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**Iranians in Vancouver: 'Legible People'/  
Irredeemable Others/Migrant Stories**

**Dan Swanton**

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**Iranians in Vancouver:  
'Legible People'/Irredeemable Others/Migrant Stories**

**Dan Swanton**  
Department of Geography  
University of Durham  
d.j.swanton@durham.ac.uk

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the ways in which ‘we’ – and this ‘we’ includes journalists, government employees, politicians, academics, NGOs as well as the ‘ordinary’ citizens on the street – come to know about Iranian migrants in Vancouver. I bring three distinct ways of narrating the experiences, identities and realities of Iranian migrants into a juxtaposition that is often ambivalent and awkward, but ultimately productive. I begin by unpacking the concise and authoritative short-cuts to the identifications and experiences of Iranian migrants enabled by state technologies of legibility such as the census. I then shift focus to the overlapping and contorted imaginative geographies of Iranian otherness fabricated and circulated in the Canadian print media, considering the ways in which these stories affect how we see Iranians as *different*. In the final section I turn to stories of migration told by Iranian migrants themselves, in the hope of admitting some of the pluralities of personal histories, experiences, and belongings. Moreover, by concentrating on the affective and emotional dimensions of migration, I also want to disrupt more conventional ways through which migration is routinely imagined.

**Key words:** Iranian migrants, Vancouver, state technologies of legibility, media representation, migrant stories

## Introduction

“So many stories, so many journeys: each one, fantastic in its particularity (how did it feel, what happened here and there?) and yet mediated and touched by broader relationships of social antagonism.” (Ahmed 2000, 90)

Stories about migration, dislocation, exile and the experiences of resettling, getting by and making home can be told in numerous ways – in novels, films, academic texts, official statistics, multicultural spectacles, conversations, migrant stories, documentaries, media representations. And yet out of these diverse and often incommensurable stories a number of ‘figures’ emerge and recur: the exile, the immigrant entrepreneur, the refugee, the cosmopolitan, the gang-member. In this paper I begin by briefly considering two distinct and powerful ways in which stories about Iranian immigrants enter into the popular imagination, namely through official statistics and media representations, before reflecting at greater length on some of the stories told – or, more accurately, solicited – in my research with Iranian immigrants in Vancouver. Bringing together these distinct ways of *narrating* the lived and embodied experiences of migration and making home, I hope to visit, and complicate, a number of ‘figures’ that are taken to stand (in) for Iranian immigrants in the partial ‘telling’ of migrant stories through the performative repertoires<sup>1</sup> of the Canadian state and the print media in Canada. My hope is that the juxtaposition of these narratives forces us to question how knowledge about immigrants is fabricated, and to consider how ‘we’ – and this ‘we’ includes journalists, government employees, politicians, academics, NGOs as well as the ‘ordinary’ citizen on the street – come to ‘know’ about Iranian immigrants. Finally, by turning to themes emerging out of the particularities of migrant stories, I attempt to disrupt, complicate and clarify a number of received ideas about immigration to Canada and post-modern celebrations of the subversive and transgressive figure of the ‘migrant’ (see Ahmed 2000; Rushdie 1991).

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Performativity’ in the sense of the ‘reiteration of norms that precede, constrain, and exceed the performer’ (Butler 1993: 225). Viewing identity as performative, then, means that identities are constructed by the “very ‘expressions’ that are said to be their results” (Butler 1990: 45). Cultural practices are reified and naturalised as ‘typical expressions’ of an ethnic identity; they are seen as resulting from that identity, rather than performing that identity. Performative acts, these episodes are part of regulatory practices that produce social categories and the norms of membership within them. In this was we might think of Orientalism as performative – *it produces the effects it names*. Its categories, codes and conventions shape the practices of those who draw upon it, actively constituting its object in such a way that this structure is as much a *repertoire* as an archive (Gregory 2004: 18).

## Departures

As the opening quote suggests, stories of migration cannot be shorn from broader social antagonisms, including imperialisms and neo-colonialisms, shifting geopolitics, petro-capitalism, class relations, and the cultural politics of gender and sexuality. In this section, therefore, I briefly trace some of the ways in which political-economic upheavals and social antagonisms have framed journeys and migrations from Iran since the end of the Second World War.

In 1953 Operation Ajax – a covert operation orchestrated by the CIA and MI6 – overthrew the freely elected and democratic government of Iran that had expressed sympathies with socialism and threatened to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Set in the context of Cold War geopolitics this colonial intervention led to reinstallation of Shah Reza Pahlevi, the recently deposed monarch, and drew Iran into the American Empire's sphere of influence, while also enabling the autocratic Pahlevi regime's petrolic dream of 'The Great Civilisation,' a vision of modernity on a grand scale built on petrodollars (Watts 1994). Neo-colonial relations, the demands of building the Shah's excessive vision of modernity, and the desires of what Watts (1994) has called 'an aspiring power bloc' that included the Shah's family, high ranking state bureaucrats, as well as financial and industrial bourgeoisies, led to temporary migrations over the next 25 years, as members of the Iranian political and economic elite travelled to Western Europe and North America largely to attend universities and finishing schools, and exile for some of the regimes' political opponents. Although these migrations did not lead to the establishment of a significant Iranian presence in Western Europe or North America, the experiences of earlier journeys, and the ideologies woven around the vision of 'The Great Civilisation' become central to later migrations and diasporic politics after the revolution in 1979.

The Islamic Revolution in February 1979 ushered a sea-change in migrations from Iran. The highly fluid and uncertain political situation that followed the repatriation of exiled religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, initiated immediate displacements as members of the political elite and affluent urban upper classes fled (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh and Der Martisian 1993). This exodus was supplemented in the early years of the Islamic Republic by the flight and exile of significant numbers of religious minorities (particularly the Baha'i), who were subjected to both government persecution and mob violence, and numerous members of Leftist political organisations, initially allied to the revolutionary movement, but increasingly purged as the theocracy sought to secure its grip on power (Khosrokhavar 2002). The denouement of events in Iran, and their multiple dislocations, generated new topographies of exile, and fomented exilic imaginaries shaped for many by traumatic experiences of loss and separation (loss of homeland, material wealth, home, loss of the revolution, severed

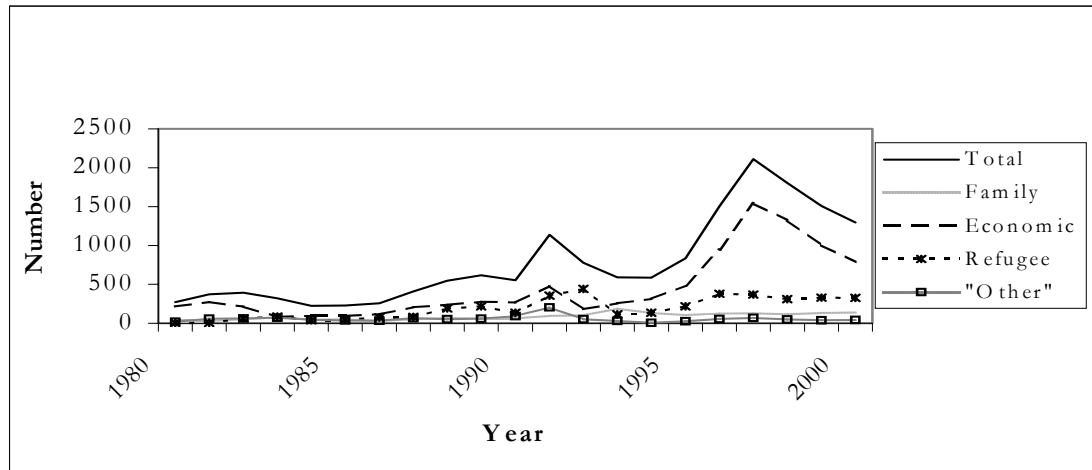
relationships to home culture language and society, diminished moral and political stature) (Naficy 1993). The psychic, symbolic and embodied experiences of exile are inscribed into the experiences of those who departed in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, with the ‘dream of glorious return’ (Rushdie 1992) shaping practices in new, but what were hoped to be temporary, homes, a theme I will revisit later.

These early – and distinct – displacements marked only the beginnings of new histories and geographies of migration from Iran. Taking documented movement from Iran to Vancouver as a case in point<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1), it becomes evident that migration has increased considerably over the past 25 years. And by thinking of migration as the negotiation of a matrix of ‘regimes of governmentality’ by disciplinable subjects (Foucault 1991; Ong 1999) – of the state, family and economy – as well as cultural imaginaries, we can situate these uprootings and regroundings within a plurality of histories, experiences and constituencies to better sense the symbolic, material and affective dimensions of migration (Ahmed *et al.* 2003). We must consider these movements as negotiations of political and economic changes in Iran since 1979, lived through the cultural politics of gender and sexuality, economic necessity and material desires, and patriarchal familial relations as well as the shifting ways in which the Canadian state attempts to regulate its borders through immigration legislation and programmes. Events in Iran – like the Cultural Revolution (1981-82) that saw the closure of some universities and the exclusion of many highly skilled workers from the workforce; the bloody realities of the Iran-Iraq war; political alienation and disaffection; increased state intervention into the private lives of citizens in the name of morality; difficult access to higher education; conscription – have over the past 20 or so years been variously interwoven into individual and family decisions to migrate, which themselves, have been formed through perceptions, imaginations and partial knowledge of both ‘home’ and destination (often filtered through social networks of family and friends).

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<sup>2</sup> And this profile replicates tendencies observed for data for all of Canada.

