

"Foreignness" and Be/longing: Transnationalism and Immigrant Entrepreneurial Spaces

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The language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations, often on the other side of the law.

(Homi K. Bhabha 1995:175)

New forms of racism construct immigrants as the "excess" of nation-states, and lay at their door responsibility for economic and cultural woes, from unemployment to the weakening of hegemonic notions of the "common good." Meanwhile, immigrant entrepreneurial spaces have become the familiar territories where effective modes of economic activity are linked to affective modes of being. These spaces are both public and private, inscribed with national, "gender," class, "race" and ethnic relations; they are the scene of performative modes of identification and disidentification that produce territoriality and deterritorialization. They are mapped both within and without the cultural boundaries. Immigrant entrepreneurs are becoming new economic agents, facilitating the movement of capital, labor, and culture from one location to another. Their existence challenges modern politico-spatial divisions based on national territoriality and market-centered economism. The entrepreneurial

presence of immigrants problematizes narrow conceptions of participation in a centralized, state-regulated polity, subverting the parochialism of modern nationalism as well as the global city-state.

Focusing on the experience of recent immigrants in general, and Iranians in particular, this paper explores immigrant entrepreneurial spaces as quintessential examples of transnationalism where taken-for-granted boundaries, separating states and civil societies, are blurred and even dissolved. In their place are found new sources of social and political agency, constituted by transnational modes of survival, self-affirmation, economic activity, technics, and political practice.

Throughout this work, I will look not only at the construction of borders and boundaries, but also at the social spaces where borders are blurred, transcended, challenged, negotiated, resisted and subverted, or even exchanged for new ones.¹ I will frame my argument in terms of how culture functions and interacts with the economy within globalizing networks and the dual process of nationalization/ethnicization and transnationalization; how diasporic "subjects" are constructed through this process; how the "nation" as an imaginary construct leaves its territorial boundaries for transnational spaces where it is imagined, produced, exchanged (bought and sold in the market),

consumed and remembered; how such a process influences one's sense of time, place, and identity; and, finally, what all this has to do with ethnic entrepreneurial spaces.

Sociological Representation of Lives

Using immigrant narratives, I will explore certain theoretical issues without attempting to generalize to all immigrants or to all ethnic entrepreneurs. These narratives speak for themselves but my reconstruction should help to place them in a setting where new connections can be brought to light and new opportunities created. These narratives are the result of my interviews with Iranians living in different parts of Europe and the U.S. referred to me through networks of mutual trusted friends or relatives. While all my interviewees are from middle-class backgrounds, many of them go through a process of proletarianization on account of their dislocation and racialization.² I do not want to get into a methodological discussion here, but I should mention that the interviewees — living a little below and a little beyond the formal regimes of governmentality as "exiles," "refugees" or "immigrants," and experiencing predictable and unpredictable forms of surveillance associated with such status — make it almost impossible to do research in the conventional sociological ways. Some researchers have noted that any fetishization of "truth" sought through scientific methods relates to the ideological assumptions embedded in certain disciplinary practices rather than proximity to a lived life. I do not go into the historicity of nationalization/transnationalization, but focus instead on the temporal dimension of cultural identification and differentiation. I am interested not in totalizing explanations, but in the ways in which cultural and economic forces are displayed at the intersections of class, nation, gender, and location in everyday life.

Neither I nor my informants are going to stay as we are. This article is part of a moving and changing

world which will find new strategies to cope, explore, survive, and succeed. My intention here is to examine and question new forms of racism that construct immigrants as the "excess" of nation-states and lay at their door the responsibility for cultural and economic crises, from unemployment to the weakening of hegemonic notions of the "common good." Using the example of immigrant entrepreneurs, I will demonstrate how the effective and affective exercise of power via cultural signification can lead to the identification of business opportunities, the creation of jobs, the facilitation of the movement of resources, resistance to the assimilationist forces of capital, and the problematization of nation-states' exclusionary practices. Yet I do not wish this to be taken as a defense of immigrant entrepreneurs, presenting them as paragons and invoking a notion of ethnic entrepreneurship in which the marginalized take over the system of domination and subvert it. I am rather cautious about a romanticized notion of empowerment from self-employment and small entrepreneurial activities; indeed I include in my study examples of disempowering mechanisms that result from the perpetuation of the social relations of exploitation and domination within the sphere of ethnic entrepreneurship. Aware of the regulatory processes that are creating new modes of domination in these "minoritized spaces," in Laguerre's terms (1999), I investigate the dynamic forces of subversion, rearticulation, and negotiation.

The Cultural Economy and the Economic Culture of Diaspora

The interconnections between culture and economics have been investigated from several different perspectives. Recent work in the sociological literature problematizing the separation between the economic and the social, as well as the contributions of cultural studies and feminist theories, have had a significant impact on the elaboration of new forms of social in-

quiry. There is a growing body of research, from a number of different perspectives, that investigates the relations between culture and economics. These developments have opened up new areas of reflection concerning the relationship between "economic action," "non-economic action" and power relations (Granovetter and Swedberg 1992; Bourdieu 1979; Light and Bonacich 1988; Laguerre 1994, Kincaid and Portes 1994); between consumerism, advertising and popular culture and gender constructions and body politics (Kaplan 1995; Enloe 1990; Grewal 1999). Disciplinary boundaries and gender-blindness have blocked systematic theoretical and epistemological inquiry into the genealogy of dominant epistemic notions of "the economy" abstracted from cultural meaning systems. Feminist scholarship has demonstrated how the exclusion of women's activities in the private sphere and the domestic mode of production from the non-domestic mode of production is no accident, but systematically related to gender-biased views of social reality (Delphy 1976; Di Leonardo, 1984; Juteau and Laurin 1989; Hochschild 1989). Analogically, there is a systematic exclusion of "race" relations in the representation of the economy. Relevant work on economic culture and its relations to the intersecting dynamics of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and nation is still at an embryonic stage.

