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The Making of the Iranian Refugee: From Revolution to Asylum

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ABSTRACT

This paper follows the narratives and trajectories of Iranian asylum-seekers in Turkey as they undergo the process of applying for refugee status through the UNHCR. Ethnographic work conducted in three satellite cities, Yalova, Eskişehir, and Denizli, reveals the dynamic narratives of Iranian asylum-seekers as they grapple with their past and attempt to forge new identities while they navigate their way through difficult institutional frameworks. The findings of this study offer an overview of the different groupings of asylum-seekers and their narratives, including Azaris, political activists, members of the LGBT community, and members of religious groups including, Christians and Baha’i. Furthermore, this paper argues that the oppressive frameworks imposed on these individuals as they apply for asylum-seeker and subsequently refugee status create an environment that fosters the form of dynamism needed to fit within the parameters of the 1951 Refugee Convention’s criteria. Engaging the application of Ian Hacking’s notion of dynamic nominalism to the refugee category with the narratives of Iranians in Turkey offers insights into the performance of the refugee identity and how this process and the state of limbo experienced in Turkey impacts upon greater collective interpretations of the past, the homeland, the nation, ethnic identity, as well as present and future aspirations. Finally, parallels are drawn to narratives found in diasporic literary texts that further demonstrate the impacts of shifting identity.

Keywords: Iranian asylum-seekers; Refugee Status Determination (RSD); transit migration; Turkish Asylum Policy; dynamic nominalism; narrative
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Purpose of Research Study

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the birth of the Islamic Republic, a significant number of Iranians have been catapulted into exile and forced to leave the country for fear of persecution. According to Turkish migration expert Sebnem Koser-Akçapar, Turkey is a transit country, or central hub, for Iranian migrants en route to the West because of its migration policies and geographic placement and also because it hosts the region’s United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). After departing from the restrictive framework of the Islamic Republic and relocating to Turkey, Iranian asylum-seekers must navigate Turkey’s Asylum Policy in order to enjoy protection from the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, while in Turkey, these individuals are only granted temporary asylum status because they are not yet recognized as refugees. The way in which Turkey has become a strategic country for Iranians in transit is the subject of my research.

To be more specific, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Iranian asylum-seekers transiting through Turkey as they follow the procedures dictated by Turkish asylum policy and apply for refugee status through the UNHCR. This study examines how Iranian asylum-seekers grapple with their past and attempt to forge new identities as they navigate their way through difficult institutional frameworks. In other words, by examining a range of narratives, I consider what Iranian asylum-seekers experience during the process of transit migration, and how their refugee identity is

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constructed in the process. This study follows the narratives and trajectories of Iranian asylum-seekers as they form communities and support networks with other asylum-seekers. Most importantly, I consider the way transit migration and the state of limbo experienced in Turkey impacts upon greater collective interpretations of the past, the homeland, the nation, ethnic identity, as well as present and future aspirations.

**Research Questions**

This study will pursue the following major research question, and sub questions:

**How do the experiences of Iranian refugees transiting through Turkey inform understandings of refugee identities?**

- a. How do refugees perform identity in accordance of the criteria of the international legal framework relating to refugees?
- b. How does the context of exit and historical experience of the Iranian refugee shape the narrative presented by the refugee?

**Background of the Researcher**

Disenchanted by the challenges and politics of conflict resolution and the barriers facing governments, diplomats and international organizations, I was intrigued by the role the diaspora could play as an agent of political change. Sri Lankans who lobbied the Canadian government to intervene in the state of affairs in Sri Lanka was one instance of mobilization of diaspora on behalf of the homeland. The powerful imagery of the Sri-Lankans stopping traffic on major inner-city transportation arteries and the subsequent protests that took place, using the space of the Canadian public sphere, sparked my interest in the host-nation as a site for the development of solidarity and mobilization on behalf of homeland politics.
In the fall of 2012, I became interested in the state of relations between Canada and Iran as well as the country’s presence within the international community. On September 7, 2012 Canada severed diplomatic ties with Iran, closed its embassy in Tehran, and expelled Iranian diplomats from Canada. The Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, viewed the Iranian government as a clear and present danger. Iran had also been sanctioned due to the looming threat of nuclear possession and was increasingly being diplomatically isolated by the international community. When the elections were set to elect a new president of Iran in June 2013, I noticed that Iranians had begun mobilizing in Toronto. The elections created much anticipation as tensions had been growing due to increasing political and economic instability in Iran, which had been worsening since the failed 2009 Green movement that occurred during the last elections. The Canada-Iran conflict came to the forefront of popular consciousness and I came into contact with particularly mobilized diaspora as the elections in Iran were approaching. The current study, initially, sought to explore how transit through Turkey shaped the political organization of the Iranian Diaspora in Canada. I decided to use Turkey as a vantage point to access the role of the diaspora as an intermediary in diplomacy and a powerful force for political change. The final topic itself came from the research organically, when the phenomena of performance dynamism emerged from my findings.

Overview of Paper

This document consists of five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion. The first chapter includes five respective components, including this overview. Within the first chapter I explain the situation of Iranian refugees transiting through Turkey, what the purpose of my individual study is, the research questions I will
pursue, and finally my own background as a researcher. The second chapter, the literature review, outlines major themes and scholarly perspectives on the subjects of the Islamic Revolution as shaping the context of exit, the Iranian diaspora, the international legal framework relating to refugees and Turkey as a transit country for refugees. The third chapter outlines the methodological approach this study has taken, and includes a review of the procedures, participants, theoretical frameworks and limitations of the study. Chapter four breaks into three sections and has individual sub-themes within them – itemizing the findings of the study and the narratives provided by the participants. In the last section, chapter five, data analysis, implications, recommendations, limitations and further study are considered and re-visited. Following chapter five, references and appendices are provided, including the letter of informed consent and interview guide, are provided.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview and Organization of the Literature Review

Initially, I approached my research by searching broadly on the University of Toronto library catalogue on the subjects of “Iranian refugees”, “Turkey as a transit country”, “transnational network”, and “diaspora as political actors”. The focus of the literature was notions of hybrid identity, transnational networks and political mobilization. There is a plethora of literature on the context of exit and its impact on identity formation in the host nation (Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Faist, 2008), however the case of Iranians transiting through Turkey presents an exceptional phenomena, since it involves a second context of exit, as well as, reception. This newly emergent phenomenon of a country of transit, established within international legal framework, presents a new dimension to refugee studies- one that remains relatively unexplored.

I. Definitions and Key Terminology

i) Context of exit

Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979 defined a powerful zeitgeist with a lasting legacy; it continues to impact Iranians generations later by shaping their context of exit. Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut explain, the “context of exit” is what remains embedded on one’s memory when thinking of homeland; thus, it acts as a central factor in determining

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political behavior in the host-nation.\textsuperscript{5} When one leaves by choice their connection to the past is very different from that of another who was forced to escape for their life. According to Kenneth D. Wald, contexts of forced-exit generally trigger a stronger sense of homeland-belonging and desire for return: “groups that were expelled or otherwise left unwillingly or reluctantly may pine for the day when they can end their ‘exile’ by returning home” (Wald, 2008). The context of exit acts as an important determinant of the behavior of groups in the host-nation and the interactions between members of the community. It also significantly impacts the relationship between migrant and homeland and the way one comes to understand their own identity.

The context of exit is central to shaping not only individual and collective identities but also the way in which “refugee” as a highly politicized term, is conceptualized within scholarship and the international legal framework.

\textit{ii) Defining Refugee}

Conceptualizations of refugee both within scholarship and in legal terms enable the governmentality of the stateless person. Edward Said explores the origins of exile, in “Reflections on Exile”, distinguishing it with the term refugee. The refugee he explains is “a creation of the twentieth century state” which carries with it political connotations and the “urgent need for international assistance”\textsuperscript{6}. The politicization of refugee in the sphere of international affairs has given rise to an entire field of “refugee studies” as it has come to define an important legal status. Liisa Malkki furthers Said’s understanding of refugee as a product of the state, making the following distinction:


These widely distributed common-sense understandings about displacement and its capacity suggest that contemporary refugees as a mass phenomenon are subject to different representational conventions than are individual exilic figures. Into contrast between refugees and those in “exile” is built a whole history of differences, not only of race class, world religion and historical era but of different people’s very different entanglements with the state and international bureaucracies that characterize the national order of things. This “entanglement with the state” is what shapes the dynamics of the relationship, between individual and state; once the state is transformed and the relationship with its citizens redefined, both national and individual identity change. When one becomes a refugee and the relationship with the state has been significantly altered and the feeling of belonging vanished, the individual falls into a new “order of things” one regulated by the international bureaucracies that control the realm of the stateless.

In the Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt characterizes the stateless person as the “most symptomatic group in contemporary politics” and a catalyst for the emergence of totalitarianism. The creation of the refugee she argues has resulted from the stripping of nationality and citizenship by the sovereign with the expansion of the system of nation-states. Saskia Sassen explains, “the emergent interstate system was the key to the creation of the stateless person, the identification of refugees as such, and their regulation or control”. Both Sassen and Arendt contend that the demarcation of refugee and the stateless person emerged as a product of the new totalitarian regimes that came into being with the intensified divisions between newly shaped states in the post-war period. The emergent international bureaucracies were established to “handle” the

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international order of things and ultimately regulate and control affairs external to the state, such as the stateless person.

In July 1951, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted at the diplomatic conference in Geneva as a global legal instrument setting the basis for the status, rights, obligations and protection of refugees. The 1951 Convention defines a refugee as “person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him— or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution”\(^{10}\) (see Article 1A (2). This framework constitutes the legal foundation for the making of the refugee. The term refugee demarcates significant legal repercussions impacting all aspects of life in the public sphere. Moreover, the much-coveted refugee status needed for resettlement is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, as individuals must convincingly fit the official criteria. In order to do so- that is to convince officials of having a well-founded fear of prosecution, oftentimes asylum-seekers must embellish their stories and change their identities.

