this cartographic depiction of the geography of settlement of Iranian-born residents in Vancouver.

\textsuperscript{39} However, only 8.15% of Iranian-born immigrants were documented as intending to settle in North Vancouver at the time of their entry into Canada, compared with 78.9% were recorded as being destined for the City of Vancouver (LIDS). These statistics may suggest either that the initial question was misinterpreted or that many individuals relocate to North Vancouver after their arrival.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Country of Birth Iran</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Vancouver</td>
<td>2890</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Vancouver</td>
<td>5825</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Vancouver</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnaby</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tri-Cities</td>
<td>2605</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17620</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.9: Individuals documented as Iranian born by select Vancouver CMA municipalities. (Source: Profile Series, 2001)

With data generated by the 1996 census Hiebert (1999) calculated the location quotients by country of birth categorisation for Vancouver’s suburban municipalities. The location quotients for individuals reporting Iran as their country of birth in North and West Vancouver are 5.73 and 3.04 respectively, indicating that individuals born in Iran are more than 5 times likely than the ‘average resident’ to live in North Vancouver, and 3 times more likely to live in West Vancouver (Hiebert, 1999). Calculations from the 2001 census produce a location quotient of 5.14 for individuals documented as born in Iran and resident in North Vancouver (Profile Series, 2001 Census). Alternatively, segregation indices calculated using census categorisation of ethnic origins provide another statistical representation of geographical concentration in metropolitan Vancouver. The category Iranian was the 2nd most segregated ethnic origin category according to the 1991 census with an index exceeding 60 (Ley, 1999). In contrast, the index produced for 1996 (following considerable migration to the metropolitan area of Iranian-born immigrants) had fallen slightly to 55.3, the 5th most segregated ethnic origin category in the Vancouver CMA.

40 “Location quotients (LQs) are the ratios of the number of a given group in an area compared with the percentage of the total population in the same area” (Hiebert, 1999, p.63).

41 The ‘average resident’, of course, does not exist, but is a statistical construction indicative of the production of equivalence through processes of categorisation and enumeration (Natter and Jones III, 1997, p.143).

42 The index of segregation indicates the percentage difference between one group’s (ethnic origin category Iranian) distribution and that of the rest of the population. LQs represent the relative concentrations within a specific sub-area (Ogden, 2000).
Figure 2.2: Settlement of individuals documented as born in Iran by census enumeration area, Vancouver CMA. (Source: 1996 Census)
Statistics from the 2001 census document Iran as the largest country of birth category for recent immigrants to North Vancouver, and the second largest country of birth category for all immigrants in the municipality (Profile Series, 2001 Census), with 5,850 individuals (4.6% of the municipal population) identifying Iran as their country of birth. Alternatively, 6,305 individuals in North Vancouver are documented as reporting their ethnic origin as Iranian (single and multiple responses), representing 5.0% of the municipal population, and the third largest ethnic origin category after those identifying with the categories English (34.5%) and Chinese (5.6%) (Profile Series, 2001 Census).

These statistical and cartographic representations of geographies of settlement do not necessarily correlate to the lived experiences and everyday practices of individuals documented as born in Iran or Iranian. However, they are strongly suggestive of relatively concentrated geographies of settlement, and are reinforced by the visibility of Persian social networks and cultural institutions within the municipal landscape of North Vancouver.

Language

The documentation of mother tongue, home language and Canadian language ability in the Canadian census also provide some useful insights. The population reporting Persian as their mother tongue provides a relatively crude proxy for Iranian immigrants, and their documentation in successive censuses suggests similar growth rates to categorisations by country of birth and ethnic origin. The cross tabulation of the population identified as Persian-speaking with knowledge of official languages produces an interesting contrast to statistical representations of language ability generated by LIDS (Table 2.10).

---

43 For example, one visible, 'everyday' manifestation of these social networks and infrastructures may be the prominent concentration of Persian grocery stores and restaurants in North Vancouver.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>17190</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1260</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>20335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9820</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1090</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>1155</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>12090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>5050</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>6300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.10: Knowledge of official languages among individuals in Vancouver CMA identifying Persian (Farsi) as their mother tongue. (Source: Profile Series 2001 Census; Profile Series, 1996 Census)

In stark contrast with the number of Iranian-born immigrants recorded as unable to speak either French or English at the time of their arrival in Canada (Tables 2.5 and 2.8) few individuals claiming Persian as their mother tongue reported no knowledge of either official languages (Table 2.10). These disparities may reflect the acquisition of English competence through settlement and residence in Vancouver. However, the different methodologies employed in these enumerated surveys (the census is a self-enumerated postal survey requiring no interpersonal interaction) may solicit different responses. These differences may also reflect ambiguities in the phrasing of questions, and different interpretations of these questions – how does ‘knowledge of’ differ from ‘ability in’ an official language? Cross tabulating home language by period of immigration for individuals identifying Persian as their mother tongue suggests that there is a tendency, over time, for some individuals to assume English as their home language (Table 2.11). The rounding of statistics in the 20% sample of the census to protect anonymity means that the data representing immigration before 1971 is too small to be meaningful. However, the assumption of English as home language appears to increase markedly with length of residence in Vancouver. It is impossible to unpack these statistics further, but what is evident is that early Persian-speaking immigrants were entering an urban context where there were very few other Persian-speakers. Contemporary immigrants are migrating into a very different environment given the accelerated growth of the Iranian population in Vancouver, and associated social networks and cultural institutions, so that it is possible to get by without being able to speak English.44

44 It will be interesting to examine whether these changes in contexts are reflected in the documentation of language attributes in futures censuses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total - Home Language</td>
<td>12090</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>4990</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>4740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>4990</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>4740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-official language</td>
<td>8725</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>3420</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>3620</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and French</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and non-official language</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French and non-official language</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English, French and non-official</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.11:** Home languages of individuals reporting Persian as their mother tongue by period of immigration, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Profile Series, 1996 Census).
2.8: Profiling 'Iranians': 1991 custom tabulation

In this section I draw on a custom tabulation of the 1991 census to produce a more detailed profile of individuals who reported their ethnic origin as Iranian (single and multiple responses). This tabulation is constructed from a 20% sample of the 1991 census and, as with all statistics published from this sample, the data are randomly rounded. It is only possible to make statements with reasonable confidence, therefore, with statistical representations that are greater than 25. Bearing in mind the caveats outlined above regarding the reproduction of census categorisations, I present a number of profiles generated through this tabulation that focus explicitly on statistical representations produced through documented attributes of religion, language, and labour force participation.

Religion

A question on religion is only included in the Canadian censuses conducted at the beginning of every decade, and therefore the information presented here is rather dated. However, the data do provide the potentiality to unpack the ethnic origin category, Iranian (Table 2.12). Moreover, it is interesting to reflect on the practices of categorisation employed by the census, which generates considerable information on multiple denominations of Christianity yet homogenises the diverse and heterogeneous interpretations and sectarian affiliations (not to mention the different ways in which individuals practice their faith) through the imperialising category 'Islam'. Even as the number (and diversity) of individuals identifying as Muslims increases rapidly in Canada –Islam was the fastest growing religion in Canada

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45 The release dates for the 2001 Census were too late to order customs tables, and my particular research interests required the possibility of examining the documentation of identifications with various religions, which were last reported in the 1991 census. Consequently the information produced through this custom tabulation is relatively dated, particularly in light of the accelerated immigration and associated growth of the number of individuals identifying with the ethnic origin category Iranian. However, this tabulation does enable multiple cross-tabulations that provide considerable potential for unpacking census categorisations.

46 Any number between 0 and 10 is rounded to either 0 or 10, and then all statistics are rounded randomly to the nearest numbers ending in 5 or 0 (i.e. any number between 20 and 25 could be rounded up or down to 20 or 25).
between 1991 and 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2003) – there has been no attempt to modify these census categorisations in ways that are sensitive to these important distinctions⁴⁷.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vancouver CMA</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>4655</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>19280</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>3530</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Eastern non-Christian</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>2350</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7085</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>26510</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.12:** Reported religions categorisations among individuals identifying their ethnic origin as Iranian, Vancouver CMA and Canada. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)

The diversity in the reporting of religious affiliations is remarkable, particularly when contrasted with statistical representations of religious homogeneity in Iran, where 98% of the population is reportedly Muslim, and the majority adhere to the Shi’a interpretation of the *Koran* and *Hadith* (Amanat, 1993). In Iran adherents to the Baha’i faith and Christianity constitute 'tiny minorities', but these groups are disproportionately represented in both metropolitan Vancouver and Canada. The significant number of individuals who expressed affiliation with the Baha’i faith in 1991 is perhaps not surprising in the context of well-documented persecution of this religious minority in Iran after the revolution⁴⁸. Moreover, the proportion of individuals reporting no religious affiliations is also significant (Table 2.12), although to be expected given the transformations in political and social landscapes in post-revolutionary Iran, and particularly the blending of religious doctrine and government.

⁴⁷ That said, due to the relatively small number of Iranians in Vancouver I am also forced to rely on the imperfect and homogenising category 'Christianity' here to draw out some of the major distinctions among those claiming Iranian ethnic origins.

⁴⁸ The Baha’i faith incorporates aspects of all three major Semitic religions, but adherents have been labelled as heretics by some members of the theocracy in Iran, predominantly on the premise that they do not accept that Mohammad was the last prophet.
The cross-tabulation of religion with documented language attributes produces some striking statistical profiles. The cross tabulation of religious affiliation with knowledge of official Canadian languages indicates high overall levels of English knowledge across all religious affiliations (Table 2.13). However, comparatively high proportions of individuals who identify with Islam, the Baha’i faith, or ‘other Eastern non-Christian religions’ have no knowledge of either official languages (Table 2.13). Alternatively, those expressing affiliation with Christianity or no religious affiliation are disproportionately represented in the ‘bilingual’ category, and have extremely low numbers documented as knowing neither official language (Table, 2.13). The cross-tabulation of religion with reported mother tongue and home language also reveal some compelling disparities between religious affiliations (for example Table 2.14). The majority of individuals identifying Iranian as their ethnic origin reportedly spoke Persian at home (Table, 2.14), but this proportion increased markedly for individuals expressing affiliation with Islam and the Baha’i faith. The documentation of home language also suggests a high degree of ‘linguistic integration’ among those Iranians claiming affiliation with Christianity or no religious affiliation, with 65% of those identifying as Christian reporting that they spoke English at home. The data produced for the mother tongue category suggests congruent trends, with high proportions reporting Persian as their mother tongue among individuals claiming affiliation with Islam and the Baha’i faith (88.9% and 94.6% respectively), compared with Christians of whom equal proportions reported their mother tongue as Persian (33.8%) and English (32.5%) (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census). The linguistic diversity in relation to expressed religious affiliations suggests significant cleavages between individuals documented through the homogenising category of ethnic origin. These language attributes suggest considerable linguistic capabilities with those expressing affiliation with Christianity or no religious affiliation, perhaps suggestive of more cosmopolitan lifestyles and greater capabilities in English before migration. One can only speculate on the possible influences of these statistical profiles on reported language; however, it is likely that these differential competencies will have significant implications for the experiences of individuals in the Canadian context, particularly in terms of labour market participation. Indeed statistics produced through the cross tabulation of religious affiliation with various recorded labour

49 The relative statistical profiles for both mother tongue and home language are markedly similar to those produced for all Canada.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Baha'i</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other Eastern Non-Christian</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>5675</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>3800</td>
<td>81.6%</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and French</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither English nor French</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7085</td>
<td></td>
<td>4655</td>
<td></td>
<td>745</td>
<td></td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>385</td>
<td></td>
<td>870</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.13:** Knowledge of official Canadian languages cross tabulated by reported religious affiliations for individuals with ethnic origin documented as Iranian, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Baha'i</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other Eastern Non-Christian</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian (Farsi)</td>
<td>4825</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>3485</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1655</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Other Languages&lt;sup&gt;50&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7085</td>
<td></td>
<td>4655</td>
<td></td>
<td>745</td>
<td></td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>385</td>
<td></td>
<td>870</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.14:** Reported religious affiliations cross-tabulated with selected home languages for individuals identifying Iranian as their ethnic origin, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)

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<sup>50</sup> Select other languages include Arabic, Hebrew, Pashto, Armenian, and Turkish, and Turkic languages, all of which are minority languages in Iran.
market attributes suggests significant differences between individuals claiming affiliation with Islam and Christianity, exemplified in the documentation of unemployment. For all individuals identifying as Iranian the unemployment rate was 20.9%, but for those affiliating with Islam the figure was 23.3%, compared with only 11.8% for Christians (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census).

Differences in immigrant status appear to draw out some further distinctions between the prescribed categories of religious affiliation. The majority of individuals claiming Iranian ethnic origin were immigrants in 1991 (Table 2.15), although distinguishing between religious affiliations produces two key variations. Firstly, the immigrant profile for Baha'is implies recent immigration, with the overwhelming majority documented as immigrants. In addition, no Baha'is are documented as reporting their immigrant status as non-permanent residents, a reflection of the contexts of migration and the impossibility of return in the absence of considerable political reform in Iran. On the other hand, individuals claiming either affiliation with Christianity or no religious affiliation had much higher proportions of non-immigrants indicating either a longer period of settlement in Vancouver or a specific demographic composition of these 'virtual communities' (Table 2.15). Data generated for period of immigration suggests that the heaviest period of immigration for all categories of religious affiliation was between 1981 and 1990, with three quarters of all immigrants in Vancouver claiming Iranian ethnic origin entering between these years. However, there are some subtle distinctions between religious affiliations. The relative number of Baha'is migrating in the 1971-80 period is significant higher than other categories of religious affiliation, suggesting migration in expectation of, and immediately after, the 1979 revolution (Table 2.15). The immigration of individuals professing affiliations with the Baha'í faith and Christianity also appears to be truncated with neither categories documenting new arrivals in 1991 — statistical profiles that may suggest a single migratory event following the revolution (Table 2.15)\(^{51}\).

\(^{51}\) The documentation of immigrants entering in 1991 also reveals a remarkable acceleration of immigration of those claiming Iranian ethnic origins, with 9.5% of all immigrants documented as Iranian to Vancouver arrived in this year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Baha'i</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Religious</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7085</td>
<td></td>
<td>4655</td>
<td></td>
<td>745</td>
<td></td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>385</td>
<td></td>
<td>870</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-immigrant</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-permanent Resident</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant - Total</td>
<td>5520</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
<td>3655</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                          |       |     |        |     |        |     |       |     |           |     |               |     |
| Immigrated prior to 1961 | 10    | 0.2%| 0      | 0.0%| 0      | 0.0%| 0     | 0.0%| 0         | 0.0%| 0             | 0.0%|
| Immigrated 1961 - 1970   | 60    | 1.1%| 35     | 1.0%| 10     | 1.4%| 0     | 0.0%| 0         | 0.0%| 10            | 1.7%|
| Immigrated 1971 - 1980   | 820   | 14.9%| 415    | 11.4%| 195    | 28.3%| 65    | 16.5%| 30        | 14.3%| 110           | 19.1%|
| Immigrated 1981 - 1990   | 4100  | 74.3%| 2760   | 75.5%| 485    | 70.3%| 260   | 65.8%| 165       | 78.6%| 400           | 69.6%|
| Immigrated 1991          | 525   | 9.5%| 450    | 12.3%| 0      | 0.0%| 15    | 3.8%| 0         | 0.0%| 55            | 9.6%|

**Table 2.15:** Reported religious affiliations of individuals reporting Iranian as ethnic origin cross-tabulated with immigrant status and period of immigration, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)
It is impossible (and undesirable) to project these documented religious attributes forwards into the contemporary context, although the possibility of truncated immigration of individuals claiming Baha'i or Christian affiliations – particularly considering the heavy immigration of Iran-born individuals to Vancouver – suggests that the religious composition of those claiming Iranian ethnic origin may have changed significantly. However, these statistical representations of categories of religious affiliation do complicate the ethnic origin category Iranian, indicating some important internal distinctions.

Language

Profiling Iranians by reported language attributes introduces further insights into the diversity contained by this ethnic origin category. Below, I focus primarily on cross-tabulations of various language attributes with age, gender and period of immigration.

Census enumeration of knowledge of official Canadian languages suggests pervasive knowledge of English throughout all age categorisations, except the (Special Tabulation, 1991 Census). Only 47.7% of individuals in the 65 years and older age categorisation reported knowledge of English, and over 30% professed no knowledge of either official language. In a similar vein, the assumption of English as the primary language of communication appears to vary significantly by age for Iranians in Vancouver (Tables 2.16 and 2.17). The proportion of individuals reporting that they spoke English at home is markedly higher in the 0-19 and 20-39 age categorisations, suggesting a degree of linguistic integration, and stands in stark contrast with the home languages reported by the 65+ age categorisation, 89.8% of whom speak Persian at home (Table 2.17). The comparatively high levels of English reported as home language among younger individuals might be influenced, partially at least, by education and socialisation in Vancouver, as well as elevated levels of labour market participation, in addition to the necessity of competency in English to achieve social mobility. The relative number of individuals in the 0-19 age category reporting English as their mother tongue is markedly higher (Table 4.16) than all other age categories, although not as significant as reporting on home language. It seems likely that

52 The phrasing of this question appears ambiguous and the category ‘knowledge of English’ does not articulating whether individuals feel confident or comfortable communicating in English, which would arguably have a greater impact on individual experiences of immigration and settlement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select Mother Tongue</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>0 - 19 years</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>20 - 39 years</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>40 - 64 years</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>65 years +</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>5920</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>1595</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>2420</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>1510</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected other languages</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7085</strong></td>
<td><strong>2115</strong></td>
<td><strong>2815</strong></td>
<td><strong>1720</strong></td>
<td><strong>440</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.16:** The age distribution of individuals claiming Iranian ethnic origin by selected mother tongue, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select Home Languages</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>0 - 19 years</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>20 - 39 years</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>40 - 64 years</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>65 years +</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>4825</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>1255</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1655</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected other languages</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7085</strong></td>
<td><strong>2115</strong></td>
<td><strong>2815</strong></td>
<td><strong>1720</strong></td>
<td><strong>440</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.17:** The age distribution of individuals claiming Iranian ethnic origin by selected home languages, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)
many of the individuals claiming English as their mother tongue either migrated to Vancouver when they were very young, or were born in Canada, and have been socialised in English both at home and in the school system. Alternatively, the proportion of individuals who claimed English was their mother tongue remained relatively constant for all other age groups, reinforcing the assertion that reporting English as one’s mother tongue, even when everyday conversation at home was conducted in English, was the prerogative of those who had not been socialised in a predominantly Persian speaking atmosphere.

Documented language attributes also appear suggest some subtle differences by gender, albeit less stark than those indicated in statistical profiles produced through LIDS\textsuperscript{53}. For example, knowledge of English is marginally higher among males (81.6\%) claiming Iranian ethnic origins than females (78.3\%), and this divergence is mirrored in the proportions of females and males speaking neither official Canadians languages (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census). The documentation of mother tongue suggests similar proportions of males (83.5\%) and females (83.9\%) identify their mother tongue as Persian, however, there is a notably divergence in the proportions reporting Persian as their home language, with 66.0\% of men and 71.0\% of women claiming they speak Persian at home (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census). By comparison more males (25.8\% compared with 20.3\% of females) report English as their home language, possibly suggesting that a number either live alone and have integrated linguistically, or are married to or cohabiting with people who are not documented as Iranian.

The timing of immigration appears to inflect on documented language attributes. For example, relatively few individuals report no knowledge of either official Canadian languages (approximately 5\%) in all periods of immigration, with the exception of those individuals who entered Canada in 1991\textsuperscript{54}, of whom 14.3\% claimed no knowledge of English or French. This divergence may suggest that knowledge of English increases rapidly with settlement in

\textsuperscript{53} This apparent divergence may in large part reflect the socio-economic and cultural composition of earlier immigrants to Vancouver, with the unequal gendering of language abilities becoming more marked with more recent immigrants. There are also important differences in methodologies employed in these surveys, as well as the design of language questions, precluding the possibility of a transparent comparison.

\textsuperscript{54} The census was taken in May of 1991 so the data presented here accounts for less than 5 months of 1991 entries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of Immigration</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated prior to 1961</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated 1961 - 1970</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated 1971 - 1980</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated 1981 - 1990</td>
<td>4100</td>
<td>3390</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated 1991</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (immigrants)</td>
<td>5520</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.18: Knowledge of official Canadian languages among immigrants claiming Iranian ethnic origins by period of immigration, Vancouver CMA. (Source: Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)
Vancouver, particularly given the similarity between immigrant ‘cohorts’ arriving in the periods 1971-1980 and 1981-1990 (Table 2.18). However, relatively high proportions of earlier ‘cohorts’ also ‘knew’ both English and French, particularly compared with individuals arriving in 1991, a difference that might speak to changes in the educational, socio-economic and cultural profiles of more recent immigrants, as increasing numbers arriving with more modest capabilities in official Canadian languages. Alternatively, reported home language and mother tongue suggests that the relative numbers of Iranians communicating at home in English, or claiming English as their mother tongue, increases gradually with the length of residence. Data produced for home language indicate that the proportion of individuals communicating primarily in Persian is lower for earlier immigration ‘cohorts’. Therefore, 59.1% of individuals entering Canada in the period 1971-80 reported speaking Persian at home, and a further 31.7% spoke English. By comparison among immigrants arriving between 1981 and 1990, 73.8% were documented as speaking Persian at home, and 18.0% English, and the ratios for arrivals in 1991 were 72.8% and 17.1% respectively (Custom Tabulation: 1991 Census). Although the relative numbers of Iranian immigrants claiming English as their mother tongue are lower, there appears to be a similar process of linguistic integration with length of residence, with 16.5% of immigrants arriving in the period 1971-80 reporting English as their mother tongue, compared with 3.4% of immigrants between 1981 and 1990 and 0.0% of arrivals in 1991 (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census).

Statistical representations of documented language attributes for individuals claiming Iranian ethnic origin produce a different tableau of language capabilities than those indicated in representations produced through the LIDS categorisations. Admittedly data from the custom tabulation is relatively dated, and there was a marked increase in migration from Iran in the 1990s, but less specialised tabulations from the profile series of the 1996 and 2001 suggests similar disparities in the census and LIDS enumerations of language abilities. The documentation of mother tongue and home language also begins to suggest some degree of linguistic integration, most remarkable among younger age groups and earlier immigrant ‘cohorts’. The cross tabulation of reported mother tongue with home language provides a

55 It is worth repeating here that this comparison is problematic. The methodologies employed by these state-sponsored surveys are different, as are the phrasing and accent of the questions.
rough indication of the extent to which individuals have begun communicating primarily in English, with 15.1% of Iranians in Vancouver citing Persian as their mother tongue also claiming that English was their home language (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census).

**Labour**

A limited number of cross tabulations between various labour market participation and other attributes reported in the census are also possible using the custom tabulation from the 1991 Census, although the insights produced are limited by the size of the sample population. Below I sketch some of the most salient features suggested by reported labour participation\(^5\), unfortunately census data on income levels was not available, although contrasting the significant rates of unemployment with, for example, the number of business immigrants now entering Canada begins to uncover the socio-economic diversity within the Iranian population.

The cross tabulation of labour force participation with immigrant categorisations provides a number of limited insights into the labour force experiences of Iranians in Vancouver. Firstly simple count data on labour force participation indicates significant clustering of individuals identifying with Iranian ethnic origins in specific categorisations of employment, namely 'management occupations' (11.7%), 'sales and services occupations' (22.9%) and 'trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations' (9.5%) (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census)\(^6\). Profiling individuals reporting management occupations by period of immigration reveals that a relatively high proportion of immigrants arriving in

\(^{56}\) Alternatively, the 57.1% of individuals who reported their home language as English are also documented as claiming their mother tongue was Persian. This group constitutes 16.0% of all Iranians reporting their mother tongue as Persian and is suggestive of the degree of linguistic integration of immigrants claiming Iranian ethnic origins.

\(^{57}\) All information presented below is produced from data on individuals over the age of 19 reporting Iranian ethnic origin in the 20% sample of 1991.

\(^{58}\) Unfortunately the cross tabulation of labour force participation with schooling generates statistical representations that are too small to discuss with any degree of confidence, although one would suspect that the levels of education among those individuals documented as having management occupations would be elevated in comparison with those in the other categorisations. The percentages here express the proportion of all individuals over 19 years of age claiming Iranian ethnic origins.
1971-80 period had entered management occupation (15.5%) compared with 10.7% in the following decade (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census). This statistical profile of labour participation by period of immigration appears to support the assertion that individuals endowed with considerable cultural capital were among the earliest immigrants from Iran to Vancouver. However, data for individuals who immigrated in 1991 runs counter to this, indicating that 24.1% of all immigrants (19 years and older) in this year entered management occupations. This significant increase, in the context of heavy immigration from Iran in this 5-month period of 1991, might correspond to the then recent changes in Canada's immigration regime, and in particular the expansion of business immigration programmes. Alternatively, the relative proportions of individuals in other professional occupations (e.g. business, finance and administrative occupations, natural and applied sciences, and health occupations) appear to decline with more recent immigration periods.

By contrast sales and services occupations appears to be a limited, but growing, labour market niche for individuals claiming Iranian ethnic origins. Differentiating this category by period of immigration indicates that 17.1% of individuals arriving between 1971 and 1980 entered occupations in sales or services, compared with 23.3% in the period 1981-1990 and 22.9% of arrivals in 1991 (Custom Tabulations, 1991 Census). Data produced through the same cross tabulation for 'trades, transport, equipment operators and related occupations' suggests a relatively marked concentration in this category among recent immigrants. For example, 16.9% of immigrants arriving 1991 are documented in this category, representing a considerable rise from 8.9% of immigrants between 1981 and 1990 and 5.3% of arrivals in the 1971-80 period (Custom Tabulations, 1991 Census). These occupations may offer the opportunity for immigrants with limited capabilities in English to become established in the labour market, as well as the potential of circumventing practices of 'racial' exclusion and discrimination. Indeed, the growth of a nascent 'ethnic economy' servicing the growing immigrant population from Iran, which is particularly visible in North Vancouver, may account for a considerable proportion of those employed in sales and services occupations. Alternatively, occupations in the trades, transport and equipment operators categorisation has become a marked labour market niche for Punjabi immigrants to Vancouver in recent years. However, distinct geographies of settlement reveal that there are relatively few
individuals claiming East Indian ethnic origin in the North Shore municipalities, and it is possible that Iranians have begun to move into these occupations\textsuperscript{59}.

In terms of unemployment there appears to be clear distinction between period of immigration and levels of unemployment. For example, the 1971-80 immigrant ‘cohort’ is recorded as having an unemployment rates of 10.3%, the same as the provincial rate of unemployment (although higher than the CMA rate of 9.0%) and less than half the rate for all individuals over 19 claiming Iranian ethnicity (20.9%) (Profile Series, 1991 Census). Rates of unemployment increase among more recent immigrant ‘cohorts’, with rates of 21.8% for arrivals between 1981 and 1990, and 27.7% for those immigrating in 1991. These statistical representations appear to suggest that employment is closely correlated with period of immigration\textsuperscript{60}. However, differentiating unemployment by documented language attributes indicates a notable divergence between the unemployment rates for individuals who report speaking English (18.8%) and Persian (26.2%) at home. The comparison of unemployment levels for immigrants and non-immigrants provides a starker contrast, with non-immigrants (individuals educated and socialised in Canada) documented as having an unemployment rate of 0.0\%\textsuperscript{61} compared with a rate of 20.5\% for all immigrants (Custom Tabulation, 1991 Census).

2.9: Conclusion

I introduced this chapter with an extended discussion on some of the epistemological, political, and ethical concerns of producing knowledge through statistical databases funded and managed by the state. As practices of surveying and ‘organs of observation’ (Hannah, 1997) the census and LIDS are necessarily governed by both the state’s administrative demands. Moreover, the powerful representations of identities produced through categorisation and enumeration reproduce the epistemological violence of ‘race thinking’

\textsuperscript{59} On an anecdotal level, there is an interesting comparison to be made between the apparent overrepresentation of Iranians working for North Shore Taxis and the overrepresentation of East Indians employed by Vancouver taxi companies.

\textsuperscript{60} This apparent correlation is likely influenced both familiarity with the local context, labour market and language as well as the socio-economic, educational and cultural composition of earlier immigrant groups.

\textsuperscript{61} It should be noted, however, that the absolute numbers of non-immigrants, at 85, is extremely low.
('race differentiated data' reify and naturalise constructed racialised perceptions in the bureaucratic and popular imagination) while hegemonic categories 'maintain' and 'stabilise' the heterogeneity and diversity of multiple and mobile identities (Natter and Jones III, 1997). My emphasis on the conditions of production of these datasets is designed to underscore the constructed character of statistical representations of the 'virtual community' 'Iranians', that overlaps unevenly (if at all) with the lived experiences and identities of those documented and enclosed through categorisation (Hannah, 2001).

My critical readings of statistical representations of Iranians produced through LIDS and recent Canadian censuses provide a broader context to the more textured and nuanced accounts constructed through qualitative methodologies. Detailed profiling through statistical representations also produced some compelling distinctions. For example, the LIDS database presented the opportunity to unpack the broad categorisation of economic class immigrants, and destabilise popular and bureaucratic construction of immigrants stemming from their scripting as 'economic' (Ley, 2000) by situating 'economic' migration (albeit imperfectly) within broader family strategies. A closer examination of refugee class immigrants by reported language abilities, on the other hand, suggested important differences between asylum and government assisted refugees. In addition, the documentation of intention to work appears to counter dominant representations of refugees in the media. Census data enabled statistical and cartographic representations of the geographies of settlement to be made for documented Iranians in Vancouver, as well as broad profiles of cultural and demographic characteristics. Moreover, data available through the differentiation of religious affiliation underscored some important differences suppressed by the impositions of uniform 'racial' and ethnic categories. The census categorisation of religion is far from problematic, manifesting the same homogenising, stabilising and reifying tendencies associated with other official statistics, but the differentiation of religious affiliation complicate identities, and nudges them closer to everyday experience.
Chapter 3.

Orientalist Imaginaries: media discourses and the production of Iranian identities.

"The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (as I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is eo ipso implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many things beside the truth, which is itself a representation."

(Said, 1979, p. 272, emphasis in original)

3.1: Introduction

Identities of the Other are, in part, discursively constituted. Far from reducing identity to the realm of ideas and abstractions this assertion is made in the recognition that discourses are embedded in frameworks of power, in institutions and structures of governmentality (Jacobs and Fincher, 1998). Working from this premise I want to open up a discussion of the media as a singularly privileged site in the production and dissemination of knowledge about, and identities of, the Other – as Arjun Appadurai (1996, p.3, emphasis added) has remarked, media technologies provide “new resources and new disciplines for constructing our imagined selves and imagined worlds”. This chapter, acknowledging the media’s centrality in the ‘social production of images of cultural difference’ (Dunn and Mahtani, 2001), examines the processes through which discourses, images and ideas of ‘Islam’, Iran and Iranians become embedded in the popular imaginary. My argument is that the production and circulation of media representations contributes to, indeed even shapes, the discursive economy of representations through which Iranian identities are actively constructed and negotiated in everyday life, and is partially constitutive of the contexts through which the politics of adaptation and integration are performed.

