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**Gender, migration and politics:
Pre- and post-migration experiences of Iranian women in New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Islam and Muslim women have become objects of considerable political controversy in countries such as Australia, France, and the USA, although less so in New Zealand. The dress-codes, customs and political allegiances of Muslim women are all debated for political reasons, and yet the diversity among these women is commonly overlooked. However, this study of women who have come to New Zealand from an orthodox Islamic regime shows quite different political orientations and issues in regards to migrant females from Muslim countries in the West. The main aims of this study are to examine the motivations of Iranian females to emigrate from Iran to New Zealand, and to investigate how they redefine their individual and social identities in the new country. The researcher involved semi-structured interviews with 34 Iranian females who migrated to New Zealand between 1979 and 2012. Their lived experiences (pre- and post-migration) are interpreted in the context of wider political ideologies, institutions, laws, social norms, and practices (of Iran and New Zealand) to show how political context influences what people can or cannot do in everyday life. In terms of the women's motivations for migration, the study shows considerable variety. The participants' stories reveal how the prevailing political ideology and gender-related policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran affected their daily lives, and how these policies influenced decisions to emigrate. These decisions are both 'political acts' and personal choices, involving personal aspirations as well as resistance to Iran's political ideology and gender discrimination. In terms of post-migration experiences, this study illustrates how New Zealand's social and political context has influenced the participants' self-perceptions, their social roles as women, and the ways they relate to public institutions. The study also explores how these changes have affected power-relations within their families. Migration for Iranian females can involve a mixture of gains and losses to quality-of-life. Most commonly, however, these women find that adjusting to a new society and its more liberal, gender-equal environment means greater autonomy and agency. This study also investigates how participants redefine their post-migration social identities. The large majority of participants create a secular social identity after migration. They report being judged according to stereotypical expectations of Muslims, and they use diverse strategies to redefine who they are.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Throughout history, people's movements and migrations have been an engine of human progress. People have always moved to new countries in search of new opportunities, but over the past several decades international migration has increased rapidly, both in terms of volume and influence (Castles, Hass, & Miller, 2014). In the last half century, the number of migrants has nearly tripled globally. In 2015, about 244 million people were living outside the county of their birth, which was up from 173 million in 2000, and 75 million in 1960 (International Organization for Migration, 2005; United Nations, 2016). Clearly, this volume of movement between different countries raises a range of questions for both the societies of origin and the host societies. For instance, the countries of origin might try to balance their losses from 'brain drain' with the possible gains in money or knowledge that their departing citizens might transfer back to their country of origin. The receiving countries face long-term changes in their social, cultural, and ethnic makeup. On one hand, these changes make the host countries more diverse and better integrated with global markets. On the other hand, diversity raises concerns over national identity, social cohesion, and race relations (Castles et al., 2014; Meares, 2007).

In addition to increase in volume of migrants, another important feature of the contemporary international migration stream is the 'feminisation of labour migration'. In the past, labour migration was mainly male, with female migrants usually being represented under the category of family reunion. Since the 1960s, however, women's participation in labour migration has greatly expanded (Castles et al., 2014). Today, nearly half of all international migrants (48%) are women¹ (United Nations, 2016). Yet despite this equality in terms of volume, female migrants are still over-represented in lower-skill-based occupations such as personal care and other service jobs (Castles et al., 2014). Prior to the 1970s, the gender dimensions of migration were mainly invisible in migration studies. However, through the growing influence of feminist thought in many disciplines and in social life, the gender-related aspects of the migration experience have slowly come into the foreground of consideration (Pessar, 1999; Curran, Shafer, Donato, & Garip, 2006; Meares, 2007). Still, despite the recent progress in gender and migration scholarship, the scope and extent of

¹ This number is slightly higher than 50% in Europe and North America, and much lower in Asia and Africa (United Nations, 2016).

research in this area remains limited when compared to gender-related scholarship in other areas (Curran et al., 2006).²

The third important feature of migration that needs to be discussed is its increasing political salience. Although the intersection of politics and migration has always been controversial, the political salience of migration-related issues has increased considerably in recent years. At the most basic level, migration involves the political issue of how governments should manage people who move across borders either legally or illegally. Furthermore, although the ‘political potency of fears of immigration’ is not new³ (Castles, 2003, p. 11), the conflicting approaches of competing political parties towards the issues surrounding migration and diversity have become more central in political election campaigns over the last two decades.

The prominence of the political dimension of migration has increased remarkably in recent years, mainly in reaction to migration-related security threats (Humphrey, 2013). The securitisation of international migration, and particularly the framing of Muslim migrants in the West as a security problem, has become increasingly common since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, and the similar attacks on trains, buses, and airports in Spain (2004) and Britain (2007). The recent series of terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States since 2014, which were mostly related to the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, has tightened the existing political linkage between issues of international migration, national security, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism. Therefore, where the social integration of migrants (particularly Muslim migrants) in Western countries was just a practical issue before the 9/11 attack, after that it turned into a prominent security issue (Castles & Miller, 2014). The perception that migrants of certain ethnic or religious groups (Middle Easterners or/and Muslims) or their children were more likely to be violent terrorists cast all Muslim migrants as potential security threats. On top of this, the historical increase in the volumes of refugees who were arriving from Muslim-majority countries (and specifically from Syria to Europe since 2015) added another dimension to the issue of Muslim migrants and their threat

² For instance, an assessment of the scholarship on migration and gender found that during the decade of 1993–2003, only 23% of the migration-related articles published in the most widely read sociology journals considered issues of gender, but this rate was over 50% for articles concerned with mainstream communities (Curran et al., 2006).

³ For instance, the ‘Know Nothing’ political party in the United States in the 1850s is a classic example of an anti-immigration party with strong nativist roots, as expressed in their slogan: ‘America must be ruled by Americans’ (Hurt, 1930). Another example is the ‘White Australia’ policy, which was designed to keep Asians out of Australia, and was endorsed by the nation’s Labour Party until the 1960s (Castles, 2003).

to national security. Anxieties over Muslim migrants in the West, in terms of both their numbers and their political associations, drew a strong political response in the rise of right-wing, anti-immigration parties in most Western nations. As one of the most recent examples, the far-right, anti-immigration ‘Front National’ party gained a record-high level of support in the French presidential election of 2017.

As another consequence, the idea that people of diverse social origins can live together in multicultural societies has grown more controversial. Political concerns over cultural compatibility have been especially focused on Muslim communities. For instance, in a public speech in October 2011, German chancellor Angela Merkel stated that multiculturalism has failed in Germany: ‘the idea of people from different cultural backgrounds living happily ‘side by side’ did not work’ (*Guardian*, 2010). A few months later, in February 2011, David Cameron echoed Merkel by saying that state-backed multiculturalism had failed, and had left young Muslims vulnerable to radicalisation. Cameron explained that ‘under the name of multiculturalism we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream’ (BBC, 2011).

At the same time, newly urgent questions have been raised regarding social integration, and the relations between cultural affinity and public acceptance for migrants in host communities. Political leaders have hotly debated issues such as what policies should apply for migrants who are considered incompatible with Western cultures, or how marginalisation and racial discrimination can alienate migrant communities. Other pressing issues have included the relationships between Western military interventions in mainly Muslim countries and terrorist attacks against Westerners,⁴ or the feasibility of introducing cultural compatibility tests to evaluate each migrant’s level of commitment to the home country’s values.⁵ In one of the most controversial approaches to migration policy, security threats, and cultural compatibility, Donald Trump, as a candidate for U.S. president, called

⁴ For instance, after the Manchester suicide bombing in May 2017 (which killed 22 people and injured 116 others), Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of Labour Party in Britain, explained that ‘many experts, ... have pointed to the connections between wars our government has supported or fought in other countries and terrorism here at home (*Guardian*, 2017).

⁵ For instance, Malcolm Turnbull, the Australian prime minister, suggested a new test of citizenship to assess how migrants have assimilated and committed themselves to ‘Australian values’. The current Australian citizenship test assesses knowledge of the law and of Australian national symbols (Smith, 2017).

for ‘a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States’⁶ (Johnson & Weigel, 2015). All of these examples illustrate that the issue of migration (with its related concerns over border control, humanitarian crisis management, social diversity, and multiculturalism) has grown ever more prominent in political debate around the world.

This increasing importance of migration as a global reality has motivated scholars of political science to get more directly involved in this whole discussion. Political scientists need to enable objectivity and clarity on the issues and options involved, in order to balance the prevailing narrative, which is mostly driven by politicians or journalists. This prevailing narrative is highly subject to overgeneralisations, to misrepresentations of minority groups, and to confusion regarding concepts such as social diversity and multiculturalism.

International Immigration to New Zealand: The Recent Context

In looking more particularly at the case of New Zealand, we see that this country has experienced record numbers of international migrant arrivals in recent years. Since the 1990s, New Zealand’s migration policies have aimed to boost the levels of immigration, but recently the numbers of migrants have risen more rapidly than anticipated. In the year prior to May 2017, the annual net migration reached a record of 72,000, which was up from 68,400 in the same period in 2016, and 10,600 in 2013 (Statistics New Zealand, 2017).

The policy changes introduced since the early 1990s have not only increased the numbers of migrants, but also aimed to use immigration as a means of economic growth. The immigration policies have sought to fill shortages of skilled professionals, attract entrepreneurs and investors, and to boost the ‘international linkage required for growth’ (Johnston, Gendall, Trlin, & Spoonley, 2010). Since the 1990s, immigration policy has moved from being a passive instrument for processing applicants to a much more dynamic, interventionist mechanism for identifying economically beneficial migrants (Simon-Kumar, 2014).

The increasing numbers of migrants arriving in New Zealand from many different nations have made this country one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse societies on

⁶ Later, after Trump came to office, one of his first actions was to issue an executive order banning citizens from five countries with Muslim majorities from entering the U.S. for 90 days. Trump also proposed that Christians and people of other minority religions should be granted priority over Muslims in terms of refugee acceptance (Burke, 2017).

earth. Almost 40% of the population in Auckland (the biggest and most diverse city in New Zealand) was born overseas, which as of 2015 made Auckland the fourth most diverse city in the world (International Organization for Migration, 2015, p. 39). In fact, today, ‘there are more ethnicities in New Zealand than there are countries in the world’ (Statistics New Zealand, 2013a). However, along with this increase in the number and diversity of migrants, the prominence of issues related to migration and social diversity has intensified in New Zealand’s social, economic, and political context.

The increasing prominence of immigration-related concerns can be exemplified by its reflection in the nation’s election campaigns. In the 1996 general election, Winston Peters, the leader of the right-leaning New Zealand First party, called for steep reductions in the numbers of migrants, and especially of migrants from Asia (Johnston, Gendall, Trlin, & Spoonley, 2010). This campaign brought the New Zealand First party the highest level of support (13.5% of the vote) it had ever gained before, which allowed the party to share in forming a coalition government with the National Party. In the 2005 general election, the New Zealand First party launched its election campaign by attacking the Muslim community, and particularly migrants from the Middle East. Peters warned of growing danger that ‘Islamic extremists’ would unleash terrorist attacks in New Zealand (Bradford, 2005).

In the 2017 election campaign, the issue of migration remained important, but the main debate among candidates concerned the ‘right number of migrants’, rather than which specific racial or religious groups were problematic. More recently, politicians and the media have tended to blame both the housing crisis in New Zealand’s bigger cities and the increase of economic inequality on the high number of migrants. During the election campaigns of 2017, the political parties offered various proposals regarding the right numbers for net migration, and their suggestions varied between 70,000 and 10,000 per year.⁷ It should be considered that the geographical situation of New Zealand helps it to maintain fairly effective control over its borders. Therefore, New Zealand has not had to deal with the huge numbers of refugees or illegal migrants that some European countries have faced,⁸ and the government is able to largely control and manage both the quality and the quantity of net migration.

⁷ It should be considered that this debate over the right numbers of migrants is separate from the issue of how many refugees to accept. Some of the parties that favour reducing the numbers of migrants also support increasing the numbers of refugees to accept per year. For instance, during the 2017 election campaign, both the Labour and the Green parties favoured reducing the numbers of migrants while increasing the quota of refugees.

⁸ More than 10,000 visitors to New Zealand have overstayed their visa permits as of 2016 (New Zealand Immigration, 2017).

The Case of Iranian Migrants

The increasingly diverse migrants who arrive in New Zealand every year include a growing community of Iranian women, who are considerably invisible in most studies of migrant minority groups in New Zealand. This study aims to examine the pre- and post-migration experiences of these migrants in relation to the political contexts of their home and host countries.

Many Iranians have left their country during the past few decades, mostly because of the political, social, and economic consequences of the 1979 Islamic revolution (Aidani, 2011; Nourallahi, 2009; Zirakbash, 2014). The total number of Iranians residing abroad is now estimated at about six million, which represents about 7% of Iran's total population (Niayesh, 2014). In general, the Islamic laws imposed after the revolution have greatly restricted people's cultural and social freedoms. More specifically, many of these laws have targeted women, and imposed standards of gender inequality (Afkhami & Friedl, 1994; Esfandiari, 1997).

Over the previous century, Iranian women had struggled for equal rights, and they won considerable reforms toward gender equality during the reign of the Pahlavi shahs from the 1930s to 1979. For example, women won the right to vote in 1963, limitations on the authority of husbands in matters of divorce, polygamy and child custody in 1967, and access to legal abortion in 1975 (Paidar, 1997; Keddie, 1981). After the Islamic revolution, many of these progressive laws were terminated, and Iranian women lost many of their rights. Although women could still vote and hold public office, men regained unilateral authority on matters of divorce, child custody, and women's employment. Therefore, we should consider the extent to which the emigration of Iranian women represents a rejection of the cultural and political values prevailing in their home country (even if these women were not the primary decision makers in the choice to emigrate). New Zealand has an international reputation for gender equality,⁹ and this is something known in Iran.¹⁰ Therefore, this country's reputation

⁹ According to the 'Global Gender Gap Report' for 2017, New Zealand ranked ninth in the global gender index, out of 145 countries. New Zealand's ranking has varied between 5 to 10 since this report was first published in 2006. The Global Gender Gap Report evaluates 144 countries on their progress towards gender equality in four thematic dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (Global Gender Gap Report, 2017).

¹⁰ I have no specific data that suggest the extent to which New Zealand is considered a gender equal country in Iran, or among Iranian females there. However, it is widely known in Iran that New Zealand is a Western liberal democracy, and all such nations have a reputation for gender equality among Iranians. Also, regardless of the rankings for New Zealand in different international reports, the fact that New Zealand has a highly visible presence of females in high level political leadership positions has been widely received as a sign of gender

could be considered in wider context of the reason why some Iranian women have chosen to come to this country in recent years.

This study aims to elicit the main motivations of Iranian women who have emigrated to New Zealand, and to determine the relative importance of their concerns for socio-political freedom, gender equality, and other factors such as educational and financial opportunity. More importantly, this study sets out to investigate the post-migration experiences of these women. Have they been better able to achieve their goals in New Zealand, or have they faced new obstacles? How have they changed? What challenges have they faced, and what kinds of dialogue have they had with the host society?

In considering the overall global and local contexts, and the interwoven borders between politics and migration, I decided to focus my PhD thesis on the issues and experiences of Iranian female immigrants. In the next section, I explain my personal relation to this topic, and the personal experiences that inspired me to choose this subject.

Background

In 2009, when I was working as a political journalist for a reformist newspaper in Iran, my country experienced the greatest political uprising since the 1979 revolution. After the 2009 presidential election, millions of people who believed that their votes were stolen came to the streets to protest against the officially declared victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (the hard-liner president of Iran between 2005 and 2013), and to demand recognition of their votes and civil liberties. During this movement, which was later called ‘the Green movement’, thousands of protesters, journalists, and political activists were arrested. Hundreds of protesters were killed in the streets, arrested, or imprisoned. Also, a large number of publications were banned, and higher levels of filtering were placed on the Internet. The consequences of that struggle affected many Iranians, myself included.

Many journalists, bloggers, and political, social, or civil activists were forced to leave Iran in the months following the election, as they were wanted by judicial officials or were

equality in the ‘court of public opinion’. For instance, New Zealand has had three female prime ministers in the last two decades (Jenny Shipley 1997–1999, Helen Clark 1999–2008, and Jacinda Ardern, 2017–?). During two recent periods, all three of the country’s highest ranking political positions were occupied by women (the governor-general, chief justice, and prime minister were all female from 2001 to 2006 and again starting in 2016). Also, New Zealand is famous for being the first country on earth to grant the vote to women; and specifically this point is highlighted in many Persian/Farsi weblogs or websites that discuss options for migration to New Zealand.

threatened with serious harm.¹¹ I was one of the lucky ones, because I was not arrested or directly threatened. I only lost my job after the government banned the paper I worked for. Still, I was one of many who decided to leave the country rather than live in the post-election environment.

Choosing a new destination is one of the hardest decisions for people who want to leave their country. I was looking for a developed, liberal democratic, and English-speaking country that would not be too picky about student visa applications. In the process of my search, one Iranian student agency offered me a chance to apply to New Zealand. Despite being concerned that New Zealand was too far away geographically, I went ahead with this option, as it has its own attractions.

Some years previously, when I was still doing my master's degree, one of my friends had encouraged me to go to New Zealand. I remember she told me that 'New Zealand is the country of women, and all the heads of power in this country are occupied by women' (the head of state, governor-general, speaker, and chief justice). Although my friend Azita was not a political person, she was very concerned with gender equality, and was very conscious about New Zealand. At that time, however, I had no serious intention to leave Iran.

Emigration is not a simple decision, especially when there are huge differences between the host country and the country of origin. Although I was seriously motivated to leave my country by 2009, I felt a sense of panic when I saw the distance between my point of departure and destination in the airplane monitors. More than 15,000 kilometres between Iran and New Zealand was a good symbol to represent the differences between the two countries.