With respect to ethnic enterprise there is actually an interesting and stimulating literature (Bonacich 1973, 1980; Light 1979, 1972, 1984; Light and Bonacich 1988; Light and Wong 1975; Juteau, Daviau and Moallem 1992; Portes, Castells and Benton 1989; Portes and Stepick 1993; Portes and Walton 1981; Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990), but four sociological observations suggest an urgent need for further research on this topic.

First, the new forms of globalization entailing massive dislocation of peoples, the expansion of transnational media, and rapid urbanization/marginalization

have had a significant impact not only on the nature of small entrepreneurial activities in urban and cosmopolitan areas, but also on the new transnational business opportunities. These changed conditions mirror an increasing interpenetration of culture and economy. There is emerging in response a literature on transnationalism in general (Bamyeh 1993; Miyoshi 1993; Grewal and Kaplan 1995; Yissi 1990) and on transnationalism vis-a-vis migration in particular (Brah 1996; Ong 1999; Glick Schiller 1992; Bash, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 1994; Baubock 1994; Grewal, Gupta, and Ong 1999). Most of this work, however, has been in anthropology and cultural studies; contributions from sociology are still rare. Moreover, almost none of this literature deals with the question of immigrant entrepreneurial spaces. Such research as there is dealing with the question of transnationalism has been focused more on macro-social analysis and less micro-ethnographic treatment (except for the relatively recent contributions of Ong and Bash, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc). A qualitative and ethnographic study of ethnic entrepreneurial spaces, of the kind proposed here, may be expected to shed light on our understanding of the connections between transnationalism, migrancy, culture, and economy.

Second, these new developments are producing decentralization of the formal and primary segments of the market, causing a transfer to the informal segments of the market, thereby breaching the normative boundaries of "home," "community," "market," "labor," and "work." These changes are characterized by massive intrusion of women and immigrants into the new socioeconomic spaces, resulting in the disproportionate representation of these groups, especially in advanced industrialized countries.

Third, the massive presence of Third World people among the new immigrants theoretically problematizes the "center versus periphery" spatial metaphor.

Transnational immigrant entrepreneurial spaces exemplify these complex new configurations of meaning and power in the current cultural and economic context.

Fourth, the differences between various immigrant groups in their orientation toward entrepreneurship stem not only from their unequal access to class, ethnic, and gender resources (Bonacich; Westwood and Bhachu 1988; Moallem 1990,1992,1999; Werbner 1984,1990), but also from their involvement in the creation of transnational entrepreneurial networks through the double process of nationalization and transnationalization.

Finally, there is a marked difference between business activities which lead to upward mobility and those which provide only the means of survival. This observation prompts questions about "ethnic enclaves."³

Transnationalism and Entrepreneurship

In my research, I use an innovative theoretical and methodological approach to study immigrant entrepreneurial activities in order to illuminate some unexamined aspects of this social phenomenon.

First, I deploy a systematic understanding of the interplay of ethnic and gender relations, not as "additive" dimensions, but as primary constituents of social reality.

Second, I establish a dynamic relation between culture and economy by criticizing the normal overemphasis on individual rationality which systematically excludes any notion of collective rationality based on the understanding of symbolic goods and patterns of consumption and production. These patterns are not only related to the ways in which different groups construct a sense of belonging, and bond together in a particular community of meaning, locating the "self" and the "other" in the same social world, but also to the disjunctive temporalities of the national as op-

posed to the transnational. In this approach any notion of a unilateral causality, of the kind which has tended to dominate the debate, which assumes that economics determines cultural hierarchies, is rejected and replaced by a careful rethinking of the complex configuration of meaning and power in different economic practices. In other words, the cultural sphere is not an independent and autonomous reality untouched by the exclusionary practices of the nation-states, by social resistance and by the dirty hands of popular taste and consumption.

Third, I construct an interactive model which includes economic forces, cultural meaning systems and social agents in the same frame of reference, to talk about business opportunities as well as strategies used for success or survival.

Fourth, my research includes a systematic understanding of transnationalism in the experience of new immigrants, from the movement of financial resources to the construction of cultural affinities as well as networks of information and support. In this case, I will look at the relationship between the modes of being within an ethnic group and the racial inequality that links transnational modes of domination to transnational modes of resistance.

Traveling Memories and Symbolic Economy

"Enfin, Isfahan, la perle de l'Iran, semble sortir d'un conte des Mille et une nuits avec ses ponts anciens, ses caravanserais, ses prestigieuses mosquées de lapis et de turquoise."

Guide pratique pour les Iraniens de France
(September 1994-1995), p. 127.

Ethnic entrepreneurial spaces are now familiar territories within public spaces where effective modes of economic activity are linked to affective modes of being. These spaces are both public and private, characterized by the performative modes of identification and disidentification embodying territoriality and homelessness. They are contrived by national boundaries

and increasingly transnational cultural and economic networks. Furthermore, they are the most visible spaces in which cultural difference is expressed through economic activity.