3.2: Power/Knowledge and the Media

“There is a source of information (the Oriental) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist), in short, a writer and a subject matter otherwise inert. The relationship between the two is radically a matter of power.”

(Said, 1979, p.308)
Edward Said's (1979) innovative coupling of Foucault's ideas of Power/Knowledge with a Gramscian conception of hegemony in his exegesis of the archives of Orientalism provides a theoretical impulse for my analysis of the production of knowledge 'covering' Iranian identities in the Canadian print media. Invoking Vico, Said argues that texts not only create knowledge, they also create the reality they appear to describe. The production of knowledge becomes, therefore, pre-eminently a question of power; the very act of representation is the prerogative of those individuals occupying positions of cultural power. In short, Orientalism argues that through a series of 'knowledgeable manipulations' articulated across unequal relationships of power the 'West' "in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental and his world" (p.40. emphasis in original), constructing a structure that promoted the difference between the familiar ('us', 'the West') and the strange ('them', 'the Orient'). The media in contemporary society constitutes a powerful form of cultural apparatus through which individuals receive ideas about the 'Other' (Said, 1981), and media narratives filter the ways in which difference and 'otherness' enter popular consciousness, albeit incompletely.

In this chapter I examine the processes of 'Othering', the manufacture of ontological distinctions between an imagined 'us' and an imagined 'them', through knowledge produced in media representations. Drawing from Karim's (2003, p.3) useful insight that 'human perceptions of everyday encounters are the product of social constructions of meanings rather than the results of objective observations', I want to elucidate the processes through which particular constructions of Iranian identities are actively produced, and partly consumed and reproduced, through discursive formations deployed by the media. Throughout the analysis I remain acutely sensitive to the embeddedness of media narratives in frameworks of social power.

Dominant discourses in the media render certain images, ideas and narratives more 'present' while selectively silencing others, and recognising the significance of the media as a distribution network for knowledge, I argue that these constructions become embedded in the collective consciousnesses and imaginative geographies. My discussion of the media as a

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1 This term is appropriated from another of Edward Said's volumes, Covering Islam (1981), and is intended to capture the sense in which media narratives cover up as much as they cover. Fleras (1995, p.7) has noted in the Canadian context: "Mass media portrayals of aboriginals and racial minorities are as likely to inform and reveal (if selectively) as they are to misinform, conceal and evade".
collective institution is not intended to suggest that all media are guilty of racist discourse. There are, of course, instances where the media ‘exhibit temperance, moderation and fairness’ (Henry and Tator, 2002), nevertheless core assumptions, values and worldviews of many working in the media warrant critical attention. In addition this excavation of dominant discourses in media constructions of Iranian identities is not intended to suggest a conscious and orchestrated conspiracy in the media; dominant discourses are not static and monolithic articulations of ideology. Dominant discourses are contingent, complex and contradictory. As Stuart Hall (1979, p. 343) has contended:

“We must remember that this is not a single, unitary but a plurality of dominant discourses: that they are not deliberately selected by encoders to ‘reproduce events within the horizons of the dominant ideology’, but constitute the fields of meanings within which they must choose”

Liberal conceptualisations of democracy envision the media as public space, a crucial site of contestation. Competing discourses are evident in the media; however, the reframing of alternative narratives or their relegation to more obscure parts of media productions renders dominant discourses more prominent. The form and accents of media representations reproduce ideological structures and refract shifting relationships of power (Karim, 2003). Said (1981, p.50) captures the sentiment succinctly arguing that dominant fields of meanings do not dictate content, rather “[w]e must think of it as drawing invisible lines beyond which a reporter or commentator does not feel it necessary to go”. Media constructions of reality are entrenched in processes of ‘socialisation, legitimation and agenda-setting’, and are, therefore, instrumental in establishing the outer limits of permissibility in society (Fleras, 1994; Henry and Tator, 2002). The ideological production of meanings, articulated through the cultural apparatus of the media, provides cultural frameworks of reference and powerful statements about the legitimacy of diversity in society (Fleras, 1994).

My emphasis so far has heavily accented the role of the media in projecting a particular ‘regime of truth’ into the popular imaginary through the production of meanings around Iranian identities (see Mitchell, 1996). I maintain that the media are fundamental in the naturalisation, rationalisation and universalisation of particular representations of the Other (‘Islam’, Iran and Iranians). However, a central tension of this argument is the tendency to construct the audience as passive and monolithic, uncritically internalising ‘regimes of truth’ promulgated by the media and eliding the fact that the media are at once reflective and
constitutive of reality (Henry and Tator, 2002). The social construction of reality in the media and the consciousness and attitudes of individuals who consume media productions ineluctably overlap and intertwine. Rather than attempt to disentangle the contingent, complex and often contradictory ways in which public consciousness and media representations are interwoven, I emphasise the processes by which the media circulate a repertoire of ideas, images and discourses that are critical to the discursive economy of representations through which Iranian identities are constructed. This is not, however, to suggest that such media projections determine constructions of Iranian identities, as Appadurai (1996, p. 7, emphasis in original) usefully observes, “[t]here is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, agency”. 

In addition, I also want to be attentive to the myopia of what Kay Anderson (1996) terms ‘the authorial paradigm of European hegemony’. Although my analysis is concerned primarily with the racialisation of identities, I do not want to disengage my analysis from other sources of identity, oppression and power. This analysis overtly privileges ethnic and ‘racial’ positionings, and in the process might be accused of reproducing the selective animation and silencing of constructions of Iranian identities. Following David Livingstone’s personal reflections of being accused of reproducing 19th century scientific racism, I want to underscore that I neither re-present media constructions as ‘authentic representations’, nor conceptualise them as free-floating conductors of power (1998, p.18).

3.3: Constructing media reality in Canada

The national community in Canada is popularly imagined through the evocation of the multicultural mosaic. Multiculturalism, conceived here as a regime of governmentality that ‘attempts to weave cultural pluralism into the fabric of the nation’ (Dunn and Mahtani, 2001), was constitutionally entrenched in Canada throughout the 1980s and early 1990s with the passage of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985, the Multiculturalism Act in

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2 de Certeau (1984, p.xxi) has also commented on the productive performance of reading, highlighting the 'metamorphosis of the text through the wandering eye of the reader'.

76
1988, and the proclamation of the federal department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship in 1991 (Fleras, 1995). Leaving aside critiques of the ideology of multiculturalism for the moment, it is important to note that the fervour with which the state has espoused the official rhetoric of multiculturalism has only recently corresponded with some reconfiguration in the Canadian media (the Toronto Star being the most dramatic example). Indeed, Fleras (1994; 1995), a prominent commentator of the media and ‘minorities’ in Canada characterises coverage of ‘aboriginals and racial minorities’ as ‘mixed at best, deplorable at worse’.

The media are frequently framed as a progressive social force, an idealised view that elides the social construction of media reality; the media have entrenched values, distinctive agendas, corporate commitments and organisation priorities, contexts that powerfully shape the production and dissemination of knowledge in the form of news (Fleras, 1995). Herman and Chomsky (2002, p. xlix), in a powerful critique of the performance and the structure of the media in the United States, recognise the situated production of knowledge arguing, ‘democratic politics requires a democratisation of information sources and a more democratic media’. Moreover, to assert that the production of knowledge and the gathering of information is a thoroughly cultural process and that media constructions of reality are influenced by ‘collective memories embedded in myths, legends, classic pieces of literature and socialisation experiences that shape our worldviews’ (Karim, 2003, p.177) problematises the ethnocultural and gendered configurations of Canada’s media industry. The marked absence of ‘minorities’, particularly in creative and management positions (Fleras, 1994; 1995), in multicultural Canada means that experiences continue to be largely filtered through the ‘fears and fantasies of a dominant white culture’ (Fleras, 1995, p.1). This is a situation that entrenches the racialising gaze of the media and reproduces imaginings of national belonging on the basis of an ontology of whiteness as the social norm (Hage, 1998). Karim (2002a) has noted that Muslims, in particular, are absent from the news-making processes in Canada; Muslims have not approached the ‘mainstream’ media in Canada, a situation that one editor’s hypotheses is symptomatic of an inability to ‘consider themselves in the North

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3 Symbolically, responsibilities for Multiculturalism were assimilated into Heritage Canada in 1996, removing Multiculturalism from the immediate political landscape and perhaps signifying a shift in the state’s priorities.
American milieu' (Karim, 2002a, p.265). Media representations of those constructed as 'minorities' in Canada, almost habitually framed through discourses of alterity and difference, erect and perpetuate psychological barriers, which preclude the acceptance of 'minorities' as normal, and fully contributing citizens. The media produce a cultural framework that makes 'powerful statements about the legitimacy of diversity in a multicultural society' (Fleras, 1994).

Media constructions of reality reflect the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. Mainstream media publications are corporate institutions, 'integrated into the political economy of the dominant economic systems' (Herman and Chomsky, 2002). The concentrated ownership of Canadian media productions contributes to a narrowing of perspective and coverage. Hollinger Inc., formerly owned by right-wing media mogul Conrad Black, was acquired in 2000 by the CanWest Global Communications Corporation, along with the majority share in another of Black's publications, the National Post. Consequently, CanWest Global now owns 11 English language metropolitan dailies in Canada (including both the Vancouver Sun and Vancouver Province), accounting for 60% of newspapers and 37% of circulation in Canada (CanWest Global, 2003). Furthermore, CanWest owns 11 television stations in Canada that reach 94% of Anglophone Canada in 8 provinces, has considerable interests in the production and distribution of the media, and has attempted to capitalise on new media technologies with the establishment of the Canada.com network. The domination of Canada's Anglophone media by CanWest Global inevitably contributes to a 'filtering' of news that is projected into the popular imaginary. This process of filtering is exacerbated by the dependence of media corporations such as CanWest Global on advertising revenues, which constitute their primary source of income—and therefore challenges the overemphasis on the agency of the media as they are encouraged to mimic their audience. Additionally the symbiosis of media corporations with powerful sources of information that become 'routine news sources' and gain privileged

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4 The editor Karim cites is Haroon Siddiqui, the editorial page editor and renowned journalist of the Toronto Star.

5 CanWest recently acquired Fireworks Entertainment Inc., the largest integrated production, distribution and financing companies in television programmes and motion pictures in Canada (CanWest Global (2003)).
access to the media; and the ability of powerful institutions (corporations and governments) to afflict costly 'flak' on media institutions (Herman and Chomsky, 2002).

Shifting geographical scales, it is also necessary to interrogate the ways in which unequal power relations in the global political economy and uneven access to media technologies intersect in the situated cultural processes of knowledge production. The concentration of the transnational mass media networks — or what Appadurai (1996) terms mediascapes, conceptualised as the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information — in the 'overdeveloped world' means that cultural and political reference points are entrenched largely in 'the West'. The media technologies of the 'overdeveloped world' are such that they militate against counterflows from the 'South', effectively 'globalising' one version of history that is imbricated with 'Western' Modernity and ideologies of development (Karim, 2003). Furthermore, the dependence of much of the media industry on a relatively small number of wire services, operating primarily out of Britain (Reuters), France (Agence France Presse) and the United States (Associated Press, Knight Ridder, The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times), exacerbates the convergence of media portrayals, and extends the hegemony of certain worldviews (Said, 1981; Karim, 2003).

3.4: ‘Telescoping news*: the multi-layered production of Iranian identities

The substantive focus of this chapter is organised around representations of 'Islam', Iran and Iranians in English-language dailies from Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

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6 The term is borrowed from Gilroy (2000), and I think the purposeful irony succinctly communicates the distribution of power in the postcolonial global order.

7 Recent coverage of the war in/on Iraq, and especially the 'patriotic coverage' espoused by networks such as CNN, in conjunction with this convergence of news 'sources', led to a remarkable conflation of media representations and the interests of the US political elite.

8 The term is borrowed from Appadurai (1996).

9 The mainstream media used in this analysis, based on Canadian NewsDisc (1994-2002) and Canadian News Index (1978-1993) database searches (keywords Islam, Iran and Iranian), were the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Montreal Gazette, the Toronto Star, the Vancouver Province and the Vancouver Sun. With the exception of The Globe and Mail and The Toronto Star, the publications are owned by CanWest Global Communications Corp. Techniques used included discourse and content analysis (see Karim, 2003; Herman and Chomsky, 2002).
Appadurai's (1996) reflections on the 'telescoping of news', that is the immediacy with which news is absorbed into public discourses, provide the rationale for the organisation of my analysis. I argue that the geographies of media networks and the immediacy of media technologies contribute to the contemporary construction and circulation of imaginative geographies of the 'Other' in the popular imaginary. Media technologies render particular of narratives, images and ideas, articulated across multiple geographical scales, immanent. Representations of 'Islam', Iran and Iranians are intertextual, they intersect, overlap and intertwine, and are thus all implicated in the broader discursive economy of representations through which Iranian identities are constructed (see Dunn, 2001). Said's (1994) fecund metaphor for the hybridity of space, 'overlapping territories and intertwining histories', or Doreen Massey's (1994) important observations on a 'global sense of place', offer useful ways of recapitulating the processes through which media constructions that inflect on imaginings of Iranian identities at multiple geographical scales are gathered, negotiated and contested within a specific locale.

This telescoping of news, and the attendant immanence of particular narratives and images, partially produces and sustains imaginings of 'otherness', rendering certain representations of Iranian identities more 'present' than others. The reductive framing of 'Islam' as ontologically distinct from 'the West', coupled with the prominence of Iran in the iconography of 'Islam's resurgence' contribute in partial and complex ways to the racialisation of immigration and the 'othering' of Iranians. These stereotypes and social constructions achieve remarkably durability through repetition, and are consumed and reproduced through the predominant adherence to particular scripts in media representations of Iranians in Vancouver.

3.5: Methodology

My analysis of media representations combines quantitative content analysis with critical discourse analysis. Content analysis is far from problematic, the process of classification is necessarily arbitrary and each category homogenises the articles it subsumes. Moreover, content analysis also abstracts the representations from their context, denying the possibility
of situating the articles, both in terms of their historical and geographical context and their positioning within the newspaper. Nevertheless, I think the graphic representation of content analysis provides a powerful illustration of the framing of ‘Islam’ and Iranians. The content analysis presented below (Tables 3.1 and 3.2, Figures 3.1 and 3.2) was produced through the categorisation of articles between 1994 and 2002 representing ‘Islam’ and Iranians from the National Post, Toronto Star, Montreal Gazette, Vancouver Sun and Vancouver Province. All relevant articles — including editorials, op-ed pieces and letters — were retrieved using the Canadian NewsDisc, read and then tallied according to the most appropriate category dependent on the meaning and imagery presented. The panoptic perspective produced by content analysis, although objectifying, provides a valuable means of communicating broad trends and situating the critical discourses analysis that follows.

The substantive analysis in this chapter engages with the literature on critical discourse analysis that provides a tool for “deconstructing the ideologies of the mass media and other elite groups, and for identifying and defining the social, economic and historical power relations between dominant and subordinate groups” (Henry and Tator, 2002, p.72; see also Said, 1981; Karim, 2003). In situating the production of media realities in their social, political and economic contexts I have begun to expose the taken-for-granted character of ideological messages. Critical discourses analysis is a research technique that further examines the ‘values, norms, worldviews and behavioural practices’ associated with specific discourses (Henry and Tator, 2002). Coupling macro-level or global analyses that focus on the ‘broad rhetorical strategies’ and central themes, with analyses examining the semantic meanings of the text (structures and vocabulary, sentence construction and so forth) I emphasise how the media narratives disproportionately portray ‘Islam’ and Iranians negatively, often repeating and reproducing overworked social constructions (see Dunn, 2001).

3.6: Othering ‘Islam’

“‘Islam’ has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility.”

(Said, 1981, p. ix)
In this section I want to elaborate some of the representations of ‘Islam’ manifest in the Anglophone print media in Canada. As a preface to my analysis, I want to briefly remark on Allan Pred’s (2000) powerful and provocative text on racisms in Sweden. Even in Sweden mobilises a Benjamin-inspired montage form, ‘deploying a strategy of radical heterogeneity, intercutting a set of (geographical hi)stories’ (Pred, 2000, p. xiii), which, from a methodological perspective, starkly demonstrates the possibilities of putting other authors to work. I invoke Pred’s work in recognition of the partiality, selectivity and situatedness of my re-presentations and arguments.

The historical duration and geographical reach of ‘Islam’, coupled with the diversity of possibilities within the ‘Islamic doctrine’, which has been variously aligned with ‘capitalism, socialism, militancy, fatalism, ecumenism and exclusivism’ brings into relief the implications of the Western media discourses that attempt to narrate Islam tout court (Said, 1981). Despite the manifest heterogeneity of Muslims ‘Islam’ is routinely framed reductively, with coverage structured around a small number of thematic clusters. Content analysis of articles covering ‘Islam’ from a series of Anglophone metropolitan dailies\textsuperscript{10} between 1994 and 2002 are illustrative of the reductive framing in media representations (Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1). Over 70% of the 802 articles retrieved explicitly framed ‘Islam’ negatively, with fundamentalism (31%) and militancy (13%) being accented heavily. Fundamentalism, in particular, is an encompassing and powerful trope frequently deployed in the media, which evokes stereotypes of militancy, violence and intolerance (Dunn, 2001). This content analysis of Canadian media representations of ‘Islam’ is congruent with a study of the depictions of ‘Islam’ in the Australian media by Dunn (2001). Analysing representations of ‘Islam’ from reports on Algeria in two major newspapers between 1992 and 1996 Dunn comments on the predominant use of negative terms (75%) in portrayals of ‘Islam’ and Muslims, with the categories of ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘militant’ accounting for 30% and 26% of all mentions respectively. The disproportionately negative portrayals of ‘Islam’ in the media, alongside the remarkable durability attained by particular stereotypes and social constructions through their repetition and reproduction, contributes in important ways to popular imaginings of ‘Islam’ and an accumulated heritage of Islamophobia. The content

\textsuperscript{10} The articles were retrieved using Canadian NewsDisc and the newspapers in the search were the National Post, the Montreal Gazette, the Toronto Star, the Vancouver Sun and the Vancouver Province.
analysis enables me to situate a closer critical discourses analysis of certain discursive formations that are routinely, but not universally, deployed in media representations of Islam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of 'Islam'</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of total mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Militant</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanatic</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerant</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misogyny</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace/Unity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backwards</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Other'</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-essentialism</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Content analysis of articles covering 'Islam', Canadian NewsDisc, select years 1994-2002.

![Pie chart showing depictions of Islam](image)

Figure 3.1: Issues treated in articles covering 'Islam', Canadian NewsDisc, select years 1994-2002.
Orientalist Imaginaries

Orientalist imaginaries pervade the social production of cultural difference in the media. In particular, the ‘civilising of global space’, most coherently distilled in Samuel Huntington’s (1997) polemic *The Clash of Civilisations*, has been singularly influential in framing ‘Islam’. O Tuathail’s (1996, p.243) rationalises the pervasiveness of the ‘clash of civilisations’ as follows: “The overarching ambition, conciseness and sloganistic simplicity of Huntington’s mediagenic thesis accounts for its appeal to opinion-makers, news journalist and professional politicians casting about for a new interpretative systems by which to order global affairs”. Indeed, much ideological work, drawing upon bounded, essentialised notions of culture, and dogmas of absolute and systemic difference, has been done in reductively framing ‘Islam’ as ontologically distinct from the ‘West’. Media constructions of reality routinely frame ‘Islam’ as the ‘West’s’ primary ‘Other’.

The dichotomous cognitive framing of ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ pervades much of the media. The extent to which these ‘monist abstractions’ support much of what is written about ‘Islam’ is evident in their deployment in headlines: “Why some Muslims hate the West” (*Toronto Star*, May 8th 1990, p.A17); and “Islamic fundamentalism the West’s new enemy” (*Globe and Mail*, July 18th, 1992, p.D3). The immediacy of ‘Islam’ and its apparent “divergence from ‘our’ familiar reality and norms sets it against us directly, threateningly, drastically” (Said, 1981, p.42) has been integral to imagining a ‘clash of civilisations’. However, it is important to register that both ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ are imprecise and ideologically loaded terms that are socially constructed towards specific ends, namely power. Halliday exposes the misrepresentations and falsifications necessary in the discursive construction of ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’:

“The West’ is not a valid aggregation of the modern world and lends itself far too easily to monist, conspirational presentations of political and social interaction. But nor is the term ‘Islam’ valid shorthand for summarising how a billion Muslims divided into over 50 states, and into myriad ethnicities and social groups, relate to the contemporary world, to each other and to the non-Muslim world.”

(Halliday, 1999, p.893)

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11 The term is borrowed from Halliday (1999).
The 'clash of the civilisations' thesis constructs essentialist identities of Muslims and 'Westerners', as if they were "watertight little containers of civilisational identity, doomed to endless self-replication" (Said, 1981, p. 43), and such constructions of Islam elide the diversity of ethnicities and the heterogeneity of interpretations of the Quran and Hadith, and the application of interpretations to everyday life.

The pre-eminence, even hegemony, of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis in media representations can be traced to a number of processes. The idea of a 'clash' has gained particular currency in media narratives as it legitimates the framing of complex processes reductively — typically as affronts to, or enhancements of, Western power. Wrenching coverage of 'Islam' from its distinct contexts circumvents problems of imperfect understandings of complex historical, geopolitical and cultural circumstances in which the 'news' unfolds. It also provides a solution to the limited capabilities and resources of media networks (Said, 1981). Other commentators suggest that the pre-eminence of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis and the (re)emergence of 'Islam' as the primary Other is contingent on the post-Cold War threat vacuum. The promulgation of the 'clash of civilisation' thesis and the demonization of 'Islam' in 'Western' media narratives are integral to what Herman and Chomsky (2002) term the 'manufacture of consent' and justifying the expansion of the military industrial complex. The contemporary deployment of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis is redolent of the 'Evil Empire' of the Reagan era, a discursive formation that demonstrated the complicity of the media with powerful corporate and political interests in the United States (Herman and Chomsky, 2002). Superficially, there appears to be a slippage between the interests of an American political and corporate elite and the broader 'Western' media. However, the reliance of the Canadian print media on wire services, themselves operating within distinct institutional contexts and acting with particular interest, contributes to a remarkable convergence in the construction of media realities. Halliday (1999) conducts a pointed critique on the epistemological basis of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, arguing that it hinges on the presupposition that 'the West' needs an enemy. While accepting the logic of this argument, I think the hegemony of the idea of a 'clash' within dominant geopolitical discourses hems in the production and circulation of knowledge through the media.
The prevalence of the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis in many of the media representations analysed also opens up space for some brief comments on the role of ‘experts’ or ‘authorised knowers’ in the construction of media reality (cf. Said, 1981; Karim, 2003). Said (1981) has contended that coverage of ‘Islam’ ‘canonises certain texts, notions and authorities’; they become *a priori* touchstones for any discussion of ‘Islam’. The cognitive framing of articles on ‘Islam’ in terms of a ‘clash’ is indicative of the intertextuality in representations of ‘Islam’ and the ways in which Orientalist polemics provide ‘an enunciative capacity that could be used, or rather mobilised, and linked into sensible discourse for the concrete occasion at hand’ (Said, 1979, p.222). Knowledge produced by authors (Naipaul, Huntington and Lewis are perhaps the most prominent) with an ‘eye to cultural anxieties in the reading public’ (Halliday, 1999, p.893), and the distortions their polemics entail, appear to be implicitly and uncritically internalised in some journalistic discourses. Furthermore, ‘authorised knowers’ are frequently solicited for explanations and understandings in the media construction of reality. A number of articles claiming a panoptic knowledge of Islam\(^{12}\) published in Canadian newspapers were either written by, or structured around statements made by, well-known Orientalists. For example, an article from the *Toronto Star* (May 8\(^{th}\), 1997, pA17) was structured around an interview with Middle East expert and Orientalist\(^{13}\) famed Orientalist and ‘expert’ Bernard Lewis, while another such expert published as a commentary in the *Montreal Gazette* entitled “Muslim resurgence challenges West” (July 7\(^{th}\), 1990, p.B3). These ‘experts’ provide an ‘official slant’ and entrench the ideologies internalised by media personnel and elites (Herman and Chomsky, 2002). Furthermore, these ‘experts’ and elaborations of their ‘scholarly’ credentials articulate an ideology of scholarship as a value-free and objective enterprise in an attempt to naturalise, rationalise and universalise a necessarily situated perspective. Deconstructing this ‘cult of objectivity’, Said (1979) argues that ‘no production of knowledge can ignore its own author’s involvement in his own circumstances’; the production and distribution of Orientalist ideas is embedded in a whole series of interests, in what Said would call a *will-to-power*. The

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\(^{12}\) Said argues this strategy is emblematic of Orientalism: “The Orientalist surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him – culture, religion, mind, history, society” (Said, 1979, p.239).

\(^{13}\) Edward Said has been particularly critical of Lewis’s programmatic statements about ‘Islam’ and the ‘Islamic world, such that Said and Lewis have come to represent conflicting perspectives in the debate famously initiated with the publication of *Orientalism*. 

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hegemony of Orientalist ideas, such as the ‘clash of civilisations’, and the access of ‘experts’ in media narratives of ‘Islam’, demonstrate the embeddedness of discourses in frameworks of power and provide critical insights into the processes through which the media constructs reality.

‘Islam’ as the primary Other

Media constructions of ‘Islam’ routinely and repetitively deploy an arsenal of narrative tropes and storyfields that frame ‘Islam’ in opposition to ‘the West’\textsuperscript{14}. In the discussion below I elaborate on some of the discursive regimes through which ‘Islam’ is imagined as anti-Western. The rationale guiding my re-presentations is that the narratives, images and ideas produced and circulated in the media have concrete implications for the construction of cultural difference within the popular imaginary.

Media constructions of reality, and specifically the crisis-driven definition of newsworthiness, results in coverage of ‘Islam’ that is often articulated around narratives of militancy, fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism (Table 3.1, Figure 3.1). Relatively isolated events, wrenched from the distinct contexts in which they unfolded and re-framed for ‘Western’ media consumers through pre-formed Orientalist discursive formations, are universalised and are projected onto the monist abstraction ‘Islam’. For example, an article published shortly after September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2001 in the \textit{Vancouver Sun}, entitled “The roots of their rage”, was replete with the Orientalist binaries constructing ‘Islam’, an imagined ‘them’, as ontologically distinct from ‘the West’, an imagined ‘us’. Furthermore, it made ungrounded and unsubstantiated proclamations such as: “They come out of a culture that reinforces their hostility, distrust and hatred of the West”; and in reference to the Middle East asserted, “[t]his is the land of suicide bombers, flag-burners and fiery Mullahs” (\textit{Vancouver Sun}, October 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2001, p.A20-1). These statements were accompanied by two images. The first was a photograph of two women (presumably members of Saddam Hussein’s Fedayeen) wearing black chador and brandishing AK47 assault rifles. The caption below the image reads: “Women march in military parade in Baghdad: In the region, the

\textsuperscript{14} Of course some cultural essentialist and demagogues of ‘Islamic’ ideologies have promulgated similar discursive constructions of ‘the West’, perhaps the most prominently articulated being Khomeini’s portrayal of the US as ‘Great Satan’.

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resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism is virulent"\textsuperscript{15}. The second image is a map with the so-called ‘Crescent of Crisis’, overlain with demographic and economic statistics and graphics for each ‘Islamic’ country and a photograph of two young boys both carrying guns. The caption for the image is “[a] measure of failure”. The montage of text and images in this article manufactures an essentialist caricature of ‘Islam’ and Muslims, who are portrayed as a monolith. Muslims are constructed as extreme, fanatical and militant, plagued by congenital nihilism, barbarism and a propensity towards violence. By contrast, and following Charles Taylor’s (1989) logic that ‘difference is essential to identity’, ‘Westerners’ are implicitly framed as reasonable, rational and moderate (see also Said, 1981; Sayyid, 1997).

A less sensational, more analytical, article reflecting on shifting geopolitical relationships in the early 1990s reproduces Orientalist narratives of essential difference and inevitable ‘clashes’, for example: “Islamic fundamentalism has replaced communism as the West’s bugbear. The basis of a new Cold War between the West and Islam is being laid” (\textit{Globe and Mail}, July 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1992, p D3).

Elsewhere, ‘Islam’ is framed not only as against ‘the West’, but also as irrational and against ‘Modernity’, and its associated liberal values. For example, an article reproduced in the \textit{Vancouver Sun} (January 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1992) from an earlier publication in the (London) \textit{Sunday Times} contended: “The West can do little more than once again provide a moral whipping boy for those who have come to despise its values”. Furthermore, this constructed antagonism is naturalised in the disarming assertion “[b]ut the whole point about Islam is that it was conceived in opposition to Christianity”. Said (1979, p.301) identifies a parallel tendency in Orientalist scholarship, remarking:

“Islam, or a seventh century ideal of it constituted by the Orientalist, is assumed to possess the unity that eludes the more recent and important influences of colonialism, imperialism, and even ordinary politics”.

Confrontations and antagonisms between contemporary geopolitical entities are framed, without evidence, in a long history of conflict, eliding structures of power and distinct contexts that give rise to hostilities.

\textsuperscript{15} The Ba’athist regime in Baghdad was, in fact, one of the most secular governments in the Middle East. The choice of the militant loyalists as a signifier for ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ is therefore, counterintuitive.
Media representations often construct 'Islam' as backward, and by implication inferior to 'the West'. One commentator, without recourse to any evidence, wrote: “The analysis now is that, for almost 500 years, Islam stagnated…” (Vancouver Sun, January 21st, 1992, p.A4). In the promethean spirit of Orientalist orthodoxy a panoptic article in the Vancouver Sun attempted to cover the history of 'Islam' in four pages, and framed the denouement of events in it title as “from poetry and justice to debauchery and war” (Vancouver Sun, February 2nd, 1992, p. B1-4). Alternatively, in an article discussed above William Pfaff argues that, “Islam still lacks its own Enlightenment to reconcile religion with modern thought – and desperately needs it” (Montreal Gazette, July 7th, 1990). This assertion portrays ‘Islam’ as monolithic and stagnating. The sentiment also reproduces an ethnocentric and under-examined conception of religion based on Christianity; in ‘the West’ religion is assumed to be a ‘self-contained unit of social life detached from the social order’ (Sayyid, 1997, p.14). Consequently, the circulation of popular portrayals of Muslim inability to distinguish between politics and religion is conducive to the construction of ‘Islam’ in opposition, and inferior, to the putative (yet fervently asserted) secular status of the Modern, ‘Western’ state. These representations also deny the significance of religious institutions organising politics of protest against domination, exploitation and oppression.16

Media narratives also frame ‘Islam’ as anti-modern. These representations conveniently evade the dovetailing of Orientalist scholarship and modernisation theory that entrenches the global political-economic and geopolitical status quo and produces situated experiences with modernity, as well as the centrality of modern ideas, values and institutions in the ‘Islamic world’17 (Said, 1979; Said, 1981). For example, an article from the Toronto Star claimed: “Islamic fundamentalism has given an aim and form to the otherwise aimless and formless resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have disrupted their societies…” (Toronto Star, May 8th, 1990, p.A17). Although this statement evidently overlaps, to some degree, with a demonstrable reality the overall tone of the article frames ‘Islam’ as

16 'Islam', or more specifically social networks embedded in religious institutions were instrumental in anti-colonial struggles, while more recently the mosques were central to the politics of protest under the oppressive and autocratic regime of the Shah in Iran, and gave rise to the popular Islamic Revolution.

