

Storytelling, Memory, and Nostalgia:

The identities of Iranian Revolutionary Migrants and First-Generation Persian-Americans

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Preface

I grew up in a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood in Sherman Oaks--a suburban neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. I don't think that I understood concepts like ethnic differences and racial divides until they became points of confusion and self-doubt in my life. I think I recognized that I was different from the majority of those around me once September 11, 2001 hit. Not that I understood what had happened, or how the now-divided country launched mercilessly into a race war, but I noticed that my awareness had heightened. My family was never particularly patriotic. They immigrated to America from Iran in 1979, in the midst of the Iranian Revolution, and express gratitude for the freedom and affordances living in America had given them. But they weren't the "stand up and pledge allegiance" types. When 9/11 happened, though, I remember my mom buying American flags to place on our car windows. I saw many other cars had them too, which I associated with an act of genuine patriotism, but I knew that ours had something to do instead with warding off fear and saving face.

I can still remember a particular moment of realization that happened in my seventh grade history class. We were talking about evolution and the changes in population and race that would happen over time. Our teacher, Mr. Nowotarski, pointed to me mid-lecture and said:

"In about 100 years, the majority of the population will likely be caramel-colored, like Rebecca, because of interracial marriages."

Not only was I made small for being called out, but I also felt horrified by the snickers and sounds of disgust and shock emitted by my classmates. From that day forward, until just

maybe five years ago, I covered myself up head to toe in clothing and hats so as not to get any tanner from the sunlight--I did this in the sweltering Los Angeles summer heat and even during visits to the beach.

The moments of realization I'd experienced were constantly rooted in feelings of embarrassment and alienation. In elementary school, I spent a lot of time at my friends' houses and rarely asked them to come to mine. I recognized that my family and home life were different. We lived in a lower-class neighborhood than my friends, we hung Persian rugs from our walls, my mom made thick, green stews with kidney beans and dried lemons for dinner at least once a week. I felt embarrassed to share my middle name--Tannaz--with my classmates, who boasted middle names like Michelle, Beth, and Lauren. While with my friends at a school carnival in fifth grade, I pretended not to recognize my cousin for fear of introducing her to them—"This is my cousin, Vajeh." I would eventually introduce her to my friends, but meekly and with hurried admission. She had continually been made fun of for her name, and I suppose I then carried the residual shame along with me.

The spaces I engaged with in my personal and social life elicited fear, embarrassment, and insecurity. However, within the confines of my home and my maternal grandparents' home, where I spent much of my childhood, I craved hearing stories of my mom and uncles' childhoods in Iran. One story I particularly loved hearing--one that conveyed the simplicity and family-oriented nature that I associated with living in Iran pre-Revolution--is of my uncle helping to build my mom a dollhouse for her favorite doll, Malooseh. When we weren't listening to stories or stuffing our faces with traditional Persian stews and rice, we'd connect over the cultural markers we'd grown up with. My cousins, brother and I would laugh as we

childishly mocked the Persian music our grandma played on the radio and the Persian dramas she watched, glued to the television screen. I loved the comfort in hearing my family speak Farsi. I grew fond of the traditional rituals and customs we took part in and the lavish meals my family would prepare together before sitting down to eat and reminisce about life in Iran. I grew jealous of my family despite feeling ashamed of them in other settings--I wanted to have those experiences, and I grew nostalgic for a place and time I had never lived.

After many years of shame and embarrassment, something clicked, and the nostalgia I felt for my families' lives in Iran--as well as my newfound appreciation for Iranian culture—made the Persian-American label an essential component to my identity. As I grew older and our lives became busier, I fought for my extended family to continue to gather together for dinner each week. I grew hungry to hear more memories from their childhoods and for the comfort that enveloped me through our food, music, customs, and culture. However, while my newfound solace in claiming my Persian identity allowed me to feel more comfortable as a person of color, the relief was impermanent. I still recognized that we, my family and I, were inherently different from those whose family lineages were rooted in America, or even in some other allied country. In being cognizant of my rose-colored and rosewater-scented outlooks on Iranian life, I become terrified when hearing my mom remember bombs and tanks as a part of her every day childhood within the uprising, her family then forced to leave because of the violence and tumult of the Revolution. She and her family are blacklisted from returning back to their homeland because of their Jewish identity and because they had fled. I felt afraid--afraid that I wouldn't ever get to visit a place I had grown fascinated by, a place I likened to home.

The tension I felt between my home life and external life taught me that labels are markers of both inclusivity and alienation. Being drawn between so many different identities, societal pressures and at times, geographical locations, I began to lose a sense of home. I've grown interested in looking at how senses of home and identity are constructed and reclaimed for individuals who have been physically displaced. I want to understand how those notions and emotions are passed on to their children, who are, like me, the first individuals to have been born in the country of relocation, but who still fail to fit that place's societal understandings of what's "American" or "normal."

As a first-generation Jewish Iranian-American I've always found myself straddling cultural, ethnic and religious borders. I've become fascinated by stories of my family's past in Iran, a country that has always been described to me as being near-European in its lavishness, cultural and technological advancement, community-oriented and culturally triumphant aspects. However, I realize that my nostalgia is fully formed through subjective storytelling and that I view my family's pre-revolutionary life through an American, post-generational lens.

Given the circumstances under which she emigrated from Iran, I'm both fascinated and confused when my mom adamantly considers her to be an immigrant, rather than a refugee. With the way refugees are harshly spoken about and treated in today's political climate, I understand the need one may feel to separate him or herself from the public or personal pain associated with being labeled a "refugee." I wonder, however, how assimilation, participation in culture, and familial ties can contribute to one's relationship with his or her cultural heritage, and the identity or label one assumes. Almost all of my family lives in America now, save for my one great aunt still living in Iran. My imagined connection to Iran exists solely through

memories conveyed by family members. Our culture is concrete and the memories I have are ones in which I engage in Persian rituals and holidays, but Iran is no longer the place of my family. The questions I face when grappling with my hybridized identity have left me interested in exploring the ways in which displacement, nostalgia, memory and identity are cultivated, passed down and refracted between generations.

Background and Methods

In 2015, Swedish runner Kristina Palten spent fifty-eight days running from one border to another across the country of Iran. In a translated interview with an Iranian journalism site after the run's completion, Palten claims she chose to run because of "the existing prejudice about the country.... [Before starting the journey, she] had a lot of preconceptions [as the news] suggested that Iran is a horrible country with odd, severe laws" ("Golden Memories"). However, what Palten found to be true during her run was an overwhelming amount of hospitality, selflessness, and giddy curiosity from each of the individuals she encountered. Strangers who drove by her on the road offered her any food they had with them and each night, she was welcomed into a different family's home. In an effort to reduce prejudice and discuss western misconceptions of Middle Eastern countries, Palten took the footage from her trip and created a documentary, *1144 Miles of Trust*, and has taken to speaking at TED Talks.

What Palten's journey and subsequent fame reveals, however, is the reliance the west has upon other white or European individuals to declare what countries, ethnicities, ritualistic practices and foods can be trusted to be safe, socially acceptable and no longer a cause for unease or fear. Palten's act emphasizes Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism," a post-colonial rhetoric that functions to undermine the hierarchical opposition of east and west on which traditional "Oriental" discourse relies. For westerners, "the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said 9). Western political media has long represented Iranians as fear mongers, terrorists with strict rules and technologically primitive individuals with narrow perspectives. Orientalism becomes detrimental when an overwhelming

amount of stories of white, western or European individuals, including Palten and the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, take it upon themselves to posit Iranians as being a kind, thoughtful, selfless, and culturally advanced population. The resulting issue is the west's sole reliance upon other white or western individuals to proclaim (or even "discover") non-western countries as being places of good. Therefore, when white, western European individuals such as Palten make it a personal mission to absolve the Middle East of the fear and terror with which it's associated, it undermines Iranian individuals' abilities (and legitimacy) to create their own narratives. People in the Middle East are left, once again, to find self-truth in their cultures and themselves.

However, Iran is and has always been a cultural hub, where storytelling and generosity are the daily realities that inform citizens' everyday lives more than the sensationalized media coverage in the west portrays. Now, forty years since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, an influx of Iranian migrants have ushered in conversation centering on the intersection of memory, exile, and identity (Mobasher 28). Due to political upheaval, the establishment of a new political and religious power (instating Iran as an Islamic Republic), a rise in threats, and fear from tyrannical laws, Iran saw a surge in emigrants in the years leading up to, during, and after the Revolution. Hundreds of thousands of individuals sought safety in the United States, with Los Angeles, California now having the largest concentration of Iranians outside of Iran.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution induced the eradication of the several-thousand year old Pahlavi monarchy in exchange for a new, conservative Islamic rule headed by Ruhollah Khomeini, known to most as Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini's politics centered on the removal of the king, Reza Shah, his dynasty, and of the Shah's liberal, westernized policies. Between

1977 and 1978, tensions between Revolutionaries and those who continued to support the Shah grew as more protests took place. Khomeini's rise to power was supported by urban migrants, young adults, and those of lower socioeconomic status who felt unheard and disregarded by the Shah. They saw the Shah's rule as old-fashioned and, unlike their parents, felt drawn to religion as "a new source of inspiration with the promise of justice and equality" (Ansari n.p.). The Shah fled for Egypt at the end of 1978, making way for Khomeini to take his place in 1979. Almost immediately, Khomeini imposed conservative policies, ones more restrictive than the policies the protesters revolted against the Shah for. His rule also persecuted individuals of the religious and political beliefs he opposed, changing the Iranian landscape irreparably. The tumult from the Revolution (and the unrest in the years leading up to it) as well as Iran's new regime led to a rise in individuals seeking exile from religious and political persecution. The majority fled left due to religious threats: Jews, Catholics (including Armenians), and secular Iranians. Individuals who politically backed or worked directly with the Pahlavi monarchy also fled in fear of Khomeini's widespread executions, that targeted those who argued against his militaristic, religious dictatorship (Ansari n.p.).

Tasked with having to create a new life in a foreign country, Iranians in Los Angeles banded together in order to lessen the difficulties of migration and engender a sense of belonging. Casey indicates that place exists as a result of culture and history's inscription in space. In this sense, space is a "neutral, pre-given medium" upon which culture, time, bodies, languages, memories, et cetera, can utilize to create place (14). Expanding on his definition of place, Casey notes "gathering" as an integral component to place-making. Gathering brings together bodies, memories, "histories, even languages and thoughts" (*Senses of Place*, 24-26).

Rogheh Feyzi notes that spaces of gathering, while they may appear insignificant, are still integral to daily life (14). In looking at Feyzi's explanation, it makes clear that Casey's notion of gathering can expand to include gathering as a means to inscribe memory, culture, and intergenerational lived experiences onto a space. Within spaces of gathering is the act of "dwelling," which Keith Basso defines as a process that "assigns importance to the ways in which individuals perceive and make sense of geographical space" (54). Dwelling takes into account not only the bodies that inhabit a space, but the ideas, concepts, and abstract thoughts that come to exist through the process of gathering. In the Iranian diaspora, this meant that once migrants of the Revolution relocated largely and began having their own families, nostalgia for their pre-Revolutionary pasts encouraged a place made from intergenerational memory, hybridization, and storytelling. Gathering and dwelling depend on place, for they locate both physical items--families, mementos, and foods--as well as intangible experiences: memory, storytelling, trauma, exile, and perception. Therefore, placemaking and the rituals engaged within a space depend largely on materiality. The Persian culture centers on sensory experiences: the sounds of traditional music, the smell and taste of home cooked basmati rice, the feel of Persian rugs, and the sight of one's family gathering together to experience these senses with one another. The feelings of kinship, closeness, memory, and cultural connection one senses from processes of gathering are mementos from physical engagement with the objects around them.

Nostalgia, exile, community, and culture were the largest motivating factors for migrants establishing a landscape of resettlement. Immigrants were tasked with finding a space that mirrored Iran in climate, community, and the ability to cultivate a new, hybridized home.

Edward Relph describes the authenticity of place as “being inside and belonging to *your* places as both an individual and as a member of a community” (65). Los Angeles started, in many ways, as a blank landscape that allowed Persian migrants to rebuild upon; in bringing their customs, rituals, foods, and families with them, the possibility of creating Iran anew--as they saw fit--allowed for the places they planned to inhabit to exist with renewed authenticity.

I wanted to look into the ways hybridization, kinship, memory and diaspora affect one’s sense of self and cultural identity. In this thesis I chose to explore this central question through several different approaches, because I found it necessary to understand the constructions of shared memory and dual identity. I weaved together personal memoir, ethnography, sociohistorical research, and scholarly texts in order to make sense of Iranian diasporic effects on both personal and global levels. I was drawn to the ways in which texts like Nadia Serematakis’s *Senses Still*, Ann Cvetkovich’s *Depression: A Public Feeling*, and Jackie Orr’s *Panic Diaries* map out narrative, autoethnography and memoir onto theoretical concepts. I also turned to Iranian-American artists, such as Shirin Neshat, Sunny Shokrae, Ana Lily Amirpour, and Rostam Batmanglij for the ways that they layer Iranian-American hybridization, longing, and the reclamation of culture in their art. I utilize Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* as a tool to explicate hybridization, culture, and memory through a theoretical lens. A mix of multicultural, poststructural, feminist, post-colonial, race and gender theory, Anzaldúa places emphasis on the new mestiza as an individual of hybridized culture and thought. While the individuals I spoke with did not explicitly point to gender or feminism as a significant component to identity and memory, Anzaldúa’s concepts lend a significant role in understanding how individuals occupy liminal spaces. Furthermore, Anzaldúa’s text serves as a

point of connection for me, because of the way I understand my Persian identity through my relationships with the women in my life--namely, my mom and grandma. In conducting my ethnography, I spoke with six individuals--three Revolutionary migrants and three first-generation (I define first-generation as the first generation of individuals to have been *born* in America) Persian-Americans. All individuals have been assigned pseudonyms. For migrants, I use the labels "Iranian" and "Persian" interchangeably as, for these individuals, they are both technically correct; however, the migrants themselves deliberately self-label as a means to dispel westerners' fear. For first-gens, I use the labels "Iranian-American" and "Persian-American" interchangeably as well; the first-gens I spoke with self-label as a way to assert their cultural identities in America.