During my first year in New Zealand, in 2012, my biggest question was how I could find myself again in this country. Would it be possible for me to mix the advantages of both my country of origin and of the host country? After living for a while in New Zealand, I still could not find myself in the new situation. I enjoyed some freedoms that I was always looking for, like the freedom of expression, but at the same time I had a strong sense of otherness. My situation seemed extremely paradoxical. When I was in Iran, I was a journalist

¹¹ According to the Human Rights Watch (2012), there has been a considerable increase in the numbers of civil society activists who have applied for asylum between 2009 and 2011. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicates that the largest number of Iranian asylum applications between 2009 and 2011 were submitted in the neighbouring country of Turkey, and the overall increase in this period was 72%.

who was highly articulate, able to express myself clearly, but I did not have freedom of expression. Here, I had great freedom of expression, but had great difficulty communicating anything I wished to say in English.

Of course I am not the only immigrant who has decided to leave his/her country after some political difficulty. Millions of people, mostly from developing countries, emigrate to more developed countries each year for various political, financial or cultural reasons. What, however, have been the main motivations for Iranians to migrate over the last few decades? Why have Iranian women chosen to leave their country more often over the last few decades? What is the political context of their migration? How do they feel after immigration? How far can they go to achieve their hopes in the new society? How well can they adapt themselves to new situations, and how does their experience of living in a secular democratic society compare with their experience of living in an Islamic semi-totalitarian society?

Despite having all of these questions about immigration turning in my mind, I did not think of studying an immigration-related topic until my current supervisor suggested it to me. During my initial period of disorientation in the new country, I found it hard to choose a research topic for my PhD. During that time, I was studying English at Massey University, and I discussed some potential topics with Associate Professor Grant Duncan in the Politics programme. He suggested the possibility that I could do research on Iranian women in New Zealand and their motivations for immigration. I felt a certain sympathy with this topic, and found it more practicable than the other options that I was considering, such as the process of transformation to democracy in Iran, or the effects of the Arab Spring on the Iranian democratic movement.

These above-mentioned events indicate the different aspects of the puzzle that have shaped my project topic and formed my plan of engagement for about five years.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine the main motivations and causes of immigration for females who emigrate from Iran to New Zealand, and to investigate the ways that they redefine their individual and social identities in the context of the new country. In particular, I am seeking to find some overall answers for the following questions:

- What are the main motivations for Iranian women to immigrate to New Zealand?

- In what ways have political processes and gender policies in Iran led these women to seek immigration?
- How has the decision to migrate been taken?
- In what ways has emigration affected these women's social and personal lives?
- How has emigration to New Zealand affected gender attitudes and the dynamics of gender relations for Iranian females?
- How have Iranian female migrants redefined their social identity in the social and political context of New Zealand?

This study considers two main categories of questions, which will be answered in two steps. In the first step, the question of women's motivations for emigration will be considered. The day to day experiences of my participants in relation to migration will be unpacked in relation to the socio-political context of the new host country. I will explore the motivations for emigration among women in various segments or classes of Iranian society. As mentioned earlier, there is a correlation between certain political and social milestones (like the 1979 revolution) and increases in the numbers of emigrants from Iran. In this study, I want to show this correlation in more detail, and to explore the cause-and-effect relations between particular laws (in both the civil and penal codes), specific policies or regulations, and women's decisions to migrate. At the same time, I will investigate other social, financial, or personal factors that are involved in the processes of making decisions about migration.

In the next category of questions, the context and focus of the study will be New Zealand (the host country). In this step, I will explore the trends of acculturation among Iranian female immigrants. I will be asking how these women find themselves and build new lives in the new society. How do the host country's socio-political structures and norms affect the migrant's perceptions and attitudes about gender roles? How do their changes in attitude affect their family and social interactions? How do they define their post-migration social identity? How do they introduce themselves in their daily interactions with others? Although the social and political norms of New Zealand are the major concerns in answering these questions, I aim to consider the Iranian social and political situation as well, as enculturation within the Iranian context has an ongoing effect on the ways that Iranian women deal with their host society.

Research Aims

The contributions of this study can be categorised into three areas: those related to minority groups in New Zealand, those that centre around women with Islamic backgrounds in New Zealand, and those that are focused on the political context of female emigration from Iran.

More specifically, this study enriches the growing body of knowledge on minority groups living in New Zealand. To date, there have been no studies concerning Iranian migrants in New Zealand society, although there have been a few more generalised studies on Muslims or Middle Eastern immigrants and their trends of adjustment in New Zealand (Bahiss, 2008; Dobson, 2009; Joudi Kadri, 2009; Jessen, 2010; Hartono, 2011). These few previous studies have focused mainly on ethnic Arabs, or what has been generally called the ‘Muslim community’ in New Zealand. It seems that Iranians, as a small minority group, are neglected in social research in NZ, partly because Iranians do not fit well into either of these categories.

It is important to emphasise that this is a study of Iranian women in New Zealand – and, due to what the participants have revealed in regards to the way that they define their post-migration social and personal identities (as we will see in the findings chapters), it has not become a study of Muslim women in a Western country. Therefore, this study differs from studies such as those by Yasmeen (2007), Jasperse, Ward, and Jose (2011), Ali and Sonn (2017), Akhtar (2014), Alrasheed (2013), or Diehl, Koenig, and Ruckdeschel (2013), all of which focus on the experiences of Muslim female migrants (of the first or second generation), and the ways these women relate to their Islamic heritage while living in non-Muslim countries.

Although this dissertation is not a typical study of Muslim female migrants in the West, Islam is still a strong factor in the background of the participants’ lives. Obviously, Islam and the Iranian theocracy are part of the politico-legal environment which my participants chose to leave. However, as the majority of my interviews show, these women view themselves primarily as individuals and as females, rather than as Muslims. Although they see being Iranian as basic to who they are, most of them do not view Islam as a defining feature of their identity. Most of them do not practice an Islamic dress code, or regard themselves as ‘Muslim’ in a strictly observant sense, although some of them regard their faith as an important personal, private matter. Most of them wish to avoid being labelled as

Muslim and some of them openly disavow any affiliation with Islam. This post-migration approach of Iranian females towards their Islamic heritage is another dimension of why Islam is important in the background of this study.

Therefore, this study does more than contribute to the existing literature on the ‘Muslim ethno-religious group’ in New Zealand (Bahiss, 2008; Dobson, 2009; Joudi Kadri, 2009; Jessen, 2010; Jasperse, Ward, & Jose, 2011; Hartono, 2011). My study improves our understanding of the diversity among migrants from various mainly Muslim nations, and it helps to disrupt a number of commonplace assumptions and stereotypes. Examining the ways through which Iranian female migrants redefine their personal and social identity in New Zealand brings a different set of insights into the ways that Islam and Islamic backgrounds can affect women’s lives and identities when they are no longer living in a Muslim-majority country.

Moreover, this research contributes to the discipline of political studies in several ways. First of all, it enriches our understanding of the varied situations or experiences of women from Muslim-majority countries (Iran in this case) who migrate to Western countries. It addresses the ‘real lives’ of a sub-group of such women, and thus helps to improve our understanding of a specific migrant group that has become politically controversial due to negative press about Iran and about Islam, and to backlashes against immigrants in many Western countries. In addition, this study gives greater nuance to the politics of diversity or multiculturalism in New Zealand. It illustrates (through showing the stark contrasts between life for women in Iran and New Zealand) how the lived experiences of individuals need to be understood in the context of wider political institutions and events, and of the laws, social norms, and practices that influence what people can or cannot do in everyday life. The study also shows how people’s experiences of migration can be better understood in this deeper political-institutional context. It examines, the extent to which migration for an Iranian woman is a ‘political act’ as well as a personal choice.

It is important to mention that this research goes beyond the dominant definition of ‘political’ by adopting a feminist perspective. Feminism has pushed the boundaries of the political science discipline by expanding the definition of ‘political’ to include operations of power in areas that were traditionally considered outside the discipline, such as family relationships, sexual matters, and personal or private interactions. Therefore, thanks to feminist scholarship, the understanding of ‘power’ as a central concept of politics has grown

more complex. Power is now regarded less as something that someone possesses, and more as a quality that affects both public and private human relationships (Weldon, 2018; Peterson & Lamb, 2012). By adopting the expanded feminist definition of what political means, this research is able to contribute to the literatures of both feminism and political science at the same time.

This study also helps to build the relationship between the existing literature on the post-migration experiences of Iranian females in other Western countries, and in the particular case of New Zealand. A number of studies have been done on Iranian female migrants' personal and social experiences in other countries, such as the United States, Canada, The Netherlands, Sweden, or Australia (Khodaparast, 1997; Darvishpour, 2002; Ghorashi, 2003; Khodaparast, 2013; Nabai, 2008; Hojati, 2011; Kazemipour, 2011). It is essential to do similar research concerning Iranian women in New Zealand, and to begin a dialogue between those international studies and the case of migrants in New Zealand. This dialogue can extend not just the international literature on Iranian female migrants, but it can also prove useful for comparing the ways that integration and acculturation can be experienced differently in different host societies by similar ethnic groups.

Obviously, the above-mentioned contributions of this study (to the literatures on minority groups in New Zealand, on the diversity of female migrants from various mainly Muslim nations, on female post-migration experiences in New Zealand and in other Western countries) all contribute to the more general literature on migration studies. Later in Chapter Six, I analyse the migration literature in detail, and in relation to 'how the migration experience affects women'. I examine the complex ways in which the experience of migration involves a mixture of gains and losses for Iranian migrants, and the ways that this experience differs case by case.

The benefits of this study are not limited to its academic contribution. Iranian women all around the world, particularly in New Zealand, will benefit from this research in certain ways. First, the academic perspective that this study offers on the emigration of Iranian women and the trends of their acculturation can help numerous host societies, not just New Zealand, to gain a better understanding of these women's desires and challenges. This understanding could enable better communication between this group of women and their host societies.

Moreover, this effort to capture the immigration experience of Iranian women will be useful for other Iranian women who are living in Iran and thinking about emigration. These women can make better decisions if they grow more familiar with the challenges and benefits of migration for their Iranian peers in New Zealand. In considering the increasing number of Iranian immigrants in New Zealand in recent years, and in evaluating their social and cultural contributions to this society, it is important to gain a more accurate understanding of their lives.

Last but not least, this study will provide practical insight for policy makers and immigration professionals, helping them to better understand the lived experiences of these people in both Iran and New Zealand. Such understanding can be helpful for obtaining a more realistic perspective on the lifestyles, attitudes, and cultural orientations of these migrants, who are normally evaluated (particularly in terms of visa decision-making) on the basis of existing stereotypes conveyed in the mainstream media, rather than according to the migrants' real-life experiences.

Research Participants

The heart of this research is my research participants' narratives. I have obtained the main data for this research through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 34 Iranian women migrants. All of these participants arrived in New Zealand between 1979 and 2012, and all were at least 18 years old at the time of their arrival. Twenty-three of these participants were living in Auckland; four were in Wellington, four in Hamilton, and three in Christchurch. Although I chose these women to represent various groups in terms of marital status, age, ethnicity, religion, and time spent in New Zealand, they are not statistically representative of all Iranian women in NZ. More detailed anonymised demographic information about the research participants is presented in the methodology chapter (Chapter Three).

A Brief Overview of the Ethnic Iranian Population in New Zealand

According to Statistics New Zealand's 2013 census data, the total number of Iranian/Persian residents in New Zealand is about 4,000, with about 53% of them being male and 47% being female. This includes people born in New Zealand who chose 'Iranian' or 'Persian' as an ethnic identity, as well as those born overseas. About 80% of the people who identified themselves as ethnic Iranian/Persian were born outside the country. The overall

trend of Iranian arrivals to New Zealand has been increasing, especially since 1986. The rate of growth in Iranian arrivals has been dropping since 2006, but the overall numbers have steadily increased.

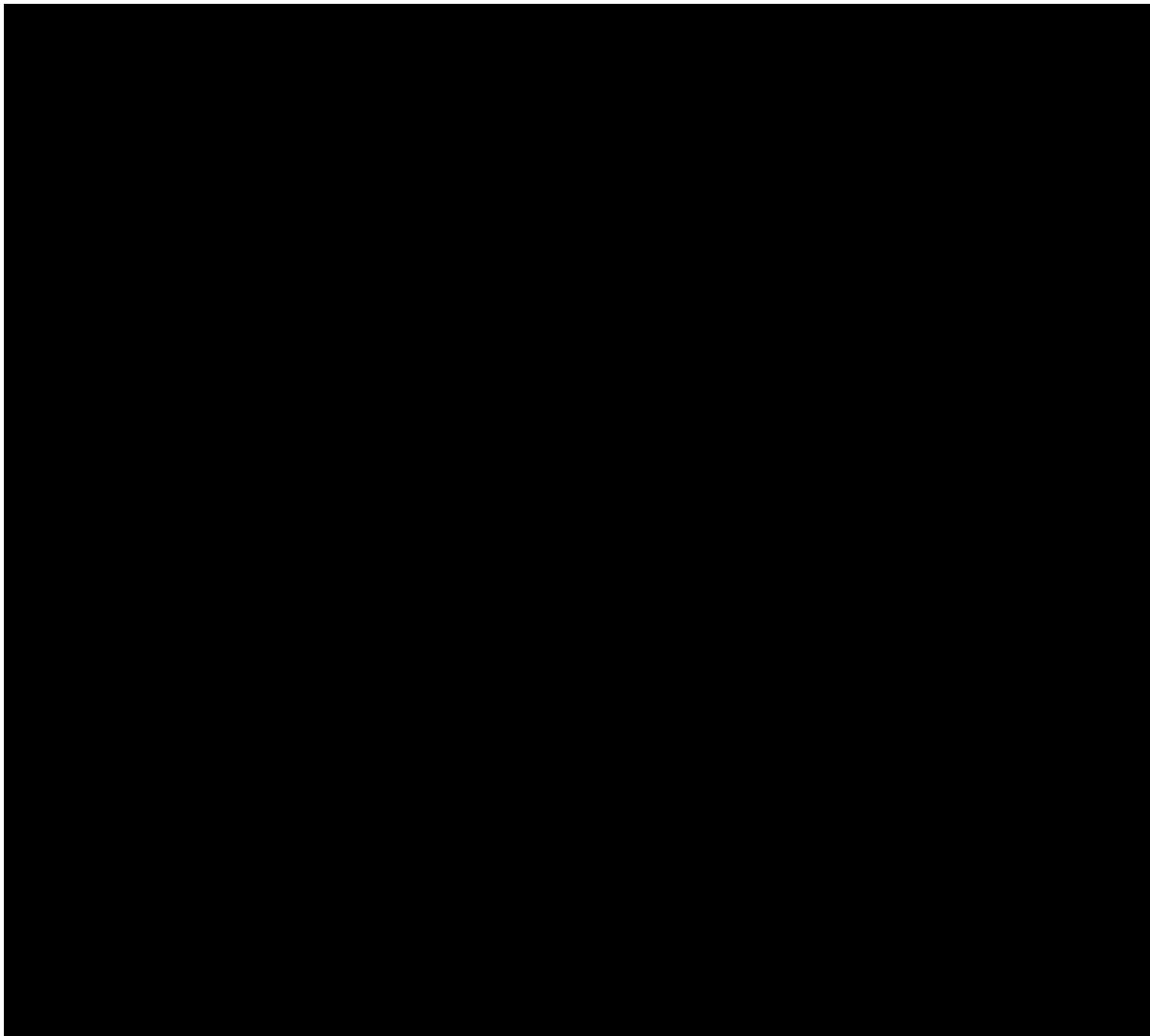
Table 1 includes those who were born in Iran and/or identified as Iranian/Persian and who arrived in New Zealand from overseas. Between the 2001 and 2013 Census, the number of these Iranian immigrants in New Zealand increased by 56% (see Table 1).

Table 1.¹²

Year of arrival in New Zealand for people of Iranian birth or ethnic group

1986-2013 Census of Population and Dwellings

Overseas-born, usually-resident population



This table includes a user-defined field, Iranian birth or ethnic group: that is, a person born in Iran OR of Iranian/Persian ethnicity.

Source: Statistics New Zealand

¹² This table is customised by Statistics New Zealand for the purpose of this research and is not available publicly.

In terms of education, the Statistics New Zealand's 2013 census data show that about 92% of Iranian adults have a formal qualification, with about 38% of them having bachelor's degrees or higher. In terms of religious affiliation, about 68% of Iranians said they affiliated with at least one religion, and 26% said they had no religion. By comparison, 41.9% of the total New Zealand population said they had no religion. The most common religions for Iranians in New Zealand were Islam (45.1%), followed by the Baha'i faith (10%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2013b).

Overall Thesis Structure

This thesis contains eight chapters, including the introduction, the conceptual framework, the methodology, four chapters presenting the research data, and the conclusion. Following this Introduction, Chapter Two provides an overview of the political ideology and the political systems of both countries, Iran and New Zealand, and the ways that their different ideologies and systems have shaped specific gender policies. This overview is used as the main framework for better understanding the participants' day-to-day experiences in regards to migration.

Chapter Three, sets out the research methodology adopted and the approach used in the data analysis. The justification for a qualitative rather than a quantitative method for this study, the benefits and limitations of the method chosen, the selection of the participants, the participants' demographic data, and the ethical considerations, are all discussed in this chapter.

Chapters Four to Seven present the study's findings. In these chapters I seek to echo my participants' voices in a narrative form, and to unpack their lived experiences before and after migration in terms of the socio-political contexts of their origin and host countries.