\(\text{iii) Defining Asylum-Seeker}\)

The United Nations Refugee Agency defines asylum seeker as “someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated”\(^{11}\) (UNHRC Official Website). Asylum systems are in place at the national level to determine which asylum-seekers fit the international criteria to obtain refugee status and thus, qualify for


\(^{11}\) UNHCR, The 1951 Convention
international protection. While awaiting determination of status, these individuals are considered as asylum-seekers. When Iranians fleeing Iran, arrive in Turkey, they must register with Turkish authorities as asylum-seekers and are subsequently granted temporary asylum status. The system for asylum-seekers is in place for those fleeing individual persecution. In the case of mass movements of refugees, as is currently the case with the more than 1 million Syrians who have fled into Turkey’s borders since March 2011, there is no capacity to conduct individual interviews with asylum-seekers. As such, due to the large scale of displacement and the ongoing state of conflict and instability in Syria, these individuals have been declared “prima facie” refugees.12

**iv) Diaspora and Identity in the Host-Nation**

Central to the understanding of diaspora is identity. The process of identity formation and construction for diasporic groups is grounded in feelings of belonging to a common past and shared cultural environments.13 This shared common background is by no means static, it is “constructed and imagined to serve as a source of belonging that goes beyond the notion of the nation-state”14 and thus, constantly negotiated. Identity formation by members of diaspora emphasizes cultural distinctness and shared meaning creating a community that is at once inclusive and exclusive. According to Stuart Hall, identity refers to the past, therefore, to reconstruct it, one must lay claim to it from the present.15

Within this framework, diasporic identity is formed through collective cultural memories of shared understanding of a past directly linked to a physical space, but in the context of

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12 "Asylum-Seekers." *UNHCR News*
13 James Clifford, “Diasporas”
the present. The present, characterized by new spatial and social surroundings within a new context permits the formation of a new identity that best suits its architect. This enables the utilization of identity as a tool for negotiation used to establish new spaces in the host nation shaped by hybridity. The hybrid-identity is one that can be utilized by its architect for inclusion in the host society, while also highlighting difference and membership in another minority community. For the refugee, hybrid identity is much more complex than the average economic migrant as the context of forced exit triggers very different memories of the homeland, embedded within both individual and collective memory. For members of the Iranian diaspora, the hybrid identity accentuates ability to integrate. Halleh Ghorashi uses a case study on Iranians in South California to contend that because of the collective context of exit experienced, Iranians in South Carolina have a tendency to integrate into the local community much better than other ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{16} Ghorashi explains that because Iranians left a nation that has been significantly transformed, many have no desire to return and thus, build their new lives with the intension of re-rooting their lives and their families. This significantly impacts success of adaptation in the host-nation. Adaptation in this context requires a certain extent of knowledge of measures of integration and ultimately the behavior and self-fashioning of the native or local.

\textbf{II. Historical Background- The Islamic Revolution}

In 1979 the Iranian nation underwent a significant change, resulting in the birth of the Islamic Republic. To understand the make-up of the country today and what it means to

\textsuperscript{16} Halleh Ghorashi, "How Dual Is Transnational

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be Iranian, it is important to understand this revolution within its theoretical and historical contexts. The Islamic Revolution can indeed be classified alongside other social revolutions, fitting Theda Skocpol’s characterization as a “rapid basic transformation of a society’s state and class structures”.  

17 In the case of the Islamic Revolution, both the state and class structures were transformed, and also the public sphere and national identity were reengineered. Over ten percent of the civilian population participated in the revolutionary process, fighting for what they believed would bring greater freedom and independence through various factions; participation rates were highest in world history. Michel Foucault saw the revolution as a single confrontation between an entire people and the state power, “an absolutely collective will” for change mobilized through “spiritual politics”. Foucault speaks of the spirit of the revolution as a catalyst for unprecedented agency. What started as an entire population’s collective will to transform a state became a powerful force to deconstruct not only state and class structures but the imperialist legacy that had come to characterize Iran under the shah. When the events of 1979 took a turn, with the clerics dramatic rise to leadership, its impact was tremendous, partly due to widespread support for the revolution. The climate in the aftermath of the revolution was filled with disillusionment and the feeling of betrayal; as the structures of the government quickly changed, laws governing the

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17 Theda Skocpol, States and social revolutions, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.4
18 Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi “The Emergence of Clerico-Engineering as a Form of Governance in Iran”. Iran Nameh, 2012 Vol. 17: 4-37
19 Halleh Ghorashi, “How Dual Is Transnational
21 Michel Foucault, 'Iran: The Spirit of a World

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public sphere followed. Instead of greater freedom and independence, those who made the revolution saw it snatched in front of their eyes\(^\text{23}\).

In 1979, a new constitution was implemented creating the new Republic; this validated the restructuring of the country and its operations. Instead of empowering the people it restructured the laws governing society, taking away many freedoms. The new Islamic Republic, with its new constitution as a legal foundation was utilized by the new leadership as a “vehicle of legitimation”\(^\text{24}\) for the newly constructed state with its new identity. The constitution “was a direct reflection of the balance of power and the aspirations of those who dominated post-revolutionary Iran”.\(^\text{25}\) The Islamic rhetoric employed in the aftermath of the revolution, was utilized to reshape this new national identity “cleansing western impurities”. Embedded within this new constitution were parameters dictating people’s everyday operations, redefining the meaning of citizenship. The transformation of the structures governing the public sphere remain at the core of Iranian collective memory, shaping both community and individual identity and the way the migration process is experienced.

III. Existing Scholarship

i) Evolving Trends in the Iranian Diaspora

In “Paradoxes of transnational space and local activism: Iranians organizing across borders” Halleh Ghorashi and Nayereh Tavakoli provide a brief background on the Iranian diaspora explaining how Iranians as influenced by their migratory experiences are

\(^{23}\) Eric Selbin, “What Was Revolutionary about the Iranian Revolution?: The Power of Possibility”, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East Volume 29, Number 1, 2009, pp.41


\(^{25}\) Said Saffari, “The Legitimation of the Clergy's, pp.82

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increasingly united through the creation of transnational space. Tavakoli and Ghorashi explain how suppression in the 1980’s in Iran bounded the diaspora together by a shared hatred for the Iranian regime resulting in a significant disconnect between those Iranians abroad and those who remain in the Iran. Furthermore, the article is centered around the “changing influence of the state on the ways that transnational alliances are formed along with the influence of transnational space on local power relations”. The power of the Iranian state over its diaspora and the transnational networks connecting these groups has steadily decreased in recent years.

**ii) The Role of the Transit Country**

In “Re-Thinking Migrant’s Networks and Social Capital: A Case Study on Iranians in Turkey”, Sebnem Koser Akcapar explores the importance of the relationship between social networks and social capital in transit countries through a case study on Turkey. Akcapar examines the space-specific variables making a site desirable for migrants on-route to the West; in this case, “Turkey’s location bridging East and West, its proximity to Iran, the existence of a UNHCR office, and accessibility by Iranian nationals; and the impact of transnational links and globalization”. These factors make Turkey the perfect transit point for those fleeing Iran in the hopes of new settlement; Turkey, as a place of transit, thus, acts as a site of transformation where social networks lead to the creation of

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27 Halleh Ghorashi and Nayereh Tavakoli, “Paradoxes of Transnational Space, pp.90  
29 Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma "The ‘Iranian Diaspora’  
31 Sebnem Koser-Akcapar, “Re-Thinking Migrants’ Networks, pp.170
social capital. Asylum seekers in Turkey are able to utilize their ties enabled through transnational networks in order to better enable them to navigate Turkish Asylum policy and the procedures that characterize the processes of applying for and receiving refugee status. Advances in communications and transportation technologies, which have been part and parcel to globalization, have strengthened transnational ties, this has in turn reinforced already existing social networks. Akcapar conceptualizes transnational networks, spanning across countries without restrictions on its activities as a phenomenon of transnationalism. Subsequently, she categorizes the “Iranian transit migrants in Turkey [as] transnational migrants, because they live, interact, operate and define themselves and others in different social fields in Turkey and between their countries of origin and destination”.

Transit, Akcapar claims, is therefore interpreted as part of the process of transnationalism. These developments have shaped the power of the diaspora as strengthened by transnational solidarity to play an increasing role in affecting homeland politics.

**iii) Forming De-territorialized Identities**

Important to the understanding of identity formation among members of the Iranian diaspora and the development of identity among refugees is the particular context of exit of the Islamic Revolution and its lasting impact. This is exemplified by the success of the Iranian diaspora in California. Halleh Ghorashi uses a case study on the activities of an Iranian diaspora organization in South Carolina to explore how national identity among the Iranian diaspora has been altered by the Islamic revolution and more recently the

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32 Sebnem Koser-Akcapar, “Re-Thinking Migrants’ Networks, pp.178
events of September 11. Through the formation of new de-territorialized identities the diaspora is becoming increasingly detached from the homeland. There is a plethora of literature on the duality between place of residence and place of origin and loyalty to the homeland as a central feature to diasporic identity. These approaches, adopt a territorial understanding of links to homeland, however the notion of “homeland” is becoming increasingly de-territorialized. Ghorashi’s study on Iranians in Southern California, demonstrates the “hybridity positioning of Iranians in America. Identification among members of the Iranian diaspora in California, as portrayed in this study indicate an important transformation of an Iranian identity emphasizing “sameness” with American identity, as the communities increasingly define themselves as Americans, a different kind of American, but still American.” Since, the attacks of September 11, and increasing sentiments of resentment towards Arab-American and Muslim communities living the United States, Iranians in the United States have increasingly distanced themselves away from their Islamic counterparts still residing in the Islamic Republic. Different diasporic groups revealed “different coping strategies with the events of 9/11

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33 Martin Slama and Johann Heiss, Comparing Arab Diasporas: Post-9/11 and Historical Perspectives on Hadhrami and Syro-Lebanese Communities in Southeast Asia and the Americas, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Volume 31, Number 2, 2011, pp. 231-250
42 Halleh Ghorashi, "How Dual Is Transnational, pp.337
that point to differences in the organization of these communities, in their relations to the nation-state, and of the identity politics involved”.