I asked each set of individuals a series of questions that connect identity to notions of nostalgia, intergenerational memory, storytelling, culture, and family. Most of the individuals' answers were narratives that identified how intergenerational memory and kinship were located in geographical space--for migrants, pre-Revolutionary Iran and Los Angeles, and for first-gens, Los Angeles and a vague notion of the Iran their parents have described. All of the individuals pointed to storytelling as the thread between generations and geographic locations. Astri Erll writes that "through the repeated recall of the family's past--usually via oral stories which are told at family get-togethers--those who did not experience past events first hand can also share in the memory. In this way an exchange of 'living memory' takes place between eyewitnesses and descendants" (306). Erll's statement melds "postmemory" with "gathering" and relays the significance many Iranians place on familial relationships and communal spaces; with the loss of home and an inability for first-gens to experience their parents' adolescence in

Iran, storytelling becomes a vehicle for memory to materialize and engender generational connection. Storytelling and memory also allow for more thoughtful hybridization, as parents are more likely to share stories in English while first-gens find further connection to their Iranian heritage. While this paper looks into exile and its accompanying loss for migrants and first-gens, I've deliberately chosen to focus on reclamation. Some of the individuals I spoke with have suffered mental health issues and trauma resulting from exile and assimilation, but the dominant theme in my findings was of reclamation rather than trauma. More broadly, migrants' relocation to America has enabled them to reclaim the parts of their culture and selves oppressed, or stolen, by the Revolution. This paper centers on the reclamation of space, culture, memory, kinship, and identity as tied to pre-Revolutionary Iran. A resounding pride for one's Persian identity, and the reclamation of eastern culture from under the western gaze.

All of the study participants currently live in Los Angeles, where a large Persian-Jewish population currently lives in the San Fernando Valley. Given that Los Angeles has the largest Iranian population outside of Iran, much of the city reflects aspects of the "homeland." The city of Westwood is an affluent neighborhood west of Downtown Los Angeles, a mere 20 minutes away from the Pacific Ocean. Due to the high concentration of Iranian-American inhabitants, Persian restaurants, stores, and services all located on a two-mile stretch of Westwood Boulevard, the neighborhood is also home to Persian Square--officially recognized by the City of Los Angeles as a place of cultural significance. Persian Square is only one stretch of land, but Los Angeles at large has jokingly earned the name Tehrangeles (alluding to Iran's capital, Tehran).

Tehrangeles relies on its citizens to maintain Iranian culture through individuals' actions and interactions. While walking down Westwood Boulevard, one can find Persian restaurants,

ice cream shops, music stores, markets, and services (such as photo development, tax and legal services, and passport and documentation services). These establishments are largely Persian-owned and created for a Persian demographic--and doubly, both the owners and patrons are Revolutionary migrants who fled to America to escape government restriction and persecution. Individuals gather through interactions with materiality. A group of elderly gentlemen sip cardamom tea while playing backgammon on a restaurant patio. A mother takes her child out for *akbar mashti*, a traditional Persian ice cream, which reminds her of her childhood while simultaneously engaging in meaning-making with her child. Iranians created a newfound communal identity Los Angeles as antidote to Iran's restrictive and oppressive regime, for it acted as a cluster of places centered on the narrative of diaspora. Through processes of dwelling--gathering, engaging in traditions and customs, and the sharing of memories--individuals have chosen to create a cultural landscape in order to retain a sense of identity and home through the places they inhabit. Furthermore, Tehrangeles has offered Revolutionary migrants and now, their children and grandchildren, places of gathering that are established locations of authenticity despite no longer being located Iran.

As Revolutionary migrants and their first-generation children come together, the location of resettlement exists as a place where liminalities--boundaries and the compounding of cultures--come together and are then refracted through the perception of each generation. Persian Square exists as a sort of place-within-a-place. It gathers within its own confines, but it also contributes to a broader sort of gathering - the gathering of cultures, ethnicities, cuisines and languages brought together by the Los Angeles landscape. As a first-generation Persian-American, Westwood has always stood out as a place of both embarrassment--when I was

younger and ashamed of my heritage--and now pride, as an individual fascinated by and in awe of Persian culture. Persian Square evokes a sort of collective memory and shared identity. Many who dwell in Persian Square are either Iranian migrants or first or second-generation Americans. We are collectively brought together by the tastes, smells, and sounds encountered at familial or communal gatherings (a gathering within the "gathering," which brings about the particular foods, memories, and rituals of that specific group of individuals). This two mile-stretch encapsulates Persian culture while being rid of the displacement and lack of freedom that initially prompted Iranian migrants to move to Los Angeles--and soon thereafter, gather into what is now, Persian Square.

I spoke with three migrants who left Iran at different ages, but individuals who have nevertheless had to navigate an individualistic culture from a collectivist standpoint. Many of the answers I received were related to the Edward Casey's concept of "shared memory," which notes the significance of family, place-making, copresence and narrative in constructing cultural and communal memory (*Framing Public Memory*, 21). Additionally, the individuals spoke about their experiences of diaspora as one that ties them to their Persian narrative, despite having experienced trauma and displacement. "Positive transnationalism" is a term created by James Clifford that encompasses these types of memories--ones that complicate the process of assimilation by mutating the homeland into a place of nostalgia and loss, affected by the passage of time and geographical displacement.

When speaking with Revolutionary migrants, I focused on several themes, including kinship, nostalgia, storytelling, trauma, and reclamation. In doing so, I explored the ways in which these concepts reaffirm or change their memories, their feelings towards Iran and their

identities, and the ways they engage in meaning making. Nostalgia and memory are active processes and are present when individuals self-narrate and touch on mental and emotional trauma; storytelling, kinship, and connection to their Persian identities are antidotes to the fear-inducing effects of exile. When dissecting such narratives, it is clear that for Iranian Revolutionary migrants, identity, memory, and nostalgia are contingent upon one's connection and contentment with the present time and location.

The first-generation Persian-Americans I interviewed relayed some of the same nostalgia, memories, and cultural connections as their migrant parents had--but instead, their perspectives are refracted through an Americanized lens. As a first-generation Persian-American, I've often found myself confused about my identity and intrinsically pulled to Iran despite never having traveled there. I've also felt nostalgic towards my parents' lives in Iran--memories of a time and place I had never experienced, nor one that existed in my lifetime. I asked first-gens about their Iranian heritage, pride, cultural connection, and kinship influence. I applied Nancy Miller and Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory," a concept that acknowledges the ways in which younger generations inherit stories, memories, and conflict from previous generations (4). My conversation with first-gens revealed how self-labeling and place-making are dependent on hybridization, cultural engagement, and familial intimacy.

I approached the six individuals with my central question: How do storytelling, nostalgia, and memory cultivate or construct identity? In particular, how have they melded and/or distanced your Persian and American identities? Their answers were nuanced and varying; many answers depended on the role of place, others on the ways in which their identities were "othered" by the non-Persian population around them. Ultimately, identity for Iranian

Revolutionary migrants means having to navigate their place of resettlement through the losses endured in exile. Identity for first-generation Persian-Americans is constituted by the cultural tension between their Iranian and American selves. For each of the participants I interviewed, the Persian culture repeatedly played an integral role in their interactions with themselves, their families, and the places they take meaning in. All individuals viewed the label “Persian” as an identity to reclaim. Migrants have reclaimed their identities through placemaking and kinship while first-gens reclaimed Persian culture from western stigma through connection, ritual, and memory.

Memoir 1 - My Mom and I

While cleaning out a narrow closet in our shared apartment at the start of my final semester of undergrad, my mom and I found stacks of old photo albums. I think she also felt both giddy and nostalgic as we sat down to sift through the glossy pictures. I paused over a photo of my 25-year-old mom at her graduation from California State University, Northridge, with my older brother, then six, at her side, and with me, six weeks old, cradled in one arm while she held her diploma with the other. Although she had emigrated from Iran at the age of nine, her dark, curly mane, thick brows and chubby cheeks suggested to me her perpetual connection to our cultural heritage. As I studied the photo, I recognized how our joint story has moved in an elliptical fashion: I was present at her graduation as she would years later be present for my graduation from the same university.

I turned the page and startled as I came across another photo of my mom: Then in her early 40s, she stood in an eggplant-colored gown at my younger cousin's bar mitzvah. Her clavicle and shoulder blades pressed up against her skin, making clear that her weight had dropped drastically to a mere 100 pounds. The bright flash from the photographer's camera made her skin look paler than it already was. I recalled being 15 and staying at a friend's house for several weeks when she was hospitalized, a few months after the bar mitzvah. When I returned home after she had gotten clearance to leave from the hospital, I remember feeling concerned and sad, seeing her wear a heavy black backpack that made mechanical whirring noises every few minutes; the nondescript black bag kept a liquid slush of ingredients fed through an inserted PICC-line that ensured she would receive nutrition throughout the course of the day. My mom took the photo out of its sleeve with what I perceived to be discomfort,

embarrassment, and sadness. As she looked down at the photo she admitted to me, six years later, after several fabricated stories about why her weight had dropped so drastically, that she battled anorexia. She told me that she denied having the disorder even after she had left the hospital, and would tear the IV out from under her skin when the rest of us had gone to bed. I think she felt I was old enough to hear the truth--and to bear witness to an internal struggle with which she had lived for so many years. But to be honest, I still don't know why she chose to tell me then. But as my mom sat by me on our couch, I saw her as someone overwhelmingly vulnerable, someone flawed with whom I could identify, in part because she lacked the language to share her story. Because I wanted to know more about my mom's story--how she became who she now is with her timid disposition, and her mental illness--and to try to tell her story through I words I can materialize, I began to make connections through stories I'd heard about her childhood.

When I was growing up, nothing made me more envious than hearing about my mom's own upbringing. "Your grandpa, *Baba Ebi*, built us a huge three-story house from the ground up, with blue and white tile covering the entire outside. The house was *huge!* The basement was so large that we used it as a roller skating rink and because the kitchen had an island, we would run laps around it."

My mom claims that her temperament as a child was the same as her temperament is today: quiet, kind, good-natured, and interested in finding companions, whether familial, amicable, or romantic. Her mother, whom I call Jeeba, is a force to be reckoned with. Jeeba parented me in many ways, due to her maternal instinct and the fact that she lived only blocks from our apartment in Sherman Oaks. Described by my mom as "bull-headed" and "stubborn,"

Jeeba is a short and stout woman with large, kind, brown eyes and an affinity for costume jewelry. I've always known her to be loving, generous, and morbidly funny, qualities I assume most Persian grandmothers share. First, generosity in the form of food: Cardamom *chai* served at all hours of the day, *lavash* bread and feta cheese that she laid out on the table that she nearly forced the rest of the family to consume. And second, an almost overwhelming love for her children and grandchildren, made clear through hugs, Hershey's kisses, and coins and dollar bills slipped discreetly into our pockets and purses.

Although I perceive Jeeba as the most loving, caring, and thoughtful grandmother, my mom's experiences, as I've observed them, stand in stark contrast. Jeeba has used my mom, for most of my mom's life, as the sole individual over whom she could exert her power. Jeeba has made it a point to corner my mom into taking care of her, running her errands, and driving her to the mall every Saturday. She's even pressured my mom into calling her on a daily basis and, if my mom happens to slip up and forget to call, Jeeba punishes my mom with a fight over the phone, followed by passive aggression and an unyielding grudge.

Despite moving to America in 1979, nearly forty years ago, my mom and her family remain deeply Persian--though they'd hate to admit it. Somehow, astonishingly, my grandma never learned to drive and rarely left the house, and therefore, she understands and speaks very little English. My mom and her brothers have retained their accents, even though they moved to America at such a young age. My mom and I joke that sounding Persian is their way of staying rooted to their heritage.

Every Friday night, since I was a child, my extended family has met at my grandma's house for *Shabbat* dinner, around the long, richly colored wood dinner table. After our meals,

the table was typically cluttered with decaying flowers, half-drunk tea glasses, trays of picked over fruit, and remnants of an El Pollo Loco family pack we consumed alongside traditional Persian stews. For me, those gatherings called for storytelling. I'd often press my mom, her brothers, and my grandma for more tales about their lives in Iran.

"I dedicated a small room in the house to storing snacks," Jeeba would start. "Every morning the kids would line up outside the door and wait patiently until I dropped a bag of Cheetos or chips into their school lunch bags."

The others would chime in.

"The bus that would take us to school was a *Mercedes!*"

"I remember when *Maman* and *Baba* bought me a film camera--to this day, I think about how that camera helped me realize my dreams of being a cinematographer."

Laughs and more stories would follow, and then a sort of lingering nostalgia, filled with sadness. The house we had dinner at nearly every week--my grandma's house--serves as a constant reminder of my family's emigration from Iran. Sometimes, but not very often, they recount the year spent fleeing the country after the Revolution began. When a new Islamic state replaced the Shah, my family, as practicing Jews, felt endangered so they packed what they could into suitcases, and flew to Israel. Soon thereafter they ended up in Los Angeles.

What affected my mom the most, she says, wasn't the Revolution itself--the tanks she remembers rolling down the street, the public threats to members of their faith, and her inability to bring her childhood belongings with her--but instead, the time spent "normalizing" in America.