Chapters Four and Five consider the participants' motivations for migration. Although many reasons are involved in the decision to migrate, for practical reasons I characterise the participants' narratives into two main themes: explicitly gender-related issues, and the other social, political, economic, or personal issues (although it should be acknowledged that gender issues are sometimes implicitly implicated in these other areas too). Chapter Four covers the narratives that are most directly related to gender issues, and chapter five covers other aspects of the participants' motives for migration. In both chapters, I trace the footprints

of ideological and political contexts from the host country in the day-to-day experiences of participants in relation to migration.

Chapters Six and Seven narrate the post-migration lived experiences of the participants, and these chapters illustrate how geographical displacements can alter women's personal and social identities. In Chapter Six, we look at the changes in the participants' personal identities as both individuals and women. This chapter examines the ways that migration can transform the participants' perceptions of womanhood and gender relations, the impact of these changes in attitude on the participants' personal and family lives, and the ways that the social-political context of New Zealand can enable women to re-negotiate the power relationships in their families.

Chapter Seven, the last data chapter, concerns the social experiences of Iranian female migrants in their daily interactions with New Zealanders. We discern the ways that Iranian females reconstruct their social identity in New Zealand (in many cases by minimising the religious aspects of their identity and emphasising other aspects of themselves). This chapter also explores how the participants deal with experiences of discrimination and exclusion from the surrounding society, and how they redefine their relationship with the official and governmental sectors in the host society.

Chapter Eight, as a concluding chapter, recaps the outcomes of the research, and discusses the study's findings in the wider social and political context. In this chapter, I assess the research contributions and implications of the findings, to determine if they are in line with my research aims as proposed in the introduction chapter.

Chapter Two: Iran and New Zealand: The Nature of Politics and Political Institutions

The political and social structures of the host and the origin countries are of great importance in this study. To understand the motivations for emigration in relation to its political context, we need to examine the dominant political ideology in Iran, and the ways it is institutionalised in the country's political system. In addition, an overview of the political ideologies, institutions, and traditions in the host country (NZ) will be helpful for understanding the trends of acculturation and integration for Iranian women in New Zealand. This overview can help us trace the effects that specific policies have had on the daily experience of ordinary citizens, and particularly of migrant women. In the first part of this chapter, the political system and institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran are discussed. In the second part, the New Zealand political system and institutions are considered in relation to the country's political traditions and trends.

Islam and Politics

The relationship between Islam, politics, and governance has always been a matter of debate in Islamic political thought. Although these discussions can be traced back to 632 CE and the early days after Prophet Muhammad passed away, the emergence of what we call ‘political Islam’ is a more recent phenomenon that has its roots in the socio-political conditions of Muslim countries in the last two centuries. Islam is an extremely law-centric religion, full of moral instructions, with numerous do’s and don’ts concerning the economy, social life, and morality.

These criteria give Islam the potential to be interpreted or used as a distinct social and political ideology, in response to the challenges of contemporary society. Therefore, Islam as a ‘political ideology’ has emerged as the result of Muslim peoples’ military, political, economic, cultural, and intellectual interactions with the ‘West’¹³ (Ayoob, 2004).

‘Political Islam’ has been characterised as a ‘form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organisations that pursue political objectives’ (Denoeux, 2002, p. 7). Basically, political Islam is the use of Islam as a political ideology, rather than as a religious practice. This politicised ideology cannot be characterised as a single movement or idea, as

¹³ It should be mentioned that Islam has always been political in the Middle Eastern context, whether it was in the Umayyad, Abbasid, Safavid, or Ottoman periods. However, in this section I discuss the emergence of Islam as a coherent set of ideologies in response to Western ideologies and the emergence of modern secular nation states.

its expressions range between extremes of fundamentalism and pluralism. Heywood (2012) distinguishes at least three main types of political Islam, including Wahhabism (or Salafism), Shia fundamentalism, and moderate or liberal Islam. Although these various types of political Islam represent profoundly different interpretations of the religion, they all have one point in common: ‘Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world’ (Ayoob, 2004, p. 1).

The rise of political Islam in the modern world began the 1920s with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. However, the most significant development for this movement was shaped through the 1979 revolution in Iran, which led to foundation of the world’s first ‘modern’ Shia Islamic nation-state (Heywood, 2012, p. 164). This development allowed political Islam to move from the arena of abstract ideas into the realm of political practice.¹⁴ In the next section, I briefly discuss the background of Shia political thought.

Shia Islam and the Concept of Governance

Shia political jurisprudence has produced a wide range of opinions ‘on governance’. These opinions range from complete avoidance and disavowal of clerical involvement in politics, to a religious obligation to participate in politics, along with endorsements for various political models, including secular monarchy, democracy, or theocracy (Mavani, 2013).

The Shia sect emerged in the 600s CE through a failed rebellion against reportedly corrupt Islamic caliphs, who combined religious and political power. Then in the 700s CE, Shia rebels played a part in overthrowing the first dynasty of Islamic caliphs (the Abbasid revolution). The Shia believed that rulership should belong to the most virtuous leaders, who they claimed were the direct descendants of the Prophet through the marriage of Ali and Fatima. However, after their rebellions were suppressed and the Prophet’s direct descendants

¹⁴ In this section, I provide a brief introduction to the interaction between Islam and politics, and the concept of ‘political Islam’, as a background for my discussion on ‘political ideology and political system of Islamic Republic of Iran’. I acknowledge that the interactions between religion and politics in the Middle East are extremely complicated, and I am not able to discuss all of these complexities here. For more information, see Enayat, H., *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, (2005), Esposito, J. L., *Islam and Politics*’ (1998), Nettler, R. L., Mahmoud, M., and Cooper, J., *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* (2000), and Black, A., *History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present* (2011).

were killed, driven into exile, or into ‘occultation’,¹⁵ Shia clerics took a strictly non-interventionist attitude toward political authority. They viewed worldly politics as inherently corrupt, and believed that the clergy should play a purely religious role in society, until such time as the pure Imam returned to rule the earth. For almost a thousand years, Shia jurists did not consider the possibility of establishing an Islamic state during the age of occultation (Kadivar, 2001).

In the 16th century, however, the Safavid dynasty rulers in Iran adopted Shiism as the official religion of the country, mainly to establish their religio-cultural and political distinction from the neighbouring Turkish-Sunni Ottoman Empire (Riddell, 2012, p. 151). The Shia clergy benefited from new political, social, and economic privileges, and starting at this time the first signs of a Shia political theory appeared in the writings of Shia clergymen.¹⁶ Since the 1500s, a spectrum of opinions developed concerning what Shia ideals should imply regarding the proper form of government, and the role of Shia jurists in political life (Kadivar, 2001; Khalaji, 2011).

For the next five centuries, from the establishment of Safavid dynasty until the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iranian politics involved an ongoing relationship between political and religious authorities. Even the Pahlavi dynasty, with its secular agenda, claimed its legitimacy partly from the shah’s role in protecting Shiism as the nation’s official religion (Rajaee, 2007). The coordination of powers between the clergy and the king was a primary theme in the theological writings in this era. However, it was not until the 1979 revolution that the clerical system presumed to go beyond ‘the realm of sacred affairs’ by taking a direct role in political leadership. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the relationship between state and religion was fundamentally changed by ‘thrusting clerics into unprecedented positions of political power which set the ground for the growth of Iran’s unique strand of religious authoritarianism’ (Khalaji, 2011, p. 132).

¹⁵ The Shia sect believes in the ‘occultation’ of the Twelfth Imam. Basically, they believe that the last holy imam of the Prophet’s lineage escaped death at the hands of the rulers by vanishing into a spiritual realm, from which he will return in the future. This Shia doctrine shapes the concept of an ideal community, or a utopia under divine guidance. Shia theologians say that history is moving towards the goal of an ideal society, and that this goal will be realised through the re-emergence of the hidden Imam, or Mahdi, who will be guided directly by God. According to this belief, when the Mahdi re-emerges, he will establish a just global state and will rule all the world.

¹⁶ The first appearance of such a ‘governance theory’ is found in the writings of Muhaqqiq Karaki (1461–1534), a famous Shia jurist of the Safavid era (Kadivar, 2001, p. 15).

Although many different socio-political factors could affect the formation of a modern Shia state in Iran, the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini was a determining influence in both theoretical and practical terms. The next section briefly discusses the main political theories of Khomeini and the theoretical framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Khomeini and the Theory of the Islamic State

Ayatollah Khomeini became the most effective ideologue of political Islam in Iran. He was the leader of the country's Islamic Revolution, and the political head of the nation from 1979 to 1989. Khomeini strongly rejected the traditional distinction between religion and politics, as in his famous slogan, 'our religion is our politics'.¹⁷

After being exiled to Iraq (in 1964) as punishment for his protests against the shah's policies, Khomeini formalised his political theory under the principle of the [absolute] 'guardianship of the jurist'.¹⁸ In a series of lectures presented in Najaf (Iraq), he argued that during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, a qualified jurist could and should assume the position of political leader. This theory was rooted in the imamate¹⁹ principle in Shia Islam, which Khomeini interpreted as requiring belief in governance by a grand ayatollah until the Twelfth Imam would return. In his book *Wilayat al-Faqih*²⁰ Khomeini explained his theory with reference to the Quran:

'Oh ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority'. Obeying those in authority (*wali al-amr*) is obligatory.

After the Holy Prophet, 'those in authority' refers to the infallible Imams and

¹⁷ This slogan was proclaimed for the first time by Hassan Modarres (1870–1937), an Iranian cleric, politician, and MP. Later it was more famously endorsed by Khomeini.

¹⁸ The concept of a 'guardianship of the jurist' appeared for the first time in the work of Mulla Ahmad Naraqi (1771–1829), (Kadivar, 2001) and several versions of this theory were suggested by later jurists.

¹⁹ Another feature of Shia Islam is called the Imamate, or guidance by messianic leaders who were descendants of the Prophet and are known as 'Imams'. The Shia believe that 'God designated Ali as the Prophet's successor, and that he was followed by the chain of 11 Imams from the progeny of Hussain b. Ali' (Mavani, 2013, p. 7). According to Shia belief, these Imams were as morally pure and infallible as the Prophet. All of these Imams rejected the authority of allegedly corrupt Islamic rulers. Almost all of them were killed by the rulers, and they are still regarded as angelic saints by their Shia followers. In a sense, this Shia rebellion against reportedly corrupt religious rulers was somewhat like the Protestant Christian revolt against the Catholic church, and this Shia revolt can be taken to imply the right of people to choose which religious leaders they consider holy (Griffith, 2001). However, the expectation of the twelfth Imam's return suggests a future restoration of autocratic rule, rather than rule by consent of the governed.

²⁰ This book in English called 'Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist' contains a collection of Khomeini's lectures delivered in the Najaf seminary in 1970, while he was in exile in Iraq.

after them it is the just jurists (fuqaha) who hold the authority (cited by Mirahmadi, 2009, p. 277).

This replacement for the missing Imam with a present jurist was an innovation in Shia law (Kadivar, 2001). The new doctrine proposed unlimited authority for a clerical jurist, without any public supervision. According to this ‘theory’, legitimate rule was divinely granted, so there was no place for ordinary people to choose in matters of law. During the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the choice of which religious expert was most qualified to rule had to be settled by a group of learned clerics.

Imamate, occultation, and ijtihad²¹ were the main concepts shaping the theory of the state in Khomeini’s thought. Khomeini was not the only jurist who was theorising the ‘guardianship of the jurist’. However, his version of the theory, known as ‘the absolute guardianship of the jurist’,²² was the most extreme version. Khomeini went so far as to claim that because protecting the government of the jurist was the ultimate moral obligation, the head of an Islamic government could decide to introduce measures that ‘take precedence over Islam’s primary commandments and all secondary commandments, even praying, fasting, and the Hajj’ (Kadivar, 2011, p. 475). Therefore, previous religious rulings could be dispensed with, if it was deemed necessary for the greatest good of the nation (Pirsoul, 2017).

Although Khomeini offered his theory of ‘the guardianship of the jurist’ from an Islamic perspective, based on his interpretation of Shia theology, we can recognise some similarities between his ideas and Plato’s theory of the philosopher king. In his *Republic*, Plato argued that philosophers are the only people who can be trusted to rule well. The idea of guardianship by the jurist proposes this type of role for a leading cleric (Nasr, 2007).

In the next section, I show how this theory has been institutionalised in the political system and public life of Iran.

²¹ Ijtihad, which can be translated as ‘independent (legal) reasoning’, is a process of thought which supplements the sources of religious jurisprudence, and allows for the creation of new Islamic laws, based on a combination of sacred traditions and critical reflection. Ijtihad gives the Shia community the potential for adapting its ideas to modern situations in the name of Islam, and of evolving over time, rather than regarding its practices as fixed and unchangeable. This principle can be taken to affirm reason in the process of moral choice. However, the practice of ijtihad has been conventionally reserved for the high-ranking clerics or jurist, and therefore denied to ordinary people (Enayat, 2004).

²² Khomeini’s theory of ‘guardianship of the jurist’ is known as an ‘absolute guardianship’ because of the ways that it defines the ‘realm of guardianship’, and due to its specific understandings of jurisprudence. For more information, see Kadivar (2001, pp. 107–111 [in Farsi]).

The Iranian Political System: An Overview

Thirteen years after he first articulated his theory, Khomeini got his chance to apply it in political practice. After successfully leading the revolution against the monarchy, Khomeini was in a strong position to establish the first Shia state in the world. In many cases, however, theories of governance cannot be made to exactly fit with social reality, and this was certainly the case in Iran. Therefore, although the Khomeini's theory of the 'guardianship of jurist' is the most dominant narrative in the Iranian political system, some Western concepts and narratives are also included in this system.

The first changes that happened in applying Khomeini's theory regarded the name of the state. Although he had generally used the term *Hokumat-e Islami* 'Islamic state' in referring to his ideal regime, a few months before the victory of the Iranian revolution he offered a new name: 'the Islamic republic'. As he described this 'Islamic republic' during his pre-revolution interviews in France, most listeners found the term incomprehensible, especially in relation to the Western context. For instance, a reporter from *Le Monde* asked Khomeini to clarify the meaning of the Islamic republic, specifically in terms of how a republic could function with a religious basis. In response, Khomeini said, 'Republic has the same meaning that it has in other places. We say Islamic republic because both the conditions of the one who is elected and the regulations that hold in Iran will be based on Islam, but the choice will be at the disposal of the people' (cited by Mirahmadi, 2009, p. 278).

This definition of Islamic government was more democratic than the definition that Khomeini had offered in his previously articulated theory. This shift in wording could be related more to the practical need for building political alliances in support of the revolution than to ideological changes in Khomeini's beliefs. Khomeini understood that he could not sell his ideal theocratic political theory (in which people would live in a strictly Islamic society and the public would play no important part) at a time when the Iranian people were in the midst of a pro-republican revolution against autocracy. Therefore, during the period of rising revolutionary sentiment, Khomeini kept quiet about his 'radical views on social and legal issues', and presented himself as a moderate leader who only asked for the removal of autocracy. This strategy was adopted mainly to assure people of the Iranian middle class (who might be terrified by the idea of living under the Islamic state) that their every 'rightful privilege' would be retained (Taheri, 1985, p. 228).

Later, when Islamist groups in Iran gained political power, they openly re-ordered Iran's institutions in a way that guaranteed the application of Khomeini's earlier theory, along with certain concessions to republican ideals. The institutionalisation of Khomeini's theory on the 'guardianship of jurist' consolidated the clerics' roles as supreme power holders. They established clerical institutions to supervise the other public sector institutions and to oversee the election process (Riddell, 2007, p. 163).

For example, Articles 5 and 107 of the Islamic Republic of Iran constitution reflected the main idea of absolute guardianship for the jurist. As Article 5 says, 'During the Occultation of the Guardian of the Age (the Twelfth Shia Imam) the guardianship and leadership of the community develops upon the righteous and pious juristconsultant, who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age' (cited by Rajaee, 2007, p. 121).

However, this central role for the theory of 'guardianship of the jurist' in the Iranian constitution does not mean that the Islamic republic is a simple dictatorship, ruled by an oligarchy of clergy. Alongside Article 5 there are a number of other articles in the Iranian constitution that emphasise the public's right to elect their political leaders, and several democratic institutions are established. Therefore, one of the main features of the power structure in the Islamic Republic is the official existence of both democratic and autocratic institutions. In other words, although modern political institutions exist in the governmental structure of the Islamic Republic, several unelected and nondemocratic institutions are incorporated to operate in a parallel fashion, with similar or overlapping functions (Kamrava & Hassan-Yari, 2004). Those parallel functions have caused extreme structural conflict between the elected and the non-elected institutions or power centres.

In addition to the formal institutions that are stipulated in Iran's constitution and its codified regulations, there are a number of informal institutions that are classified as religious or political associations, and are related to the Iranian leadership elite or the revolutionary security forces (Buchta, 2000, p. 2). These parallel institutions and power centres (of both formal and informal types) make for a complex, diverse set of power-holding agents in the Iranian political system, and such complexity makes the regime markedly different from most of the monolithic totalitarian regimes in the Middle East. In the next section, the most important formal and informal political institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran are explained. First, however, I need to briefly discuss the important role of Islam as a social institution that stands above all of the formal or informal institutions in Iran.

Islam as a Social Institution in Iranian Society

Islam, as a social religion, offers detailed guidelines to govern many aspects of social life, and these guidelines were formalised into several systems of Islamic jurisprudence over a period of several centuries. The Shia tradition has a very comprehensive and complicated bank of instructions, as well as a dynamic system for producing new instructions (through *ijtihad*, or ‘logical interpretation’). By the use of logic in ijihad, Islamic laws and traditions can be modified to suit changing times and circumstances, while still applying Islamic principles (Riegler, 2012, p. 141).