**Figure 1:** Iranian-born Immigrants destined for Vancouver by Immigrant Class. (Source: LIDS)



### Legible People?

“No administrative system is capable of representing *any* existing social community except through a heroic and greatly schematised process of abstraction and simplification.” (Scott 1998, 22)

State technologies of legibility, such as the census, clearly provide useful snapshots of populations; however we need to wary of the effects that the census might have by legitimating particular forms of knowledge, and the impact of taking such stories at their face value, rather than as partial tellings and knowledge – situated within particularly political and institutional contexts. We must therefore be both modest in our uses of the census and open to other ways of telling – bringing them into conversation.

In this section I demonstrate how statistics produced by the Canadian state authorise particular ways of telling migrant stories, and suggest some implications of these narrations. While it is widely acknowledged that statistics are ‘social artefacts,’ embedded in the governmental practices of the state and need to be recognised as ‘partial and problematic, rather than totalising and accomplished’ (Ley 2003: 427), it is also important to consider their enduring performative force. The categories, codes and conventions of the census and other immigrant databases “shape the practices of those who draw upon them, actively constituting its object in such a way that this structure is as much a *repertoire* as an archive” (Gregory 2004: 18). As such, official statistics can in one sense be seen to *produce the effects they name* (Butler 1990; Gregory 2004).



Before looking more closely at some of the narratives encouraged and enabled through the census and other state practices of ‘stocktaking’ (Goldberg 2002), I want to dwell briefly on two effects of relying on such technologies. Firstly, processes of categorisation reveal the application of ‘race-thinking’ in the regulatory practices of what Goldberg (2002) has called the ‘racial state,’ reinforcing (and entrenching) structures of white (Anglo) governmentality, where whiteness is sedimented as the unnamed but assumed cultural core of the nation (Anderson 2002). Secondly, I want to emphasise how the census and other inventories fabricate ‘virtual categorical communities’ (Hannah 2001), divorcing individuals from lived, embodied realities and knowledge as they are placed according to documented attributes within a matrix of power/knowledge. Practices of categorisation and enumeration produce legibility as they cover up the precariousness of identities, and conceal the indeterminacy and contested meanings of signifiers such as ‘Iranian.’ State exercises in ‘stocktaking’ enclose, fix and stabilise identities, and inscribe them on to the bodies of migrants as they produce a semblance of homogeneity and equivalence by suppressing heterogeneity, flux, ambivalence and antagonism.

The conciseness and simplicity of census categories, and the virtual categorical communities they create, means that statistical representations become easy short-cuts, and are regularly taken up in various authoritative representations (including, for example, political statements, government documents, media coverage, and academic texts) and assume explanatory power. The performative force of ‘race-thinking’ and census categories lies in their repetition and translation. Practices of ‘race-thinking’ and virtual categorical communities become mundane, routine and common-sense. These arguments reinforce the need to carefully consider the practices through which statistical representations are fabricated, and the importance of comprehending how authoritative representations not only attempt to depict the lived worlds, but are also constitutive in important ways of these worlds.

With these arguments in mind, I focus on two particular migrant stories that emerge from statistical representations of Iranians. The longitudinal immigration database and census inevitably privilege the priorities and objectives of the Canadian state for what James Scott would call ‘legibility,’ thereby limiting not only the kinds of migrant stories permissible as knowledge, but also the ways in which these stories are told. Accordingly, state sponsored snapshots of Iranian immigrants tend to assess ‘fitting in’ and ‘getting by’ in Canada (itself in the making) measured by a host of calculable, and therefore normative and arbitrary, attributes such as language competence, employment and education that assume a teleology of integration into the Canadian nation imagined through the rhetoric of a multicultural mosaic. Migrant stories emerge through the telling of smooth

journeys to Canada (obscuring complex negotiations of immigration programmes, diverse contexts of movement, failed applications, ease of movement and so forth) by individuals neatly black-boxed into one of a limited number of immigrant categories, which themselves define and powerfully shape the experiences and life chances of immigrants (Mountz 2004), and confine individuals to ethnically determined ‘communities’ that ‘get on’ in their new home with varying degrees of success. Looking critically at the particular lives lived through statistical representations, I hope to reanimate these narratives by simultaneously considering the affective experiences of journeys and migration (Ahmed 2000). I am thinking here about the emotional experiences of migration, the traumas of forced movement, sustained senses of loss and unmooring, the ruptures of being out of place in the setting of one’s everyday life, the struggles of getting by, the yearnings for belonging.

### **Spacing Iranian Identity**

Census cartographies, constructed through the disembodied abstractions of census geographies, enable spacings of ‘Iranian’ identities in Vancouver, which at once reinforce and undermine imaginative geographies of an Iranian ‘presence’ in Vancouver. For example, everyday imaginative geographies of Persian/Iranian concentration in Vancouver’s North Shore municipalities of North Vancouver and West Vancouver are partially confirmed by census spacings enacted through mappings of residential geographies for individuals documented as Iranian-born in the census (Appendix 2).<sup>3</sup> These spacings are not pernicious in and of themselves, indeed such census cartographies can, for example, usefully inform immigrant service provision or multicultural monies. However, we do need to be wary of distended spacings of Iranian identities, that contort realities through the selective vision of authoritative imaginative geographies, and by dwelling too heavily on spacings of ‘Iranian’ identities that emphasise gathering and concentration reinforces popular imaginings of sameness and homogeneity within the category Iranian to the extent that the North Shore becomes metonymically entangled with ‘Iranian’ in the local construction of Iranian immigrant identities (Anderson 1991). Perceptions of homogeneity, encouraged by the repetition of *visible* and *legible* spacings of Iranians within Vancouver’s metropolitan landscape override the very real differences and antagonisms among those identified (and located) as Iranians. Moreover cartographies that over-emphasise gathering and concentration can generate, sustain or legitimate (White/Anglo) resentments that Iranians are ‘sticking to “their” own,’ failing to ‘integrate’ in the spirit of multiculturalism – or perhaps taking multiculturalism to its logical end (Bissoondath 1994) –

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<sup>3</sup> These ‘spacings’ can also be expressed statistically through location quotients and the index of dissimilarity, that translate complex geographies of residence into descriptions amenable to comparison on a plane of equivalence (see Hiebert 1999)

and anxieties about emergence of balkanised neighbourhoods as Iranians are seen to be ‘taking over’ parts of the city.<sup>4</sup>

However, a number of alternative narratives also emerge from the census. Firstly, migration is as much about ‘gathering’ as dispersal (Ahmed 2000), and the ‘gathered’ geographies evident in census cartographies are suggestive of the significance of social networks in communicating and ‘filtering’ information and knowledge about destinations to potential migrants and providing psychological and social support and information to new arrivals. More broadly, the geographies of Iranian settlement correspond to recent diagnoses of the suburbanisation of recent immigration in metropolitan Vancouver (Hiebert 1999), coincidental with shifting immigrant ‘profiles’ associated with a reorientation of the Canadian immigration regime towards economic, and particularly business, migrants.

***Spaces of constructed visibility and invisibility: Seeing through immigrant categories***

“Discourse is material in the sense that it brings into being classifications of objects, bodies and identities (Butler 1990; Haraway 1991) and exists as situated practices, supported by institutions, buildings, and so forth.” (Pratt 1999, 217)

In this second intervention I hope to engage with discursive practices through which Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) – alongside other state agencies – identifies, categorises and nominates migrants. These discursive practices are inevitably embedded in the shifting priorities of Canadian immigration policy – which increasingly appear to be concerned with the international economic standing of Canada and advancement of an imagined national future (Walton-Roberts 2004: 268) – but here, I am primarily interested in comprehending the *effects* of these discursive practices as they are inscribed on to the bodies of migrants (Pratt 1999; Mountz 2004). Depending on how Iranians entered Canada they are bracketed into one of a number of immigrant classes (economic immigrant, business immigrant, skilled worker, refugee, sponsored immigrant, dependant and so forth), and this process of (black)boxing migrants can generate horizons of possibility enabling or constraining the individuals obliged to live within them. I hope to destabilise the ways in which migrants become legible, knowable, even transparent through immigrant categories, by tracing the silences and contradictions contained within categories, and following lines of ‘connectivity’ that cross immigrant classes (Pratt 1999; Walton-Roberts 2003).

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<sup>4</sup> For example we might read a vitriolic debate played out in the pages of the *Vancouver Sun* in January 1997 over Farsi-only signs on some shops in North Vancouver as a manifestation of a sense of White/Anglo empowerment, as some assume the right to *manage* local space.

Immigrant classes provide concise and powerful shortcuts but I suggest that by disrupting the ‘discursive geographies’ of these categories (Pratt 1999) and thinking through the implications of disembodied migrants through dominant discursive practices, we can better grasp the lived and embodied experiences of migration. For example, the discursive practices of CIC make a series of distinctions between political and economic, worthy and unworthy, capital rich and poor, skilled and unskilled, independent and sponsored<sup>5</sup>. However, these state practices of ‘enframing’ obfuscate, and at worst erase, the realities of human mobility, which are entrenched in socially and spatially mediated processes and cultural logics beyond the language of economic rationale or political insecurity.

Disembodied categories gesture to particular readings of migrant stories, however, when we begin to ‘embody’ migration, admitting stories recounted by migrants themselves, intimate connections and overlaps begin to emerge across immigrant categories, complicating and compromising the bounded discursive geographies offered by categorisation. I begin with extending Ley’s (1999; 2003) incisive unravelling of the ‘strange story’ of Canada’s business immigration programmes, in which he disrupts the received wisdom about business immigration and Canada’s search for *homo economicus* by exposing the modest economic performance of many business immigrants. The intervention is an important one, challenging popular and bureaucratic imaginings of an immigrant ‘overclass,’ but leaves me wondering how ‘strange’ this story of business immigration really is. For example, statistics compiled by CIC (LIDS) suggest that 15.1% (2476) of immigrants born in Iran and destined for Vancouver entered Canada through business immigration programmes,<sup>6</sup> either as principal applicants or dependants. The financial capital required to enter Canada through these immigration programmes is considerable,<sup>7</sup> and the conspicuous consumption of some Iranians in Vancouver, alongside the establishment of a number in the ‘stratospheric property market’ of the British Properties in West Vancouver (Hiebert 1999) appears to suggest that the Canadian

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<sup>5</sup> It needs noting that these dyads are open to contestation and can become blurred. For example, in recent years the integrity of Canada’s refugee programmes has increasingly been questioned, with a growing sense that the system is ‘soft.’ A corollary of this tendency is that refugees and asylum seekers are increasingly portrayed and perceived as economically motivated, and the category is increasingly seen as ‘illegitimate,’ and exploited by ‘queue jumpers’ (Mountz 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Given that the business immigration programmes were initiated in 1986 this proportion likely under estimates the relative significance of this immigration stream for Iranian born immigrants.