Iranians are among the new immigrants who have found spaces of hope and continuity in small businesses. While some entrepreneurs find a place in existing categories of business activities, others base their businesses on their distinct cultural identity. In the former case, cultural disidentification can slowly converge with reidentification, and in the latter, identification can acquire a contingent form, both emergent and unbounded. The familiar icons incorporated in the traveling memories of migrants inform the process of naming and invest certain products and their consumption with symbolic affective values. In the interplay of culture and economics and in the performative economic actions of everyday life, cultural goods and meanings move around, blurring the boundaries between the symbolic demands of cultural difference and the economic demands of everyday survival. The presence of Zafran rice on the menus of some Italian restaurants in San Francisco, of "Isfahan" in the middle of Paris, of "Khayam" in Berlin does not have much to do with certain naive notions of multiculturalism, but demonstrates the insistence of the diasporic presence and the impossibility of its effacement and suppression from the hegemonic structures, both material and symbolic. The links between social memory, space, migrancy, and economics in the discourses and practices of immigrants are part and parcel of new forms of global restructuring and transnationalism.

In the two types of Iranian small business — the one that is established in a locality (hair salon, taxi, restaurant) and the other that moves between different national spaces (flower shop, Iranian food production, travel agency, securities brokerage, printing, telecommunications, construction, publishing, and

dating services), the construction of symbolic and material relations is defined no longer by the "myth of return" or by a successful assimilation in the host country, but by the experience of a transnational moment, where being "here" merges with being "there" without any sense of linear motion between the two. Diasporic agents in such entrepreneurial activities, out of survival or success, participate in the construction of an Iranian national/transnational imaginary life-world through the everyday modes of a communicative memory bringing together culture and economics.

Nationalized Markets and Transnational Transactions

Rose is an Iranian immigrant who lives in London and works throughout Europe and the Middle East as an Islamic art dealer. She migrated to England in 1964. Having studied art history in France, she took over her father's art business after his death in 1985. Because her profession is dominated by men, Rose was pressured by her family and business partners to give up her career. But her deep attachment to the aesthetics and spirituality of Islamic art and its connection to her Persian identity saved her from the hostile environment around her:

I believe in the spirituality of Islamic art. Its impulse toward self-expression as the manifestation of the worship of God is extremely meaningful to me. Islamic art has a lot of modesty and dignity without being pretentious. In addition, Islamic art has a small audience and is only appreciated by those collectors who have some knowledge of it and not by the majority of people.

Transnationalism and the dislocation of many Middle Easterners have created new interest in and demand for Islamic art:

In the last few years there has been a growing interest in Islamic art in general and Persian art in particular. Some Iranians who did not care about their "Iranian-ness" before have realized that it is OK for them to go back to their roots.

Rose describes her entrepreneurial activities as

highly service-based, emotionally intensive, and filled with extreme stress and tension. While her connection to Iranian culture and her knowledge and appreciation of Islamic art have facilitated her integration into this segment of the art market, she has been forced to struggle with gender issues in her everyday business transactions:

In many cases, I meet with people in their own houses and I have to struggle not to get into their personal stories. Sometimes it is unavoidable. This might be related to my personality or my femininity. But I cannot be tough, and people don't expect me to be like that.

Rose not only works between different national spaces, but also identifies herself as a hybrid with a strong attachment to Persian culture:

I don't respect all Western values, nor all Persian values. I am fluent in different languages. I am a mixture with a very deep sense of attachment to Persian poetry, language, calligraphy, colors, shapes, symbols, and the particularity of every single art piece.

For Rose, formal borders and barriers imposed by the nation-states are rather sites of manipulation and negotiation:

The American embargo has affected art dealership, specifically carpet dealership. Many of us cannot sell Persian art to those who live in the United States. This is not good for an art dealer because a considerable number of our Middle Eastern clients live in Los Angeles and New York. But many art dealers have managed to change the identity of the objects. Persian art works from the Safavid period are being exchanged as Turkish art, Afghan carpets have become Persian rugs, a lot of objects are misidentified before circulation.

For Rose, difference is experienced at both the personal and professional levels. At the personal level, because of her long stay in Europe and her familiarity with its languages and cultures, she is constantly commended for being different from other Iranians and for her successful Westernization. Rose finds such statements very offensive, since they un-

dermine her feeling that she can maintain all parts of her identity. At the professional level, difference is expressed through the appreciation and exchange of art objects in the market:

These days many people express interest in early Islamic art, and contemporary Islamic art is getting neglected and marginalized because of hostile feelings toward Middle Easterners.

For Rose, the metatemporal moment of transnationalism is expressed at the convergence of economics, culture and politics, where her entrepreneurial activities are facilitated or hindered.

Hassan, who has a Persian carpet shop in Berlin, is faced with similar issues. Hassan studied engineering in Germany before the revolution of 1979 and became active in Iranian political resistance. A few years after the revolution, he and his wife left Iran and sought asylum in Germany. Like many other Iranian immigrants, Hassan and his wife had difficulty finding jobs in their own professions. Disappointed by the restrictions of the job market, they started to think about going into business. Coming from a family of carpet merchants, Hassan thought of using his family resources and opened a carpet shop:

I did not learn to become a carpet entrepreneur overnight. I was trained to be an engineer, but as the son of a carpet merchant, I learned about the business from a very young age.

While the most difficult aspect of starting a business was dealing with German legal restrictions on "foreign" entrepreneurs, his class resources, from finance capital to previous knowledge of the business and family networks, were great assets.