17 The Islamic revolution in Iran, framed by the Western media largely as an indication of resurgent religious atavism and thoroughly anti-modern, in fact Khomeini deployed a set of modern and ‘Western’ popular and revolutionary vocabularies, and the Islamic government continues to be dependent on the modern institutions of the nation-state.

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backwards and irrational through reactions to ‘disruptive’ forces (rather than resistant). ‘Islam’ is framed as lacking the capacity to shape its own destiny. ‘The West’ is constructed as active in the production and export of teleological models of modernity, whereas ‘Islam’ appears to be merely reactive. Even more alarming was an article published in the *Vancouver Sun* (October 27th, 2001, p.A21) entitled “What the West must do now”. Asserting “We will have to do something on that scale [a reference to the myriad ideological strategies used to discredit the appeal of communism] to win the cultural struggle to help Islam enter the modern world”, this article reworks the colonialist discourses of the ‘civilising mission’ and concluded that “[w]e have no option but to get back into the nation-building business” (*Vancouver Sun*, October 27th, 2001, p.A21).

**Dissenting Voices:**

The elaboration of discursive formations presented so far has concentrated on some dominant narratives produced in media constructions of reality. However, I want to recapitulate that dominant discourses constitute fields of meanings; they are not static and unchanging reproductions of the dominant ideology. The media are a powerful form of cultural apparatus, but they are also a forum through which ideological meanings are contested and negotiated. In this section I want to outline some of what might be characterised as dissenting voices that counteract dominant discursive formations in the Anglophone print media in Canada.

In the wake of the September 11th attacks the *Montreal Gazette* (November 10th, 2001, p.B5) published a brief essay by Salman Rushdie. The use of Rushdie as an ‘authority’ on relationships between the monist abstractions ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ is interesting in itself. More significant to my project is the fact that while framing his piece around a discussion of modernity and ‘Islam’ – the subtitle to the article reads, “It’s about whether Muslim societies can depoliticise religion and reconcile with modernity” – Rushdie engages in limited exegesis of ‘Islam’, and the social construction of the term towards specific political ends. Rushdie is writing within dominant fields of meaning, but he is simultaneously destabilising one of the fundamental constructs upon which the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis, for example, is predicated.
A number of letters and editorial pieces explicitly challenge essentialist constructions of
'Islam' in media representations. The publication of letters entitled "Dispelling myths about
Muslims" (Globe and Mail, July 15th, 1992, A.15) and "Muslims are not a monolithic entity"
(Toronto Star, August 18th, 1994, p.A20) demonstrates the limited presence of oppositional
discourses in the media. These oppositional discourses are predominantly reactions to more
substantial articles that appeared in the respective media, a situation that militates against
their broader impact on consumers. Furthermore, the length of these oppositional
discourses and their confinement to more obscure sections of the newspaper reduce their
impact in articulating alternative perspectives. A more substantial op-ed piece published in
the Vancouver Sun (September 9th, 1992, p.A13) articulated a critique of media
representations of 'Islam' that 'feed ethnic and religious stereotypes' in response to the
release of the movie The Siege and news coverage of the bombings of US embassies in
Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. The article provides a coherent and persuasive discussion of
the implications of entrenching the idea of a 'Clash of Civilisations' in the popular imaginary
through media production and circulation of narratives and images of a fanatical, terrorist
and violent 'Other'. This piece offers an important corrective to the dominant discursive
formations. However, its positioning in the op-ed section constructs it as opinion and
subjective, in contrast to the implied 'objectivity' of news. In addition, the piece is dominated
by an image of a 'terrorist casualty' being rushed to hospital. This juxtaposition detracts
from the power of the oppositional narrative provided in the text; the image of the reality of
what is framed of 'terrorist' violence is used to delegitimate the valid assertions that are
made in the article.

In the run up to the first anniversary of the September 11th attacks, the Vancouver Sun
(September 7th, 2002, p.D3) published an article under the title "Re-envisioning Islam" in its
Mix supplement. The article is written by Rahat Kurd, who is actually a writer, poet and
progressive Muslim activist; although the only qualifications that the Vancouver Sun chose to
disclose were that she 'has prayed in the mosques of Isfahan, Lahore and New York City', a
form of race-tagging re-enforced by the accompanying photograph depicting the author
wearing a veil outside a mosque in Isfahan, Iran. The placing of this article at the margins of
the newspaper, and the editorial framing and narration of the text, detract from the potency
of the arguments made. The substantive focus of the text was the sudden visibility of Muslims in the ‘shared cultural landscape’ after September 11th. Kurd provides powerful critiques of the essentialisation of ‘Islam’ and Muslim identities that appear through the media construction of ‘Islam’ as a spectacle. Specifically I want to highlight two of her most powerful statements. Firstly, Kurd notes, “there is a huge empty space where poetic and humorous stories about ordinary Muslim life ought to be”. This assertion underscores crisis-driven definition of newsworthiness and the attendant construction of ‘Islam’ as spectacle. The media representations of ‘Islam’ project an over-determined, essentialist, and divisive set of discourses, symbols and images that manufacture narratives of difference and incompatibility, and militate against intercultural dialogue. Alternatively, her assertion “When I say ‘us’ now I really mean all of us – Muslim or not, latte-drinking, left-coast types who are still bitter about the racist referendum and the bus fee hikes”, implodes essentialist constructions of the ‘Other’, eloquently communicating the intersectionality of identities, and the real and cross-cutting interests that are occluded by racialised narratives of difference.

Constructs of Islam’ and imagining of Iranian identities

In this section I have attempted to situate media constructions of ‘Islam’. Critical representations are designed to demonstrate the ‘inauthenticity’ of many media narratives and their embeddedness in social networks of power. In dominant discursive formations ‘Islam’ is a ‘black box’; it refers to an entanglement of essentialist ideas, narratives and images. Critical interventions are imperative given that the media are privileged forms of cultural apparatus through which geopolitical discourses (such as the ‘clash of civilisations’) are relayed to the media-consuming public. The production and circulation of discourses, symbols and images of ‘Islam’ in the media have concrete implications for popular imaginings of Iranian identities. Media discourses influence the ways in which ‘Others’ and difference are conceptualised and assessed, providing powerful statements about the legitimacy of diversity in a multicultural society, and influencing the politics of adaptation. The prevalence of anti-Muslim prejudice against immigrants in ‘the West’, often
misidentified as 'Islamophobia'\textsuperscript{18}, is largely contingent on ignorance, misunderstanding and a lack of 'intercultural'\textsuperscript{19} dialogue and is exacerbated through the social production of images of cultural difference in dominant media discourses.

3.7: Othering the Islamic Republic of Iran

"First of all, it seemed that "we" were at bay, and with us the normal, democratic, rational order of things. Out there, writhing in self-provoked frenzy was "Islam" in general, whose manifestation of the hour was a disturbingly neurotic Iran"


The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the 444-day hostage crisis at the United States embassy in Tehran that began in November, 1979, as well as the so-called 'Rushdie Affair', have ensured that Iran has been prominent in the imagining and production of an 'Islamic Other'. The prevalence of Iran in the iconography of media representations of 'Islam's' apparent resurgence is reflective of the complicity of the media with powerful geopolitical and economic interests\textsuperscript{20}. This section examines the mobilisation of particular discursive formations to construct Iran, and therefore by extension Iranians, as different from an imagined "us" in the Canadian print media. The substantive analysis is organised around an elaboration on a number of interconnected themes in coverage of Iran. Initially, however, I want to make some brief comments on overall coverage of Iranians in the media.

The content analysis represented in Table 3.2 and Figure 3.2\textsuperscript{21} provides a powerful, albeit epistemologically limited, heuristic tool for analysing the tendencies and biases of media

\textsuperscript{18} Halliday (1999) argues that Islamophobia misidentifies the problem. Discourses are not against 'Islam' per se, but Muslims, especially immigrants. To label such prejudice as 'Islamophobia' reproduces distortions of the monist abstraction that is 'Islam' and 'indulges conformism and authorities within Muslim communities' (ibid., p. 899).

\textsuperscript{19} 'Intercultural' is not intended to imply a bounded, essentialised notion of culture – hence the scare quotes.

\textsuperscript{20} The prominence of particular narratives in the Anglophone media in Canada signifies convergence, in large part attributable to the dependence of media corporations on the American, British and French wire services.

\textsuperscript{21} The articles retrieved using Canadian NewsDisc, select years, 1992-2002. Newspapers in the search were the National Post, the Montreal Gazette, the Toronto Star, the Vancouver Sun and the Vancouver Province.
representations of Iranians. The articles retrieved covered Iranians both inside and outside of Iran; the results, therefore, do not refer solely to media constructions of Iran. However, I think Figure 3.2 does impress through the overwhelming negativity of the coverage. For example, the thematic clusters ‘militant’, ‘fundamental’, ‘fanatic’, ‘intolerant’, ‘misogyny’ and ‘threat’ speak directly to media representations of Iranians in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and account for 49% of the 1481 articles retrieved. The clusters of ‘corruption’ (7%) and ‘culture’ (8%) refer predominantly to articles covering Iranian immigrants in Canada. Furthermore, the ‘other’ category, which accounts for 27% of all the articles retrieved, is partially illustrative of the ‘events’-or ‘crisis-driven’ definition of newsworthiness. Articles subsumed by this category were largely stimulated by individual political crises (such as a bombing of a synagogue in Buenos Aires that was linked to the Iranian embassy, or a conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1998, caused by the assassination of Iranian diplomats in Kabul) or natural catastrophes (in particular earthquakes). In spite of the manifest limitations of content analysis, such compartmentalisation of media constructions of reality are illustrative of the sorts of ‘encounters’ that dominate coverage of Iranians that are presented in media discourses, as well as suggestive of the possible implications of such tendencies for the popular imagining of Iranian identities. In the remainder of this section I provide a closer analysis of some of the recurrent discursive formations mobilised in the media representations of Iran.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of Iranians</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of total mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Militant</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanatic</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerant</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misogyny</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and Unity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backwards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Other'</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign relations</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1484</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.2:** Media depiction of Iranians, Canadian NewsDisc, select years 1994-2002

**Figure 3.2:** Issues treated in articles covering Iranians, Canadian NewsDisc, select years, 1994-2002.
Framing Iran: religious fundamentalism and anti-Americanism

The removal of the Pahlevi regime in 1979 and the forcible and unapologetic assertion of traditional Muslim symbols, in conjunction with overt opposition to dominant global discourses by the inchoate Islamic government in Iran was an iconographic event in what ‘Western’ media narratives commonly imagine as the “resurgence of ‘Islam’” (Said, 1981; Karim, 2003). The rejection of a regime that symbolised ‘modernisation’ and neo-colonial relations with ‘the West’, particularly the United States, was framed as a retreat to religious atavism. Since the revolution portrayals of politics in Iran have disproportionately deployed narratives of a monolithic and unchanging ‘Islam’, eliding the reality of fluid and open political struggles and reproducing a reductive architecture that constructs media reality through the optic of affronts to, or enhancements of, Western power.

Media representations have seized on the explicit dovetailing of religion and politics in post-revolution Iran to construct the Islamic Republic of Iran as backward, inferior and the imagined ‘Other’ to the modern, secular ‘Western’ State. Statements include: “They [fundamentalists in Iran] see Islam as a political religion: the state only exists to enforce the Koran’s holy law” (Vancouver Sun, January 13th, 1983, p.A5); or “If there is one thing the West has indeed learned about Islam, it’s that the sacred and the secular are inseparable in Islamic terms. It is this sense of a coherent spiritual identity that is baffling to the West, which has come to regard cultural and religious pluralism as a divine doctrine, and committed itself to strict separation between church and state” (Globe and Mail, April 10th, 1991, p.A16). These assertions exemplify the embeddedness of Orientalist discourses in media constructions of reality. Reproducing ethnocentric narratives of religion informed by a Judeo-Christian worldview and uncritically asserting the secularity of Enlightenment thought and modernity these discursive formations explicitly construct politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran as atavistic, backwards and anti-modern. Moreover, representations of a retreat to religious atavism in Iran radically decontextualise the denouement of the revolution. The prevalence of religious doctrines in the revolution signified, in part at least, the role social networks embedded in religious institutions played in organising the politics of protest – these social networks were able to evade the Savak, the secret police of the Shah’s autocratic regime.
One component of media constructions of religious atavism in Iran hinges on the reproduction of a classical Orientalist dogma in discussions of Shi’a interpretation of Islam. Said (1979) remarks powerfully on the tendency within Orientalist scholarship to ‘explain’ contemporary events in the ‘Islamic World’ on the basis of an idealised construct of ‘Islam’, in the process eliding the important histories of imperialism, colonialism and contemporary politics. For example, one article from the Globe and Mail (June 24th, 1992, p.A4) characterised religion in Iran as “unchanging and unwavering over the centuries”. Alternatively, another piece published in the Globe and Mail (February 1st, 1979, p.A2) as the revolution in Iran was unfolding explains the political events solely through reference to the Shi’a interpretation of Islam that descended from the history of the fourth Caliph Ali, and the last legitimate leader of Persia. Not only does this narration deploy an idealised, atavistic and unchanging construct of the Shi’ite tradition – the essence of the Shi’a interpretation is assumed unchanged since the murder of Ali in 661 – avoiding the complexities of the immediate and historical context, but it also demonstrates the uncritical manner in which the absolutist polemics of representatives of the Islamic revolution were assimilated and represented in ‘Western’ media discourses.

Media representations of the Islamic Republic of Iran are disproportionately framed in narratives of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism. Stark examples include headlines affirming: “Iran a nation possessed” (Montreal Gazette, February 18th, 1984, p.B1), “Martyrdom fascinates Shiite Moslem [sic] fighters” (Vancouver Sun, November 8th, 1986, p.D14), or “No moderation in Iran” (National Post, July 6th, 1999, p.A19). Discourses in such pathological exegeses of Iranian society under Islamic government invoke a number of overdetermined signifiers in their construction of reality to sustain assertions in the absence of informed understanding or evidence. Discourses of religious fanaticism, fundamentalism and zealotry are nourished, for example, by monolithic characterisations of the government as a ‘fearsome theocracy’ overrun by ‘evil hardliners’ (National Post, July 6th, 1999, p.A19), by disproportionate coverage of the strict Islamic codes of a chauvinistic society, and by embellishments on the rhetoric of martyrdom. An article published in the Montreal Gazette (September 13th, 2001, p.A9) in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th attacks asks

22 These articles also demonstrate the remarkable perseverance and consistency of such discourses.
rhetorically “How the US became ‘Great Satan’” in an overt attack on the “zeal bred in the alleyways of Gaza and the slums of Tehran”. The author of this diatribe reproduces the cognitive frame of ‘Cold war Huntington-style’ (Karim, 2003) adding that the ideological battle with communism was “political rivalry not messianic demonisation”, and at least the Soviet bloc shared a “Christian, Western culture”. The prominent placing of Iran in these discursive formations has a definitive impact on the popular imagining of Iranian identities. Without condoning human rights abuses and curtailment of women’s rights in post-revolutionary Iran, it is important, I think to underscore that exaggerated media coverage circulates a repertoire of images, symbols and narratives that contribute to the construction of all Iranians, even all Muslims, as religious fanatics and fundamentalists, and constructs women as the victims of such religious fervour.

Media narratives do not monolithically reproduce dominant ideological meanings inscribed upon religion in post-revolutionary Iran. For example, one oppositional discourse situates coverage in Iran within a broader fear of ‘Islam’ in ‘the West’, contending “the West has largely dealt with it [Islam] by denigrating and demonising it, or by having puppet governments run it” (Toronto Star, February 24th, 2000, p.A28). The piece proceeds to emphasise the embeddedness of Western, liberal values and Enlightenment thought, citing Hobbes and Locke in particular, in Christian moral and ethical codes. Alternatively, the Montreal Gazette published an article following George W. Bush’s State of the Union address in which he articulated his ‘Axis of Evil’ rhetoric in which they acknowledged and critiqued the demonisation of Iran in ‘Western’ media narratives (Montreal Gazette, February 12th, 2002, p.B3). However, this article was accompanied by an image of a ‘throng’ of young, Iranian males carrying an effigy of ‘Uncle Sam’. Such visual signifiers powerfully communicate ideas of anti-Westernism that are associated in dominant media discourses with religious fanaticism, consequently this juxtaposition detracts from the oppositional discourse articulated in the text.

The publication of Salman Rushdie’s novel The Satanic Verses, and the reactions it provoked, heralded a new and extended episode in the Othering of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Appadurai characterises The Satanic Verses as a ‘text in motion’, which circulated outside ‘the safe haven of Western norms about artistic freedom and aesthetic rights’, provoking
reactions from some Muslims and organisations (Appadurai, 1996, p.9). My interest here is to elaborate the construction of this ‘collision’ in the media and the ways in which reactions to the novel – in particular Khomeini’s fatwa and the symbolic violence of book burning that hauntingly reproduced images from Nazi Germany – licensed unrestrained Othering and Orientalist discourses in media constructions of reality. The so-called ‘Rushdie Affair’ became integral to reinforcing narratives of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism in Iran, and the construction of the Islamic Republic of Iran as backwards and ‘uncivilised’. Media representations frequently interpreted reactions to The Satanic Verses as vindication of the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis and little time was wasted in projecting images of Iranians in particular, and Muslims more generally, as ontologically distinct from an imagined, progressive ‘us’. Through the mobilisation of bounded and essentialised notions of culture, Iran, as ‘Islam’ incarnate, was prominent in the construct of fundamental difference and inevitable conflict. Neil Bissoondath, for example, in an op-ed piece for the Toronto Star (February 17th, 1989, p.A27) declared “[o]ur visions of society and religion are so divergent that dialogue and compromise seem impossible”, while an article in the Globe and Mail (February 18th, 1989, p.D1) asserted that the “Islamic world does not operate in the same way [as ‘us’]”. The extreme reactions of some radical Muslim groups to Rushdie’s novel, characterised by one media commentator as ‘intellectual terrorism’ (Globe and Mail, August 7th, 1992, p.C6), was overwhelming cognitive framed in media narratives as ‘they’ hate ‘our’ values. Media representations monolithically and uniformly constructed Iranians as irrational, uncivilised, anti-intellectual, anti-Western and anti-modern. The Islamic government in Iran was overtly attacked, with assertions including: “the premodern state of Iran” (Globe and Mail, February 18th, 1989, p.D1); “the traditional Islamic law that governs Iran is essentially medieval” (ibid.); and discussion of the “medieval, reactionary, brutal and inhuman practices carried out by zealous priests” (Toronto Star, January 7th, 1992, p.A13). These media representations provide a prominent distillation of many of the processes through which knowledge about post-revolutionary Iran has been produced and projected into the popular imaginary. The actions of a small and conservative, if powerful, religious elite in Iran were extrapolated and mapped ubiquitously and uniformly on to all Iranians, with necessary consequences for the popular imagining of Iranian identities in ‘the West’. Media narratives were insensitive to the heterogeneity of reactions to the novel, in both ‘the West’ and the ‘Islamic world’. Additionally, for all the rhetoric of freedom of expression,
there was little discussion of the responsibility of authorship, and the fact that Rushdie's knowledge and experience meant that he knew precisely the inflammatory potential of his novel.

Iran as a terrorist state

Another significant theme in media constructions of post-revolution Iran is the labelling of Iran as a ‘terrorist’ state. Karim’s (2003) extended discussion of the dovetailing of terrorism with ‘Islam’ in media representations emphasises the situated, partisan and contingent processes of labelling that speak as much to political ideologies and agendas as they are reflective of ‘reality’. The deployment of discourses of ‘state sponsored terror’ have dogged representations of Iran since the revolution, and have recently assumed renewed verve as the media have assimilated and rearticulated the ‘Axis of Evil’ rhetoric promulgated by the White House. Articles covering the activities of Hezbollah, represented as an ‘Islamic’ ‘terrorist’ group (as opposed to ‘freedom fighters’ or the more neutral designation ‘guerrillas’) against the Israeli state, perpetually forge a link between the group and the Islamic government in Iran.

Most often Hezbollah is characterised as supported and/or funded by the Iranian government, thereby entrenching constructions of the Islamic government of Iran as a ‘terrorist state’ and conveniently eliding the complicity of ‘Western’ governments in activities that would merit the designation terrorist were they subjected to similar standards of interrogation. The Islamic government in Iran has also been directly implicated, often without evidence, in a number of well-publicised political ‘assassinations’ – for example, one Vancouver Sun (June 14th, 1997, p.G4) article argued that Iran’s ‘foreign policy is as often carried out by murder and fatwa (religious decree) as by diplomacy’. For example, the Montreal Gazette (August 26th, 1996, p.E7) published an article initially written for the Washington Post that claimed ‘gangland-slayings of opponents of Iran’s fundamentalist regime’ were ordered by Tehran (the title read “Tehran ordered Berlin Slaying, exiled Iranian says”). The ‘evidence’ supporting the accusations of state sponsored terrorism is based on the assertions of the exile cited, Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr – who, incidentally, was the last president of Iran under the Shah, and therefore unlikely to be extolling the virtues of the

At times the media constructs ‘terrorist’ connections more explicitly. For example, an article from the *Vancouver Sun* (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998, p. A22) uncritically assimilated the political blustering of the US state department declaring “Iran branded most active sponsor of state terrorism”. This representation grouped Iran with other ‘pariah states’, without even questioning the political ideologies and motivations that ground the impulse to produce and circulate such designations. Alternatively, Iran *per se* is constructed as a ‘terrorist’ entity. Presciently anticipating the ideology of the ‘Axis of Evil’ and doctrine of ‘pre-emptive strikes’ in the name of US national security, an article in the *National Post* (July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1999, p. A19) argued: “Iran remains the world leader in terrorism, is deeply involved in chemical and biological warfare programs, and is developing a nuclear bomb. So much for moderation”. Beyond reproducing the untenable logic that only certain nation-states are entitled to possess so-called weapons of mass destruction such narratives reinforce the discursively constructed association of the Iranian government with multiple forms of ‘terrorism’. They also contribute to the imagining of all Iranians, both inside and outside of Iran, as threats and potential ‘terrorists’.

*Ethnocentrism in representations of Iran*

A recurrent theme in media representations of Iran is the predominance of ethnocentrism in the processes of defining newsworthiness and the discursive formations through media constructions of reality are articulated. A brief elaboration of the extent to which ethnocentrism permeates representations provides an avenue into critiques of media discourses more generally. A critical reading also examines how powerful agendas and perspectives become embedded in the popular imaginary, and how Iranian identities come
to be constructed around a limited repertoire of images. Media coverage of the Islamic revolution was diverse, but often – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the cultural and political frames of reference – events were overtly and solely framed in terms of ‘Western’ interests. An article in the *Globe and Mail* (February 3rd, 1979, p.A9), for example, lamented “The Gulf Policeman in gone”, and posed the question “If the Shah’s Iran was the policeman of the Gulf does it mean its disappearance means a free for all for the burglars?” An article published in the *Vancouver Sun* (February 2nd, 1989, p.B8) on the tenth anniversary of the revolution registers the revolution as a ‘loss’, depicting the revolution as when a “strategic pillar of Western defence declared itself an Islamic Republic”. Such coverage of the revolution is framed in terms of betrayal and loss, and contributes to the construction of Iran, and by extension Iranians, as against ‘the West’ and ‘our’ interests – as a threat. Alternatively, the Islamic revolution and the subsequent Islamic government are frequently constructed as a disruptive, destabilising force. For example, the *Montreal Gazette* (May 28th, 1987, p.A1) covered a statement from Ronald Reagan in which he declared that “the US would not allow ‘barbaric Iran to close Persian Gulf”. This construction is more powerfully conveyed in the political cartoon below (Figure 5.3), which depicts vultures with the face of Khomeini swooping over oil fields, as a dove carrying an olive branch in its beak, presumably signifying the Shah’s regime and its cultivation of close political allegiances with ‘the West’, flies away.

![Political Cartoon from the *Vancouver Sun* (January 13th, 1983, p.A5).](image)

**Figure 3.3:** Political Cartoon from the *Vancouver Sun* (January 13th, 1983, p.A5).
This image communicates starkly the ethnocentrism that is endemic to representations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In identifying a pervasive tendency in Orientalist discourse, Said (1979, p.108) notes that “[a]lways there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the World’s resources”. I think ‘Western’ reactions, articulated through media narratives, to the establishment and survival of the Islamic government reproduces such ethnocentric preoccupations. Accordingly, media constructions of ‘reality’ were predisposed, partially at least, to frame political change in Iran as disruptive and a threat to ‘security’ in the Gulf as well as the flow of oil. These representations, once circulating in the popular imaginary, have considerable implications for the ways in which Iran and Iranians are popularly imagined.

The oppression of women in Iran

Narratives woven around misogyny and the oppression of women constitute a significant proportion of media coverage of Iran – content analysis presented in Figure 5.2 suggests approximately 6% of coverage clustered around the theme ‘misogyny’. Representations of women in Iran are disproportionately framed through tropes of oppression and victimisation, and images of veiled women in particular are frequently deployed to communicate both ideas of religious fanaticism and the oppression of women in the construction of a universally chauvinistic society. A book reviewer for the Toronto Star (March 18th, 1995, p.K16) even acknowledges that the veil presents a “precise and focused point of attack against Islamic Iran and against Islam in general”. The pervasive journalistic pathologies of religion and culture in Iranian society, produced with little evidence or understanding, commonly diagnose ‘Islam is a strict life in Iran’ (Toronto Star, December 11th, 1984, p.F4), or the lack of social freedoms (Montreal Gazette, October 4th, 1998, p. A8) before immediately, and seemingly automatically, turning to a discussion of the oppression of women, which is invariably signified by the veil or hijab. At its most extreme media coverage prominently positioned a story of an Iranian transsexual’s decision to have a sex reversal, on the basis of a ‘painful and intolerable life’ (Vancouver Sun, June 20th, 2000, p.A1) and the ‘impossibility of constraints’ (Vancouver Province, June 22nd, 2000, p.A28) as a woman in Iran, sensationally reinforcing dominant media constructions of oppression and misogynist
practices. The veil in media narratives is predominantly read as a symbol of oppression, subordination and immobility; the religious symbolism and the personal meanings of the veil – which for women is a positive assertion of religious identity – are apparently inconceivable. Furthermore, the imagery of veiled women, constructed as embodiments of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ construct the Islamic Republic of Iran as oppressive and backwards in a remarkable reproduction of colonialist discourses that legitimate a modern-day ‘civilising mission’. The pervasiveness of colonialist lenses is illustrative of the ‘globalising’ tendencies of critiques developed by ‘Western’ feminism, and elides the fact that control over bodies is a function of governmentality per se; legislation against wearing the veil (under the last Shah of Iran’s father’s regime, or in contemporary France) signify attempts to control women’s bodies in a similar ways as compelling women to wear the hijab (Sayyid, 1997). This discussion is not intended to deny the realities of oppression and misogynist practices, but explicitly attempts to critique the skewed and monolithic representations of Iranian women in media narratives.

Oppositional discourses are occasionally voiced within the mainstream media. An op-ed piece in the Montreal Gazette (March 15th, 2001, p.B3) articulated a powerful critique of the ‘Western’ stereotypes of Muslim women, arguing that such stereotypes “feed racism in the name of feminism”. Acknowledging misogynist practices and ‘violations of modern conceptions of women’s rights’ the authors argue that media representations only communicate half the story. Media narratives ignore the multiplicity of Iranian women’s acts of resistance and subversions of oppressive practices, and by constructing women as victims, these discursive formations legitimate colonialist fantasies of the ‘civilising mission’. Oppositional discourses provide isolated instances of dissent against dominant discursive constructions. However, the overwhelming prominence of dominant media narratives, exacerbated by the excessive and indulgent use of the metaphor of the veil (‘unveiling’; ‘behind the veil’ and so forth) in articles covering Iran specifically, and ‘Islam’ more generally, serves to project dominant ideological meanings of gender relations and the symbolism of the veil into the popular imaginary, and contribute to the construction of Iranian immigrant women as passive, home bound and oppressed (Dossa, 2001; Dossa, 2002).

Representations of Iran and imagining Iranian identities
Media representations of Iran intersect and overlap significantly with dominant narrations and imaginings of ‘Islam’ articulated through the media, particularly given the prominence of Iran in the iconography of representations of ‘Islam’ in the late 20th century. The ‘image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality’ (Appadurai, 1996) articulated through the media produce representations of Iran which contribute fundamentally to discursive economy of representations through which identities of Iranian immigrants in Vancouver are imagined and constructed by multiple and differently situated individuals. I have no intention of being an apologist for the government in Iran, which has committed human rights abuses and brutal acts of oppression and persecution, but I do think it is important to reflect on the situated production of media realities and their impacts. The analysis so far has underscored how media technologies telescope constructions of Iranian and Muslim identities, which inflect on the way in which Iranian immigrant identities in Vancouver are imagined. In the final empirical section of this chapter, I centre my analysis on media representations of Iranian immigrants and refugees in Canada generally, and Vancouver more specifically. The architectures of Otherness manufactured through media representations of ‘Islam’ and Iran are reproduced through the adherence to particular scripts in the media constructions of Iranians in Vancouver.

3.8: Scripting Iranian identities in Vancouver

“Through stereotypes…minorities are put down, put in their place, or put up as props for the edification of the mass audience.”

