

Desiring Place: Iranian “Refugee” Women and the Cultural Politics of Self and Community in the Diaspora

Janet L. Bauer

Becoming Immigrant Women: Between Self and Others

Sima was a college-educated, older political refugee, who had been married and divorced and imprisoned in Iran. Although she had never imagined herself actually leaving Iran, there was no chance of her living there freely anymore, and she optimistically anticipated the new possibilities awaiting her, maintaining she had never felt she was really “at home” in Iran. Shiva was a younger, less middle class, less-educated refugee than Sima, but also affiliated with a political organization in Iran. She imagined many possibilities for herself too, but unlike Sima she was also quite nostalgic for the culture and ties she was leaving behind. Coming to Europe and North America after the revolutionary events in Iran (1979-1982), refugee and immigrant women, especially those who had been politically active, were eager to take advantage of the new opportunities they expected to find. The initial priorities of newly arrived refugee women I interviewed usually revolved around their desires for more education or careers. However, women like my friends Sima and Shiva were to discover that re-fashioning

and creating a “place” for themselves was not just a matter of pursuing personal aspirations. They would confront the challenges of not only integrating disparate memories into some workable notion of the present self, but also negotiating around a variety of images of themselves, conveyed through a myriad of encounters and social relationships.

From the narratives of Sima and Shiva, and other refugee women I first began interviewing in 1987-88, I came to understand some of the dilemmas facing Iranian refugee women in balancing their own yearnings with the expectations and demands placed on them by the Iranian and non-Iranian communities with which they interacted. Although their narratives differ from one another, reflecting their unique backgrounds — one accompanied to Germany by a child and the other one arriving single in Canada — like many women who had been politically active and not unfamiliar with women’s issues, they were now amazed at their own previous lack of attention to gender inequities in their political organizations. In exile, they devoted new energy to working on women’s issues in different refugee women’s organizations. It may be

said that such politically conscious women are somewhat distinctive. Still, despite very different backgrounds and experiences in Iran and arriving in different host country contexts, like Canada and Germany, other Iranian women in exile similarly found that their expectations were challenged and compromised and they too joined some of the women's organizations and clubs.

While they generally envisioned societies in Europe and North America as places where they could create their own identities and find new opportunities, they faced daunting difficulties in their quest for meaningful personal and community life. Responsibilities for the community and household, with few immediate childcare options or domestic supports, are only a part of the continuing challenges as well as opportunities they confront in renegotiating gender relations and identities. Iranian women refugees are engaged in the project of reconstructing themselves, looking for ways creatively to balance commitment to family and community with pursuit of self-definition. This is revealed through their attempts (and strategies) to build social networks that provide both support from their membership in collective life and relief from the limitations that are often imposed on individual choices by those very social relations.

Despite great hopes for designing new lives for themselves, both Sima and Shiva encountered obstacles along their way. Sima became controversial in Iranian circles, beginning with her public positions on feminism and Iranian politics. Shiva was ostracized over her principled stands on the cases of several Iranians engaged in extralegal activities, including a family member, who were supported by the rest of the community. Previously active in a number of Iranian and multicultural organizations where she also had disappointing experiences she attributed to being "different," Sima became more independent of both, pursuing her own tastes. Shiva, whose international circle

of friends sometimes failed to come through for her, also distanced herself from her previous affiliations in the community to take up music and dance.

Iranian refugee/immigrant women's desire to create new lives and renegotiate their gender roles, including involvement in women-centered or feminist groups, is played out within a network of constantly changing communal politics which is concerned with community representation vis-a-vis the larger society. Through an otherwise dissatisfied and nostalgic lens, individual (particularly male) refugees periodically waxed on the degree of change in everything, particularly on women "losing" their culture and contributing to the breakdown of the family. Retrospective longings for a cultural past in the refugee community, however, place women at the center of this exercise and affects their efforts to define themselves through the community. So, women have continued to seek individual relationships and contacts not only with Iranian associations like local women's organizations but also through host country institutions and individuals outside the Iranian community to provide greater leverage in balancing their own desires with those of the community — for good reason. The social atmosphere of their host countries may afford some freedom but not necessarily in the way women imagined. Refugee women frequently reported being thwarted by expectations — from both the host society and from other Iranians, especially men — as to what they should be. Within these divergent social spheres, there is unfortunately, a false but convenient convergence between the cultural stereotypes of natives and outsiders regarding immigrant women's behaviors with which Iranian women must deal¹ — that of natives based in idealized cultural behaviors and those of the outsiders based on historical and contemporary media portrayals (Bauer 1998). Refugee and immigrant women, despite their own lives to the contrary, remain *racialized and sexualized* vehicles for negotiating those re-

relationships with both home and host communities. Attention should therefore be given to host communities (their immigrant, worker, and educational policies, as well as cultural climate and racism) in shaping women's possibilities.

By the time James Clifford (1994) raised questions about the fate of women in diaspora, a growing body of literature on refugee and immigrant women already pointed to both their centrality and these ambiguities of their status in the resettlement process. In many ways the struggles of Iranian refugee and immigrant women over individual place — gender relations, sexuality, race, and identity — in the face of both opportunities and constraints within the household and various communities of reference, are similar to those reported for Vietnamese, Chilean, Algerian, Mexican, and other immigrant women.² In all these cases, women serve both as intercultural negotiators and as emblems of community status. Both immigrant and refugee women, some of whom were primarily housewives and others who had been economically and professionally active before leaving home, take on major roles in negotiating and providing economic support through the manipulation of (increasingly international) networks of kin, fictive kin and peers, and participate in community and political organizations. At the same time, women's economic roles after immigration change their positions in the family and their sexuality and behavior have become the focus of debate and struggle, where women are accused of being disloyal to their cultures and carry the brunt of men's loss of status in public activities.

These observations draw attention to similarities in immigrant circumstances and the social relationships underlying what are otherwise unique cultural ways of viewing one's place in the world. Yet, in contrast to others, Iranian women's position vis-a-vis their communities is also heightened or distinguished by several factors — the globalization of their sexualization

as stereotyped *Middle Eastern, Muslim* women, the degree of alienation from recent experiences with the Iranian homeland and its politicization of religion, which make it more complicated to use national and religious referents as sources of comfort in resettlement, and the emotional intensity of cultural commitments to family, political ideals, and social relationships.

Finding Community

Immigrant and refugee women have multiple communities of cultural reference and engagement, non-Iranian and Iranian, in their countries of exile residence and back home. I use "Iranian *community* in the diaspora," then, to suggest or denote the *Iranian-identified* interactions, associations, bonds, and expectations through which women seek to realize themselves, rather than some essentialized notion of Iranian culture or even a generalized "imagined community." This "community" is constituted differently by different generations and by those with different experiences; it is constantly changing with new arrivals. It is to some extent a cultural community because of demands based on some shared assumptions. Similarly I use the "host community" to refer to those sets of ties in the non-Iranian community that likewise serve as a point of reference for women. After years of residence and struggles for self within its confines, women are in some way a part of that local culture. However, the refugees' relation to the Islamic Republic, while problematic and vacillating, also remains an important reference point for defining themselves.³ Women's position and sense of identity or belonging vis-a-vis these multiple communities, and the shape and dynamics of the communities themselves, change over the long process of resettlement. In setting these out briefly, let me explain why I have incorporated many student and immigrant women into my discussion of refugee women and their communities.

Although their legal and social status might momentarily differ, in Canada, both refugees and landed immigrants could claim citizenship after three years; in Germany refugees had slight advantages in this regard. The legal differences between the categories *immigrant* and *refugee* (those who could stay and those who theoretically could go home) do have implications for differences in benefits, at least in the short term, and in the extent to which they can divide communities because of the political connotations of leaving and the ability of immigrants to visit their homeland more freely than refugees. Like Kibria (1993), however, I find the boundaries drawn around “immigrant” and “refugee” to be misleading. They fail not only discretely to capture differences in individual politics, fear of persecution, willingness to leave one’s homeland, or the energy with which one pursues starting over,⁴ but also to reflect the extent to which the community in exile is formed across these lines, particularly in terms of common experiences in the host societies and affiliation through cultural events.

To a large extent, Iranian exile communities are defined by the “refugee experience” and opposition to many aspects of life in the Islamic Republic. The revolutionary events remain a defining event in the life of Iranian exile communities and in their current adaptation in host societies. Other defining events are also felt to some extent across different diaspora communities — like the arrival of brides of arranged marriages or *posti* brides, reactions to the book and film entitled “Not without my Daughter” (in which an American woman, Betty Mahmoody described her Iranian husband as someone who beat and mistreated her when they returned to Iran and portrays much of Iranian culture in negative, even racist, language), and a wide variety of shared cultural productions like newspapers, films, and music (Naficy 1993). Immigrants and refugees often participate in the same community networks. These associations caution against essentializ-

ing the notion of an Iranian community, while also reminding us that there are cultural, political, and personal ties that link many of the disparate Iranian diasporic communities. As the community matures households may come to include both refugee parents and immigrant children and grandparents. And, where once most refugees clamored for the right to claim that status (of political opposition), many now deny this label, preferring to claim immigrant status as their children begin school and seek a respectable place in the host society. Very importantly, immigrant and refugee situations with respect to cultural and social adaptation and exposure to racisms in various host societies remain similar, even if varying to some extent by prior education and facility in the host country language. For all these reasons (and not the refugee’s sense of an “imagined” exilic community), I consider these diverse communities to constitute an exile Iranian community reference point.