“I clearly remember going to the mall with my mom and as we walked out of a store, the alarms started beeping and security ran after us, as if we were thieves. They targeted us because they knew we were foreigners and because we had broken English. They made us feel really bad. Those experiences were typical the first years after we came to the U.S.”

Because of my grandparents’ old-fashioned perspectives and my grandma’s stubborn temperament, my mom’s parents expected her and her brothers to follow Persian cultural norms, which made assimilation that much more difficult. From the stories my mom has told me, Jeeba seems to have exerted control over her ever since their move to America in 1979.

“We were only allowed to speak Farsi at home and we could never go to someone else’s house, or even speak with friends over the phone,” my mom once told me meekly. “We only ate Persian food and only listened to Persian music. As young children, we were torn between adhering to these cultural norms or adopting the American culture. Our parents had difficulty accepting that their children wanted to be American, and their restrictions made me want to run away from my culture and where I came from. I feel sad sometimes because the newer generations have more freedom and the choice to pick their identity. Instead, I was forced to assume mine.”

I spent a lot of time during my teenage years looking at photos of my teenage mom, her dark, curly ringlets teased up high around her head, her outfit one that any teen in the eighties would envy--ill-fitting, high-waisted tan shorts, an oversized pastel colored sweatshirt, tube socks scrunched down around her ankles, and a ubiquitous pair of white Reeboks. I’ve found it saddening that my grandparents prodded her--still very much a child at 18 years old--into marrying my dad, a man 12 years her senior. A year and a half later, she gave birth to my

brother and five years later, to me. Thrown into raising her own family, my mom assumed the role of “mother” and very little else for the next 20 years.

My dad--in many ways, a lot like Jeeba-- became the authority figure for my mom. My mom tells me that she loved him, but felt continually put down when he'd make a comment about how emotional she “always was,” or how she wasn't contributing to the family financially, or how she was “never eating enough food.” As the eldest sibling, I think my dad felt responsible in a lot of ways for his brother and sister. He, like my mom, immigrated to America because of the Iranian Revolution, but almost immediately moved to Louisiana to attend university; he's told my brother and I about the difficulties of navigating a new country and education system while speaking very little English. I think that their 12 year age difference, in addition to the tough experiences my dad dealt with when a foreigner in a brand new country, led him to feel that only he knew best for my mom.

One evening when I was around 17 years old--a while after my mom had been released from the hospital--my family made an outing to a local TGI Friday's. My dad ordered some sort of appetizer, mozzarella sticks or onion rings, and he kept suggesting that my mom eat some, even after she'd declined. When the waitress asked for our orders, my mom asked for a “grilled chicken breast and steamed broccoli, without any butter or seasoning.” My dad grew enraged, his eyebrows furrowed in anger and his words in short, sharp syllables.

“What the fuck, Dalia? You're not eating again? You're just going to eat yogurt and berries and claim to be full? You need to eat!”

My mom promptly grabbed my arm and walked the two of us out of the restaurant while my brother remained at the table with my dad. A few minutes later my dad came out. I

can't quite remember what they said to one another, but we ended up back at our table in the raucous restaurant, eating our meals in silence.

After I sifted through old photos that evening in our apartment, I thought about the ways in which the Revolution, a controlling mother, a tumultuous adolescence, and a hurtful marriage have wholly overwhelmed my mom. I have come to see her as an individual in whom a conflicting Iranian and American sense of self induced anxiety, now treated by medication, denial in having had an eating disorder, and recurrent depression. She's shared with me the regret she feels about missing out on the years of growth and exploration one typically associates with person's latter teens and early adulthood. Although she graduated college with a bachelor's degree in psychology and child development, the only time she typically makes use of her degree is when she fills out the "education" portion of a retail store application. Because she had to care for my brother and I, I feel guilty about the fact that my mom has missed out on decades of career opportunity. When she finally had autonomy and personal space near the mid-point of her life--after a tense marriage with my dad induced her to leave him--I witnessed her fall into childlike state of self-doubt and destruction through her tantrums and impulsive purchases. But, when I was 18 years old, the same age she was when she had her first child, our mother-daughter relationship shifted. I grew more comfortable sharing stories about the difficulties of navigating school and burdensome friendships, and my mom vented about being overwhelmed by everyday troubles. In a lot of ways, we grew up alongside one another.

I call her everyday and unlike my mom with Jeeba, I call willingly and without coercion. I check in with to her ask how she's doing, what she's eaten that day, and how things are going with Lyle, my stepdad. I'll tell my mom how I've been listening to Persian music and she'll laugh,

and she'll tell me with frustration about how after she had worked a nine hour day, Jeeba made her go to Rite-Aid to pick up a half-gallon bottle of diet peach Snapple. Sometimes, when the call ends, my mom will text over a photo from my childhood - one in which she's hugging me from behind or one in which she, Jeeba, and I are smiling at the camera. She looks happy and loved in all of the photos, unbothered by whatever else surrounds her.

Migrants of the Revolution

Iranian Revolutionary migrants memorialize experiences and events of the past through storytelling, conversation, and communal events. In engaging with processes of retaining, communicating and understanding collective memory, individuals are able to engage in placemaking and meaning making in their places of resettlement. In researching the roles of various types of public memory within the current time and place, Edward S. Casey concludes that “shared memory” is:

The memory held in common by those who are affiliated either by kinship ties, by geographical proximity in neighborhoods, cities, and other regions, or by engagement in a common project.... We remember by way of being reminded, by recognizing something, and by reminiscing with others. The latter has proven more significant than I had first thought: it is a primary prop of social memory; and it introduces the crucial factor of language into memory, and thus narrative and history. When we also consider that there is a distinctive body memory and place memory and many acts of commemoration, we are already beyond any model of memory as confined to the individual mind and its representations. (*Framing Public Memory* 21)

Shared memory is an integral antidote to the trauma and loss associate with exile. It allows Iranians to replace the personal pain they’ve experienced with nostalgia and communal support. In turn, shared memory translates to a collective identity--one that enables individuals to transform personal memories and historical knowledge into a broader Persian narrative.

Storytelling is a distinct practice for Iranians - from the poetic ruminations of Rumi to songs of longing and celebration and, more recently, to the rise in Iranian migrants sharing their narratives through memoirs and art. Whether discussed orally, by way of physical text or through internet-based journals or blogs, to tying one’s narrative (in addition to compiling one’s narrative with others’) to an experience or, in many of these migrants’ stories, a lifetime of events gives way for these individuals to reclaim their exile stories. Memory is legitimized and

refracted through the collective memory of those who have also felt the same emotions, shared the same memories, and lived alongside one another in that specific geographical space. When in the process of reclamation, memory and storytelling become vehicles for displaced individuals to gain agency, which in time, allows them to mend their torn identities and become comfortable with their newly hybridized selves. Casey's definition of "shared memory," rather than individual or public memory, explicates the effects of transnationalism on Iranian migrants. Shared memory isolates the individual and their narrative as distinct and unknown from others, memories that are situated in a time and place the individual has experienced. Individual and/or public memory, however, is reliant upon one large catastrophic event (for example, the September 11th attacks or the John F. Kennedy assassination) that becomes a figment of the majority of the population's memories, even if they were not present for the event.

Shared memory relies on placemaking and the movement of bodies in two ways: first, the collective memory of an event having taken in an initial location (the 1979 Revolution of Iran) and second, the reminiscing and sharing of narratives and conversations of the initial memory within the present time and place (Iranians now located Los Angeles, Texas, or any other large location of settlement). In regards to diaspora and shared memory, scholars Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller write that:

Diaspora came to appear, in James Clifford's terms as a 'positive transnationalism,' a fruitful paradigm capable of disrupting identity-based conflicts. In the language of diaspora, originary homelands are not simply there to be recovered: already multiply interconnected with other places, they are further transformed by the ravages of time, transfigured through the lenses of loss and nostalgia, constructed in the process of the search. (Introduction)

Positive transnationalism relies on collective diaspora and shared nostalgia but results in individual diasporic memory--how *each* individual uses personal memory as a way to understand their identity within the broader culture. I grew interested in exploring the roles geographical distance and the passage of time play in each migrant's personal narrative.

In order to understand the personal and communal implications of the Revolution, I spoke with three Revolutionary migrants all living in Los Angeles. Lily, a mother of three, Donya, a mother of two, and Abner, a father of one. Conversations with these individuals revealed that in processes of assimilation and hybridization, diasporic migrants must navigate their cultural identities and balance those identities within their American households. Most often, the bargaining of identities accommodates positive transnationalism as it relates to one's place of exile. But the memory and trauma associated with exile allows for reclamation of Iranian culture and continues to anchor migrants to an ever-unraveling Persian narrative.

Geographical relocation is one way that individuals have experienced distance from their culture, as all three individuals declared Los Angeles as being "home." All named LA home because of the duration of time they have lived there as well as the opportunities afforded (namely, freedom) and new memories made with their kin. In their places of relocation, individuals found themselves to both be taken back to the memories and spaces of their past, while also feeling a sense of wholeness and possibility as their identities mirror the amalgamation of past and present.

Donya is a mid-age woman born in Tehran, Iran who fled to the United States in 1979. As she spoke with me about abandoning the country at age ten and having to begin her adolescent life in a brand new country, it became clear that Donya stayed close to her siblings

and family members for comfort. Shared memory was the thread that kept them together. She also finds solace in the fact that she defines herself as an immigrant; Donya feels fortunate for her family to have had the time to gather their belongings and sell their house and other possessions. When I asked why her family chose to move to Los Angeles, Donya replied that it was because “our entire flock of over 300 family members moved to the same places, between the [San Fernando] Valley and Beverly Hills. We came here because my father’s sister lived here, so we wanted to know at least one family member and eventually everyone else moved and came to the same location.” In such a frenzied and emotionally overwhelming moment, Donya (and as she shares, the entirety of her family) found peace and comfort in those who empathized with her fear of exile and with those who banded together to form a hybridized collective.

Lily is also a woman of middle age who left Iran of her own accord but who was unable to return once the Revolution began. She moved to Denver, Colorado as an exchange student on visa in her late teens, and her brother had moved to America two years beforehand to study as well. Once the Revolution took hold, however, she could not return home or even speak with her family for fear of government interception. Lily “moved to America in 1978 just before the Revolution. There was a little bit of noise--as far as [what] that was gonna [happen]-- but nobody believed that it would.” Lily is unable to label herself as either strictly an immigrant or a refugee because she came here willingly but was unable to ever return. Lily’s parents joined her and her brother a few years later, once they had been able to leave the country. Like Donya, Lily’s family moved to Los Angeles because of the collective Persian community.

Abner is a man in his late sixties who, unlike Lily and Donya, lived through much of the Revolution as an adult. He and his wife both pursued higher education while in Iran--Abner as an architect and designer--but ultimately left Iran for monetary reasons as well as fear and trauma. He, like Lily, has difficulty in parsing out his migrant identity. He felt he was in some ways both an immigrant and a refugee. "I could stay, but at the same time, I know that they forced me out." He had witnessed firsthand much of the tragedies and consequences of the Revolution, and was himself a casualty of the militaristic regime. When asked why his academic background paradoxically resulted in financial instability, he replied, "My feeling is, [the government] put pressure on [the educated] to leave, because they know [that the educated] were pro-freedom, and [that] they [would] fight [against the regime]. They would rather see crooked people like themselves." He, like Lily, felt that something bad would happen to the country as talk of Khomeini's push for Revolution spread. "[My wife and I] were not happy that we didn't have freedom. I told my wife that I wouldn't work with the Mullahs, even when I was poor. [I told her,] 'These people are not doing anything good for us.'" Abner moved to Gainesville, Florida to attend graduate school while his wife finished her undergraduate education. Unable to find a Ph.D. program in Florida that suited his needs, he moved to Los Angeles and was accepted to UCLA's architecture Ph.D. program. Ultimately, he had to transfer into their master's program once he and his wife found out they were expecting a child.

While each individual experienced the Revolution differently, all interviewees expressed a sense of religion-centered trauma associated with the event. However, the way in which Donya and Lily lived through the event is vastly different than Abner's experience, as he was Muslim and suffered through the midst of the regime. Donya and her family felt threatened by the

government because of their Jewish faith. Donya was nine years old at the time and experienced the Revolution through a child's view that she can still visualize--memories of moving tanks as she looked out her bedroom window after school. Lily echoes her statement, stating that she felt as if "the Holocaust can happen again. As a Jew, [the Revolution] was totally different [than for Muslims]." Unlike Donya and Abner, Lily didn't experience the Revolution firsthand as she had been living in America at the time. However, she still says that "it was the scariest time of my life...Nobody thought that Shah would really go down. What happened was a dream I'd never thought would happen, I would never think that I'd come here and never go back. It was a scary time [because I was unable to communicate with my family in Iran]."

Abner, however, lived through the Revolution as a Muslim at an age when he could fully understand (and in turn, endure) its ramifications. He, like Lily, felt that a revolution brewing. He was in his early twenties at the time and felt frightened by the regime's expectation for Muslims to join the Revolution. He spoke of countless atrocities, including a time when his wife had been wrongfully blamed for murdering someone in the neighborhood. She was kidnapped by the police and jailed for 24 hours without Abner's knowledge. Abner too had been jailed twice. He shared with me, his voice frenzied from thinking of all the memories, that "I had a list of friends that I had to erase their numbers, because [the government] killed them, and they would ask us to see our phone book [to see if we were affiliated with those they killed].... [I] still I have nightmare from those days." Because memory is a process one must actively engage in, speaking about traumatic events brings fear and perspective into the forefront of one's mental

and emotional faculties. Despite having moved from Iran forty years ago, Abner's experience of the Revolution will always be tied to his personal narrative.