The transformation of Iranian diasporic identity after the events of 9/11 is an important indicator of the impact of the conditions of departure on shaping reactions to the new socio-political climate. This political move and shift in position among Iranians in contrast to other Arab and Muslim communities residing in the U.S can be linked to the shared feeling among Iranians of suppression under the Islamic regime and forced-exit. The Islamic revolution, thus, becomes an important part of this discourse, as the reactions of Iranian-Americans and subsequent shifts in identity after the attacks of September 11 differed greatly from diasporic communities from other Islamic countries. An important boundary was subsequently created, not between America and Iran, but between Iranians in the homeland and the members of the diaspora. The revolution of 1979 triggered an exodus of Iranians who became defined by their political identities and negative sentiments towards the Islamic regime as the “revolution of the people” drastically changed course with its Islamization through the implementation of the 1979 Constitution. This laid the groundwork for the “detachment and new positioning of the past and present [as] essential conditions for the formation of a hybrid identity named: Iranian-American”.

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43 Martin Slama and Johann Heiss, Comparing Arab Diasporas: Post-9/11 and Historical Perspectives on Hadhrami and Syro-Lebanese Communities in Southeast Asia and the Americas, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Volume 31, Number 2, 2011, pp. 231-250
44 Halleh Ghorashi, “How Dual Is Transnational, pp.338
45 Martin Slama and Johann Heiss, Comparing Arab Diasporas
47 Halleh Ghorashi, "How Dual Is Transnational, pp.338

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iv. Theorizing Diaspora as Political Actors

In “The ‘Iranian Diaspora’ and the New Media: From Political Action to Humanitarian Help”, Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma explore the construction and transformation of identity within Iranian diasporic networks, seeking to situate the diaspora within development discourse. Ghorashi and Boersma examine the shifting patterns present in the Iranian diaspora; they divide this process into three distinct stages: from a shift in the dominant pattern of an exilic identity centered around desires for political change, to a diasporic identity defined by the emergence of transnational networks creating important interactions shaping identity, and finally, to a newly emerging pattern defined by the instrumentalization of these transnational networks for the purpose of supporting and strengthening a growing civil society in the homeland. The article attempts to situate these changing patterns and the positioning of the diaspora vis-à-vis Iran as product of these transnational networks strengthened by the utilization of virtual space and solidarity among the diaspora as transnational actors. This solidarity is characterized by an abandonment of the homeland, as defined by the current regime, in the hopes of defining diasporic identity through transnational interactions, which the authors argue is “a more action-oriented attitude”. These groups are now utilizing “national networks of their new countries, to develop projects in Iran”. This trend is increasingly important as diasporic groups are becoming significant actors in development, acting as intermediaries

48 Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma "The ‘Iranian Diaspora’
49 Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma "The ‘Iranian Diaspora’
50 Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma "The ‘Iranian Diaspora’, pp.181
51 Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma "The ‘Iranian Diaspora’, pp.182
in diplomacy through these transnational networks, surpassing the confines of the Nation-State by shifting power dynamics.

IV. Iranian Refugees Transiting Through Turkey

Turkey presents as an attractive country for the large body of refugees fleeing persecution in Iran, due to geographic proximity bridging East and West, special VISA policies and presence of the United Nations Refugee Agency. The Turkish legal framework enables refugees to seek refuge within its boundaries, but limits duration of stay and rights during this time. Despite taking part in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Rights of Refugees, Turkey “maintains a geographical limitation”, whereby it is not obliged to apply the convention to refugees outside Europe. However the majority of refugee and asylum applicants over the past few decades, have originated from non-European countries; the largest group amongst them having been Iranian.

In response to a growing refugee crisis, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) was established in Turkey under the framework of the 1994 Asylum Regulation, to “provide non-European refugees with temporary asylum-seeker status and permission to remain in the country until UNHCR finds durable solutions for them elsewhere” (UNHCR, Turkish Asylum Policy). Turkey has since become an important transit country, where transnational migrants settle until receiving official refugee status,
and then await third-country settlement. The experiences of Iranian refugees in Turkey are complex and multi-faceted.

To obtain asylum status in Turkey, individuals must fit the criteria laid out by the 1951 Convention. Refugees, according to this framework, are “person[s] outside his or her country […] with a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social or political group or political opinion” and are unable to return. Obtaining this status has become increasingly difficult over the years, as a result of external pressure from the European Union as Turkey is being reviewed for membership in the organization. Transit migration in Europe has been highly politicized over the past decade. The European Union has adopted a range of policies against incoming migrant flows and because Turkey has come to constitute an important land and sea border to Europe’s periphery, concerns around migration have impacted relations with Turkey. Many of Turkey’s most recent policy changes have been shaped by the dynamics and mechanisms of Turkey’s relationship with the E.U. In “Rethinking Transit Migration in Turkey: Reality and Re-presentation in the Creation of a Migratory Phenomenon”, Içduygu and Yükseker argue “security concerns and economic interests in the migratory regimes of major receiving countries” have predominantly shaped transit migration policy. Policy, thus, is “becoming more restrictive and selective, but also more dynamic and multifaceted” and yet this legal framework itself acts as site of contestation where refugees are increasingly utilizing their identity to negotiate their way through repressive systems of control.

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56 1951 Convention Relating to Refugees
57 Ahmet Içduygu, and Deniz Yükseker, “Rethinking Transit Migration
58 Ahmet Içduygu, and Deniz Yükseker, “Rethinking Transit Migration, pp.441-442

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Turkey, as a place of transit, acts as a site of transformation where social networks lead to the creation of social capital. Transnational ties have been strengthened by globalization, creating advances in communication and transportation technologies, ultimately reinforcing already existing social networks. Akçapar conceptualizes transnational networks, spanning across countries without restrictions on its activities as a phenomenon of transnationalism. Subsequently, she categorizes the “Iranian transit migrants in Turkey [as] transnational migrants, because they live, interact, operate and define themselves and others in different social fields in Turkey and between their countries of origin and destination”\textsuperscript{59}. Transit, Akçapar claims, is therefore interpreted as part of the process of transnationalism. Turkey occupies a very special role in the formation of these transnational-socio-political networks acting as a nucleus for social, cultural and political activities. Hence, Turkey has become an important transit country for refugees seeking asylum and the focus of this study.

\textit{i) Challenges}

Refugees and asylum-seekers transiting through Turkey, face many challenges during this period of time because of the strict limitations imposed on them with the Turkish asylum policy. Research findings indicate that UNHCR applicants live in urban areas in more than 50 different cities across the country.\textsuperscript{60} The UNHCR closely monitors their protection and welfare, while providing them with basic assistance including the provision of non-food items, health care and psychological counseling. However the UNHCR falls short of providing the same rights as the 1951 Convention, most

\textsuperscript{59} Koser-Akçapar, Sebnem, (2010). “Re-Thinking Migrants’ Networks, pp. 178
\textsuperscript{60} UNHCR, “Turkey country profile” United Refugee Agency, 2010
significantly the right to work (Article 17 to 19), the right to education (Article 22), and
the right to freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26). Iranian refugees
residing in Turkey are unable to continue their studies, unable to work and must register
with the police office in their assigned city, sometimes up to five times a week, limiting
their freedom of movement within the country. According to the Turkish Law Related to
the Residence and Travel of Foreign Subjects\textsuperscript{61} established in July of 1950, refugees must
reside in a place that is designated by the Ministry of the Interior (Article 17). Upon
status determination, persons who are granted “temporary asylum seeker status”, by the
Turkish authorities, may be relocated to one of over 50 satellite cities, by the Ministry of
the Interior, while waiting for their application to be considered by UNHCR, or after
being recognized by UNHCR while waiting for resettlement to a third country. While in
the satellite city, asylum seekers must register with the police on a regular basis to
confirm their presence in the city. Travel outside of the city without permission from the
authorities is prohibited. These restrictions allow the Turkish authorities to have greater
control over asylum seekers. Supposedly, this system of satellite cities is meant to ensure
the protection of the refugees and to distribute refugees evenly throughout the country.
However in practice, restrictions on freedom of movement can be highly problematic. In
one interview, Malik, a 24 year-old political activist from Mashad, explains that he feels
trapped in Eskisehir where he must register with the local authorities twice a week
(Interviews, 2013, Malik). This is especially difficult because the individuals have no
access to employment during this time. The 1994 asylum regulation states the following

\textsuperscript{61} Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (1982). Implemented 7 November 1982, available at:
http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b5be0.html
in Article 27 with regard to work and education: “Within the general provisions [of the law], possibilities for education and work, limited to their period of residence in our country, are to be accorded to refugees and asylum seekers”. Despite this provision, in practice asylum seekers are not allowed to work without a work permit, and thus, are forced to work in the informal sector. The majority of asylum seekers interviewed during fieldwork in Eskisehir, Denizli and Yalova survived on remittances sent from family members abroad. As with the right to work, Article 27 of the 1994 asylum regulation states that possibilities for education are to be accorded to refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution states that: “No one shall be deprived of the right of learning and education”. However, aside from the 1994 asylum regulation, there are no specific legal provisions for asylum seekers and refugees to attend schools in Turkey; because asylum seekers are given no indication of the period of their stay, as well as the bureaucratic challenges associated with enrolment the majority of refugees will not send their children to school. As such, the situation for Iranians transiting through Turkey remains very challenging. The period of stay lasting up to two- and in extreme cases even three years- is a difficult state of limbo. According to research findings, during this time, Iranians finding it very difficult to integrate will form their own communities with other refugees and asylum seekers. Often with those fitting the

62 UNHCR (1999). Regulation No. 1994/6169 on the Procedures and Principles related to Population Movements and Aliens Arriving in Turkey either as Individuals or in Groups Wishing to Seek Asylum either from Turkey or Requesting Residence Permission in order to Seek Asylum From Another Country (as amended in 1999)
64 “Constitution of the Republic of Turkey”, Implemented 7 November 1982, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b5be0.html
same refugee category, that is, other political activists, LGBT, Azaris, Christians and Bahai.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

This study uses a qualitative framework that is influenced by phenomenological and ethnographic methodologies; it will explore the experiences of Iranian refugees transiting through Turkey through the perspective of diverse groups of refugees as distinguished by their conditions of departure and refugee type classification. This research study took place over two and a half months, from April 17, 2013 – to June 30th, 2013.