<sup>7</sup> The business immigration categories include self-employed, investors and entrepreneurs. Investors are expected to invest Cdn\$400,000 in Canada and have a net worth of at least Cdn\$800,000; whereas entrepreneurs must have a net worth of Cdn\$300,000 and must establish a business that contributes to the Canadian economy and provide one or more jobs, beyond the employment of the entrepreneur and their family; self-employed immigrants must be able to set up or buy a business that employs themselves and makes an economic or cultural contribution to Canada (CIC 2001; Ley 2003; Walton-Roberts 2003).

government has indeed found its *homo economicus*. However, listening to the diverse personal histories of a number of ‘business immigrants’ during interviews, the official stories of business immigration became less and less compelling. As ‘business immigrants’ are embodied and their stories admitted the economic logics explicitly privileged in the rhetoric and discursive geographies of business immigration programmes are profoundly unsettled.

Indeed, far from embodying the ‘muscular entrepreneurialism’ anticipated through the nomination of business immigrant, the stories told suggested that migration emerged from complex negotiations of multiple regimes of governmentality, but particularly those of the nation state and the family. In fact economic logics were largely absent in explaining decisions to migrate. Sam, who had recently moved to Vancouver with his family, entering Canada as an investor, suggests the decision to relocate involved the interplay of numerous concerns and desires that centred on the family, perceptions of Canada and Vancouver and the need to negotiate state regimes of governmentality embodied in immigration policy and citizenship requirements:

Well [...] my main motivation was because there was an order from the lady of the house that we should move. That was the main motivation [laughs]. And then after that we went because of the children, we wanted to be for the children in the United States if they want to study or advance and [...] better country to live. We thought Canada would be a nice place and in Canada we thought that Vancouver is...has a better weather condition and [...] that we would be more at peace here. So [...] you know, in fact we wanted to have another nationality as well, to, to be free.

– Sam<sup>8</sup>

Sam’s immediate response is intriguing. Beginning with the assertion that mobility for his family was initiated by his wife, not only does he purposefully unsettle discursive geographies of immigrant and Muslim women<sup>9</sup>, variously constructed as passive and ‘dependant’ by the state, but he also hints at his ambivalence about relocating to Vancouver. This ambivalence re-appears later in the interview when I questioned Sam about his experiences of work in Vancouver:

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

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<sup>8</sup> All names are pseudonyms. [...] indicates a pause in speech.

<sup>9</sup> It seems to me that Sam’s statement is carefully calculated. What he says to me is more complicated than a simple contestation of constructions of Iranian immigrant women but he seems purposeful in what he says, calculating the implications of what he is saying and second guessing how I will receive his words.

Far from an embodiment of *homo economicus*, Sam appears hesitant and at times frustrated by what he sees as impediments to him being economically active in Vancouver, which he then expresses through an ambivalence about where he is located...‘It doesn’t make much difference.’ Vancouver is portrayed as a ‘comfortable’ place (it is peaceful; he *doesn’t mind* living here), as a place where his children will have access to a good education and better opportunities in the future, but it does not appear as a place for doing business. Indeed, for Sam migration has involved semi-retirement, remaining economically active only by remotely managing businesses in Iran through a series of partnerships and extended business trips back to Iran.

Without overextending Sam’s account, I think his case is illustrative of the alternate, yet still partial, perspectives that emerge as we embody immigrant categories. Firstly, I think his narrative, alongside many other stories I was told in interviews, suggest that many Iranian business immigrants, or economic migrants more generally, do not move to Vancouver to make money – even though their conditions of entry are often scripted in such terms. Migrant stories introduce more affective dimensions of migration and emphasise migration as a negotiation of familial aspirations, concerns, and means as the regulatory regimes of immigration programmes are negotiated in ways which undermine the meaningfulness of analyses that reify distinctions made through categorisation. Migrant stories shed light on the enactment of diverse and innovative transnational spatial ‘tactics’ (de Certeau 1984) which manipulate state disciplinary regimes and their territorialisations, to reconcile economic imperatives with the (often partial) reterritorialisation of the family (Ong 1999). In this sense Sam’s story is somewhat unique. His affluence and business partnerships involve spatial practices that allow him to live in Vancouver, while remaining economically active in Iran. For a number of other families I spoke to, various transnational spatial tactics associated with the ‘astronaut family’ (Waters 2001) were employed – occasionally with considerable emotional and psychological costs – to balance family goals and desires to relocate while avoiding the ‘familiar story of deskilling by immigration’ (Pratt 1999).

In similar ways, as we embody other immigrant classes the distinctions implied and assumed through practices of identification, categorisation and nomination are complicated (Mountz 2004). Perhaps most striking is the frustrating but all too familiar experiences of skilled migrants. The cruel irony for many skilled immigrants from Iran is that while they are admitted to Canada on account of their ‘human capital,’ they are routinely prevented from using this human capital in the labour market. The following passages add texture to the experiences and frustrations of underemployment among Iranians entering Canada as skilled migrants and highlight connections across immigrant classes by prominently placing the family in explanations of why they struggle on:

But, when you go somewhere, and you lose a fortune, and you don't find a job, and then you are not happy, your family is not happy – sometimes you say, 'To hell with it, I'll sacrifice my freedom and at least I can get my family to a standard that I want, or I was used to.' And that's something that is happening with a lot of Iranian families here. They say, 'What the hell with it, I'll have my wife wear a [...] you know, a scarf, but at least, you know, I am making money, I am successful and my family is happy'...*so people like me end up doing what they did 20 years ago [...] with one third of what they were paid and with no perks.*

– Fahrddad (emphasis added)

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

– Davood

By bringing out the frustrations and significant emotional, psychological and financial costs of migration these excerpts point to the inadequacy of immigrant categories as representations, and allude to the dangers of seeing through categories which in emphasising 'skilled' suggest that these migrants will get by in the Canadian labour market.

A close interrogation of early migration from Iran also begins to blur the explicit distinctions made by the state between economic and political migration, and forced and voluntary displacements. CIC documents that 24% (3,929) of Iranian-born migrants destined for Vancouver between 1980 and 2000 were refugees. However, refugee streams were relatively unimportant for the majority of the earliest migrants to Vancouver at a time when the largest numbers were exiled from Iran. The refugee stream only begins to account for significant numbers of migrants born in Iran by the mid-1980s, and remains at relatively consistent levels throughout the 1990s. In years immediately after the revolution, economic immigration programmes were the primary route into Canada. There are, I think, three interwoven explanations. Firstly, that these initial émigrés were not exiles as such, but were temporarily relocating in a time of acute political and economic flux and insecurity in Iran. Secondly, it might be that Canada was not an initial destination for refugees, but they were resettled in Vancouver, either voluntarily or as Government assisted refugees. Thirdly, many of these initial migrants, although fleeing Iran through fear of religious or political persecution, drew upon their human capital – and particularly educational credentials often from institutions in North America or Western Europe – to ensure mobility, thereby eluding the state nomination 'refugee.'

### **Embodying Categories**

State technologies of legibility (Scott 1998) produce important ways of seeing, accounting and recounting migrant stories, but the concise and authoritative short-cuts to identities, experiences and realities fabricated must be used with caution. Returning to the stories solicited in interviews with Iranian migrants, I have attempted to embody – literally flesh out – the disembodied vision enabled by categories fabricated and circulated by the state (Haraway 1991), in ways that emphasise partiality and begin to gesture towards silences and connections. The aim here is not to discredit the census and other forms of ‘demographic accounting’ but to disrupt the performative force of these technologies by questioning the authoritative statements they enable.

#### ***‘Irredeemable Others’: Imaginative geographies of the media***

Arjun Appadurai (1996, 3; emphasis added) has recognised that media technologies provide “new *resources* and new *disciplines* for constructing our imagined selves and imagined worlds,” and in this section I reflect on the media’s role in the fabrication<sup>10</sup> of Iranian identities. Specifically I sketch the ways in which the media are implicated in assembling and circulating what Edward Said (1979) would call ‘imaginative geographies’ of Iranian Others. For Said imaginative geographies are integral to the performative *repertoire* of Orientalism, ‘fold[ing] distance into difference through a series of spatialisations’ (Gregory 2004, 17), “designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’” (Said 1979, 54; Gregory 2004, 17). I am interested in elaborating on some of the imaginative geographies deployed in representations of ‘Islam,’ Iranians and Iranian immigrants in the Canadian press. In particular I argue that migration contorts existing imaginative geographies as individuals become constructed as out-of-place in the everyday places they inhabit, therefore initiating new performances of space (Rose 1999) that seek to maintain demarcations between ‘the same’ and ‘the other,’ but also overlap and intertwine with existing imaginative geographies as they ‘become knitted together in a symbolic web’ (Dunn 2001). Representations of ‘Islam,’ Iranians and Iranian immigrants are intertextual – they are immanent to one another and are contorted in the fabrication of imaginative geographies of Iranian Otherness. In ‘mapping’ the discursive geographies mobilised in media representations of Iranian Others in Vancouver, I draw attention to the performative force of these imaginative geographies and the potency of situated cultural practices involved in fabricating media realities, which in turn operate as ‘sociospatial circuits through which cultural and personal stories are circulated, legitimated, and given

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<sup>10</sup> As Gregory (2004, p.17) argues, thinking of imaginative geographies as fabrications is particularly useful, as the word combines ‘something fictionalised’ with something made real.’



meaning' (Pratt 1999, 218). I examine these discursive geographies as they gesture to the dominant fields of meaning through which Iranian others are popularly imagined – especially in instances when there is little habitual intercultural contact – emphasising the implications of repeatedly underscoring differences and strange(r)ness and the implications for the kinds of stories that can then be told.