Applying one's personal memory to a communal, historical event enables an individual to orient themselves with others through shared memory and collective trauma. The trauma Abner suffered during the Revolution is, in many ways, on a much larger scale compared to Lily and Donya's experiences. However, all of the individuals endured the pain, loss, and anguish of exile. Donya, Lily, and Abner described a range of reactions towards the Revolution and exile at large, despite each having had a different lived experience. Although the migrants' experiences of the Revolution differed from one another, each suffered the loss of their homeland and their collective identity, thus binding them together through memory. Elżbieta Hałas writes that

Trauma as a cultural process is based on symbolization – this process takes place between the event or situation which has been traumatogenic for a community and the establishment of its collective representation. In this sense one may speak of a cultural process of constructing collective trauma, which is initiated by a message – the claim of the traumatized group that the symbolic representation of its experience should be acknowledged. (318)

Hałas validates why these three migrants, and the individuals of the Persian diaspora at large, have banded together after resettlement. Memory is embodied through symbolic and material traditions--such as celebratory holidays, superstitious rituals, foods, and storytelling--but aiding those practices is a collective lived experience. The passage of time and geographical distance has inevitably removed the individuals from the site of trauma. However, the healing of personal and collective trauma comes about by acknowledging the Revolution from a place of remembrance and fear.

Resettlement in America

After moving to America, the Revolutionary migrants I spoke with became hyperaware of their minority status--their Iranian identities subjected to Americans' judgment and preconceptions. Lily and Abner felt ambivalent about their first experiences in the US, but never experienced direct confrontation. They also felt that the American population was largely ignorant of Iran and its people. When Abner spent time in North Carolina, he noted that while individuals were nice, "[people would] come and ask questions. They asked if we drove cars, if we had red lights, stuff like that. There was a lot of ignorance up there... the feeling [of prejudice] in the air." Lily too felt as if she had to educate others on what was really going on; in some ways she was fetishized by individuals who found her minority status to be exotic, while others were simply unaware of what life in Iran at that time was like.

Donya's experience was unlike Abner and Lily's because of the direct aggression aimed at her and her family. She also notes that the Iran hostage crisis of 1979 made her feel unwelcomed in the presence of white Americans, and that she was targeted because of their collective association with Iranians and terrorists. The most pervading theme when speaking with Donya on Persian identity is the role that western, American society and traditional, Persian authority play in forming individual experience and interaction. Said writes, "There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness," which results in ignorance, fetishization, and discrimination (15). For Donya, it was clear that her sense of identity and feelings towards her culture were largely constructed by her new American peers and her parents; she shares, "Middle school were the toughest years of my life, I was treated extremely unfairly, and looked

like a foreigner and I felt I didn't belong here, [due to] not speaking language and also classmates hating me and that as Persian people we took hostages... they blamed us and I didn't have friends in middle school - no American friends at least." She felt ostracized by her classmates in her first year of American middle school, stripping her from any sense of belonging in her location of resettlement. The experiences she lived through during her first few years in the US exemplify the negative effects of relocation--the divide one faces personally and geographically when faced with the loss of one's homeland.

Now in the US, all three individuals have chosen to somewhat distance themselves from Persian culture. Lily said that having children in America brought her closer to the American culture and that she has very little contact with individuals in Iran or the country's goings on. For Donya, living in America led her to resent her the culture because her parents forced her to maintain her traditional Persian roots. She shared, "[Having strict parents] broke my wings as a young person wanting to dive in and have friends. I wanted to blend and become a part of [the American culture], but your parents want to keep you like you're back in Iran, from their generation of 50 years ago. So we were very much in between [and] going back and forth [in asking], 'Am I Iranian? Or American?'"

Abner has distanced himself from his Muslim Iranian identity because of his tumultuous relationship with Iran and the Revolution. Besides indulging in food, he attributes his connection to Persian rituals when he engages in yoga and meditation, as well as reading: "I think about family that I left, that's become a ritual for me. Nothing else. I read a lot of books about the story of Iran. For a while I was reading Rumi and Sufi [texts], and basically I am trying to get the best of the two culture and leave the bad things of both culture out." Despite sensing

a loss of family and home, Abner has chosen to reclaim parts of the culture he finds significant to Persian culture.

Jan Assman notes that “Assimilation, the transition of one group into another one, is usually accompanied by an imperative to forget the memories connected with the original identity” (114). As Abner demonstrated through his choice to keep the “best” of both cultures, the individuals I spoke to have largely stuck to the “positive” aspects of their cultures--i.e. foods, music, celebratory holidays, and at times, home décor. The “positive” aspects they pointed to center on communal gatherings and sensory pleasures. These rituals and objects are clear of the trauma created by exile due to the way in which they now take root in new geographical space--one unmarred by the loss and distress existent in Iran. In anticipating in certain types of cultural ritual, the individuals understand their current identities as guided by their pasts and the broader Persian identity.

Donya and Lily created a conscious break in practicing their familial and cultural rituals, yet still feel an inherent connection to their Persian identities. Donya illustrates how her Persian identity is a significant aspect of her life. “I wouldn’t want to change a thing in terms of being born as an Iranian, because it had so many good sides to it, the love that I had, the sensitivity that I had, the emotions that I have, the love for people.... I’m proud [to be Iranian], it’s made me who I am and I feel more complete.” Although they distanced themselves from the Persian culture to some extent, both Donya and Lily still feel pulled to their national identity because of the familial and communal environment that’s nurtured them. While Abner points largely to materiality by way of reclamation, Donya and Lily have chosen to reclaim their Persian identities by understanding the significance of their culture and upbringings.

Despite initial unease, concern and fear, many Iranian migrants have now come to embrace their place of resettlement due to their newfound ability to parse out their chosen cultural customs, rituals and narratives into their newly transformed identities. John Agnew and James Duncan write, “the meanings of place and its landscape have changed during these periods, yet [tied together by] a central narrative” of diaspora (7). The layered narratives the authors point to can be combined with positive transnationalism in order to reveal that Persian culture in America is one that exists independently of that in Iran. However, migrants have the opportunity to construct this newly hybridized culture in order to pay homage to their pre-Revolutionary pasts and their hopes for a more stable future.

Once out of one’s homeland, the same rituals and communities can no longer be recaptured as they have already begun to change through the lenses of displacement, diaspora, migration--all within the search for one’s identity within a new space of being. Donya echoed Miller and Hirsch’s sentiments on positive transnationalism by sharing that she has “more [of a] sense of understanding of other people, cultures, and nationalities because I did come here as a foreigner, so I don’t take things for granted.” What becomes clear then, when reading the narratives of individuals such as Donya, is that the Revolution has allowed for unexpected, beneficial outcomes to take root and allow for a newly recreated identity.

Diaspora and transnationalism are therefore not always traumatic as relocation allows for reclamation. Donya demonstrated feeling grateful for the freedom and opportunities afforded by immigrating to America. But as Clifford makes clear, positive transnationalism may allow for individuals to recognize the nuances of each cultural identity, a sentiment that Abner has upheld in recognizing his proclivity towards retaining the better parts of each culture. In

engaging in the remembrance of memory through both Iranian and American perspectives, individuals can better understand the beneficial aspects of each (while also making the homeland feel different in a way that breeds growth and nurtures past memories).

In many ways, a sense of nostalgia for the past has enabled migrants of the Revolution to cope with the lingering trauma of being uprooted. In many of the Persian gatherings, celebrations, and luncheons I've attended, individuals often bring up the past, which then elicits laughter, communion, or a distant sense of belonging. In her book on the Iranian diaspora and relocation in America, Mitra Shavarini introduces the concept of *ghorbat*, which connotes alienation and roughly translates to "nostalgia, exile, longing for homeland, feeling yourself a stranger...yearning" (3). In my interviews with Lily, Donya, and Abner, a sense of nostalgia when referring to the past routinely came to the surface, even in questions that inquired about the present. When asked whether they had nostalgia for their lives in Iran, all three individuals referenced their childhood and families--which is understandable for Donya who left at age nine, but interesting to note for Abner and Lily, who left in their twenties and late teens, respectively. Rather than speaking on personal nostalgia, Lily placed the nostalgia in a sociopolitical context: "Because I had such a nice childhood and grew up in the golden years of Iran, it's strange that people want to make a move to another country and start a new life if they don't have to.... [But] I made a promise to myself to never go back [to Iran] unless the regime changes but I don't know if that's ever going happen. I like to remember how it was before the regime changed." Lily's comment on an inability to return parallel's Vanessa May's description of a *mutable nostalgia*, "a general sense of loss and regret, a kind of mourning for the impossibility of return because the longed-for object of one's desire exists 'somewhere in

the twilight of the past” (404). While the individuals expressed no sense of regret for leaving, all three recognize the inability to go back to their homelands and have come to navigate the pasts they long for in their present lives and locations. Therefore, nostalgia for the past results from both positive and negative memories; each induce an appreciation for the pre-Revolutionary Iran of the past as well as a reclamation of cultural identity in the present. In such ways, the past serves the present--whether through a remembrance of one’s childhood, a vehicle to instill Persian values with one’s children, or through the act of storytelling.

The Significance of Storytelling

All three migrants mentioned storytelling as central to Iranian culture and values. Lily sees storytelling as an anchor to her Iranian identity and claims that storytelling is “what Iranian culture is about.” Abner also places storytelling at the forefront of Persian culture when answering, “Storytelling is creating a meaning in the child’s mind, how to view the world in the grand scheme, and some stories are grand narratives, like [religious stories and] grand stories that each culture has.... And then [at the] lower level, you have stories that you hear from your grandparents and parents.” What Abner demonstrates is the significance of storytelling as existing at different scales. On one end lies national and religious storytelling--stories that enable one to understand the labels assigned to them (Persian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) and that connect the individual to their broader culture. At the other end lies intimate and familial storytelling. These nuanced stories help create an individual’s sense of self and feelings of belonging; in many ways, familial stories pull the individual deeper into their culture as memory is actively passed from one generation to the next. When asked about the importance of storytelling, Donya positions narrative within a familial context: “[Storytelling is] extremely

important, it's in our blood. We love to tell stories about the olden days and about grandparents, great grandparents, we're very connected to the culture and our past." In examining the power of narrative, Donya demonstrates that storytelling can nurture connection.

Although Donya considers storytelling a connector to one's culture and national history, the rigid, Iranian upbringing she experienced in America has altered her longing for the past. While stories of Donya's life in Iran may enable her to feel connected with her kin and homeland, her sentiments towards diasporic identity and the yearning for pre-Revolutionary Iran are diminished because her parents disavowed her from exploring both cultures. What Donya's admission uncovers is that the diasporic or exilic memoir is not solely one of trauma, nostalgia for the past, and/or longing for home. While experiencing the Revolution as an adolescent is indeed frightening, what it results in is not simply the endorsement of one's (birth) homeland, culture or identity. Instead, what Donya displays is first, Clifford's notion of positive transnationalism (due to her desire to explore and meld both cultural identities) and second, the way in which culture can persist (at times, to a point in which it becomes stifling) even when taken out of its locality. Therefore, for individuals like Donya, shared memory and nostalgia for the past are not experienced as traumatic memory. Longing can distance Revolutionary migrants from their Iranian identity, as many may have felt stifled by old world ideals and instead, wish to become integrated in their now-current locations. Dual narratives enable Revolutionary migrants to apply one's feelings towards the past to their current lives.

Having now spent nearly forty years in America, the migrants' memories of pre-Revolutionary Iran have mutated over time and the individuals' shifting lives. Nima Naghibi writes that the current generation of mid-age migrants are:

Old enough to recall, and later to feel nostalgic for, their lives before the revolution, but they were too young to have actually participated in the various revolutionary movements. They see the revolution as something that happened *to them*, and as a result, this particular generation battles with a sense of frustration over their lack of agency during a moment that had such a definitive and devastating impact on their lives. (129)

This sense of agency can only truly be reclaimed once an individual is able to accept and feel as though they are an active participant in their narrative. For many individuals that sense of control comes decades after the Revolution, after many have had their own children and are now able to choose how their Iranian heritage will continue to thrive (or be discarded).

Although Abner was old enough to experience the Revolution as an adult, he still felt as though he had little agency under the rule of the militaristic regime. Now, in Los Angeles, he has the autonomy to restrict which aspects of his past to anchor to his present. Donya and Lily reflect Naghibi's described narrative, with Donya admitting that she found a "happy medium" between her birth and adopted cultures in her thirties, once she was married, a mother, and separated from the influence her parents had over her. She goes on to say that for her, her narrative (and therefore, her senses of agency and identity) could only be fully realized once given the ability to explore her culture and ethnic identity through her own processes of meaning making. In order to have done so, however, she had to find balance between her American and Persian selves.

For displaced migrants, interstitiality and liminality come together in a way that forces the individuals to assess their culture, as well as their nostalgia, longing for the past and

contentment in the present. Speaking openly about diaspora and exile in the context of therapy can also allow for individuals to understand the ramifications of living through the revolution. Mastaneh Moghadam, a counselor in Los Angeles who works exclusively with Farsi-speaking Iranian immigrants, shared that the most pervasive themes in her conversations with her clients centered on assimilation, cultural issues, and bridging cultural gaps. She noted that “one of the main diagnoses we see [with individuals who lived through the revolution] is PTSD and it does come from people who, as immigrants, suffer from stress because of the immigration process.” The traumatic memories that stem from experiencing the Revolution and resettlement in America can lead an individual to, like Abner, distance themselves from the culture; in doing so, one faces the loss of their homeland, forced to make sense of the assimilation process in America. In doing so, Iranians cling to pre-Revolutionary nostalgia and reclaim their Persian identities through happier memories, rich with culture.