We are competing with big German-owned businesses such as department stores. Nowadays, they are all selling Persian carpets. The only way we can manage to survive is to provide our clients with a selection of high-quality authentic Persian carpets at reasonable prices that are not accessible to non-Iranian dealers.

Even though both Hassan and his wife are in-

volved in the business and take responsibility for the shop, Hassan is the one who takes the lead in management:

Carpets are a typically male-dominated segment of the market. Although the majority of carpet weavers are women, the majority of those who are involved in trading and dealership are men. Men are much more trusted in the carpet business. It is also typically a family business: sons inherit it from their fathers, and the secrets of the business are only passed from one generation of men to another. It is for this particular reason that many colonial powers have not been able to control it, and many immigrant entrepreneurs can still use it as a resource to start businesses. Also, those who are involved in the carpet business are very well organized, they have several international networks, they publish several newsletters, and they have regular meetings and gatherings all over the world.

Transnational genderization and nationalization of the Persian carpet trade seem to be reinforced and perpetuated through diasporic businesses. Questioning certain critiques vis-a-vis the implication of female and child labor in the Iranian carpet industry, the transnational moment is articulated through Hassan's expression of nationalism and his naturalization of gender and class hierarchy in the carpet industry:

The business is definitely male-dominated, but when it comes to the work of children, many critiques in the West do not put it in the context of general social poverty, which makes it impossible for many rural families not to use children's work. I think we should learn from other colonized people and not give up our carpets. Carpet weaving is an important knowledge and its control is guaranteed through those who control it.

Transnational Economic Agents: Trust and Cultural Affinities

Trust and cultural affinities facilitate involvement in transnational ethnic businesses. The moment of the business encounter is not solely determined by formal rationalized rules but also by the presence of cultural codes favoring the process of trust-building in busi-

ness transactions. In small-scale transnational entrepreneurial activities, culture can both promote and limit business opportunities. In this context, formal and rationalized market structures are subordinated to the economic culture of the social agents.

Hamid came to California in 1972 to study electronic engineering. Because of the sociopolitical situation in Iran, he decided to stay on after graduation and was offered a job. He worked for one company for six years, but in the early 1980s was laid off when the firm downsized. For a time, Hamid worked as an independent contractor while he looked for a new job, but his search yielded nothing.

I could not even find something close to my profession. Being a minority is not easy. I even had difficulty getting contracts. Most of the time the "old boys' club" had control over the networks. You know most contractors have their own networks, and it is very difficult to get a contract from them, especially when they realize that you are an immigrant from a Middle Eastern country.

Soon Hamid started to explore entrepreneurial opportunities, hoping to create his own trading business:

I started to study different markets, and realized that one could still do a lot in the trading business. At that point, I came to the conclusion that China had possibilities. I spent days and nights in the library and in front of my computer. Finally, I found a connection with China and started in the seafood trade. In the US, the market was receptive to seafood, and in China, it was the least monopolized and state-regulated segment of the economy, so I could move in that direction.

Race and cultural codes play an important part in Hamid's work. Part of his success in China is due to what he describes as his familiarity with "Asian" cultures and his ability to relate to the economic culture of China because of its similarity to the one in Iran.

In China, I could not make it without my familiarity with certain cultural issues, like the issue of "trust-building." China was so similar to Iran. People who were dealing with me just didn't function within the framework of a ra-

tionalized, contract-oriented market. You have to take a chance and you build up a trustful relationship. Many of my American counterparts had difficulty dealing with entrepreneurs without signing a contract. Some started when I did and soon gave up. I could take it. It was not irrational to me — it had its own rationality. Also, one had to understand that a contract on a piece of paper had no importance in that sector of the economy. In addition, trust was built through personal interactions. For example, one had to relate to their notions of hospitality. One's response to a hospitable offer could determine one's survival in the trade. My Iranian cultural background was very useful to me. Spontaneously, I walked people to the door, I invited them to dinner, without expecting them to reciprocate. Most of the time, I had to say yes to an invitation. Also, I soon discovered that many Chinese businessmen who were dealing with me had the same notions of privacy that we have in Iran. They want you to be very private about your deals and the person you are dealing with. They expect you not to share business problems with everyone around you. You have to be very cautious about what you say in front of others. For example, I once had a dispute with a small company, and I was expected not to talk about it to others. After the settlement, they apologized about the dispute. Then I asked my translator to give my regards to one of the business partners in that company. This was something that I did as an Iranian, and I did not realize how important it was. But I heard that the person was very touched and interpreted it as a gesture of friendship, and he started to give me a lot of credit. At some point, he mentioned that he appreciated that I kept the dispute to myself and did not damage his reputation. You see keeping things private and the issue of offering personal acknowledgement were two important elements of trust building. You know, once I established a trustful relationship, things got much easier for me. They let me in to their networks, and one entrepreneur recommended me to another and I got into a circle of business people who trusted me, and this guaranteed me success in this highly competitive market. I really think that my flexibility in the market and the way I value relationships helped me a lot. In addition, as an immi-

grant, I have become more aware of cultural and ethnic relations and sometimes I use them in my own business. For example, I only hire white Anglos for sales positions, because I know that most of my buyers are "white" and they take them much more seriously.

Hamid has recently expanded his business to Iran, traveling back and forth between Iran and California.

I like it this way. At this point, I don't have any plan to go back to Iran or to stay here forever. With my involvement in international business and access to new technologies, my location is not really important. As long as I have access to my computer, fax, and telephone, I can do everything, from financing to networking. For me, globalization and access to information technologies have definitely created new opportunities. I do not need to be attached to any particular location any more.