I use the term “political exile” to characterize both Iranian refugees and immigrants, denoting a central factor among Iranians who participate in the “communities” I have examined — that is, identifying oneself as politically exiled and unable to return to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some aspects of their relationship with Iran can be different in terms of ability to travel there or, lately, more accommodating attitudes toward the Islamic Republic,⁵ but their categorization as refugees or immigrants neither precludes nor necessitates this. When I began interviewing a sample of Iranian refugees in Turkey (and later in Germany and Canada), who were seeking political asylum,⁶ I found that refugee associational groups or “communities” included many “immigrants,” students, or non-refugees whose cases had not been accepted but who had found some way to remain abroad. Many were still engaged in or had begun to take up political activity. Thus, students, in particular those who had been abroad at the time of the revolution, might feel they

could not return to Iran. Political asylum seekers who had other means, through profession or wealth, to enter countries as immigrants did so. Thus my original samples of interviewees in Turkey expanded to several cities of different sizes and opportunities in Germany and Canada and grew to include those whose asylum claims were not accepted, who as students stayed on, who came as sent-for brides, or the sisters and brothers of former refugees. My inclusion of other individuals also reflects the general composition of existing refugee networks. These locally constituted communities based in my asylum-seeking samples are diverse — encompassing linguistic, ethnic, and religious minorities⁷ and members of different political organizations — but include few exceedingly devout, observant Muslims closely identified with the Islamic Republic or individuals with exceeding wealth (as stereotyped in Irangeles/Tehrangeles), although clearly such Iranians do live abroad.

I use *refugee women* here in referring to this expanded sample of women asylum seekers. Some of these women reject the prevailing tendencies to idealize home culture (a constant source of debate) but continue to associate primarily within Iranian networks. Others (immigrants and refugees) choose not to be active in locally organized group activities but identify strongly with the network of other Iranians in diaspora and at different points in time may tap into its resources and debates. Some women, like Sima, who deny being part of an Iranian community, participate locally through periodic contact with others in the community, attendance at some organized events, and communicating with and entertaining relatives from back home, as well as making representations of Iran in their interactions with the host society. Individual differences and tensions within any cultural group and sometimes uncomfortable individual relations with those outside the immigrant or refugee group complicate any understanding of voluntary involvement in

the community.

Women's multilayered social worlds come to encompass their home communities — of local Iranian immigrant networks (loosely structured) and a farther-flung network of Iranian friends and family in Iran and various countries abroad — as well as non-Iranians they encounter throughout their ordinary lives. As the Iranian refugee's community enlarges to include increasing numbers of immigrant women, especially *posti* (or sent-for) brides, the challenge of defining oneself with respect to women back home is altered. Problematizing relations between the local host community and the exile community is important,⁸ especially for refugee women who are conceptualized as racialized, sexualized others in many of their interactions with the host community — even when they draw upon those same relationships as sources of support.

Below I consider how refugee and immigrant women of different backgrounds are able to confront multiple audiences, holding contrasting gender expectations and demands, and fashion for themselves a more "transcultural" gender identity, through actively balancing their commitments to community and their personal interests in opportunities for self-expression, over different phases of their exilic life. In successive stages of exile they have often grown disenchanted with their prospects inside and outside the community. They have turned from making sense of the revolution and Islamic Republic to tackling gender inequalities within local Iranian communities, seeking to come to terms with the social history of Iranian women (speaking at Iranian or multicultural conferences or publishing in Iranian journals). Finally, they take up the battle against the racism ("because of our 'black' heads") or "cultural fundamentalism" (Stolcke 1995)⁹ and the cultural relativism¹⁰ they have encountered in their host communities' reactions to them or to the Islamic Republic, which continues to loom large in the processes

of locating themselves with reference to their various communities. Manipulating relations across their various communities becomes important in creating a sense of a woman's own identity. Successful adaptation, I suggest, is reflected in the shape of women's networks: women who are able to develop networks that balance relations and contacts, inside and outside the Iranian community, come closer to achieving lives that approach their own reported expectations for self and society. I will draw on the stories of a wide range of women to illustrate that.

A Gendered Politics of Exile: Creating Diasporic Culture through Women

Iranian immigrant women are active participants in their various communities, where they also become the "site" of cultural politics. They experience the gendered nature of refugee life — from their departures and journeys of arrival through different phases in their own and the Iranian community's adaptation abroad. In political and social climates where refugees and immigrant minorities are struggling for a place in an alien society, considering what/who represents the community and its culture becomes important. Debates about women's behavior and gender roles are central to the project of reconstituting the Iranian community, its notions of "Iranianness" in diaspora, and its relationship to the various host societies where Iranians find themselves.

These politics of Iranian identity and cultural representation are played out among individual refugees and immigrants within the Iranian community and with outsiders — through community organizations, specifically in women's associations, and community media on the one hand, and through multicultural organizations and daily encounters with non-Iranians on the other. Specific concerns are partly episodic — in earlier years evidenced during public debates about divorce or sexual orientation in immigrant or women's

organizations and, later on, in heated discussions over the place of the sent-for brides, the question of refugees' leaving or returning to Iran, and appropriate responses to "Not without My Daughter" — all perceived to have some impact on the representation of the community. Both their own exile community's and the host society's tendency to "nationalize" or essentialize home cultures and images of women play a role in setting the terms of refugee women's participation or inclusion in the public space.

In making arrangements to flee, working with smugglers, or living in transit, women have to be more concerned for their security.¹¹ From the construction of their refugee cases to the reestablishment of their households and communities in exile, refugee women experience further gender inequities.¹² Women often experience greater difficulty in establishing grounds for political refugee status, even when they were involved in political actions, although they may eventually achieve this through the status of male family members, arranged marriage, or sometimes even religious conversion. Unequal burdens are felt through assuming roles in sustaining the Iranian community and in creating economic strategies for their households in exile and at home in Iran. Like di Leonardo's Italian American women's holiday card exchanges, refugee women remain central to the organization of household and community social events, rituals and subsistence (through contacts with schools and social service organizations).

Women have key roles in preserving various aspects of so-called community culture — maintaining rituals and food preparation, and organizing and staffing most of the Persian language classes. They do much of the work that keeps community networks alive and provide general assistance to new refugees, such as locating new housing for others in the community and bringing individuals together to share housing, arranging dinners and gatherings (around

marriage, death, Iranian New Year, and even Christmas as a secular event for their children), doing child-care, obtaining educational loans or direct assistance from government agencies, working in minimal wage jobs to supplement assistance and trying to bring other family members out of Iran. They were instrumental in maintaining family connections — whether sponsoring the visits or immigration of their sisters or their mothers-in-law, doing the work of maintaining these international family and collegial (ex-political party friendships), or helping relatives to arrange marriages that would facilitate their immigration. On the other hand, community members who theoretically had been supportive of equality for women, even back home in Iran, often subjected women's dress, liaisons, and other behaviors to the scrutiny of cultural "authenticity."

While some of the refugee and immigrant women in Canada and Germany had more support (especially from state assistance) to study, work, and raise their families independently if they wished, they were not always able easily to take advantage of new opportunities, as both their roles and behaviors were submitted to community debate and discussion in organizational meetings, in the Iranian media, on radio shows, and over tea and coffee. Men often suffered depressing loss of their political and social status vis-a-vis their host communities. Ferideh pointing to her friend Kaveh's problems, says, "He's been in Germany for 14 years and is disappointed that he's failed to do anything with his life. His problem is he can't move on." Men's personal stories often reveal their difficulties in starting over and establishing the statuses they enjoyed before — in political, social, or professional groups. While it's been generalized that women refugees adapt better than men to the circumstances of exile — getting on with the business of organizing daily family life, accepting employment as domestic labor when male relatives found it more difficult to ac-

cept demeaning labor or share fully in household chores, it would be unreasonable to assume that women have an easy time doing it.

Before exile, women of whatever class background were generally constrained publicly in their sexual relationships. Outside, women continue to feel the disapproval of even those male friends and acquaintances who politically sanctioned equality before they were exiled. Men continue to tell them what the appropriate alternatives are. Many experience persistent frustrations in personal relationships over sexual access and the household division of labor. Men who professed egalitarian ideologies before exile find it difficult to integrate these beliefs into their personal relationships or venture that *their women* aren't ready for the freedom and choices offered in western society. "I can't get used to seeing men and women kiss on the street," one middle-aged (leftist) refugee man reported. For some there is an avowed fear of women's sexuality and sexual behavior, exacerbated by images of western women as wanton. Refugee men's reconstructions of masculinity and femininity remain a relatively unexplored, but vitally important, aspect of refugee adaptation.

Struggles over "Making" Communities

In both Canada and Germany, women refugees (and immigrants generally) have been active in developing and participating in any number of community groups — to assist other refugees, to foster the communication of Iranian culture among Iranians, and to pursue individual rights for Iranians in the larger society. These include refugee and cultural organizations, political organizations, women's organizations offering advice/assistance or political support and reading groups, human rights and legal assistance organizations, Persian language schools and libraries, radio/education programs/public access television, dramas, video production and independent Iranian

journals and newspapers.

As I have reported elsewhere (cf. Bauer 1994), many debates occurred within immigrant meetings over women's place in reconstructing community and culture, responsibilities to engage in certain behaviors, and role in perceived increases in family dissolution, divorce and sexual promiscuity, or homosexuality. Ideas about a monolithic Islam influence refugees' conceptions of the lives of women back home just as their own lives are complicated by the notions of non-Iranians about Islam. Although refugees know from personal experience that there are many different kinds of Islam that affect women of different classes differently, until recently they retained images of women in Iran as more religious and constrained by Islam, backward and uneducated, even modest and retiring, and comparatively supportive of the Islamic Republic.

Although in the case of Iranian refugees loyalties to an imagined cultural collective might be seriously challenged given the painful remembrances of recent political divisions, the nature of refugee/exile life, in which men frequently experience diminished respect and status, encourages the recreation of some notion of traditional culture, with specific repercussions for women. "Home culture" (as distinct from the Islamic Republic itself) increasingly becomes romanticized as a symbol of what has been lost, especially for men — refracting both their images of the behavior of women back home and expectations for the behavior of women in exile.¹³ This is apparent in standards for judging social and sexual behaviors or reputations — disapproval for women who study too much (at the neglect of home and children), see too many male friends, wear short or apparently seductive clothes, or have certain difficulties with their spouses — which place additional social pressures on Iranian women refugees. In other words, exile conditions reinforce the ideals they may have never practiced but which be-

come more imperative for male refugees' gender constructions. In this, their conceptions and misunderstandings of German and Canadian "liberated" gender roles and erotic sexualities also figure prominently. In some cases women report closer, more open collegial relationships with individual men but may still be constrained in their activities by Iranian networks, that monitor the appropriateness of their behaviors — especially their sexuality.