Storytelling can deter Persian migrants from assimilating because it encourages individuals to hold onto positive memories--ones to attempt to again aspire to--and in doing so, places those memories in conflict with Americanization. As Miller and Hirsch suggest, the passage of memory acts as a vehicle for which individuals are able to take agency over their lives, engage in forms of escapism, and reacquaint their present and past histories. The remembrance of pre-Revolutionary Iran motivates migrants to understand how both exile and nostalgia exist in their personal narratives. For childhood refugees of the Revolution now middle aged and contemplating the effects of such an event (and for those considering questions of home with the knowledge that they cannot return to their country of birth), navigating memory becomes a therapeutic method with which these individuals can “reattach”

themselves to their homelands. This process occurs when the remembrance of nostalgic memories of the past is combined with a comprehension of the events that took place, refracted and reimagined through the creation of a narrative, or piece of art, that has allowed the individuals to navigate such liminal questions. Additionally, shared memory and storytelling can allow the migrant to understand how to properly deal with such trauma (or confusion), as “stories are one means of organizing and interpreting experience, of projecting idealized and anticipated experiences, a distinctive way of formulating reality and idealized ways of interacting with it” (Good 80). In thinking about the way in which immigrants and refugees are forced to both meld together and parse out their newly constructed identities, hybridization is established as a point of conflict. Borders, both physical and abstract, prompts migrants to position their traditional, cultural identity within a larger, American framework.

Confusion in Hybridization

Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* acts as a parallel for revolutionary migrants who must straddle between liminalities (geographical locations, identities and languages) in order to acknowledge and allow for an integrative identity - all of which contribute to these individuals’ statuses as both (or neither) insiders and (nor) outsiders. Originally a categorical term referring to the mixture of Spanish and indigenous races, “mestiza” meant to create racial hierarchies where pure blood is superior to mixed blood. Anzaldúa’s hybridized woman, which she labels the “new mestiza,” is the embodiment of diversity existing within one body; she is a hybrid of “cultural, ideological, racial and biological cross-pollination,” existences, but knowledgeable of multiple thought processes (Anzaldúa 2099). The new mestiza is a walking deconstruction; adapting Derrida’s notion of deconstruction, Anzaldúa’s theory is

one that functions to undermine the hierarchical oppositions of males given preference over females, Anglos given preference over indigenous, and America given preference over minority cultures upon which traditional notions of racism, sexism and nationalism rely. As a walking deconstruction, this means that the new mestiza is able to subvert such hierarchical oppositions just by existing; this hybridity enables “a new consciousness” composed of multiple scopes that allows her to think differently (Anzaldúa 2101). Anzaldúa supports that these changes can – and must – happen internally and through processes of sharing narrative, whether through memories, conversations or writing. No longer is there a single or unified identity; instead, an individual must work inward to actively construct his/her identity through an acknowledgement and understanding of his/her multiple lineages and the geographical locations from which he/she comes from.

The juxtaposition of liminalities Anzaldúa posits greatly reflects the characteristics and experiences depicted and felt by Iranian Revolutionary migrants. As Donya referenced earlier, her time in Los Angeles began with much difficulty, as she was ostracized by Americans for being Iranian, and yet now as an (exiled Iranian) American, is unable to return back to her birth country. Furthermore, the walking deconstruction Anzaldúa points to can be seen in the way that Donya acknowledges, understands and appreciates her hybridized self. Donya demonstrates deconstruction in the ways she is able to self-construct an identity that best reflects her American and Iranian selves, and in the way that she feels she has a deeper understanding and respect of other individuals and cultures. Lily similarly demonstrates the effects of liminal spaces and identities. When speaking about the first time in which she, her brother, and her parents all lived together in Los Angeles, she shared that they “were a little

more blended than average Iranian families. My parents kind of took after my brother and I, so they adapted more to American [values]. Food is the number one thing that we kept [from the culture.]” Lily had more of an opportunity to craft her hybridized self because of her parents’ willingness to adapt to the American culture. However, she still finds herself rooted to her Persian identity because of her nostalgic past and engagement in Persian rituals upheld by her family.

Anzaldúa alludes to a “cross-pollination” of identities within one self, but when family plays as large of a role as they do in Iranian cultures, how can the integration of cultures occur organically? The most pervading theme when speaking with Donya is the role that western, American society and traditional, Persian authority play in forming individual experience and interaction. It was clear that her sense of identity and feelings towards her culture were largely constructed by her new American peers and her parents when she shared the traumatic experiences she had in middle school. She continues, sharing that following her move to America, at age 10 with her family, she

didn’t have as much freedom with my parents and [that] they sheltered me so much... all of that made me want to run away from my culture and where I came from, because the newer generations have more freedom and have the choice to pick their identity, while I was forced. It made it even more difficult for us as children because we wanted to go into the mainstream and find a sense of belonging here [in America], but they pushed us that you’re Iranian, don’t forget your roots.

Though subversive in her desires to assimilate into the American world, and due to the way in which she lived a largely traditional Persian lifestyle in progressive Los Angeles, Donya was able to both uphold and deny Anzaldúa’s notions of the new mestiza--and it happened at the hands of familial, cultural and authoritative forces. For Donya, the realm of America was one where she felt very little autonomy: Both her new American peers and her parents built an experience

that made her feel as though she had to uphold both ideals, yet she crumbled under the pressure to adhere to her familial requirements. On one hand, she was a foreigner, especially one who, to her peers, was aligned with the Iranians who held Americans hostage in 1979; on the other hand, she felt stifled by overbearing eastern parents, eager to uphold traditional values, rituals and customs and who had difficulty allowing their daughter assimilate into the larger American culture. Therefore, her feelings towards her culture and her memories of the past, while not traumatic, are riddled with upset. Due to the way in which others played a large role in shaping her cultural and ethnic identity, it is clear that she views her identity as one that has caused personal pain in the past.

All three of the individuals have navigated liminalities, cross-pollination, and positive transnationalism through their relationships with their American-born children. The migrants emphasized maintaining a culturally mixed home in order for their children to feel well-assimilated into the American culture, while also having the option to learn more about and engage in their Persian identities. In writing about diaspora and memory, Miller and Hirsch acknowledge that “The emotional effects of diasporic dislocation and relocation also have led many to recapture, in writing, family memories and stories, in order to rescue lost legacies, to restore connections suspended by time, place and politics.... The return to family through acts of memory is a journey in place and time” (NP). Lily and Abner maintained a greater emphasis on American culture in their homes compared to Donya, but all three have “restored connections” to their lineages and to Iran through intergenerational memory, traditions, and stories shared with their children.

Lily feels that it is important to share culture, rituals, and customs with her children so that her children can have "a sense of closeness and family." She acknowledges that she and her husband found it beneficial to allow their children to find belonging in the American culture, but to keep smaller rituals within the family. Oddly, she emotes a sense of regret when sharing, "We raised the kids very American, and our household overall isn't very Persian. Sometimes I wish I had given them more of it but it's just the way it ended up being." Much like the way in which Abner chooses which aspects of the Persian culture to maintain in his current life, he shared food, décor ("I love Persian carpets, I'm living in a place full of carpets") and language with his son. However, he made it a point to "raise my son American. Because he's living here. Why should I bother him like Persian?" Paradoxically, however, Abner's son found interest in his Iranian heritage in his late teens as a way of claiming his hybridized identity. "He calls himself Iranian, [and] he calls himself a Muslim, but we don't practice anything. We've never been in a mosque. But he says 'No, no, I have to defend our culture.'" What I found most interesting in all of the individuals' answers is that Donya finds it important for her children to inherit the Persian culture, despite having had a traumatic and tumultuous adolescence in America. She answered that it was "Very important [to share culture, rituals and customs with my children] because of the fact that they had never been to Iran. So it's good for the children to have some concept of where their parents were born, where they came from, and our heritage in Iran."

Narratives in Tension

Through processes of shared memory, storytelling, and kinship, it can be argued that Iranian Revolutionary migrants largely understand the pain and confusion of their pasts by making

sense of their Iranian and American identities in the present. Anzaldúa's concepts of hybridization and liminality are useful in understanding the difficulty faced by migrants when trying to assimilate into a white, western culture. Anzaldúa points to the significance of kinship and culture when negotiating one's identity. Due to the way in which *ghorbat* plays a significant role in the shaping of such identities, remembrance of pre-Revolutionary times are largely rooted in fondness, but disrupted by the trauma of displacement. For Donya, Lily, and Abner, trauma manifests not only as a longing for the past, but also a loss that has occurred in the inability to reconcile their two cultural identities in a space they had difficulty navigating. Trauma, however, is not an equally pervasive experience for all exiled individuals as narrative for it has enabled shared memory (and fragmented identity) to act as a vehicle for comfort and reclamation--especially in its ability to provide migrants with autonomy. In sharing their personal narratives, individuals are enabled to engage in processing the memories and nostalgia constituted by placemaking.

Memoir 2 - Superstitions

At some point between the ages of 15 and 18--older than I should have been--I asked my mom if we were witches. I asked the question sincerely, after watching the Disney Channel movie, *Halloweentown II: Kalabar's Revenge* for maybe the fifth or sixth time.

"Hey mom?" I approached her in the kitchen while she scooped yogurt from the plastic container and into her bowl. "Are we witches? I mean, you, me, and grandma?"

I could tell the question caught her off guard at first because she looked at me with a perplexed gaze. She then laughed and walked past me, towards the couch in the living room. I could hear her voice trail off as she replied,

"Come on, Yabee. What kind of question is that? Of course not."

I still have to admit, though, that I think the question I asked my mom seemed valid at the time. As Persians, our very culture reveres superstition and the uncanny. My mom has worn an evil eye necklace--its pendant a circular eye, surrounded by dark blue enamel--for as long as I can remember. At the most basic level, we engage in the popular ritual of knocking on wood to ward off bad luck. But Persian rituals drip to excess with symbolism and the stakes are higher if only because we take superstitious rituals so seriously.

My maternal grandma and the matriarch of our family, Jeeba, introduced my mom and I to Persian witchcraft, so I think of her as being magical. With an unkempt shirt stained by her afternoon meal, Jeeba rules with an iron fist and almost always claims to know best for our safety. Nearly every time my immediate extended family--my mom, brother and I, and my aunts, uncles, and cousins--went to an extended family gathering or party, Jeeba would grow wary and would warn us to wear evil eye jewelry--to watch our backs. She held everyone, even

other family members and family friends, under suspicion because they had the potential to cast evil upon us.

After a party, when we returned or went to Jeeba's, Jeeba would remind my mom, "*esfand dood koni*," meaning, "do the *esfand* ritual." Persians typically engage in the *esfand* ritual if they or their children receive too many compliments from others. The compliments, she told us, come from a place of jealousy or hatred--people make these remarks in order to ruin or stop what the individual noticed.

Then my mom or Jeeba would heat up *esfand*--small brown seeds--in aluminum foil over the open fire of a stove. I'd hear the seeds crackle as they heated, the seeds jumping up and falling back onto the aluminum foil. *Esfand's* burnt, earthy smell is difficult to describe, a cross between burnt popcorn and incense. Once the heated seeds began emitting black smoke, Jeeba or my mom would take the tinfoil off the stove and circle the now charged object around our heads as the ritual leader chanted, "*door besheh, door besheh, chesmeh hasood koor besheh*," which translates to "Go away, go away. May the evil eye [cast upon us] be blinded." If we didn't have access to *esfand*, or if Jeeba thought the evil eye was *too* strong to cast off with just one ritual, then she'd sprinkle salt into her palm and circle her enclosed fist around our heads three times. Taking part in these rituals meant we'd have to wait an additional ten to fifteen minutes to go to bed after we came home from a gathering that often had already gone on several hours later than I had wanted to stay, all because Jeeba didn't trust her cousins or nephews or nieces. A lot of times I found the rituals to be complicated, unnecessary, even laughable, but sometimes, I believed in their powers and took comfort in knowing they protected me the evil around me.

Sometimes, despite our initial attempts, the evil would persist. I remember being seven or eight and having a stomach ache that made me throw up for more days than my mom said I should have, or a time when my brother fell and twisted his ankle in our backyard, or when my mom's relatively clear complexion broke out in pimples. When persistent bad luck befell one or more of us for a long period of time, we'd summon the egg. I honestly don't know whether the egg is a tradition in which only our family engages, or if it earlier Persian generations passed it down to us. Essentially, the ritual leader takes an egg--any regular raw egg, nothing special--from a carton and in pencil, writes the names (or if the names are too long, the initials) of a range of people suspected of having cast the curse. As a child, I remember sitting in a circle with my mom, Jeeba, aunt Neda, and when she was still alive, my great-grandma, Khanoomi. We sat in wooden chairs and on worn, leather couches as we began the ritual. We'd to call out names of the accused.

"Sharoneh Said!"

"Ramin!"

"Heleneh Gabbai!"

On and on we'd go, calling out the names of family members and friends, while Jeeba or Khanoomi penciled them onto the egg in random patterns. I'd usually just watch with deep fascination and excitement, or sometimes I'd yell out the names of family members when I wanted to feel involved. Once the names of potential suspects filled up space on the hard, white shell--or once we had run out of names to share--the individual holding the egg would place her thumb onto the penciled name, say the name aloud, and press down on the spot. An unbroken shell meant that that particular suspect was clear of any implication in casting the

curse. The process continued as name by name the shell remained rigid. And then, *crack*. As Jeeba or Khanoomi called a name and pressed her thumb into the shell, the shell would crack and the egg's insides would ooze out, as if the shell were made of soft, crumbling clay. Everyone's body would stiffen and their faces would freeze as we'd begin to understand the ritual's implications.

"*She's* the one who cast the evil eye upon us?" one woman would ask.

"I knew it! She was avoiding me all night, eyeing me from the corners of the room when she thought I wasn't looking!" Another would answer.