(Fleras, 1994, p.273)

This chapter has repeatedly underscored the significance of the media in the social production of images of cultural difference. In a series of interventions into the scripting of Iranian immigrant identities in media constructions of reality I reflect on the processes through which Iranian identities are homogenised and selectively silenced. My analysis situates the social production of the news within institutional contexts and corporate

23 For example, Ahmed (1992, p.vii), pursuing a strong argument about the impact of media constructions of reality, contends “We cannot hope to understand Muslims without first understanding the nature of the Western media".
commitments (see Herman and Chomsky, 2002), as these necessarily influence the definition of newsworthiness – news is structured around the unusual, negative and the problematic. The production of knowledge and gathering of information by the media is also an inherently cultural process. Any analysis of media representations must, therefore, understand that immigrant experiences and multicultural realities are filtered through the “fears and fantasies of a dominant White culture” (Fleras, 1995, p.1), and emphasise that coverage rarely challenges the Eurocentric cultural hegemony (Dunn and Mahtani, 2001). Beyond this situating of media constructions of Iranian identities within specific cultural and institutional contexts, I also want to remark that the production of Iranian identities in the media is intertextual. Media constructions are partially and contingently informed by discursive constructions of Muslims, Iranians, as well as immigrants more generally, circulated through a variety of media. My re-presentation of discursive formations framed through negative tropes of alterity and otherness is informed by the conviction that such discourses preclude the full acceptance of Iranians as normal and fully contributing members of society. This condition has been diagnosed more generally in the Canadian context by Fleras (1995, p.8), who contends little space is given over to the representations of ‘minorities’ as “average, normal, tax-paying Canadians with a broad range of opinions and activities beyond the ethnic community”. I now want to examine some of the storyfields through which Iranian immigrant identities are narrated by the mainstream media.24

Overlapping territories: political activism in response to events in Iran

Initially. I want to provide some examples where the mappings of Otherness through media representations of Iran overlap and intertwine with coverage of Iranians in Canada. Coverage often reports on political mobilisations by Iranians, or other sympathetic groups, in Canada in response to political events in Iran. Protests against the Islamic government in Iran are most prevalently covered, with accusations of torture and executions being particularly prominent. Such coverage, seemingly confirming brutality and the ‘uncivilised nature’ of Iranians and ‘Islam’, concur with dominant media constructions of Iran. These representations frame certain Iranians in explicit opposition to the Islamic government in

24 Articles retrieved for the content analysis of Iranian cover stories about Iranians in Iran as well as Iranian immigrants to Canada. Although there is no content analysis for Iranian immigrants per se the majority of coverage was categorised under the terms ‘culture’, ‘corruption’, and ‘other’.
Iran, and against all the meanings invested in dominant media constructions of Iran, offering a glimpse into the heterogeneity contained within the ascribed ethnic signifier Iranian and destabilising dominant constructions of Iranian identities. The media does not monolithically reduce Iranian identities. It necessarily recognises some of the diversity in political perspectives and opinion, although recognition of diversity is often restricted to discussions of perspective in relation to 'homeland politics', a framing which establishes psychic barriers by implicitly questioning notions of belonging and commitment in Canada. Moreover, media constructions of reality often render such overlaps in transnational political and cultural fields as problematic. For example, after Khomeini issued the fatwa on Salman Rushdie a Globe and Mail columnist writing from Vancouver seized upon what he called the 'Ayatollah's curse' in a politically conservative critique of immigration and multiculturalism, arguing that “Canada is on the front line of the culture clash” (Globe and Mail, March 4th, 1989, p.C1). In his debunking of Orientalist orthodoxy the author is worried about the flipping of the 'multicultural dream...into a nightmare' and the fragmentation and balkanisation of the Canadian polity; a situation to be remedied through the assimilation of those constructed as ‘Others’ into the ‘vigilant tolerance’ of an imagined mainstream.

The criminalisation of Iranian immigrants

In the recognition of the pervasive tendencies of under-representation and misrepresentation exhibited by the media in the coverage of immigrants and individuals marked as ethnically or racially Other (Fleras, 1994; 1995; Dunn and Mahtani, 2001; Henry and Tator, 2002), in conjunction with the media’s capacity to shape opinions, my analysis focuses on the adherence to a small number of scripts in media coverage of Iranian identities in Vancouver. Portrayals of Iranians in Vancouver, overwhelmingly confined to negative stereotypes, project dominant constructions, reproduce Eurocentric cultural hegemony and sustain anti-Muslim prejudice. In what follows I want to examine a thematic

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25 Hage (1998) argues that worrying is the prerogative of members of the dominant White culture, betraying assumptions about their centrality as 'governors' or 'managers' of the nation, and the conception of 'ethnic others' as objects to be governed and positioned within the national space.

26 Hage (1998) also provides a powerful critique of 'multicultural tolerance', contending that it is a strategy for reproducing and disguising relationships of social power: 'It is a form of symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism' (p.87).
cluster of representations that has contributed to the criminalisation of Iranians in Vancouver.

One striking example of the criminalisation of Iranian identities was articulated around the murder of Mohammad Mirhadi in a North Vancouver movie theatre that precipitated ungrounded explanation as a ‘gangland slaying’ (*Vancouver Sun*, March 6th, 1997, p.B1; *Vancouver Province*, September 15th, 1997, p.A3). This violent event was ubiquitously scripted through narratives of ‘gang culture’—the murder was framed as a ‘gangland-style slaying’ or an ‘execution-style slaying’ (*Vancouver Sun*, November 18th, 1997, p.A3)—in spite of police statements to the contrary. Even where such police statements were acknowledged—one title read, for example, ‘Murder at movie not a gang hit, police say’ (*Vancouver Sun*, March 4th, 1997)—the narratives in the text consistently and routinely emphasised the gang-like behaviour, such as tendencies towards criminality and violence among young Iranian males. Expressions of pride in Persian heritage particularly among young Iranian males, some of whom where evidently involved in criminal activities, was misinterpreted and invoked as evidence of the existence of an imagined gang called *Persian Pride*. Mirhadi was scripted as a member of the mythical gang *Persian Pride*, and criminalized on the basis of being known as a ‘young offender’. Media re-constructions of the murder contributed to an imaginative geography of gang culture, and this shooting was linked with other incidents of violent crime involving young Iranian males, namely the shooting of two Iranian males, who were purportedly ‘accomplices’ of Mirhadi’s (*Vancouver Sun*, March 7th, 1997, p.B4). Media speculation on the motives also reinforced the scripting of the murder as related to gang activity. For example, Mirhadi was accused of being a cocaine trafficker (*Vancouver Province*, September 15th, 1997, p.A3) and articles in the immediate aftermath routinely concluded that the murder was driven by drugs and criminal activity, explained by the ‘problems of immigration’ for teenagers and the ease of access to guns and drugs in the North American context (*Vancouver Sun*, March 8th, 1997, p.A15). It transpired after a six-month police investigation that the murder actually involved three Iranian teens and took place after a physical and verbal altercation with the victim.

Media representations deployed other mechanisms to further entrench the cognitive framing of the murder as gang violence. Speculation about escalating violence through revenge
attacks (*Vancouver Sun*, March 7th, 1997, B4; *Vancouver Sun*, March 8th, 1997, p.A15), for example, situated the shooting within a narrative of gang violence. Alternatively, media coverage repeatedly noted that the murder occurred during a screening of *Donnie Brasco*, a gangster movie. The prevalence and repetition of this observation in the media narration of events invests significance and meaning into fact that it happened to be a gangster movie, and serves to undermine the assertion that the murder was unrelated to an imagined ‘gang culture’.

Unravelling the scripting of the Mirhadi murder provides a useful conduit into understanding the power of the media to produce and circulate particular constructions of reality. The murder, assumed to be embedded in a complex entanglement of criminal activities was reductively framed as related to gang culture. The existence, or not, of *Persian Pride* is not the central issue. It seems evident that there were a small number of young Iranian males involved in criminal and violent activities operating in North Vancouver. However, the immediate, seemingly automatic, and, more importantly, unsubstantiated scripting of the murder as a ‘gangland slaying’ in the media exaggerated the situation on the North Shore. The freight of discourses of ‘gang culture’, which indelibly marked media representations of the murder, projected associations with violence and organised crime into the popular imaginary. The prominence of this ‘gangland’ scripting mapped discourses of violence, criminality and social problems on to the popularly imagined identities of young males of ‘Iranian descent’ in Vancouver.

Associations between male youth culture and gangs was reinforced by media coverage of the murder of two Iranian men in a drive by shooting at a gas station in Vancouver’s West End in 2000. The discursive framing of this violence in the media - the ‘style’ of the killing, the fact that one of the victims was ‘known to police’ and his father was under investigation for smuggling arms into Iran (see below), and that both victims were said to be into Vancouver’s ‘rave scene’ (*Vancouver Province*, June 2nd, 2000, p.A2) – implicated the victims in a ‘gang culture’, reinforcing and reproducing dominant constructions of young Iranian male identities in the process.

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27 The film, *Donnie Brasco*, was mentioned in the majority of articles in the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Vancouver Province* reporting on the murder and the subsequent police investigation
The prominent coverage of a number of other stories involving Iranians in Vancouver has further contributed to the criminalisation of Iranian immigrant identities. For example, two Iranian immigrants were accused and tried of conspiring to export arms to Iran in violation of a US embargo in what the Vancouver Province (June 25th, 2000, p.A3) caricatured as 'international intrigue that would make Ian Fleming proud'. The media’s portrayal of these individuals as international arms dealers involved in an ‘Iran smuggling ring’ (May 16th Montreal Gazette, May 16th, 1998, A20; Vancouver Sun, May 18th, 1998, p.A1) projected a particular set of discourses and images in association with Iranian immigrant identities. In the end the two individuals were acquitted, with a judge ruling that they had made imprudent decisions and been ensnared in a sting operation led by a rogue DEA agent from the US (Vancouver Sun, June 1st, 2001, p.B1). In a separate incident another Iranian businessman in Vancouver who exported dual civilian/military use scientific equipment found himself accused of exporting materials used to make weapons of mass destruction (Vancouver Sun, January 11th, 2001, p.A1-A2). The title and the kicker28 framed this story as a conspiracy to export equipment for the manufacture of chemical and biological weapons, while the article later acknowledged – although notably not on the front page – the lack of information available in the commercial trade sector regarding the export of such equipment. The framing and layout of this article provides some instructive insights into the social production of news. It betrays the significance afforded to grabbing a reader’s attention in the interests of satisfying a profit imperative within the corporate media, in this case at the expense of representing reality in a manner that distorts the truth and contributes to the criminalisation of Iranian immigrants within the popular imaginary.

Alternatively, charges of corruption, forgery and attempted organized entry brought against an Iranian immigration consultant based in Vancouver received prominent coverage in the city’s metropolitan dailies. The immigration consultant was accused of providing refugee claimants with false documentation and advising them to lie to immigration officials (Vancouver Sun, April 30th, 1998, p.B1 & B4). It was also alleged that he had threatened violence, and had connections to a ‘gang’, accusations that forged a connection between his business and organised crime. The immigration consultant was first fined $15,000 for his

28 ‘Kicker’ refers to the first sentence of an article after the headline.
illegal activities but his case was later overturned on a technicality (*Vancouver Province*, September 28th, 2001, p.A19), although the subtext of the article assumed that he was guilty. Interestingly, a recurrent narrative throughout the media coverage of this case was the impotence of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the absence of regulation in the immigration consultancy business. These discourses became even more prominent in media coverage following the 1999 arrival of undocumented migrants from China along the British Columbian coast, and the attendant construction of a crisis in undocumented migration.

This analysis is illustrative of the potentiality for the media to contribute to the criminalisation of Iranian identities, particularly those of young Iranian males. In certain instances I have attempted to deconstruct discursive formations deployed by the media to elucidate the pernicious impacts of narrative framing in representations. Another strand of my argument has been to recognise that while some Iranian individuals are involved in criminal and/or violent activities — and that such activities warrant media coverage — the prominence and visibility of such coverage, particularly in the absence of other stories about Iranian immigrants, embeds particular constructions of Iranian immigrant identities in popular consciousness. This analysis situates the media as a centre in the production of knowledge, both as a powerful form of cultural apparatus occupying a privileged role in socialisation, legitimation and agenda-setting in society as well as a corporate institution governed by the hegemony of profit imperatives.

*Violence between ‘Iranian-Canadians’ and ‘Shiite Muslims’*

A ‘street-fight’ between Shi’ite Muslims and Iranians protesting against the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in particular the presence of an Iranian religious leader at Shi’a ceremony observing *Ashura* at the PNE, received prominent media coverage and licensed speculation about the spread of ‘Muslim extremism’ into BC. Both groups blamed each other for the outbreak of violence, which involved over 100 people, or ‘combatants’ as the *Vancouver Province* (May 21st, 1997, p.A8) chose to construct them. In my analysis I want to examine the ways in which the prominent coverage of this event projected discourses and images of

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29 *Ashura* is a Shi’a ceremony that remembers the martyrdom of the third caliph Hussein.
internecine and irrational violence on to Iranians in Vancouver, as well as demonstrate the partisanship of the media coverage.

An article in the *Vancouver Province* the day after the event demonstrates poor research, a lack of knowledge and patent misunderstanding. At first the piece claimed that a ‘radical Shia [sic] group had gate-crashed a prayer meeting’, then contradicted itself in the same article citing a police spokesperson who said the ‘melee’ probably began when a group of protesters ‘likely opposed to the fundamentalist Islamic regime in Iran’ entered the PNE (*Vancouver Province*, May 21\(^\text{st}\), 1997, p.A8). The same article also misidentified the religious gathering as observing *Moharam*, rather than *Ashora*. Alternatively, the discursive framing of the violence as between ‘Iranian-Canadians’ and ‘Shiite Muslims’ in a *Vancouver Sun* (May 22\(^\text{nd}\), 1997, p.B2) is also interesting. On one level it constructs the two groups as mutually exclusive, but it also symbolically excludes ‘Shiite Muslims’ a place in the Canadian polity, contemporaneously embracing the presence of Iranians (who are presumably imagined as secular and Westernised, and therefore share ‘our’ values).

Media representations in both Vancouver’s metropolitan newspapers afforded more space to those constructed as belonging, that is ‘Iranian-Canadians’, even though their presence and antagonistic chanting at the PNE during the religious ceremony was evidently the immediate catalyst for violence. Indeed, the *Vancouver Province* prominently endorsed the perspective of ‘Iranian-Canadians’; one sub-heading read: ‘Iranian-Canadians fear the spread of Muslim extremists into B.C.’ (*Vancouver Province*, May 23\(^\text{rd}\), 1997, p.A19) and the same article went on to infer grossly unsubstantiated connections between the religious meeting at the PNE and Hezbollah. Both Vancouver newspapers explicitly sympathised with the fear that the ‘fundamentalist government was trying to expand its influence in Canada’ (*Vancouver Sun*, May 22\(^\text{nd}\), 1997, p.B2) and that the event at the PNE was ‘not a religious gathering but a political exhibition’ (*Vancouver Province*, May 23\(^\text{rd}\), 1997, p.A19). The only form of oppositional discourse that appeared in relation to the media re-construction of events at the PNE was a marginally placed letter - published two weeks after media coverage of the event
— in the *Vancouver Province* (June 6th, 1997, p.A39) that criticised media representations for failing to acknowledge the ‘provocative and abusive’ actions of the Iranian organisations and the media’s reproduction of ‘propaganda’.

Alternatively, the ‘melee’ at the PNE also licensed the publication of a cover story in the *Vancouver Sun* (June 14th, 1997, p.G1 & G4) entitled ‘Terrorism is a real fear’, which explicitly constructed ‘Islam’, Iran and particularly Iranians in Canada, as a terrorist threat with the aid of a series of snapshots and statistical epithets. Orientalist dogmas of religious fundamentalism and state sponsored terrorism caricatured as ‘foreign policy by murder and *fatwa*’ – usually reserved for broader discussion of politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran – were deployed to construct an immediate threat in Canada. The evidence that sustained this narrative of an immediate terrorist threat in Canada was drawn entirely from Iranian exiles and refugees – individuals with distinct positionalities and possibly interests in inciting such a politics of fear. This discursive formation attempted to engineer a distinction between ‘good’ (secular, ‘Westernised’, integrated) Iranian immigrants and ‘bad’ (fanatical, isolationist, terrorist) Iranian immigrants in Canada. A particular focus in this coverage was the affirmation that the Iranian government were sending agents or spies to ‘the West’, including Canada, to put pressure on, and disrupt, the Iranian diaspora. One quote from an Iranian exile, highlighted in the text, universalised the threat and appealed directly to Orientalist constructions of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, in contending, ‘**they are not only dangerous for us as Iranians, they are dangerous to everyone who believes in tolerance and human rights**’.

In some cases media representations of the PNE ‘melee’ projected discourses of seemingly irrational, internecine violence onto the entire Iranian population in Vancouver. The prominent coverage of such violence also has the potential to fuel stereotypical accusations routinely deployed in nationalist discourses, in the form of ‘immigrants bringing *their* problems here’ (see Hage, 1998). Moreover, the sympathetic construction of ‘Iranian-Canadians’ in opposition to those imagined as ‘religious fundamentalists’, problematises the practice of ‘Islam’ in Canadian national space, symbolically undermining national belonging.
While claims that the Islamic government of Iran is sending spies to Vancouver incites a politics of fear and encourages suspicion of recent immigrants from Iran.

Scripting Iranians as Refugees

Disproportionate media coverage of Iranians in Vancouver situates individuals in relation to issues surrounding applications for asylum and refugee status. Media representations scripting Iranians primarily as refugees intersect with a variety of other discursive formations. I am particularly interested in examining how narratives woven around refugees constitute a form of geopolitical discourse, reinforcing a manufactured architecture of Otherness through which dominant constructions of Iran are imagined. Alternatively, the adherence to particular scripts in media representations of Iranian refugees provides some illuminating points of contact with an emerging literature that has identified pervasive tendencies to criminalise refugees and racialise crime in the print media (for example, Mountz and Mahtani, 2002; Henry and Tator; 2002; Hage, 1998).

In a recent article Nagel (2002) has persuasively demonstrated the ineluctable entanglement of immigration policy and geopolitics, a situation brought into stark relief in the post-9/11 geopolitical order. The construction of immigration policies and attempts to regulate the mobility of bodies across political-territorial boundaries is profoundly racialised, and dominant geopolitical discourses inform the operationalisation of immigration policy. In a similar vein Nagel (2002, p.976) contends that “notions of assimilability reflect the assessment of foreigners within national boundaries, these notions are based on particular mappings of the world outside one’s borders”. In my analysis I want to reverse this logic, arguing that certain media representation of refugees, and by implication the refugee policy, intersect with and reproduce dominant geopolitical discourses contributing to the Othering of Iran. For example, a *Globe and Mail* (November 26th, 1986, p.A4) article on a refugee claimant politically opposed to the Islamic government in Iran argued that it was 'unjust and inhumane to return any Iranian back to that country'. This assertion was founded on the probability of torture and possibility of execution, with the discursive formation underscoring the brutality and political intolerance of the Iranian regime, and in the process

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30 Emphasis added.

Discourses of ‘undesirability’31 and the abuse of a refugee policy imagined as ‘soft’ are also prominent in the narrative framing of Iranian refugees. On one level there is a tendency to represent refugee claimants as queue jumpers, abusing the largesse of the Canadian refugee system and undermining the integrity of national space. This is exemplified in representations of 38 Iranians in the *Toronto Star* (July 13th, 1985, p.A3) who arrived at Toronto’s Pearson International airport without passports or any other form of documentation and claimed refugee status. This article narrated this event in terms of a violation of national integrity, automatically delegitimising the claims made by the 38 individuals involved. Indeed, no space was allocated to reporting the potential legitimacy of these claims for refugee status. Even when concerns about the welfare of deported refugees appears to be at the fore, as in the article above covering calls for an ‘deportation amnesty for Iranians’ (*Vancouver Sun*, January 11th, 1996, p.B2) the subtext is frequently framed by concerns about the potential for abusing of the system and the preservation of national integrity.

The situated definition of newsworthiness precipitates a disproportionate focus on scripts that tend to criminalise refugee claimants. Prominent coverage of deportation procedures against individuals labelled as terrorists, for example, necessarily influence popular constructions and imaginings of Iranian refugee claimants and fuels a more general suspicion of all refugee claimants. Alternatively, the allocation of refugee status to Iranians

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31 Hage (1998) privileges discourses of ‘undesirability’ in representations of ‘ethnic Others’ in place of discourses of ‘inferiority’ on the basis that ‘undesirability’ implies and propels action.
with criminal records also feature conspicuously in media discourses attacking what they perceive to be a ‘weak’ refugee policy. The *Vancouver Sun* (April 11th, 1998, p.B1 & B3), for example, ran a significant article on the decision to grant a last-minute reprieve on a deportation order issued to a refugee claimant in Vancouver who had been a judge under the Shah’s regime in Iran and had been convicted *in absentia* of crimes against humanity. Numerable other articles explicitly construct Canada’s refugee policy as ‘soft’ – ‘Two men allowed to stay in Canada despite criminal records’ (*Vancouver Sun*, February 24th, 1995, p.B2) – through its failure to deport Iranian refugees who have committed criminal offences. While often these cases are featured prominently to justify the discursive construction of Canadian refugee policy as ‘too soft’, they have the pernicious tendency to project an image of all Iranian refugees as criminal and therefore unworthy, and more importantly undesirable.

In a pointed attack on the refugee system in Canada, the *National Post* ran two articles on the deportation trial of an Iranian ‘agent of violence’ (*National Post*, May 21st, 2001, p.A8). Entitled ‘On trial: right to deport terrorists’ the first article in May 2001 contended that the failure of the refugee system to deport ‘foreigners considered to be threats to national security’ would ‘open the borders to a rogues gallery of international terrorists and other dangerous criminals’ (*National Post*, May 21st, 2001, p.A8). The deportation trial of Mansour Ahani, constructed both as a terrorist and a spy, is used in this article to ideologically construct Canada’s refugee system as weak through discourses of abuse, impotence and penetration. The legitimacy of Ahani’s claim for refugee status is consistently elided. A decision by the Ontario Court of Appeals to delay Ahani’s deportation in February 2002 formed the basis for another attack on the refugee system by the *National Post* (February 9th, 2002, p.A4). In this article Ahani was labelled merely as a ‘terrorist’, reflecting the inchoate geopolitical lexicon of the post-9/11 world order and Iran’s placement in the ‘axis of evil’. The delay in deportation primarily provided a point of departure for the *National Post* to launch an enraged attack on the immigration system, citing the case as an example of ‘why the country has an international reputation for harbouring terrorists’ and affirming it is ‘a rare case’ that ends in deportation. The coverage of the delays in Ahani’s deportation appear to be a vehicle through which the *National Post* has articulated a sustained attack on Canada’s refugee and immigration policy. The discursive framing of these media
representations, however, contributes to the negative constructions of all Iranian refugee applicants, particularly given the marked absence of positive coverage of Iranian refugees in Canada.

Cultural Enrichment and White Multiculturalism

I also want to make a brief intervention into media representations of Iranian or Persian culture, which are primarily articulated through human-interest stories and restaurant reviews. Both the *Vancouver Sun* and *Vancouver Province* run articles of the celebration of Norooz, Persian New Year. Frequently coverage assumes the form of human-interest stories that emphasise exotic features, ancient traditions and the spectacle. Representations of the celebrations routinely emphasise the ‘ancient rituals’ (*Vancouver Sun*, March 18th, 1999, p.B5), ‘colourful myths and legends’ (*Toronto Star*, March 20th, 1994, p.A7) and ubiquitously provide a photograph capturing the spectacle of Chahar shanbeh soori—the first celebration of Norooz—which involves jumping over a small fire. Alternatively, a number of restaurant reviews reproduce these discourses of cultural enrichment through the same tropes of exoticism, ancient traditions and the spectacle. A review from the *Montreal Gazette* (May 30th, 1998, p.W4) provides the most stark example, declaring in the title ‘Iranian café is an exotic excursion’, continuing to state that ‘a spot of breakfast comes pretty close to becoming a mystical experience’. Restaurant reviews from Vancouver articulate a similar obsession with the exoticism of Persian culture and cuisine. A reviewer for the *Vancouver Province* (October 16th, 1997, pB13), in an article entitled ‘Gyrating hips, menu tips at Caspians’, devotes a considerable amount of space to a discussion of the spectacle of belly dancing and in particular tipping etiquette for ‘those gyrating hips’, before moving on to ruminate on the ‘ancient flavours of Persian cooking’. In the same vein a reviewer for the *Vancouver Sun* (March, 23rd, 2000, p.C25) emphasised that ‘Persian cuisine is sensuous and sophisticated and gentle’.

Media representations of the exoticism of Persian culture, and its portrayal as enriching to the Canadian multicultural mosaic, provides a point of entry into debates over the meanings of multiculturalism, most provocatively examined by Ghassan Hage in his critique of White Multiculturalism in Australia. Following Hage I want to argue that discourses of
enrichment, central to White multiculturalism, place the dominant culture in a more important position than Other, migrant cultures. Migrant cultures are afforded a ‘different mode of existence’, they are considered to exist for the dominant White culture (Hage, 1998, p.121). White multiculturalism is embedded in the reproduction, and disguise, of particular modalities of power, mystifying what Hage would call the ‘multicultural Real’ or ‘multiculturalism of being’ — ‘it is a form of symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism’ (Hage, 1998, p.87). The excerpts from media representations above illustrate, I think, the ways in which ‘White multiculturalists’ feel empowered to position and manage constructs of Iranian culture and identities in what Hage would term the ‘economy of otherness’.

*White fantasies’ and the management of national space*

In January 1997 a debate appeared on the pages of the *Vancouver Sun* over the existence of Farsi only signs on some shops in North Vancouver. Catalysed by worries about balkanisation in the multicultural metropolis a number of White commentators felt empowered to deploy the rhetoric of multiculturalism to manage the activities of non-White Canadians, in this case Iranians. The debates in the *Vancouver Sun* implicitly assumed an ontology of whiteness, or more specifically Anglo heritage, as the cultural norm in imagining national belonging – one article, for example, was titled ‘English a common thread between cultures’ (*Vancouver Sun*, January 18th, 1997, p.C3). Hage’s (1998) arguments about the ‘White Nation fantasy’ are instructive here, demonstrating how an image of the nation as a space structured around a White culture is coupled with the conviction that White people are the masters of the national space, whereas ‘non-white ‘ethnics’ are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will’ (Hage, 1998, p.18).

*Oppositional discourses: Immigrant success stories and underemployment*

There are limited examples of what might be considered ‘immigrant success stories’ that constitute a form of oppositional discourse that counteract some of the pervasive tendencies of media representations of Iranian immigrants. These representations predominantly assume the form of human-interest stories and are restricted to a narrow number of scripts.
For example, the *National Post* (January 19th, 2001, p.C4) published a column on Hassan Khosrowshahi, the Iranian 'émigré'32 and founder of Future Shop, who was scripted as the archetypal ethnic entrepreneur persevering in the face of discrimination and prevailing through hard work. Articles in the *Montreal Gazette* (May 17th, 2002, p.A4) and *Vancouver Province* (November 18th, 1996, p.B3) concentrated on the commitment to education among Iranian immigrants, with representations emphasising hard work and a dedication to the achievement of university education. Alternatively, in response to comments made by Federal Liberal leadership candidate, Paul Martin, the *Vancouver Sun* (May 13th, 2003, p.A1-2) published a much overdue article on the problems of underemployment within Vancouver's Iranian population. An interview with a taxi driver, who had been an airline pilot in Iran, highlighted many of the common problems in finding employment in Canada. Only after his arrival did the interviewee become aware that his education and qualifications were not recognised and that he would have to undertake two years study to get his Canadian pilot license. He obtained the license shortly before the September 11th attacks, after which the airline industry went into decline, and he was forced to continue working as a taxi driver. Sunshine Cabs, based on Vancouver's North Shore, has numerous other Iranians with professional qualifications on their books, including 'six engineers, a mathematician, a film director, and a broadcaster with 25 years experience', a situation suggestive of the extent of underemployment within the Iranian population. These oppositional discourses capture a greater sense of Iranian immigrant experiences in Vancouver, even if they occasionally resort to essentialised scripts. More insidiously, however, their infrequency and isolation means that they offer little counterpoint to the dominant media representations of Iranian identities in Vancouver.

*Scripted Identities*

My analysis of media representations of Iranian identities in Vancouver demonstrates the scripting of Iranian identities in the situated production of the news. Through media constructions of reality particular Iranian identities are staged and articulated by a media dominated by White cultural norms, while more prosaic, everyday Iranian identities are

32 The designation émigré carries a sense of cosmopolitanism thereby discursively forcing a distinction between this successful entrepreneur and other Iranians in Vancouver.
silenced. The images and discourses of Iranian identities most prominently narrated by the media become embedded in the popular consciousness, and contribute significant to a ‘discursive economy of representations’ through which individuals imagine Iranian identities. It is precisely this centrality of the media in projecting constructions of Iranian identities and shaping public consciousness that motivates my critical readings of media representations.

3.9: Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to trace the situated processes through which media representations produce a repertoire of overdetermined narratives, images and ideas through which Iranian identities are popularly imagined. With an emphasis on the intertextuality of representations, and how social constructions and stereotypes are circulated ‘globally’ but impact locally (see Dunn, 2001), I have examined some of the implications for disproportionately negative media representations. Throughout the analysis, I have remained attentive to the situated, and social production of media reality, foregrounding the institutional contexts and corporate structure of the media industry in Canada, and the significance of the media as a form of cultural apparatus that is unique in its capacity to make powerful statements about the legitimacy of diversity in a multicultural society (Fleras, 1994; 1995). Content analysis of media representations of ‘Islam’ and Iranians are indicative of the extent of negative portrayals of both Muslims and Iranians in the media, a reality that contributes to the prejudiced practices collectively termed ‘Islamophobia’ (Dunn, 2001; Halliday, 1999). Alternatively, critical discourses analysis provides a framework through which one can dissect media representations, challenging dominant discourses and hinting towards counter and oppositional discourses that enable ‘alternative ways of interpreting, understanding and interacting in the world’ (Henry and Tator, 2002, p.72). The critical interventions into discursive formations must not, however, be overextended. Media representations do not determine popular constructions of Iranian identities, rather they contribute in partial and unpredictable ways to a discursive economy of representations, through which Iranian identities are popularly imagined.
Diverse experiences and fragmented identities: narrating Iranian identifications.

“If we no longer think of the relationship between cultures and their adherents as perfectly contiguous, totally synchronous, wholly correspondent, and if we think of cultures as permeable and, on the whole, defensive boundaries between polities, a more promising situation appears. Thus to see others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least.”

(Said, 1989, p.225)

“The topography of subjectivity is multidimensional...The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another to see together without claiming to be another.”