Within the first ten days I had gained access to a group of participants based on an initial contact developed while in Toronto. Recognizing that the group interviewed were primarily Azari, I attempted to develop more contacts while in the field by attending political protests and events. In doing so, I established contact with an English-speaking journalist who was also working with refugees and political activists from Iran in Turkey. By gaining this access point, my participants and network within Turkey grew substantially, affording access to political activists in Eskishehir, Turkey. Through Michael⁶⁵, my journalist contact, I was able to organize two focus groups in local cafes over the span of two days. In this context, I was able to observe the political activists and their interactions with one another in group-settings as well as conduct more in-depth interviews with some of the individuals. These focus groups provided a semi-structured environment where I was able to obtain consent for focus group discussion as well as one-on-one interviews. The nature of the focus group provided an important setting

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⁶⁵ Michael is a pseudonym provided for the actual Journalist I worked with. Given the nature of his work in the field, his confidentiality is of utmost importance.
where I was able to bear witness to competing narratives and the apparent hierarchy of status within the group, as well as in relation to their ability to gain refugee status.66

Subsequent to these focus groups and interviews, approximately three weeks into the timeline for research study, I was invited to a farewell party for a refugee who had been accepted as a refugee to the United States. At the farewell party, I gained contact with a politically active refugee who shared an apartment with three other refugees who identified as part of the LGBT community, but were not politically active. I was then invited to their home, where I conducted one more focus group with those living in the residence with their consent.

Additionally, at the above mentioned farewell party, I came into contact with a politically active refugee living in Denizli, Turkey who was visiting for the refugee hosting the farewell party. This led to my time in Denizli where I was able to conduct further research; it is notable however, that this period, May 12th to the 22nd, coincided with the pre-election period in Iran, and announcement of the candidates who were eligible to run for presidency. Thus, the political situation was at the forefront of discussion and concerns arising in the interviews.

After returning from Denizli, I sought to gain access to another important group of refugees, the religious groups, and in particular the Christians, a group that is receiving increasing attention from scholars who are speculating their claims to asylum. As this is one of the most difficult groups to access due to their vulnerability and level of protective measures in place, I reached out to a contact that suggested conducting interviews in Yalova, a city one hour outside of Istanbul, because of the need for additional

66 These observations will be further elaborated on in Chapter 4, the Findings section.
confidentiality in Istanbul, and concern for spies. Initially, I had reached out to a priest at an Iranian parish located in the neighborhood of Aksaray in Istanbul, who explained that he could not provide access to individuals within the congregation as it would jeopardize their safety. When a contact referred me to a community in Yalova and confirmed their safety I went there. I spent 4 days in Yalova, conducting further research with Christian Iranians seeking refugee status. Given my circumstances with regards to finances, parameters of study and minimal research experience, these methods accommodated the nature of this study as well as the limitations and restrictions for access to participants.

**Participant Sampling and Instruments of Data Collection:**

As mentioned above, this study utilized in-depth semi-structured focus groups as well as one-on-one individual interviews with 28 consenting participants. The participants were selected using convenience and snowball-sampling methods, as made possible through contacts and networking opportunities in Turkey during my research period. The questions in my interview guide were open-ended, in order to allow for refugee narratives to transcend pointed questions and instead, to unfold according to the explanation of the refugee, rather than being directed by my own research interests. In this way, open-ended responses allowed for additional prompts to be made during the interview as unknown information was shared. The focus group setting provided a meaningful yet informal setting where the participants were able to interact with one another, and the questions simultaneously. This brought forth behaviors and responses that I was able to observe and make informal research notes on. Given my position as an outsider to these groups, it was beneficial to have them interact with one another in order

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67 Refer to Interview Guide in Appendix
to establish a level of comfort and ease of expression. In addition to my interviews and focus groups, I attended police-station check-ins, community meetings, farewell parties, and political events in order to observe social dynamics and individual behaviors as well as develop further networking opportunities; these vantage points allowed for additional field notes and insights.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection for this study was characterized by a qualitative approach and engaged with concepts of refugee identity and experience. According to Pauly (1991),

> The “something” that qualitative research understands is not some set of truisms about communication but the awful difficulties groups face in mapping reality. The qualitative researcher is an explorer, not a tourist. Rather than speeding down the interstate, the qualitative researcher ambles along the circuitous back roads of public discourse and social practice. In reporting on that journey the researcher may conclude that some of those paths were, in fact, wider and more foot-worn than others, that some branched off in myriad directions, some narrowed along the way, some rambled endlessly while others ran straight and long, and some ended at the precipice, in the brambles, or back at their origin."

This account of qualitative research serves as an effective interdisciplinary approach to the critical examination of data, and the exploration of theoretical paradigms. The qualitative nature of this study allowed for pertinent new findings, outside the scope of the original research question to surface. More specifically, the methods of this research paper are characterized by a phenomenological approach, focusing on understanding the essence of experiences of a phenomenon described by John Crestwell as “lived experiences.” Additionally, it also utilized ethnographic observations and field notes as gaining the trust and level of comfort needed for the nature of this study called for

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complete immersion into the everyday lives of asylum-seekers. As Margaret Mead explains, anthropology requires an “open-mindedness with which one must look and listen, record in astonishment and wonder that which one would not have been able to guess”. 70

The phenomenological qualitative method seemed most appropriate for data collection during the development and planning of this study, as it allowed for multiple themes to emerge, narrowing the scope of the topic and the question of the study. However, once in the field, it became apparent that the phenomenon of Iranian asylum-seekers within Turkey, and in their respective satellite cities, was divided among multiple communities of refugees and political actors, each maintaining their own culture and identity. As a result, this study evolved to be influenced by data collecting methods and analysis that utilize both phenomenological and ethnographic styles.

Limitations

The United Nations Refugee Agency, initially conceived as a research study partner was inundated with refugees due to the political turmoil in neighboring Syria and the refugee crisis that arose and as a result, my networks for developing research contacts had to adapt to the context of research. I realized in my approach to recruiting study participants that I had often been referred to individuals with similar narratives and thus, in order to broaden my scope I had to find new point persons in order to account for the various groups of Iranian asylum-seekers in Turkey.

Theoretical Framework

i. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theorizing Diaspora

In “Integrating Interdisciplinary Studies Across the Humanities and Social Sciences”, Rick Szostak (2010) explores the need for research informed by perspectives across disciplines. He explores the value of ‘travelling concepts’ (as cited in, Bali, 2002) as “stimulating new thoughts” and acting as “a major source of creativity in the humanities”71; however, the migration of concepts across communities, he claims, requires clarity. According to Szostak “the best concepts are those that refer to one phenomena or the characteristics of one phenomena […] defined precisely with a classification of phenomena.”72 This classification, he emphasizes, is the key to clarity leading to grounded theoretical arguments, enhancing scholarly understanding. Acknowledging Julie Klein’s claims on the issue of “boundary work”, (2010) constraining common understandings and creating challenges for conversation among scholars to proceed; Szostak stresses the importance of “achiev[ing] a core set of understandings across the academy”73 of the phenomena’s under study and the theories and methods used to do so. This will enable each community to carefully ground its core concepts within these common understandings; a challenging destination to reach in rapidly evolving fields of integrated studies such as diaspora and transnationalism. Interdisciplinarians, he urges must consider “clarity, causal analysis, comparative research, theoretical flexibility, methodological flexibility, a constructive recognition of

72 Rick Sztozak, “Integrating Interdisciplinary Studies, pp.182
73 Rick Sztozak, “Integrating Interdisciplinary Studies, pp.183
disciplinary and other scholarly biases, and an appreciation of the possibility of a cumulative interdisciplinary scholarship that links all areas of the academy and beyond.\textsuperscript{74} This basis, will guide the selection of theoretical assumptions informing my framework, methodological approaches applied in this study and understandings of interdisciplinary as requiring clarifications of concepts to effectively contribute to scholarly discourse.