Stories about how (nameless) other women have mishandled their relationships are circulated around local communities and stand as a means to judge and circumscribe women's behavior. Women are often complicit in this. Even those claiming "I'm not Iranian about this" often criticized other women who did not call to offer condolences or deliver the expected politenesses of old or who were suspected of sexual "improprieties," wore tight clothing, or talked freely with men. One anonymous story depicted a refugee woman who has separated from her husband and taken up successive German boyfriends, using drugs and engaging in prostitution. Social judgments made of the individuals who transgress expectations, prompted many of the women I interviewed to say, "I can't get really close to Iranians because then the details of my life will be spread all over the community." For example, the story of one of my interviewees who was abused by her husband was circulated widely and retold to me everywhere in revealing detail.

Differences within communities over the nature of Iranian culture and individual experiences of hybridization or syncretism in different locations make the portrayal of both Iranian and Iranian exile culture even more difficult — particularly since even before emigration Iranian culture had consisted of a variety of linguistic, religious and regional communities. Nevertheless public endeavors and debates within immigrant organizations provide insight into attempts to forge an Iranian culture with which to encounter the host soci-

ety. This "nationalized" culture is dominated by the Persian language, permeated with Islamic connotations and images from the revolution, symbolized by women's behavior and gender relations. Kermani, Armenian, and Kurdi (as geographical, religious, and ethnic based identifiers) become Iranian in exile and women's multiple identities become forged into the "Iranian woman."

Meetings of various immigrant and refugee associations in Canada and Germany became a venue for circulating gossip and for social control — especially in the earlier phases of resettlement. In informal meetings in Turkey, male refugees voiced their uncertainties over whether women would be able to handle the "autonomy" available in the west, even though many had been in prison or otherwise separated from their families because of political activities in the past. After arriving in Canada or Germany, regular debates on gender roles and sexuality occurred within the Iranian community organizations to prevent what women said was men's tendency to "want to create a little Iran for themselves." Women complained that Iranian males exploited relations with local women while expecting their own women to circumscribe their behaviors. "And," Soheila said, "even if they contend we are not ready for 'freedom' as western women know it, we are. We simply have to persevere and be role models for others" — although many of the leftist Iranian women, who have taken an active role in community life, find themselves described as "unrepresentative" of Iranian women. Men were also concerned about lesbian and feminist activities. "It's not right," said one, "It's not right for women to love other women." Women argued this was a matter of preference. Furthermore, they proposed that women should be paid for doing housework. Colleagues and fellow male refugees, often in the same household, who maintained some vigilance, surrounded even women without husbands or brothers in exile. Said one man of women's flexibil-

ity and strength, however, "There is no woman problem; the Iranian women are strong and forceful. The problem is their men."

Bacon (1996: 35,42) contends that among Asian Indians in Chicago working out a collective identity and moral positions vis-a-vis the host society is an important aspect of community interactions. Iranian refugee women like Shiva have found the appropriateness of their actions outside the community debated within it and sanctions exercised against them for betraying an image the community wants to project to others — in Shiva's case, of trustworthy individuals. Her compatriots had a lot to say when she agreed to testify against an Iranian defendant who claimed "cultural tradition" in assaulting another Iranian woman. They feared her testifying would draw attention to the case and give Canadians a generally bad opinion of the entire Iranian community. She insisted that he could not get away with telling the court what he did was cultural tradition. Shiva's experience was the culmination of many debates within the community — at picnics, meetings, and fairs — over how to present this to the outside community.

More recently, Iranian "community" debates (formal and informal) have developed around positions to be taken on the arrival of post-bridal, former refugees' returning to Iran, and the rights of certain refugees to seek asylum. When Canada proposed the return of an immigrant family to Iran and when the writer Sarcouy was incarcerated in Iran, wives were at the center of struggles to secure asylum through appeals to their communities. Sima has been frustrated by her lack of opportunities publicly to voice alternative views to what she perceives as the increasingly acceptable view in Germany that certain religious constraints in Iran should be viewed in terms of cultural relativism (or respected as the values of another culture). Consequently she is especially critical of refugees who return for visits in Iran and of the noticeable upsurge

in nationalist feelings evidenced in some refugees quietly sending their children to Farsi classes sponsored by agencies of the Islamic Republic. In her view, these practices contribute to increasing international accommodation to, and acceptance of, the current regime. So a refugee woman like Parvaneh finds her place in the community complicated by what was an agonizing decision to visit her homeland. Doing so has marginalized her in a community that already criticized her for prioritizing her studies over husband and family. Much of the community disapproves of the political message conveyed by refugees who find it "safe enough" to return to Iran and who, by circulating between their two cultures, position themselves closer to the *posti* brides they want to distinguish themselves from.

Posti Brides and the Community: Sources of Contention

Gender issues are magnified in the cases of the "posti brides" — the brides, married by proxy in Iran or when refugees and immigrants go home or to Turkey to visit family, and later sent outside to join their new husbands. Although other women (and men) have relied upon marriage arrangements to acquire legal residence abroad, *posti* brides¹⁴ become emblematic of a standard by which wives are expected by husbands awaiting their arrival to fulfill some traditional domestic ideal without any expectations of participating in public life in Germany or Canada. Much as Ann Stoler (1992) talks about the role of white women colonials in reconstituting and preserving the home culture abroad, sending for or providing a bride from back home evokes an expectation that these women represent tradition — caring for the home, preparing Iranian dishes, raising good Iranian children, and preserving the language while offering up the appropriate amount of *ta'arof* or ritualized deference to their mothers-in-law, as well as premarital virginity. Refugee

women object to these expectations, which challenge the more active and resourceful image they are creating, and ridicule those women who are sent for under these conditions from Iran, usually as brides of refugee men who cannot return to Iran and are under pressures from their families back home to secure an Iranian bride. Increasing numbers of *posti* brides and stories about them are circulated throughout the communities, heightening tensions between *posti* brides, their husbands who are suspected of wanting "traditional" women, and others in the community.

Through discussions around *posti* brides, the idealized expectations of submissiveness and domesticity remain alive in the communities. However, the arrival of *posti* brides can also be a shocking reminder that gender relations and family expectations back home have also changed. Drawing on idealized notions that might even contradict their own experiences before leaving Iran, men often anticipate brides coming from Iran to be more modest, virginal, and compliant. These brides, on the other hand, like refugee women generally, are usually looking forward to enjoying new opportunities and companionate marriages with westernized spouses.

Several *posti* cases which evoked controversies over sex and marriage in the community included So-roya (married by proxy in Iran) who had envisioned a wonderful companionate marriage but was rejected by her husband (who already had a girlfriend/lover) when she arrived in Germany. Her sisters-in-law's feminism was compromised when they were asked to show loyalty to their brother in this matter. Mahnaz (almost 30 when she married), who sought a fresh start abroad and was experiencing a difficult pregnancy, was pressured by a female relative to reveal to her husband a previous marriage in Iran. And, Mona, much younger than her refugee husband and a member of a minority group in Iran, arrived resolute in her plans to get an education, only to be caught up in de-

mands from her husband and his (leftist) friends that she drop her classes and start a family before her husband was too old.

It might be argued that these brides are a force for what Honig (1996) and Stoler (1988) call the revitalization of patriarchy or retraditionalization of gender roles through marriage to brides from the homeland. However, these *posti* women demonstrated agency in negotiating or attempting to negotiate what they wanted for themselves out of these marriages. Contrary to expectations, they were not always the "traditional" women many in the diaspora had continued to imagine back home.

Confronting and Debating Images: Women's Organizations in the Exile Community

Although refugee women who were politically active in Iran continued to seek avenues for self-expression, they are not the only women participating in women's organizing in exile. There were other women like Haleh whom I met at a women's meeting, "Who would have believed this would happen to us when we left Iran. I was a housewife. We were the typical middle-class Iranian family," she said. Like women of other refugee groups, they began early on in their exile establishing women's organizations (or interest groups within immigrant associations), seminars, and radio programs to address gender issues and gay/lesbian rights or to offer assistance and information about resettlement in both Germany and Canada.¹⁵ In Turkey women formed groups seeking assistance from other refugees in Germany and Canada. They have worked to alter perceptions of women both in the Iranian and host communities, especially after the publication and showing of "Not Without My Daughter."¹⁶ *Posti* brides, in particular, challenge activist women's definition and positioning of themselves and threaten to be a source of misunderstanding vis-a-vis the host community if they are acknowledged as

participants in "arranged marriages."

Many of these women's groups are formed around preexisting political friendships or relationships. This in itself has been the basis for internal disagreements and feelings of exclusion. As in other aspects of adaptation, women's associations have survived cycles of inactivity or dispersal and reformation. As new groups of refugee women arrive, they may organize around some of the same gender and immigrant issues as earlier organizations, with which they have tangential contact. A persistent focus across these women's groups has been an interest in recovering and preserving Iranian women's history — whether it is in the pamphlets about immigrant women in Berlin, the unwritten history of women and sexuality, or women's experiences in the revolution or particular political groups. This is reflected in women's attendance and participation in international meetings like the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation (IWSF) annual meetings discussed later and in the number of papers (including undergraduate and graduate theses) and Persian language journal articles they are beginning to write on these topics. Ferideh, whom I interviewed, for example, prepared and presented material on women in the Mojahedin (an Iranian opposition group) for the 1997 IWSF meetings in Paris, even as her participation in women's groups in Berlin declined.