In the course of establishing an Islamic state in Iran, most of these traditional religious instructions were incorporated into the state’s legal system and more conservative system of Ijtihad has been used in order to adjust some of the Islamic rules.

It should be explained that Islamic jurisprudence institutionalises several kinds of social inequality. The most controversial legal inequalities concern the distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims, between men and women, between slaves and free people (a distinction that is now abolished), and between commoners and jurists (particularly in Shi'a jurisprudence) in terms of their rights and roles in public affairs (Kadivar, 2009). These inequalities are strongly reflected in the legal system of the Islamic Republic, which has formalised certain kinds of discrimination against women and minority religions.

Considerable controversy surrounds the issue of whether the Islamic Republic’s discriminatory policies are actually rooted in Islamic teachings, or if they are mainly adopted to serve the political purposes. As mentioned earlier, Islam as a religion and the Quran as a foundational text can both be understood or interpreted in several ways. Although some interpretations of Islam are overwhelmingly restrictive in terms of gender roles, religious freedom, and tolerance/toleration,²³ other interpretations offer much more inclusive and pluralistic understandings of Islam.

²³ The terms ‘tolerance and toleration’ are sometimes treated as synonyms in English, and they are used interchangeably in academic or philosophical discourse. However, for the purpose of this study, these two terms are treated according to the definitions proposed by Spencer. ‘Toleration’ is principled forbearance, or an

In terms of gender equality, some scholars (Mogadam, 2002; Mohammadi, 2007; Mir-Hosseini, 2009) have suggested the reinterpretation of Islam to support gender equality, as they believe that the root of gender discrimination in Islamic tradition is patriarchal interpretations of the religion, rather than Islam itself (Riegler, 2012, p. 142)

In terms of religious freedom, Afsaruddin (2017) traces the concepts of religious ‘tolerance’ and ‘toleration’ as they appear in the Quran and other Islamic traditions, and she suggests that these concepts were actually foundational principles in early Islam. In particular, she traces the concept of ‘religious tolerance’ in the Quran, and argues that verse 2:256 endorses freedom of religion for all humans. This verse seems to directly condemn compulsion, either to make people accept or reject any religion. Afsaruddin explains that it was only later, during the second century of Islam, that rulers and scholars of the new Islamic empire declared this verse to be ‘abrogated’ by later teachings. This abrogation was done mainly for political reasons, ‘to legitimate the triumphalist worldwide empire’ of Islamic rulers (Afsaruddin, 2017, p. 101). Over time, the whole concept of tolerance as promoted in the Quran was whittled down to a policy toleration for non-Muslims as legal and spiritual inferiors, so long as they obeyed their Muslim rulers and paid a ‘jizya tax’ on non-Muslims (Afsaruddin, 2017, p. 108).

Although we should recognise the great diversity of perspectives in understanding Islam, for the purpose of this chapter the definition of ‘what Islam is’ is mostly limited to the version officially endorsed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The major elected and unelected political institutions which apply ‘Shia Islamic principles’ in governing Iran can be briefly summarised as follows.

Political Institutions in Iran

The supreme leader. The most powerful person in the political system of Iran is the supreme leader, who has structural authority over most other institutions. The responsibilities of the supreme leader include the appointment or termination of the ‘six clerical members of the guardian council, the head of the judiciary, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the commanders of military and security forces’. The supreme leader also ‘determines general policies of the Islamic Republic after consultation with the expediency

official policy of non-interference in others’ beliefs. ‘Tolerance’ refers to a willingness to embrace diversity, or to actively promote respect for different religious beliefs (Spencer, 2017, pp. ix–xx).

council', appoints the permanent and rotating members of the expediency council, orders referenda, and signs the presidential decrees after elections (Kamrava & Hassan-Yari, 2004, p. 505).

The assembly of experts.²⁴ This assembly with 86 seats is elected by a popular vote, and its members serve eight-year terms. All members are required to be experts in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and the candidates are assessed for their knowledge of jurisprudence by a guardian council. The main responsibility of this assembly is to elect the supreme leader, as well as advise him on a range of national issues (Article 107 of the constitution). The constitution states that the assembly of experts has the authority to remove the supreme leader from power. However, the assembly has never yet challenged any of the supreme leader's decisions. In 2009, when one of the members criticised Ayatollah Khameini and asked for more supervision by the assembly over his leadership, the other members tried to dismiss him from the assembly by signing a petition against him.

The law does not ban women from running for the assembly of experts, and in the 2016 election, 16 female religious scholars submitted their candidacy (Khbaronline, 2015). The guardian council, however, disqualified them all on grounds of having insufficient credentials in Islamic law.

The president. This official is the head of the executive branch, and the second most powerful person, after the supreme leader (according to the constitution). The president is elected by a direct vote of the people for a four-year term. Act 114 of the constitution seems to restrict the presidency to males. As the head of the government, the president appoints and dismisses ministers, whom the parliament must confirm. There is no limitation on the president's appointments or dismissals of ministers, save that the supreme leader can override his decisions. The president is also responsible for implementing the laws passed by the parliament and for managing state budgetary and administrative matters.

The parliament (or majles). The institution of parliament was established in Iran after the constitutional movement in 1906. In the Islamic Republic, a new single-chamber parliament has been elected every four years since 1980. Although the constitution stresses the 'absolute sovereignty of God', it also declares that that 'parliament is the trustee of this sovereignty' (Buchta, 2000, p. 58). Therefore, the parliament can legislate 'in all matters

²⁴ The assembly of experts is comparable to the Vatican's college of cardinals (Sial, 2011).

within the context of the constitution' (Kamrava & Hassan-Yari, 2004, p. 505). Also, the parliament supervises the executive branch, and can remove the president and ministers, subject to confirmation from the supreme leader. Since 2000, the Iranian parliament has had 290 members. This body includes proportional representation for the Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian minorities.

A range of laws regarding women's rights have been passed in the Iranian parliament since 1980. Some of these laws have improved conditions for women (compared with the initial situation after the 1979 revolution), but a larger number of new laws have imposed additional restrictions on women. In just the last decade, several bills in parliament have been proposed or passed that further restrict or breach women's basic rights. One of the most controversial laws involving gender discrimination introduced 'gender quotas' to restrict and limit women's access to some study programs in various universities.²⁵ Another law allowed men to remarry without their current wife's permission. In 2014, the parliament discussed two bills proposing legal reforms to encourage child bearing, so as to increase the population.²⁶ If these two bills are passed into law, women's access to birth control will be highly restricted, and voluntary sterilisation will be outlawed (Amnesty International, 2015).²⁷ Also, all employers, private or governmental, will be instructed to give first priority in job hiring to male applicants who have children, second to male applicants without children, third to female applicants with children, and last to female applicants without children.

²⁵ The numbers of these majors and the universities concerned vary every year, but at the time this law was introduced, the main idea was to restrict the number of female students to less than 50% of university capacity. Then in 2011, more restrictions were introduced by the Ministry of Education, which limited the numbers of women in engineering programs to 20% of all admissions (Alizadeh & Danesh, 2017). In 2012, more majors in more than 30 universities were assigned gender quotas, including English literature, archaeology and business. It should be mentioned that women are well represented across a wide range of majors in Iranian universities. In 2001, women outnumbered men for the first time, and in 2012, they made up more than 60% of the overall student body (Sahraei, 2012).

²⁶ These bills were approved in the first draft with an overwhelming majority in August 2014. Then one of them was amended by the parliament, based on guardian council recommendations, and the other bill was sent back to the cultural commission of parliament for more discussion. At the time of writing this thesis, these bills have not been passed into law.

²⁷ In 2015, Amnesty International criticised the Iranian parliament for its attempts to reduce Iranian females to 'baby-making machines rather than human beings' (Amnesty International, 2015). For more information see the whole report by Amnesty international 'You shall procreate Attacks on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Iran' (Amnesty International, 2015).

The Iranian parliament has also passed certain reforms to reduce the level of discrimination on women. For instance, a law that had restricted single women from applying for Iranian government scholarships to study overseas was revised, so that some such applications were allowed. Also, an article in the inheritance law was changed in a way that slightly increased women's shares from their husband's estates.

It should be noted that moving towards gender equality in the law has never been a priority of the Iranian parliament, and the few minor legal changes that have been proposed to expand women's rights have usually been vetoed by the guardian council.

The guardian council. This council of twelve members includes six clerics (who are selected by the supreme leader) and six jurists (who are elected by the parliament). The most important responsibility of this council is to guard the principles of Islam and the constitution by reviewing all laws passed by parliament (Article 94 of the constitution). Any laws which the council views as contrary to Islam or to the constitution are vetoed, and therefore this council plays a role somewhat like that of the upper house in Western political systems. It should be noted that the process of decision-making in this council gives disproportionate power to the clerical members. The six clerical members are the only members who can veto parliamentary legislation on the basis of its violating Sharia law. In the case of laws deemed inconsistent with the constitution, all twelve of the council's members are allowed to vote.

Some of the most important bills that have been vetoed by the guardian council include a bill that increased the minimum age of marriage for girls from nine to fifteen years old, a law giving divorced mothers custody of their sons until they reach the age of seven, a law giving women equal rights in applying for divorce, and a bill authorising the Iranian government to join the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.²⁸ Some provisions of these laws were later approved through the expediency council, and others were blocked from ever becoming law.

The guardian council also supervises all elections in Iran from start to finish (Article 99 of the constitution). This responsibility makes it possible for the guardian council to reject or approve the nominations of candidates for the president, the parliament, or members of the assembly of experts. Therefore, all candidates must be approved by this council before they

²⁸ All of these bills were discussed in the 6th parliament (2000–2004). Most of the members of this parliament (68%) represented reformist groups, and most of them never got a chance to be re-elected in the next election, because the guardian council disqualified them.

can stand in elections. In many cases, a large number of candidates are disqualified at this stage, mainly because the council assumes that they do not fully support the principle of absolute guardianship of the jurist.

The expediency council (or the nation's exigency council). This council is a consulting assembly for the supreme leader, and most of its members are selected by him. According to Article 112 of the constitution, the main responsibility of expediency council is to decide on cases in which the parliament and the guardian council cannot reach an agreement.

Regarding the issue of gender equality, this council has in some cases voted in favour of the parliament and passed some of the above-described legislation with certain changes. For instance, in the case of the article granting a divorced mother custody of her son until he is seven years old, the expediency council voted in favour of the parliament. Concerning the law to increase of the legal age of marriage for girls, the expediency council decreased the proposed minimum age from 15 to 13, but it allowed for the possibility of marriage before that age in cases specifically approved by a court.

The head of judiciary. This senior cleric is appointed by the supreme leader for a five-year term. His duties include the hiring, promotion, or termination of all judges. This official also appoints the head of the supreme court and the attorney general, both of whom are drawn from the ranks of senior clerics, and who have primary responsibility for their institutions (Kamrava & Hassan-Yari, 2004). Prior to the 1979 revolution, Iranian women could serve in any judicial position, including that of court judges. After the revolution, however, women were highly marginalised in the Iranian judicial system, and were banned from serving as judges independently, or from making substantial decisions in any case. The legal system in Iran also has a harsh policy against women's rights activists, and it has arrested, convicted, and imprisoned many women, mostly for their online activities (United Nations, 2015).

The above-described institutions are the main political structures of Iran. As already mentioned, this system suffers from functional overlaps and conflicts between the appointed and elected actors. The authority of the supreme leader over all of the elected institutions is institutionalised, and this affects all sectors of society. For example, the guardian council (in which the most powerful members are appointed by the supreme leader), oversees all parliamentary legislation and all decrees of the president. Despite the fact that the president is

elected by a public vote, he is still subject to approval by the supreme leader after the election, mainly because the theory of guardianship of the jurist does not accept the public vote as the ultimate source of legitimacy.

Figure 1 illustrates the political structure that has been outlined.

Figure 1. The political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Source: BBC (2009, June 9).

In addition to these official-political institutions, a number of informal institutions and groups (as well as some social practices or traditions) are institutionalised in the political and social structure, or else they operate in ways that affect the lower levels of administration. In the next section, this category of institutions is briefly described.

Informal Institutions

Revolutionary Guards and Basij. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (or IRGC) is one of the most important rings of power in the Iranian political structure. Its leaders are generally close to the supreme leader and to the more conservative political factions in the government. This organisation was formed shortly after the 1979 revolution in order to protect the revolution and its achievements (Article 151 of the Iranian constitution). The main function of the IRGC is to fight against the regime's domestic opponents and any other threats to the state (Alfoneh, 2008). The IRGC was the most important arm of the revolutionary state between 1979 and 1982. During this period, Khomeini and his supporters were struggling to establish and stabilise the Islamic Republic, and they were fighting with

their former allies, the Islamic Marxists, the Communists, and other left-wing groups (Buchta, 2000). During the eight years of war with Iraq, the IRGC was mainly engaged with the battle against Iraq's military forces. Since the war ended, the political and financial role of the IRGC has grown yet stronger. A large number of Iran's political elites either were or still are members of this organisation. For instance, more than half of the members of Ahmadinejad's cabinet (during his presidency of 2005–2009), were former IRGC officers (Alfoneh, 2008).

The Basij, as the most powerful paramilitary volunteer organisation, is dependent on the IRGC. One of this group's main obligations is to defend the Islamic Republic against potential domestic threats (Golkar, 2012). The Basij, with its numerous members around the country, is a most effective tool in the hands of hardliner groups, as it ensures their commanding position in the power structure. Due to changes in Iran's elected bodies during the reformist Khatami presidency (1997–2005), the supreme leader's dependency on the Basij and the Revolutionary Guards has intensified (Partow, 2011).

In general, the Basij and the Ansar (a special group inside the Basij) have been most visible in Iranian politics during periods when reformist leaders or their allies have gained a substantial share of power. For instance, during the first years of the Khatami presidency, the Basij were organised to act against reformists and their supporters. In many cases, they attacked student events at the universities, or harassed reformist political leaders such as Khatami's minister of the interior and his minister of culture and Islamic guidance. Similarly, in 2000, a group of Basijis assassinated Saeid Hajjarian, a reformist political strategist and advisor to President Khatami (Golkar, 2012). During major social movements and popular uprisings such as the Iranian student protests of 1999 or the green movement (after the 2009 presidential election), these armed groups have cooperated with other military and security troops to manage the crises. The Basij frequently suppress women's rights activists and their supporters, calling them threats to national security and to Islam. For instance, in 2006 when women activists called for a public protest to demand equal laws for women, Basiji groups, in cooperation with police, prevented the demonstrators from holding a peaceful assembly. They beat the demonstrators with batons, used pepper gas against them, and sprayed them with paint to mark and arrest them (Center for Human Rights in Iran, 2009).

In 2009, a group of 150 Basiji members gathered before the house of Shirin Ebadi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and women and children's rights activist. They chanted slogans

against her and destroyed the plaque to her law office (Iranian Nobel Peace winner Shirin Ebadi threatened in her home, 2009). A number of other activists for women's rights and legal reform, including Shadi Sadr and Faezeh Hashemi,²⁹ have been harassed by the Basij. By increasing the pressure on women activists, the Basij induced a number of them, including Ebadi and Sadr, to leave the country and pursue their activities overseas.

Apart from controlling female activists, the Basij have actively organised to monitor and enforce the dress code for women (or the requirement for wearing hijab) as a political and religious priority (Partow, 2011). This function of the Basij has allowed its members to police Iranian women in parallel with the regular police, and to play this role without official accountability to any organisation outside their group. The militia nature of this group and its advantage in not being accountable to the public, enables the Basij to violate laws, and in many cases to use violence against citizens. Some reports of their violence have been lodged with the provincial police offices in different cities, and have appeared in the media in Iran.

A number of incidents have been reported in the media concerning women who were harassed or physically attacked by members of the Basij over their style of dress. However, these incidents have rarely been investigated properly, and the link between Basij and these incidents have never been confirmed officially. For example, in 2014, hardliners issued warnings to women who failed to properly observe modest Islamic covering, and criticised the moderate elected government for not being sufficiently serious in confronting such women. These threats were followed by a series of acid attacks and stabbings against women in two Iranian cities. In one stabbing attack, some news sources named the attacker as a member of Basij (*Deutsche Welle*, 2014), and this man was later arrested as the main suspect in the case.³⁰ Concerning the acid attacks, as of late 2015 no one had been arrested.³¹

The Basij work as a pressure group and make propaganda by organising big rallies and demonstrations for implementing Sharia laws in public spaces, including strong control of the women's public dress code. In such cases, the Basij always claim that they represent the anger of the public and of the Muslim community (*Ummat-e Hezbollah*) against women's

²⁹ This woman is the daughter of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president of Iran (1989–1997), who was one of the most influential politicians in the country.

³⁰ For more information, see 'Stabbing of six women continues series of attacks against women'. (Center for Human Rights in Iran, 2014).

³¹ For more information about this incident, see 'One year after acid attacks against women in Isfahan, no arrests' (Center for Human Rights in Iran, 2015). For more information about possible political aspects of acid attacks, see: Torfeh, M. (2014). 'Acid attacks in Iran: A message for Rouhani?'

transgressions of hijab requirements, which are claimed to threaten Islamic values. For one recent example, in June 2015 the current semi-reformist government tried to loosen the restrictions against females attending sports events by allowing women entrance to attend a men's volleyball match. In response, Basiji groups organised demonstrations and threatened to 'spill blood'³² if women were admitted to sports stadiums. As a consequence, the government back-pedalled and announced that the restriction had not yet been removed.