\textit{ii. A Global Power Perspective on International Migration}

In “A Global Perspective on Transnational Migration: Theorizing Migration Without Methodological Nationalism”, Nina Glick Schiller critically examines current scholarship on levels of analysis used to theorize trends in international migration; introducing her own approach “a global power perspective on international migration”\textsuperscript{75} Schiller argues that using the Nation-State as a level of analysis is limiting in its understanding and fails to address the power relations involved in influencing migration as seen as a flow of capital. Schiller suggests a transnational lens to understand how “institutions […] structure imbalances of power and migrant experiences within and across states borders [which] both shapes the circumstances that compel people to migrate and simultaneously constitutes the conditions under which migrants attempt to settle and develop transnational social fields.\textsuperscript{76} This global power perspective is important to the understanding that social networks are formed between diasporic communities across borders, not only between homeland and host-nation, but also as connected to other locations of settlement. Schiller’s article is both critical and innovative,

\textsuperscript{74} Rick Sztozak, “Integrating Interdisciplinary Studies, pp.185
\textsuperscript{75} Nina Glick Schiller, Chapter Six. “A global power perspective on transnational migration without methodological nationalism”, In R. Baubock & T. Faist (Eds.), Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods, (Amsterdam University Press 2010). Pp. 113
\textsuperscript{76} Nina Glick Schiller, A global power perspective, pp.116
contributing a new perspective to discourses around transnationalism and levels of analysis, filling an interdisciplinary gap with her notion of transnational social fields as shaped by power relations. This theoretical framework serves as a useful tool for conceptualizing social networks formed between diasporic community members within Turkey as connected to Iran and other sites across the globe.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview:
This research study took place over two and a half months, between 17 April 2013 and 30 June 2013. During the course of this period, I utilized in-depth semi-structured focus groups as well as one-on-one interviews with twenty-eight consenting participants. Based on two and a half months of interview data, focus groups and extensive field notes, this findings chapter summarizes overall narratives of these groupings and makes use of data that emerged from rapport built with participants and observations of behaviors from daily interactions. The findings from this research study will be presented in chronological order, based on the cities researched and groups interviewed, in the following cities in Turkey: Istanbul, Eskishehir, Denizli, and Yalova. This section has been organized according to grouping of refugees that participated in the study, including: Azaris, political activists, members of the LGBT community, and members of religious groups including, Christians and Bahai. Additionally the final subsection within this chapter, “Reflections on Identity” includes responses from asylum seekers and field notes from across the groupings. The map in Figure 1.1 outlines regional data collection; the infographic outlines the locations within Turkey that the asylum-seekers interviewed were assigned. Upon arrival to Turkey, Iranians must register as asylum seekers with Turkish authorities and are subsequently assigned to satellite cities by the Turkish Ministry of Interior; this system is in place to monitor and protect the safety of this vulnerable group. Pragmatically, this procedure also allows the government to keep asylum seekers outside of Istanbul. Figure 1.2 describes the classification of types of refugees and outlines not only the order in which their narratives will unfold within this
chapter, but also emphasizes the communities that are built within each grouping. These groups, as will be discussed further, had direct connections with one another, while only cursory knowledge of asylum seekers beyond their specific status criteria. For ethical purposes all participants have been assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

**Figure 1.1: Map of Regional Data Collection**

![Map of Regional Data Collection](image1.jpg)

**Figure 1.2: Classification of Types of Refugees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee Status</th>
<th>Case Study on Iranian Refugees</th>
<th>Interview Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member of Ethnic/Cultural Group</td>
<td>“Pan Turks” Azari National</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Political Group (Activists)</td>
<td>Journalists, bloggers, student/labour/women activists, NGO workers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member of Social Group</th>
<th>Self-identified as Lesbian, gay, Bisexual, Transgender</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Religious Group</td>
<td>Christians and Baha’i</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Narrative of Azaris:**

The first focus group conducted took place in Istanbul at a café in Sultanamet, a location recommended by my contact Riza in Istanbul who also worked as my translator. Riza, an Iranian PHD student studying translation at Marmaris University, assisted in finding participants for this focus group. The group included six Azari participants: a) Anoush and Faraz, a married couple with two children; b) Jasmine and Javed, a woman in her 30s and her father, a prominent political activist; c) Farhad, a man in his 40s; d) Riza, our translator.

The discussion touched significantly on cultural activities and life back in Iran, in the city of Tabriz. It was important to these participants that I recognize the presence of Azaris and the challenges they faced as a minority group in Iran. As evidenced from tone in the discussion, the participants spoke fondly of their time in Turkey. Jasmine explains “we are lucky in comparison to other Iranians because we are Azari” (Interview, 2013, Istanbul). They further explained that their advantage was based on the similarity of culture and language of Turks and Azaris. As previously discussed, asylum-seekers in Turkey are assigned to satellite cities where they must reside and check in regularly to the local police station. Because Anoush and Faraz were Azari, they had a previously established network of contacts in Turkey, as a result, they were able to secure employment in Istanbul, which allowed them to maintain residence in both Kayseri, their satellite city, and Istanbul at once (Focus group, 2013).
The group of Azaris interviewed perceived themselves to be cultural refugees, as they were fleeing persecution due to their cultural practices. Faraz had been teaching Azari classes in Tabriz and was involved in promoting cultural activities before he was arrested. Once released, he and his family fled the country and came to Turkey through Van. He explains: “In Iran cultural activities are political activities. Everything is political” (Interview, Faraz, 2013).

During the focus group, the participants demonstrated ease of interaction with one another from their tone and body language; it was clear they had all known each other back in Iran (Fieldnotes, 2013). Although Faraz explained that he did not want to associate with other Iranians while in Turkey, he and his family spent a significant amount of time with Turks and other Azaris. Anoush added, “We are still very close to Iran here in Turkey and I am very concerned for my family back home. So I stay away from the Iranian community gatherings” (Interview, Anoush, 2013). She further explained that Iranian community gatherings in Istanbul are not safe due to spies from Iran, and by attending events in Istanbul their family’s safety in Tabriz may be jeopardized.

**Narrative of Political Activists in Eskisehir:**

Over the course of three days, two focus groups were conducted with a community of political activists, while in Eskisehir, Turkey. This group was accessed through a journalist contact working in Istanbul. The focus groups were held in two different areas of the city at different times in order to allow for more participants to attend. Consentig individuals who participated in the study included bloggers, journalists, NGO workers and women/labor/student activists, for a total of 12 people over
the three days. This group included 4 females and 8 males, among which were two couples, participants were between the ages of 22-38.

This group maintained the strongest ties to the homeland (Fieldnotes, 2013). Based on the discussion, it was clear that most of these individuals had jeopardized their lives aspiring for political change; many of the subjects interviewed had also spent time in prison preceding their departure (Interviews, 2013). Amongst this group there was still hope for change in Iran. I also noticed an apparent hierarchy within this group as I observed interactions and group dynamics (Fieldnotes, 2013). Many of the participants had established reputations back in Iran and had known each other in some fashion or at least had been aware of each other; the majority of these participants had participated in the 2009 Green movement in some capacity (Interviews, 2013).

These participants were very well versed in Turkish Asylum policy and the international legal framework for refugees (Feildnotes, 2013). They were highly educated and remained politically active in Turkey (Interviews, 2013). They spoke of freedoms and lifestyles they were able to lead in Turkey that were only available via underground culture back in Iran. However, although there was lack of freedom, nostalgia for Iran was evidenced through discussion of food, often entering conversation, as did many other stories and anecdotes about daily life back home. For example, Hamid explained:

I miss it [Iran] so much. I miss the food… The food was so much better. The doner was much bigger and tastier and another thing is the Mosques. In Iran you have to have a good voice when you’re doing the call to prayer. In Turkey it seems anyone can shout out on those loud speakers (Interview, 2013).

Despite displays of nostalgia, all the members of this community discussed Eskisehir with positive tone (Fieldnotes, 2013). Eskisehir, they explained, was one of the most open cities in Turkey and had many students and many bars. They were especially
excited about the bars (Interviews, 2013). The participants explained that the freedoms they were offered in Eskisehir allowed them to live freely and make lifestyle choices according to interest rather than regulation. Dress, drinking, and dating were considered far more acceptable in Eskisehir (Interviews, 2013). One participant itemized favorite bars to frequent depending on the night of the week; indeed, their enthusiasm for the nightlife was based on the lack thereof in Iran. For example, Hamid explained, “Once I can walk down the street with an alcoholic beverage in one hand and my girlfriends hand in the other that’s when I will return to Iran. Freedom, it’s not that complicated, that’s what I want for my country and our people,” (Interview, 2013). In line with their interest for freedom, discussion and debates over politics over the situation in Iran dominated discussion. Participants indicated individual views and opinions, sometimes in conflict with one another, despite differing opinions; members of this group seemed to know each other very well and spent a lot of time together (Fieldnotes, 2013).

**Narrative of Political Activists in Denizli:**

The focus group and subsequent interviews conducted in Denizli enabled me to develop further insights into the competing narratives of this particular group of asylum seekers. As I had already met many of the participants in Eskisehir and was referred to the others by participants in the Eskisehir focus group, the participants seemed more comfortable and spoke more openly and more freely in a less formal setting. This focus group was conducted at the home of one of my contacts, located in a building that had supplied furnished apartments geared towards the influx of refugees that had arrived in the city (Fieldnotes, 2013). Participants in this focus group were between the age of 22
and 28 and had been very politically active in Iran and remained so while in Turkey. These asylum seekers tended to select Los Angeles, referring to the city as Tehrangelos, as their destination of choice. Others selected Canada for its open multicultural policy. Either choice indicated a focus on freedom of expression (Interviews, 2013).