The positioning of sent-for brides is central to attempts by women generally to rearrange understandings of gender roles, of the community's sense of itself, and of relationships back home. While refugee women portray themselves as more "feminist" in the sense of taking control of their lives, the *arus posti* challenge this conception. These *posti* brides do not come as political activists — the image which defined post-revolutionary exiled womanhood. However, the individuality and independence of many of these "brides" challenge refugee women to rethink their position vis-a-vis women back home as well as their at-

tempts to redefine idealized gender relations in exile. As one refugee woman said to me: "They (posti brides) have some disappointments but they know from the beginning what they want, and they end up getting more out of the arrangement than the men do."

In contradicting expectations of themselves, these women also force the diasporic community to rethink the way it has imagined and defined itself. They not only provide physical links back home, for unlike refugees they can continue visits there, but they are also constant reminders that life back home against which the refugee community and refugee women define themselves, is different than imagined, less political, less traditional, very much less Islamic. Indeed their integration into the community also occurs at a time when changes in Iran's posturing disturbs refugees' conception of their flight from a politically repressive Iran which is at the core of community's identity in exile.

Even those refugee women who openly support altering the "gender order" generally argue for a feminism that cooperates with men to achieve that change. In remaining committed to community, feminist refugees, like the *arus posti*, may be engaging in what Kandiyoti (1988) calls a "patriarchal bargain," in which women "knowingly" sacrifice in complying with some social expectations in order to gain support for other activities. When the majority of women's meaningful daily social encounters are with other Iranian exiles, these relationships may serve to impose certain expectations upon them. However, women's integral involvement in sustaining these relationships also gives them the potential to challenge and change them.

Freedom and Community: Expanding Networks of Participation

Refugees have almost daily contact with non-Iranians in their neighborhoods, places of work, and

educational establishments like their children's schools. The relations women establish with host country organizations and individuals can become important for negotiating some freedom around their own social community and its controls in order to make choices that one prefers. Agency personnel, friends, coworkers, and lovers from outside the Iranian community provide information, solace, and access to new opportunities when one can access them. While women refugees can thus use these relationships and activities to create some measure of balance and greater autonomy of action in their lives, they are also the sites for waging battles over their past and present identities. Because of lack of training or ability to renew credentials, refugee women working outside the household often take low-status positions as domestics or in the service sector, where the host society's views of them, as well as their own self-respect within the Iranian community, are necessarily compromised, as Parvaneh pointed out to me.¹⁷

Besides anti-foreigner and immigrant discrimination experienced in both Germany and Canada, women are confronted with stereotyped and limiting misconceptions about "Muslim women" or the specter of fanatical Islam in the Islamic Republic, from a legacy of historical portrayals, as well as from contemporary journal and newspaper articles. While refugee women themselves represent a variety of educational, political, marital, class, and religious backgrounds and settle in different kinds of communities in Germany and Canada, they experience similar essentialist (and often exotic and sexualized) images of the Middle Eastern or Islamic woman through the variety of relationships they form in the host society.

In Germany, where women reported feeling "uncomfortable and foreign" because of their "dark complexions and hair," *Zeit Punkte* devoted a 1993 issue to "Islam, Enemy of the West?" As Mina told me, these stereotypes of veiled women, images of "for-

eignness," and questions from coworkers about whether all Iranian men are like Betty Mahmoody's husband "really hurt." Such images stand between them and ordinary Germans or Canadians they meet or pass on the street and colleagues at their places of work who often consider their individual acquaintances to be the exceptional cases. Upon hearing I was interviewing Iranian refugees, a German university student expressed fear of the power wielded by Muslims, and an elderly German grandfather asked me with incredulity, "So, you talk to Iranian women — do they really talk for themselves?" Such preconceived notions of Islamic women were reflected in one Iranian woman's coworkers' first impressions of her — as someone who didn't speak up (she probably didn't know the language well enough then) and who needed to be taken care of, as they explained to me. Although they later came to know the woman as a competent, active, self-possessed individual, it is not clear that their general impressions of "Muslim" women were altered.

Engagements outside the Community — The "Feminist"¹⁸ Experience

Many refugee women report great difficulty in making friends when Germans and Canadians seem to have little interest in listening to stories about the real Iran or Iranian women or of knowing the refugees' particular experiences, background, or attitudes toward religion — things that would make close friendships possible. "Islam" does interfere in these relationships. At the same time this sometimes served as the starting point for discussing general attitudes and stereotypes and for the formation of good friendships. Some of the more sustained discussions and opportunities to confront stereotypes have occurred among women working in multicultural and antiracist groups or activities, and Iranian women generally have had more persistent contacts of this type with the host communi-

ties than have the men.

Iranian women supported by women's groups have become active in a range of activities which address intergroup misperceptions (in both Persian and host country languages) — publishing life-story accounts and feature articles — like *Simple Truth* about the prison experiences of one woman, giving demonstrations of Persian cultural traditions for their children's classmates, organizing lectures and conferences, television/radio interviews and presentations, and persuading me to give lectures to diverse audiences not only to address stereotypes about women but also to demonstrate more fully the richness of Iranian culture and the complexities of women's lives. Attempts to provide information to foreigners about Iranian women's lives (or supporting others who can do this) takes place in different venues, in front of different audiences — host country, themselves, publishers — and increasingly makes use of the internet to convey information about Iran, Islam, and the Middle East. Such efforts at "dialogue or exchange" meet with varied success.

There are, of course, many cooperative efforts among German or Canadian and Iranian organizations (especially through women) on the issues of anti-racism and anti-foreignerism in Germany and multiculturalism in Canada. Shiva has been active in an Iranian immigrant and refugee association, which has ties to a Canadian multicultural society. Sima has been active in both Iranian and multicultural feminist organizations in Germany, as well as other associations promoting public education on various issues. With increasing frequency Iranian women refugees, with experience but limited academic credentials, are speaking out and telling their tales to selected audiences.

Mahmoody's "Not Without My Daughter" provided an opportunity to directly and collaboratively engage the host society's misperceptions. There are many

tales of the reactions and “broken engagements or marriages” experienced by Iranians in their relations to Germans and Canadians after this work was circulated. However, activists, particularly in Germany, felt that Iranian women could more credibly deliver statements that were both antiracist and sensitive to other cultures and critical of the patriarchy reflected in the behavior of Mahmoody’s husband. Iranian women were torn between speaking out against the travesties of patriarchy, on the one hand, while pointing out the cultural biases against Iran depicted in this book, on the other. Five books were written in German by Iranians or foreign women married to Iranians to clarify its biases.¹⁹ Not all Iranians agreed with the degree of “correction” that was presented by their compatriots and there was correspondingly lively debate within the community about how to address the impressions left by Mahmoody.

Still, over time, several active refugee women expressed aggravation about “educating” German or Canadian women about the special concerns of Iranian women and concluded that many host country, feminist women (and multicultural groups), with their own agendas, had little interest in learning about the particular interests of Iranian women. In many instances Iranian refugees or groups still report they cannot engage with the larger community (politically or otherwise) without first making clear where the boundaries around Islam are — the role it does or doesn’t play in most people’s lives.²⁰ As one woman said, “They, like my coworkers, don’t understand my cultural experiences, where I’ve been. It’s not that we don’t talk; it’s just that you can’t take for granted that they will understand what you’re talking about — you have to explain too much background.” So when Af-saneh, one of a few Iranian refugee women studying technical and scientific subjects at a local college and a women’s representative there, decided to form a group for women science students who faced dis-

crimination in that field, she was steadfast in making it an all-Iranian women’s group, despite the interest of other female students in joining.

Negotiating for the Self: Women’s Interpersonal Network Choices

Women are thus situated between the Iranian relationships upon which they depend for important supports (for borrowing money, getting advice and emotional satisfaction, finding housing or work, sharing common experiences) but which may also impose certain constraints and their relationships with the host society where they might have opportunities (like legal and financial benefits for women divorced or abused by their husbands) but also face misunderstanding, racism, and discrimination. Parvaneh had separated after my second trip to Germany and from her own accounts, it is clear that she was able to end the unhappy relationship partly because of government assistance and the support of several close Iranian friends who spent long hours listening to her complaints and advising her. When Simin brought charges against her abusive boyfriend, Canadian friends encouraged her in this action but, unable to comprehend how traumatic the ensuing ostracism from the Iranian community might be, could only view her as weak and passive for refusing fully to pursue the charges.

Mina, not unfamiliar with sexual encounters in Iran, desired the freedom to have relationships with foreign men if she wished. But having taken a German lover, she now yearned for him to accept her for herself not just as some exotic Middle Eastern woman — he called her his “little dark girl.” She found it impossible to share this with either German friends, who did not understand her, or Iranians, who might betray the information. Her German coworkers, she said, sometimes wanted to show empathy but had no basis for reference and didn’t really listen or try to understand the traumatic experiences of a refugee woman fleeing

her home. She sought solace from a new set of Iranian friends and foreign immigrant coworkers. In contrast, Ferideh who lived and worked with non-Iranians, took an Iranian lover and maintained that among her closest friends were both Iranian and non-Iranian women. While women's choices of connections at specific times may not be consciously deliberate, accessing, utilizing, and maintaining different relationships provide different possibilities at every phase of refugee life abroad. Women can and do strive to balance their relationships among these competing communities in order to create places for themselves that transcend specific cultural location.

Emmanuel Marx (1990) has encouraged a more systematic look at social networks in studying the processes of refugee adaptation. Constructing *community* from personal network ties would seem to discourage the essentializing of refugee culture and community, while acknowledging these complexities of women's social relationships. I saw evidence of the impact of refugee networks from the first time a refugee in Turkey gave me the addresses of 15 friends and colleagues in Europe. I subsequently began noting women's visits, contacts, telephone calls, and different sources of information in order to configure the impact of others on women's choices and actions. From the selection of refugee destination in the initial stages of exile, refugee women and their families mobilized contacts and sought out relationships with other Iranians, who provided sources of support and information (cf. Koser 1997).