Friday prayer imams. Friday prayers are important public ceremonies in Islam with considerable potential for serving political purposes. In these prayer services, which feature a public speech, the imams are traditionally supposed to talk about the most important political and social events of the past week. In Iran, the supreme leader selects Friday prayer imams from the most trusted cadres of clerics. Apart from leading the Friday prayers, the Friday imams serve as personal representatives of the supreme leader to each of the country's cities, towns, and villages with no accountability to any elected institutions (Kamrava & Hassan Yari, 2004). The Friday prayers function as propaganda forums for the leader, and they often call people to reject policies or social trends that the hardliners oppose.

Friday prayers Imams are generally very conservative regarding women's rights and they are close to the supreme leader. In Friday prayers, Imams often criticise and threaten women who depart from religious standards of dress, and they urge the government to use forceful measures to control women's hijab.³³

The roles of these various informal institutions, and the ways they help the government to enforce its policies on the female dress code, are very important. These informal institutions are able to push, threaten, or terrify females into conforming with the conservative dress code, and they do so without facing any accountability for their actions. In other words, although the morality police and other government institutions are required to follow legal norms when enforcing hijab, the Basij are not held accountable to those norms and regulations. They have the freedom to enforce the law in any way they want, because they are not a part of the formal structure of the government. Official institutions accept no responsibility for how informal institutions such as the Basij perform. Therefore, in cases like

³² For more information, see Kamali Dehghan, S. (2015), 'Doubts persist over Iranian pledge to ease ban on women at sports events'.

³³ For instance, see *The Guardian* (2010), 'Women to blame for earthquakes, says Iran cleric'.

the above-mentioned stabbing of females in the streets, the public is often well aware of what is happening. The independent media may openly report the identities of the attackers, but the government does not officially confirm these reports, and in many cases the accused are not prosecuted.

Moreover, there is considerable ambiguity about the requirements for women, with differing opinions on which styles of clothing do or do not violate the Islamic dress code. This lack of clear standards for female clothing may be an intentional policy, deliberately maintained to create anxiety for females. If women are kept unsure about what they can or cannot do in public, then they are more likely to be very cautious. This ambiguity also gives more power to the morality police officers, as it grants them authority to define the law according to their personal judgments. This ambiguity over the legal requirements, combined with the ambiguity over what informal institutions can do, raises serious questions regarding the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the Islamic Republic, especially among females. The enforcement of arbitrary rules by arbitrary agents generates public distrust of the government, its laws and regulations, and its law enforcement officers. In Chapter seven, I further discuss the issue of political trust among Iranian female migrants in New Zealand. Almost all of my participants report very low levels of trust towards the official institutions of their home country, and they describe rebuilding their trust toward public institutions in the host country.

The above-described informal institutions are power centres in the Islamic Republic. They are closely related to conservative and hardline political factions, and they help these factions to tighten their control over Iranian society. While the formal structures of government are designed to ensure the domination of appointed officials over elected representatives, the informal institutions are designed to reinforce the power of those appointed officials. As the result, the total structure of power strongly favours the non-elected officials, and it limits the influence of officials who are accountable to the electorate. Due to this structure, any type of major reform in the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran (including gender-related policies) by the elected officials has been rendered extremely difficult.

In the next section, I briefly, discuss how discrimination towards women has been institutionalised in the Iranian legal system, and how it has affected the lives of Iranian women.

The Feminine Experience of Living under the Islamic Republic of Iran

There is no doubt that women's rights, identity, and appearance are highly important concerns in Iranian politics. Therefore, we cannot study Iranian women's issues outside of their political context. Over the last century, the most significant political developments in Iran have started from efforts to control women's appearance.

In the first step, Reza Shah (1925–1941) implemented an unveiling policy to stop women from wearing the Islamic veil in public places. This was an integral part of his modernisation policy. Fifty years later, the Islamic regime made the veil compulsory for Iranian women, as a significant part of its Islamisation policy. Indeed, both the veiling and the unveiling of women have been political symbols of power for Iranian governments, which have imposed these requirements on women (Sedghi, 2007). Consequently in Iran, women's struggles for equality have been an important part of the country's political life.

The integration of politics with gender issues became stronger after the Islamic revolution in 1979, because the revolutionary government tried to introduce political Islam to the world, and the role of women was one of the most visible aspects of this ideology. Regardless of the international dimension of this issue, for the Islamic Republic, women's rights and specifically the ways that women dress in public are integral to state legitimacy. The political authorities argue that women's lack of adherence to the Islamic dress code in public undermines their authority. They fear that the concept that Iran is an Islamic society will gradually lose public support, which will challenge the necessity for having an Islamic government. Therefore, the Islamic Republic has drawn a red line around the issue of hijab, and it is set on controlling women's social activities such as public cycling or running. The established authorities believe that if they cannot impose their standards on women, then they will be viewed as failures in upholding religion and ruling the nation.

These attempts to control women's lives have not been restricted to the social or public sphere. The legal regime was shaped in a way that guaranteed governmental dominance in the private sphere of women's lives as well. For instance, 'a young woman is allowed to marry with the permission of her father, grandfather, or the court' (Iranian Civil Code, Articles 1043 and 1044). Or, marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man is not allowed (Civil Code, Article 1059). Also, citizenship by blood can only be inherited from fathers, and not by mothers. Therefore, children who are born from a foreign

mother can be Iranian, but not if their mother is Iranian and their father is foreign (Civil Code, Article, 976).

More importantly, the civil law, the Islamic penal law, and the family law all legitimise extreme discrimination against women. For instance, according to the laws adopted immediately following the 1979 revolution, a woman is legally obligated to obey her husband (Articles 1114 and 1108, The Islamic Civil Code of Islamic Republic of Iran). A man may take more than one wife (Article 942). A man can prohibit his wife from employment (Article 1117). A woman cannot leave the country without her husband's legal permission (Article 18, Iranian Passport Law). A man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes to do so, after obtaining court certification (Article 1130, Civil Code), but a woman can apply for divorce only in specific situations, (i.e., a husband's addiction to harmful drugs, desertion of the mutual home for at least six months, or conviction for a major crime). Moreover, the management and supervision of the affairs of children below the age of 18 is assigned to their father or paternal grandfather, and the mother has no legal say in the matter (Article 1181). In cases of a father's death, the guardianship of the children lies with the paternal grandfather, not with the mother (Article 1183). In the case of murder, the blood money for a Muslim woman is half that of a Muslim man (Article 300, Islamic panel law). In such cases, if the family of the murdered woman insists on the death penalty, then they are obliged to pay half of the blood money to either the murderer or to his family (Kar & Farshi, 2008). In the decades since 1979, only some of these laws have been slightly modified to accommodate women's rights.

In this section, I have tried to show how political Islam has shaped the political system in Iran, and how this system works in practice to produce specific gender-biased policies. Taking account of this process is significant for this study, particularly for the following chapters in which we discuss the possible correlation between gender-biased policies in Iran and the decisions of women to migrate. In order to understand this relationship, we need to unpack the daily experience of Iranian migrants to New Zealand in relation to this socio-political context. For instance, we need to see how the unequal laws towards women have affected the daily lives of the research participants, and how these laws may have played a role in their decisions for migration. Understanding the state's ideology and political system in Iran, the limited flexibility of this system for change, and the utilitarian approach towards women's public and private roles in this system provides a

background regarding gender policies in Iran, and the effects of those policies on the research participants' experiences.

Political Ideology and Institutions in New Zealand

In this section, I discuss the political ideologies and concepts that were developed in Europe and then became effective in New Zealand. I outline the ways that these ideologies and concepts have been manifested in the context of New Zealand, and how they have influenced political institutions, traditions, social trends, and the daily lives of ordinary citizens, particularly women.

Liberalism. Liberalism took form as a systematic political ideology in the nineteenth century, but the ideas and theories which shaped it developed over the course of the last three centuries. Although liberalism is commonly characterised as the 'political theory of modernity', historically it has reflected the desires of the rising middle classes of the eighteenth century, and their conflicts of interest with the power of absolute monarchies and feudal landholders in the West (Grey, 1995). Many of the main principles of liberalism, such as freedom, toleration and tolerance, individualism, and equality, have become deeply rooted in the institutions and customs of New Zealand (Duncan, 2007, p. 63). Liberalism, as the dominant political ideology in New Zealand, is institutionalised in the political and social construction of this society, and in its civil liberties such as the freedoms of speech, assembly, religious expression, or the press that are embodied in the country's Bill of Rights, laws, and the constitution.³⁴ The lawful processes for ensuring the implementation of these rights and for preventing any official attempts to breach them have been a major consideration in forming the country's structure of power.

The Political System of New Zealand: An Overview

The political system of New Zealand has been deeply shaped by the institutions of a 'parliamentary Westminster system inherited from the United Kingdom' (Barker, 2010, p. 15). Prior to 1996, when proportional representation in the electoral system came into effect, the political structure of New Zealand was very close to the United Kingdom's system (in terms of the party system, the forms of representation, and the ways that the government and

³⁴ For instance, see the *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act of 1990* (Articles 13–18), the *New Zealand Privacy Act of 1993*, and the *Human Rights Act of 1993*.

parliament functioned). In 1993, when New Zealanders voted for a shift to the MMP³⁵ electoral system instead of the FPP³⁶ system, New Zealand adopted the German model of proportional representation. That shift has been described as the most important change in the country's electoral system since women's enfranchisement in 1893 (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2018).

In the previous FPP electoral structure, a two-party system was dominant, at least from the 1935 election, and the cabinet was responsive to a unicameral parliament with a single party majority, with minority party members acting as the opposition. In the current MMP system, however, the cabinet has to negotiate with its supporting parties. Therefore, there is more space for citizens to support minor parties, and more room for different voices and ideologies to play a role in the political arena (Barker, 2010, p. 15). Although other social factors could play a role, the change to MMP has arguably assisted in the progress towards a more gender-balanced parliament. Before MMP, the proportion of women in parliament was rising (to over 20% in 1993), but it seems that female candidates gained a boost in support during the 1996 election, especially with women gaining list seats. The proportion of women passed one third in 2008 (34%), then declined a little (Ministry of Social Development, 2016), and reached 38.4% in the 2017 election, which was the highest level to date (Hurley, 2017).

Unlike most other countries, New Zealand does not have a particular document that can be recognised as its written constitution, although there are a number of different sources such as constitutional conventions, the Treaty of Waitangi, the principle of rule of law, and some Acts of Parliament which fulfil the function of constitutional law (Webb, 2010, pp. 103–104; Harris, 2010, p. 91). According to New Zealand's 1986 *Constitution Act*, the political structure is divided into four elements: the sovereign, the executive council, the legislature, and the judiciary (Mulgan, 2004, p. 53). In the next section, these main formal political institutions of New Zealand will be discussed.

³⁵ MMP stands for 'mixed-member proportional system'. In this electoral system, each voter gets two votes: one to choose their favourite political party, and the other to choose their constituency MP. The candidate who gets the most votes wins. Furthermore, any political party that wins at least one electorate seat OR 5% of the party vote gets a share of the seats in parliament proportional to its share of the party vote (Electoral Commission, 2014).

³⁶ FPP stands for 'first-past-the-post' electoral system. In this electoral system, each voter has one vote to choose his or her favourite candidate. The candidate with the most votes in each electoral district wins and becomes the MP for that seat. All the other votes are discarded.

New Zealand's Political Institutions

The sovereign. The role of the sovereign, or head of state, is filled by the king or queen of the United Kingdom, who also acts also as the sovereign of New Zealand. The main powers of the sovereign include the authority to appoint or remove ministers, to summon or dissolve parliament, to assent to legislation, to make statutory regulations by order in council, and to grant pardons (Mulgan, 2004, p. 53). Despite the above-listed powers of the king or queen, the sovereign (as represented by the governor-general) does not play an active role in the New Zealand government. In general, the sovereign plays a constitutional role, which is free from involvement in politics or administration (Wood & Rudd, 2004). The sovereign's representative in New Zealand, the governor-general, is appointed by the monarch, on the advice of the prime minister, for a five-year term.

The executive council. The executive council consists of ministers of the crown, who must be elected members of parliament. These ministers are appointed by the governor-general to act as advisers to the sovereign. The selected ministers and the governor-general (who is not a member of executive council but presides over it) constitute the executive council. This council issues executive orders, or orders in council (Mulgan, 2004, p. 53). The prime minister and cabinet are at the pinnacle of political power in New Zealand's Westminster-style system of government (Palmer & Palmer, 2004, p. 68). The most important functions of cabinet include decision making on policy and expenditure, proposals for new legislation, and ratification of international treaties (Webb, 2010, p. 156). The prime minister, as the head of cabinet and the head of the executive council, has several roles and powers. These powers or roles include serving as the principal adviser to the sovereign and her representative (the governor-general), determining the general policy direction of the government, appointing or dismissing ministers, and calling for elections (Palmer & Palmer, 2004).

The legislature. The main function of the legislature is drafting, establishing, or revising the country's laws. The parliament consists of an elected House of Representatives and the sovereign. However, as the role of the sovereign in law-making is reduced to a formality (the royal assent), the term 'parliament' usually refers to the House of Representatives alone. The members of the House of Representatives are chosen through national elections, which are held at intervals of not more than three years (Gold, 1992).

Following the 2011 and 2014 elections, the total membership of the House was 121, and, after the 2017 election, 120.

The parliament in New Zealand, as the highest law-making power, is theoretically able to pass any law without any limitation (Webb, Sanders, & Scott 2010). No other person, law-court, or body can invalidate or set aside laws that have been ratified by the parliament. Also, any proposal to make a new statute or to change an existing law must have the approval of the House (Mulgan, 2004, p. 54).

Although law making is the main function for the parliament, the MPs are also responsible for other functions such as challenging government policies or actions, scrutinising the performance of government programs, holding government officials accountable to public standards, approving the government's budget, and receiving petitions from members of the public.

In the political structure of New Zealand, the parliament plays the most important role to ensure the healthy functioning of the whole system. The unique position of the parliament, as the only political structure that is directly accountable to the public, means that its members must explain and define their policies to voters, thereby increasing the transparency of the whole system. The ability of political parties to use the parliamentary platform for criticism or self-promotion determines how well they can present initiatives, deal with counter-arguments, and win wider support (Wood & Rudd, 2004).

The judiciary. As an independent body, this branch of the government is responsible for creating and interpreting its own case law, as well as applying or interpreting parliamentary law. The Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal and the High Court are the highest courts in the judicial system of New Zealand. Although the task of the judiciary is ‘solving the disputes of fact and law’ between citizens, it is also responsible to do the same between citizens and public bodies (Webb, Sanders, & Scott, 2010, p. 119).

One of the main functions of the judiciary branch in New Zealand is to protect the individual rights of citizens. In exercising this function, the courts are able to ‘review the particular decisions of the executive which [have] affected individual people’ and to breach the principle of natural justice (Mulgan, 2004).

Concerning the judiciary’s other function of interpreting parliamentary legislation, the ‘judiciary is entitled to prefer the meaning of an enactment that is consistent with the New

Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990'. In cases of clear inconsistency with the Bill of Rights these acts should, if possible, be read in a manner that is consistent with the Act. However, the parliament can and does pass laws that are considered inconsistent with the Act, and the judiciary still has to apply those laws as written (Webb, Sanders, & Scott, 2010, p. 125). In some countries, such as the United States and Canada, the courts can overrule any act of the legislature that is held to breach the basic rights of citizens, but New Zealand's Bill of Rights does not allow for full-scale judicial review (Mulgan, 2004). However, New Zealand has certain watch-dog bodies, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Review Tribunal, that are established to address unlawful discrimination in areas such as ethnicity, gender, or religion (Mulgan, 2004, p. 172, 177).

The judicial system of New Zealand is independent, and the judges are apparently unbiased politically. The significant tradition of non-political appointments to the judiciary helps to guarantee the independence of this branch from other institutions of government. High Court judges and Supreme Court judges are appointed by the governor-general (on the recommendation of the attorney-general), and they can be removed from their positions only by a resolution of the House of Representatives—for misbehaviour or incapacity. Moreover, there are some specified constitutional conventions that help to guarantee the independence of the judiciary from the parliament. For instance, it is traditionally accepted that MPs should not publicly criticise the decisions of judges, and that the courts should not interfere with parliamentary procedure (Mulgan, 2004, p. 54).

In an overall view, it seems that the main three institutions of government in New Zealand can coordinate and interact effectively with an acceptable level of balance among them. The systematic checks and balances of power among these branches, combined with free and competitive elections, the high level of protection for freedom of speech and of the press, and the low levels of political corruption, all represent the principles of liberal democracy in practice.

The other significant feature of this political system is the capacity for self-reform. For most of the 20th century, the New Zealand political system had been commonly described as the purest form of Westminster democracy in the world (Levine, 2004). However, in the last years of that century, New Zealand began a process of political change to rearrange some aspects of its electoral, parliamentary, and governing systems. Although

the 1996 electoral system transition from FPP³⁷ to MMP³⁸ decreased the purity of NZ's adherence to the Westminster system, the overall health of the system has not been affected (Levine, 2004). New Zealand's vote for the MMP system, which could enable a better reflection of the pluralism and diversity of society, demonstrated the capacity of the political system for self-reform and adaptation to social change without any recourse to revolutionary actions or violence.

Apart from above-described formal institutions of power, there are certain other important informal traditions in New Zealand's political life that contribute to the political system. These traditions are discussed in the next section. A discussion of these traditions demonstrates how the concepts of toleration and tolerance, liberty and freedom and equality have been embodied in political traditions and institutions and practices in New Zealand.

The Tradition of Secularism

New Zealand is not an officially Christian state, and it has never had a state-sanctioned church. At the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the French Catholic Bishop Pompallier intervened to ensure that the future British colony would uphold religious toleration. A written statement (not incorporated into the Treaty itself) was read to those assembled at Waitangi: 'The Governor says the several faiths of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also the Maori custom, shall be alike protected by him' (cited in Orange, 1987, p. 53). This statement did not include Islam or other major religions, but in light of the history of discrimination against the Roman Catholic faith in England, it did lay down a principle of religious toleration and the separation of church and state.