Subject participants in this group closely followed the June elections, even participating in interviews with news agencies such as BBC Persia. The journalists and bloggers amongst this group were especially active in the month preceding the elections (Field notes, 2013). In the weeks preceding the June elections, the political activist groups interviewed remained very active, writing articles, blogging multiple times per day and even conducting on-air-interviews with BBC Persia. The debates among the activists were fiery and passionate (Field notes, 2013). Despite resettlement, many still had family in Iran and worried for the worsening economic situation. Elnaz, an activist in her early 20s, explained, “the situation is getting much, much worse, with the sanctions prices are exceedingly high and even my middle class family is finding it very difficult to deal with”. Elnaz’s husband, Malik, was a political activist who spent three months in solitary confinement in Evin Prison after protests at Zanjan University; his close friend, Ahmad, was also imprisoned with him during that time. Malik and Ahmad explained that their only hope for political change in Iran was through the channel of improved Iranian-American relations and by extension the improvement of the state of the economy. The young activists explained that the situation among refugees in Turkey was tense, “the activist community in Turkey really isn’t that large. We are well aware of who the real activists are because we were all familiar with each other or at least each other’s stories in Iran [...] many of the ‘political refugees’ here have lied. And the rest of us know that”
Malik and Ahmed explained that many of the other refugees in Turkey under the status of political refugee, have embellished their stories in an attempt to advance their case for Refugee status. Animosity, regarding case status, from political Asylum seekers in this focus group was noticeable (Fieldnotes, 2013). Saaed continued: “But they are liars, our group knows because we were very active in the politics in Iran”. What Saeed refers to, as the “group”, is a community of 20 political activists, bloggers, journalist and NGO workers living in Eskisehir and Denizli that have formed a tight-knit community amongst themselves. Regardless of time spent with one another and apparent sense of community, it was clear that each asylum seeker closely monitored one another’s case processing in a way that other groups did not (Fieldnotes, 2013). Alternately, the environment in Denizli was very different from the setting in Eskisehir, lacking the student atmosphere and openness that had characterized life in Eskisehir.

**Narratives for LGBT Community:**

The focus group for this community was held at an Eskisehir residence where the three participants interviewed lived together. Two of the participants were in a relationship with one another and the third participant identified as transgender. All individuals gave consent to participate in focus group discussion and subsequent interviews.

The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) group of asylum seekers interviewed showed a tendency to form their own communities and integrate with other members of this community in Turkey (Fieldnotes, 2013). Participants expressed an appreciation for their time in Turkey, where they were able to live more freely (Focus
group 3, Eskisehir, 2013). Mehran explains, “in our country we are not able to be like this. In Turkey we are able to dress and act the way we want. It’s not always easy. We are lucky that Eskisehir is more open than Istanbul and many other cities in Turkey” (Focus group 3, Eskisehir, 2013). Caspar adds, “Sometimes we have problems here too, but we know we are not alone. We have each other. In Iran my family didn’t support me and my country betrayed me” (Focus group 3, Eskisehir, 2013).

Amir explained how every Monday, he and his friends would go to this Karaoke bar and they would get all dressed up and spend the night there. Eventually, Turks that self identified as homosexuals also began to attend this bar on Monday evenings (Interview, Amir, 2013). Initially he explained that they didn’t feel too welcome, but because they went as a group they felt strong and proud. Eventually business boomed for this bar, and it had become a safe place for individuals identifying as LGBT to get dressed up and interact freely (Interview, Amir, 2013). Turkey still has many issues with open sexuality and there are still many incidents were hate crimes are committed against these groups. But in the relatively small and open city of Eskisehir, this group was able to utilize their community for support and pave the way for others in Turkey (Field notes, 2013). The community of LGBT refugee is Eskisehir essentially reshaped social dynamics by turning a karaoke bar into a safe place and a space where self-identified LGBT could go to meet others.

Members of the LGBT community selected destination countries such as Canada and Australia in an attempt to live less restrictedly (Interviews, 2013). This group still remains relatively unexplored within the refugee literature, although has begun to receive
more attention in recent years. Particularly, through media coverage, as they face many challenges and severe discrimination.

When discussing, the past in Iran, interactions and body language were tense at first, as participants recounted the discriminations they faced in the public realm as well their experiences with police and government officials (Focus group 3, Eskisehir, 2013). Once discussion progressed to the lives they led in the privacy of their homes and the underground scene tensions dissolved and participants began to share stories of parties and other gatherings. At this point, Caspar pulled out an album of wedding photos from is unofficial marriage ceremony with Mehran that had taken place 3 months before their departure from Iran (Focus group 3, Eskisehir, 2013).

An important subject that came up in focus group discussion was self-identification. I asked participants about the nature of their identities and which parts of their identity took precedence over others, particularly in terms of gender, sexual identification and ethnicity. Responses varied. Caspar said that his identity wasn’t accepted in his country, his country had failed him and he saw himself as a human being, a homosexual. Caspar and his partner Merhad had faced many hardships in Iran, they were ready to leave and never look back (Focus group 3, Eskisehir, 2013). Amir on the other hand, explained that leaving Iran was the hardest thing he had ever done, and he missed his home everyday. There was no future for him back in Iran, but he hoped one day the regime would fall and the people would become more open to accepting individuals who self-identified as LGBT. Amir considered himself an Iranian bisexual.
Narratives for Religious Communities:

The other very controversial group of asylum-seekers was the community of Christians. For the purpose of this study, a case study was conducted on the community of Christian Iranians living in the city of Yalova. This community is difficult to reach and for the purpose of security and their refugee cases, many interview subjects would not disclose their names. According to findings, the Iranian Christian community, is located across the country but mostly located in the neighborhood of Aksaray nearby two exclusively Iranian Christian churches, where services are conducted in Farsi. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, the methods section, I had initially, reached out to a priest at an Iranian perish located in the neighborhood of Aksaray in Istanbul, but due to security concerns and discretion, no interviews were conducted within these communities. As such, interviews were conducted in the smaller community located in Yalova. Iranian Christians in Yalova described the importance of the support they received from the Christian community and the way this had facilitated their time in Turkey. They often discussed the role of their faith in coping and expressed no desire to return to the country they had felt betrayed them. Many explained that their Christian identity had surpassed their Iranian identity in the way they come to see themselves (Fieldwork, 2013). Riza explains, “I don’t see myself as an Iranian-Christian. Some others here might, but I definitely do not” (Interview, 2013, Yalova). Riza further explained, that he could not identify himself with a nation defined as Islamic, which failed to recognize his faith (Interview, 2013, Yalova). The community of Iranian Christian refugees has received a lot of attention from scholars in the past few years, many scrutinizing the authenticity of their fate. Sebnem Koser Akcapar from the Institute for the Study of International
Migration, at Georgetown University has been the leading scholar on the case of Iranians converting to Christianity since 2004. However, the topic has since received much more attention, since more and more Iranians have tried to obtain refugee status through this channel.

Reflections on Identity:

Time spent in Turkey, it is clear from interviews and observations, has significantly impacted the lives of asylum-seekers (Interviews; Field notes; Focus groups, 2013). This period of legal limbo, lasting up to three years enables ample time for reflection on the past, as well as the present and understandings of self and identity. This is particularly true in the case of Iranian asylum-seekers, as they attempt to understand the parameters of the legal frameworks they must navigate. Furthermore, due to the political conditions and the nature of their departure as asylum-seekers, memories of the period of time prior to departure, as evidenced by individual accounts, are filled with anxieties and uncertainties. As such, once asylum-seekers have arrived in Turkey, and been able to settle in, they are finally able to properly digest the experience, allowing for reflection. In one interview, a participant who was a member of the group of political activists explained to me the importance of his time in Turkey. He explained that his political activities and mobilization in Iran had consumed his life from a very young age. After his arrest and the process of leaving the country- a very long process- he explains that he was finally able find peace in Turkey. Due to the limitations presented by Turkish Asylum policy and the nature of being stuck in transit in a country for an uncertain period of time he was able to use this time to reflect on his past and his identity (Interview, 2013). After a few months in Turkey, he explains that he realized he had an inclination towards men
(Interview, 2013). He had spent some time with the group of self-identified LGBT refugees and realized that he was not only a political activist and an active member of this group but began spending time with this other group and realized that he had been able to identify with both groups (Interview, 2013). This speaks volumes to the significance of time spent in Turkey to individual reflections on their past and identities and the politics and inefficiencies of policies relating to asylum.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

The Iranian Revolution, its context, its reaction developed the phenomenon of a large group of refugees exiting; historically, physical people migrated from one location to another under three separate political policies and frameworks, however this section will describe how this movement and the experiences of the individuals can be interpreted theoretically based on the findings of this study. The range of narratives presented by refugees demonstrated a significant amount of agency and dynamism on the parts of the asylum-seekers who were able to essentially perform the role of refugee. This performance and agency, act as a survival mechanism. Moreover, the performance has been enabled by the experiences of these individuals in the homeland, as a result of their context of exit and the lasting impacts of the 1979 revolution. Based on this preliminary qualitative study and the findings that emerged, this section proposes a set of theoretical observations. This discussion chapter has been divided into three themes that correspond to the major research questions, including: “Performing the Refugee”, “From Revolution to Asylum”, and “The Role of the Transit Country”. Following these discussion themes, the paper will describe recommendations and implications of the study as well as suggestions for future study.