In the stock market, nationalization of a transnational Iranian community through networking and trust has created new business opportunities for some Iranian immigrants. This has been true in London, New York, Toronto, and Los Angeles. Since the early 1980s, with the breakdown of the old bureaucratic structure and the process of "deregulation," new possibilities have emerged for those migrants who have access to finance capital through community networks. In London, many Iranians who work in "the City" (the financial district) and live in the areas identified with "Eurotrash" are now tied to a channel of time, space, and ethnic networking that transcends the boundaries of nation-states. For these economic agents, national/territorial time and spaces are de-emphasized and replaced by a worldwide quest for investment opportunities.

For those involved in the stock market, access to the capital of a transnational/nationalized community has been an important resource for economic survival and success. Class connections within the ethnic community have been essential in this form of entrepreneurship. Economic trust is established through ethnic and class networks and cultural connections to

the well-established members of the community who have access to capital. For some Iranians, the class capital of relatives and Iranian friends has been fundamental in their entrance to the stock market. Ethnicity is used instrumentally, and a transnational "class identification" is emphasized on certain occasions. Many community gatherings such as New Year celebrations have become privileged spaces for business networking and trust building. Cultural affinities facilitate access to capital and competition in a transnational market.

Men are the main agents of entrepreneurial activity; there are very few Iranian women involved in the stock market. This situation demonstrates that "cultural capital" such as trust and networking are not gender-blind and are related to the cultural meaning systems associated with masculinity and femininity. The Iranian pattern of giving control of wealth to men is perpetuated through the structure of a transnationally gender-segregated market and the processes of nationalization/ethnicization. Class connections, gender ideologies, and ethnic resources facilitate access to the finance market for those who have entrepreneurial ambitions.

In the areas of trade and finance, class, gender, and transnational ethnic resources are essential to the survival and success of certain immigrant entrepreneurs. While such resources create business opportunities, transnational agents of these economic activities also participate in the reproduction of social divisions across borders.

Diasporic Capital: Class and Gender Resources

Jamshid meets with me in his office located in an upper-class neighborhood in Paris. Before the interview, we chat and he shows me pictures and drawings of his various construction projects in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Costa Rica. Jamshid's construction company is based in France but is connected to many

other locations. He owns more than 50 percent of the company; his investor/partners are Iranian, Arab and French. He subcontracts with more than 200 small entrepreneurs.

I studied in France and got a degree in engineering. I went back to Iran before the revolution and got involved with one of the big construction projects supported by the *ancien régime*. During the revolution I escaped from Iran, but I was not able to bring any money out. In France, one of my professors offered me a teaching job and I replaced him for a while. At that time, I had an Iranian student who was involved in the construction of a hospital. The company was owned by Lebanese immigrants, and I started to work with them. Through this connection, I got into several construction projects, from hotels to hospitals, in the Middle East and elsewhere. After a few years working with these Lebanese fellows, in '86 I started my own company. At that point I had enough contacts and one solid investor, my brother-in-law, who is also Iranian and had capital and trusted me.

In starting his business, Jamshid was helped not only by class resources, from family connections to access to capital, but also by cultural affinities with other Middle Easterners.

In Europe, hundreds of qualified people compete for the same thing, but what determines one's success is "trust" and "connections." In France, connections are everything — in a sense, they are as important as money. Indeed, what distinguishes me from a French businessman when I am working in certain regions such as the Middle East is my cultural understanding. Among the French, you start working with someone when you get a contract; with an Arab client or investor, you have to have dinner or lunch before you start talking business. You have to go to his house, yet still be respectful of his boundaries. You give him plenty of time to establish a trustful relationship, but when finally he comes to shake your hand, nothing can come between you.

Transnational business connections are facilitated or hindered not only by cultural affinities but also by notions of masculinity. It would be very difficult for an

Iranian woman to use this kind of bonding as a business resource.

Jamshid, like many entrepreneurs, uses his "Frenchness" and his knowledge of French society to help him negotiate his entrepreneurial activities:

Since I have studied in France and know a lot about French culture, people cannot accuse me of not knowing about this society. Also, I am very careful about certain issues. For example, in my company, no one is allowed to speak any language but French, because if someone walks in and realizes that you are a foreigner, he will not trust you. He may think of you as someone who might take his money and take it back to the homeland. When I have a French client, I don't hide my identity, but I show him that I am someone like him, different only in that I can speak another language and listen to another kind of music.

Foreignness and belonging are constantly constructed in business transactions. All of the entrepreneurs in my research were conscious of this. Identification or disidentification were part of their daily business transactions. Both experiential and external boundaries were at work in these business interactions. Accommodation to external boundaries was not indicative of the dissolution of experiential boundaries, and vice versa. In these transnationalized spaces, economic interests and cultural meaning systems are not defined by any single entity or group but by constant interaction in the daily rituals of foreignness and belonging.

Mehran, an Iranian designer who is based in France and works across Europe and the Middle East, experienced downward mobility after his migration to France during the Iranian revolution. He had studied design in Europe and returned to occupy a very prestigious position at the royal court. He escaped from Iran in haste and was unable to bring any capital with him. For a while, his new situation seemed devastating to him:

I was obsessed with what I'd had in Iran, and I felt hor-

rible about losing it. I started to have financial problems and I needed to establish a new life for myself and my family. At some point, I came to the conclusion that the past is the past and one should do something about the present. I also felt that what I did in the past was not meaningless and I could use it to live in the present. I looked at the situation this way: we'd had a revolution at home and a revolution at the personal level, so things could not stay the same. When I began to think about starting over, I told myself: what you want to do has either been done by someone else, which shows you can do it, or is innovative and there must be a place for it.