The earliest parliamentary proceedings affirmed the political equality of all religious denominations. However, there has been some discrimination against Roman Catholics in relation to the sovereign. The Act of Settlement 1701, which is incorporated into New Zealand law, indicates that Catholics are prevented from becoming heirs to the throne. Therefore, anyone who becomes a Roman Catholic is disqualified from inheriting the role of the sovereign (Royal Succession Act 2013, 2013).

Although we cannot call New Zealand an officially Christian state, this country has an arguably long tradition involving the de facto establishment of a generic form of Christianity

³⁷ First-past-the-post electoral system

³⁸ Mixed-member proportional system

(Ahdar & Stenhouse, 2000, p. 75). Consequently, the laws and public institutions have represented the predominantly Christian character of the population, as the civil law of Western civilisation has historically been Christian law. However, during the 1960s a steady shift began, which has been called ‘the erosion of the cultural or de facto establishment of Christianity’ (Ahdar, 2006, p. 619). In this process, various Christian observances and practices that were historically protected in New Zealand law have been challenged or ‘disestablished’. The laws and practices governing civil and social life are therefore increasingly detached from Christian influence. For instance, homosexuality and prostitution have been decriminalised, civil unions and religious marriages are deemed equally legitimate, and marriage has been made inclusive of same-sex partners. At this point, discussions are in progress to change additional laws that have reflected traditional religious attitudes, such as new policies on euthanasia and the use of cannabis.

As previously mentioned, New Zealand is an officially secular country (in that it has no state-backed religion), but this secularity has never been entirely ‘pure’. Examples of a special position for Christian beliefs or symbols in New Zealand’s political life include the following: A Christian-style opening prayer has been read at the start of each parliamentary session since 1854.³⁹ Official oaths are normally sworn on the Bible (although other forms of oath affirmation are also allowed). The public holidays include religious occasions such as Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Monday. The monarch, Elizabeth the Second, is recognised as the Queen of New Zealand ‘by the grace of God’, and one of her titles is Fidei Defensor (or ‘Defender of the Faith’). The national anthem is a hymn entitled ‘God Defend New Zealand’. ‘Blasphemous libel’ remains on the law books as a criminal offense (Ahdar, 2006, p. 632).⁴⁰

The principals of religious freedom and tolerance are established in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act of 1990, which has four directly relevant provisions. According to s. 13 of this act, ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, including the right to adopt and to hold opinions without interference’.⁴¹ Also, s. 15 of the

³⁹ After the fifty-second parliament assembled in 2017, the newly elected Speaker, the Rt. Hon. Trevor Mallard, changed the wording of the daily prayer, removing references to Jesus Christ and the Queen. This change led to debate about the wider significance of the prayer. Some observers have argued in favour of the “traditional” role of Christian values in New Zealand’s parliamentary and legal history. Others have emphasised that New Zealand is increasingly diverse in religious and ethnic terms, and that it is a largely secular nation. Either way, the Speaker has the power to change the wording, as no prayer is prescribed by law.

⁴⁰ At the time of writing, this section of the Crimes Act was going to be repealed.

⁴¹ *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act of 1990*, section 13.

Act holds that everyone has the right to manifest his or her religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, and to practise religious observances or teachings either in public or private (Cox, 2010, p. 25).⁴² In particular, this Act has aimed to restrict any action by a public body that might infringe on this freedom of opinion and faith. Moreover, s. 20 of the Act provides protection and freedom of practice for religious minority groups, and s. 21 prohibits any sort of discrimination on the ground of religious and ethical beliefs, with reference to the Human Rights Act. On the basis of these two sections (20 and 21), New Zealand is required to accommodate non-Christian faiths without discrimination, and it can therefore expect to face various claims for protection of religious freedom from minority groups such as Muslims and Hindus. At the same time, growing numbers of secularists, rationalists, and atheists insist that freedom from religion must be equally respected in New Zealand (Ahdar, 2006, p. 658).

The Tradition of Feminisms

Feminisms are an institutionalised tradition in the social and political culture of New Zealand, and the feminist movements in New Zealand have been among of the most successful in the world. This was the first country to give women the right to vote, in 1893. After this achievement, New Zealand's women's movement shifted to demands for social and economic equality. This second wave of New Zealand feminisms was also successful by the late 1960s, bringing dramatic changes in the status and social expectations of women. The women's movement achieved valuable outcomes in areas such as employment, domestic violence, and paid parental leave. The key element of this second wave was the progressive removal of legal inequalities affecting women, and the introduction of laws prohibiting discrimination against women (Duncan, 2007).

The women's movement in New Zealand has also made substantial progress in electing and appointing female political leaders. Between March 2005 and August 2006, New Zealand was the first country in the world in which all of the highest offices were occupied by women (at the same time). The sovereign was Queen Elizabeth II; the governor-general was Dame Silvia Cartwright; the Prime Minister was Helen Clark; the speaker of the House of Representatives was Margaret Wilson; and the chief justice was Dame Sian Elias.

⁴² *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act of 1990*, section 15.

The trend of political changes regarding women's rights in New Zealand has suggested that political changes bring social changes, and the combination of social and political changes has led to reform in individual rights for women in the areas of family, work, and income. In the next stage of change, all these kinds of empowerment may bring further political outcomes.

Although the above-mentioned achievements for women's rights are substantial, the current situation in New Zealand remains inadequate. New Zealand is often praised on the international stage as a leader in women's rights, but a closer examination reveals that this image is misleading, as a number of important issues remain unresolved. (Davies, McGregor, Pringle, & Giddings, 2018). In particular, the ongoing issues of the gender-pay gap and family violence clearly show that much work is needed to achieve real gender equality in New Zealand. Although these two issues can be discussed independently, they are actually connected in many ways, and each of these problems tends to reinforce the other. Keeping women in lower income jobs, or paying them less for the same work, can raise barriers that prevent them from escaping domestic violence. Women who earn less can be more vulnerable to financial and emotional pressure, which can put them at risk of violence. Also, experiencing domestic violence at home can affect women's performance at work, which can further limit their earnings.

On average around the globe, women earn 23% less than males doing the same jobs (UN, 2017). In New Zealand, the gender pay gap has fluctuated at around 12% since 2002.⁴³ Any progress in reducing this gap has been very slow. Actually, the gap is increasing among workers in higher income brackets (Pacheco, Li, & Cochrane, 2017). According to a report by the Ministry for Women, around 80% of the gender pay gap occurs due to unexplained factors. In many cases, however, there is clear evidence that such gaps are related to the glass ceiling effect (Pacheco, Li, & Cochrane, 2017, p. 8). Furthermore, a number of researchers have noted the effects of neoliberal policies in New Zealand over the past few decades, showing that policies of deregulation or privatisation have contributed to gender pay gaps (Davies, McGregor, Pringle, & Giddings, 2018). It is also important to mention that the gender pay gap is wider for women of minority ethnicities. For instance, Maori and Pacific Island females have lower rates of pay than both women and men of other ethnicities (Ministry for Women, 2018,). The widest gap is reported in comparing the wages of Pacifica

⁴³ In the second quarter of 2018, the gender pay gap was about 9.2%, which was the second smallest gap recorded in the last two decades (Stats NZ, 2018).

females with those of Pakeha males (Stats NZ, 2018, Hayan, 2011). At present, no data exist on the gender pay gaps for women of other particular ethnicities, but based on the evidence regarding Pacifica women, it seems evident that the gender pay gap is wider for migrant females.

In addition, New Zealand has one of the highest reported rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the developed world (Gulliver, Fanslow, Fleming, Lucassen, & Dixon, 2018), with one third of the ever-partnered New Zealand women reporting that they have experienced physical and/or sexual IPV in their lifetimes. When psychological/emotional abuse is included in the surveys, 55% of NZ women report having experienced IPV in their lifetimes. In 2016, the NZ police investigated 118,910 reports of family violence (New Zealand Family Violence Clearing House, 2017), and the police estimate that only 18 to 20% of family violence incidents are reported to them. Between 2009 and 2015, there were 92 IPV deaths. In 98% of these fatal events, the killings were preceded by a recorded history of abuse, but the women were not protected from abusive male partners (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016).

Over the past few decades, the government has introduced several laws and policy changes to manage the issue of domestic violence. The centrepiece of these laws is the Domestic Violence Act of 1995. However, this law and other recent reforms have typically focused on enabling intervention following violence, rather than preventing abuse. Also, these laws and policies have focused on addressing proximal risk factors rather than distal risk factors. For instance, more attention has been paid to identifying personal indicators such as ‘help-seeking or the personal characteristics of the victims and/or perpetrator’, rather than examining social risk factors such as ‘poverty, alcohol abuse, intergenerational trauma or the impact of colonisation’ (Gulliver et al., 2018, p. 1).

As with the issue of the gender pay gap, ethnicity also appears as a factor in the incidence of domestic violence. In general, Māori women are twice as likely to experience violence as other New Zealand women (Ministry for Women, 2015, p. 4). Also, migrant women from Asian or Pacifica backgrounds are more at risk of being killed by their partners than any other group except Maori women (*Ibid*, p. 1,389). Certain factors that are common among migrant females make them more vulnerable to domestic violence. These factors include language barriers, isolation from host society and community, lack of family support in the new country, and insecure visa status. On the top of these factors, certain cultural

traditions such as stigmatising divorce, dowry payment, under-aged marriage, or arranged marriages can make the situation harder for female migrants, and put them at greater risk of domestic violence. In chapter six we further discuss how immigration tends to affect internal family relationships or power structures, and how changes resulting from migration can increase the risk of domestic violence against women.

The Concepts of Biculturalism and Multiculturalism

As New Zealand has been a white settler society with a large indigenous community with whom it has a treaty, and as it later acquired a great diversity of immigrants, the politics of identity have always been important.⁴⁴ Since the 1980s, as a response to Maori claims for their collective rights, biculturalism (in recognition of the indigenous rights and the principles stated in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi) has been adopted as the official policy of the country. At the same time, through the development of neoliberal policies enacted by the fourth Labour government (1984–1990), the human capital approach has replaced the race-based approach to immigration policy. Prior to 1974, automatic entry rights were granted to migrants from traditional source countries such as Britain and Ireland. Then a new policy prioritised a selection of migrants who could fill skills shortages. The 1987 Immigration Act formally prioritised labour and skills criteria over racial and cultural criteria (Simon-Kumar, 2014).

As a consequence of this policy, the overall ethnic composition of the country has changed considerably. For example, between the census years of 1991 and 2013, the percentage of residents reporting Asian ethnicity grew from 3% to nearly 12% (Ministry of Social Development, 2009; Statistics New Zealand, 2015). Between 1986 and 1996, the rate of growth for the Chinese population was 176%, for the Indian population 141%, and for the total Asian population 189% (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, p. 108). Such changes in the origins and numbers of migrants, and the fact that New Zealand seems destined to grow yet more culturally and ethnically diverse over time, have made an official recognition of this

⁴⁴ As New Zealand was a ‘white-settler’ colony of Britain, there was an explicit aim among early policy-makers to exclude migrants from the Asian continent, and to discriminate against those who did immigrate. This policy involved, for example, a law denying ‘Asians’ eligibility for the Old-Age Pension, initiated in 1898. In the 1970s, politically motivated attacks on immigrant workers from the Pacific Islands led to the infamous ‘dawn raids’ in pursuit of ‘overstayers’. Also, anti-immigrant attacks (especially on ‘Asians’) were a regular feature of political rhetoric from the populist New Zealand First Party, especially in the early 2000s (Duncan, 2007). In Chapter 7, I discuss the history of racially targeted prejudice and discrimination against non-white migrants in more detail.

diversity inevitable. Therefore, since early 2000s, the government has placed a considerable emphasis on developing a multicultural context for the country. Although New Zealand does not have any official commitment to multiculturalism, bi-culturalism is the legislated ethnic policy, and the country has actually practised ‘de facto multiculturalism’ for at least two decades (Simon-Kumar, 2015). An Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Human Rights Commission’s Diversity Action Programme have been considered the two most important governmental institutions for promoting, supporting, and recognising the multicultural context of New Zealand (Terruhn, 2016).

In official practice, therefore, New Zealand observes a ‘strong’ bi-cultural policy that recognises and makes exemptions or special measures for the indigenous Māori people. At the same time it observes a ‘weak’ multicultural approach towards immigrants of minority ethno-religious groups. This ‘weak’ multiculturalism prohibits discrimination, and mandates respect for the participation of diverse cultural and religious groups in civil society. However, this policy does not provide for any special minority-group recognitions, exemptions, or special measures in law or policy. In this way, the type of multiculturalism that New Zealand practices differs from what mainstream liberal theories of multiculturalism have advocated. The mainstream theories emphasise state recognition of minority ethnic groups, using legal terms such as ‘special group representation rights within political institutions’, ‘self-governance rights’, and ‘protection of specific religious and cultural practices’, including exemptions from specific dress codes, or from regulations that contradict certain groups’ religious beliefs (Kymlicka, 1995, pp. 37–38).

Also, in terms of public administration, the New Zealand government makes official documents available in multiple languages, so that clients can ask for such documents and/or for interpreters in their own languages.⁴⁵ The New Zealand State Services Commission encourages ‘diversity’ regarding employment practices in the public sector, and the ‘superdiversity’ of Auckland, the country’s most populous city, is recognised as a positive trend.

Despite all of the above-mentioned trends, there are still major barriers in terms of power-sharing, representation in state or local institutions, and tolerance regarding the rights

⁴⁵ For instance, some of the documents in ‘The Electoral Commission’ website are available in several languages, including Farsi. Also, ‘Treaty of Waitangi’ is translated to 30 languages, including Farsi.

of ethnic minority groups in New Zealand (Spoonley, 2015). It appears that the dominant neo-liberal inclination is to emphasise the economic and financial benefits of diversity more than the cultural aspects. Therefore, migrants and ethnic groups are mainly considered as economic contributors, or as people who are in New Zealand to fill shortages of labour or skills, rather than being an integral part of a new, culturally diverse society.⁴⁶

Regardless of the ways in which multiculturalism is practised in New Zealand officially, the way that this concept is received by ordinary New Zealanders is a matter of controversy. Some confusion surrounds the exact meaning of ‘multiculturalism’ in New Zealand. However, most New Zealanders regard this term as referring to the presence and visibility of overseas-born immigrants (from non-traditional source countries) and their local-born descendants (Terruhn, 2016). It seems that as far as ‘multiculturalism’ has been understood at this level, most New Zealanders embrace it.⁴⁷ However, far less agreement is found concerning the different level of ‘everyday multiculturalism’. For example, according to the Election Survey (by Stuff.co.nz/Massey University),⁴⁸ if multiculturalism is considered in terms of whether migrants maintain their own ways of living or adopt New Zealand lifestyles, 53 % of the respondents preferred to remind the migrants that they should ‘learn to do things the Kiwi way’. Some 33% approved of saying ‘Do what you like, so long as it’s legal’. Only 14% endorsed the view of ‘Please bring your way of life to our shores’ (Duncan, 2017, p. 9). These results show acceptance for three different levels of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ among New Zealanders. Another survey by UMR (2017)⁴⁹ has shown that 36% of New Zealanders strongly believe that the current level of immigration threatens the Kiwi way of life, and 34% strongly disagree with this view. It is important to mention that according to an Ipsos (2016) poll on international immigration, refugees, and Brexit, New Zealanders are generally more tolerant, accepting, and positive towards migration than other countries with official multicultural ethnic policy systems such as Australia or Canada. The level of acceptance in New Zealand appears yet higher when compared with that found in countries such as the U.K. or the U.S.A.

⁴⁶ For example, see the speech by the secretary for the treasury, Gabriel Makhlouf, and the way that ‘diversity’ is treated as ‘capital’: ‘In New Zealand, and in Auckland in particular, the diversity of our people provides cultural capital that connects us directly to the fastest growing markets in the world and represents a performance advantage for our economy’ (Makhlouf, 2016, p.7).

⁴⁷ Although there is a lot of disagreement over the right number of migrants in public opinion and also among different political parties, the whole idea that New Zealand is a diverse nation is widely accepted.

⁴⁸ This survey was done with a non-probability sample of nearly 40,000 New Zealanders over 18 years old.

⁴⁹ This survey involved a nationally representative sample of 1,000 New Zealanders over 18 years old.

Actually, Iranian society is also ethnically diverse. The Persian ethnicity is the largest and most dominant ethnicity in the country, followed by the Azari, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Kurd, Arab, Lur, Baloch, and several other ethnic groups. Although the Iranian constitution has confirmed the equality of all ethnicities (Article 19), there are some obvious inequalities when it comes to non-Shia ethnic minorities.⁵⁰ For example, the Kurd and Baloch minorities have experienced more discrimination (both institutional and non-institutional) than Azari or Mazandarani minorities, because they are both ethnic and religious minorities. In Iran, therefore, the ethnic gap has been intensified by the religious gap.

We can recognise different levels of discrimination towards minorities in both New Zealand and Iran, but it seems that such discrimination in Iran is official and institutionalised, whereas, in New Zealand, although there is informal discrimination against minorities, official discrimination contravenes the *New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990*. Race, religion, and nationality are among the ‘prohibited grounds’ of discrimination as defined by the *Human Rights Act 1993*. It is important to note that most ethnic minorities in Iran are related to larger ethnic groups in other neighbouring countries, which share borders with those groups, and therefore have the potential for ethnic nationalism and separatism. These factors have made ethnic relations in Iran a matter of national security for the government, while in New Zealand the context of relations between ethnic groups is more socio-cultural.