(Haraway, 1991, p.193)

4.1: Introduction

In this chapter I draw upon qualitative research techniques to produce a different kind of knowledge of Iranian identities that resists the homogenising tendencies of media representations and the restrictive categorisations of statistical databases. Between December 2002 and March 2003 I conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 immigrants from Iran now residing in Vancouver and this research with Iranian immigrants grounds an attempt to produce a ‘less authorial, authoritative and authoritarian’ form of knowledge ‘about’ Iranian identities (see Pile, 1991). Distancing myself from bounded constructions of identity, reified as something that is possessed and displayed, I understand identities as ongoing processes of self-making and social interaction (Gilroy, 2000). Stuart Hall (1991) has argued that the processes of identity-building are contradictory and ambivalent, complexly composed through multiple discourses that position us differently at different moments...and in different places. Judith Butler’s (1990) Foucauldian account of performativity goes further in asserting the profound uncertainties and tenuous constitution of identities, arguing for a reconceptualisation of identity as an effect that is produced (generated) through sustained social practices (acts, words, gestures, desires).
In *Against Race* Paul Gilroy (2000) makes a provocative attempt to move beyond the strictures of thinking through the construct of ‘race’. Gilroy is particularly critical of the ‘pious ritual’ conspicuously prevalent in academic and anti-racist writing to accept the ‘inventedness’ of race, but then defer to the construct’s embeddedness in the world and the materiality of its effects. I remain uncertain whether my definition of the ‘research field’, and an explicit focus on the identities of *Iranian immigrants* – both ‘Iranian’ and ‘immigrant’ being historically constituted and socially produced categories – makes me culpable of reproducing a ‘racialising gaze’. This is not my intention. Through the use of qualitative interviews, and what Geertz (1973) famously termed ‘thick description’, I tentatively hope to re-present some of the subtleties of individual experiences and identifications. Indeed, I wanted to subvert tendencies to homogenise and smooth out incoherence through the deployment of unifying constructs such as ‘Iranian immigrant’, arguing instead that webs of social relations, saturated in power structures, shape diverse experiences and meanings of self. This chapter provisionally hopes to convey some sense of the diversity – or what Spivak (1988) has termed the ‘irretrievable heterogeneity’ of the subaltern – that is contained by the designation Iranian immigrant. Specifically, I provide three extended readings, each designed to communicate some of the texture of everyday experiences and identifications, as well as challenge the imagined, mythical coherence of signifiers such as Iranian and Persian.


In the next section of this chapter I address some theoretical concerns with the politics of re-presenting the ‘Other’, and specifically the potentiality for admitting the multiple voices of the Other without colonising them in the act of translation/writing (Spivak, 1988; Said, 1989; Bonnett, 1993; Merrifield, 1995). Donna Haraway’s arguments for ‘situated knowledges’ – that is “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating,”

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1 Through racialising gazes the “racialised body is bounded and protected by its enclosing skin. The observer's gaze does not penetrate that membrane but rests upon it, and, in doing so, receives the truths of racial difference from the other body” (Gilroy, 2000, p.46).

2 Ley (1999) has commented on the incompleteness and uncertainty of our knowledge regarding the immigrant experience, and I hope this chapter is at least a start in producing a situated and partial understanding of some of the experiences of immigrants from Iran in Vancouver.
where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (Haraway, 1991, p.195) – provide a conceptual platform for negotiating the space between the ‘god-tricks’ of relativism and totalisation, both ideologies of objectivity, and producing partial, situated and responsible re-presentations of Iranian immigrants. I then outline the methodologies employed, before turning to a substantive discussion of Iranian identities and experiences in Vancouver.

4.2: ‘Situated knowledges’ and re-presenting the Other

“Calculating the relationship between identity and difference, sameness and otherness is an intrinsically political operation.”

(Gilroy, 2000, p.99)

The politics and ethics of representing the Other have increasingly been addressed in interpretative research. Arguing from one extreme, Keith (1992, p.559) asserts that practices of representation are ‘an act of capture’ and deploys colonisation as a metaphor to depict the processes through which the real world is rendered to the academy. The strength of this characterisation seems debilitating – the importance of understanding the potentiality for appropriating the Other’s voice is necessarily argued but in the process Keith closes off any spaces of enunciation from which it might possible to re-present the Other uncoercively. Spivak (1988) in her landmark essay on cultural representation, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, introduced a more enabling argument, distinguishing between re-presentation as interpretation and representation as ‘speaking for’. Negotiating the enunciative space opened by Spivak’s distinction I strive for representation as re-presentation, as opposed to making the Other, in my case Iranian immigrants, speak.

Some of the earliest and most notable attempts to expose and negotiate the power of the researcher to represent the Other were made by anthropologists (Geertz, 1973; Marcus and Fischer, 1986; see also Pred 1990). Experimentations in reflexive anthropology negotiated power relations in the research process through textual strategies within ethnographic texts that attempted to avoid closure and allow multiple sets of voices to speak for themselves, simultaneously muting and marginalizing the author’s voice as commentary (see Keith, 1992,
P.557). Such strategies attempted to place “epistemological limits on the authority of the ethnographic text without descending to relativism” (Keith, 1992, p.557), although Said (1989) has contested that such strategies have failed to live up to their rhetoric, and disrupt the power of the ethnographer to represent the Other.

It is in the context of this contested political terrain that I turn to Haraway’s (1991) demand that we situate knowledge. I reflect briefly on the implications of Haraway’s arguments for doing qualitative research and the possibility of incorporating what Gillian Rose (1997) has called situating technologies in the production of geographical knowledge of the Other.

Situating technologies — effected through discussions of reflexivity and positionality — are increasingly prominent in the production of interpretative geographical knowledge. There is growing consensus that knowledge is marked by its origins and the circumstances of its production, but situating knowledge in research practices has proven problematic (Rose,

Haraway’s arguments arose from an attempt to avoid the false neutrality and universality that pervades by underscoring the historical specificity and contestability of knowledge, while resisting becoming entrenched in a radical constructionist programme. Haraway (1991, p.190) is arguing for ‘situated and embodied knowledges and against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible knowledge claims’. ‘Situated knowledges’ provide a conceptual framework for a feminist objectivity through which knowledges are partial, locatable, embodied, and critical, opposing what Haraway would call the ‘god-tricks’ in the performance of scientific practices that promise ‘vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully’ (Haraway, 1991, p.191).

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3 Indeed Crang (2002) has remarked that reflexivity has become something of a shibboleth in the practice and presentation of qualitative research in geography.
1997). Rose has been highly critical of the claims to what she calls 'transparent reflexivity', where the researcher is portrayed as a 'knowable agent whose motivations can be fully known...This transparent self then looks outward, to understand its place in the world, to chart its position in the arenas of knowledge production, to see its own place in the relations of power' (Rose, 1997, p.309). Claims to transparent reflexivity reduce complex entanglements of power relations into 'visible and ordered space' in analytical claims that Rose argues are not so different from the god-tricks critiqued by Haraway. Rather than aspire to transparent reflexivity, Rose argues that we must strive to situate our knowledge by recognising the 'messiness' of research, and the complex ways in which researchers are entangled in the research process; we must write anxieties, ambivalences, and uncertainty into the research.

Working through some of these admittedly abstract discussions I want to hold on to this idea of situated knowledge as a means of organising a tentative discussion of my positionality and embeddedness in complex webs of power in producing partial, situated – but not innocent – geographical knowledge of Iranian immigrants in Vancouver. Without pretending to fully comprehend the complex and dynamic ways in which power relations unfold in the interview process, I want to signpost some negotiations that might have been operating in my research with Iranians.

Positionality

"[A] 'story' is a joint production. How the interviewer's role is to be taken into account is of course a difficult problem, but it is not solved by making the interviewer invisible and inaudible, by painting her or him out of the picture."

(Mischler, 1986, p.82-3 cit. Herod, 1993, p.314)

Positioning is key practice for grounding knowledge. Experiments in self-reflexivity have attracted trenchant criticism within the academy, variously described as 'navel gazing' and 'narcissistic and egoistic' (see England, 1992). However, following Sidaway (2000, p.295), I

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4 Rose (1997, p.311) argues "Indeed the answers are so massive, the questions so presumptuous about the reflective, analytical power of the researcher that I want to say they should be simply unanswerable: we should not imagine that we can answer them. For if we do, we may be performing nothing more than a goddess-trick uncomfortably similar to the god-trick."

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argue that 'reflexivity is not primarily a project of self-knowledge, but rather concerns itself with the conditions of the production of the “self” and its knowledges; it constitutes part of a more ‘critical reflection on the construction and transformations of social realities’.

As researchers we embark upon the research process with what Haraway (1991) would call ‘maps of consciousness’ that are inflected by the ‘heterogeneous multiplicities’ of our intersecting social identities. The production of knowledge is necessarily situated and partial with these ‘maps of consciousness’ influencing the ways in which each researcher views and interprets the worlds at specific locations in time and space. Moreover, social identities are partially, ambiguously and contingently embodied, as well as uncertainly but repetitively performed (Butler, 1990). By writing my biography into the research process I gesture at the ways in which participants may have received certain truths about my identities, and how these might have impinged on the research process. However, these acknowledgements must not assume that social and physical characteristics are unproblematic or obvious either to the researcher or the researched; to do so presumes essentialised notions of such identifications (Herod, 1999).

With these caveats in mind I situate myself within this research recognising that aspects of my social identities are neither coherent nor static. I belong to the historically constituted and geographically variable categories of whiteness, maleness, and Englishness. I come from a middle class background, I am in my early 20s, and in the context of my research I anticipate that I was constructed as an ‘outsider’, primarily in terms of my perceived ‘racial’ and ‘ethnic’ attributes. I have an imperfect knowledge of the histories and cultural identifications of ‘Iranians’, and the knowledge I do possess is primarily mediated through academic, literary, and media representations. I spoke no Farsi beyond the most basic salutations. I am marked by my ‘personal experiences of academic socialisation’ (Lawson, 1995) that shape my politics, sensibilities and perhaps the ways in which I am perceived. Entering the research encounter as a graduate student, I am located within the academy and therefore embedded in a powerful institution of knowledge production. My positionality was reinforced by the requirements of the ethical review process, through which I was required to introduce (reveal) my research interests in a statement printed on university headed paper – an obligation which perhaps invests me with additional authority. Reflecting
on some of the apparent perceptions of my positionality as a graduate student, it seems that my participants variously constructed me as an ‘expert’, embodying cultural capital, and an individual with access to privileged networks of academics and policy makers through the anticipated publication of my research. Moving on from this limited, and inevitably partial, disclosure I want to turn my attention to three clusters of power relations in the research process that interlock with my positionality.

Positionality and the research encounter

Asserting the significance of the thoroughly mediated and interactive processes of interviewing compels us to situate our production of knowledge. The interview process is embedded in complex and shifting networks of power – too complicated to disentangle without performing a god(dess)-trick – but it is important to state that the knowledge produced through this research is marked by the social identities of both me as researcher and the participants as the researched, and our embodiments and performances of these identities in the ‘field’. Below I sketch some prominent negotiations of power.

Social identities, power relations and speaking positions are constantly, interactively, and at times contradictory, negotiated within the interview context\(^5\). The interview process constitutes a disruption – welcomed or not – into an individual’s everyday life, with the researcher asking questions that might be variously received as inane, intrusive or arrogant (Katz, 1994). The process of introduction may impact power relations and shape the knowledges produced through research. Repeating the ethical review statement reinforced my location within a specific field of power/knowledge, while my reliance on a number of ‘gate-keepers’ to access particular networks of participants (who are differently empowered within these networks) may have influenced perceptions of my positionality and authority. Crang (2002) has problematised the reliability of participants in qualitative research, arguing that undermining the ‘privileged’ knowledge of the participant is rarely part of the aim. In this vein, Valentine (1999) has questioned whether participants give ‘idealised or

\(^5\) Such negotiations might be strategic on the part of researchers through attempts to develop rapport, or convey a particular image of themselves by attempting to enhance and suppress particular social identities (see Herod, 1999; Mullings, 1999; Pile, 1991); alternatively they might arise dialogically in response to perceived social identities of either the researcher or the researched.
conventional' rather than actual accounts of experiences and behaviours through 'imaginative generalisations'. Stuart Hall (1991, p.58) has similarly reflected on the ways in which the past becomes narrativised, it is "retold, rediscovered and reinvented" through history, memory and desire. The interview assumed more complex power dynamics when I interviewed couples or members of the same family together. Valentine's (1999) commentary on some of the potential ethical and epistemological implications of interviewing couples together and apart provides a useful précis, and particularly how individuals might position themselves differently in narratives of their experiences, roles and identities when a partner is present.

Moreover, it is necessary to recognise that the spaces in which interviews were practised are embedded in social and cultural contexts at different scales - "microgeographies of interview locations situate a participant with respect to other actors and to his or her multiple identities and roles, affecting information that is communicated in the interview as well as power dynamics of the interview itself" (Elwood and Martin, 2000, p.652). Interviews were conducted at a time and place of the participant's convenience, and accordingly the research encounter was predominantly in the homes of participants. The 'migrogeographies' of social relations and meanings embedded in the homes of participants might have influenced the responses. Alternatively, two interviews were conducted in my office on the university campus, where power relations woven through this space may have invested authority in me as an 'expert' situated within the institutional structures of the academy, and shaped the communication of information.

An emphasis on the dialogical and interactive processes of the interview, and the co-production of social meanings, also opens up space to negotiate the dualistic framing of 'insider/outsider' knowledge that pervades so much of the literature on the practice of qualitative research. Herod (1999, p.325) argues that 'interviews are about producing social texts which, by definition, have multiple meanings' — interviews are therefore joint productions in which the researcher and the researched interact and construct particular accounts of events and processes. This contention grounds Herod's critique of any positivist notion of an interview that sustains an 'insider/outsider' dualism, where 'the interviewee is seen as the knower of all knowledge which is to be transmitted to the
researcher and, consequently, the less socially distant the researcher from the source the less “cultural interference” there will be in the information transfer process’ (Herod, 1999, p.326).

**Positionality and academic fields of power/knowledge**

While early writing on reflexivity and positionality and the production of geographical knowledge has disproportionately theorised the power relations shaping the interaction of the researcher and researched, recent literature has turned critical attention to ways in which the researcher is embedded in powerful institutions of knowledge production (Keith, 1992; McDowell, 1992; Herod, 1999; Sidaway, 2000). Sidaway (2000), for example, characterises academic geography as a field of power, situating the researcher in “complex fields of commodified power/knowledge with and against which s/he must struggle and operate”. The production of geographical knowledge must also be situated in relation with its anticipated - and desired – audience (Lawson 1995). In addition to acknowledging the significance of personal experiences of academic socialisation and the implications of being situated within the academy, I make two particular interventions relating to positionality and academic fields of power/knowledge.

Firstly, and more generally, Keith (1992, p.558) describes the research process as a twofold system of translation. In the first translation the researcher makes his/her observations intelligible to themselves, and then produces knowledge fit for consumption by the broader academic community. The currency and authority invested in the research is largely contingent on its reception in journals and at conferences (see Katz, 1994). Keith (1992) concludes ‘the audience determines’ – “what lends the text ideological power to shape tomorrow’s common sense is the relation between the texts and its endorsement by the academy” (Keith, 1992, p. 564). This is a provocative, perhaps overstated, argument but Keith forces us to reconsider our positionality within academic fields of power/knowledge and the ways in which this location conditions how we produce geographical knowledge. For me, the research process was variously influenced by the conditions of my degree programme, my ambitions within the academy and research’s anticipated audience.
More specifically, I want to situate my research in recent debates – most often couched in terms of ‘validity’, ‘rigour’, and ‘objectivity’ – that have raged over the use of qualitative and quantitative research techniques in geography. The traditions of positivist methodologies and epistemological stances in human geography, emphasising “objectivity, hierarchy, detachment and ‘science’” (Herod, 1999), haunt the practices, and reception, of qualitative research (England, 1994; Lawson, 1995; Herod, 1999; Mullings, 1999; Winchester, 1999). Crang (2002) in a recent progress report on qualitative methodologies in geography, asks whether qualitative approaches might have become the new orthodoxy in human geography, although there are evidently still pressures to conform with what Winchester (1999) labels the ‘objectivist standards of quantitative empirical social science’. Negotiating this contested terrain, and sympathetic to both arguments for ‘situated knowledges’ rather than conformity and concerns about responsibility in using qualitative research, I follow Crang (2002, p.652) in pushing for a more codified approach to interpreting qualitative research avoiding taking transcripts as ‘data’ and resisting the “evidential ‘mining’ of responses”.

**Positionality, translation and the production of geographical knowledge**

“...lives, loves and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data, grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has truly grinding power.”

(Stacey cit. England, 1994, p.186)

The third cluster of power relations reflect a concern the power of the researcher in the last instance; the power to translate geographies of talk into a text of public geographical knowledge. The processes of transcription unavoidably purify speech acts, “dolbying out the ‘white noise’” (Laurier, 1998, p.39) and suppress interruptions, long pauses, shows of understanding or disagreement. Geographies of speech are transformed into unsolicited and controllable statements through the processes of transcription and interpretation (Laurier, 1998). The positionality and biography of the researcher are both visible and integral throughout the research process, filtering perceptions and interpretations of the experiences.

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6 This is perhaps best exemplified in Baxter and Eyles (1997) demands for ‘enhanced rigour’ in qualitative research practices through ‘standardised procedures and modes of reporting’ in the quest for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This paper provoked reactions from a number of feminist geographers (see Bailey et al., 1998; Winchester, 1999) for its assumptions.

in the ‘field’ (England, 1994). As Lawson (1995, p.456) candidly reflects: “the conclusions I draw from the interviews are my objectifications of these women’s words and experiences, refracted through my politics and ambitions and ultimately open to interpretations by a diverse audience”. ‘Betrayal and exploitation are endemic to fieldwork’, and acknowledging and being sensitive to power relations does not remove them (England, 1994).

Rather than attempt to conceal the presence of complex power relations, I rely on situating technologies and rendering my voice audible throughout the research process with the aim of producing more modest, partial and located knowledges about the experiences and identifications of Iranian immigrants in Vancouver.

4.3: Research practices

Recruitment

Having obtained approval from the university’s ethical review board, I began to recruit potential participants through a number of cultural and religious organisations based in Greater Vancouver. Initial contact was made in writing with a letter introducing the broader research project, and was followed up by telephone contact. Participants were recruited through key informants, and recognising the tendency of networks to reproduce themselves I approached a number of different ‘gatekeepers’ to broaden my network of participants. Two key ‘gatekeepers’ we heavily involved in immigrant service provision in North Vancouver, and my introduction by them and their overt support for, and comments on the potential significance of, my research may well have given me access to participants who might otherwise have ignored my requests. The support of such gatekeepers may have created a degree of credibility in the eyes of potential participants, particularly when coupled with my association with a large academic institution (Herod, 1999). That said, it might equally – and simultaneously – have introduced specific power dynamics into the research process, fuelling perceptions of my proximity to a particular network of service providers and policy makers (Mullings, 1999). Moreover, the association of my research with the Metropolis Project, a federally funded initiative in a “programme of ‘applied research’ in a
partnership that involves three levels of government, the universities, the private sector, and immigrant settlement and advocacy organizations” (Ley, 1999, p.3), may well have motivated the endorsements of my research and created certain expectations around the research process. A number of the participants were recruited strategically, with the design of diversifying my sample to include different religious and cultural groups.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 immigrants from Iran in Greater Vancouver between December 2002 and March 2003 (see appendix 1). Five interviews were conducted with a number of family members present, introducing more complex power dynamics within the interview process (see Valentine, 1999). All interviews were conducted in English, and while all participants were competent English speakers, a number, particularly those who arrived more recently in Canada, were less confident in their language abilities. Language was a problematic component of the research design. Firstly, conducting interviews in a participant's second or third language introduced the possibility of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, with the subtlety of questions and answers potentially being lost in the communicative process. Additionally, I had originally planned to conduct a limited number of interviews in Farsi using an interpreter. Logistically, this proved impossible, and as Herod (1999) has noted the use of interpreters when one is researching oral histories and everyday experiences is highly problematic. My reliance on English language interviews inevitably introduces a bias in my sample, precluding participation of those individuals who do not speak English, or did not feel confident enough to participate because of their language competencies. Alternatively, a number of participants seemed to relish the opportunity to practice their English, complaining that they only spoke to other Persians on a daily basis, and in some cases participants claimed their English had got worse since they arrived in Canada:

Before I came here I knew a lot of English. My English was better than now. [Laughs] Because I don’t have any jobs in this city [...] I don’t speak to Canadian people and I forget a lot. (Naheed)

Interviews were arranged at a time and place of the participant's convenience. Recognising the potential implications of the spaces of interviews, and their embeddedness in microgeographies of social relations and meanings (Elwood and Martin, 2000), for the
production of knowledge through the interview process the locations of all interviews are included in my profiles of participants (appendix 1).

*Interview techniques:*

Before interviews commenced participants were given a statement outlining my research interests and required to sign a consent form in accordance with the directives of the ethical review process. All participants were offered an honorarium to defray from the inconvenience of the interview. Permission was sought to record all interviews and the participants were allowed ample opportunity to turn down this request – permission was granted by all interviewees with the exception of Nadia. Participants were invited to stop the recording should they want to say anything off the record. I also kept a field notebook to record any observations or thoughts immediately after the interview.

In the interviews I asked a number of open-ended questions that could be loosely clustered into five themes: family histories, motivations and experiences of migration, transnational connections and imaginaries, culture/religion/language, and perceptions of the mainstream and ‘ethnic’ media. While similar areas of conversation were covered in all interviews, I tried to remain as flexible as possible and allow each participants’ responses to lead the development of the interview.

*Transcription: translating geographies of talk into texts*

All interviews were transcribed *ad verbatim* and I also attempted to incorporate aspects of the performance of speech acts (including silences, pauses, emphases and emotions)\(^8\), although I recognise the limitations of transcription as a form of textual appropriation that is informed by numerous conventions (Laurier, 1998). In an attempt to resist what Crang (2002), amongst others, has termed the ‘evidential mining’ of qualitative research, all transcripts were then open-coded, in a process that systematically identified all themes suggested by the content of the interviews. The coded sections were then cut out of the original transcripts and grouped together maintaining as much context as possible, including my own voice so

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\(^8\) Following Silverman (2001) the use of [...] in transcriptions indicates a pause in the conversation.
as to avoid purifying statements and portraying them as 'unsolicited statements' (Laurier, 1998).

In the interpretation and analysis of the interview processes and my emergent representations of the experiences and identifications of my participants I try to remain as true as possible to their responses. In the last instance it is impossible to diffuse, redistribute or destroy power differentials wholly. Some form of epistemological violence appears to be unavoidable, be it through the articulation of some voices while others are contemporaneously silenced, or the refraction of the experiences and words of participants through my sensibilities and positionality (see Lawson, 1995). However, this apparent impasse need not be debilitating, and following Gibson-Graham's (1995) Foucauldian conceptualisation of power as productive rather than 'unevenly distributed and repressive' (Rose, 1997) I present my interpretation as interventions to existing discursive structures and power relations through which Iranian immigrant identities are popularly imagined.

4.4: Reading one: putting migration in context

Individual contexts and experiences of movement deconstruct and fragment popular imaginings of migration from Iran to Vancouver. After the end of the Second World War the confluence of the strategic geopolitical importance of Iran, with the US Cold War doctrine of containment, and the Shah Reza Pahlevi's strategic cultivation of close political allegiances with 'the West', contributed to significant migrations between Iran and the US in particular, but to lesser extents Western Europe and Canada. These neo-imperial relations afforded many (primarily middle and upper class) Iranians considerable mobility, and these relations opened up streams of largely temporary migration, most notably for education:

When I was in United States we were all students - you couldn't find Iranian families there to come and set their grandmothers, grandfathers and fathers like now. So, the students came to United States or Europe have their education, most of them went back to Iran. Some of them got married and stayed – like some of my friends. (Babak)

Eight of my participants had undertaken some form of post-secondary education in the United States or Western Europe prior to their migration to Canada, with a further three
taking courses at colleges associated with Western academic institutions in Iran. Alternatively, only 10 participants (5 of whom belonged to the same family) had no family members who had been educated in ‘the West’ at some point prior to their immigration. Although, it is possible that these proportions speak to biases in my sample, they might equally reflect the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of many migrants from Iran now resident in Vancouver. The Islamic revolution in 1979, however, heralded a sea change in migration from Iran, transforming both the conditions of everyday life in Iran, as well as Iran’s positioning within the global geopolitical order and political economy with ramifications for the mobility of Iranians.

Rather than disentangle the complexities and messiness that appeared to infuse decisions to migrate through an explanatory reduction of migration from Iran to Vancouver that lists series of ‘push and pull factors’, I want to think through the migration and movement in terms of individual and family strategies for negotiating sets of scaled and unequally empowered social relationships (family, state, economy). In *Flexible Citizenship* Aiwha Ong (1999, p.6) traces the processes through which different regimes of truth and governmentality – ‘state, family and economic enterprises’ – at once condition and structure ‘border crossings and transnational relations’ in an analysis of the transnational practices of elite ethnic Chinese ‘mobile subjects’. Maintaining the critical differences in the contexts and experiences of border crossings, migration and transnational relations between Ong’s ‘mobile subjects’ and my participants, I think Ong provides a valuable conceptual framework for understanding the complex intersection of multiple regimes of governmentality in the formation of migratory strategies. When questioned about their motivations for migrating to Vancouver, many of the responses suggested that the decision has been reached through a complex and embedded negotiation that had differentially incorporated considerations of the family’s welfare and economic well-being, as well as differences in political contexts and state practices.

Some participants, offering more foundational accounts of the migration from Iran and attempting to speak more generally to the conditions of Iranians in Vancouver, tended to universalise experiences simplifying the processes that underpinned the decision to migrate.
For example, when asked directly about his motivations for migrating from Iran, Babak begins:

Yeah, actually the motivation or the problem really – because our motivations and the problems for immigrating to other countries is the same more or less for all Iranians - for example in, as you may recall, in 1979, I think, we had the revolution in Iran where the religious government took over. (Babak)

And then later in the same response he states:

But mainly, I mean I would say about 80-90% of the people who left the country were the most educated, especially those who had been educated abroad in the States or Europe or Canada and these places. They just couldn't cope with the pressures of religious government. They just couldn't agree with it. And then, later on, lots of people were gradually, for the last 20-23 years since the revolution, lots of people, they are still coming. (Babak)

Alternatively, Davood, an academic and recent immigrant to Canada, provided a more detailed contextualisation of migration that focussed purely on the 'structural causes' of migration, periodising movement out of Iran into four generations. He drew distinctions between those individuals who fled in the immediate aftermath of the revolution primarily for political and religious reasons; a second generation consisting of ‘draft dodgers’ during the Iran-Iraq war; a third were portrayed as mainly economic migrants; while the fourth involved the on-going exodus of a highly educated cohort from Iran. Davood’s narration of the emigration may well have been influenced by his perceptions of my positionality as a fellow researcher. Moreover, there also appeared to be a deep ambivalence in his reductive narrations of the structural conditions of migration and a sense of rootedness that rendered his decision to migrate so difficult:

For me that took maybe 6 to 8 years [...] to come up with this decision [...] because – you know – that's a very hard decision, you leave your country, your job. Because I have, I was the head of the department [...] in my country, my university. So, it was very hard for me to leave, and you know, to come away here for new job, for new life, for new environment, for new [...] you know – everything is different culture. (Davood)

Comprehending some of the diverse contexts and experiences of migration begins to differentiate and fragment individuals homogenised through the ascription of the ethnic signifiers in the Canadian context. In this section I hope to sketch some of the complexity
in terms of the overlapping, intersecting but also contradictory ties and relationships that inform the eventual decisions to migrate.

Persecution in Iran

For some of my participants migration had taken place under the traumatic and adverse conditions of religious persecution in post-revolutionary Iran. Pari, a Baha'i, speaks of her experiences after the revolution:

I was there for a year after the revolution happened. It happened in '79, I left in 1980 in July. And [...] yes, it was beginning to change. There was a lot of persecution of the Baha'is in subtle and in [...] not so subtle ways. There were several people who had, who were kidnapped — members of the National Assembly of Iran were kidnapped while I was there and no one heard of them after that, and they were assumed to be dead. And [...] numerous Baha'is were taken into prison and let go from their jobs. (Pari)

However, Pari's decision to leave Iran appears more complex than simply driven by the possibility of persecution on account of her religious faith. Narrating her decision to migrate she frames her positionality as a woman prominently, arguing that she would not have undergone the restrictions imposed on women under the Islamic government. This statement seems to be particularly informed by her faith — the Baha'i scriptures advocate practices of gender equality — and an education in the US during her formative years.

So I actually never had to do that [...] in terms of wearing — and that to me as a Baha'i woman was quite denigrating and a step, a major step backwards in time [laughs]. So I was intent on not doing that as far as possible. And it hadn't come to the point where they would make the women wear the hijab in the streets yet — when I left. (Pari)

And later, when asked directly about her motivations for migrating, she adds:

Ohh, motivations [...] Probably more than anything else, as a woman, the suppression and the oppression would be unbearable to me. (Pari)

Pari's migration from Iran was facilitated by the fact that she had — by chance — applied for a Canadian visa in 1978, and was therefore able to move directly to Vancouver in 1980 (as an independent migrant) just as she had been dismissed from her job, and before stricter rules regulating women's bodies in public spaces had been introduced.
Alternatively, disclosures of undocumented border crossings featured prominently in other participants’ accounts of migration from Iran. For example, when questioned about her family history, Nina — a Baha’i who moved to Vancouver from Iran 5 years ago — immediately began to recount an unsuccessful attempt by her family to cross the border with Pakistan:

**Ok [...] I grew up in a Baha’i family. I was about [...] about 6 when we tried to escape from the border because we couldn’t get passports. Baha’is are not allowed to leave the country. So we tried to escape and we got — they caught us and I went to jail when I was 6 for about [...] maybe 19 days. And then I went back to [...] back to Iran and stayed there for another 15/16 years until we got the passports.** (Nina)

Majid, a convert to Christianity, provides a similar account of an undocumented border crossing into Turkey to escape religious persecution in Iran:

**Actually this is a very long, long story. I came up from a Muslim family; I grew up as a Muslim in Iran. And I convert to Christianity in Iran. So, and I was Christian for almost 2 years in Iran and my father understood that I had converted to Christianity so he went to the government of Iran and said, ‘My son became a Christian’. So he went against me. And he betrayed me there and [...] so I escaped from Iran and I went to Turkey and after, from Turkey I went to Norway. I became a refugee in Norway and I continue my faith in Norway and I was doing Bible School and those kinds of things, college and those kinds of things.** (Majid)

However, Majid also uses the narrative of his escape and exile from Iran as an opportunity to introduce a discussion of abuses of the refugee system by other Iranians, who are economic migrants but convert temporarily to Christianity in order to claim asylum in Canada. As a pastor, Majid had received requests for support from Iranians seeking asylum in Canada, a positionality that evidently influences his perspective:

**So they like to come here for better life. But of course when they come here they make up stories that it’s dangerous for them to, back home it’s dangerous, they’re going to kill them — make up stories [...] . This [...] I can tell you that 99% of, at least after my knowledge, 99% of refugees from Iran that they come to other countries and they say that their life is in danger — they are not genuine. They are lying. Definitely. The real refugee was me — I was a real refugee [...] and I cannot go back to Iran, because my life is in danger.** (Majid)

On the other hand, Hassan had been involved in student activism after the revolution, and when conditions became inhospitable he decided to flee, crossing undocumented into
Turkey. The citation below is part of his response to closer questioning about his decision to flee Iran:

The reason was that back then as students we were politically active [...] in many different ways and then the war was going on and during the school years they, in the first of the revolution, they sort of knew who was doing what. And then they started [...] how should I say it [...] after they knew who everyone was they started picking on them. So things got a little rough and [...] and I just decided to leave. And then I went to Turkey – through mountains and horseback and everything – and then back then there were different ways of doing things and there were people would falsify passports and visas and everything and send you away to different countries. I was 17/18 at the time. (Hassan)

These narratives of persecution, coerced migration and undocumented border crossings attest to the stressed and dangerous contexts of movement for some Iranians in Vancouver, with individuals fleeing Iran at different times and under diverse contexts.