In women's groups, political groups, and informal groups of exiles, women had pivotal roles in facilitating relationships, linking households and individuals with host-country organizations. These activities provided them an opportunity creatively to fashion new social networks during later stages of migration when their relations within the Iranian community also begin to constrain women in conflicts over appropriate be-

havior and roles. Amarasingham (1980) found that other immigrant women's friendships in Boston depended upon "a complex mix of circumstances and personal choice." Certainly the configuration of women's networks (constituted by their contacts and interactions) reflects many factors — personality, family background, financial resource, previous networks of support, and education, for example, as well as their current circumstances — like the size of place of residence, host cultural expectations, education that translates into employment, facility in the local language, legal status, resources, immigrant access to citizenship, and personal status (married, parent, time since arrival).²¹ Graves has suggested that variations in migrant women's reliance upon kin, peer, and self-reliant network strategies may convey something about the nature of their adaptation (1984). However she does not fully assess the extent to which these network ties cut across communities or change over time.²² In effect both self-reliance and reliance on the community of kin or friends are necessary for adjustment but intimacy with those outside of one's culture is important for understanding the new culture better and for molding one's own identity.

While the metaphor of "balancing act" has been used to characterize the lives of women across cultures (Johnson 1992), Bacon's recent work on Asian Indian women in Chicago is one of the first monograph-length works to highlight immigrant women's struggles to balance their individual and family lives within the trajectories of the immigrant community at different stages of adaptation (1996). Here I will only provide a descriptive summary of the nature of these relations for Iranian women as they developed over time and the options they provided.²³ Refugee women's patterns of "networking" correspond loosely to Stein's phases of refugee adaptation (in years of duration) over four periods — from coming to terms with their emigration, to the initial elation of arrival and

motivation to create a new life, to the disappointment in what has not been achieved, and finally the acceptance of what one has (Stein, 1981). There is some evidence that women's attempts to expand their network relations and to balance contacts with Iranians and non-Iranians vary over those different stages of adaptation in consistent or similar ways, despite variations in background conditions, particularly in what Stein calls the third stage, in which personal struggles to define oneself are heightened. While useful, of course, this periodization of refugee adaptation does not fully explain or account for these developments and cannot convey the intensity of emotional responses or disappointments in relationships.

During the first stage in Stein's framework (0-1½ years) as individuals adjust to what they have "lost" and make sense of what happened to them in Iran, refugee women relied heavily on seeking out and developing relationships with other Iranians with whom they can readily communicate and who provide keen sources of information for putting together one's case or seeking out access to housing or government benefits (Bauer 1991). In other words, during this stage refugee applicants are making close contacts mostly with other Iranians and only limited numbers of host country service providers. Even Ana who was able to immigrate to Canada because of her profession, has spent the first two years of residence thinking about what she left at home and using contacts with other Iranians to assess her best prospects for getting a job and getting her life started. Before the end of two years, these relationships have already begun to be burdensome.

Different routes out of Iran entail different kinds of experiences for making contacts during this early period. Going to Turkey to seek asylum provided access to formal Iranian refugee organizations. Spending time in Kurdistan, some contemplated the harsh plight of mountain women in contrast to their own situation,

while working especially closely with a few colleagues. Fleeing more directly to a European country, refugees are placed in dormitories and have access to already established women's and refugee organizations. Those who are smuggled directly to places of resettlement have quicker access to host country contacts and language classes. Parvaneh went directly to Germany, with her husband and other refugees, where their cases were soon resolved, but Ferideh spent some time in Turkey with a group of relatives and comrades, where she felt she was losing ground in starting over. Those women like Soheila who waited nearly two years in Turkey or those who spent time in refugee centers in Germany and Canada formed extensive contacts with other refugees on whom they continue to rely in later years, for example, to raise the money to bring out other relatives from Iran.

Those who left in the mid-1980's were among the first in their families to emigrate. Some had distant kin somewhere outside of Iran. Unlike immigrants, few were actively involved with any kin who are close enough (in the same country) to maintain familial obligations. Refugees must generally create other kinds of supportive relationships through local Iranian communities. Initially, women began making contacts with host communities through language classes and negotiations with agencies. Although while waiting for refugee status in Turkey or in Germany they were not permitted legally to work, some women did find underground employment. However, during these initial years before they become fully employed, a substantial amount of free time was devoted to socialization with other refugees. For those without this community, it is a lonely time.

Even Soroya, the young *posti* bride rejected by her husband was able in just a few months to expand her network beyond her husband's sisters to include a variety of Iranians — service providers, other *posti* brides, women who participated in the women's or-

ganization, a man at the Iranian embassy, and assorted friends of her sisters-in-law, most of whom offered to find her some way to stay in Germany if she desired. Through these contacts she attempted to demonstrate to her husband that she was desirable and attractive to others. Unsuccessful in these attempts, she chose to return to Iran where she felt she could exert greater control over her life course. Maryam, an asylum seeker whose case was rejected and who took advantage of assistance offered through the Iranian women's group in her city, saw the need very early in her refugee experience to include non-Iranians in her network. She and her husband befriended a young German student and met with him several Sundays a month. That relationship began within nine months of their arriving in Germany. At each stage, he has been an important resource, as when he secured private housing (extralegally) for the family before their refugee case had been determined.

During Stein's second phase (1½ to 4 years), when most refugee cases have been decided one way or another, refugees and immigrants become optimistically active in making a new life for themselves — taking classes, learning the host country language, finding better employment or training programs. Women are still utilizing the services of Iranian community organizations. During this time, those whose status is not settled may marry to secure status. Shirin married a non-Iranian and was severely criticized by other Iranians for doing so. Some make a break by divorcing or separating from their spouses. Mina had separated from her husband and got involved with host country boyfriends. Indeed, by this stage most women have either begun retraining or other educational programs or are in the process of getting accreditation for training received in Iran, expanding contact with host country individuals a little. Some Iranian women become more involved in refugee and women's organizations. Ferideh left the smaller town where she was

first settled to start a course of study. At this point she met and started living with host country activists but was also an important participant in several women's groups. Parvaneh also started her course of study during this time, but she made very few friends among the other students. Fati finally divorced the husband she was separated from, took on a boyfriend, and withdrew from her involvement in the network of monarchists she had previously supported by holding meetings in her home. Soheila started a one-year course that would lead immediately to employment; her children were small and the family needed money but she was finding some colleagues with whom she studied during lunch. Maryam socializes almost exclusively with her siblings and a few other Iranians she met in the refugee dormitories and focuses on making a good life for her children. Mona, the post- bride, is taking classes and having babies.

By the end of this period, the majority of refugees in Canada had acquired citizenship, and visits from parents and relatives had begun or refugees themselves had made a few trips to visit friends in neighboring regions. Mona was negotiating for her mother to come from Iran to provide some childcare. Upon her arrival it was her mother, a Muslim, who began developing ties into the host country with churches and other non-Muslim organizations. Women were making on average two or three calls a day to other Iranians locally. Many were still not fully employed, living on a combination of welfare payments and part-time work. It is at the end of this stage that retraining will be completed and a significant job change occurs. Whereas during the first stage only one-third were working, often in Iranian businesses, by the second stage two-thirds of the women are employed outside the home.

Stein's third stage (5-10 years) signifies a resignation to one's new life, a period when certain disappointment, maybe anger, will occur. However, the be-

ginning of this period signifies a great deal of change for Iranian women, with new jobs and training and language skills that allow them greater reliance on local media and sources of information in addition to Iranian ones. However, it is also a period in which the realization and weight of host country racism and cultural exclusion becomes more burdensome, forcing some, like Layla (already a citizen of a northern European country) to remigrate to Canada, where she hoped to reduce the discrimination experienced by her children. Some women began to realize that even with more training they would not find satisfying jobs with the kind of advancement they had expected. At this point several men and women dabbled in starting their own small businesses — mostly catering to an Iranian clientele — restaurant or food business (cf. Moallem 1991). Other women began to feel the pressures and anxieties of dealing with their expanding families — of their nearly pubescent children's struggles to find their own place in the host society, with its problems of sex and drugs or of their now emigrant parents or other relatives joining them.

Some women relied heavily on network resources for bringing relatives to widen their kin groups in exile, but when newly arrived relatives fail to return loans or provide emotional support, there is further disappointment and rethinking of obligations to, and dependence upon, family networks. A few women turned to Iranian alternative and multicultural religious groups — Bahai and Sufi groups — in search of more meaningful and serene places for themselves. Parvaneh was in the midst of controversy over returning to Iran, something which had not brought the comfort she had sought through returning; with that trip, she had lost some of her privileges as a refugee student and with few Iranian or non-Iranian friends, was lonely and miserable. Mahin, a divorced single mother who had been a teacher in Iran and had begun computer classes, while holding down a low-paying job as a

domestic, was among those who was not able to reestablish her professional life in exile. However, she happily enjoyed a network of both Iranian and non-Iranian friends. During this period she was finally beginning a new life with a foreign partner. Ferideh on the other hand not only finished her degree (in a subject other than the profession she had been trained for in Iran) but was also contemplating continuing her education and traveled abroad yearly. By her own estimation she has equal numbers of intimate Iranian and non-Iranian friends, through her involvement with some antiracist organizations and local women's groups and travel to the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation meetings held annually in a North American or European location.

Soheila, who had been less active in community organizations because of childcare responsibilities, embraced the host culture advice about adapting to Canadian life by getting skills training to prepare for a job in health services. So she was disappointed to find this work did not increase her status in her new society. In group discussions around dinner, she asserts on the one hand that the life of the family and the welfare of her children in their successful adjustment to Canadian society are more important; privately, she is agonizing over the sacrifices she is making for her husband and children. "I spend hours taking them to school, picking them up, cooking and cleaning, and working part-time. I have no time for my own education. How can I get ahead? Why did I have so many children," she laments. She is trying to keep, she tells me, a "private space" for herself between her husband and her colleagues.