Performing the Refugee

As discussed in the previous chapter, the most significant finding that surfaced from this study was the dynamism and agency employed by Iranian asylum-seekers as they entered the process of applying for refugee status. One of the primary indicators of the

77 See Chapter 4: Findings
impact of the legal framework relating to refugees and the criteria of the 1951 Convention is the formation of distinct communities of refugees. The snowball/convenience methodology employed to find study participants, was significantly impacted by the nature of the phenomena under study. I realized when recruiting new study participants via the referral of previous participants, that I was often referred to individuals with very similar narratives; other Iranians who had left the homeland under very similar pretenses and who shared similar concerns. Essentially, their claims to the refugee label were very similar. Thus, I was able to identify different trends that emerged within the different subsets of Iranian asylum-seekers interviewed in this study. Interviews conducted in Denizli in the period preceding the Iranian presidential elections yielded important insights to the competing narratives presented by Iranians asylum-seekers. As previously described in the findings section, one participant explained that many of the Iranians in Denizli who had claimed the status of political refugee had not in fact been as politically active as they claimed. They were aware of the parameters of the legal framework and manipulated their stories and self-fashioned their identities appropriately (Denizli, Focus Group, 2013). This form of adaption is utilized as a survival mechanism in the true Darwinian sense. When transplanted into a new environment, it is human instinct to adapt to the new surroundings and determine what resources are at one’s disposal to provide for oneself. Similar instances of self-fashioning are also demonstrated in the case of other groups, particularly the religious refugees. There has been increasing attention in scholarship to the case of Iranians who convert to

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78 Although this is certainly not the case for all Iranian-asylum-seekers in Denizli, this phenomena is noteworthy among the group of asylum-seekers interviewed in the parameters of this study.
Christianity upon arrival to Turkey as a means of reinforcing their claims to asylum. There is now a significant amount of scrutiny paid to the authenticity of the faith of these individuals. The same can also be said about the community of self-identified LGBT asylum-seekers. It is common knowledge among asylum-seekers that identifying as LGBT is one of the easiest ways of obtaining refugee status (Fieldnotes, 2013). During one-on-one interviews conducted across groupings, study participants explained the procedures for applying for asylum and subsequently refugee status with the United Nations Refugee Agency. Many of the participants seemed very well versed in the procedures, many of which had been informed via transnational networks from friends who had been through the refugee channel and who were now settled in a receiving-country.

Iranians to this day, remain one of the largest groups of registered asylum seekers in Turkey alongside individuals from Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to obvious political instability and the threat to safety in these war-torn countries it is not surprising that Afghans and Iraqis would be among the largest groups of asylum-seekers. The case of Iranians however is very particular. Since the 1979 revolution, Iranians have steadily remained one of the largest groups of asylum-seekers, numbers that are projected to rise according to the UNHCR’s 2014 planning figures (See Appendix E). The existing body of literature, particularly Sebnem Koser Akcapar’s 2006\textsuperscript{79} case-study on Iranian’s converting to Christianity in Turkey as a migration strategy and Halleh Ghorashi’s


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(2004) article that’s explores the impacts of the 1979 Iranian Revolution on the formation of the Iranian-American hybrid identity provide the ground work for the conceptualization of Iranians overseas as highly dynamic in measures to adapt their identities as a means of navigating new settings. Koser’s study provides meaningful insights into the ways Iranians use conversion to Christianity as a migration strategy to obtain refugee status; by changing their religious identities they are enabled to surmount the barriers of the legal framework. Halleh Ghorashi’s research takes place in Southern California where she explores the formation of the Iranian-American identity and measures used to create de-territorialized identities; Ghorashi’s argues that the Iranian revolution and its lasting impact on the nation as well as it centrality in Iranian cultural consciousness, has played a significant role in enabling Iranians to better integrate overseas. She explains, that the abandonment of the homeland, as defined by the new regime allows Iranians in the United States to form new identities. Based on these two studies, as well as interviews and observations of the present study; this paper argues that the context of exit and the lasting impacts of the Iranian revolution of 1979 have significantly influenced the success of Iranians in receiving asylum-seeker and subsequently refugee status. The context of exit as defined in the literature review section of this paper, plays in an important role in shaping the migratory experience and the way they context of reception and subsequent measures of integration unfold. The flow from departure to reception should be conceptualized as a process impacted by historical background in shaping the context of exit. In the case of the Iranian revolution, the

80 Halleh Ghorashi, How Dual Is Transnational
81 See Section Two: “Literature Review” p.8
country of departure and notions of national identity and citizenship have been transformed, significantly shaping the public sphere and relationship between state and citizen as a result; the very relationship that creates the state of refugee. In terms of reception, whenever entering a new sphere, there are always rules of conduct that govern interactions and rights. These parameters act as frameworks. For the purpose of this paper I will discuss these parameters in the form of Turkish Asylum Policy, and the International Legal Framework for Refugees.

**Legal Framework- From Revolution to Asylum**

The Iranian revolution as discussed in the literature review (refer to chapter 3) transformed the nation, with the birth of the Islamic Republic and the implementation of a new constitution restructuring systems of powers and acting as a tool of legitimation for the new regime. The political reconfiguration of the state post-revolution is crucial to the social dynamics and understandings of the relationship between citizen and state that would develop in the aftermath. Although this subject deserves further attention, my interest here in the transformation and restructuring of the nation lies in its impact and lasting influence on shaping the subsequent departures of human flows that would take place. The restrictions imposed under the new constitution, pushed many freedoms outside the realm of the public sphere into the private realm. The veiling of women, restriction on alcohol, modes of dress, displays of affection and modes of interaction significantly altered everyday life in the public sphere. These were the parameters of lifestyle in the public sphere under the new regime.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency “nationality is a legal bond between a state and an individual.” Once an individual flees their homeland as a result of
fear of persecution, the legal bond is broken and the individual must now seek to enter a new legal bond. The premise of departure from within the nation-state borders, on the basis of an inability to return into the very same borders means that the individuals falls into a form of legal limbo. In the case of Iranians, many are forced to travel by land to neighboring Turkey where they must register as asylum-seekers and subsequently try to obtain refugee status. However because these individuals are fleeing individual persecution, they must be recognized by legal authorities in order to be considered refugees. As such, they are labeled asylum-seekers, a temporary status leaving these individuals stateless but bonded by the legal terms of Turkish Asylum Policy.

Upon arrival in Turkey, asylum-seekers must register with Turkish officials and are subsequently assigned to a satellite city by the Ministry of Interior Affairs; they are then provided with the rules of conduct and limitations imposed on them during their time in Turkey. This includes regular registration with the police station in their assigned satellite city, the inability to work and the inability to go to school. These are the parameters of Turkish Asylum policy.

The next step is to register with the United Nations Refugee Agency and to enter the procedures of applying for refugee status and seek third country settlements as asylum-seekers are only granted a temporary stay in Turkey while their case is processed by the UNHCR. In order to receive refuge status, asylum seekers must meet the criteria of the 1951 Convention, and prove that due to their identities and activities in the homeland they were facing persecution and danger and thus were forced to leave the

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82 In certain cases, asylum-seekers are also registered by UNHCR’s partner organization the Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), which also assigns a satellite city.
country and now have a well-founded fear of return. These are the parameters for obtaining refugee status as dictated by the international legal framework.

The above breakdown illustrates the different legal frameworks that Iranians interviewed had to navigate through in order to arrive to where they were at the time of the interview. These different frameworks all with their own parameters have significantly shaped the refuge experience, from revolution to asylum. These parameters and the need to live within them have cultivated the experience of these individuals enabling them to self-fashioning and mold their stories and identities appropriately for different settings. Because they have been thrown in to so many different settings were they have had to adapt accordingly; these experiences, I argue, have enhanced their ability to adapt and recognize the importance of being able to behave according to different parameters.

**Theorizing Dynamics of Performance**

Measures of self-fashioning and mimicry as portrayed in postcolonial and diasporic literature offer meaningful insights into the experiences of immigrants and outsiders as they arrive in a new country and attempt to carve out their futures. Using a selection of existing theoretical lens, this section attempts to build on concepts of self-fashioning and mimicry paralleling the experiences of Iranians transiting through Turkey as they attempt to fit the category of refugee, to the experiences of immigrants who seek immigrant success by trying to fit the category of native. By employing insights from Eva Hoffman and her narrative lens of “exaggerating the native”, Ian Hacking’s concept of

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Dynamic Nominalism and Homi Bhabha’s\textsuperscript{85} notion of mimicry this paper offers a theorization of the dynamic performance of the category of refugee. More specifically, it argues that the transit country as the site of performance of the category of refugee will play an important role in shaping the role of native played upon arrival in the receiving country.

\textit{Lost in Translation} is Eva Hoffman’s memoir of her departure from the Polish homeland to Canada in which she endures a difficult childhood. The story charts her path from being a new immigrant who later attends college in the United States in which she finds the resources to become what she calls a “successful immigrant”.\textsuperscript{86} In her memoir Hoffman writes, “perhaps a successful immigrant is an exaggerated version of the native […] From now on, I’ll be made like a mosaic of fragments—and my consciousness of them. It is only in that observing consciousness I remain, after all, an immigrant”.\textsuperscript{87} Here, Hoffman describes the ambivalent relationship that immigrants have with their identities. Hoffman uses her understanding of immigrant success as a means of self-fashioning according to qualities that she associates with the category of the “native”\textsuperscript{88}. Hoffman’s process of self-fashioning requires forming a consciousness of the self as an outsider; this fragments her sense of identity. Hoffman, in other words, self-fashions her experience by deconstructing herself, both for the sake of performance and at the expense of her own consciousness. Indeed, as a “successful immigrant” she becomes the personification of the divisions in her identity. This narrative lens, that is the exaggeration of a pre-conceived social category, can be successfully applied to the scenario of Iranian asylum-

\textsuperscript{85} Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” 1984, pp.125-33
\textsuperscript{86} Eva Hoffman, \textit{Lost in Translation}, pp.164
\textsuperscript{87} Eva Hoffman, \textit{Lost in Translation}, pp.164
\textsuperscript{88} Eva Hoffman, \textit{Lost in Translation}, pp.164
seekers trying to fit the category of refugee and the ways they must form a consciousness of themselves to self-fashion accordingly.