'Twice-migration'?

For many of my participants migration from Iran to Vancouver was direct; however a number of participants followed distinct trajectories involving multiple border crossings before eventually arriving in Canada. As the excerpts above suggest a number of my participants undertook undocumented border crossings to escape the threat of political or religious persecution in Iran, and then were subject to the processes of refugee determination in their countries of arrival (Turkey or Pakistan), before being granted asylum. Majid’s history of migration (see above) unfolded complexly and involved a number of border crossings, before he was resettled in Norway as a refugee, and eventual migrated to Canada as an independent immigrant with his Norwegian wife some years later. Although it is impossible to unpack the potential impacts of these movements on Majid’s identities, these border crossings and the social and cultural capital ‘accumulated’ en route would have necessarily shaped his experiences of migration and settlement in Vancouver.

A limited number of my participants migrated to Europe or North America as the revolution unfolded, and then migrated to Vancouver later. These individuals were relatively affluent and highly educated members of the upper and middle class cohorts in Iran under the Shah’s regime, drawing upon social networks in their relocation during the
political upheaval. A temporary migration strategy for these families – contingent, in part, on the extreme fluidity of the political situation at the time in Iran – was dispersion. The wife and children were relocated, while the husband returned to Iran to look after business interests and support the family financially. These transnational practices are redolent of those associated with the ‘astronaut family’, a strategy that has been researched extensively in relation to the practices of Hong Kong and Taiwanese business and professional families (Waters, 2002). For example, as the revolution was unfolding Nadia and Reza moved to the south of France, where they had bought an apartment anticipating that their children would eventually be educated in France. Reza returned shortly afterwards working in Iran, however, after 8 months the stresses of splitting the family meant that Nadia decided to return to Iran:

In 1979 we went to France – even before the Shah had left Iran and Khomeini was still in Paris. I stayed in France with the children for 8 months. My husband came with us but then went back to Iran to work. The children were enrolled in French schools but they were always fighting with each other. One day, in despair, I asked them, ‘What is the matter? Why do you fight all the time?’ And my son, he replied that he missed Iran, he wanted to go home. So, I called my husband and we decided to return to Iran after 8 months in France. (Nadia)

However, a year later when the family was on holiday in France the government in Iran introduced legislation regulating women’s dress by requiring that all women wear the hijab in public. In her response Nadia claims that this legislation led her to reconsider the ‘astronaut strategy’ until Reza, her husband, took early retirement:

My husband, he returned to Iran, for one or two years and worked. We did not suffer politically or financially, but after 2 years he took early retirement – he was about 45 – and came to join his family in France. (Nadia)

Neenah also described similar transnational family practices as part of a strategic negotiation of political changes in Iran. Neenah’s husband was able to get residency in Belgium through business connections, and accordingly the family initially fled to Belgium during the revolution. However, Neenah and her two young children soon relocated in Oklahoma where they stayed with Neenah’s sister, while her husband returned to Iran to work. The costs of living in the US, Neenah’s difficulty in gaining accreditation and therefore access to employment (in Iran she worked as a specialist nurse), coupled with the emotional and psychological stresses of separation, meant that Neenah threatened to return to Iran.
Neenah and her husband abandoned the ‘astronaut’ strategy after a year, and the family was reunited in Belgium:

My husband wasn’t with us — he was still working in Iran and providing [for] us here. So after that no, no way, you have to come, otherwise I’ll come back to Iran. So he came and we went back to Belgium again because we had a residency there. But in the States we didn’t have a residency and everything was so expensive...

(Neenah)

It is important to stress that these experiences and the temporary and flexible migratory strategies of the ‘astronaut family’ were relatively limited responses to an extremely fluid political situation in Iran. It appears that the ‘astronaut strategy’ as a means of negotiating the changes in Iran at the time of the revolution was a highly ‘classed’ practice; significant amounts of social and cultural capital had to be coupled with considerable financial resources for families to be able to relocate and negotiate individual state regimes of governmentality effected through immigration policies. Within these particular families the strategic dispersal of the family was accompanied by specifically gendered roles. However, while Waters (2002) makes an important contribution, commenting on the potentially oppressive character of intra-familial relations within ‘astronaut families’, in their narratives, both Nadia and Neenah’s position themselves centrally in the decision-making processes. The employment of the ‘astronaut strategy’ appears to be the outcome of the negotiated response to political change in Iran that involves the complex intersection of economic imperatives and intra-familial relations both conditioned by the regulatory effects of the practices of different nation-states. Moreover, the experiences of border crossings, transnational practices adopted and abandoned, resettlement and the imperatives of negotiating different state regimes of governmentality inevitably influenced these individuals and shaped their experiences of migration to Canada. After she arrived in Canada, Neenah obtained registered nursing accreditation in both Canada and the United States, a strategy of accumulating cultural capital that appeared to be informed by previous experiences of being prevented from practicing her profession. The three participants who had been involved in the practice of these strategies appeared to have settled in Vancouver. Indeed they all identified as Iranian-Canadian, perhaps reflecting the length of their residence in Canada, as well as their desire to move to Canada after difficult experiences of migration elsewhere, and the cultural capital they accumulated through these previous movements.
Independent and business migrants

Well [...] my main motivation was because there was an order from the lady of the house that we should move. That was the main motivation [laughs]. Although I don’t know their tactic was. And then after that we went because of the children, we wanted to be for the children in the United States if they want to study or advance and [...] better country to live. We thought Canada would be a nice place and in Canada we thought that Vancouver is...has a better weather condition and [...] that we would be more at peace here. So [...] you know, in fact we wanted to have another nationality as well, to, to be free. (Sam)

The rationalisation of migration decisions provided in the narrative of more recent immigrants converged markedly, despite manifest and important differences in class, affluence, competence in English, education, social capital, and immigrant class. Many of these participants were eager to affirm that they had no political problems in Iran; a condition that clearly differentiates them from those individuals who fled undocumented, or those families who temporarily adopted ‘astronaut’ strategies to weather a complex and fluid political situation. More recent migrants overwhelmingly migrated directly from Iran to Canada, entering primarily as independent or business class immigrants. Migration appeared to be the outcome of negotiating a complex and often contradictory bundle of ambitions, desires, constraints, responsibilities and imperatives, and was clearly conditioned by the overlap and interplay of familial, economic and state regimes of governmentality (Ong, 1999) – as the layering of motivations from my conversation with Sam suggests. In the analysis below I identify some of the most prominent narratives that were deployed in response to my questions about logics underpinning decisions to migrate to Vancouver, recognising that decisions were not one dimensional or self-evidently coherent, but informed by a host of overlapping and interlocking considerations.

Education

Discourses of children’s education featured prominently in responses to questioning over the decision to migrate. The government’s attempt to increase fertility rates, particularly during the war with Iraq, initiated a population explosion in Iran. The population, of which 50% is under the age of 25, has doubled to 68.9 million since the revolution in 1979 (UN,
Lona, for example, lives in West Vancouver with her children (Ali, her son studies in community college, her daughter is in high school) while her husband continues to work in Tehran. Lona positions educational considerations prominently in her explanations for her family's decision to migrate, a decision that effectively led to the dispersal of the nuclear family and the stretching of close familial relationships and responsibilities across space:

Yes, I was comfortable [...] financially. But the reason we immigrated to Canada [...] was because I wanted my son to go to university. Because in Iran it is too difficult [to get] into the university because of the huge population. About 2 million students attend for the, for going to University but just about 300,000 can go to the university – they don't have good future in Iran. After they finish their university there is no job for them – that's why we have immigrated to Canada. The most reason is this. (Lona)

Alternatively, Amir's perceptions of the contrasts between the university systems in Iran and Canada reinforces the sense that education is a central component in the logics that eventually end in migration:

And it is very much limited [in Iran] – you can't just [...] like [...] you have to work really hard to be able to get into a course. There's nothing to worry about here – you know [...] there is worry but you can probably get into an education system, maybe if not university you can get into college. There is always an education system you can go to, but in Iran there isn't. So [...] That's the most different – one of the biggest differences. But [...] still I think Iran has a better education system until like the senior years – better than here. (Amir)

Indeed, the logic seems so pervasive that although Abbas and his wife did not have any children at the time, he cites education in his rationalisation of his decision to migrate:

I thought maybe that if I move to the Canada, I thought I can have more [...] and better, you know, situation. Especially for my, you know, kids, for my children. I knew that I have to have children and I was thinking I can make [...] better, you know [...] future for my children in Canada rather than in Iran because it is so hard – you are not very familiar I guess with [...] the situation in Iran [...] the education is so hard, especially for the higher education in the University. (Abbas)

9 Lona and her children entered Canada through the investor immigration programme.
And later in the same response Abbas acknowledges that the decision to migrate has involved considerable financial and material sacrifices — initially at least — but he is willing to forgo his career as an academic in Iran to improve the quality of life of his family, and his children’s life chances:

**But right now, I mean, by this situation I am not the same salary of the Iran, but I have more facilities for my family rather than Iran — you know? It is acceptable for me; it is [...] you know, good for me and for my family.** (Abbas)

Naheed emphasised the significance of her children’s education in her family’s migration strategy — and the attendant transnational practices of an ‘astronaut family’ as she relocated in Vancouver with her children while her husband remained in Iran — arguing that the opportunities afforded, or cultural capital accumulated, through an education in Canada outweighed those of an Iranian education:

**But the young people, the children, when they finish their education in this city they can find a good job because they are young and their education is from Canada — and this is very good for finding a job.** (Naheed)

Coupled with this rationalisation of migration in order to access education, is the reality that young males in Iran are required to perform 2 years military service, and for some families ‘draft dodging’ seemed to influence the decision to migrate. Ramin, for example, talking about the possibility of returning to Iran for vacation says:

**You can leave – but you cannot come back. He [Amir, his brother] can, I cannot. If I go back to Iran I have to go through the military service. Yeah but...he can go, he can come out – he has no problems, just waiting for citizenship for the US.** (Ramin)

Education featured heavily in narratives advanced in explications of migration, and it appears in many cases education takes precedent over ‘normal’ family life. The transnational strategies of the ‘astronaut family’ that disperse family members, disrupt everyday family life, and are often associated with emotional and psychological stresses, appear to be employed to reterritorialise family relationships primarily as a means to gain access to education and accumulate cultural capital. However, the ubiquity of narratives of education in the logics of migration also forces us to confront the question as to whether education is an over-determined factor in the decision making matrix, or whether it constitutes a *post facto*

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10 These findings are remarkably similar to research conducted with ‘astronaut families’ from Hong Kong and Taiwan in Vancouver (see Waters, 2002; 2001).
rationalisation, a means to save face and deal with the psychological and financial costs of migration through narratives of education and sacrifice, both in terms of financial well-being and family welfare\(^\text{11}\).

'Better life'

Other prominent narratives revolved around discourses of improving the quality of life through migration. Some of my participants appeared to find conditions of everyday life in Iran grinding. Babak indicates that the attrition of regulation and legislation under the Islamic government impinged upon his family's decision to migrate to Vancouver:

We were much more religious, me and my wife, but gradually, slowly [...] Our religious people are running the country and we were disgusted of the way they talk to the people and they run the country and [...] they lied, you know, to people. And sometimes there's a dictatorship. So, we thought: 'This is the religion?' This is not what we were thinking of, so we had to leave, get away from the religious people and religion, altogether. But things have changed for us, since we came to Vancouver. This culture began changing things for us. (Babak)

In a similar vein, Naheed communicates that some of the impacts of government legislation and regulation on everyday life in Iran were a significant consideration in her family's migration strategy:

Because after revolution a lot of the Iranian people had problem with this government and [...] some of the people like to go to other countries because the other countries are [...] have freedom and [...] the education in other countries like Canada, America or European is very highest of the Iran. Now. And [...] we decided for better life and for better education for my children and better freedom we decided to come to this country. (Naheed)

Naheed's discussion of freedom is ambiguous here, but in conversation initiated by her response centred on the how women were obliged to wear a scarf in public and the prohibition of alcohol. Naheed and her daughter, Parveneh, were also very keen to demonstrate how life in Iran was very different in private, showing me pictures of parties taken during a trip to Iran in the summer of 2002. On the other hand, Chirin, an Armenian Christian, who had been in England during the revolution in 1979, but returned with her husband to be with her extended family, articulated their regret at returning to Iran:

I am grateful to David Ley for bringing this possibility to my attention.
The reason that I came to Canada? From that day that we returned to the country my husband said, 'I don’t want to live here. I hate here. I want to go to the England.' So we couldn’t go to the England for 10 years, because there were visa problems and it was very difficult for us to go to the England. (Chirin)

Throughout the interview Chirin expressed regret at returning to Iran in 1979, particularly in relation to the implications for her family. Since 1979 Chirin and her husband had pursued a number of migration strategies, including applications for British residency, migrating to Vienna for a short time, and shuttling between Vancouver and Iran for 8 years, before Chirin and her daughter Parvin relocated in Vancouver on a more permanent basis, so Parvin could complete her high school education in Canada, while her husband remained in Iran. The motivation to migrate appeared to be driven in part by government attempts to regulate everyday behaviours in Iran ranging from the restriction of religious practices and community activities, to bans on the consumption of alcohol, controls on women’s dress and prohibition of satellite television. Although, Chirin and Parvin discussed the ways in which these regulatory pressures were habitually subverted, Chirin’s conversation was pervaded by a desire to move away from Iran and she positioned herself ambivalently throughout, at once distancing herself culturally and existentially from Iran but also showing affection for Persians and acknowledging her reliance on Persian social networks in Vancouver.

Alternatively, Davood, whose work as an academic in the health sciences in Tehran exposed him to poverty, epidemics and crime on a daily basis, was clearly depressed by the stresses of working in such conditions, particular given the government’s apparent inaction in ameliorating the situation. In part of his discussion about his motivations for leaving Iran, he says:

So, that’s why, one of the reasons, maybe I can stay here [because of the] psychological or mental problems, not problem I mean mental [...] uncomfortabilities. Looking at young people dying and being infected with the HIV but the government is doing nothing [...] so you want to just go and never see that condition or situation – you want to just come out of that situation. For me, believe it or not, that was the main reason because I was working with the young people and I saw everyday young people infected with HIV. They used drugs. They died because of just careless driving. And nobody teaches them. Nobody talk about the lifestyle. I couldn’t, you know, stand, I couldn’t stand to see all that happened to my people, to my country. So I said ok, let’s just go away from here. I wanted to come out from that situation. (Davood)
On reflection Lona cited family security – particularly after personal experiences of robbery – as a significant consideration in the decision to migrate:

Because there is a big difference with the poor people and the rich people [...] one of the most reason is that sometime you go to the bank and you get money – cash – money from the bank and [...] some people grab your purse and run away and vanish and you can’t do anything. Sometimes the robbers come to your house with gun and they want to get everything from your house [...] and you must give them anything they want otherwise they will kill you. (Lona)

Ali, her son, reiterates this concern for personal security in Iran, and also articulates some of the socio-economic disparities evident in Tehran:

And affluent people – like us – we are hated by them. We had, we had this Toyota Cruiser it got blocked a couple of times when we parked it in the street, you know, they took the storage system. So they don’t really like rich people. So [...] you kind of don’t feel comfortable about it – in Vancouver it’s not like that. I mean no matter how rich you are here they won’t, you know, try to rob you – that’s the first thing. And the second thing is that, you know, you feel safe…(Ali)

Among these interlocking narratives that rationalise family strategies of migration through appeals to quality of life or a ‘better life’ in Vancouver, one narrative stood out as particularly powerful. Lawson (2000) has argued that migrants have situated engagements with capitalism, the disruptions and perspectives produced through the experiences of migration open up critical speaking positions. In the excerpt below I think Sam’s narrative and the ideas he articulates ‘haunts’ capitalism and global geopolitical posturing:

So for us to stay here from Third World country in which they have a lot of difficulty getting on in the world [...] because I think the world is easier in the West and countries like America or England or France or these sort of countries are trying to separate the worlds into 2, 3 part. One part is the Western world and they have much better than those of the weak and the other half are under their control. And […] this is what the world has been for the past few hundred years and maybe it continues for the foreseeable future so we thought of the children – they study here, if they want to live in any other country in the world as they are Canadian citizen it would be much easier for them to go and work and live anywhere else, they like. If they don’t want to live in Canada, then live somewhere else, and if they want to come back to Iran, ok they could go back […] That was the main reason. (Sam)

Sam, who articulated a discomfort at ‘living in the country of my enemies’, responds to my question about motivations with critiques of ‘Western’ political economic hegemony. He argues that he felt compelled to migrate to ‘the West’ so that his children can receive a
'Western' education and obtain a 'Western' passport to ensure them better opportunities in the future than those available in Iran.\(^\text{12}\)

**Restrictions on women**

Issues of governmentality and the regulation of women's bodies, particularly through legislation obligating women to wear hijab, have been prominently deployed as a visual signifier of 'Islamic' and Iranian fundamentalism in 'the West'. In print and electronic media, as well as expanding genres of cultural biography and travel writing, the imagery of the veil dominates representations of everyday life for Iranian women. Such representations reproduce narratives of backwardness and oppression that legitimated the colonialist discourses of the 'civilising mission'. Without denying the oppressive, patriarchal relations that do structure so much of everyday life, discussions with Iranian women introduced some of the multiple meanings of the hijab and the myriad subversions to government attempts at regulation.

None of my participants wore a scarf during our interviews, perhaps a crude barometer of religious observation and symptomatic of broader religious practices among Iranians in Vancouver. Some of my participants positioned the regulation of their bodies and appearance as a significant factor in their decision to migrate. Pari was perhaps most strong in this respect, placing the then imminent introduction of legislation regulating women's bodies alongside her religious faith as fundamental to her decision to migrate:

> So I actually never had to do that [...] in terms of wearing [the hijab] — and that to me as a Baha'i woman was quite denigrating and a step, a major step backwards in time [laughs]. (Pari)

And later when I asked her directly about her motivations for leaving Iran she begins:

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\(^{12}\) Similar critical interventions, produced in part by the disruptions of migration, were made in comments about Canada's immigration policy. Pari, for example, remarked on how immediately after Khomeini's return to Iran the Canadian and Australian embassies announced that they would accept immigrants – 'They immediately look to drain, drain the professionals out of the system' (Pari). Davood conveys a similar sentiment: 'That's the problem. Somebody take the money, somebody take the brain. You know some country took our money from the oil, some other take advantage of the brain...' (Davood).
Ohh, motivations [...] Probably more than anything else, as a woman, the suppression and the oppression would be unbearable to me. (Pari)

In a similar vein Chirin, positioning herself as Armenian and Christian, and therefore an outsider in Iran, objected to the regulation of her body and appearance, in the process distancing herself from Islam and ‘their’ (Persian) culture:

And you have to wear a scarf. You have to wear long [...] trousers and dark colours. So [...] although maybe it’s not a problem because they [...] it’s their country, everything belongs to them but for us if we are not have to it’s very difficult. So [...] whenever the people can leave the country they can leave. (Chirin)

And Haideh, who left Iran soon after the revolution, comments on the normalisation of the regulation of women’s bodies in Iran through everyday practices, suggesting that it is much more difficult for women who have not been subjected to such regulation:

For some ladies who live there, they’re used to, you know. They’re used to it. But for me, for example, or my daughter when we go there it is very difficult to put scarf, you know – it is very difficult. It’s very hard. (Haideh)

For other women the regulation of their bodies was less prominent in their narratives of migration, although it constituted one of a number of considerations that influenced the eventual decision. For example, Sam discussing his family’s motivations adds:

The hair has to be covered and the body and so on and my wife she didn’t like that under those conditions. And she likes to be free of those conditions, so [...] that was another reason. (Sam)

Naheed positions her discussion about the regulation of her body in a more general discussion about freedoms:

But in general the city or the country is not good for the living [...] because it, there isn’t any freedom or party. There isn’t very freedom for the women and the women must put scarf and...(Naheed)

Alternatively, a number of women played down the significance of such regulation in family migration decisions. Parveneh, responding to Haideh’s comment cited above, contended that she actually like wearing a scarf, an affirmation that sparked an intense conversation between the four women present. Lona, when asked directly whether obligations to wear the hijab had influenced her decision, replied:
Not very important problem. We got used to it. It is not important. We have [...] many problems which are more important than wearing [...] scarf. (Lona)

For some of my participants migration appears, in part, to have been a strategy driven by a desire to negotiate the regulation of women’s bodies by state regimes of governmentality, although it must be emphasised that such desires always interlocked and overlapped with other rationalisations of migration. Restrictions on women’s mobility and regulation of their bodies in public spaces, were differentially positioned within women’s narratives of migration. These differences, and the anecdotal evidence of subversions and negotiations of legislations undermine the premises that sustain the colonialist discourses that pervade many popular representations of women in Iran. In general, however, it appeared that women initiated migration more often than their husbands, and that they were more comfortable once they had settled in Vancouver.

Accumulating Citizenship

A number of participants stated that migration was a strategy primarily for obtaining citizenship, a practice producing new meanings of citizenship in an increasingly transnational age. A number of participants spoke of the symbolic degrading of the Iranian passport since the revolution, reflecting on their experiences of travel and the difficulties imposed on their mobility. Chirin’s perspective was typical among those participants who discussed the changing symbolic value of an Iranian passport:

That was the only way because the Iranian passport — they just throw it away and we cannot do anything. They were very respect before the revolution. When we go to the England there was no visa needs — nothing. They gave us visa in the airport and there was, they were respecting because of oil. ‘Oh you are so rich. Your country is so nice.’ But now they just throw our passports away [laughs]. (Chirin)

In a similar vein Fahrdad comments on the ‘downgrading’ of the value of an Iranian passport:

During the Shah’s time I was in Italy, I was going to France, I was flying to Switzerland, I was living in Paris and we were treated like Royals because we had the Persian Empire’s passport. Now our passport is downgraded — so it’s different treatment...and memory is short — you know people have a short span of memory, memory span. You know, it is different. So, the treatment is different. (Fahrdad)
Canadian citizenship appears to be valued for a number of reasons. For example, Reza’s expression of pride in his Canadian passport seemed to be a function of the values commonly identified with Canada:

I don’t mind to say that I was Iranian and I am Iranian, but in some places it is making problems for me these days. But I am very proud when I give my Canadian passport at the airport. I like that. I like more than any other passport. Better than American. Better than French. Better than anything, when I show my Canadian passport. (Reza)

Others approached the accumulation of citizenship more strategically. For some accumulating Canadian citizenship appeared to be part of a strategy of what Ong (1999, p.6) calls ‘flexible citizenship’ – “the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions’. A number of participants said that extended family members had migrated to Canada to accumulate citizenship as a flexible strategy to negotiate the economic and political instability. For example:

I have to mention something. Another younger sister of mine has also emigrated to Canada about 2 years ago. But they don’t live here; they just come and go. They are landed immigrant status and they decided not to live in – they came to Toronto, every 6 months they are coming here, they renew their things and they go back. Maybe later on they will come, but lots of people are like that. (Babak)

Fahrdad, on the other hand, expressed shock at such strategic accumulations:

Fahrdad: I have met engineers from Korea, I have met doctors from Singapore, I have met doctors from India, who come here, they get disappointed, and they leave. You know what...one Chinese guy, he told me something very interesting – he said, ‘Look, the reason I come to Canada is to get this damn passport and leave.’ I said, ‘My goodness, what sort of an attitude is that?’ You know.

Dan: I think that is quite common though.

Fahrdad: Is it?

Dan: Yeah, certainly...

Fahrdad: Well I was shocked – well you know [...] this coming out of his mouth – I just couldn’t believe it. I said, ‘Then, you are buying the passport.’ (Fahrdad)
Chirin appeared to be particularly concerned about accumulating citizenship and new ‘documented identities’. She invested considerable symbolic value in passports, particularly those which enabled mobility and access to education. Such concerns are likely to have been attenuated by her regrets of returning to Iran after the revolution and her experiences of feeling ‘trapped’ in Iran. Nina, a Baha’i who recently migrated from Iran, suggested that having eventually escaped from Iran the accumulation of citizenships had become a family strategy in part to enhance their sense of security, although the presence of extended family was also a consideration. Discussing how her mother was currently in Australia to fulfil her citizenship requirements and obtain double citizenship, she explains:

I think part of it is insecurity. She wants to be secure. She wants to, I don't know, she wants to maybe have the benefit of two countries. And I think the major, major reason is that her family. Her mum, her sisters, her brother, everyone is there. Big family in Australia, so I think that's the point. (Nina)

**Economic Migrants?**

Strikingly, very few of my participants deployed narratives of economic advancement in their rationalisations of their migration to Canada, although, entering as business class and independent immigrants, the majority would be identified as ‘economic migrants’ through immigration categorisations. A number did, however, remark on the costs – emotional and psychological as well as financial – of migration. While I want to enter into a more detailed discussion below I think this the omission of narratives of economic advancement is significant. For the more affluent of my participants this omission might reflect the considerable economic capital at their disposal, or pre-migration knowledge about the health of the economy and labour market in Vancouver, which then shaped their expectations. In this vein upper-middle class Iranian immigrants might have adopted similar strategies to other ‘assets rich, earnings poor immigrants’ (Ley, 1999, 2000) to negotiate the regulatory structure of Canada’s immigration policy. Migration strategies, including the ‘astronaut family’ and early retirement, may be products of negotiating and subverting the regulatory structures of what some critics have termed Canada’s ‘designer immigration programme’ (Ley, 1999). Alternatively, less affluent immigrants – entering primarily as independent immigrants – appear to have rationalised sacrifices in income and material comfort, in the short term at least, for the political, environmental and educational advantages of relocating
their family in Vancouver. However, the conspicuous absence of narratives of economic advancement might also constitute rationalisations made with the benefit of hindsight, allowing a re-ordering of priorities when recounting the contexts of migration; it need not preclude the possibility of pre-migration expectations of material betterment in Canada. Indeed, the number of participants who discussed the costs of migration suggests that there was a significant mismatch in their expectations and actual experiences of migration. I return to this discussion below.

**Diverse experiences and fragmented identities:**

In this reading I have drawn on the narratives of my participants in an attempt to sketch some of the contexts through which the decision to migrate is made. I have argued that the eventual migration strategy is contingent on a complex and contradictory negotiation of different regimes of governmentality — family relations, economic imperatives, and the regulatory practices of different nation-states. Moreover, these negotiations are embedded in networks of social relations that channel information (often imperfectly), provide access to resources and support, and shape imaginations and expectations. My emphasis on the diversity of contexts, and complex negotiations conditioned by intertwining regimes of governmentality emphasises the fragmentation of experiences, identifications and positionalities that are homogenised and suppressed through the assertions of racial and ethnic signifiers such as 'Iranian' or 'Persian'. The experiences of migration and relocation are potentially life changing, and by attempting to retain some of the texture of the contexts in and through which migration strategies are formulated, I strive for a more nuanced appreciation of some of migration.

**4.5: Reading two: narrating experiences of migration**

Migration and relocation is, for most individuals, a life transforming experience. The depth and potential of migrations have been variously identified. For example, Salman Rushdie’s controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* is ostensibly a story of transformations through migration, whereas the literary critic Homi Bhabha has famously exploited the radical
potential of experiences of migration and the spaces of enunciation that it produces. In this section I draw on the narrated experiences of my participants to demonstrate the diversity and heterogeneity of experiences and identifications through migration, resisting the hegemonic and colonising tendencies of 'documented identities' (Hall, 1990).

The 'costs' of migration

Discussions of the costs of migration to Vancouver were an evident theme in my conversations with participants. The logics sustaining these narratives converge with a marked absence of discussion of economic advancement in post-migration rationalisations of motivations. Initially my analysis is limited to issues surrounding employment in Vancouver, elucidating some of my participants’ experiences and strategies for overcoming impediments to labour market entry, underemployment and the financial burdens, as well as personal, social and psychological costs of migration strategies. The affirmation that families had ‘limited’ their lives in the decision to migrate was repeated in a number of interviews. My analysis begins with a brief examination of transnational migratory practices, including the phenomenon of the ‘astronaut family’, as strategies of adaptation before turning to a discussion of some of the significant economic, social and psychological costs of modest performance in the labour market for those nuclear families that relocated to Vancouver as a unit.

In total 12 of my participants, from 6 different families, had immediate family members who were involved in some form of economically motivated transnational practice. The ‘social morphology’ of the so-called ‘astronaut family’ (Waters, 1999) seemed to be a common formation, reluctantly entered in the attempt to reconcile broader family goals (education, citizenship, security, ‘freedom’ and so forth) with economic imperatives. Alternatively, for one family interviewed, strategies included living from capital assets and a dependence on communications technologies to maintain a business partnership in Iran. Among the members of ‘astronaut families’ I interviewed there was a visible affluence, but these transnational practices did not appear to be practices of ‘ungrounded, flexible accumulation’ of the kind performed by Ong’s (1999) elite ‘mobile subjects’. Instead, they were situated, embedded and strategic negotiations of different, but intersecting, regimes of
governmentality (various regulatory structures in Iran, Canadian immigration programmes, intra-familial relationships, desires, ambitions and so forth) and shaped significantly by the labour market conditions and economic contexts into which they were migrating. The everyday realities of transnational strategies of dispersion may incur numerous social, psychological and emotional costs – as Ley (1999, p. 15) has commented: ‘But the astronaut option has very severe family implications; women are isolated and highly stressed, affairs occur, children become disorientated and develop behavioural problems’. Furthermore the financial costs of these transnational practices are significant, particularly due to levels of inflation in Iran, which produce highly unfavourable exchange rates. The reluctant entrance into such transnational practices is indicative in part of the economic difficulties and constraints faced by immigrants to Canada.