By the end of this stage, feeling burdened, a few women begin to actively seek different associates. Some women also reduce involvement with host country and Iranian groups, focusing instead on a few individual relationships and indulging themselves with new experiences and a new sense of personal sexual-

ity (new lovers and new friends). One woman moved to a new neighborhood, deliberately reduced her (daily, multiple) contacts with Iranians, and finally devoted herself more fully to her education and to associating with non-Iranian students, making significant strides toward fulfilling her professional dreams and personal ambitions.

As these women enter the last stage (10 years +), when they have to come to terms with their lives as they are, many like Soheila are re-surveying the landscape. She poignantly tells me, "What progress can I tell you that I've made — what improvements in myself?" She attributes her slow start to her early marriage and motherhood; "it takes a good five years into that life," she said, "to recognize what one wants and then go looking for it." She hopes that her daughters can realize the dreams she has not been able to achieve. She pushes them harder in homework, they have their own rooms, unlike her son; she wants her daughters to experience freedom to study and make choices in their lives. However, as her children grow older, she is spending more time talking with other Iranian women about women's issues, and while she is wary of (political) groups that try to impose their ideas on others, she is ready to spend more time studying the issues herself.

Like Soheila, most refugee women's closest relations are with other Iranian women, but their access to other relationships is crucial to their finding place. Mina, who earlier had reestablished ties with her ex-husband — he was familiar and comfortable and she was dissatisfied with her previous Iranian friends — used her existing Iranian ties to reconstruct her ex-husband's treatment of her in support of a second separation, while altering her closest Iranian friendships to include women who had frequent social ties in the host community. Although she herself has not been able to develop close ties with Germans, she does have fairly close relations with foreign cowork-

ers.

Layla, who started over after many years in Europe, has progressed quickly through different phases in her new life in Canada. Initially depending upon her Canadian lawyer, a few other immigrants from the same European country and her Iranian boyfriend, she survived a disastrous marriage and divorce to find employment and activism in a writer's organization. She felt that it was not possible to reconstruct the kind of family and kinship networks one wants and needs to sustain life outside of Iran. On the other hand, she told me, "It's easier being between cultures, going around with two networks of friends, rather than depending upon just one to give you a sense of importance." She did not escape racism and discrimination but she has a sense of satisfaction with her new life in Canada. Although I cannot adequately convey the consequences of women's seeking to articulate relations among their various communities here, I do contend that the politics of self requires women to enlarge, change, and balance networks toward providing them with better chances for successfully reinventing their lives and places in their various communities.

Of course, the formation of women's networks during these phases intersects with individual immigrant and family cycles, cycles in the development of the community, and structural cycles — in the economy and in international political relationships, especially with Iran. For example, the stage of their family cycle and degree of family reunification affect individual women's relationships and involvement in different community activities. Some contacts with host country agencies and families increase as their children age, while time and energy to spend on community activities often decreases. For example, Naheed, initially active in an immigrant organization publishing a newsletter, found less time for those activities, after she found full-time work, more children arrived and matured, and various family members came to stay for

longer periods of time. Single, childless women were more likely to have women friends in the host society who could serve as social support or role models. In the initial phases of their adaptation in the absence of close family, refugee women had to rely upon close friends (who often became like fictive kin) but over their years of exile, increasing numbers of family members, including aging relatives, have arrived abroad. The specific circumstances facing different cohorts of refugees and immigrants also have some impact on their relations and adaptation cycles.

Likewise economics of place — the tearing down of the Berlin wall, the worsening economy in Germany and Canada, and the opening up toward Iran — and political changes, including the tightening of immigration laws, the expansion of citizenship in Germany and the increase in racial tensions (Wrench and Solomons 1993), affect individual and communal options. Debates within the exile communities I surveyed, as noted above, reflect changing political circumstances; feelings of Iranian “nationalism” for example emerged and became controversial as more refugees returned home, as feelings of exclusion surged, and when the Iranian soccer team played at the World Cup games in 1998. The contour of community itself changes as new immigrants arrive (including *arus posti*) and the second generation with its own aspirations matures, some of them giving new shape to the community or community organizations. With the arrival of older parents, I saw the reestablishment of women’s religious events like the *rowzeh* in some places. In Vancouver a major immigrant association split into two groups, partly reflecting different waves of arrivals and signaling changes in communal politics toward the host society. And from Turkey to Canada, the women’s groups, often begun as self-help organizations, evolved into feminist or women’s organizations that took up debates around issues of feminism, sexuality, democracy and Islam,

questioning the possibilities for feminism with an Islamic configuration, preferring to dismiss Islamic activists or to call them Islamic womanists, following perhaps preferred practice in African American circles.²⁴ Some of these organizations eventually faded, as in Berlin where funds were withdrawn by the state and reassigned to selected organizations; others were replaced by new organizations of newer immigrant women.

Establishing a Place: Self and Citizen

Participating in a multisocial world, refugee women experience dualities and multiplicities of cultural affiliation — that is, the constraints as well as possibilities embodied in sharing a group culture and the desires or tendencies to be part of one group and yet be independent of it; to accept some aspects of the culture while disagreeing on others. Individual women resist and seek freedom to move among cultural communities and to express what might be considered nontraditional, even feminist views, as a source of personal satisfaction and autonomy and in ways that minimize racial categorizing. In other words, they must seek to retain a commitment to the Iranian cultural community through a variety of ties and affiliations, at the same time seeking other relations and ways to express themselves and their changing identities.

Self-identity is clearly tied to (even limited by) social relations which are themselves always changing. Suad Joseph (1993a,b) has emphasized the importance of “relationality” (or “connectivity”), particularly through women’s family relations, in the construction of the self within the Arab societies neighboring Iran. However, assumptions that life in western cultures necessarily represents a new tension between individual choices and emotional connectedness in relationships may cause us to overlook the significance of women’s struggles around self and gender before exile, as well as the pressures of social relations on women in host societies.²⁵ While a degree

women in host societies.²⁵ While a degree of connectivity, especially to family, remains an important aspect in reconstructing identities, I suggest that Iranian refugee women's search for a balance between individual and relational aspects of self began long before emigration or flight.

Viewed as cultural icons by both home and host cultures, cultural borders seem to be inscribed on the very bodies of women, presenting them with conceptual and practical dilemmas in their personal transformations. Most immigrant women have a sense of a gendered and sexualized self, however complicated that is, and have increasingly developed some notion of a "racialized" self. While there are (mostly invisible) communities of Afro-Iranians and while Iranians were aware of race prejudice in the United States, they were not prepared to be "black" in Europe (and to a lesser extent in Canada), to be made to feel through the gaze of others that they are intruders.²⁶ These senses of self play off a variety of relationships in home and host cultures, both of which are changing and adapting. Rights to personal identity generally necessitate, then, a notion of rights to more than one culture reflecting multiple cultural locations and lived experiences — the right to support the different aspects of oneself. As yet we have no efficacious models for detailing the processes of changing and integrating different aspects of self across cultures.²⁷ However, rather than articulating this, as Bacon does, in terms of how immigrants come to terms with their "xness" or what separates them from the mainstream or makes them distinctive (1996), I would draw attention not to particular qualities of difference but to sets of relationships through which women can "locate" themselves.

Expanding one's network to include significant involvement and some personal friendships in the host culture may also problematize not only refugee's relationships with their home country and identity, but also

their very place in the host society. This is demonstrated in Mina's struggle to come to terms with her desires to be true both to her sexual urges and to the effects of her socialization as a girl in Iran, something which actually contradicted her own knowledge of unauthorized sexual practices in Iran. However, other women like Mahin, whose father had rejected her because of her decision to marry someone he didn't approve of back in Iran, felt she had absolutely nothing to tie her to her country of birth and she experienced dreams in which she searched aimlessly for friends and family in Iran only to find none. For others, the challenge to reimagine their relationship to Iran is represented by others, like *posti brides'* and the second generation's inquiries into their place, which parents understand will be different from their own. Such examples of contrasting positionings question the usefulness of prevalent notions of culturally-bounded selves in portraying complex identities that bridge cultural experiences and relations. And, they challenge our monolithic conceptions of cultures, which inhibit the expression of internal diversity, "hybridization," and different aspects of the self.

This process of claiming place for the self in exile is a complicated task that involves reimagining connections to various communal histories and processes (cf. Hoffman 1989; Ewing 1990; and Chachian 1997). Moghissi (1994) locates many of women's difficulties in the patriarchal culture of gender relations into which Iranian men were socialized. In exile, others might emphasize the host culture's patriarchy and fear/racialization of foreigners as powerful experiences in creating their personal and sexual identities. Although refugee language skills have generally improved and their alien status stabilized over time, facility in language does not necessarily bring social acceptance. Layla recounted that before she acquired citizenship in Europe she was considered an immigrant who spoke good host country language; once a

citizen she was transformed into a native with bad language skills. The discourse of citizenship has been created as a means to claim political opportunities for self-actualization in the host society. Soysal (1994) has argued for a conception of participatory citizenship that encompasses all those who interact together routinely in the public sphere,²⁸ approaching what feminists Alexander and Mohanty (1997) have called *universal citizenship* "defined through and across difference" and what Sarvasy (1997) has called a kind of *social citizenship*. In all of these senses of participation in their various communities, Iranian women have activated their citizenship, but as Layla found even legal membership did not bring her full cultural rights or the feeling that she is accepted by others in her adopted country.

The internationalization of women's networks provides an added dimension to the possibilities, as well as the limitations of expanding self-creation through connections across cultural boundaries. With the broadcast of Iranian television from Los Angeles in Germany and Canada and the electronic circulation of the latest political news concerning other refugees, immigrants and refugees are no longer bound by state confines in projecting and negotiating their cultures.²⁹ In the absence of sustained or cooperative government action, CHAIR (the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance to Iranian Refugees) and other groups email daily missives across the virtual globe — on refugee law, cultural policy, state decisions to deport, and discrimination. While cyber networks and Iranian chat rooms provide the illusion of seamless connection to an accepting community, the internet and other forms of electronic communication are also channels for confirming essentialized images and stereotypes.