The politics of identity and of possible discrimination towards migrants and minorities is important for this study in several ways. In the first place, we can trace the effects of ethnic discrimination on the process of decision-making for migration on women from various ethnic minorities in Iran. In examining their post-migration lives, we can investigate how the experience of being from a minority can be different in the Iranian or the New Zealand contexts. In general, women from the ethnic majority in Iran may interpret their experience of being a minority in New Zealand differently from women who were from a minority in Iran. There is a possibility that these two groups will follow different patterns of integration in the host country.

⁵⁰ For more information about discrimination towards ethnic minorities in Iran, see the special report to the seventieth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, entitled ‘Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran’ (United Nations, 2015, pp. 19–22).

The Experience of Moving from Islamic Theocracy to a Liberal Democracy

This section will briefly discuss how the political and legal differences between New Zealand and Iran could affect the migration experiences of Iranian women.

New Zealand, like some other democratic countries, is governed by a secular democratic system in which the government makes comparatively few attempts to control the citizens' private lives, or to dominate their social relations. Also, both the legal regime of New Zealand and the general practice of civil society aim to guarantee formal equality between men and women, largely through human-rights legislation that bars discrimination. However, substantive inequalities of income and occupational status persist.⁵¹

For Iranian women migrants, probably the most positive outcome of life in Western societies has been the weakening of social and legal limitations placed on them as females (Shahidian, 1996). Higher acceptance of women's independence, a greater availability of economic and legal support for women, and more equal job opportunities have all facilitated the development of new identities or lifestyles among Iranian immigrant women. For instance, in the case of divorce, the host society offers much more equal laws than the Iranian family law system. Also, the assistance that New Zealand provides for divorced women is greater than what is offered in Iran.

By looking at the UN's human development report (Jahan, 2016) we can get a general overview of the ways that some aspects of 'gender inequality' differ between Iran and New Zealand. A consideration of these differences can help us to better understand the post-migration experiences of Iranian female migrants, and the ways that living in both countries as a woman can be experienced differently.

⁵¹ For more information regarding gender pay gap in New Zealand, see Pacheco, Li, and Cochrane (2017). The research report of empirical evidence on the gender pay gap in New Zealand.

Table 2

Comparative Gender Inequality Index

Source: Jahan, 2016, p. 214.

In this table, New Zealand ranks number 34, and Iran ranks number 118 in terms of gender inequality. The most visible gaps are in the share of seats in parliament and the labour force participation (with 31.4% of New Zealand's parliament seats at that time, taken by women, and Iran's parliament having only just over 3% women). In terms of labour force participation, the rate of female participation in New Zealand is almost four times higher than that in Iran.

In terms of the politics of identity and inclusion, the levels of tolerance and toleration are quite different. Although New Zealand is considered a diverse society, with high levels of toleration and some official policies to promote tolerance, Iran's official policies are highly assimilationist. They offer only a limited degree of official toleration for most minority religious groups. For female migrants who were members of a minority religion in Iran, especially Baha'i, the differences between these countries in terms of religious tolerance and toleration are enormous.

From another perspective, the negative consequences of migration must also be taken into account. Although Iranian women have faced significant gender-related obstacles in their country of origin, and although these obstacles are far less in NZ, immigrant women can also encounter new difficulties here. For instance, many migrant women previously held highly professional jobs or earned high-level degrees in Iran, yet they often find it hard to have their qualifications accepted, or to get jobs in their fields of expertise, regardless of their

professional merits. This issue can threaten the financial independence of immigrant women. Moreover, problems with sexism may be replaced by problems with racism. If sexism was a problem in Iran, immigrant women may instead encounter racism in the host society.

Conclusion

The separation of religion and state in the New Zealand political system, and the fact that the political system is not based on any particular religion, provides a suitable context for the practice of democracy, equality, and freedom. The other feature of New Zealand's political structure is the flexibility of the system in reforming itself, and the accessibility of tools (such as referendums) to deal with conflicts peacefully. This capacity, alongside the regularity of free elections, empowers the democratic aspects of the political system and reduces the chance that members of society will resort to revolutionary or violent means in seeking political change.

In contrast, the political system of Iran is constructed based on the hegemony of religious authority over politics and society. The Islamic base of the political system produces a context suitable for institutionalising political and social inequality. For instance, the nature of the political system, which recognises the divine right of governance by clerics, officially reproduces additional social structures of inequality and legitimises discrimination in society, particularly against women (Kar & Farshi, 2008).

Moreover, Iran's structural dominance of appointed institutions over elected institutions, and the limited capacity for self-reform, both function to resist any significant change from inside the system in the near future. Therefore, it seems that the only way to promote major reforms of the system, including its gender policies, lies in popular social movements or revolutionary actions, which involve a considerable danger of generating violence.

As the main purpose of this chapter, I have surveyed how political ideologies can shape the political systems in both Iran and New Zealand. In the coming chapters, I investigate how these political ideologies and systems have affected the life experiences of ordinary citizens, particularly of migrant women. Therefore, this chapter provides a framework for interpreting and understanding the research participants' experiences in the context of migration in both their host and origin countries.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the methodology that underpins this study. I begin by discussing qualitative and quantitative approaches in social sciences, and by considering the appropriateness or limitations of the qualitative approach for conducting this research. Next, I consider my position as an insider researcher, and outline both the advantages and shortcoming of this ‘insiderness’ for conducting this study. Third, I discuss the design and research methods in terms of the data collection tools, access to the participants, the structure of interviews and the sampling techniques. Finally, the chapter presents the data analysis methods, and reports the ethical considerations.

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Migration Studies

Traditionally, migration studies have been mainly focused on policy-relevant quantitative analyses of international population flows. In the last few decades, however, many researchers have applied a range of qualitative methods in this field. At the same time, a third approach has involved taking a middle road looking at the zones where both of these methods can overlap through using mixed methodologies (Collins & Huang, 2012).

Despite the advantages of such variety in research methods, since the 1960s there has been an inclination in the social sciences (and consequently in migration studies) to set qualitative and quantitative methods against each other, and to support one method against the other. For instance, the notion that ‘quantitative measurement enables us to transcend our subjectivity’ may be set against the idea that ‘qualitative methods are more faithful to the nature of the social world’ (Symonds & Gorard, 2010, p. 123). Such issues are at the centre of many qualitative/quantitative debates. It seems that the basic conclusion from these arguments is that quantitative and qualitative methods involve ‘two fundamentally different ways of thinking about explanation’ or “two different interpretive communities” (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003, p. 342).

Today, we can admit that there is no winner from this methodological paradigm war of the past century. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are legitimate and beneficial, but neither of these methods has a natural priority over the other, and both can be used to explore different aspects of a single topic (Greene, 2008). Consequently, researchers may choose qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, according to which perspective they take toward their topic, or which aspects of the subject they wish to investigate. In this study, based on the

research questions and the aspects I want to explore, I have chosen the qualitative approach, with data obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 34 Iranian women migrants to New Zealand.

Qualitative Approach

The tradition of qualitative studies is inherited from anthropology, and particularly from late 19th-century ethnographic studies of non-Western peoples. Later during the 1940s, the Chicago school of sociologists introduced the qualitative tradition as a systematised methodology for social disciplines, and social scientists began to produce a rich and varied body of research using this approach (Padgett, 2008).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3) defined the qualitative approach in a very general way, as an ‘interpretative naturalist approach to the world’. They said that qualitative researchers examine social phenomena in ‘their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them’. In comparison with quantitative research, the terms of qualitative research refer to a set of ‘non-statistical inquiry techniques and processes used to gather data about a social phenomenon’ (MacNabb, 2004, p. 341). Participant observation, personal experience, introspection, life stories, interviews, artefacts, and cultural texts or productions are among the most common types of empirical data analysed through this approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

Today, qualitative approaches are widely used in many disciplines, and involve various types of research methods for conducting complex studies and dealing with in-depth data (Padgett, 2008). Ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, narrative analysis, phenomenology, or action science are among the most common types of research methods used in qualitative approaches.

Qualitative Methods in Political Studies

Traditionally, the basic structure of political science was built on a descriptive, qualitative approach. It was not until the 1950s that this approach was challenged by behaviourists and advocates for the study of individual behaviour in politics. Since then, political studies have shifted towards an emphasis on quantitative analysis. Although the interdisciplinary nature of politics makes it possible to say that both qualitative and quantitative approaches are common in this discipline, the quantitative approach is more predominant,

especially in the areas of psephology, comparative politics, and U.S. politics (Marsh, 2010; Levay, 2007).

Regardless of this predominance, various types of qualitative methods have been adapted and developed for conducting research in political studies. Methods that have proven especially effective are ethnography (Berliner, 1957; Peterson, 2001; Wedeen, 1999; Rhodes, 2011) and case studies (Hoddie, 2002; Soni, 2000; Nunez, 2001). Case studies are most commonly used when researchers want to establish a new theory or when re-examining existing theories (MacNabb, 2004). For instance, Hoddie (2002) used a case study of Australian Aboriginals to challenge mainstream theories, which suggested that ‘ethnically based preferential policies consistently lead to the construction of well-defined boundaries between ethnic groups’. Based on his case study, Hoddie found that these policies actually ‘may have the effect of blurring the boundaries between groups when the programs favour subordinate collectivities’ (Hoddie, 2002, p. 293, p. 308).

Although ethnographic approaches can be used effectively for collecting rich data sets and for showing how various connected variables play out in the real world, only a limited number of ethnographic works have concerned political science. Ethnographic studies are most commonly used in circumstances where ‘official statistics are suspect, media outlets are controlled by political interests or political violence impacts survey research’ (Schatz, 2009, p. 304; Volvo & Schatz, 2004). In one classic example, Berliner (1957) offered a series of insights into the nature of the Soviet political economy from the perspectives of shop floor workers. In a more recent case, Walder (1988) studied similar issues in the Chinese context (Volvo & Schatz, 2004).

Another area in political science which needs more attention from political ethnographers is public administration. Little ethnographic work has been done in research on public administration, except for some classic works from the 1960s and 1970s (Rhodes, 2014). Rhodes (2011) studied the everyday lives of ministers and permanent secretaries of three British government departments, producing a work that applied the ‘observational methods of the anthropologist’ to investigate the motives, beliefs and actions of political elites. Rhodes suggested that after many years of field work, interviews and reflections, he had found that ‘observation is an unused but vital part of political the scientist’s toolkit’ (Rhodes, 2014, p. 307).

As in other disciplines, there have been many recent attempts to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods in political studies. However, it seems that a number of questions in political science need to be addressed through a qualitative process. For instance, questions such as how and why certain political institutions, events, issues or processes came about can be answered most effectively through either detailed text-based historical analyses, or by reflection on the explanations given by participants in those institutions, events or issues (Vromen, 2010, p. 249).

In the next section, I will explain in detail why I have chosen the qualitative approach for my research.

Qualitative Methods: Advantages and Disadvantages for This Study

‘Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail’ (Patton, 2015, p. 22). Fitzgerald (2006) suggested that ever since British anthropologists conducted their studies of mobile workers in southern Africa (Richards, 1939; Velsen, 1960), migration has been a topic of long-standing interest in qualitative studies. Moreover, the complex nature of migration at both the individual and the community levels needs to be explored through a qualitative framework. Factors such as sense of place, identity, the social dynamics of sending and receiving societies, transnationalism, or integration, all require qualitative evaluation.

In the case of my research, two main issues need to be addressed: the motivations for migration by Iranian women, and the possible changes of their personal and social identity in New Zealand. Therefore, the study needs to elicit the pre- and post-migration experiences of Iranian women, and the ways they have redefined themselves in relation to New Zealand society. To obtain this information, I need methods and approaches that allow me to explore the experiences of the participants in depth and over the course of time. Qualitative methods can give voice to the participants, allow participants to reflect on their viewpoints in discussion with a researcher, and enable the interpretation of major social or cultural trends (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013). This framework of methods is best suited to the nature of my research interests for the following reasons.

First, I wish to capture the participants’ understandings of their lived experiences. As Padgett pointed out, when the researcher wants to ‘capture lived experience from the perspective of those who live it and to create meaning from that experience’ (Padgett, 2008, p. 16), qualitative methodology provides the best set of tools. When we are looking for deeper

understanding and for insiders' points of view, using surveys or questionnaires is not the best choice, especially when dealing with complex and potentially emotionally charged issues.

In addition, research on the effects or interpretations of concepts (such as gender or identity) requires an exploration of personal experiences and the collection of dynamic data. This study pursues questions concerning the effects of politics on women's migration, and the ways that migration can change women's perspectives on matters such as gender equality, identity or political trust. Such dynamic questions are best answered through a qualitative approach. The types of questions asked by quantitative approaches, and specifically questionnaires, can easily miss some of the uncertainties or complexities of real life that are important to consider in a research project such as mine (Anderson, Rogaly, & Ruhs, 2012, p. 400). In-depth interviews enable me to examine the complexity of these considerations and the ways they are connected to the political context. For instance, in-depth interviews can better trace how political processes can affect women's decisions to migrate, or how migration can affect the ways they define gender equality. A survey or questionnaire would be better suited to determining whether there is a statistical correlation between political processes and women's migration, or to measuring specific changes in women's attitudes towards gender equality after migration.

Moreover, qualitative methodologies, such as face-to-face in-depth interviews, are particularly suited to the study of Iranian women for the following reasons. First, most Iranians find it unusual to be questioned about social and political issues, especially concerning their critical feelings toward their own country. Therefore, the structure of any survey or questionnaire that touches on such issues will probably seem strange and unfamiliar for them. This lack of familiarity can make it difficult to obtain the highest level of validity by using such methods.

Second, Middle Eastern people, including Iranians, tend to consider forced-choice surveys or questionnaires to be impersonal or silencing, especially because these people come from cultures in which interpersonal relationships are of central importance (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004). Middle Eastern people are culturally prone to being protective about their personal experiences, and they are commonly reluctant to provide information through any paper-based system (Joudi Kadri, 2009).

Last but not least, it should be mentioned that in any authoritarian political system (such as that of Iran), there is generally strong distrust between the official sectors and ordinary

people. Researchers are traditionally assumed to be associates of the political system, who might share any data they collect with the authorities. In this context, developing mutual trust between the researcher and participant is of great importance, and this can be best achieved by face-to-face communication in which rapport and a safe context can be established.

Although there are many advantages in using qualitative methods for this study, it should be noted that each methodological approach has its limitations. For instance, although the data provided by qualitative techniques are commonly considered to be richer and deeper than data gathered through quantitative methods, the level of generalisability is reduced with qualitative data. As Patton explained, ‘The advantage of quantitative method is that it’s possible to measure the reaction of a great many people to a limited set of questions ... by contrast qualitative methods produce a wealth of detailed information about much smaller number of people and cases ... this could reduce the generalisability’ (Patton, 2015, p. 22).

Like all other qualitative studies, this study seeks to represent the complex worlds of the participants in a holistic, practical way. The sample size of this study (34 Iranian females) is considered quite large for a qualitative study, and it allows me to include a diverse set of experiences from participants who arrived in New Zealand with different personal backgrounds, levels of education, ages, ethnicities, religions, marital status and so on. However, this sample is not sufficient to enable findings that can be generalised to all Iranian migrants in NZ, or even to all Iranian women migrants to NZ, or to those who have migrated to other places. The sample size and the methods of participant recruitment preclude any assumption that the present sample is statistically representative of its social group. I discuss the sample size and the participant recruitment process in more detail in the last part of this chapter.

In quantitative methods, the validity of the data is mainly dependent on constructing accurate instruments for measuring the specific factors to be measured, and on the selection of a random stratified sample that is representative of the population being studied. In qualitative studies, however, the ‘researcher is the main instrument for data collection’ (Patton, 2015, p. 22). In that case, the success of the study is highly dependent on the researcher’s discernment and sensitivity in conducting the study. This unique position for the researcher, as Padgett explained, can ‘impose special burdens as well as opportunities’ (2008, p. 17). Due to the significant role of the researcher in conducting a qualitative study, the researcher’s relation to the subject is especially important. The factor of whether the

researcher is a social insider or outsider toward the participant is also important, and requires due consideration. In the case of my study, I must consider the advantages and liabilities of conducting research as a cultural insider.

Doing Fieldwork in Your Own Culture

Many researchers do their fieldwork in a setting with which they are familiar. This familiarity can help them to delve deeply into their research topic without having to do a great deal of preparatory work, such as learning a new language, understanding the complexity of a new culture, or growing comfortable in a new social environment (Ely, 1991). The factors that most commonly determine the researcher's insider or outsider status in social science fieldwork are matchings of sex, race, religion, or age between researchers and participants. Many scholars (Ely, 1991; Babbie, 2013; Okely, 1996; Goodkind & Deacon, 2004) consider that such matching between researchers and participants has certain advantages. These matches can increase the researcher's level of understanding and acceptability, but being an insider can also raise some concerns. The high levels of sympathy, similarity and connection between the researcher and participant have the potential to give the researcher a stronger voice as a key resource in relation to the participant's voice.

In researching Iranian women in NZ, I am a part of the community that I am investigating. As an Iranian middle-class woman who is living in NZ, I have many things in common with my participants. A large number of Iranians who emigrate from Iran come from middle-class backgrounds and are highly educated (many of them have at least one undergraduate university degree). Also, the experience of being a woman in Iran, despite all of the diversity among women, provides a more or less similar framework for many Iranian female migrants.

My Iranian insiderness is in many ways beneficial for conducting this study. First of all, as an Iranian who is living in New Zealand, I know a large number of Iranians here. I have some networks that to some degree facilitate my access to the participants better than if I was a non-Iranian person.