I loved every minute of the egg ritual. I loved knowing that in that moment, we had all recognized a collective enemy. In the back of my mind I knew that the tradition could be cause for skepticism. That Jeeba or Khanoomi could have just happened to have pressed harder onto the egg shell after she said one of the names--either by accident or on purpose--causing the shell to break. But she almost always followed the breaking of the egg up:

"I pressed firmly on each of the other names and the shell was as tough as steel! And then I just gently pressed onto this name and my thumb went straight through!"

None of the women in the circle seemed to doubt the ritual or the outcome. We took it the outcome as fact and tended to brace ourselves for more bad things to come. But I was grateful to have had a magical prediction that would prepare me for evil that might come my way.

On the odd occasion that my family would be invited to a second cousin's wedding or great uncle's funeral, Jeeba would make sure that my mom and I wore evil eye bracelets, and necklaces with turquoise pendants. I had learned by listening in on others' conversations that

turquoise is the stone of protection. While I wasn't quite sure why *turquoise* was the stone of protection, and not amethyst or rose quartz or something else, I simply assumed that the stone was yet another charged object whose charm we needed. For as long as I can remember, Jeeba has worn a thin silver chain around her neck, adorned with a teardrop-shaped turquoise pendant, the pendant surrounded in angular, irregular shaped diamonds. I liken the necklace to an amulet she wears to ward off curses and keep her coven safe. The turquoise stone is as blue as the sky on a sunny Los Angeles day, marred by a thin brown line running through the left side of the stone--what I now envision as being a potential crack in an otherwise encompassing protective shield.

My family's rituals have continued, despite us typically having less tumult to investigate. Nearly every time I visit Jeeba I walk away with some type of amulet--a piece of turquoise stone, a lucky penny, or grains of rice, which represents wealth. Oftentimes, she'll paint a small red dot on our pennies with her signature OPI red nail polish, so that we'd make sure not to accidentally spend the money. For older generations like my mom's and Jeeba's, superstitions are traditional cultural practices essential to our health, wellbeing, and the unity of our clan. For first-gens like me, we've come to see superstitions as exciting, exoticized rituals--ones that trigger pride in our mystical culture. I've come to see superstitions as processes that engage with the past. I imagine myself performing the egg ritual with Khanoomi or burning esfand alongside my ancestors in Iran. I sit at the table with my great-great grandma Rivka--my namesake--reading tea leaves from gold-leafed teacups and tearing into freshly baked *barbari* bread.

When I grew old enough to form my own opinions on superstitions, I began to adopt some of my family's rituals and a few of my own. I'd knock on wood each time a friend shared good news or a hopeful prospect. If a friend complained of their ears turning red and feeling hot, I'd tell them that it was because someone was, at that moment, talking about them. But I didn't want to come across as too much of a superstitious lunatic to my non-Persian friends, so I kept most of my rituals to myself. Along with superstitious traditions, I've also kept my charged objects within arm's reach: A few of Jeeba's lucky pennies and grains of rice, a small turquoise pendant she had placed in my palm one languid summer afternoon, a small chunk of wood to knock on for when I'm on the go. When I visited Jeeba on my first trip home after moving to Nashville to attend graduate school at Vanderbilt University, she greeted me with a long, Clinique Happy-scented hug. Then, she promptly picked up the saltshaker from off the dining table, shook a handful of salt grains into her palm, and circled her enclosed fist around the crown of my head. I couldn't help but feel safe.

First-Generation Persian-Americans

When Rostam Batmanglij's solo album, *Half-Light*, was released in 2017, I rushed online to order a copy on vinyl. Rostam is a founding member of the New York City-based band, Vampire Weekend, and served as an instrumentalist, songwriter, and producer. I became a fan of Vampire Weekend in high school and can remember bopping around to one of their more famous songs, "Cape Cod Kwassa Kwassa," when I first saw them perform live. After I found out that Rostam is a first-generation Persian-American, I flipped out and my love for Vampire Weekend grew stronger. And when Rostam left Vampire Weekend in order to pursue his own career, I felt prideful as he began to speak more openly about his identity. He interviewed with *The New Yorker* in 2017 about his album and ethnic heritage. When speaking about the Iranian Revolution and the resulting Iranian diaspora, he responded, "I think there's a generation of people who were forcibly removed from where they lived and had to content with surviving in America... And part of how they contended with that is to assimilate. I think [my parents'] life's work was actively rejecting stereotypes about Iranians in America'" (Hsu). Rostam's solo work echoes his statements; while many of the songs on his album are reminiscent of Vampire Weekend's indie rock beats, other songs are flooded with the harmonies of my childhood. I became fixated on the sounds emitted from traditional Persian instruments and in turn, was drawn back into the smells associated with family gatherings, the sight of Persians picnicking on Persian New Year, and the songs my parents played off a cassette in our old, gold Volvo.

Much like their migrant parents do, first-generation Persian-Americans struggle with navigating an American landscape that is not wholly theirs--a landscape that is complicated by Persian culture and generational kinship. When writing about the Iranian diaspora, Mitra K.

Shavarini writes, “Children of immigrants often get confused about their identity. When you grow up in America with parents of another nationality... of another land... there’s a duality that lives within you. There are two sides to you, and sometimes you’re not sure who is who” (75). Having spoken with Iranian migrants on the importance of passing down culture, rituals, and customs to their children, I grew curious as to whether certain themes were also prevalent for first-gens. In particular, I wanted to know if children of Revolutionary migrants felt conflicted about their dual identities, and whether they had the same fascination for their heritage and the stories they’ve heard from their parents as I do. Positive transnationalism acts as a thread between Revolutionary migrants and their children; each generation must approach diaspora through the lens of nostalgia and memory, as the homeland of the past has now ceased to exist. In hearing the stories their parents have shared of pre-Revolutionary Iran, first-gens sense the loss of what *could* have been. Our generation experiences exile secondhand--the inability to return to the perceived homeland while also a sense of exile from our white, western peers. In order to instate a sense of belonging and reclamation, first-gens are reclaiming their Persian-American identities through cultural engagement, time with family, and a desire to learn more about their Iranian heritage.

I wanted to explore the effects of secondhand loss and communal identity, so I spoke with four first-generation Persian-Americans within their mid-20s and early-30s, all living in Los Angeles. I found that first-gens largely constructed their Iranian identities by placing themselves in time and space--namely, their parents’ lives in Iran, and the memories their parents have shared with them while in America. Casey’s “gathering” and Miller and Hirsch’s “postmemory” were two concepts that were especially prevalent in our conversations. Postmemory exists in

narratives that, when “transmitted powerfully from parent to child, are always already inflected by broader public and generational stories, images, artifacts and understandings that together shape identity and identification” (Miller and Hirsch 5). The memories transferred might reflect parents’ traumas or transmit a sense of happier nostalgia; postmemory might induce individuals--like me--to feel exile and loss as my parents endured, or experience Iranian culture as they had once done. Given the communal nature of Persian culture, the individuals recalled times of physical gathering but many of their answers centered on the gathering of history, culture, and memory. The memories they amassed in processes of gathering were ones passed down by their parents; such memories were imbued with emotion and situated within intimate and global spectrums of time and space. Furthermore, the memories first-gens receive communicate contextually with others’ memories. Assmann and Czaplicka write that “Every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others. These ‘others,’ however, are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past” (127). In many ways, first-generation Persian-Americans, construct their cultural identities through their connections with the Iranian community at large--a community that is constituted by collective memories and storytelling.

Finding Oneself in America

Jacob grew up in a home filled with Persian markers. His parents moved (separately) to the United States in 1979 when the Revolution struck and brought their music, food, stories, traditions, and aesthetics with them. Because he grew up in a home with parents who impressed the culture upon him and his sibling, he felt that, “Iranian culture was always something that was unfolding but [in] very little bits of information at a time. [There’s] not an

age I can pinpoint as to when I became more interested [in learning about Iranian culture]. It's not something that had a start point, and it's still going on today." Jacob's family never returned to Iran after their emigration, and while he hasn't yet visited Iran, he hopes to someday.

Like Jacob, Ehsan didn't have much choice in whether to engage in his Persian heritage because he grew up in both Los Angeles and Iran. "I went to Iran when I was nearly six, and I studied first grade through fourth grade [on and off] there. The Iranian culture was fed to me whether I wanted it or not." Despite having lived in Iran Ehsan, like Jacob, feels that as an adult, he's sought out the Persian culture "little by little over a long standing amount of time... [and that] it's part of [who I am]."

Laudan's family raised her in a largely Iranian household--one where they wanted her to speak Farsi (though she never fully took to the language), a home filled with material goods such as rugs, books on Persian architecture, and traditional foods. She began showing interest in learning more about the Iranian culture through film and literature in her later teen years, after reading "[Marjane Satrapi's] *Persepolis* in high school. I was a little embarrassed because I was trying to figure out where my place was in terms of ethnic label.... In college I started exploring Persian identity more because of [Ana Lily Amirpour's] *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*." Laudan has also strengthened her connection both with her family and her Iranian heritage through stories shared by kin, specifically her grandpa. "He'd tell us stories about his time in Iran, when he lived in a rural area.... He talked about when he was a kid and was friends with a bear cub and they'd eat apples together." She realizes that these stories are likely

fantastical but loves them immensely, and claims she can't help but wish she had stories to tell like the ones her family did.

Ashley's upbringing and cultural immersion is similar to the other three individuals' familial homes. She's shown interest in learning more about her heritage her "whole life. It's manifested in different ways. As a kid it's been asking my parents about stories, talking to random relatives, [and] the internet [has] played a huge role in letting me understand myself. That's the new way I try to learn about the culture. And I do it quite often [because I'm] proud of where I'm from." Ashley would love to continue to parse out her sense of belonging but is likely unable to visit Iran in the near future because of her Jewish faith and her family's support for the Shah. She says that she's tried to, on a smaller scale, engage in Persian culture and customs through time spent in Los Angeles's Persian Square.

Despite admitting to a stable sense of identity, all four individuals have felt like "outsiders" while living in the United States--a place that may not accommodate for aspects of gathering. Jacob feels that being Iranian-American has its difficulties: "The cultures are pretty different from one another, different sensibilities and ways of thinking, different emphases on certain values. [There's definitely] a [negative] stigma and stereotype associated with being Iranian-American, specifically in Los Angeles." Ashley also points to issues within the Persian community itself as lending to a sense of isolation. She shares that "[being an Americanized Persian] can be annoying because it's tight knit and some relatives are not open to assimilating to society. There's a schism between my family and the rest of my relatives." Laudan has experienced the cultural split divisively, similarly to Revolutionary migrant Donya. Both have been persecuted in some way by their minority status, yet both feel an intrinsic and welcomed

connection to their Persian heritage. On one end, Laudan's identity caused anger, embarrassment, and irritation while on the other end, it's allowed space for belonging. Her negative experiences have had to do with stereotyping, when sharing, "I get randomly selected by TSA all the time; I flew out to Mexico--[me and my friends] flew together--and customs picked me out and they had to go through my stuff and pulled me into the room." Ironically however, Laudan's "outsider" identity has enabled her to feel privileged amongst her white friends. "When I talk to my friends who are white or American [and] who don't have religious families, I wonder, 'do you feel tied to any one country that's not here?' I like that I have something and somewhere to have a feeling [of belonging from] that's not from the US."

For certain individuals like Laudan, and as nearly all Revolutionary migrants shared, being a minority has instilled a sense of pride and possession of their Iranian identity. I asked the individuals how their feelings towards engaging in Iranian culture has changed over time. Marotta writes that "at times and in certain contexts identity may be an intra-cultural process in which what binds us together is as important as what differentiates us from others;" similarly, Laudan and Ashley made clear that pride and belonging can oftentimes come from acknowledging one's minority status (199). Laudan approaches her involvement in the culture as being bolstered by a sense of levity, answering: "It's fun [to engage in the culture]. I used to be more embarrassed when I was trying to find my place; I really enjoy it [now], the familiar hallmarks of Persian parties that people make fun of, but it's all true." Ashley points to family and community as being motivators in manifesting and maintaining a sense of pride. Acknowledging her hybridized identity and her family's history of exile, she answered, "I've adopted my own version of being Persian.... [my parents] were forced to leave and start from

scratch, so I have this need to preserve it as much as possible. Now I feel confident engaging in [the culture] but doing it in my own way.... I feel like I have a responsibility to pass down those rituals and traditions [someday]." However, while Jacob demonstrates an appreciation for the culture he was steeped in within his home, he feels a sense of shame toward engaging in the current (and often stigmatized) community at large. "I feel that I don't fit into [the culture]," Jacob shares. "I feel like Persian culture specifically is a little vapid and shallow, especially with the social media aspect... it's a little disingenuous, you're not enjoying these things solely to enjoy it but to share it with other people. It's [present-day] Persian culture."

Storytelling as a Conduit for Culture

All of the individuals, to some extent, point to storytelling as a vehicle for understanding their national and familial identities. Ashley succinctly shares that storytelling has made her "more confident in [her] Iranian identity." Laudan connects the stories she's been told as near-necessary to her sense of self: "I love hearing stories from the past regardless of whether they're good or bad.... I'm excited to hear about that stuff because I feel like I'm understanding parts of my life and the shared past." Laudan points to a seminal notion when considering the influence of migration and diaspora. Assman and Czaplicka's description of intimate memory as existing within communal identity ties Laudan--individually--to the effects of the diaspora. The "shared past" Laudan refers to--one that exemplifies Edward Casey's notion of "shared memory"--are made up by individual, intimate stories of family and kin that grow in scale to allow for national and Revolution-based narratives. In being told stories of a parent's or family member's past, children are engaging in processes of intergenerational memory; memories that, while not exact or complete, gives a sense of a collective and communal identity. Jacob

validates Laudan's statement when telling me, "Hearing stories of growing up in Iran from my parents or stories of Iran in general from my grandparents--living there most of their young adult life--just gives me a shadow of that country, an amorphous outline of what that country is like."