In addition to the impact of Iranian media and cultural production across state borders, individual and community contacts are indeed far-ranging. Much as Ho (1993) described the increasing internationaliza-

tion of Caribbean immigrant kin networks, refugees I interviewed had increasing cross-national contacts with family and old friends, through letters, videos, internet emails, tapes, phone calls, personal visits and sponsored (legal or illegally initiated) immigration. Immigrant networks become less local, more international, and not entirely limited to kin. Almost every refugee household I interviewed maintained contact with friends/political colleagues and/or family living in other countries outside of Iran. During the third stage of adaptation, in particular, as finances increasingly allow, women can reactivate kin and nonkin contacts abroad. Letters and visits increase. The majority of these ties are with other Iranians and can also suppress women's action. Although Gity's sister-in-law was able to escape a bad refugee marriage in Europe and start over again in Canada, Gity herself nearly crumbled under the additional expenses of organizing this relative's resettlement. It was at this time that Mina began writing again to her friend in Los Angeles, an old political colleague; she even made initial plans to purchase a ticket and vacation there deciding at last that it was not feasible that year. But the contact had enlivened Mina's possibilities for future fulfillment.

The importance, breadth, and constraints in the internationalization of Iranian networks were brought home to me often. At the welfare office in a small German town I had met a young man and his mother, with a very complicated story of how they had come to be refugees and were left behind by the father who was now in Canada. I was given the father's name and asked to contact him upon returning to Canada, but had no success in doing so. Then a friend invited me to accompany him to the town where the father was living to visit other friends. At the home of two women I had myself interviewed in Turkey several years before we discovered that the boy's father was their neighbor. Repeated examples of this kind underscore the surprising density or connectedness of refu-

gees' far-flung contacts, across the globe and back to Iran.

Yet this very network connectedness also brings greater scrutiny, particularly for women, and new concerns about Iranian culture and identity. On the one hand, through regular exchanges and visits, Iranians' notion of a home culture beyond their local exile communities is strengthened and community debates assume a life without borders. At the same time their lives, and especially those of their children, are increasingly situated within local host cultures. They see, for example, that refugees in Los Angeles or Toronto have adopted a lifestyle and even mannerisms distinctly different from, say, Iranian refugees in Germany. Their children, whose language skills and interest in Iranian culture may be waning (at least temporarily), may not be able to easily communicate with cousins in another country or back home in Iran.

Global Feminist Politics, as Dimensions of Self

Some refugee women seek to work out their cultural attachments and identities in a transnational context by attending women's meetings like the women's conference in Beijing, local panels and conferences, or the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation meetings. Drawing Iranian women (of different backgrounds) from Europe, North America, and occasionally Iran, women at IWSF meetings debate and sometimes mobilize around women's rights and their violation, Iranian women's history, cultural celebration, the racialization of exiled women, the politics of Islamist women's activism, and cultural hybridization. Attempts are generally made to include host countrywomen as well as second-generation, self-described Iranian women who seek to participate despite their lack of facility in the national language, and there are debates, often initiated by presentations from Iranian academics who are in other forums engaging host-country academics on subjects like cultural relativism

and fundamentalism, as with Moghissi's *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*. Yet this transnational feminist route to social citizenship is largely an Iranian one (excepting those who are engaged in academic circles) and limited by many of the frustrations voiced earlier by women in multicultural collaborations.

Hybridizing Desires and the Communal

Significance of the Expansive Self

In the end, what does the expansion of women's networks mean for women or their communities? As women immigrants and refugees pass through stages of adjustment, moving from reflecting on home, to resenting the impositions of the host society, to seeing the good and the bad in each and struggling with both, they are constituting themselves, drawing on different facets of their experiences and connections, indeed situating themselves in a cultural location that (at least in an abstract way) transcends national boundaries, as Maryam has.³⁰ Participating in international networks and migrating for a second and third time, she poignantly and resignedly tells me she has found home to be wherever she is immersed in a community of friends. Recognizing her mobility, crosscutting ties, multicultural email lists, and the details of her personal struggles to get an education and find meaningful life work does not reveal to me precisely how Maryam constitutes herself (in identity, behaviors, speech, loyalty, or action), how she makes a place her own, or when she feels she belongs. And, it does not reveal precisely how her identity transgresses or transcends something we could call cultural or national boundaries. In other words, through these identifications we cannot easily reveal the painfulness of dislocation, of remaining incomplete in reestablishing one's identity or social reciprocity. Did Shiva realize when she said to me, "I just want to be a North American woman like you" that her identity was left perhaps forever unfinished by the revolution in Iran and her subsequent

diaspora flight?

Refugee women's hybridizing senses of self are played out in a hegemonic context of the unequal values accorded to various cultures, which further complicates one's own search for satisfaction. When Ann Ferguson (1997) proposes the development of bridge identities for a feminist affinity project across different cultures, she recognizes the power of identity politics but not the dilemmas of communal politics from which they emerge. The utilization of these bridge identities does not create a self that integrates or creates its choices as it wishes but rather, according to Ferguson, "reconstitutes itself beyond cultural particularism" by "first refusing who we are (that is becoming class, race or gender traitors) and second, actively involving ourselves in political work that challenges our horizons of ignorance about our social locations (structural positions of gender, race, class, sexuality) that involve social privilege" (134).³¹ The experiences of those refugee women involved in multicultural feminist activities suggest that their cultural locations already position them in bridging activities and identities and should, perhaps, not require of them additional destabilization or transcending of subjectivities (cf. Trinh Min-ha 1997). These bridging engagements — active participation in shared public spheres, claiming of social citizenship through new avenues of participation (Sarvasy 1997), and contestations of public images of Iranian women — do contribute to the communal interest,³² because the ways in which women are represented and positioned in the host society have repercussions for how other Iranian refugees and immigrants can or wish to represent themselves in engaging their host societies.

It becomes important for immigrant communities to devise multiple means for creating social citizenship in host communities, and women's groups, to a greater extent than traditional Iranian political parties or opposition groups, have, I think, engaged the host societies

on issues of racism and cultural fundamentalism. Certainly any cultural or social community (and thus, the material for identities) constituted through the pivotal role of women's networks will take on some unique culture-in-exile or culture-in-host-country dimensions. If one were to annotate the cultural landscape of their practices, one would have to describe at length the various ways in which immigrants/refugees accommodate their host cultures, both relinquishing "native" practices and/or asserting and claiming the right to preserve cultural habits and connections — whether integrating German locutions into spoken Persian, putting up Christmas trees for their children, refusing to practice ta'arof, or weighing in on the current academic debates on cultural relativism. I have used hybridization to refer to various configurations of multiple attachments and connections observed both in individuals and cultural forms. These communal or cultural reference points of identity are unstable, dynamic reference points, expanded partly by changing experiences and notions of self-realization.

Through the "disciplining" and "racing" of their new lives in the workplace and main streets,³³ many immigrant women have learned to submerge their search for personal options. Accommodating the pangs of displacement as a persistent part of the self, they can bargain for their children's futures, regardless of how unsatisfying and difficult this may be for themselves. By adolescence most second-generation Iranians, like their parents, self-identify with Iranian nationality or community (as Iranians or hyphenated ones in Canada where Canadian passports technically do make them Canadian). Yet they occupy a very different cultural space than their parents. Nima, as his parents say, "can think like a Canadian." Of course, Nima's mother can also "think more like a Canadian" than her mother-in-law who now lives next door. As part of the Canadian/global youth culture, his aesthetic sense (in music, style, and sociality) contrasts with that of his

parents'. He has little patience for traditional ta'arof (or exaggerated forms of politeness) and is at ease with many things that irritate his parents. However, while 17-year-old Nima noted, "I mix with friends of different nationalities at school," his best friends are other Iranian kids. "It's easier. We just share so much of the same experiences, like where our parents are 'coming from'." Besides, his group of Iranian friends gave him a source of protection and support when confronted by other "ethnic gangs" on the streets and playgrounds.

Affiliations among Iranian kids may be stronger for male than for female youth, yet this situation denotes the complexity of racial difference in the disciplining of national and communal (Canadian, Iranian) identities for both boys and girls. Sepideh's mother has imbued in her a strong feminist, and even oppositional, and independent identity which provides her strength for confronting unpleasant situations with Germans and with other Iranians, who find her clothing too revealing, but has failed to provide her with the political models or skills for engaging the host society from her own location as a new Iranian. Immigrant women's bridge efforts do, in many ways, facilitate opportunities for their children and other members of their communities. However, the Iran-oriented political skills the first generation activists or citizens take for granted are not sufficient for positioning the next generation of Iranians, especially the girls, who will be pivotal in relocating the community, in a very different cultural, sexual and racial place. Women can gain something from balancing their participation in Iranian and non-Iranian communities although it is not clear whether this will ultimately provide them with the means to satisfying identities or pave the way for the next generation's reworking of community.

Notes

¹ Women have been considered signifiers of cultural and familial well-being and honor (Shaarawi 1986; Hecht and Yuval-Davis 1984; Yeganeh 1993; and Brown 1994), as well as the lens through which we see other societies (Hatem 1989).

² See Kibria for Vietnamese refugees (1993, 1990), Chai for Korean refugees (1987), Hondagneu-Sotelo for Mexicans (1992), Andezian (1986) for Algerians in France, Di Leonardo (1987) for Italians in America, Werbner (1990), and Bhachu (1993) for South Asian migrants in the UK, Ho (1993) for Caribbean migrants in North America, and Kay (1988) and Eastmond (1993) for Chilean refugees.

³ See Olwig (1998) on the importance of home cultures as changing points of reference in immigrant adaptation.