A connection to the manager of a big design company in Switzerland (the husband of one of his wife's friends) helped Mehran to enter the right circle:

Once we had dinner together, he expressed interest in seeing my work, and by the next week I was at his office and had a contract in hand.

Both Mehran's sense of belonging and his sense of otherness affect his work as one of the top watch designers in Europe. While cultural capital enabled him to find the right connection and to reach a place where his otherness could be negotiated, he uses "difference" to compete in the market.

My work has an "oriental" touch which makes it unique and desirable for many Europeans as well as Middle Easterners. Many French designers cannot compete with me because they have a tendency to impose their Frenchness. What I do is use my culture to give my work a special touch, something which distinguishes it from the mainstream. Design is becoming more and more subordinated to technology and pricing, and the artistic work of the designer is less and less emphasized. There is less and less interest in your identity as a designer, and more and more concern for how an object can successfully get exchanged in the market. The role of the designer is reduced to the task of creating "difference" and avoiding boredom and monotony. I am therefore able to use difference to make the product competitive in the market.

In the case of Parvaneh, "feminine" resources were very important in her entrepreneurial activities. Before

migrating to Paris in the 1980s, Parvaneh had a prestigious job in Iran. In France, small entrepreneurship offered the only means by which she and her husband could manage to survive:

I turned to business first of all because we needed money to live. Even when you bring a lot of money with you, it disappears very fast, and you have to think about doing something. In addition, for me, working is mental exercise. I cannot see myself not working. I always worked in Iran, and cannot afford not to work. The only thing is that I have been displaced — transferred from a privileged situation to a position in which I have to please everyone.

In contrast to the mainstream view that sees immigrant women as joining the labor market for the first time when they arrive in their new country, many Iranian women are used to working and having a job outside their home. This experience is merely interrupted by the process of migration. But often, migratory conditions such as gender and ethnic discrimination impose unemployment on such women (Moallem 1990). Parvaneh has always been employed. Upon immigrating, she and her husband opened a newspaper kiosk, but they closed this business after he developed health problems. Parvaneh then began to think about business activities that she could pursue on her own. She opened a clothing repair shop, counting on her knowledge of sewing — a skill considered essential for women in much of the Iranian middle class. She mobilized her network of Iranian female friends as consultants or subcontractors to provide backup in those aspects of the business that needed special skills. Her experience in the newspaper kiosk also proved very helpful.

What I needed for my business was some knowledge of sewing and repairing, and this I had from a very young age. I've never hired people to do my sewing jobs — I've always done them myself.

She speaks Farsi in her small shop, where her friends visit her and occasionally help with the busi-

ness. Not feeling included in French society, she strongly identifies with Iranian culture and traditions. Her attachment to Iranian culture is sustained not only through her network of friends in France but also through her Iranian relatives and friends in Canada, the United States, and Australia. The "myth of return" does not apply to Parvaneh; she thinks she will either stay in France or move to Canada or the US. With the ever-present possibility of moving on to new places the myth of return is losing its attraction.

Parvaneh's small repair shop is a special place where, by means of her work, she reconciles the outside world with her inner identity. The counter is the "border." Behind it, she sits on her own or with other women, conversing in Farsi. Through her business transactions, gender and ethnic borders are constantly reconstructed or dismantled.

I work hard to have French people's trust. Many of them know that I was well-off in Iran. Some of them respect me, but some are very difficult to deal with.

For Ali, a former university professor who is now the owner of a "cigar shop" in Berlin, entrepreneurship is a site of tension and contradiction between survival strategies and political citizenship. Before our formal interview, we have a long chat during which he tells me enough about his past to ensure that I will not judge him solely as an entrepreneur. He is another German-educated, politicized Iranian who went back to Iran during the revolution and participated in the country's political changes. Disappointed with the way politics went in post-revolutionary Iran, he returned to Germany as an exile, but was faced with the difficulty of finding a job in his profession.

For a so-called "foreigner" to get a university job in Germany is very difficult. Even with a lot of luck and good connections, you can only get a contract for a few years and once it is over, your academic life is finished.

Disappointed with the job market, and coming from an upper class background, he managed to transfer

some money from Iran and opened the cigar shop. After a period of hard work, he was able to survive and even to make some profit. He was also able to support the publication of a Farsi journal on democratic politics. Ali finds himself torn between the demands of day-to-day business life and his political goals for the establishment of a democratic order in Iran. The myth of return is still alive for him, but it depends entirely on the possibility of radical political change in Iran:

I am constantly torn between being a businessman in Berlin and being a politically committed Iranian intellectual. This duality does not help me. It is painful. But I have managed to create a business which can be abandoned whenever I decide to return to Iran permanently. There are also advantages. In my prior life, I was obsessed exclusively with ideas; now I have to deal with everything from clients to financial and state institutions. Life is showing me a different face.

In addition to his class resources, he uses his political understanding as a resource for his business:

Business and political work are somehow similar to each other. Both need intuition and a good sense of reality.