While emphasising the importance of the media's role in fabricating and disseminating imaginative geographies of Iranian immigrants, we must also appreciate the complex ways in which representations of any kind are consumed. M. de Certeau (1984, xiii) captures the essence of my argument, pithily noting that "the presence and circulation of a representation ... tells us nothing about what it is for its users." My arguments about the circulation of imaginative geographies merely identify a repertoire of images, ideas and narratives available for consumption, and we need to recognise that reading a newspaper is a 'silent form of production' (de Certeau 1984), involving mutations and appropriations, provoking multiple and contested reactions. "...[t]here is growing evidence that the consumption of mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, an, in general, *agency*' (Appadurai 1996, 7).

### ***Metonymic geographies: Iran and the resurgence of 'Islam'***

Firstly I want to provide a sense of the discursive geographies of a Iranian Otherness assembled and circulated by the Canadian press, situating the discursive geographies of Iranian immigrants by illustrating the entanglement of imaginative geographies of 'Islam' and Iran.

The historical duration and geographical reach of 'Islam' coupled with the diversity of possibilities within the 'Islamic doctrine' bring the implications of the attempts of Western media discourses to narrate 'Islam' *tout court* into stark relief (Said 1981). However, Orientalist imaginaries continue to sustain the imaginative geographies of 'Islam' assembled and circulated in the Canadian Anglophone media, with the manifest heterogeneity of Muslims' lives lived reduced to a small number of overwhelmingly negative stories. For example, what Derek Gregory (2004) has recent termed 'architectures of enmity' are prominent in imaginative geographies of a 'clash of civilisations,' which borrows from Samuel Huntington's sloganistic polemic of the same name (Said 2001; O Tuathail 1996, 243). These Western imaginative geographies of a 'clash'<sup>11</sup> become integral to the fabrication and circulation of differences between the 'us' and 'them' that are not fixed,

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<sup>11</sup> It needs to be emphasised that these Western imaginative geographies of clash and enmity find their mirror image (or gaze returned) in particular representations of the West, such as the imaginative geographies of Khomeini's 'Great Satan,' or more recently in the rhetoric of Osama bin Laden's *jihad*.

absolute or essential, but are ‘set in motion and made meaningful through cultural practices’ (Gregory 2004):

*‘Why some Muslims hate the West’* (Toronto Star, 8 May 1990, p.A17)

*‘Islamic fundamentalism is the West’s new enemy’* (Globe and Mail, 18 July 1992, p.D3)

The portmanteau capabilities of the ‘clash of civilisations’ polemic means that imaginative geographies of a ‘clash’ have become a short-hand for many journalists, providing ‘an enunciative capacity that could be used, or rather mobilised, and linked into sensible discourse for the concentric occasion at hand’ (Said 1979, 222), and are increasingly embedded in the cultural practices and imaginaries through which media realities are made. And the horrific events of September 11, 2001 have served as a fulcrum around which imaginative geographies of enmity have been both solidified and contorted into new configurations through the multiple territorialisations of the ‘war on terror’ (Gregory 2004). An article entitled ‘The roots of their rage’ by Fareed Zakaria (one of Huntington’s former students)<sup>12</sup> first published in *Newsweek*, but rerun in the *Vancouver Sun* (27 October 2001, p.A20-21) illustrates these arguments shockingly, and here I dwell on two sedimentations of the idea of a ‘clash’ that Zakaria enables through two performances of space. Firstly, when referring to the Middle East, Zakaria states: ‘This is the land of suicide bombers, flag-burners and fiery mullahs,’ folding multiple imaginative geographies of violence, fundamentalism and terrorism into ‘one diabolical landscape’ and freezing the various and vibrant cultures of the region (Gregory 2004, 60). Alternatively, in a cartographic performance Zakaria uses a montage entitled the ‘Crescent of Crisis’ to ‘map’ imaginative geographies of extremism, violence, fanaticism, congenital nihilism and failure onto a Muslim Other, territorializing fabricated differences in the Middle East, and entrenching the imagined inevitability of enmity.

Clearly such representations and the discursive geographies they invoke are not uncontested, fixed and immutable (Hall 1979; Said 1981), nor do they exist in a political-economic, geopolitical or cultural vacuum. Indeed, there are examples of dissenting voices that disrupt the dominant narration of ‘Islam,’ but they are all too uncommon and are often marginalised to commentaries or letters sections of newspapers. In the end, however, we must consider the *effects* of both the crisis-driven definition of newsworthiness that tends to mobilise ‘Islam’ as a spectacle, fabricated through the

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<sup>12</sup> The re-running of this article in the *Vancouver Sun* provides an insight into the political economy and material geographies of the Canadian print media, and its dependence on a relatively small number of wire services and media outlets, which in turn lead to a convergence of media portrayals and extend the hegemony of certain worldviews (see Herman and Chomsky 2002). Furthermore, the privileged access afforded to ‘experts’ or ‘authorised knowers’ such as Zakaria serve to ‘canonise certain texts, notions and authorities,’ so that they become *a priori* touchstones for any discussion of ‘Islam.’

enveloping of various imaginative geographies (backwardness, fundamentalism, irrationality, hatred, violence, terrorism and so forth), and the realities that these imaginative geographies are circulated for a ‘Western’ audience on the kinds of stories told about ‘Islam’ and Muslims.

Western anxieties about a resurgence of ‘Islam’ largely appear to have dovetailed with the 1979 revolution in Iran, and as well as the 444 day hostage crisis at the US embassy in Tehran that began in November of the same year.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Said (1981: 83-4) communicates a metonymic slide between ‘Islam’ and ‘Iran’ appeared in Western imaginative geographies at the time, writing: “First of all, it seemed that ‘we’ were at bay, and with us the normal, democratic, rational order of things. Out there, writing in self-provoked frenzy was ‘Islam’ in general, whose manifestation of the hour was a disturbingly neurotic Iran.”

The fall of the Shah’s autocratic regime signalled the severance of neo-colonial relations with the United States, and framed through ethnocentric imaginative geographies of the Western media the revolution was widely registered as a ‘loss’ or ‘betrayal.’ For example, as the revolution was still unfolding, the *Globe and Mail* (3 February, 1979, p.A9) declared the “The Gulf policeman is gone,” and then with the question: “If the Shah’s Iran was the policeman of the Gulf does it mean its disappearance means a free-for-all for the burglars?” enacts a grisly performance of space that territorializes criminality and pillaging in opposition to the imagined virtues and benign influences of ‘the West.’ The widespread framing of events in Iran as against ‘the West’ and (Western) ‘Modernity’ meant that imaginative geographies of a ‘clash’ between ‘Iran’ as a particular political embodiment of ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ became inevitable. Imaginative geographies of fundamentalism and fanaticism, atavism and anti-modern stances, and antagonism, even hatred, of ‘the West’ and the US, were routinely mobilised then in media narrations of the revolution, obfuscating the highly fluid realities of political struggle during the Islamic Republic’s infancy (Said 1981). This architecture of enmity was not only a product of Western imaginative geographies, but was encouraged, and achieved a sense of inevitability, through the gaze of the new government in Iran, particularly in the imaginative geographies circulated through the infamous rhetoric that caricatured the United States as ‘Great Satan.’ The discursive geographies of ‘Western’ media representations of Iran have continued to narrate an inevitable antagonism over the past 25 years, with fabrications of essential and absolute differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ confirmed in the ‘Western’ imagination most spectacularly as Khomeini issued a *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie and through the symbolic violence of images of book burning.

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<sup>13</sup> Naficy (1993) has argued that confluence of these two events led to the ‘double exclusion’ of Iranians in exile, as they were marginalised both at ‘home’ with the ascendancy of the Islamic Republic, as well as the places in which they were exiled as they were associated with events in Iran.

The confluence of these multiple and often overlapping imaginative geographies in Canadian media representations fabricates a powerful and performative repertoire of narratives, images and ideas that are readily available for everyday consumption. By mobilising and territorializing differences, and making them meaningful, these disproportionately negative discursive geographies impact locally, shaping the contexts and experiences of ‘making home’ in Vancouver, often founding discourses of irreconcilable difference and ‘undesirability’ (Hage 1998).

### **Iranians Out of Place**

The embodied movements of Iranians into the ‘familiar’ spaces of the Canadian state contort and rework these imaginative geographies of an Iranian Otherness. Iranian migrants are routinely imagined as ‘out of place,’ and identification often then slides into portrayals of a ‘threatening’ presence (Henry and Tator 2002). The tendencies towards under-representation and misrepresentation in the Canadian media’s coverage of individuals and ‘communities’ marked as racially or ethnically Other have been noted elsewhere (Fleras 1994; 1995; Dunn and Mahtani 2001; Henry and Tator 2002), and below I dwell particularly on the *effects* of the restricted – and overwhelmingly negative – storyfields through which Iranians are narrated in ways that work against Iranians being imagined as ‘one of us.’