Fahrdad remarks on the ‘astronaut family’, suggesting that it might be a strategy pursued by those who lack sufficient cultural capital, in terms of language competency or transferable education qualification:

The other thing I want to tell you is that also I have seen that in the Iranian community, with a lot of Iranians, they leave their family here and they go back to Iran and make money there. Because it is hard to make money here. Or some of them [...] don't possess an international background, or a cosmopolitan background, or they don’t speak the language well enough to work, that’s another thing. (Fahrdad)

In a similar vein, Nina suggests that her father's age, the ‘language barrier’ and necessity of Canadian accreditation before he could practice medicine, influenced his decision to continue working in Iran after his family had relocated to Vancouver:

The language barrier is the big, big thing for him. And he is 63 now – he is almost retired so he tried to study some medicine and then take the exam again here. But he is not finding that easy because he has to become a resident and do it all over, everything. So I don’t think he wants to do that. But he is thinking about doing

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13 The ‘astronaut strategy’ also involves a reworking and reterritorialisation of gendered roles and at times patriarchal intra-familial power relationships, with the male assuming primary responsibility for the ‘productive’ maintenance of the family, while the relocated female takes charge of family reproduction. While in my interviews the ‘astronaut family’ was the outcome of family negotiations and deliberation – with women often presiding over family decisions – it is important to also recognise the highly gendered implications, and particularly the sacrifices and limitations often imposed on formerly professional women by transnational strategies of family dispersion.
some business here sometime. I don’t know how serious he is but he sometimes thinks about that. (Nina)

When asked directly about her family’s recent entrance into an ‘astronaut strategy’, Chirin – whose husband had been educated in England – suggested that the decision was informed primarily by the necessity of reconciling her daughter’s educational needs with economic imperatives:

Uhh. Because, because of economy. Because there was nothing to do here for my husband. There are plenty of opticians and – as, maybe you didn’t recognise but there are no-one wearing glasses. All very old fashioned and very old – it’s not like England, it’s not like Italy, it’s not like France – it’s not. They don’t care about their glasses.

Alternatively, Naheed indicates that for some Iranian families the ‘astronaut strategy’ might be a temporary phenomenon, employed to acquire Canadian citizenship, and the associated security, before being abandoned with families returning to Iran:

Some of my friends’ husbands worked in Iran and after they got citizenship they came back to my country. And […] and some of, and some of my friends have children in high school, and when the children went to the university and they can put their children alone here, they went to my country. (Naheed)

Sam, who migrated with his family, but maintains a business partnership in Iran, rationalised his migration decision – and some of the financial and personal costs, evident in his ambivalence about relocating to Vancouver – as follows:

And, for me, it might be almost the same as if we were here or in Iran, and my work is in Iran, which there were, you know, 9 factories. And I knew the work there, and knew about the […] market and so on. And I cannot really do anything in here – I don’t have any facilities, and I have to put money in stock for the first 2 years, which has been going down all the time and that really costs money. So, for me, there was much better. But I don’t mind living here, it doesn’t make much difference living here in Vancouver or Iran.

These brief excerpts illuminate some of the fundamental motivations grounding transnational strategies practices by relatively affluent Iranian immigrants in Vancouver. These practices are complex strategies devised to fulfil broader, negotiated, family ambitions. While many of these families are comfortable in terms of their material lifestyles, there appear to be numerous costs – personal, social and emotional – associated with the everyday practices of the transnational family.
The stresses induced by the separation of the family for extended periods were evident in a number of conversations. Lona complains:

And one of my problems is that he is in Iran; we don’t have family life here since we have immigrated to Canada. Because there is no job for [...] people. (Lona)

Adding:

No, he [...] he wants, he wants to come to Vancouver to create a business here but [...] it, it takes time. It takes time [...] for coming here. He comes twice a year here and he stays here about one month. But it is not enough. Because children need their father. (Lona)

In my interview with Lona and her son Ali it became apparent that there were a number of stresses within the family. For example, Ali admitted to ‘playing up’ shortly after moving to Canada, hoping that his behaviour would force his parents to reconsider the ‘astronaut strategy’ and return to Iran. Lona also articulated concerns about her 13-year old daughter’s behaviour. The daughter, integrated and socialised into the Canadian education system was becoming increasingly ‘Westernised’. Speaking English with her friends and immersed in North American teen culture, her behaviour was evidently a source of tension within the family. Similarly, Nina discusses the stresses on family life resulting from her father’s transnational migrations:

I have gotten used to it. It was hard, especially for my younger brother – he’s 11 now but, when we came here he was 5 or 6 but he had to grow up without permanent, stable dad right? So now he’s gotten used to it too. (Nina)

And Naheed expresses the ‘difficulties’ of everyday family practices in transnational families:

I like this city because [...] my husband isn’t all the time here it is difficult for us. I heard the job and the earn money is difficult in this city. This is the problem is for me. But I like this city. (Naheed)
“Brain waste”**: Underutilising migrants’ skills:

Among those individuals who have attempted to enter the labour market in Canada frustration at the underutilisation of their ‘human capital’ was manifest. Fahrdad, who had just obtained a part-time job teaching an ESL class after 3 years in Canada despite considerable cultural capital (including a PhD in political science, a graduate degree from the Sorbonne, and flawless English), was perhaps most candid in venting his frustration at his situation in Vancouver:

**But, when you go somewhere, and you lose a fortune, and you don’t find a job, and then you are not happy, your family is not happy** – sometimes you say, ‘To hell with it, I’ll sacrifice my freedom and at least I can get my family to a standard that I want, or I was used to.’ And that’s something that is happening with a lot of Iranian families here. They say, ‘What the hell with it, I’ll have my wife wear a [...] you know, a scarf, but at least, you know, I am making money, I am successful and my family is happy.’ (Fahrdad)

Even Neenah, a participant who appeared ostensibly ‘successful’ in terms of ‘making it’ in Vancouver remarked that she and her husband were only ‘comfortable’, and not affluent compared to their life in Iran. Below, I trace experiences of employment in Vancouver, charting some of the stresses and costs induced by modest performances in the labour market. These narratives are introduced as partial and situated insights into the everyday experiences of particular immigrants from Iran. As such not only do they reveal some of the struggles within immigrant families, but they also provide a potent counterpoint to the pathological framing of immigrants in much of the media through discourses of criminality, social problems and Otherness. Moreover, the economic performance of recent immigrants has increasingly gained political currency, most often mobilised by the political right to legitimate critiques of Canada’s immigration policy and the contemporary rates of immigration (for example, Stoffman, 2002).

When questioned about their employment in Vancouver, participants often immediately contrasted the work here, with their employment in Iran (see appendix 1). The underutilisation of skill seemed pervasive in the experiences of my participants, even among those educated in universities in North America and Western Europe. Describing his

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14 The term is Geddie’s (2002).
experiences in Vancouver as both a ‘total disappointment’ and ‘huge mistake’. Fahrdad reveals some of the personal and psychological anguish resulting from his modest performance in the labour market. He sums up his current position, and extends his comments to the Iranian ‘community’:

So people like me end up doing what they did 20 years ago [...] with one third of what they were paid and with no perks [...] and this is what I can also say about the Iranian community – as a journalist and editor, I also have an eye for what goes around me, what’s around me…(Fahrdad)

Babak, educated as a chemical engineer in the United States migrated to Canada with his now ex-wife, a graduate in English and former English teacher. He describes his employment situation after migrating:

And [...] then I start working not really as a chemist, some, for some time I was working in a [...] in a lab, in a laboratory, chemical laboratory, here in North Vancouver and my wife was working as a baker. (Babak)

Davood, diagnoses a wider trend, suggesting that difficulties in becoming established in the labour market, and especially in employment commensurate with cultural capital, compels immigrants to adopt different strategies of economic integration, which for many highly educated Iranians involves establishing small businesses:

That’s why unfortunately many educated people came here and because they don’t have money and to live they cannot go to charity or get the money from the government or nothing. So after a few attempts they fail and they go into business – like a store market, groceries, maybe restaurants, something like that. (Davood)

For example, Abbas, who used to work as a professor at one of Azad University’s Tehran campuses, is now employed in a North Vancouver gas station, and tutoring mathematics in his spare time. He is optimistic about his future, and the potential for upward socio-economic mobility – he is hopeful of eventually obtaining a franchise for a gas station – yet he continual narrates his employment experiences in Vancouver through discourses of sacrifice for his family and in relation to his ‘situation’ in Iran:

Actually [...] you know, I have a good [...] situation in Iran and if I went back to my homeland, you know, my Iran – I have my, you know, degree, I have, my position in my job and you know, I can do business there better than here because I don’t have

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15 Fahrdad even described the experiences of migration to Canada as ‘degrading’ for his wife. In Iran she had not needed to work and they had employed domestic workers. In Canada not only had she assumed all responsibilities for childcare and housework but was also obliged to work full-time in a bank.
to, you know, get the languages there. The most problem for us is [...] we are of the second languages and it is limiting for us... (Abbas)

Here, Abbas also raises the significance of language competency in constraining labour market mobility, particularly for recent immigrants — although clearly such rationalisations do not hold for all participants, some of whom arrived fluent in English and had been educated in ‘Western’ institutions.

The divergence between expectations and actual experiences, and the attendant psychological stress and relative economic hardships, provoked different responses. Abbas, strategically planning his future and striving for social mobility, coupled optimism with narratives of temporary sacrifice for the greater good of his family:

And right now I am better than last year — I am going towards my goal, but it takes time [...] and I hope I can get a, earn a good job, you know a good situation [...] in the future. But right now, I mean, by this situation I am not the same salary as in Iran, but I have more facilities for my family rather than Iran — you know? It is acceptable for me; it is [...] you know, good for me and for my family. (Abbas)

Narratives of sacrifice are similarly embedded in Davood’s account of the contrasts between his life in Iran and Vancouver. He concludes:

So staying here maybe I eat less, maybe I dress less, I couldn’t buy every time whatever I want but I am living in a free country, and in a society where the people believe each other. So I can raise my children and perhaps maybe I sacrifice for my family — that is the belief of many of the first generation of immigrants. They all the time think they would be making sacrifices but the next generation would have a better life. (Davood)

Alternatively, Fahrdad clearly depressed and frustrated by his experiences in Vancouver, and critical of the regulatory structures that recruit immigrants on the basis of their cultural capital, sympathises with those immigrants who decide to leave Canada after a limited and unsuccessful experience of immigration. Asked why he has remained in Canada he replies:

Well, because of the education for the kids [...] and Canada at least in those years had a very good reputation. I don’t think it has it today. Because there are lots of people going back and, you know, the vibes are not very positive, because people come here and they don’t have jobs and they say, ‘Goodness, I am not going to sacrifice everything for kids’. Some people do, because they’re [...] like myself, they prefer to have the kids move along rather than themselves. But most people are not. They go back or they go somewhere else. (Fahrdad)
Experiences of employment in Vancouver, and the underutilisation of human capital, were explained by my participants in a number of different ways. The difficulties of obtaining the required accreditation, and particularly the investments of time demanded, while understood as necessary, often constituted a significant barrier to the full utilisation of cultural capital. In an anecdote involving a friend’s daughter, Babak recounted how a Persian who had trained as a doctor in Italy had been forced to take employment as a decorator as he could not afford the expenditures in time and money required to acquire Canadian accreditation. The stresses of this situation eventually broke up the marriage, and the husband returned to Iran to practice medicine. Babak also commented more generally on the recognition of educational qualifications in Canada:

We, right now, everyday we have that problem for the Iranians who come in here. You know, in Canada, Canada doesn’t accept the educational background of many countries – and even European countries. (Babak)

In a similar vein, Abbas’s perspective, mediated by personal experiences of employment and voluntary work with recent migrants to Vancouver, emphasises the need to accumulate local knowledge and accreditation, along with some of the costs involved:

You know, when you move to a new – not a new, maybe not for all countries – when you move the Canada from countries like my country – you need the local experience, local, you know, certificates, local – you know [...] grades [...] in the university. And [...] it is hard to start because you have to spend 2 years, 3 years maybe more to get ready to be, you know, a person who is working in a good job or good income [...] salary. It takes time [...] it is hard to start. (Abbas)

Nadia, trained as a nurse in Iran, and is registered in both France as well as England and Wales, describes how she struggled to get through TOEFL examinations, in spite of her competency in English, which then excluded her from employment.

I tried to get work as a nurse here, and had to take the TOEFL exams. I tried 3 times but did not pass – I read very slowly, even in Farsi – and in the TOEFL you have to be really quick, so I found it really difficult. (Nadia)

Beyond the frustrations and difficulties of obtaining accreditation in Canada she acknowledges the importance of ‘retraining’ and integrating into the professional codes of different labour markets, emphasising:

I think it is important to be ‘refreshed’. I think wherever you are you should do retraining. I think it was important that in France and Vancouver that I did some training to be refreshed, and to become integrated, to learn the code of ethics and
the practices. These are different in every country and it is important to learn how the systems works [...] if I had just started working straight away, and hadn't know how to use the medication or equipment then I could of killed people. (Nadia)

While quick to discount experiences of overt racism a number of participants alluded to suspicions of subtle practices of ‘racial exclusion’ or ‘discrimination’ in the labour market. Speaking more generally about experiences of discrimination in Canada Pari remarks:

And I found that there is a subtle form, a very subtle form of prejudice in Canada – you know. And I would say that I’ve always known that it existed, ever since I came [...] in that they tolerate you [...] but that’s where it ends. And it is a real...it is so subtle that it almost impossible to identify it. (Pari)

She continues in the same response:

The notion, the Canadian notion of prejudice is I don’t really want to know about you, I don’t really care, you live your life and I’ll live mine and I’ll tolerate your existence [...] it is a very, if I may dare say a very English way of looking at things, right? Ummm. A kind of intellectualised prejudice [...] and almost [...] justified even in some respects but generally if you compartmentalise a group, let them do their own thing as long as it doesn’t bother your, your [...] your allowing them to, you know, do it and be there but not [...] it doesn’t go much beyond that. (Pari)

One suspected manifestation of forms of subtle ‘racial exclusions’ that several participants forwarded in conversation was the feeling of being passed over for jobs on the basis of their perceived background. For example, Babak contends:

You see the thing is – sometimes there is a hidden prejudice that they don’t show. Say for example – I’ll give you one example. You are an Iranian, who comes here, you have an Iranian name and so forth, and you make a resume and you put your name down. And this goes to different places. Now you never know how the people who are hiring and get the resume – how he feels? He’s not going to let you know. That if he rejected your resume was it because of racial problems? Because of your names? Because on your resume you don’t say I am Muslim or I am Iranian or I am this and that. (Babak)

In response to a direct question about whether he had ever experienced any behaviours or practices that he might describe as discriminatory Fahrdad conveys a similar message, albeit more powerfully:

I never personally experience anything [...] discriminatory. But when it comes to jobs and my CV goes out I feel that. Because I know the same person, if he was born in say Latvia or in Estonia or in the Ukraine, he would get the job and I
wouldn't because I was born in Iran. That's for sure. Let's face it. It is unfortunate but it is true. And I am willing to talk about it because I'm not scared. (Fahrdad)

It is impossible to fully disentangle the complex, interactive and dynamic processes that converge in individuals' experiences of the labour market in Vancouver. However, I think the narratives woven through interview conversations, and emerging in my interpretations of these conversations, are richly suggestive of some of the broader contexts, processes and experiences recent Iranian immigrants encounter through migration, and the embedded and contextual responses they develop. The experiences and performances of many recent economic migrants raise a number of urgent policy and human questions. On the political right, labour market performances are often read as evidence for the needs to revise (reduce) immigration targets (Stoffman, 2002), but these experiences also compel us to consider the personal, psychological and social costs of modest performances and transnational strategies for immigrant families, and Canada's obligations to these individuals, many of whom were recruited on the basis of their human capital which now goes underutilised.

'Culture Shock'? Migration and Adaptation

Migration is, for most individuals, a life transforming experience. Although highly abstract Homi Bhabha's (1994) identification of migration, border crossings and movement in celebrations of hybridity, inbetween-ness and the critical perspectives of Third Space attests to the radical potential of the experiences of migration. More prosaically, Mehrdad while discussing his recent experiences of migration observed:

In Iran we didn't think about the things going on here...but here we are challenging these experiences. (Mehrdad)

Narratives of 'culture shock' and 'cultural adaptation' figured prominently in discussions of the experiences of migration, revealing not only multiple conceptualisations of culture, but also the fragmentation and diversity straight-jacketed through externally imposed – although often internalised – ethnic and racial signifiers. Many individuals reflected on the difficulties of migration both in terms of 'uprooting', moving away from friends and family, employment and familiar ways of life and establishing
new social networks, careers, while forming new identities and lives in new social milieus in which they are popularly imagined as Others to the dominant constructions of Whiteness as the cultural norm in Canada. Ali summed up his experiences of migration and relocation as follows:

But [...] I mean it’s, it’s the most – it’s the hardest thing that I have ever done in my life. (Ali)

Hassan fled Iran undocumented after becoming involved in political activism. In the extended excerpt below he communicates how he severed all contact with family and friends in the knowledge that he would be unable to return to Iran while the present government remained in power. He succinctly articulates the wrenching associated with his forced uprooting, and the continuing temptations to return to Iran, but he also recognises that Iran is no longer ‘home’. His forced migration and the strategies he employed to re-establish his life in Canada have indelibly marked his identity. In his words his ‘essence’ is made of being outside of Iran:

Well absolutely. I have often thought about this. Like for the first few years I [...] forced myself not to because I knew that if I get homesick I can’t move on, and you know it would get in the way of my success or whatever [...] that fate has planned for me. So, for the first year I wrote letters and then I stopped everything, no letters anymore and I haven’t written letters home for 20 years – or called actually. So [...] I trained myself not to think, think of all of the bridges behind me – broken and no way back. And, that got me going up to now [...] you know, I concentrated and focused on life here [...] without the possibility of ever going back. That got me going. But now [...] you see films from Iran, you see videos and people come, they talk and [...] every breeze that comes from there invites you back [...] not because – it basically invites me back to my childhood, to [...] growing up, to all the good memories. But then what stops me are bad memories, not bad memories but memories that I have never got to have there, and that’s exactly from when I left until now. But not only the fact that I go there and I may not ever come back or [...] maybe they kill me or what have you. But the point is [...] after 20 years it’s not home anymore. (Hassan)

Alternatively, Neenah narrated the difficulties of the initial period of relocation in Vancouver, but also proposes that the cultural capital that she and her husband had accumulated, through education, language competencies and previous experiences of migration, differentiated their experiences of settlement and integration from other Iranians. Ideas of cosmopolitanism appear to pervade her account:
Yes [...] for a while it was awful – just like emigrating anywhere else. You had to start like a kid. We could speak the language, which was a big bonus, and we could work. We had a little bit of money. All of these were components, which helped us, but I know there are a lot of people who come without any of these and they go through a disastrous period of life. You know, they don’t know anybody, they don’t know the language [...] they have difficulties in communicating with different organisations. But fortunately we had all of these, which was a big plus. (Neenah)

Others spoke specifically about initial difficulties in establishing social networks in Vancouver. Nina, for example, discusses how she and her sister were initially excluded and made to feel like ‘outsiders’:

I was trying to fit in with maybe like my peer group here. It was kind of hard. Like they ignored me and my sister. Like we were outsiders, wherever we went. No matter how we spoke. Sometimes they made fun of our accents, or [...] I don’t know, trying to fit in was I think the hardest. (Nina)

Later in the same narrative Nina described how she was ‘Othered’ and excluded by Persians in North Vancouver, who appeared to accentuate the cultural and social distance between themselves and herself, a recent immigrant:

Even people, Persians who grew up here, they’re worse I find. They are more discriminative than Canadians. They – I don’t know – they are, they don’t like their own origins, I think they’re embarrassed of it and so if they see somebody [...] that’s what I think. That’s my theory, when they see somebody who is fresh off the boat, maybe I should call it, they kind of, they try to escape from that and they try to attach to Canadian population to ‘Canadianise’ themselves. So that was the saddest part, the most painful – that we were ignored all the time. But now, it’s getting better. Much better. (Nina)

The experiences of migration and relocation are formative of identities and subjectivities. There seemed to be a considerable degree of divergence in the ways in which participants positioned themselves in relation to other migrants from Iran. The considerable concentrations of migrants from Iran in the municipalities of North and West Vancouver have sustained the establishment of extensive social networks, and ‘cultural’ infrastructure of ‘ethnic’ businesses and cultural societies reminiscent of the erstwhile ethnic enclave. Reproducing supportive social networks ‘home from home’, maintaining cultural practices and in part circumventing constraints of limited competencies in English, the social networks and the infrastructure were integral in some of my participants’ narratives of their
settlement in Vancouver. ‘Astronaut’ wives appeared to be more heavily dependent on the support networks provided by the ‘cultural’ infrastructure and social relationships on the North Shore, perhaps reflecting the partiality of their ‘uprooting’ through relocation characterised by frequent and sustained contact with Iran and their adaptation to the reterritorialisation of familial relations. Lona positions Persian social networks and the ‘cultural infrastructure’ centrally in describing her comfort in North Vancouver:

But in Vancouver we have a big Iranian community. That’s why we don’t feel homesick; sometime I feel I am in Iran. Because we have got satellite, which we have 12 channels – Iranian programmes, and we have Persian restaurants, Persian food stores, everything we want we can get in Vancouver. (Lona)

Alternatively, Nina described how her mother became embedded in Persian social networks after migrating to Canada, a situation that inhibited the development of English language skills:

My mum and dad are struggling with English – because they take the relationships with Persians mainly. And then my mum – my mum has recently gone to Australia but when she was here in North Van they’re all Persian. You go to the bank, they’re Persians, you go to the grocery, they’re Persians, so […] she unfortunately didn’t have much chance to practice her English. And my dad hasn’t been here. Like he goes back and forth. (Nina)

The dialogue below between Naheed and her daughter Parveneh reinforces the extensiveness of social networks and ‘cultural infrastructure’ on Vancouver’s North Shore:

Naheed: I don’t need to learn English! [Laughs] Because I speak with my family, with my children, with my sisters, with a lot of friends, with my doctor and a lot of shops – all of the time I speak...

Parveneh: Even the car company, the insurance.

Naheed: Before I came here I knew a lot of English; my English was better than now [Laughs]. Because I don’t have any jobs in this city and […] I don’t speak to Canadian people and I forget a lot.

Mahmound’s depiction of his experiences in high school in North Vancouver conveys the extent to which Persian social networks and cultural practices are maintained even more powerfully. Mahmound was born in Vancouver shortly after his parents relocated to Delta, a Vancouver suburb, in 1979 and later moved to North Vancouver:

Especially when I went to High School in North Vancouver my, I think my Farsi got better ‘cos I went – it definitely better a lot, ‘cos the school I went was called Carson
Graham and there’s a lot of Persians there and I remember when I was in Grade 10 there most of the kids knew how to say some words in Farsi – not the Iranians but just everyone. It seemed like almost everyone knew how to swear in Farsi and [...] people would celebrate the Persian New Year there. So, I mean there are so many Persians in North Van you walk down some stretch like Lonsdale and, you know, for sections every shop is Persian. (Mahmound)

Although some individuals clearly find such social networks supportive and comforting, alleviating some of the anxieties and stresses of migration and relocation, the extent of such networks, and some individual’s dependence on them, raises some important questions. Perhaps most critical are the implications of such networks for inhibiting or stalling language acquisition, reducing interaction with other Canadians, and limiting economic opportunities.

A number of participants explicitly distanced themselves from these ‘Persian’ social networks, to some degree revealing the fragmentation of what is popularly imagined as a ‘community’. Hassan, for example, speaks of ‘Iranian-phobia’, and the purposeful avoidance by Iranians of places where they know other Iranians will be:

For example, I go to a restaurant and I see an Iranian person I say, ‘Hello.’ Always in Iranian – ‘How are you doing?’ I mean that’s in me, that’s part of my programme [...] but, ok we – or the other way around – we don’t go there. Some people, they have Iranian-phobia, Iranians who have Iranian-phobia – let’s not go there it’s full of Iranians. (Hassan)

Pari constructing herself as more ‘Western’ distances herself both socially and culturally from other Persians:

...but I don’t particularly socialise with Iranians – I am married to a Canadian and I tend to be culturally, because I left at the age of 16, more [...] Western in my, you know, attitudes and [...] so I am not, you know, particularly socialising on a regular basis. (Pari)

Similarly Reza is critical of the behaviour of many of his ‘compatriots’ in Vancouver, arguing that they fail to adapt their behaviour and cultural practices to their new social milieu:

They need education – they have to be [...] these adaptation classes that they run in the Family Services of North Shore is for that. They tell them how to act here. Because a lot of people they still are doing the same thing that they were doing home in that time. But now the time is changed and the place is changed – two big factors have changed, you have to change yourself, but you have to tell. (Reza)
Ali, is perhaps even stronger in asserting his position in relation to other ‘Persians’ youths in North and West Vancouver – this distancing may reflect changes in his outlook and attitudes after he had been involved in some ‘trouble’ associated with street racing in North Vancouver, as well as completing high school and moving to a North Vancouver community college where he has become heavily involved in the Muslim Students’ Association:

Like to be honest with you I would rather, I would rather not live in the North Shore – not in Vancouver, but especially the North Shore. Since [...] Persian society is [...] I mean there is no doubt that our culture is so rich and, you know [...] everything [...] we have the background of 2000 years of history but [...] the Persian society, especially the youth society, just can’t live with them.

He continues to distance himself from other young Persians in Vancouver, although recognises how inserting herself into such social networks has been important for his mother, Lona:

I have friends who are in this country for 3 years and they can’t speak a single word, a single word in English, you know? But they only talk Persian; they only meet other Persian people. I had a friend who went to Concordia University and came back here in summer and his English was even better than me because there was no Persian guys over there so [...]. You know, it’s not the, it’s not really [...] I don’t really enjoy living in the Persian society, to be honest with you [...] but since my mum, she is – learning English is hard for her. Communication with the other cultures is pretty difficult for her [...] she would rather, you know, not try to [...] you know, kind of fit in the society, try to - you know [...] because it’s all about trying to communicate with the other cultures. (Ali)

Majid, whose perspective was admittedly isolated and relatively extreme, discusses the ‘isolation of cultures’ in response to the ‘culture shock’ of migration, continuing by communicating fears about the balkanisation of ‘ethno-cultural groups’ in the multicultural city. His perspective is clearly prejudiced by his perspectives on ‘Islam’ and Persians, undoubtedly influenced by his positionality as a convert to Christianity forced to flee Iran for fear of persecution:

And the thing that it is, that these kind of ghettos that everyone has made for themselves – for example, Italians, Chinese Chinatown, ‘Indi-town’ and everything, and Persian-town, you know when you go to North Vancouver. These things are going to be danger for future of Canada, because it comes a time that this population, they grow more and more and more and they’re gonna claim this part of the city is mine, it’s ours. So because we are living here, our father was living here, our language is here [...]. So, whether Canada has to [...] integrate all the cultures
into their culture – which is also another question, what is Canadian culture – or this multicultural country going to be a ‘jungle’ future. (Majid)

In her discussion of the social networks in North Vancouver, Chirin positioned herself interestingly. Her narratives reflect, I think, deeper ambivalences in her identity and identification as an Armenian Christian born in Iran. She is identified as Persian by other Persians in North Vancouver, and evidently draws upon, and appreciates, the social networks this identifications provides, but then she forcefully asserts her sense of cultural distance, repeating categorically that she is not Persian. The dialogue reproduced below—between Chirin, her daughter Parvin, and myself – is illuminating of Chirin’s ambivalent disposition:

Chirin: And although I am not a Persian everybody who looks at the first look, says hello to me in Persian. Everybody – I don’t know why.

Parvin: We look like Persians so...

Chirin: Because of the dark hair. Because we look so much. There are people that sometimes I guess that whether they are Persian or they are not. But I haven’t seen any person who has a doubt that I am not a Persian. Everyone that I saw that’s Persian, they said hello in Persian. They recognise that I am from Iran. So it’s very easy for us to communicate with each other.

Dan: But you feel quite strongly that you’re not Persian?

Chirin: Oh yeah. I don’t wish to be.

These diverse and ambivalent positionings in relation to ‘Persian’ social networks on Vancouver’s North Shore provide some situated insights into the multiple, contradictory and fragmented meanings and understandings of signifiers such as Iranian and Persian, constructs that imply homogeneity and coherence.

The family also constitutes an important space for cultural negotiations, particularly in instances when younger generations are educated and socialised in the Canadian context and parents maintain cultural values and expectations that are rooted in their socialisation in Iran. Frequently responses included bounded notions of culture that emphasised differences, often translated into cultural distances, in discussions of the contested
negotiation of cultural terrains. Ali, for example, characterises his mother’s concerns about
his sister’s acquisition of a number of behavioural traits associated with North American
teenagers as symptomatic of her ‘Persian way of thinking’:

Although [...] it’s pretty difficult for my sister to study, you know. The culture [...] my mother she thinks in the typical Persian way of thinking. But I mean I am a Muslim, I mean I practice Islam and I like a lot [...] but I don’t mind my sister not practicing personally. Because, you know, I saw a lot of people in Canadian society who are not religious and they are great people. I mean they are a lot better than Muslim people that I know. But she, she just wants her, her daughter to be a religious person because she thinks, you know, you are not religious you are not a good person. (Ali)

Babak, although talking more generally, expresses a similar perspective:

This is a problem we have right now in here, in Vancouver, with lots of families who have come here and they want to — their children, you know, they can be too young here and they adopt the new culture but the parents cannot and there is a clash of cultures here between the families. Right inside the families. (Babak)

Mahmound, born in Vancouver, articulates his sense of self through his exposure and interaction with ‘different cultures’, and positions his upbringing in juxtaposition to his parents’ background:

So [...] I have a more diverse range of interests in, in food, in music [...] just from having grown up here in Vancouver. Whereas they have been cultured in a certain way and also their food, their music, their friends, their interaction, their language — everything is Persian. For mine — it’s been a lot more diverse since I have grown up since I was a kid and had exposure to different cultures and [...] sampled lots of different things. (Mahmound)

Space precludes a fuller examination of these apparent clashes, or cultural negotiations, within families. The identities and cultural practices of the children of migrants are clearly a source of conflict in some families, although certainly not all families. Without intending to romanticise identities or elide the evident conflicts and psychological traumas of growing up ‘in-between cultures’, I want to suggest that the blending of cultural practices, mobile identifications, and the strategic negotiations of different cultural and social contexts by ‘second-generation migrants’ destabilises the binaries endemic imagined ‘clashes’ of discrete, bounded cultures. Moreover, negotiated cultural practices open up important spaces for
escaping reductive self/Other dualisms that pervade the constructed meanings of culture and difference.

Diverse experiences

This second situated reading has emphasised the diversity and heterogeneity of experiences and identifications produced through migration. The analysis has underscored the diverse, innovative but also costly strategies and practices assumed in negotiating broader family ambitions and economic imperatives, in addition to social and cultural experiences of life within a diaspora, and multiple engagements with Persian social networks in Vancouver. This partial and situated knowledge also contributes to a disruption of reductive framing of essential ethnic and racial categories.