I asked the four participants: What types of stories have your parents chosen to share with you? Three groupings emerged. First, stories about family; second, stories depicting pre-Revolutionary Iran; lastly (and only for one particular parent), stories of trauma. In many ways, however, the three themes are tangled due to the way in which their parents' fond memories of the past are positive in comparison to the instability of the Revolution. On family, Ashley told me that she heard stories of Persian holidays her family celebrated, and how "all of [her parents'] family members would live in the same building but in different apartments--all in the same place." Jacob also located his parents' stories in shared spaces: "My mom [nostalgically] told stories of the amazing house that her father built from the ground up, custom designed. [Stories of] living with her three brothers and the fun they had as kids. A wholesome kind of feel, a lot of family members always coming over." Laudan simply described her mom's stories as being told with complete nostalgia.

Their parents' pre-Revolutionary stories drip with the same nostalgia that Laudan described, locating the concept of nostalgia within pre-Revolutionary Iran. Miller and Hirsch's "postmemory" accompanies the longing and loss first-gens feel for having missed an opportunity to witness the spaces they had been told of. All of the participants' parents' memories of the past concern the notion of freedom, but are ones indicative of an Iran that has since changed drastically. Ehsan's answer concerns culture and an objectively western lifestyle:

“The fact that [my] parents listened to George Michael growing up, [the way they] talk[ed] about music and dancing that’s American and British--from immigrant Iranians--sounds surreal. It sounds modern, yet wholesome and a life rooted in values.” The stories Jacob and Laudan were told portrayed a sense of distance between the past and present. “Those stories embodied the freedom of being a child, how safe everyone was and felt in that country,” Jacob answers. “To what I understand, the country is nothing like that these days. The Iran that they grew up in doesn’t exist anymore.” In his answer, Jacob points to the elasticity of time and space. Culture is mutable, yet the Persian culture his parents experienced has changed due to the tumultuous Revolution and the passing of time. For Laudan, her mom’s stories portrayed the financial stability and wealth associated with the Shah’s regime. The stories passed down to first-generation Persian-Americans are tinged with the acknowledgement and acceptance that Miller and Hirsch touch on; the Revolution happened and has been documented through stories, media, and the loss of homes and material belongings. Persian migrants have now banded together in silent unison, passing the narrative of relocation and hybridization to their children.

While all of the children noted moments of fear or anxiety in their parents’ stories, Ashley openly and explicitly spoke on the trauma her mom faced. “[My mom has shared] a lot of stories about [her family] feeling persecuted as Jewish people. My mom told me a story about how someone was throwing stones at her.” Ashley’s answer points to the complexities and conflicts associated with the Revolution. The persecution her mom experienced as a minority in Iran connects to the traumatic persecution Donya experienced as a minority in America, but instead, by the hands of her community. Many families miss pre-Revolutionary

Iran and are grateful to have escaped the war, but few acknowledge the atrocities felt and faced when sharing narratives of their lives in Iran. The focus on positive shared memory links with nostalgia, which is then passed on to the children of relocated migrants.

Secondhand Nostalgia

I asked the participants their definitions of “nostalgia” in order to map out personal and collective understandings. I found, largely, a consensus on the definition as having to do with longing, remembrance, and positivity--specifically as they correlate with time and place.

“Nostalgia to me is a sort of wistfulness that you have for times gone by, it’s remembering something very fondly,” Jacob answered. Ehsan also looked at the role of the past when answering, “that which makes memories of childhood come alive.” However, while Jacob agrees with nostalgia as emitting positivity, he acknowledges that it is due to being “highly subjective and deeply personal. [Nostalgia] removes the depth from [a memory or event]. It simplifies it and may overlook details that had provided it with depth.” Jacob’s multi-faceted response points to the ways in which intergenerational memory and storytelling can only be experienced through the perspective of the storyteller; while memories exist within the broader cultural landscape, nostalgia only points to nuanced moments within history.

I then complicated my initial question by asking whether the participants felt nostalgia for their parents’ lives in Iran. I’ve personally come to struggle with this sense of nostalgia--a nostalgia, longing, and homesickness for a time and place I’d never lived in and one which has never existed in my lifetime. I found validation in most of the participants’ answers; in some ways, we all attribute the longing for pre-Revolutionary Iran as a missing piece of our identities. “[I] definitely [feel nostalgic],” Laudan shared. “When I was a kid I was against going to Iran to

visit. I didn't want to go, and I had this weird perception about wearing *chador* (the traditional headscarf). But now I really wish it were an OK time to go." Ashley also referred to her nostalgia as connecting to geographical place, as well as migration: "I do feel nostalgic. My whole life that I'm [now] building [here] came from somewhere. It'd be cool to see how [my parents] got [here]." I found Jacob's answer interesting and complex, because of the way in which he noted the discrepancies that lay in intergenerational memory; "You hear these stories in your own life and you get an impression about another country you've never even been to through [your parents]. I'm receiving memories in Iran almost third-hand because it's not just going through your parents to you, it's going through your parents as children, through the lens of nostalgia, and then to you." Jacob's response echoes a passage from Miller and Hirsch: "While the idea of postmemory can account for the lure of second-generation 'return,' it also underscores the radical distances that separates the past from the present." As children of exiled immigrants who themselves once lived happy and fulfilling lives in their birth country, we feel nostalgic for a homeland we no longer have access to (in the same ways that our parents describe). Many of us feel as though we must reclaim our Iranian identities through different channels than our parents had. While unable to enjoy the pre-Revolutionary Iran our parents had experienced, we've chosen to form a broader, collective identity.

In order to both experience and combat our parents' experiences, many of us have turned to engaging in Persian rituals, traditions, and customs. All of the participants found engaging in culture to some extent as necessary to their identities. Ashley points to her parents' exile as being the driving force when answering, "I think it's important. It would be different if my family came here voluntarily. But at the end of the day they were forced here from their

country.” Jacob points to relocation and assimilation as a reason to participate in culture: “It’s important [to maintain traditions] because you realize how easy it is to lose your parents’ and personal culture when you’re in a melting pot like America. Culture becomes an amorphous thing [that needs to be preserved].” Given that Persian culture has already been filtered through trauma, exile, and relocation, first-gens feel a sense of urgency to preserve tradition. Ehsan echoes Jacob’s acknowledgement of small scale and large-scale significance. He answered that he doesn’t “want to let [all traditions] go. I’d like to retain some of the things that are truly important, whether they’re important to me or important at large to Iranian society.” Mastaneh Moghadam, speaks of the weight first-gen Persian-Americans place on their Iranian identities, when sharing that she’s “come across kids who are in their twenties and teens even, who have never seen Iran, [and who] seem to be a lot more rigid, traditional, and collectivist than those who are from Iran.” While paradoxical, I can attest to Mastaneh’s revelation in my need for tangible connection--I listen to a lot of Persian music, crave Persian food (especially now that I’m in Nashville and have less access to traditional foods), and actively seek other Persian-Americans more than my parents do. For me, much like she stated, a lot of it has to do with my desire for a collectivist community and the ways in which to rectify the distance and apathy brought about by dislocation.

Kinship and Community

After speaking with the first-generation Persian-American participants, I noted the ways in which memory, storytelling, and culture have brought them closer to better understanding their sense of hybridized identity. The first-gens’ answers made clear that much of that exploration has to do with familial memory. As a first-generation Persian-American who has

become closer and more comfortable with her identity over time and through lived experiences, I attribute my cultural growth to the connection I feel when hearing the narratives my parents have shared. For Jacob, Ehsan, Laudan, and Ashley, nostalgia, culture, and ritual are integral aspects to holding steadfast loyalty to their Iranian-American identities. Persian culture is elastic; for me, Persian culture is constructed through a variety of moving parts and framed by materiality. Persian culture is listening to Rostam's music. It's sitting down with my extended family at Shabbat dinner while parsing through photos from their lives in Iran. It's Persian rugs of all colors and sizes. It's simultaneously being embarrassed by, and being prideful of, reality shows like *Shahs of Sunset*. Yet at the same time, Persian culture is fragmented; first-gens can no longer inhabit the same places our parents had. We're instead forced to scrap together pieces of the stories we've heard from our parents in order to navigate and reclaim our hybridized identities, all while perpetually anchored to nostalgia.

Revolutionary Migrants and First-Generation Persian-Americans on Labeling and Geographical Space

As described in their interviews, all of the Revolutionary migrants separated themselves from their Persian identities to some extent. Their reasons centered on the difficulties of assimilation, trauma from the Revolution and resettlement, and the stifling pressure of traditional Persian culture. Paradoxically, however, each continued to practice the aspects they found beneficial, such as Abner's love for Persian food and storytelling and Donya's appreciation for the perspective, sensitivity, and range of emotions she's gleaned by having grown up with an Iranian heritage. In many ways, those same threads can be drawn to the first-generation Persian-Americans I spoke with, who outlined nostalgia and memory as the forces that drive them to explore and maintain their Iranian identities in mainstream American culture. While their answers reflected the fact that duality and assimilation have resulted in trauma and hurt, the answers on a whole reflected a narrative of reclamation--that of one's Persian identity and culturally identity at large. Given the way that identity and memory take form on familial and national scales, I asked both generations of individuals a set of identical questions. The first was "Do you consider yourself to be Persian or Iranian? Why? What connotations are associated with each label?" The second question was "What differences do you assume there to be culturally between the global east and the global west?" When placed in conversation with one another, the answers I received made clear the significance of geographical place, perception, and external influences on forming the individuals' feelings towards their identities and Iran at large.

The Politics of Labeling

When asked whether they identified as Persian or Iranian and the associations that came with conscious labeling, migrants found themselves swayed heavily by historical events, while first-gens claimed their identities with pride and confidence. All three Revolutionary migrants immediately referenced the Iranian hostage crisis of late 1979 as a source of fear and shame. Orientalist discourse filters through eastern cultures and landscapes “as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness” (Said 14). From the latter half of the 20th century until the present, the west has come to align the Orient with terrorism, oppression, and poverty. In turn, Iranians have had to distance themselves against the west’s biased and ignorant views of the east through conscious labeling. “We use the word ‘Persian.’ [The label] started after the hostages,” Lily started. “People just didn’t want to say they were ‘Iranian,’ so [the term] ‘Persian’ at that time--the average American didn’t know what it [was]--took off.” Abner agreed, stating that from his perception, Americans felt that “Iran was associated with terrorism and killing,” and that he therefore “like[s] the term ‘Persian.’ The whole culture started using ‘Persian’--especially when living in the U.S.” They shied away from labeling themselves “Iranian” because of westerners’ fear of the country; geographical distance from their homeland had to be couple with an abandonment of their cultural identities in order to avoid discrimination.

First-generation Persian-Americans, however, have used labeling as a way of subverting cultural associations and reclaiming the identities; most of us now find ourselves steadfast to the label our parents distanced themselves from when moving to America. “I say ‘Iranian.’ I get an intuitive feeling that people say ‘Persian’ because it sounds better, as if ‘Iranian’ is

something to shy away from, and I don't feel that.... I feel like people run away from the word 'Iranian' but I don't," Ehsan shared. Laudan's answer aligned with his when she answered, "Sometimes I'll say 'Iranian' on purpose to make them uncomfortable and see what happens." While their answers referenced the stigma associated with the term, "Iranian," the first-gens also touched on geopolitical and historical changes as shifting the ethnic label. Ehsan added to his answer, "Persia is what we use to refer to the Persian Empire and Iran is the last remaining land of the Persian Empire... so the label is accurate but it speaks to [a broader] historical sense. [We're] ethnically Persian, but nationally Iranian." Much like Ehsan, Laudan followed up her answer with, "I'd definitely say I'm 'Persian' ethnically but I also call myself 'Iranian' despite never having gone to Iran--but because my parents were born there." Though not to the extent Ehsan and Laudan go to when reclaiming their Iranian identities, Jacob fights against the stigma his parents' generation fears when answering, "I don't think there's a difference between the two. I don't know why people get hung up on one or the other. They're interchangeable." At its core, the distinction between labeling oneself as "Persian" as opposed to "Iranian" has much to do with global perspectives on value, norms, and social expectations. For first-gens especially, labeling has become a significant and public act of cultural reclamation; we actively speak out against the west's sensationalized depictions of Iran and use the terms "Persian" and "Iranian" with spite and pride. When immigrating to the west (America), Persians (the east) are forced to confine their identities into what's perceived as 'acceptable' by the place of relocation.

The Global East

When I asked the participants on how they viewed the global east in comparison with global west, I received a variety of differing answers. The dissimilarity in answers makes clear how

complex self-labeling is, and how difficult it is to think about characteristics and customs on a global scale. However, the general consensus was that the east fostered a collectivist community, while the west enforced individualist attitudes. When speaking about the east, Laudan was the only person to point at westerners' sociopolitical perceptions. She speaks as an American living in America and refers to Iranians currently living in Iran when answering: "Iranians love Americans, people here are so blind to our own political situation; [Americans] think we're living in some crazy utopia [in America] and everyone [in Iran] is suffering. [Iran is] surprisingly progressive to people here in the west. People in the global east have a more nuanced perspective about international relations." Laudan's answer denounces Kristina Palten's problematic journey across Iran. The trip's name itself, *1144 Miles of Trust*, is insensitive and condescending. Palten points to Iran as the west presumes it to be--dangerous and threatening--a place that requires "trust" in Iranians in order for her to survive her trek. In order to subvert those misconceptions, Palten takes it upon herself to uncover the Iran Laudan and nearly all other participants have fought for.