Youth violence, invariably scripted in the local media as evidence of gang violence and criminality, is a recurrent theme in representations of Iranians in Vancouver. The idea of the ‘gang’ is founded on gendered racialisations, as constructions of gender, generation and cultural differences are knitted together as particular Iranian masculinities become ‘hyper-visible’ – but in ways that simultaneously construct a ‘mirage disguising a more profound invisibility’ (Alexander 2000, 133) – in imaginative geographies that suggest essential and incompatible differences. For example, a particularly violent murder of a young Iranian man in a North Vancouver movie theatre was immediately reported as a ‘gangland slaying’ (*Vancouver Sun*, 6 March 1997, p.B1). Through a series of misapprehensions (for example, expressions of pride in Persian heritage were somehow morphed by the media into evidence of a gang called *Persian Pride*), and in spite of statements by the police to the contrary, this violent event was framed repeatedly through narratives of gang-culture. The imaginative geographies of gang violence conjured, and then circulated, by the local media forge (often fictional) connections to other violent events and criminal activity (most often drug-related), and ‘ethnicity’ and ‘immigration’ routinely resurface in representations as the inescapable rationale for violence and criminality (Alexander 2000).

The resonance of these imaginative geographies is amplified through repetition, as narratives of ‘gang culture’ acquire performative force. So while the scripting of any violence or drug-related crime involving young Iranian men through imaginative geographies of the ‘gang’ might make for a better story, the immediate and seemingly automatic ascription of such narratives has profound effects. The hypervisibility of particular performances of violent/criminal masculinities in the media not only obfuscates the plurality of subjectivities of those individuals involved, but also serve to map constructions of ‘inevitably flawed and eternally failing’ masculinities onto the bodies and behaviours of all young Iranian males (Alexander 2000). My argument is not that violent events do not warrant coverage, but the scripting and visibility of these events, particularly in the absence of other stories, embeds these imaginative geographies of irreconcilable difference (which are as much a silent production of normative –white – masculinities).

Media stories about Iranians in Canada have also tended to dwell disproportionately on claimants for asylum or refugee status, in narratives that often seek to play on public anxieties of a nation ‘soft’ on refugees and unable to enforce its borders (Mountz 2004, 329; Ahmed 2004)<sup>14</sup>. Stories about Iranian refugee claimants tend, then, to be framed by discourses of undesirability, which imply and propel action (Hage 1998). Considerable column inches are dedicated then to coverage that narrates Iranian refugees as ‘queue jumpers,’ abusing Canadian largesse and a ‘soft’ humanitarian immigration programme, and undermining the integrity of the nation space, all of which implied that the state needed to ‘toughen up’ and become ‘hard’ (Ahmed 2004). Thus, when 38 Iranians arrived at Toronto’s Pearson International airport without passports, and claimed refugee status, media coverage in both Toronto and Vancouver<sup>15</sup> conjured and circulated spatial anxieties over this violation of Canadian national integrity, while wholly marginalising the stories, experiences and motivations of the individuals involved, and automatically undermining the legitimacy of their claims for asylum.

Finally, I want to touch on the seemingly more benign and mundane imaginative geographies presented in media representations of Iranian and Persian ‘culture’ – often fixed through the grammar of multiculturalism as possessive and expressive, and so static and available for display (Ahmed 2000). In many ways media representations, largely assuming the form of human-interest stories and restaurant reviews, are emblematic of the way in which multiculturalism attempts to ‘reinvent the nation of the bodies of strangers’ (Ahmed 2000), illustrating how ‘ethnic’ and ‘racially’ marked people are no longer other through simple processes of rejection and exclusion, ‘but through an ambivalent and apparently contradictory process of *inclusion by virtue of othering*’ (Ang 2001, 139).

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<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, media reporting on Iranian refugees at times explicitly overlaps with, and reinforces, imaginative geographies of fundamentalism, oppression and state violence.

<sup>15</sup> *Toronto Star* (13 July 1985, p. A3); *Vancouver Sun* (11 January 1986, p.B2).

Persian culture is selectively circulated by the media, then, through narratives of cultural enrichment (Hage 1998), where “ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is white culture” (hooks 1992, p.21), without troubling the national imaginaries of ‘ordinary’ Canadians. For example, both the *Vancouver Sun* and *Vancouver Province* report celebrations of *Norooz* (Persian New Year) in Vancouver, in coverage that routinely emphasises the spectacle of *exotic practices* and *ancient traditions*, never failing to provide a photograph of the spectacle of *Chahar shanbeh soori*, the first celebration of *Norooz* which involves jumping over a small fire. Alternatively, restaurant reviews are frequently exultant about the ‘exoticism’ and sensuality of Persian cuisine, declaring, for example, ‘Iranian café is an exotic excursion’ (*Montreal Gazette*, 30 May 1998, p.W4), dwelling on the ‘gyrating hips’ of in-restaurant entertainment (*Vancouver Province*, 16 October 1997, p.B13), or ruminating that ‘Persian cuisine is sensuous and sophisticated and gentle’ (*Vancouver Sun*, 3 March 2000, p.C25).

In this way, multicultural imaginative geographies of cultural difference articulated through the media, position essentialised, and easily digestible slices of Iranian/Persian culture in an ‘economy of otherness’ (Hage 1998) seen to exist *for* the dominant white culture.

### **Imagining Iranian Alterity**

This section has attempted to sketch out some of the overlapping and contorted imaginative geographies of Iranian otherness in the Canadian print media. In mapping out various discursive geographies, I have been careful to emphasise that media representations merely gesture towards a repertoire of narratives, ideas and images available for, but not determining, popular consumption. These virtual encounters enabled through imaginative geographies of Iranian Otherness, then hold multiple, ambivalent and contested meanings that influence everyday encounters with Iranians (see Massumi 2002), and also close down ways of thinking otherwise about Iranians. Media realities effectively construct invisibility, that preclude thinking about Iranians as normal, *like us*.

### **Migrant Stories**

“If the *Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant’s-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity...The *Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world... The *Satanic Verses* is for

change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves.”  
(Rushdie 1992, 394)

Salman Rushdie’s manifesto for a (disembodied?) migrant’s-eye view of the world that envelopes the subversions and transgressions of ‘living-as-usual’ (Ahmed *et al.* 2003) is routinely allied to the emblematic post-modern figures of the ‘exile,’ the ‘cosmopolitan’ or the ‘diasporic subject,’ but, as Ley (2004) has noted, this figure of the hybrid migrant has also attracted considerable disapproval. Following Sara Ahmed (2000) I consider how the *figure* of the migrant gathers different displacements under the *singularity* of a given name. In particular Ahmed (2000, p.80) challenges ‘how different kinds of journeys become conflated through theorising identity through migrancy,’ and how the figure of the migrant erases the ‘real and substantive differences between the conditions in which particular movements across spatial borders take place’<sup>16</sup>. Drawing from stories solicited in interviews with Iranians in Vancouver, I elicit the plurality of histories, experiences and constituencies, sketching out the affective, symbolic and material enactments of ‘uprootings and regroundings’ (Ahmed *et al.* 2003) in narratives that sit ambivalently and awkwardly in juxtaposition with the kinds of stories told through official statistics or the media.

### ***Tales of migration: Epistemologies of telling stories***

“Migrant stories have always been a central part of the migration experience: in the imagination of possible futures; during the physical process of passage; and as migrants have lived and made sense of the consequences of their migration. At each stage life stories articulate the meanings of experience and suggest ways of living.” (Thomson 1999 *cit.* Ahmed *et al.* 2003)

Migrant stories provide important, situated insights into how people *make sense* of the displacements and estrangements that migration involves. However, while there may be some truth in claims that ‘in the end we become the autobiographical narrative by which we tell our lives’ (Ahmed 1999), I think there is also a need to be more reticent about the narratives recounted, and the knowledge produced, through migrant stories solicited during an interview. Autobiographical narratives, identifications and reflections of the ‘self’ orally communicated and encouraged in the interview potentially enable partial insights into the precariousness and provisionality of identities. Equally, however, if we insist that “the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original” (Haraway 1991, 193), we must be tentative and modest in the claims we make through these narrations. Indeed, undermining the ‘privileged’ knowledge of participants is

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<sup>16</sup> Ahmed (2000:80) insists that we need then to ask is movement forced or voluntary – and does anyone ever move freely? What movements are possible? Which are impossible? Who has a passport and moves? Who has no passport yet moves?

rarely part of the aim of this kind of research (Crang 2002), but we need to be aware that testimonies are performances, often involving stagings of useful identities (Ang 1999). Migrant stories may elaborate idealised or conventional accounts through ‘imaginative generalisations,’ rather than transparently lay down actual experiences, feelings, and behaviours (Valentine 1999). Alternatively, Stuart Hall (1991: 58) reminds us how the past is refracted and translated as it is narrated; the past is ‘retold, rediscovered, and reinvented’ through history, memories, and desires. Accordingly it is important to recognise that the migrant stories I use below are indelibly marked by the conditions of their co-production. Interviews do not involve a one-way downloading and transmission of knowledge and information from the ‘researched’ to the ‘researcher’; interviews are dialogical and interactive, they are about producing social texts that by definition have multiple meanings (Herod 1999).

### *Affective/Emotional geographies of migration*

In this section I consider how experiences of embodied mobility were registered affectively and emotionally – literally how people were *moved* by their experiences of migration – in ways that provide more embodied and sensible narratives of migration that move beyond disembodied identifications.

### *Trauma and uprooting*

Traumatic narratives of uprooting, flight and displacement surfaced in a number of the stories I was told. The events retold in these accounts had most frequently occurred in the years immediately after the revolution, as the new government began to tighten its grip on the fluid and unstable political situation. Traces of danger, anxiety and the unknown appear in these narratives, although for some the intensity of these emotions appear to be diminished, with some individuals telling their stories matter-of-factly, perhaps reflecting the years separating movements and their retellings.