Business and politics are merging in the lives of many Iranian entrepreneurs, providing both cultural resources and financial support for such activities as newspaper and book publishing. But in the narrative of these social agents business and politics do not seem to be compatible with each other. The boundaries separating immigrant and non-immigrant/foreign/native, etc., either in the outside world or as they are constructed in the process of identity formation by social agents, attribute to longing and belonging distinct spatial and temporal modes of being. Becoming is therefore experienced as a movement toward the requirements of either longing or belonging. Furthermore, political disenfranchisement is perpetuated through the hyperspaces of "in here" and "out there," where longing and belonging come to an end without

being able to create new possibilities of political and cultural citizenship.

Ethnic Entrepreneurs as Caregivers

For immigrants, many entrepreneurial spaces are spaces of social and community care. For example, Parvin has a small snack bar in a shopping mall in Berlin. She is from an upper-middle-class background, and opened her business only after experiencing great difficulty finding a job in her profession.

My kids cannot believe that I had servants and nannies and even a driver in Iran. Here in Germany, I have been treated like nobody. Even to start a business, you need so many permits, you have to deal with so many bureaucrats who treat you so badly, you have to prove to so many institutions that you can make it, running from one inspection to another, and you are constantly treated with a lot of suspicion and distrust.

Her class, gender and family resources (her husband and her children are involved in the snack bar), as well as a one-year training in small entrepreneurship offered by "Initiative selbständiger Immigrantinnen," have been crucial in enabling her to start a business. However, she has been forced to give up any clear identification between her business and her Iranian culture because of racist reactions:

When I opened this place, I put up a sign advertising Persian specialties. But I heard people talking about Khomeini and Salman Rushdie. Many looked at me in a strange way. I was not getting enough clients, and at this location I mainly rely on German clients. I could not afford to lose them. Once, a couple passed by and the woman suggested that they have a cappuccino, but the man refused. In a very loud voice, he said, "I do not drink a foreigner's cappuccino," so I changed my sign.

But Parvin has not given up her affective connections to Iranian culture. She has effectively incorporated them into her business activities. One way of doing this is cooking Iranian dishes and presenting them under a German name.

I have managed to put some Iranian food on the menu,

but I have given it different names. [She laughs.] This *Genussesnack*, for example, is nothing but our own *Kou Kou Sabzi*. The same with the eggplant dish. They don't want to identify these dishes with my culture, but that doesn't make any difference to me. I get to have them on the menu because they are special to me.

For Parvin, another opportunity to blend the affective and the effective is her work of "caring." She combines her abilities and knowledge as a former social worker, her Iranian cultural notions of hospitality, and her gender position as a wife, mother, and older sister in her small business:

This is a highly individualistic society. People need attention and care. I use Iranian hospitality to comfort them here. I talk to them, I pay attention to what they tell me, I give them suggestions about what to do and what not to do. At the end of the day, I even give up my extra bread and croissants — I ask my clients if they want to take some home. Sometimes, I make Persian cookies and leave them here for everyone. In this way, I have been able to create a stable clientele. They might try other places once in a while, but they always come back to me.

Parvin organizes the daily rituals of business interactions so that there is no separation between her affective relationship with her culture and her effective methods of doing business in a hostile environment. Caring as feminized and invisible work — identified increasingly with an immigrant and ethnic division of labor — manifests itself in her entrepreneurial strategies of survival and success. Through the discursive boundaries of foreignness and belonging, the German market is able to exploit the unpaid work of caring performed by Parvin in her daily business interactions, and she is able to offer it voluntarily as a natural part of her business activities.

Taghi is another Iranian businessman in Berlin whose entrepreneurial activities rely extensively on his work of caring. In his case, caring is directed toward community members. Taghi has a hybrid shop in Ber-

lin: his business is divided between a small Persian finger food counter at the front and a travel agency at the back. There is no door between the two sections, but one does not immediately notice the desk, computer and fax machine in the rear. The walls of the store are covered with pictures of Iranian monuments and cities. I am received kindly, and treated to tea and fresh fruit. I sit with Taghi and we start talking. There are some Iranian men sitting outside, playing chess and backgammon. During the interview, I see both women and men dropping by for different reasons. The café has a homey atmosphere; people come and go. Since Taghi and another Iranian who works for him are from Azerbaijan, one hears Farsi and Turkish being spoken in the store. Occasionally, a German-speaking client walks in and is addressed in German. Phones ring constantly. Taghi tells me that he has a phone line connected to several Iranian homes where kids are left alone by working parents and instructed to call Taghi if they have any problems.

I don't charge them for this service. I try to be helpful.

They make sure that their kids have access to someone from the community, and it is not much work for us. Sometimes the kids just call and talk to us and get support until their parents are back home.

Taghi studied engineering in Germany and had also been active on the Iranian left. His migration resulted from the political repression of the left by the Islamic Republic. After immigrating to Germany, Taghi obtained a teaching job at a university and stayed there for a few years, but when it became clear that he was unlikely to find a permanent position in his profession, he too turned to business:

Many Germans think that we are taking their places.

They don't know how much hassle we have to go through to make a living. I come from an academic and activist background, but I have learned to cook, to talk to all these small business bureaucrats, and to use day-to-day business language, etc. People see us working, but never ask how we've managed to survive.

In his business, Taghi is not only trying to create a space where Iranians feel at home and can come and ask for different services. He also organizes cultural activities, lectures and exhibitions.

Some people come here to talk to me about their problems, some come to meet with others, and some come to get information about different activities in the community. I have notices about all kinds of cultural activities.