In contrast to Laudan's answer, the majority of other participants portrayed the global east as familial and emotional. They answered the question through the (eastern) lens they have been entrenched in. "The emphasis on family is what I feel the most, and it was important for my family to be together. A lot of my American friends didn't understand that," Ashley answered. Jacob's answer was similar: "Persian [culture] is family oriented, you live with your family up until you're married or into your 30s, [and there's a] big emphasis on family oriented culture. Children, when they do move, won't move too far away." Donya too points to family as constituting eastern culture, but takes an alternate standpoint: "In the east you're put under a

microscope, you have to go by [the community's] rules and regulations, you don't have a sense of self who you are. Your parents, family members, and the nation [of Iran] dictate who you are." When asked which culture she prefers, Donya surprisingly answers, "I like the Persian and eastern culture more because they're more united, they come together, [and the] sense of connecting with family is very important. I don't get that sense with the western culture."

Donya exhibits how external (read: American) perception and lived experiences have induced frustration over her traditional, collectivist culture.

As Donya shared in a previous section, she feels overwhelmingly frustrated with her parents for not allowing her to explore an American identity once relocated in Los Angeles. However, the desire to assimilate comes with its own difficulties. One obstacle is, as Donya has shown, a family's desire to maintain the culture of the homeland. The other is the sense of shock and fear towards being in a foreign space with new people and the (western) cultural perception that her traditional customs are wrong. Donya felt nostalgic for her collectivist home back in Iran, and speaks through perceived shame and embarrassment. When I spoke with Mastaneh Moghadam on the topics of assimilation and hybridization, she explicated the confusion and conflict Donya feels towards her identity.

Mastaneh explained that for many individuals, assimilation can be difficult because they "com[e] from a collectivist cultural perspective and [are] trying to find yourself suddenly in this very individualistic culture, and trying to make sense without losing your own identity." Iran and the Persian culture at large revere community. As participants have previously shared, several generations live together under one roof or in neighboring apartments; extended family members take care of one another's children and attend outings as a group. Intimacy with

one's kin is not only expected, but also revered. In western cultures--and specifically, the United States--families can be close, but it's more common for families to live far apart from one another and not see each other on a regular basis. Children are expected to move out at eighteen-years-old and cultivate a life for themselves. Iranians who move to America--and who are expected to hybridize their Iranian and newly found American identities--may often experience a sense of shock and loss. Despite distancing themselves from the Persian culture to some extent, Donya still feels pulled to her national identity because of the familial, communal environment that's nurtured her.

The Global West

Mastaneh's depiction of the United States mirrors what most of the participants answered when asked about the global west. Jacob, in particular, points to the individualistic culture that Mastaneh highlighted: "Western culture puts a big emphasis on individualism--being an individual within a society--you doing your own thing first. American parents are very much about instilling in their children autonomy and responsibility." Like Donya, Abner gives a complicated answer: "The west thinks that giving is better than taking [while the east thinks that it's better to take than to give]." While he didn't go in depth about why he perceived the west as being more giving, his answer may have been related to the traumas experienced during the Revolution--when government officials expected Iranians to give their money, autonomy, and allegiance to the dictatorship. His perception as an Iranian in America may also explain the way that he's chosen to assimilate, as previously noted that he's taken the "positive" parts of each culture and left the "negative" ones behind. Donya and Abner's answers relay how their identities have been shaped by two main external factors: Past events,

such as the Revolution and the subsequent placelessness, and the ways in which they've found themselves needing to adapt to western American culture.

The consequences of modern-day Orientalism affect both migrants and first-gens. Both generations utilize the fetishization of Iran in a) adhering to the Orientalist and fantastical label "Persian" and b) a self-exoticization seen in individuals' pride, love, and appreciation for Iranians and the Iranian culture. When thinking back to processes of assimilation, a hybridized individual is one who straddles liminalities, including geographical locations, labels, and languages. This leads to a hybridized individual who gathers a sense of self through each culture and its traditional values. All participants have straddled such liminalities, pointing to cultural abrasion, generational ties, and memories of the past as forming the lens with which they see themselves and the global world. Those lenses are then refracted through an "outsider" mentality--seen in the way that migrants refer to themselves as "Persian" over "Iranian," and the way in which individuals fend for, or interpret, their eastern culture in comparison to the west.

Conclusion

All six individuals grappled with the effects of nostalgia, intergenerational memory, and the presence of culture when forming their hybridized identities. After Revolutionary migrants moved to America in light of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the pre-Revolutionary pasts they--and now, their children--associated with freedom and family ceased to exist. But those memories took hold for first-generation Persian-Americans who longed for--and were in awe by--the lives their parents lived in the homeland. When in conversation with Edward Casey's concepts of "shared memory," "gathering," and Hirsch and Miller's "postmemory," it is evident that key issues of memory and identity--especially the dilemma of constructing self and identity in the present--are based on relationships to a past that is always changing. In this paper, I focused on narrative, both through my personal memoirs and my in interviews with others. I chose to explore familial storytelling because of in the way that it serves as a vehicle through which people experience the rupture and hybridization that have helped form our identities.

My central question--How do storytelling, nostalgia, and memory cultivate or construct identity--in particular, how have they melded or distanced Persian and American identities?--is one that's extremely personal for my navigating my own identity. I grew up in a household where Persian culture was the norm. The first three concerts I had ever attended were for Googoosh, a famous Persian singer. I spent every Friday Shabbat at my grandparents' house, with Persian stews and rice dishes filling the entirety of the dining table, and Persian music videos playing on the television in the living room. My parents instilled a culture in me that I found difficult and distancing when sharing such rituals with my friends. As written in my first memoir, I loved hearing the stories of my parents' childhoods. The photos my grandmother

shared with me--a beautiful 60s cocktail dress, her hair up in a bun and decorated with a tiara--elicited in me a sense of wonder and awe. I've always dreamt of traveling to Iran, to experience the foods, sights, smells, and cultural customs I've heard secondhand through my parents. But I know that for the foreseeable future, it isn't a possibility, given Iran's current regime and my Jewish faith. I'm also held back by my parents' feelings towards Iran--a geographical place that has led to exile, loss, placelessness, and to some extent trauma--and how I'd like to honor the *ghorbat* they have for their birth country.

In speaking with Revolutionary migrants, I learned that despite loss, their stories of migration and relocation centered more on reclamation than on loss. Despite having lived in America for forty years now, the migrants still found themselves grappling with exile and the subsequent (negative) effects of hybridization. However, Abner was able to reclaim a sense of home once in America, away from the violence and brutality of Revolutionary Iran. Donya and Lily, in their own ways, were able to reclaim their Iranian identities through nostalgia and kinship. I pointed to Gloria Anzaldúa's "new mestiza" as providing framework for newly hybridized migrants who were forced to straddle geographical and cultural borders. In order to create spaces of belonging, migrants found collective community in Los Angeles and created physical spaces to perform traditional rituals, gather with kinship and friends, and relish in sentimental material objects.

Communal and familial intimacy has required migrants and their first-generational children to navigate their hybridized identities to a further extent. First-gen Jacob was brought up Persian and Jewish by a family who deeply honored both cultures. He shared with me, "When I was very young and didn't know a difference between Jewish and Persian culture I

thought that all Persians were Jewish and [that] all Jews spoke Farsi. To be more Jewish meant participating in temple life and because [my] temple [serves the] Persian [population], engaging in Judaism has brought me closer to Persian culture.” For Jacob, being Jewish and being Persian were inextricably bound for much of his childhood. The process of gathering--with other bodies, memories, languages and history--led to place-making, a physical space he could dwell in and feel a sense of belonging. Revolutionary migrant Lily also points to place and culture as leading her family to adapt to American values--all while maintaining an Iranian household. In maintaining intimate relationships with one’s kin, individuals are better adept at maintaining their cultural identities. The stories and memories shared from one generation to another both engender and feed into nostalgia. While such nostalgia may foster feelings of loss or distance, it can also allow for the opportunity to connect further with one’s culture and, for migrants, explore that nostalgia with their children.

Although familial and communal gatherings are seminal to the individuals’ sense of self, I noted the ways in which their identities are doubly constructed through the eyes of the “other.” I felt shame about my Persian identity when my history teacher had called out my skin tone during class. I was embarrassed because, through the eyes of others, my cultural heritage was unwanted and marred by fear. Edward Said notes the problematic concept of Orientalism, which exoticizes eastern cultures while simultaneously ridding individuals of their cultural identity for fear of western discrimination. Donya, Abner, and Lily acknowledged the use of the word “Persian” once moving to America because of the connotations “Iranian” carried; nevertheless, Donya was still targeted and discriminated against for being an Iranian immigrant.

First-gens Laudan and Ehsan are using “othering” as a way to reclaim and subvert preconceptions about their Iranian ethnicity.

First-gens are utilizing the American landscape as a place wherein they can assert their identities and reflect on and refract their parents’ memories through their hybridized lenses. These individuals can be, as Mastaneh Moghadam noted, more connected to their Iranian roots than their immigrant parents are. Despite having been born in America, the first-gens I spoke with still feel neither fully Iranian nor fully American; instead, they are tasked with constructing identities through the materiality they engage with. Laudan found pride through Iranian books and movies. Ehsan and Ashley relish in Iranian cuisine, and Jacob and I find connection to our culture through music.

Constructing one’s identity is not a fixed process; as first-gens get older, they’ll either grow towards or away from their Iranian identities. And Revolutionary migrants may Americanize as their children begin having their own families here in America. In thinking and writing about my relationship with my mom and grandma, I’ve realized that my Persian identity wholly relies on their exile story. I’ve encountered it in the pain, loss, and longing they’ve shared with me while we sat around Jeeba’s table on warm Sunday afternoons. The way in which they instilled in me the significance of knowing each of the Persian holidays and the rituals that accompany them. The inherent need to find and form community so as not to lose our Persian identities as we did our homeland. What remains are the effects of the 1979 Revolution and the places we’ve since inhabited, grown into, and made ours.

Memoir 3 - Sorry, I Seem to Have Displaced My Identity

In third grade, I looked up inquisitively at my teacher, wondering which box to check under "ethnicity" on our standardized test. He told me to check "white." *How can I be white if I'm brown, if no one sees me as being white?* I checked the box, and thus started the domino effect that resulted in my displaced identity. In seventh grade, my teacher pointed to me mid-lecture and told the class that in 100 years, everyone would have the same skin color I had. I distinctly recall hearing gasps and worried whispers from girls around me. I figured that these were signs from above telling me to completely upheave any roots I had in the Middle East. During that time, my mom would say every so often that I was a true American girl. No true American girl I had ever known paired her Abercrombie & Fitch skinny jeans with distinctly overgrown sideburns.

I have three warring selves. I'm an Iranian, an American, and a Jew. If the United States, Israel and Iran are all in the midst of a great and seemingly ever-lasting war then it only feels warranted for there to be a war within myself. *Though*, I've come to learn that it does have its benefits. There's no need to learn Pig Latin when you've got a language thousands of years old at your disposal. I've learned to navigate my interests between *The Real Housewives* and saffron – reaching towards a *chador* with one hand and Cheez Its with the other. And if there's one thing I know as a Persian, it's that I have options in life: doctor, lawyer, engineer, or disgrace to the family. I've chosen to deviate from those paths and instead, write about it.

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Interview Questions for Iranian Revolutionary Migrants:

- Where were you born?
- When and why did you move to America?
- What types of memories do you have of the Iranian Revolution?
- Do you consider yourself to be Persian or Iranian? Why? What connotations are associated with each label? Do you consider yourself a refugee or immigrant?
- Where did you settle in America? Do you know others that settled in the same location? Why did you choose that location?
- What feelings/emotions do you have towards your childhood? Are you nostalgic?
- How were you treated or approached by others in America?
- How much of your past/homeland/culture did your parents keep in your family? Did they uphold rituals and try to keep that culture alive?
- What rituals do you engage in today to remind you of your culture? Is your culture a large part of your identity?
- How connected to you feel to your past?
- What types of memories are you most fond of when thinking back to your childhood/life in Iran? What are some more negative memories?
- Where do you consider to be “home?”
- Have you returned to visit Iran? Why or why not?
- What differences do you notice between the east and west? How do they differ culturally?
- How important to you are storytelling and music to Iranian culture?
- When do you think you found a happy medium between both cultures?

- How important was it to you to share your culture, traditions and rituals with your children?
- How much of your childhood/life in Iran have you chosen to share with your children?
- How involved were your children in the Iranian culture and community? What types of involvement?
- Have your children shown curiosity in learning more about their Iranian heritage? In what ways?

Interview Questions for First-Generation Iranian-Americans:

- Where were you born?
- How do you culturally self identify?
- Do you consider yourself to be Persian or Iranian? Why? What connotations are associated with each label?
- What feelings do you have towards being Iranian-American?
- Have you ever had difficulty living as an Iranian-American in America? Have you had negative experiences? Positive experiences?
- What differences do you assume there to be culturally between the east and west?
- Have you ever visited or had desire to visit Iran? Why or why not?
- What types of stories have your parents shared with you about their lives in Iran? What types of feelings do you associate with those stories?
- How do you define “nostalgia?”
- Have you ever felt nostalgic about your parents’ lives in Iran? How so?
- Where do you consider to be “home?”
- Have you shown curiosity in learning more about the Iranian culture? At what age did you begin showing interest?
- Did your parents keep an “Iranian” household - i.e. foods, customs, music, television, gatherings, etc.?
- How have you participated in Iranian culture, traditions, and rituals? How have your parents involved you in participating in Iranian culture, traditions, and rituals?
- What are your feelings towards engaging in Iranian culture? Have those feelings changed over time?
- How involved were/are you in the Iranian community? In what ways?

- How have storytelling and cultural markers (e.g. art, food, music, film and other media) made an impact on your Iranian identity?
- How important to you is it to engage in Iranian rituals, traditions, and culture?