Politically active as a student during and after the revolution, Hassan frames his experiences of being smuggled out of Iran as an adventure – ‘through mountains and horseback and everything’ – in a narrative that appears to elide the fears, anxieties and loneliness that surely shaped his flight across national borders towards an unknown destination and future:

The reason was that back then as students we were politically active...And then they started [...] how should I say it [...] after they knew who everyone was they started picking on them. So things got a little rough and [...] and I just decided to leave. And then I went to Turkey – through mountains and horseback and everything – and then back then there were different ways of doing things and



there were people would falsify passports and visas and everything and send you away to different countries. I was 17/18 at the time.

– Hassan

The affective dimensions of enforced displacement, estrangement from his family and friends and exile do appear in Hassan's story. These excerpts, taken from Hassan's response to my questioning about how he would feel if he could return to Iran, is particularly illustrative of how he coped with the psychological strains of exile and the profound ways in which sense of self has been forged through his physical and emotional estrangement from Iran – from 'being outside':

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

– Hassan

Loss and estrangement are communicated evocatively here, particularly through the idea of home(land), which resonates with a yearning for homely belonging, that imagines the homeland as 'bountiful and fulfilling...a secure, pleasing and gratifying space' (Hage 1995, 473). Iran is circulated then as childhood memories forever lost and the alluring/captivating nurturing qualities of a 'motherland' – 'protection, warmth, and emotional security' (Blunt 2002) – and, as we shall see later, contrasts considerably with multiple other imaginary Irans circulated in migrants' stories.

Alternatively, Majid's narrative of exile begins with betrayal. His father reported his conversion to Christianity to the Iranian authorities (which earned him the status of apostate), and his subsequent flight from religious persecution:

Actually this is a very long, long story. I came up from a Muslim family; I grew up as a Muslim in Iran. And I convert to Christianity in Iran. So, and I was Christian for almost two years in Iran and my father understood that I had converted to Christianity so he went to the government of Iran and said, 'My son became a Christian.' So he went against me. And he betrayed me there and [...] so I escaped from Iran and I went to Turkey.

– Majid

Mobility and experiences of displacement in Majid's case are tinged not only with the fears and anxieties associated with dangerous, undocumented border crossings and traumas and losses of exile (Said 2001), but also his 'betrayal' which estranged him permanently from his father, and severed relations with other family members for years.

Nina's story of her family's failed attempt at flight into Pakistan with the assistance of smugglers was perhaps the most harrowing I heard. In her account, she powerfully communicates her fear, and the psychological violence she and her sister were subjected to:

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

– Nina

### ***Hope and promises of the multicultural dream***

The divergent conditions of mobility and circumstances of migration for Iranians now living in Vancouver are in sharpest relief when these traumatic uprootings are contrasted with the more hopeful narratives of new, 'better lives' in Vancouver, narrated through expectations and desires. Nassrin, for example, was passionate in her response to my questioning about her recent move to Vancouver. Her narrative is filled with expectation and hope, weaving together family reunion, quality of life and the environment as she communicates imaginative geographies of Vancouver as a kind of idyll:

First of all, because, as I said before, that we had very strong relationships with members of the family and when my son emigrated and came here he invited us to visit Canada. To see the different country and...and when we came here we were really in wonder of this beautiful city and this beautiful country...we heard before, we heard about Canada a lot - because, you know, it is the best country to live in for the quality of life. But the difference is when you hear something and when you see that...and we had a very good time at that time.

– Nassrin

Nassrin and her husband communicate sincere excitement about the opportunities of their retirement and migration to Vancouver, aligning their own philosophies of being-in-the-world with perceptions of Canadian multiculturalism and fully embracing the possibilities for meeting new and 'different' people in a multicultural setting:

But for us, me and my husband, we have, I think, a wide [way of] looking at the world. We didn't believe in a limited country, in limited boundaries. We believe that all people belong to one earth and if you feel that all the people are your friends...it is up to the person. And also we haven't got young children – it is very difficult for the family to cope with the very different culture here [compared] with our religion, our country. It is easier for us with that opinion, with this situation – we accept everything and we are excited with this new community here. We look at everything from the top – you know – and of course there are a lot of problems here, of course, but it is natural – we accept that.

– Nassrin

For others, while the decision to migrate was ostensibly framed in narratives of hope and promises of a 'good life,' the realities of getting by were more sobering:

In 1988 I came here to visit a friend – that is not anymore my friend, but he is here. I liked it and he said something...but of course I didn't know that my capital is not enough to run the business that I wanted here. We wanted to run a senior's home. But I found out that my money is not enough if we wanted to make that we would have to work shifts ourselves, which I didn't want. But...my imagination...according to my friend's false information that I accepted, I trusted, I thought that with my money I could buy and hire the people to work for me. But then I found no, it is not right, I have to work myself – shifts, maybe 18 hours a day.

– Reza

For some, increased state intrusion into the private lives of citizens in the name of morality constituted a major motivation for moving, in narratives that construct Canada, as a site in 'the West' more generally, as a place where one is 'free' from the surveillance and regulation of the state:

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

– Naheed

For others discomfort in Iran assumed different forms. Affluence for Lona and her son Ali had given rise to increasing anxieties in Iran, as they had feared for their personal security after experiences of robbery and theft. Thus, Canada is constructed as safer, a space in which affluence can be enjoyed more comfortably.

*Emotional geographies of 'getting by'*

Whatever the contexts and ease of mobility, narratives about the demands and difficulties of 'getting by,' settling down and making new lives in Vancouver pervaded migrant stories. Ali makes the point bluntly:

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

– Ali

Alternatively, for some the experiences of getting by in Vancouver were told through admissions of initial difficulties and adjustments, which quickly gave way to successful 'integration.' Neenah's account of her family's experiences of making new lives in Vancouver is particularly instructive. In the excerpt below Neenah seems to be projecting a self- as well as class-conscious cosmopolitanism that emphasises cultural competencies and worldly know-how, as she draw distinctions between her family and other, less cosmopolitan – and therefore by implication less integrated – Iranians:

Yes [...] for a while it was awful – just like emigrating anywhere else. You had to start like a kid. We could speak the language, which was a big bonus, and we could work. We had a little bit of money. All of these were components, which helped us, but I know there are a lot of people who come without any of these and they go through a disastrous period of life.

– Neenah

Migration involves feelings of estrangement, as displacements sever senses of 'home' as a space of belonging (roots and 'where one comes from') and 'home' as a lived, sentient everyday space. In leaving their 'home,' bodies become out of place in the everyday worlds they inhabit and in the communities in which they come to live (Ahmed 2000). Nina evokes this sense of not being-at-home – of being made to feel out of place – as she describes her experiences of settling into life in Vancouver:

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

– Nina

### *Sacrifice and frustrations*

My commentary on the ironies of the Canadian state's search for *homo economicus* through business immigration programmes touched upon the 'familiar story of deskilling by immigration' (Pratt 1999). Here, I want to reiterate and dwell more explicitly on the symbolic and affective dimensions of this story. Bitterness and frustration were often manifest when talk turned to the experiences of work in Vancouver. Fahrdat was perhaps the most candid in expressing his frustrations with 'getting by' in Vancouver, but his lucidity gestures, I think, to broader affective experiences of getting by in Vancouver. He appeared infuriated at the redundancy of his considerable 'human capital' (he held a PhD in political science, a graduate degree from the Sorbonne and spoke flawless English), and the personal and financial costs of migration:

But, when you go somewhere, and you lose a fortune, and you don't find a job, and then you are not happy, your family is not happy – sometimes you say, 'To hell with it, I'll sacrifice my freedom and at least I can get my family to a standard that I want, or I was used to.'

– Fahrdat

Later in our discussion Fahrdat described his experiences in Vancouver as 'degrading,' which provides a jarring insight I think to the symbolic, material and emotional repercussions of feeling rejected or under appreciated in the Canadian labour market. The disappointments of not being able to obtain work even remotely commensurable with his qualifications feeds directly into anger, but also perhaps diminished senses of self-worth, as well as painful losses in prestige, social status and material comfort.

For some families the difficulties of getting by in Vancouver had initiated the adoption of transnational practices of 'flexible families' (Waters 2002), where the family relocates to Vancouver, while a parent – most often the father – continues to work in Iran. The transnational dispersal of family members in the families I spoke to had emerged as a situated and strategic practice to reconcile desires to migrate with economic exigencies and labour market conditions in Vancouver. And while celebrations of 'flexible citizenship' (equated to diminished democratic and fiscal responsibilities) have been met with disapproval, the transnational practices I witnessed seemed far removed from those of 'ungrounded, flexible accumulation' performed by Ong's (1999) cosmopolitan 'mobile subjects.' Indeed, in a discussion about transnational practices Fahrdat, in a manoeuvre that asserted his own cosmopolitanism, suggested that flexible families were evidence of a lack of cosmopolitanism among other Iranians:

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

– Fahrdad

More central to my argument, however, are the manifold emotional demands of living out these transnational practices (Ley 1999; Waters 2002). Astronaut strategies fundamentally disrupt everyday family life, as wives/mothers are isolated and stressed, but also often become empowered and independent (Waters 2002), sometimes putting additional strain on geographically and emotionally stretched marital relations. Lona, for example, talks about the strains of being apart and an 'end' to family life:

And one of my problems is that he is in Iran; we don't have family life here since we have immigrated to Canada. Because there is no job for [...] people...he wants to come to Vancouver to create a business here but [...] it, it takes time. It takes time [...] for coming here. He comes twice a year here and he stays here about one month. But it is not enough. Because children need their father.

– Lona

Transnational home arrangements also have potentially disruptive influences on children, as they become disorientated and unsettled, play up and ratchet the stresses of already strained family relations. Nina talks of her parents' decision to live an 'astronaut strategy,' and of being apart from her dad as being hard, but emphasises the unsettling effect it had on her younger brother.