⁴ While some researchers argue for distinguishing between refugees and immigrants, others like Kibria (1993) argue against maintaining rigid distinctions. Many studies of Iranian exiles focus on immigrants or use data bases that don't clearly distinguish between refugees, asylees, and immigrants (Bozorghmehr and Sabagh 1988; and Nassehy-Behnam 1991). Indeed, as pointed out later, it is often difficult or unproductive to assign individuals to discrete categories. Some have been in both categories at different times. Some tried to become students first, applying for asylum later; some applied for asylum but after entering my sample, were denied refugee status. Should I throw them out? Layla, for example, was a political refugee (ex-Tudeh) in Europe, who became a citizen of her host country, only to immigrate to North America because of racism. Kaveh, who started as a student returned as a refugee; partly because of former student status his application was accepted. Yet he had a foot in both worlds. Mehran who was a student in Germany, working with a political organization, returned to Iran after the revolution, lost student status, returned and reapplied for refugee status, was not accepted in Germany but then became a refugee in Norway, from where he then applied for student status in Germany.

⁵ Some other contrasts were also apparent. It was generally true that political refugees initially had fewer resources (especially in the form of family assistance) than immigrants and fewer close kin than those who claimed refugee status but did not receive it. While they often have brothers and sisters in exile, they have had fewer multiple-generation relatives until recently. They usually had ex-colleagues or close friends with whom they maintained ties and built networks of mutual support, but the longer they remain abroad, the more members of their family (with greater or lesser degree of claim on political asylum status) also make their way overseas.

⁶ I began participant observation among refugee men and women in 1987 and 1988, conducting life history and semistructured interviews with 75 Iranian asylum seekers (from across the political

spectrum) in Turkey, Germany and, two years later, Canada, and also participating in community and women's organizations and events. I chose these diverse locations in order to understand refugee processes across very different cultural and political contexts. The initial average length of stay abroad in 1988 was around two years. I have continued interviews over several research trips through the present time. Since the initial series of interviews, this sample has grown to around 200 men and women and also includes both the parents and the teenage children of the original interviewees, other immigrants (including the post-bridal brides), and refugees who have arrived in more recent years.

⁷ See Naficy (1993) or Bozorghmehr and Sabagh (1991) for a glimpse of ethnic and religious variation within the Iranian "community" in Los Angeles, for example.

⁸ Woldemikael (1987) has emphasized the importance of this focus in correcting for host country bias in evaluating the resettlement process.

⁹ "Cultural fundamentalism" is the term which Stolcke uses to refer to arguments in the current European anti-immigration "rhetoric" which support the exclusion of "foreign populations" by essentializing human cultures as inherently different and incompatible.

¹⁰ Another tendency to essentialize the home cultures of immigrants is reflected in the position of "cultural relativism," by which the actions or expressed "values" of other states or its elites are simply accepted as legitimate representations of a "different" culture or way of life, regardless of the human rights consequences of these "values" for various groups or individuals within that society. A number of recent articles, for example in legal journals, explore the gender politics of cultural relativism. Iranian women are engaging this concept in their own discourse (cf. Rimonte 1991).

¹¹ Of course, not all women leave Iran alone or by clandestine means.

¹² UNHCR sources confirm the disadvantages women face in the refugee process and their official commitment to establish some basis for including "crimes against women" as legitimate reasons for seeking asylum. So far, Canada is the one country to do so and several women in my recent samples have been granted asylum there on such grounds. I have described this in more detail in Bauer (1991).

¹³ In this way, Islam manifests itself socially through the reification of some behaviors associated with cultural traditions, especially those concerning gender relations and women's modesty.

¹⁴ While some students and immigrants can return home to help conduct a search for an adequate bride, refugee men, at least until recently, were unable to do so. In the latter case, they meet their prospective brides and conduct a courtship after a search (and often a courtship) by their families, as well as video, cassette, letter

and phone exchanges over a period of time.

¹⁵ These organizations range from immigrant women's assistance associations (like the Independent Women's Movement Organization in Berlin which published material on everything from the problems of refugee women to the history of Iranian women, in German, as well as providing information and support to Iranians), to unnamed reading groups, groups working for specific political goals (like alleviating the conditions of women prisoners in Iran), women's interest groups within immigrant associations and multicultural women's groups — particularly in towns with small numbers of Iranian women. Of my research sites, Vancouver was unique in having fewer women's associations, separate from the broader immigrant or political associations. However, the Iranian refugee organizations there sponsor seminars and discussions on a range of issues including topics of gender roles, homosexuality, and family life. Currently a public access weekly radio program (*Pejwak*) organized by Iranian women also addresses these topics with discussions and guest interviews. An Iranian woman also founded a half-hour radio program on Berlin's multicultural radio station to address issues of importance (like the interview with Sarcouy) to the Iranian community.

¹⁶ For example, the Action Committee on Women's Rights in Iran publishes a newsletter in English reporting on Iranian women out of Canada.

¹⁷ Many of the earlier arrivals qualified only for preprofessional training programs in the host country (which some suggest track them into particular kinds of nonintellectual labor), while more recent and younger arrivals are often able to enroll more immediately in courses leading to professional employment and higher education.

¹⁸ While not all of these women activists would self-identify with feminism because of its association with western hegemony, I use the term here first of all to characterize the active commitment and struggles of many Iranian women on behalf of women for gender equality and, in this section, to convey that these "feminists," often guided by their leftist backgrounds, are the women who are also more involved in these struggles within the larger community. Certainly women activists struggle over feminist issues within the Iranian community as well. However, it is their experiences with other women activists in the larger community, particularly with feminists from whom they might expect to find solidarity and commitment, that further challenge both their notions of "feminism" and their prospects for social citizenship in their host societies.

¹⁹ These include Mostafa Arki, *Das Andere Anders Sein Lassen* (nd), Autonome Iranische Frauenbewegung Im Ausland, *Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Buch "Nicht Ohne Meine Tochter"* (1991); Nasren Basseri, *Nicht Ohne die Schleier des Vourteils* (Bad Konig: Horizonte Verlag 1991); Sonia Seddighi, *Betty Mahmoody* —

Ein Amerikanerin in Tehran. Anmerkungen Zum Buch und Film Nicht Ohne Meine Tochter (Berlin: Arabische Buch 1991).

²⁰ As an example, when I accompanied one of the Iranian women speakers who had written about "Not Without My Daughter" to Potsdam, Germany, in 1991, the announcement on the door of the lecture room featured a woman in Arab clothing.

²¹ For example, differences in the structures of labor markets, as well as ability to naturalize citizenship status quickly, has meant that in Canada, Iranian women refugees have easier access to jobs in pizza delivery and fast food industries, whereas in Germany women were initially limited to domestic labor. The size of a place of residence usually reflects differences in the size of the local Iranian community from which one can choose relationships. And typically, members of some political groups or religious communities (especially Bahais) have opportunities to enter established communities of coreligionists in the host societies.

²² In his classic study of networks, Fischer (1982) noted similar changes in the friend/kin composition of the networks of urban dwellers in the U.S.

²³ While on the one hand it is necessary to enumerate aspects (frequency, quality, content of contacts) of network configuration, linking the shape of the networks to women's attempts to rebuild their lives and communities, it is also important to assess these in the context of women's own qualitative assessments of their life plans, which I focus more on here. Although I have not enumerated links in network configurations in this text, I have followed the precedent set by Kibria (1993) and others for constructing personal networks, counting institutions and resources as well as individual contacts. I found that women's ties, links, and contacts were exceedingly complex and changing, so that the location of their relatives and other contacts across Europe and North America or their reliance on smugglers, friends, or family could not be so discreetly categorized as in Koser's (1997) reporting of the importance of networks to Iranian refugees.

²⁴ See Badran (1994) on the debates about the labeling of Islamist women activists in Egypt and Gordon (1994) on the use of "womanism" among African American women as a desirable alternative to a feminism which sees itself as independent of, in the latter case, race and class, or in the former case, I could say, religious frameworks. Badran prefers to use the term gender activism to characterize any activism on behalf of women, while many Iranian feminists and political activists argued that feminist activism seeking actual equality among genders was not possible within the confines of Islamic (or any religious) discourse and practice. Moghissi (1999: 134) has also recently detailed debates around the use of the term "Islamic feminism," while noting the increasing number of Muslim or Islamist women activists who have begun to self-identify as Muslim

Feminists and the probing questions which this raises.

²⁵ As Brouwer and Priester (1983) point out, western societies are also burdened by patriarchal social conditions.

²⁶ These feelings are complicated by their acknowledgement of Iranian racism toward others. Most have no contact with black Iranians, a small minority of the Iranian population, and characterize the traditional theater, *siyah bazi* (black theater), in which an "endearing" buffoon character in black face succeeds in ridiculing the elite character, as a cultural form devoid of racist overtones.

²⁷ Ewing (1990) has conceptualized and developed a notion of multiple selves within particular cultures, which, however, does not seem to address the problem of the transformations of selves across so-called cultural categories. It's clear that relationships with others are also important in this process of learning, adapting, and building a workable self, that individuals of different backgrounds and relationships may experience different alterations of identities even within a specific culture, and that notions of oneself are, therefore, always changing.

²⁸ According to Soysal (1994:166), claims to immigrant inclusion and participation are "grounded in a shared public, social space, a set of abstract principles and responsibilities (such as human rights, respect for justice...), and the rationalized organization and routine of everyday praxis...." This definition of citizenship does not stress the actualization of specific ties to others in a community but emphasizes the more abstract connections that are posited in "imagined community."

²⁹ A majority of households I interviewed in Germany have fax machines. A larger number of Canadian immigrant households have both internet and fax access.

³⁰ These processes of immigrant transcultural identity formation (and the relationships encompassed therein) are part of what Appadurai (1991) points to as "the cultural dynamics of what is now called deterritorialization...."

³¹ See also Gunning (1997) on the world-traveling method of developing affinities.

³² They have not quite, however, developed the organized forms of immigrant oppositionality that Lowe legitimizes as "the formation of alternative social practices" (1996:172).

³³ See Lowe (1996), for example, on the impact of host country institutions and policies in creating or socializing immigrant workers to their place.

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