Taghi is no longer involved with political activism, but he remains very concerned about the well-being of Iranian exiles. His concerns have turned toward the care of community members and the development of an effective mode of entrepreneurship. In his business, politics, economics, and culture merge, spanning the gulf between Germany and Iran and connecting also with other diasporic locations. His work of caring brings its rewards: he has been able to add his travel agency to his finger-food store because of the effective and affective connections that he has established between his entrepreneurial activities and community needs.

I started to expand my business and opened a travel agency when I saw so many people around me who trusted me. I have been successful because I am able to serve them almost 24 hours a day. Some of my clients have very little time and come and see me late at night. Some prefer to deal in Farsi and trust me to find them good deals. These days, many Iranians travel back and forth to Iran and to other parts of the world where they have family. The presence of a considerable number of Iranians in diaspora has created a market for a travel agent who can serve them conveniently. In addition, I perform extra services such as sending medications or gifts with travelers. Sometimes people need to send a power of attorney, a legal document or simply urgent messages. I always do my best to be helpful to them.

Taghi's business is more than an entrepreneurial space. It is also an affective community space. Here, culture and economics meet and enrich each other

through social agents' creation of some sense of control and power. It is also a transnational space where Iran and Berlin are lived through the nationalized/ethnicized interaction of social agents.

As foreigners, we need to have our own spaces where we can take care of each other. I personally get a lot of energy from this business and the kind of life I have here. It gives me hope, as well as a sense of continuity and connection. When I see my fellow Iranians milling around and talking to each other, I feel very happy and joyous. For me, this is a business and also more than a business.

Conclusion

Small entrepreneurial businesses are quintessential examples of new transnational spaces. While some immigrants find themselves in entrepreneurial spaces because of political, cultural and institutional discrimination and exclusion, others create new business opportunities by mobilizing ethnic, class, and gender resources. Small entrepreneurial spaces occupied by "third world" immigrants are the major spaces where the dichotomy between first and third world breaks down, and is replaced by the presence of the third world *in* the first world. The new forms of globalization have radically changed the purpose of such spaces. The "myth of return" has been replaced as the motivation for immigrant entrepreneurial activities by the vision of living in transnationalized spaces where "traveling homelands" meet with territorial nation-states without eliminating the possibility of returning to a homeland or staying in a host country. A new emerging myth of "repeated dislocations" undermines any fetishization of a final return to the homeland.

Through an examination of the interplay of culture and economy in entrepreneurial spaces, I have argued that Iranian immigrants mobilize pre-national, national, and transnational unities, both conceptually and on the ground, to create economic activities in diasporic locations. Furthermore, this research sug-

gests that Iranians are among the new transnational immigrants who live in social spaces where taken-for-granted boundaries separating states, ethnicities and civil societies are blurred and replaced by new social spaces of daily life, new sources of social and political agency related to the transnational social spaces of survival, self-affirmation, economic activity and political practice. In addition, for massive groups of immigrants, the production and consumption of "cultural goods" and specialization in small entrepreneurship are less relevant to the collectivity's decision to preserve its common memories (their "cultural baggage" or "cultural heritage," depending on whether the viewpoint is pejorative or multicultural) than the very fact that in the context of a daily experience of restriction and discrimination, ethnic entrepreneurial activities create economic continuity that opens up the possibility of employment, money, and hope in diaspora.

In conclusion, I would like to argue that with the expansion of new forms of globalization and the presence of diasporic people in different locations and territories, new transnational entrepreneurial possibilities are emerging and establishing new cultural boundaries. Immigrant entrepreneurs are becoming new economic agents, facilitating the movement of capital, labor, and culture from one location to another, from the private to the public spheres and from the formal to the informal. Their existence challenges modern politico-spatial divisions based on national territoriality and market-centered economism. The entrepreneurial presence of immigrants problematizes any narrow conception of participation in centralized, state-regulated politics, placing in crisis both the narrow confines of modern nationalism as well as the global city-state. In this context, ethnic entrepreneurial spaces can be characterized as spaces of everyday self-government where past and present, there and here, outside and inside encounter each other at an ontological level. However, the epistemological con-

sequences of such an encounter are constructed by the dominant society via systematic categorization, while they are expressed through ethnic entrepreneurs' reconstruction of politics, culture and economics as fragmented and disconnected. Such categorizations on the part of nation-states and such perceptions on the part of immigrants separate the practices of everyday life from idealized political and national spaces.

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Notes

¹ This article draws on a larger project dealing with the Iranian diaspora and various spaces of transnational migrations.

² A stereotype of Iranian immigrants depicts them as a "wealthy community." It is true that many who left Iran, especially during the time of the revolution — members of the bourgeoisie with a strong connection to the world market and senior functionaries of the state — brought with them considerable capital, which enabled them to set up numerous businesses. On the other hand, most middle and lower middle class Iranian immigrants had no access to capital. They have, nevertheless, been able to mobilize other means, such as cultural capital (education) and ethnic resources (pre-migratory experience in business, group identification, credit associations, networks and so on) in the setting up of entrepreneurial operations. In many cases, contextual factors such as the inability to find a professional job, unemployment, and immigration restrictions determine an orientation toward ethnic entrepreneurship. Membership of an ethnic or religious minority, or even a political grouping, has been an important resource in economic reorganization.

³ According to Portes and Rumbaut (1990:21) the areas of concentrated immigrant entrepreneurship are considered ethnic enclaves and are characterized by the presence of a number of immigrants with substantial business expertise, access to sources of capital

and access to labor.

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