It was hard, especially for my younger brother – he's 11 now but, when we came here he was 5 or 6 but he had to grow up without permanent, stable dad right?

– Nina

Alternatively, this exchange between Ali and his mother, Lona, illustrates alternative affective responses to migration. Ali recounts being unhappy and unsettled by his parent's decision to relocate the family in Vancouver while Ali's father stayed in Tehran, but this passage also suggests how the doubly unsettling experiences of migrating and dispersing the family for extended periods can lead to children acting up, and tensions within the family being amplified.

Ali: My family made this choice and I had to follow them. I am not saying that I am not happy with it but you know I didn't make that choice.

- Lona: But now he is happy. He doesn't want to go back to Iran.
- Ali: Right, I am happy now[...]by that time I didn't, you know, make that choice so that was really difficult – you know, I was trying to act[...]kind of[...]stupid in some cases that makes my family think maybe we need to take him back to Iran. So, I was just kind of resisting this whole process[...]so, it was really difficult. I mean, you just said there yourself it is difficult even for a guy who decided himself to come to another country – I didn't decide to come here it was really hard...

### ***Belongings***

The multiple ways in which belonging surfaces in discussions provides another avenue for reflecting on the emotional and affective dimensions of migration. Reading migrant stories through the lens of belonging is particularly suggestive, and following Elspeth Probyn (1996: 19) I argue that belonging provides a means of capturing more accurately the “desire for some sort of attachment, be it with other people, places, or modes of belonging, and the ways in which people and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.” Dwelling on longings for attachment and ‘home’ moves us away from expressive and possessive conceptualisations of identities through an emphasis on the making, unmaking and remaking of connections, and also disturbs the idealisation and exoticism of liminality and transgressions embodied in figures like the cosmopolitan or the diasporic subject by tracing their desires for attachment (albeit reconfigured outside the nation-state).

### ***Multiple Irans***

Iran becomes a ‘scattered concept’ in the imaginative geographies of migrants, as it is worked through multiple and diverse personal histories and experiences of mobility, and used in different ways by a range of people (Rushdie 1992). I begin, then by reflecting on some of the multiple Irans presented and circulated through narratives of belonging, attachment and displacement.

If we recall Hassan's narratives of emotional and physical estrangement from Iran, it is possible to identify a complex imaginative geography of Iran as a lost homeland, imbued with the nurturing qualities of a motherland (Hage 1995). Although his narrative does mobilise an alluring imaginary of Iran – that of childhood memories – Hassan's exile has not been the paralysing, imprisoning experience of a loss likened to death that Naficy (1993) has identified among some Iranian exiles in Los Angeles. Displacement and estrangement were traumatic experiences, but Hassan acknowledged the impossibility of returning to his lost Iran (even if he could return to

physical places), eschewing exile as a ‘dream of glorious return’ (Rushdie 1992). The excerpt below picks up on a narrative in which Hassan articulates a sense of self formed and reformed through the liminality of being-in-between:

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

– Hassan

In other migrant stories – and particularly those Iranians who identified ostensibly with the Shah’s regime, and therefore bought into the ideology of the ‘Great Civilisation’ – imaginative geographies mobilise Iran as an inspiring and venerated source of memory, heritage and tradition. For Neenah, then, who emigrated from Iran at the time of the revolution Iran is imagined through nostalgia for ‘the golden years’:

Ok, at that time the golden years of the Persian Empire – or whatever way you want to call it – we were all happy – a lot of us. As you know there’s always some people who are unhappy. That’s always a minority – the bulk of minority. So they start taking over - for everything. The problem was Iranians were very well off at that time – extremely well off. For instance the things that I see some people here don’t have, they had. That made you feel that you want more. So they started this crazy revolution.

– Neenah

My parents never emigrated anywhere because there was no need for emigration in Iran in the ‘golden days.’ We were all happy and we were living in a peaceful country. No fighting, no issues between religions. Nothing.

– Neenah

These imaginative geographies of Iran as a place of happiness and prosperity, are clearly punctuated by Neenah’s personal and classed experiences and a narrative enabled only by social amnesia and a collective forgetting of the oppression and brutalities of the Shah’s authoritarian regime and the trenchant economic inequalities it engendered. Moreover, Neenah’s imaginative geographies were closely aligned with active investments<sup>17</sup> in nostalgic constructions – even fetishes – of Persian heritage, celebrating Persian literature and poetry, Persian history and Persian culture (Naficy 1993). Thus, having settled and made an ostensibly successfully new life in Vancouver with

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<sup>17</sup> Neenah was involved in a Vancouver-based Iranian cultural association that ran frequent events celebrating a Persian heritage imagined along similar lines to the Shah’s vision of a Persian ‘Great Civilisation.’



her family, Neenah continues to look back and displays a sense of loss, and in her words depression, at an enforced severance from a cultural ambience, particular around the celebration of *Norooz*:

And spiritually every year when it is New Year I really feel depressed. Because you know, you need to have that environment. You need to have that air. That feeling is not here. I mean you have the TV, it comes and says Happy New Year, tadatadada...But...that feeling, that going and visiting friends, or having a special celebration – it is not there. I miss that very much. I miss the music, I miss the history, because when you are there it is there with you...I mean no, it is not. It is not. That is a huge loss to me, it always is.

– Neenah

Ideas of connection punctuated imaginative geographies of Iran in a number of ways. For some Iran appeared to be primarily a locale where friends and family happened to be, and where memories and pasts were located. Belonging is framed as being-with people and attachments to places through memories, rather than meaning investing the territory ‘Iran’ or territorially bounded ideas of history or culture. Alternatively, imaginative geographies of roots also surfaced in a number of discussions about belongings and identifications. The repeated use of the arborescent metaphor of roots in migrant stories articulates stable and continuing identifications with Iran, and disrupts constructions of the migrant as an *essentially* transgressive figure (Ahmed 2000). These appeals to roots with/in Iran largely communicate senses of existential security and consistency derived from belonging to an Iran imagined through fixed and bounded meanings – and illustrates perhaps a desire or need for stability and moorings as everyday lives were disrupted and disarrayed by migrations:

Because we grow there and have strong roots there. We cannot cut everything. Like other people. Like a tree we have a lot of roots in that country.

– Nasrin

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

– Abbas

However, expressions of rooted belongings to, and identifications with, Iran seemed to be a highly contested terrain within migrant stories. On a number of occasions, as I steered conversations towards discussions of identity and belonging responses rebuffed imaginative geographies of ‘roots,’ identifying awkward relationships between socially assigned identities and hybrid experiences (Ang 2001), and taking issue with the ethnic absolutisms implied and arguing that they slid easily into prejudices:

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

– Babak

I don't like tags, you know [...] people who say you are Persian and [...] this is why the world, you know, is in conflict. Yes indeed [...] the moment there is a separation, there is a tag named and there is a war. So I would rather be a citizen of the world...

– Ali

In opposition to the territorial boundedness and internally homogenising effects of articulations of belonging expressed through appeals to imaginary Irans, a number of individuals proclaimed attachments to what they saw as more 'inclusive' world-historical formations (Ang 2001). For example, a Kantian notion of moral cosmopolitanism premised on a philosophy that urges us all to be 'citizens of the world' – members of a worldwide community of humanity committed to common values (Vertovec 2002) – emerged in narratives that announced belongings to religious diasporas. This notion of moral cosmopolitanism is prominent in Ali's subscription to a transnational Muslim identity – nurtured in part by his involvement in the Muslim Students Association – which then enables a counter-narrative in which he positions himself as beyond/above ethnic absolutisms and prejudices:

I would rather say Muslim. It would, kind of [...] if I say that I am a Muslim I would kind of be a citizen of 52 different countries – so [...] you get closer to the idea of the citizen of the world. Yeah, I would rather say I am a Muslim rather than I say I am Persian. Because if I say I am a Persian, you know, it sounds kind of racist [...] in this society. Arab guys are kind of aggressive when you say you are a Persian; they say well we are Arabs, you know.

– Ali

Alternatively, a number of Baha'is presented moral cosmopolitanism as a constitutive component of belonging to a world community of Baha'is, a concept that embodies the notions of *unity*, *diversity* and the *oneness of humanity*, central teachings of the Baha'i faith:

I would definitely describe myself as a world citizen. I do not see myself as Iranian or Canadian [...] or American – or Lebanese. I, even though I can be as Canadian as anybody when I'm in Canada; as American as any American in the US [...] I love Lebanon and its people, I could have lived there all of my life [...] and I was content to live in Iran – I went back [...] So I would say that I have no

particular attachment to any particular nation or country [...] But I have learned, and honestly through the faith and through my life experience that it is possible to make any place home [...] and to make any country comfortable to live in.

– Pari

Well just as a Baha'i. I mean I just, just see myself [...] as a member of the Baha'i community, which is like [...] you know, possibly the most diverse groups of people in the world.

– Mahmoud

For all the emancipatory and inclusive overtones implied in these narrations of moral cosmopolitanism, the promises of belonging and attachment enabled by religious diasporic formations inevitably stress internal coherence and unity, and therefore belonging is still fabricated out of a logic that necessarily sets an imagined 'us' apart from 'others.' These narratives diasporas are mobilised then as concepts of 'sameness-in-dispersal' rather than 'togetherness-in-difference' (Ang 2001, 13), troubling constructions of diaspora as an essentially subversive and liberatory third space (Bhabha 1994).