4.6: Reading three: producing identities — migration and narratives of the self

Iranians are diverse no matter where you go — even in Iran they are diverse because Iran is made of different ethnic groups as well — you have Turks, you have Kurds, you have [...] a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds [...] and then, economic positions in the community in Iran, or class differentiation, if you will, makes a difference. In Montreal it was different because, first of all, I was a student and a lot of people were students and we sort of grew up together. But in Vancouver it is different, there are people who have lived here for 40 years, there are people who got here 2 weeks ago. There are people who, they are millionaires. There are people who can’t make dinner — not enough to have dinner. (Hassan)

Conceptualising identity

The identifications of individual Iranians are diverse and complex, challenging what Stuart Hall (1990) has referred to as ‘old, imperialising, and hegemonising’ forms of ‘ethnicity’ or cultural identity constructed on myths of essence and purity, and frequently enshrined in popular constructions of Iranian identity. Here, I emphasise that situated identities communicated in the interview process are ‘unstable points of identification or suture which are made within the discourses of history and culture’ (Hall, 1990, p.225). Some participants evidently drew on a repertoire of narratives and imaginative geographies that positioned
them within an 'imagined community' of Iranians produced through constructions of common historical experiences and cultural codes (Anderson, 1991; Hall, 1990). Other participants actively negotiated these narrations and constructs of cultural identity, subverting and undercutting them.

Diversity and heterogeneity: fragmenting stable constructs of identity

In the interview process a number of participants positioned themselves through narratives of roots, appealing to different constructions of a produced and imagined community. For Nassrin and Abbas, identifications with Iran appear to be highly personalised, their attachments to Iran appear to be heavily mediated by personal memories and social networks of friends and family:

Because we grow there and we have strong roots there. We cannot cut everything. Like other people. Like a tree we have a lot of roots in that country [...] and relationships with our family. (Nassrin)

And [...] this is my country, you know, I like Iran, I don't hate the Iran, hate Iran – I like it, I have lots of friends, I have lots of, you know, memories of there. And I cannot – it is the same thing for, I guess, all the persons – I cannot cut my past from the Iran. (Abbas)

Alternatively, Neenah deploys a narrative of roots that is explicitly an appeal to heritage, locating an imagined cultural history of Iran and Persia that is mediated by her positionalities and experiences of migration. In conversation Neenah identified overtly with the Shah’s regime – repeatedly she depicted the time before Khomeini’s return to Iran as the ‘golden days’, and left Iran immediately after the 1979 revolution. I suggest that her appeal to ‘heritage’ here is an appeal to distinct ‘imaginative geographies and histories’ that are invested with situated cultural meanings:

Nationality. Nationality has always been very important for me and for my children. I would very much like to keep my heritage. Very much. And you know, I am

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16 It is worth noting that in producing and narrating identifications some participants contradicted themselves, committed Freudian slips, and rethought their positionings within various narratives. On one level these contradictions and slips might suggest the uncertainty with which individuals perform identities. Alternatively, it raises questions about the type of knowledge produced through the interview process and the self-representations individuals might be attempting to generate.

working in that organisation the Iranian Canadian Cultural Association. The reason for that is I believe my children have to know where their root is. It is very important. (Neenah)

Narratives of ‘roots’ and cultural attachment are, however, a contested terrain, and Babak explicitly distances himself from what he considers ‘prejudiced’ discussions of ‘roots’. The juxtaposition of Babak and Neenah’s responses also contrasts two divergent perspectives on ‘ethnicity’: Neenah appears to envision cultural identity as positive, assertive, and empowering, whereas Babak suggests that affirmations of cultural identity are exclusive and exclusionary, harbouring the potential for prejudice.

Some Iranians may be different from others. Some Iranians pride themselves on being Iranian, you know, I don’t find myself to be so much […] I was born in Iran. My idea is that most of the things that happen you are born into it. Religion is what you are born into. A country, you are born there. You could have been born, say for example in South England – in Italy you would have been Italian. So I don’t think – not that I wouldn’t call it pride – prejudice. I have no prejudice or anything like that, about religion and ethnicity […] or nationality. (Babak)

Similarly, in the two excerpts below Ali begins to subvert hegemonic narrations of ‘rooted’ cultural identity that are founded on the invented, but also embedded, cultural constructions of nation and ethnicity. In the first he subverts the project of the modern nation-state, challenging the geographical boundedness of the ‘nation’, and suggesting that affinities are produced within social networks:

Well […] you know, it’s just that I […] she [his mother, Lona] misses Iran because she, she got this idea of Iran with the borders and so on but I don’t believe in a world that has border, you know. So […] if I go to France, you know, and feel just as comfortable as I feel in Vancouver in downtown Paris. Or, you know if I go to – I don’t know – Beirut, downtown Beirut in Lebanon, it would be the same way. (Ali)

In this second instance, Ali emphasises the potentially pernicious implications of asserting ethnic absolutisms. His position is, I think, clearly influenced by his religious beliefs, and discourses of the Ummah, the project of imagining a transnational Muslim brotherhood:

I don’t like tags; you know […] people who say you are Persian and […] this is why the world, you know, is in conflict. Yes indeed […] the moment there is a separation, there is a tag named and there is a war. So, I would rather be a citizen of the world… (Ali)
The coupling of routes of migration with rooted narratives of identity and culture is manifest in many responses. In contrast to the 'legible people' produced by government statistics or media constructions, self-descriptions by individual Iranians illuminated the contradictory and complex processes of identification. Relatively few participants specified themselves as simply Iranian. A number explicitly stated that they were Persian, an assertion that might place, intended or not, distance between their sense of self and the political situation in contemporary Iran, and socially produced meanings of Iran and Iranian in the media and in popular culture. Persian might alternatively signify pride of imaginative geographies and histories of the 'Persian empire'. Others, however, professed 'hyphenated identities'.

A number of my participants articulated complex identifications that suggested a cultural negotiation and blending of 'roots' and 'routes'. These individuals positioned themselves as 'in-between', conveying a sense of hybridity. For example, Neenah produced a sense of self that simultaneously suggested a fragmented and coherent identity. In this complex articulation she situates herself as Canadian, Iranian and both at once:

...I am involved in a university women's club and involved in the West Vancouver Foundation, I am working with them and I am very happy to practice my Canadian part – being involved in the community. But then again I am practicing my Iranian part as well. They are two different, but then again they are the same. You know what I mean, there are some points where they come together. I can easily start speaking Farsi and then start speaking English – keep both of them. They are both very dear to me, very dear. (Neenah)

In contrast Nina's response, while suggesting a sense of 'in-betweenness' involved a negation of 'being' either Canadian or Persian. Although it is impossible to definitively unpack the conscious and subconscious logics that may or may not underpin these narratives, I think Nina's statement raises some fundamental questions about her sense of belonging.

My identity. I am definitely a Baha'i – for sure. And [...] I am not quite Persian any more. I would say I am bi-cultural. Maybe I am getting towards Canadian culture as well. I am not so Persian I am not so Canadian. (Nina)
The responses below illuminate some of Nina’s ongoing cultural deliberations, suggesting shifting and blending cultural practices that position her messily in relation to the homogenising tendencies of such categories as ‘Iranian’, ‘Persian’ and ‘Canadian’:

Movies, like Persian movies – they don’t have any good quality in that. That when you want to compare to Canadian, or maybe that’s because I know like, non-Persian – I have watched a lot of non-Persian movies – that I don’t enjoy that any more. Music – I love to watch the video music, but I don’t listen to them in my car. Like I prefer to listen to Canadian ones, or non-Persian ones... (Nina)

Ali also conveys a sense of inbetweenness as his identification appears to emerge through a shuttling between Canada and Iran, and is implicitly instructed by exclusive assertions of ‘national’ belonging from which he is excluded through transformative experiences of migration:

I went back to Iran 2 years ago and after 2 years when I was in Canada and [...] you know, you feel that you are not part of that kind of Iranian community in Iran any more, you know? They look at you as a kind of a Western type of fellow so [...] they don’t, they don’t really accept us and [...] Canadian guys really don’t like us that much so [...] we, our kind of, you know, generation, our kind of community here, you know, we have the Western culture, we speak the Persian language, we have these kind of mixed culture, you know, Persian culture, Western culture. So it’s [...] it’s a bit of a conflict (Ali)

Hassan, articulating a complex and deeply ambivalent sense of his positionality, states that his identity is produced from being ‘outside’. Hassan’s sense of self and his career are all constituted through his experiences of enforced displacement through exile, to the extent that he would no longer have an ‘identity’ or meaning if he were to be repatriated:

For the past 20 years we have earned an identity [...] or we have developed an identity, look at what I do here – I sit here and talk to you about the Iranian community, I publish a newspaper, I do a radio show, produce 2 TV programmes, all geared toward the Iranian community [...] unite, be nice to each other, take care of each other [...] stand up for your rights, and do this. Now take me and put me in [...] Iran. What I am doing for 40/50,000 people, or 2 million people who are out of the country – my whole identity is made of being outside. Now if you take me and put me back inside, then what do I do? I have no identity there – I have lost my identity as a human being, as a social creature in Iran. (Hassan)

A number of participants also spoke of strategic negotiations of the excerpts below are suggestive of the ‘unstable points of identification or suture’ (Hall, 1990, p.225), which are highly contingent and uncertainly performed:
It depends where I am. And that come back to the question of identity – I’ll always be an Iranian, so no matter where I go [...] I hold a Canadian passport [...] in Germany visiting friends and family [...] or in Jamaica for vacation – they ask you where you are from – well I say I am from Canada but I’m Iranian. And here I’m an Iranian – basically it depends on what category [...] or what situation you ask me that question. (Hassan)

So too, Farideh’s mobile identification unfolds according to context:

She [Haideh, her mother] is definitely Iranian [...] It depends where I am. Here if someone asks me in the street where I am from I will say Aussie, and then they’ll say but where are you from and I’ll say Ok Persian first. My nationality is Australian [...] but I am Persian. (Farideh)

These complex identifications resist and destabilise popular imaginings of Iranian identities.

Religion and Identity:

Through a critical examination of the complex intersection of religious beliefs and practices I hope to challenge a number of remarkably stubborn myths that sustain the apparent automatic coupling of the national and ethnic signifier Iranian with the cultural constructions of ‘Islam’, and more specifically ‘Islamic fundamentalism’. In the process I do not intend to privilege the intersection of religion with my participants’ identifications. Nasrin’s narrative framing of her identity, for example, is suggestive of the significance of gender in situated self-depictions:

I we said for me – I am Iranian. I am Muslim and I am a woman. And this is a special feeling – you know? Especially in our country, or in our culture, our religion [...] the women are different – there are big differences for women and for men. So [...] my feeling is very strong to feel I am woman – you know? Because, all that is in my life, all of my life I lived in that condition. Every time, every second, every [...] when we go, when I work everything says to us you are a woman; you are different than the men. And in the work, in the study, in the street, in the family also, in the relationship with the husband, with the others [...] everything says to us you are a woman and you are different than the men. (Nasrin)

Nasrin’s statement is positioned here to hint at the intersection of the multiple sources of identity.
Many of my participants who were Muslims played down the significance of religion in their sense of self. The absence of a purpose-built Persian mosque, and the lack of knowledge among many participants of places of worship are indicative, perhaps, of the relative importance of religion in the everyday practices of many Iranians in Vancouver.

Not the people who got out of Iran because they were more liberal, liberal so far as these things were concerned. They were educated, they were middle class and they - they accept religions. (Babak)

As Babak suggests religious liberalism may be reflective of the immigrant cohort, as well as the contexts and experiences of migration from a country governed by an ‘Islamic theocracy’ to the nominal – and imagined – secularity of the Canadian polity. A number of participants acknowledged that they were born Muslim, but distanced themselves from religious practices and beliefs. For example, Babak states that he was born Muslim, but professes to be agnostic:

I am not a religious person. I don’t practice. I was born Muslim but for my own reasons I don’t practice any religion, even though I respect people who practice any religion. (Babak)

Similarly, when asked directly about religion Hassan states:

Well by birth, yes but I am one of those non-religious people – I don’t believe in any organised religion. I don’t believe in disorganised religion either. So no I am not a Muslim.

Mehrdad communicated the sense that being socialised through Muslim traditions has influenced his cultural identity, although religious faith or practices appear to figure no deeper in his identification:

Naturally I am Iranian too […] and Muslim as a tradition. In our religion, as people of other religions […] they are in their religion by their parents, not by choice. I am Muslim. (Mehrdad)

Ramin distances himself more strongly from his religious background, stating that only in documented forms of identity was he Muslim:

Actually my dad and my younger brother don’t do the bad stuff, don’t do the good stuff. I don’t do the good stuff and I do the bad stuff [laughs]. So [...] I am the worst in the family. Just on the papers – Muslim on the papers. (Ramin)
Other participants emphasised the ‘privacy’ of their faith, remarks suggesting a partitioning of their public and private selves, and that religious practices or beliefs were insignificant in everyday encounters. Neenah positions religion as personal, and in appears to make a conscious effort to distance herself from the confluence of politics and religion in contemporary Iran and the religious practices of some Iranians:

For me and my family religion is something within. (Neenah)

And later she asserts:

Religion has got its place in everyone’s life but it is not the whole thing. At least we didn’t believe that. (Neenah)

Fahrdad’s narrative performs a similar distancing:

As I said, religion is something that belongs to you and I think it should be something private. And...the main thing is that you have to be a good person. The fact that they go and shoot in the name of God, or hang people or chop somebody’s arms off or hands off, or [...] in the name of God. I don’t believe in it. I just don’t believe in it. (Fahrdad)

Alternatively, Abbas communicates a stable identification with historically constituted and socially constructed categories such as ‘Iranian’ and ‘Persian’, even through the experiences of migration, yet presents his viewpoint vis-à-vis religion more fluidly, suggesting the possibility of shifting religious identifications that perhaps speak either to the character of his religious belief or the depth of his commitment to being a Muslim:

You know, religion is, you know, a personal thing. I can be Muslim right now, I can change it tomorrow – I can be Jewish tomorrow, I can be no religion tomorrow. But I am an Iranian, even I move to another country, even I do good things or bad things, I cannot change it. Right? This is my original, you know, background. And I feel that strongly – I am Iranian, I am Persian. Anytime, I cannot say I am Muslim. I am Muslim but this is my personal, you know, behaviour, my personal, mine. (Abbas)

Ali was one of the few participants who claimed the significance of religious practice in his sense of self. His response below attests to his subscription to a transcendent, transnational Muslim identity – presumably nurtured in part through his involvement with the umbrella organisation, the Muslim Student Association – in the production of a counter-narrative that is positioned in distinction to ethnic absolutisms and national prejudices.
I would rather say Muslim. It would, kind of [...] if I say that I am a Muslim I would kind of be a citizen of 52 different countries – so [...] you get closer to the idea of the citizen of the world. Yeah, I would rather say I am a Muslim rather than I say I am Persian. Because if I say I am a Persian, you know, it sounds kind of racist [...] in this society. Arab guys are kind of aggressive when you say you are a Persian; they say well we are Arabs, you know. (Ali)

These excerpts are both suggest of the diverse and heterogeneous positionalities and engagements with religious beliefs and practices among those ‘documented’ as Muslim and Iranian, as well as the pervasive tendencies among many of my participants to play down the role of religious faith and practices in their identifications.

Some participants who practiced different religious faiths commented on religious practices among those Iranians in Vancouver that they identified as Muslim. Payam, a Christian pastor, commenting on the practices of various interpretations of ‘Islam’ among Persians in North Vancouver stated:

You see, so this is kind of become cultural religion. It is not the real – like people are not religious. No. You can see, if you look at their life, they are not religious. (Payam)

In a similar vein, Nina asserts:

I don't see any of them practicing religion. Like Baha'is we fast, but I haven't seen them, I haven't seen my Muslim friends do *Ramadan* for example. And I don't see them saying their obligatory prayers. And I don't see them covering their hair, because they have to cover their hair. And I see them having boyfriends, drinking and I haven't seen any [...] Well I have seen a few people who have come from other countries, maybe, and Muslims from there and some persons who recently come from Iran, they are very religious first, but then if you see them after two years they are not the same. They've changed. (Nina)

Perhaps anticipating such criticisms Parveneh contends that religious practices do not equate to faith:

Yeah some of them will still like pray 5 times in a day, but it's just [...] it really – that's sort of [...] I don't believe if I don't pray I am not a Muslim so [...] I do like other stuff and I believe in god so [...] I am not saying that I am not a Muslim. (Parveneh)
However, in an interesting counterpoint Hassan argues that for some Persians in Vancouver religion continues to play a significant role in everyday life:

For example, there are days in the year that [...] you can’t [...] celebrate things and you can’t have happy moods, because they are days of mourning, right? When I was living in Montreal nobody knew when those days were — it was of no concern. But now [...] we can’t have a concert on those nights, so concert promoters look at the calendar — because it changes, it’s a lunar calendar as opposed to solar calendar, so it falls on different days of the year — so they have to always check to see when those days of mourning are, so they don’t have concerts on them. It affects me [...] although I don’t believe in any of that stuff, I have to be careful that I don’t have my music show [...] coincide with that particular nights of mourning because it affects people and [...] they consider it disrespectful. So, in that regard the religion still plays a role here even in Canada. (Hassan)

Once again these excerpts attest to the differences in religious practices and faiths, and the complex ways in which religion intersects with the ways in which individuals perceive themselves, and others.

The Baha’is I interviewed positioned their religious faith and practices more centrally. Pari, communicates a cosmopolitan sense of self, through an identification that reflects the notions of unity, diversity, and the oneness of humanity, central teachings of the Baha’i faith:

I would definitely describe myself as a world citizen. I do not see myself as Iranian or Canadian [...] or America — or Lebanese. I, even though I can be as Canadian as anybody when I’m in Canada; as American as any American in the US [...] I love Lebanon and its people, I could have lived there all of my life [...] and I was content to live in Iran — I went back [...] So I would say that I have no particular attachment to any particular nation or country [...] But I have learned, and honestly through the faith and through my life experience that it is possible to make any place home [...] and to make any country comfortable to live in. (Pari)

She concludes this response recapitulating the prominence of her faith:

But [...] yeah, I would definitely describe myself as a world citizen - I would say that’s the outcome of the faith more than anything else. (Pari)

In a remarkably similar response Mahmound also claims to be a world citizen, in an identification that is tightly bound up with his religious faith:

M: Well just as a Baha’i. I mean I just, just see myself [...] as a member of the Baha’i community, which is like [...] you know, possibly the most diverse group of people in the world. (Mahmound)
After some contemplation Mahmound concludes:

Even, even within the Baha’i community I see myself as kind of like a World Citizen. Outside of the Baha’i community, I guess, being a Baha’i – I still see myself as a world citizen culturally [...] so yeah if I was to describe myself as anything it would be just as a [...] just as a member of the world. (Mahmound)

The centrality of religious faith and practices in these expositions of identity is likely skewed by the method of recruitment in the interview process – initial contact was made through a cultural organisation affiliated with one of the Baha’is Spiritual Assemblies in West Vancouver. Moreover, the context and experiences of religious persecution and forced migration, alongside the age of the Baha’i faith as an organised religion its and global ambitions, are likely to influence the identifications of those associated with the religion. The contrast with those ‘documented’ or even practicing Muslims is stark, and the existence of this religious minority destabilises any sense of Iranian homogeneity.

A number of my participants also express Christian affiliations. Once again narratives of religious faith and practice were central in identity formation, reflective of both the recruitment strategies employed and distinct life histories. Majid, a pastor, when asked if he identified with other Persians in Vancouver, reveals the prominence of his religious faith in his identification and distances himself from identification with any nation or ethnic signifier:

No. Because I am not a land worshipper, I am Lord worshipper. So [...] my country, of course I don't deny I was born in Iran, I am Iranian – I am not saying that I am Canadian or Norwegian, even though I am a Norwegian citizen, I am not Norwegian. But my country does not have anything that I can be proud of. If my country is a great place why am I not today in Iran? I cannot be proud of something that I don’t have. I should be proud of the things that I have. My country is not a good country; my people are not a good people; so I cannot be proud of anything. (Majid)

Alternatively, Payam asserts the primacy of ‘Christianity’ in his layering of identifications:

Yes. Out of everything Christian is the first thing in my life. Like I am Christian and [...] this is what I want to be, and this is what I am. I mean this is what god make me and changed my life so [...] first of all I am Christian. And of course as you can see my face, I am a dark face even if I said I am Canadian, you know as I said, some people don’t like it when I say that. ‘Oh no,’ I say. So Iranian background, of
course, but Canadian citizen but my real citizen again in the end is heaven not the Canada. So that's how I like to describe myself. (Payam)

However, Hassan and Majid both suggested that some Iranians might possess an ulterior motive for identifying as converts to Christianity. In Iran there is legislation that permits converts from Islam to be sentenced to death, and there are rumours that some individuals have professed to have converted to Christianity in order to qualify for refugee status in Canada. Hassan was keen to qualify this observation. However, the suggestion that such practices had occurred, and were presumably recognised among other migrants from Iran, introduces new dynamics to the meanings of converting to Christianity.

**Fragmented identities**

This third reading is the most direct intervention into the repertoire of narratives through which Iranian identities are popularly imagined, and although my comments are limited primarily to the complex intersection of narratives of ethnicity, culture, religion and national belonging — a focus that downplays other sources of identity, oppression and power — the diversity and heterogeneity of my participants' identifications produced through the interview process was compelling. This third reading explicitly challenges the geographically specific and historically constituted cultural constructs of 'Iranian' and 'Persian', destabilising the epistemological violence performed through the ascription of essential racial and ethnic signifiers.

**4.7: Conclusion**

An initial ambivalence about the politics and ethics of re-presenting the Other forced me to negotiate the conditions in which my knowledge was produced. Influenced heavily by Haraway's (1991) view of 'situated knowledges', I have produced three strategic readings, each of narratives communicated by my participants. These readings are intended to contest the limited repertoire of narratives through which Iranian identities are popularly imagined. The 'thick description' and rich texture of everyday experiences and identifications, enabled through interpretative research, are deployed to produce different kinds of knowledge.
Acknowledging the partiality and situatedness of my re-presentations, my three strategic readings consistently emphasise diversity of experience and the fragmentation of documented identities, providing an illustrative counterpoint to the restrictive and reifying categorisations of statistical databases and the reductive, Orientalist imaginaries that pervade media constructions of reality.
Conclusion

5.1: Reflections on triangulation

Individuals are neither determined by the structures of racialisation, class, gender and bureaucracy, nor are they completely outside of these processes – to paraphrase Jacobs and Fincher (1998) identities are produced through the negotiation of the categories by which we come to be known. In this research I grounded my examination of the complex cultural politics of Iranian identities in an innovative triangulation of research techniques that generated three situated and partial perspectives. I provided critical interpretations of official statistics and the print media, two sites that contribute prominently to a limited repertoire of narratives, images and ideas through which Iranian identities are popularly imagined. I then contrasted these constructions of Iranian identities with the insights produced through my interpretation of semi-structured interviews, which emphasise the complex and diverse affiliations that cross and subvert ethnic boundaries and stereotypes.

Juxtaposing quantitative analyses of official data sets with qualitative interviews and critical discourse analysis, my triangulation contributes to an underdeveloped literature within human geography that has attempted to the debunk the stubborn myth that epistemology equates to methodology (see Lawson, 1995). The use of triangulation is relatively sparse in geography – perhaps a reflection of this imagined connection between epistemology and methodology – although Ley’s (1999) critical realist approach in his challenge to two pervasive myths about an immigrant underclass and immigrant overclass in Canada, and Rocheleau’s (1995) use of multiple methods in feminist political ecology, represent two key contributions. My triangulation attempts a sustained and critical engagement with each research technique, illustrating some of the potentials of triangulation beyond merely contextualising research. Identity, and theoretical constructions of identity are a powerful motif in my research, and combined with an emphasis on the location and partiality of perspectives, I allay the concerns of some commentators who worry that the
complementarity of research techniques is ‘illusory’ rather than real (Winchester, 1999; Baxter and Eyles, 1997). By consistently situating the knowledge constructed through each perspective (Haraway, 1991), I have argued that each reading opens up – and closes down – thought in different ways. Accordingly, the productive tension between these situated perspectives produces multiple truths, as they work together towards nuanced and richly textured understandings of Iranian immigrants in Vancouver. Triangulation also hints at some of the epistemological consequences of an over reliance on a single way of seeing by repeatedly underscoring the partiality of perspectives.

More specifically, this triangulation makes a grounded intervention in a contested cultural politics of identity, demonstrating the internal differences elided through the enclosure, stabilisation and homogenisation of identities and experiences by ethnic and ‘racial’ signifiers such as Iranian and Muslim. The research therefore overlaps with a growing – and increasingly politically expedient – literature on the migration and settlement of Muslims in ‘the West’, contributing in particular to knowledge on the politics of identity and, less centrally, on ‘Islamophobia’. In addition, this research diversifies knowledge on the immigrant experience in Vancouver, which has predominantly focussed on immigration from East Asia in recent years, and provides valuable insights into the under-researched experiences of Iranians in diaspora.

5.2: Re-presenting Iranian immigrants in Vancouver

Introducing my analysis of state-sponsored databases with a discussion of the conditions of knowledge production, I argued against the uncritical internalisation of categories that enclose identities, manufacture ‘virtual categorical communities’ unmoored from complex social realities, and performatively reproduce ‘race thinking’ (Hannah, 2001; Natter and Jones III, 1997; Butler, 1990; Gilroy, 2000; Zuberi, 2001). Conceptualising the Censuses of Canada and the Longitudinal Immigrant Database (LIDS) as ‘organs of observation’ (Hannah, 1997) and instruments of governmentality¹, I emphasise the embeddedness of

¹ Following Ley (2003) I emphasise that governmentality is ‘partial and problematic’, and against strong analyses that imply the omniscience and omnipotence of the state.
statistical databases in networks and practices of state power. Sensitive to the potential for statistical representations to produce the effect of stable, fixed and bounded identities, my interpretations start to uncover some of the diversity contained within the category Iranian. In particular, differentiation through information available on immigrant class, religion, gender, education and language abilities produced a number of compelling distinctions in statistical representations that began to capture some of the diverse religious affiliations and contexts of migration. In addition, marshalling data from the LIDS database I was able to sustain a partial critique of the scripting of some migrations as 'economic', a manoeuvre that fails to situate immigration as a family strategy that negotiates multiple regimes of governmentality (Ong, 1999; Ley, 2000; 2003). Official statistics also permitted a broader contextualisation of my research. Cartographic (Figure 2.2) and statistical representations revealed, for example, concentrated geographies of settlement in North and West Vancouver, and the manifest social networks and cultural infrastructure on Vancouver's North Shore suggests that these representations overlap to a certain degree with the everyday experiences of some Iranians in Vancouver.

The media hold a central place in the production of images of cultural difference, and statements about the legitimacy of diversity in a multicultural society (Fleras, 1994; Dunn and Mahtani, 2001). However, in spite of limited advances in recent years, my content analyses of representations of 'Islam' and Iranians communicate the extent of negative coverage in the Canadian print media, a reality that contributes to 'Islamophobia' and other prejudicial practices (see Dunn, 2001). Moreover, critical discourse analyses were employed to dissect dominant narratives within the intertextual media representations of 'Islam', Iran and Iranians, suggesting alternative avenues of interpretation and understanding by opening up spaces for counter discourses (Said, 1981; Henry and Tator, 2002; Karim, 2003). In these critical analyses of official statistics and the media, two privileged sites of hegemonic representation, I construct two partial perspectives through which Iranian identities can be made visible, outlining some of the structures – racialisation, Orientalism, class, gender, bureaucracy, and so forth – that frame the production, performance and negotiation of identities. However, I think the analysis also brings out the contingency of dominant constructions (Hall, 1979) by teasing out contradictions and ambivalences in representations, providing the possibility of admitting some of the heterogeneity routinely enclosed or elided.
Retaining a critical engagement, I reflected on my positionality in the interpretations of interviews with 28 Iranians in Vancouver. The diversity of strategies and experiences of migration – gestured to by the internal differentiation of Iranians by immigrant class in official databases – proliferates in my participants’ highly textured responses. A number of participants appeared to be involved in transnational practices, including ‘astronaut strategies’, that were variously motivated by political and economic instability in Iran, fears about the quality and ‘portability’ of an Iranian education, the desire to obtain Canadian citizenship, and modest economic performances in Vancouver. These strategies are remarkably reminiscent of the transnational practices associated with some recent immigrants to Vancouver from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Waters, 2002; Ley, 1995; 1999), and the convergence challenges us to consider whether these practices and ‘social morphologies’ are, in part, a product of the Canadian state’s immigration regime in an increasingly transnational age. In more general terms, my participants’ dense accounts of their lived experiences highlighted multiple axes of diversity, providing greater context and substance to differences that were either ‘invisible’ or opaque when approached through other methodological lenses. In particular, focussed questions on identity generated many insights into the fragmentation and intersection of identities among Iranians, many of which problematised ethnic boundaries and stereotypes. Even when restricting my analysis to negotiations of national, ethnic and religious affiliations, thereby downplaying other sources of identity, oppression and power, my participants’ narratives indicated compelling diversity and heterogeneity, as internal differences in religious affiliation, social networks and positioning in relation to ethnic signifiers came to the fore. The extent and depth of these internal differences fundamentally challenges the geographically specific and historically constituted cultural constructs of Iranian and Persian.

The contrast of situated and partial perspectives via triangulation consistently disrupts the enclosure and reification of Iranian identities performed through statistical representations and the reductive framing of identities and experiences in the print media. The productive tension generated through the juxtaposition of all three perspectives provides insights into the contested cultural politics of identities, and produces more nuanced understandings and interpretations of the everyday experiences of Iranians in Vancouver. A further development of methodological triangulation, not pursued in this thesis, might have
attempted to integrate the situated perspectives more fully in narratives organised around specific themes.

The practical value of this research resides foremost in the contestation of the false precision of official statistical categorisations, and the emphasis on the partiality of media representations of reality. Deconstructing categories such as ‘Iranian’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islam’, and underscoring the manifest diversity and heterogeneity within these categories, gestures at the partial ways in which categories overlap with lived experiences and identifications. An explicit focus on the official statistics and media enables critical readings of two of the most prominent sites through which knowledge about Iranians is produced and disseminated. Methodological triangulation permits the broader integration of situated perspectives working towards a more complex understanding of Iranian identities, challenging the ways in which Iranians are popularly imagined by the general public. Moreover the centrality of media representations and official statistics as sources of information for policy makers means that by contesting the categories and constructions routinely employed this research assumes direct relevance in working towards more informed decision making.
Bibliography


Scott, J.C. (1998). Seeing Like a State: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed


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Superscript letters indicate that these participants were interviewed together.