This theorization can be supplemented by Ian Hackings’s concept of “dynamic nominalism,” which is expounded in Making up People;\(^{89}\) dynamic nominalism describes the ways that people will define themselves by categories created by society, indeed, dynamism surfaces from the negotiation of these parameters; this transformation is illustrated in the case of Iranians seeking refugee status in Turkey as they attempt to self-fashion their experience in line with the criteria needed to be considered a refugee in legal terms. For Iranians migrating to Turkey, the oppressive legal framework in place within the 'host' country requires, from the individual seeking refugee status, an identity and story matching predetermined criteria, creating a constrictive environment for individuals, and compromising their sense of identity. Hackings argues that as one tries to fit a category and “behave according to the description,” they begin to “contrive new ways of being”. For asylum-seekers, playing the refugee- to clarify once more- means fitting the classification of religious minority, LGBT, political/cultural activist etc. The effects of the reconstruction of one’s identity can be seen in many facets of the asylum-seeker and refugee experience. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, described as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other,’ as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite”\(^{90}\) presents another interesting component to the case of Iranians seeking refugee status. Particularly in terms of the effects and what he refers to as the “menace of the resulting double vision”.\(^{91}\) According to Bhabha this

\(^{89}\) Ian Hackings, “Making up people”, pp.164
\(^{90}\) Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and man”, pp.122
\(^{91}\) Homi Bhabha, Of Mimicry and man, pp.129
process of imitation is never complete because of the cultural, historical and racial differences which act as hindrances to a complete metamorphosis. “the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse, also disrupts its authority”. 92 In other words, Bhabha warns us of the discrepancy between being English and being Anglicized. 93 Mimicry disrupts power dynamics, though it may initially empower the mimesis, proving that the burden of performing is heavy-handed. The performance of the categories of native and refugee in the case of diasporic and postcolonial texts, paralleled to research findings on the Iranians provide important nuances in concepts of “dynamic nominalism” and “mimicry.” The context of exit, the relationship to the homeland, and the severing of ties with the self ultimately determine one’s ability or aptitude at playing the part of the native, and fitting the categories needed for belonging and advancement. Despite the dynamism and agency as demonstrated by these characters, “there is always something disfiguring that survives the performance of diasporic mimicry” as explained by Smaro Kamboureli. 94 Although the mimesis may become a blurred, tainted, or even a stained copy of the original, the power dynamics have been altered as a result of mimicry. Indeed, performance and mimicry act as powerful sites of contestation and for the negotiation of identity, particularly in the case of outsider. When examined alongside the case of Iranians seeking refugee status in Turkey, it is evident that the oppressive frameworks imposed on these individuals create an environment that fosters the form of dynamism needed to fit within their parameters.

92 Homi Bhabha, Of Mimicry and man, pp.129
93 Homi Bhabha, Of Mimicry and man, pp.130
The Role of the Transit Country

Turkey, as a vantage point, offers important insights into the phenomena of transit migration. In the second section of her memoir, entitled “exile”, Hoffman describes her time in Canada and the struggles she faces as a new immigrant. In the conclusion of this section of the book, however, she decides she must change her mindset to construct herself like “a mosaic of fragments” to become a successful immigrant. By doing so Hoffman enables herself to embark on a new path, as she does in a separate section of her memoir entitled “the New World”. This division in the novel reflects the division of Hoffman’s past as she has chosen to remember it, and it therefore illustrates an important transition she makes from being in “exile” to adopting an “exaggerated version of the native”. For Hoffman, her arrival in the new world ushers in an equally new version of herself, one that is composed from a mosaic of fragments that only further represents the termination of her imposed exile and her feeling of being alienated as an outsider. As such, Hoffman appears to associate her coming out of exile with her coming into the role of the exaggerated native. Hoffman’s experience, particularly her trajectory as she spends a portion of time in Canada-which she entitles exile- before she is able to pursue her dream in the next section of her memoir “the New World” parallels the experience of Iranians as they are transiting through Turkey. This creates meaningful insights for the theorization of a first and second context of exit and reception, contributing to the phenomena of transit migration. Furthermore, the research findings presented in the

\[ 95 \text{ Eva Hoffman, Lost in Translation, pp.163} \]
\[ 96 \text{ Eva Hoffman, Lost in Translation, pp.164} \]
subsection entitled “Reflections on Identity” provide interesting insights into the way one may self-reflect and develop new understandings of their identities.

The case of Iranians transiting through Turkey presents an exceptional phenomena, transit through Turkey creates a second context of exit as well as reception. This newly emergent phenomenon of a country of transit, established within international legal framework, presents a new dimension to refugee studies - one that remains relatively unexplored. Iranian asylum-seekers in Turkey tend to form communities with others sharing the same categorization, creating a support network that also enhances this collective identity (Field Research, 2013). As such, the formation of these refugee categories and the importance of individuals fitting their parameters, as explained by Hacking means that often they begin to “contrive new ways of being”. This effectively illustrates the “dynamic nominalism” paradigm whereby a new construct is legitimated by legal authority and requires submission and compatibility for those operating within this framework. For the generation of Iranians that have experienced transit migration through Turkey, the relationship with the homeland becomes more difficult to grasp. The tensions of struggling with one’s identity are apparent. However, this scenario and the forms of adaptation needed for these individuals should facilitate integration in receiving-countries, while also developing a highly politicized sense of ethnic identity.

**Implications and Further Research**

This study has brought to surface the complexities of the international legal framework relating to refugees and the politics at stake in Turkish Asylum Policy and within the broader framework of the official refugee criteria. As such this study has

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97 Ian Hackings, Making up People, pp.164
generated important data on the narratives of Iranian refugees transiting through Turkey, offering important insights into the refugee experience as well as the implications and political connotations that surround the term refugee as highly charged. As a result, I have reformed my conceptualization and understanding of the refugee experience with newly conceived views of the dynamism and agency these refugees have demonstrated in light of the challenges and bureaucratic framework and legal barriers they have encountered. Based on these findings, I believe more research is needed in this area, particularly on the types of social reflections and social transformations undergone in Turkey, as the phenomena of transit migration truly is an important phenomena. More and more individuals are having to go through these channels and the system in place in Turkey is having an increasingly difficult time absorbing these asylum-seekers. Moreover, with the significant influx of over 1 million Syrians arriving in Turkey since March 2011 and recent turmoil in Iraq and subsequent arrival of Iraqis the UNHCR’s resources have been exhausted. Iraqis registering as asylum seekers with the Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants at the time of writing (August 2014) are currently being assigned case processing dates with the UNHCR as of October 2020. This means these individuals will need to remain in Turkey under the regulations of Turkish Asylum policy for another 6 years before their case will even be looked at.\footnote{WOCMES Conference, August 18th, 2014} During this period of time, they are bound by the legal framework which means they are assigned to a satellite city, much register regularly with the local police station and are unable to work, study or move freely within the country. The current system in place, with growing influxes of asylum-seekers and lengthy case-processing is not sustainable and will have
serious repercussions in the long-term. The area of policy implementation is thus another area that will require attention from scholars as practices and policies implemented now will have long terms implications as Turkey has gone from site of emigration, to transit and as a result of recent events in neighboring countries, for certain groups Turkey will now become a destination. Although for Iranians, settlement in Turkey will not be an option. However, the practice of transit migration is not sustainable. The creation of a second context of exit and reception will have a significant impact on the future of the individual experiencing the phenomena.

Concluding Remarks

For Iranians migrating to Turkey, the oppressive legal framework in place within the 'host' country requires, from the individual seeking refugee status, an identity and story matching predetermined criteria, creating a constrictive environment for individuals, and compromising their sense of identity. In the new Islamic Republic, citizens were required to act and dress as deemed appropriate by the new regime. This meant the strict veiling of women and appropriate conduct in the public sphere, significantly altering their lifestyles. This experience of repression and the conformation of identity under the legal framework of the Islamic Republic resonate with the experiences of Iranian asylum-seekers trying to obtain refugee status in Turkey. Contrary to the dominant narratives of migration as freeing, increased mobility does not always mean increased power. The process involved in obtaining refugee status and transiting through Turkey is both challenging and complex, altering the lives of the individuals experiencing this phenomenon. The resettlement process for refugees today has become
Increasingly challenging as regulations for the control of the stateless person have tightened to reduce incoming flows in refugee-receiving countries. The phenomenon of transit migration is increasingly becoming the norm for those wishing to leave Iran and this trajectory still remains relatively unexplored. Research findings indicate that time spent in Turkey, in a state of limbo, develops a second context of exit for refugees, further impacting their identities and the way they experience resettlement. For the generation of Iranians that have experienced transit migration through Turkey, the relationship with the homeland becomes more difficult to grasp.
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Appendix A: Research Study Survey

Survey Questions

What is your age?
1. 25 or under
2. 26-34
3. 35-44
4. 45-55
5. 56 or older
6. Prefer not to say

What is your gender?
1. Female
2. Male

What is your primary language?
1. Farsi
2. English
3. Turkish
4. Other ______________________________

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
1. Grammar school
2. High school or equivalent
3. Some college
4. Bachelors degree
5. Masters degree
6. Doctoral degree
7. Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)
8. Prefer not to say
9. Other ______________________________

What is your current marital status?
1. Divorced
2. Living with another
3. Married
4. Separated
5. Single
6. Widowed
7. Prefer not to say

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Is this your first time in Turkey?
1. Yes
2. Second time
3. Third or more

How long have you been living in Turkey?
1. Less than 1 month
2. 2-8 months
3. 8-12 months
4. 1-2 years
5. 2-4 years
6. 5-9 years
7. 10-19 years
8. 20-29 years
9. 30-39 years
10. More than 40 years

What is your current legal status?
1. Permanent Resident
2. Dual Citizen
3. Refugee
4. Asylum-Seeker
5. Prefer not to say
6. Other ____________________________

Where were you born?
1. Iran
2. Other ____________________________

Are you currently employed?
1. Yes
2. No
3. I am currently unable to work in Turkey
4. Prefer not to say

How many children under 16 years old live in your household?
1. None
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4 or more
### Appendix: B: United Nations Refugee Agency- Turkey 2014 Planning Figures

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