### ***Making homes: constructing spaces of comfort?***

Ideas of home and homeliness punctuated numerous migrant stories, and here I want to pursue these metaphors to understand something more of the affective and emotional dimensions of 'regrounding' in Vancouver, and the strategies employed to cope in everyday settings where you are habitually imagined to be 'out of place.' Ideas of home, do not simply refer to collections of inanimate objects, but involve the ways in which we *feel* homes as ours, through the presence of habits and the effects of spouses, children, parent, companions and so forth (Wise 2000). Boym (1994, 166; Wise 2000) captures the argument aptly: "It was not the space itself, not the house, but the way of inhabiting it that made it home..." Home is felt then as a space of comfort, and in this sense, the transplantation and translation of routine everyday activities and habits were an important part of becoming *at home* in Vancouver for a number of my participants. Home life for a number of the Iranians I spoke with involved a host of everyday practices, habits and routines transplanted and translated from their everyday lives in Iran – and ranged from food, to home decoration, to maintaining rituals of hospitality and the kinds of music they listened to. For some re-creating spaces of familiarity and a 'homely' ambience extended to the consumption of Persian programming on satellite television – and the continuities in the flows of language and culture into the space of the home it enables.

I am interested in extending these metaphors of home and homeliness beyond the materiality of the house, however, to think about the ways Vancouver's North Shore was often portrayed as 'home' or 'homely' in migrant stories. The North Shore in these narratives is presented as a *comfortable* space – particularly for more recent migrants, those uncomfortable speaking English, or those for whom 'astronaut' strategies mean that they are only partially uprooted from Iran – primarily through the possibilities of being-together with other Iranians, and the familiarities of language, food, products and so forth:

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

– Lona

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

Parveneh: Even the car company, the insurance.

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

These excerpts gesture towards the extent to which territories of comfort and familiarity have been made and marked on Vancouver's North Shore, and how the 'homeliness' of this home from home has been both reassuring and supportive through the unsettling and disruptive experiences of migration. However, this gathering and constructed space of comfort on the North Shore is also disabling – exemplified perhaps in the repeated emphasis on how there is no need to speak English. Indeed, this constructed space of comfort, which inevitably reduces meaningful everyday intercultural contact is often read as a symptom of balkanisation, and has led to occasional backlash played out in the local media,<sup>18</sup> but also to reactions among those socially assigned the nomination Iranian. Hassan talks, for example, about Iranian-phobia:

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

– Hassan

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the presence of Farsi-only signs over a number of shops in North Vancouver (Vancouver Sun, 18 January 1997, p.C3).

Alternatively, Reza communicates a discomfort with this constructed space of familiarity, and the cultural practices of many Iranians on the North Shore:

They need education – they have to be [...] these adaptation classes that they run in the Family Services of North Shore is for that. They tell them how to act here. Because a lot of people they still are doing the same thing that they were doing home in that time. But now the time is changed and the place is changed – two big factors have changed, you have to change yourself, but you have to tell.

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

– Reza

The dialogue below speaks to an even more ambivalent engagement with the 'homeliness' of the North Shore. Chirin and Parvin are Armenian, but migrated from Iran and are routinely identified as Iranian. Being in North Vancouver provides them familiarity, but this is a familiarity to something to which Chirin sees neither herself belonging, nor as belonging to her:

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

Parvin: We look like Persians so...

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

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

Chirin: Oh yeah. I don't wish to be.

These multiple and complex feelings towards the North Shore – which in some narrations appears as 'homely,' but in others is alienating – speak directly I think to the heterogeneous and often awkward ways of inhabiting the socially ascribed identity Iranian.

### **Migrants Stories**

In paying closer attention to migrants' stories I have tried to embody understandings of migration more generally, and the various 'uprootings' and 'regroundings' enacted by Iranians in Vancouver. Reading migration as an affective and emotional process complicates conventional interpretations of mobility, and enables thinking about the multiple personal histories, experiences and motivations

complexly woven into migrations. Moreover these embodied, affective and emotional narratives interrupt and contest the markedly limited repertoire of stories through which Iranians in Vancouver are popularly imagined, as well as unsettling academic imaginings of the figure of the migrant, in its multiple contemporary incarnations.

## **Conclusion**

My primary concern in this paper has been to contest the ways in which a number of ‘figures’ come to stand (in) for multiple and often incommensurable stories of displacement, mobility and estrangement. By bringing three distinct ways of ‘narrating’ the multiple experiences, histories and constituencies of Iranian migrants into conversation, I have attempted to stimulate reflection on the ways in which ‘we’ come to know about ‘immigrants,’ as well as emphasise the partiality of each of these styles of narration. I began by unsettling the concise and authoritative short-cuts to identities, experiences and realities enabled by state technologies of legibility, before tracing the overlapping and contorted imaginative geographies of Iranian otherness fabricated and circulated for popular circulation through the performative repertoires of the Canadian media. These critical sketches aim to disrupt the ways in which particular stories about Iranian migrants are authorised, in ways that close down the possibilities of thinking otherwise, and work against thinking about Iranian migrants as normal – *like us*. In turning to the stories of migrants themselves I hoped to admit some of the pluralities erased in state and media narrations. Migrant stories are used to embody the figure of the migrant and by tracing the affective and emotional enactments of migrations, I have attempted to complicate the ways in which being-Iranian are routinely imagined, as well as providing a more nuanced, complex and sensible understanding of ‘uprootings’ and ‘regroundings’ as they are lived out by migrants.

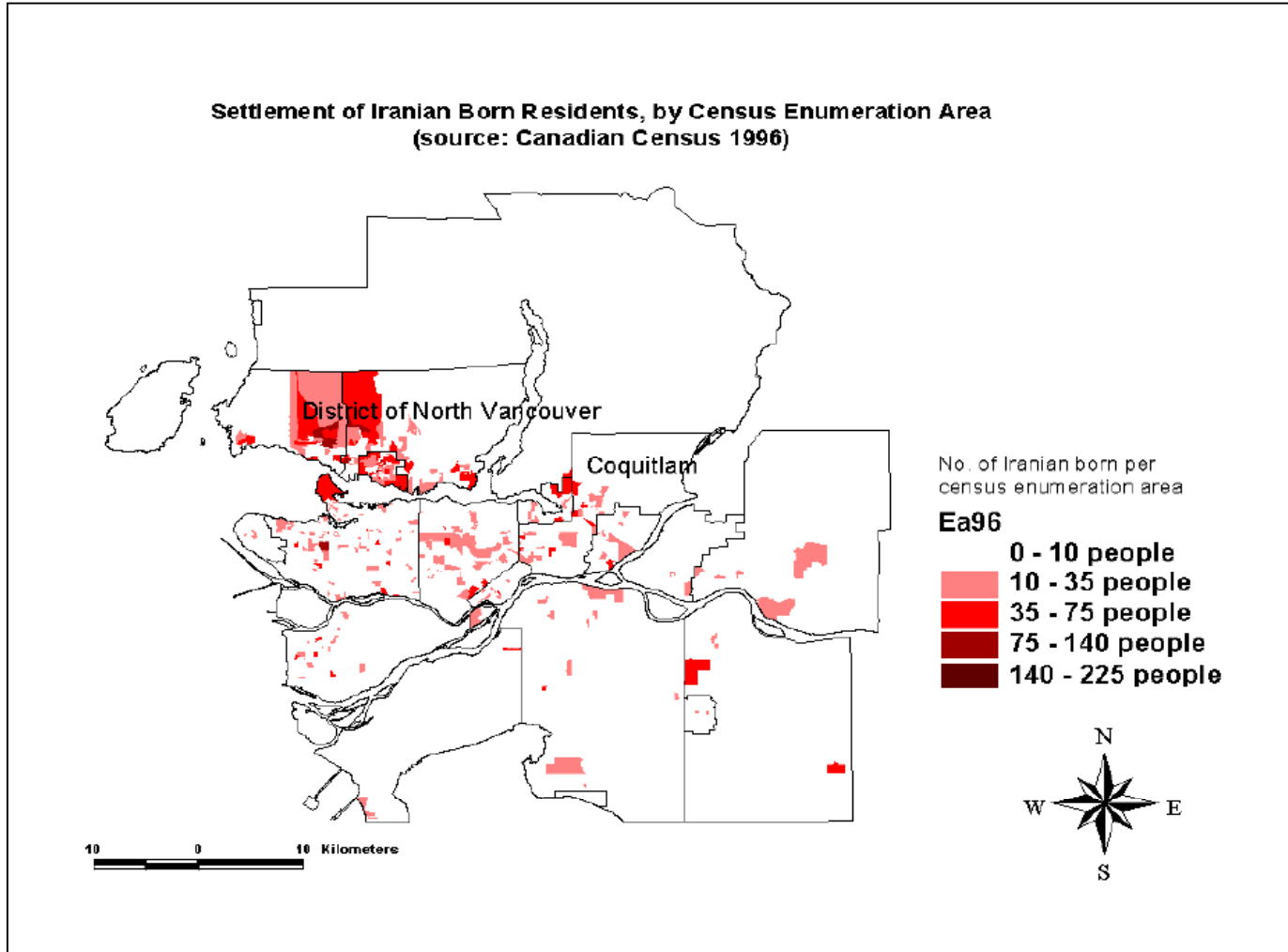
**Appendix 1**

Period of Immigration for those residents of Vancouver CMA reporting Iranian ethnic origin.

| <u>Period of Immigration</u> | <u>Total Reporting Iranian Ethnic origin</u> |
|------------------------------|--|
| Before 1961                  | 10   |
| 1961 - 1970                  | 60   |
| 1971 - 1980                  | 820  |
| 1981 - 1990                  | 4,100  |
| 1991 - 2001                  | 15,500                                       |
| <u>Total</u>                 | <u>20,490</u>                                |

### Appendix 2

Settlement of individuals documented as born in Iran by census enumeration area, Vancouver CMA. (Source: 1996 Census)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Cameron McAuliffe for permission to reproduce this graphic.



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