Also, as this study goes deep into the social-political and gender-related experiences of the participants in their home country, and in many cases involves criticising the general policies of the government there, it is more appropriate that the data be collected by a native researcher, for two main reasons. First, the sense of nationalism, which is normally strong

among Iranians, might make it hard for some participants to share the sorts of experiences and narratives that are highly critical of situations in their home country with a non-native person. More simply, the participants might feel embarrassed to talk about some of their experiences with someone they consider as an outsider. Also, a non-native researcher might find it hard to ask questions which are considered critical towards the politics and even the culture of the participants' home country. Therefore, there is a possibility that both the participant and researcher may try to self-censor themselves, or avoid talking directly about controversial issues, which could affect the accuracy and cohesion of the work.

Also, I conducted all of the interviews in our native language, Persian (Farsi), which has removed the language barrier and made my participants more comfortable. Goodkind and Deacon (2004) mentioned that although qualitative methods provide more opportunities for the participants' voices and perspectives to emerge, the use of such methods can be challenging and time-consuming when multiple languages are involved.

In the initial contact with my participants (if I contacted them myself),⁵² I introduced myself as a student doing my PhD here, and doing research about Iranian female migrants. Also, my name and the language I used told them that I was an Iranian female, and this could provide some level of affinity with the participants initially. Later during the interviews, they sometimes asked me more about myself, such as asking my age or how many years I have been in New Zealand. Sometimes my participants shared experiences that were very similar to my own. In such cases, I normally mentioned how my experience related to theirs. This situation was especially common during interviews with participants who were or had been university students, or whose ages were similar to mine.

Moreover, the shared cultural background between my participants and me increased the level of understanding during the interviews and let the participants present themselves more naturally. For instance, in asking demographic questions, I asked the participants what their religion is. In answering this question, most Muslim participants started with a strong smile. This body language was completely meaningful for me as an Iranian, but it could be meaningless for many non-Iranians. Following this smile (which conveyed the sense that 'I am, mostly, just named Muslim'), some participants simply shook their heads and said,

⁵² Sometimes initial contacts with participants were done by a third person, and I do not know how those persons introduced me to those participants, although I always provided the mediators with information sheets. I described myself on those information sheets as an Iranian PhD student, and gave my name and contact details.

‘Okay, you know I am Muslim in my ID⁵³ ... like ourselves but ...’. In these cases, to make the participants more comfortable, I usually affirmed that ‘like many others, you are Muslim by birth, but you are not practicing’, which they confirmed. This example simply illustrates the cultural complexity and potential for misunderstanding that can be involved if the researcher and participant come from different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Due to our shared cultural background, when the participants talked to me about their experiences in Iran, they commonly neglected to explain the context, or they just mentioned relevant points very briefly. In these cases, I usually asked participants for more clarification. They then started to explain the context in greater detail, but they did so with a sense that ‘you should know that; that’s common knowledge in Iran’. As my participants expected, many of these contexts are indeed common knowledge for people who have lived and grown up in Iran. I asked them to spell out these details, because I wanted to hear their story based on their perception of it, not based on my own assumptions. I think that asking the participants to vocalise an assumed context gave them a chance to clarify how they see, experience, and interpret this common knowledge. As Kim (2012) suggested, differences can exist between the researcher and the researched, even within the same racial/ethnic group. In the case of this study, despite the previously mentioned similarities between my participants and me, we were still different in many other ways. Marital status, length of stay, religion, ethnicity, age and occupation were some of the distinctive factors that made us different. For instance, I would find a higher level of insiderness while interviewing a participant who was 30 years old, single, and a postgrad student who had arrived here in last three or four years, than I would with a participant who was married, 50 years old, a professional, and had been living here since the 1980s. It should be mentioned that even in cases of having the same demographic characteristics, the participants’ experiences could still vary. The same demographic features and levels of shared insiderness do not determine the same life experience, and this is why insiderness (like outsiderness) should be considered as a spectrum.

Although many researchers bring certain levels of insiderness to their fieldwork, there is no doubt that my insiderness outweighs my outsiderness in researching Iranian women in NZ. Situations like this, where the borders between personal life and formal study begin to

⁵³ Being ‘Muslim in ID’ is a very common concept among Iranians, which indicates people who are born as Muslims, but are not following most of the Islamic rules.

blur, are familiar for many social scientists conducting qualitative studies (Frank & Gosling, 2007). Such cases are commonly classified into the categories of ‘insider research’, ‘anthropology at home’ or ‘auto-ethnography’. As mentioned above, the strong sense of connection between the researchers and the researched people in these types of studies has been considered a factor that can increase the level of ‘reflexivity’,⁵⁴ and may threaten the level of reliability. In this regard, I need to mention some points about my insider position and the way that my position could be different from that of some other insider researchers or auto-ethnographers. First, the level of closeness and sympathy between the researcher and participants is different in each study, based on the nature of the shared experiences. The contexts of some experiences give more room for emotions shared by both the researcher and participant, while other experiences involve less emotion. For example, if the researcher and participant have both experienced the same serious illness or the same trauma, the level of proximity and closeness may greatly increase. For instance, Ghorashi (2002), an Iranian migrant anthropologist who was politically active in leftist political groups inside Iran during the Iranian revolution, has studied the concept of ‘identity’ among Iranian migrants with similar backgrounds. In this case, common experiences such as prison, torture, hiding and living in the fear provide a highly emotional context for the study, with increased sympathy and solidarity between the researcher and participant. My research is less involved with personal emotions and more concerned with the general social aspects of life experience, which are seldom so traumatic. Also, the fact that my methodology was based on interviews only, and did not include observing the participants in their daily lives or living alongside them, reduced the likelihood of getting emotionally engaged with them.

The personal experiences and self-narratives of the researcher are the key sources of data in the type of ethnographic study known as ‘auto-ethnography’. For instance, Khosravi (2010) studied the auto-ethnography of social borders and ‘illegal’ travelling based on his own experiences of illegal border crossing. He described his personal experiences in a way that mixed autobiography with ethnographic writing, which formed a type of self-narrative that placed the self within a social context. However, conducting research on Iranian women in New Zealand is not a type of auto-ethnographic study, and the role of my personal

⁵⁴ As there is no consensus in the relevant literature on the meaning of reflexivity, I want to specify that my use of the term is based on a study by Muecke, who suggested that ‘reflexivity is the dynamic and mutual influence of the ethnographer and the research field on each other’ (Muecke, 1994, p. 194). In the other words, reflexivity involves the researcher in reflecting on his/her positionality, and the impact of this positionality on the research participants, the research context, and the eventual analysis.

experiences is not dominant in this study. As mentioned above, the types of data that I gathered were highly related to the socio-political contexts of the origin and host countries. Therefore, I simply used my experiences and knowledge as useful tools for understanding the experiences and social intersections of the participants.

To sum up, this study differs from some common types of insider research and auto-ethnographic studies in at least two ways. First of all, the nature of the study is more concerned with ‘non-emotion-involved social experiences’ than with experiences that are socially or personally emotion-laden. Also in my study, the researcher’s experience is not the central focus. Instead, the dialogue and interactive conversation between the researcher’s understanding and the participants’ experiences shapes the direction and context of the study. The approach adopted in this study and the way I define my position draws on the work of several other insider researchers who have studied their own migrant communities (Voloder, 2008; Seghatoleslami, 2013; Kim, 2012).

Access to Participants

Finding access to participants for this study was a prolonged process that took about one year to achieve. I looked for participants in Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton, and Christchurch, but Auckland was the main site for fieldwork, as this city has the largest Iranian population and is the place where I live. However, due to the absence of any Iranian community organisations in Auckland, I found that the initial access to participants was harder than I expected.

In one of my first efforts to gain access to participants, I went to a religious gathering for Ramadan in the Iranian Mosque in New Lynn, West Auckland. Approximately 100 women were attending that gathering, of which 60 to 70 were Iranian. I introduced myself and my research project to 20 or 25 of the Iranian women individually. Some of the women were sitting in groups of four or five when I spoke to them. Most of the women I talked with seemed to welcome my project, and told me they would be happy to help if they could. After this initial consent, I gave them the information sheets and asked them to contact me by phone, text, or email if they wanted to participate. Although most of these people expressed enthusiasm for my project, I never heard back from any of them.

After that experience, I understood that I probably needed a trustworthy person to sit between me and the potential participants, to introduce me to them, and to facilitate the trust-

building process. I therefore contacted two immigration specialists, an Iranian and a New Zealander, both of whom had reputations among Iranians for being helpful, trustworthy, and resourceful. As a first step, I sent these specialists an email with a copy of my research information sheets in both Persian and English (see appendices 1 and 4), and asked if we could meet to discuss my project.

I met them in their offices, discussed my project with them, and asked them to introduce me to some of their Iranian clients. They both agreed to contact some of their clients who might be willing to participate. I asked them to give my contact details to any clients who expressed interest, and invited them to contact me directly. Although the New Zealander immigration specialist trusted me immediately after seeing my fieldwork permission, it was harder for the Iranian immigration lawyer to trust me. He had some concerns (which I tried to address) about my possible interactions or relations with the Iranian government, or with the Iranian embassy in Wellington. He asked me several questions about my previous jobs, education, the reasons I came to New Zealand, and why I chose this research topic. He also expressed some concerns about the security of the data that I might collect, in the event that I decided to return to Iran after finishing my PhD. He told me that in some previous cases he had asked some of his clients to participate in similar studies, but they all refused. He asked if it was possible for me to change the topic of my study.

He explained that it was very hard to win the trust of refugees,⁵⁵ and particularly female refugees. He said that these people were usually concerned that their family members in Iran could be harassed by the authorities there, if the information they disclosed was leaked at any point in the future. At the end of our meeting, he kindly agreed to contact some of his clients who might be less reluctant to participate in this research. He said he would ask them to contact me directly if they wished to be part of the study, but I was never contacted by any of his clients. Although I did not ask my friends to participate in this study (mainly for the ethical reasons that I explain below in the ethics section), I did ask them to contact their friends, and see if any of them wished to participate in this project. My friends invited me to their small parties and gatherings with their other friends, to give me a chance to talk with the

⁵⁵ In this study I was looking for participants with different backgrounds, but as the previously mentioned immigration lawyer had lots of clients who had sought asylum in New Zealand, I hoped that he might provide me with some contacts with a refugee background (though I did not ask him directly for any particular type of participants). His response, however, mainly concerned his clients who were asylum seekers.

other guests in person. This method also had very limited success. The people I talked to usually hesitated to say ‘no’ directly, but I could understand from their reactions that they were reluctant. To make them more comfortable, I invited them to read the information sheets at home and contact me if they wanted to participate, which they never did.

I started to contact most of the Iranians I knew in Auckland, mostly on Facebook. I provided them with some information about my research project and asked if they could help me. At first I did not ask them to participate, but only invited them to text me back. They usually asked me how they could help, and then I provided more explanation, sent them the information sheets, and asked if we could meet face-to-face. If they accepted to meet me, I told them more about the project, but did not ask them directly to participate. During our conversations, they usually said whether they wanted to participate. Sometimes they offered to an interview immediately and sometimes we arranged another meeting. Some of the people I met told me they could not participate themselves, but they could introduce me to someone who might. This method was the most successful of my contact methods, but it was limited to the people I happened to know.

To get more access to participants, I contacted the administrators of some Facebook pages, groups or weblogs that provided various kinds of information about living in New Zealand for Iranians. The administrators of these pages usually had a good number of connections and networks among Iranians, even though there were no organised social groups of Iranians in Auckland. This method was useful as well.

When I interviewed a participant, I would ask her if she knew another potential participant whom I could contact. This method is called the snowball or chain sampling technique, and is widely used in qualitative sociological research, especially in situations where the ‘members of special populations are difficult to locate or not likely to cooperate without referral from others in their network’ (Babbie, 2014, p. 188; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Although a few participants referred me to their friends, this technique was most helpful when people who were not participating themselves introduced me to their friends or to other potential participants. As I began using different contact chains for accessing participants, I found a good range of social variety, and got beyond relying too heavily on groups with similar experiences. Also, the various chains of contacts enabled me to find participants by different criteria in terms of religion, ethnicity, marital status, education level, or age.

After doing about 22 interviews in Auckland, I started looking for some participants in Wellington. Although fewer Iranian people live in Wellington, getting access to them was much easier, as they have their own community group, the Iranian Cultural Society of Wellington. This community facilitated my access to potential participants by forwarding my email (including the information sheets and a brief introduction to my research) to all of its eligible members. About six Iranian women showed interest in my project, and I interviewed four of them. Hamilton and Christchurch were two other cities that I chose my participants from, because they accommodate the largest Iranian populations after Auckland and Wellington.

Conducting research on your compatriots and your own cultural community in the new context of a host society can expose a lot about the immigration process and how the new social context can change immigrants' attitudes towards different social and personal issues. This fieldwork, regardless of what the participants said in their interviews, always showed whether they had redefined their relationships and social interactions according to the new context of the host country, or if they had just reproduced the practices of their old country, which most emigrants had left Iran to escape from. According to my experience in doing this research, it seemed that in terms of the methodological issues I faced, the social and cultural dynamics of the home country were stronger than those of the host country. Although the specific aspects of this issue are discussed in the next chapters, I would like to mention some of the main points that affected my fieldwork and my access to participants.

First, the Iranian community in New Zealand is small, and this fact made some people concerned that they could be personally identified if they participated in any research on the Iranian community. Secondly, many Iranians wished to avoid being labeled or recognised for their political views, or being seen as politically oriented persons. I was aware of this sensitivity, so I tried not to mention that I was studying politics unless specifically asked. I became more aware of this sensitivity when one of the people I invited to participate told me she could not do so because her immigration experience was not political. I tried to convince her that I was not looking for directly political experience, but she did not accept my explanation.

Also, like many other Middle Eastern people, Iranians can be highly protective of their personal information and tend to fear being spied on by their government, even when they are abroad. As a result, they are often unwilling to trust people they do not know well,

including researchers, as research could be a cover for spying. This attitude is mainly shaped by the intelligence methods used in Iran, in which the revolutionary government initially encouraged citizens to spy on each other and report information to the Iranian intelligence services. Concerns like these could affect social research in two ways. First, they could make initial access to participants difficult, as people preferred not to talk about the personal or social aspects of their lives. Second, these concerns could increase the likelihood of self-censorship during interviews. Some other researchers (Shahidian, 2001; Ghorashi, 2003) who have conducted research on Iranian migrants have also mentioned the challenges they faced regarding the issue of participants' trust. Their research was mostly focused on Iranian refugees who were politically active in Iran over the first years after the revolution, and who fled the country because of their political activities. Considering the samples used in those studies, the process of trust-making between researchers and participants was more complicated than in my research.

Interviewing

In-depth interviews are one of the main tools for data collection in any type of qualitative study. Such interviews can provide an experience that is 'deeply rewarding and satisfying about talking to another person for an hour or more in such a way that ... you understand a particular part of their life in depth' (Liamputpong & Ezzy, 2005). Such in-depth interviews may be designed according to structured, unstructured, or semi-structured models (O'Reilly, 2012).

The main data for this study were collected by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with 34 Iranian women who live in Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton and Christchurch.

I chose the semi-structured style for conducting interviews, because this structure could be guided and planned in a flexible way to ensure that there was enough room for the participants to express a range of thoughts, and allow them to take some initiative in shaping the overall structure of the interviews. Iosifides (2011, p. 178) described the desired 'in-depth' quality of such interviews as 'communicative interaction between the researcher and research participants with the purpose of obtaining interviewees' interpretation of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live'.

All of the interviews were conducted in Farsi/ Persian and then translated into English. All except one of the interviews were tape-recorded. Recording the interviews provided much more detail than note-taking, and it allowed more interaction and eye contact with the participants. Most of the participants did not mind being recorded. Only one of the participants asked me to not record our interview, so I took notes in that case. The duration of the interviews differed case by case, according to the amount of information the participants wished to share. A few interviews lasted less than an hour, but most of them lasted between three and five hours. When an interview went on longer than two hours, I asked the participant if she wanted to continue, or if she preferred to schedule another meeting. In most cases, we scheduled a second or third meeting to cover the rest of the topics. All of the interviews were transcribed and translated by me, to guarantee the privacy of the participants.

The main contents of the interviews were guided by the research questions, and aimed to explore the women's motivations for emigration and their process of Westernisation or acculturation. Although I had outlined over 30 general questions, which I referred to during my interviews, sometimes we deviated from those questions to cover new areas that were unique to the participants' own experiences (see Appendix 3 for the interview schedule). To investigate their reasons for migration, I needed to consider many political, social, financial or personal factors that could be involved in the process of making such decisions. I encouraged the participants to talk in detail about their experience of deciding to migrate. By considering the context, I aimed to identify, when the idea of migration came to their minds for the first time, and how it became a practical plan. In the midst of these discussions, the participants usually talked about different social and political processes in Iran, which helped me to understand their social and political points of view. Some participants discussed these points very clearly and in detail, but others were less specific and more cautious. In those cases, I asked more questions.

When I asked one participant why she decided to migrate, she said it was because of the problems in Iran. I asked what types of problems she had. She said I should know better than her the types of problems we had in Iran, and she briefly named some of them. In these cases, I could suggest further lines of response, but I tried to keep silent as much as possible to avoid shifting the focus from the participant's context and interpretation to my context (Liamputpong & Ezzy, 2005). Other times, the participants gave me a great deal of detail about themselves and their families, and much of it was not exactly related to the interview questions. In that case, I considered that these stories might help me to understand the

participant's position better and gave me a holistic sense of my interviewees as whole people with large lives. So, I tried to avoid interrupting the participants.

It was generally less complicated for the participants to talk about their post-immigration experiences, their trends of integrating, and the ways they defined themselves here in NZ. In this part of the interviews, I asked some questions to learn how NZ's public policies and social structures affected the participant's roles as women, spouses or mothers. In addition, I aimed to highlight how the participants defined themselves in relation to New Zealand people, to other migrants, and how they related to the political system here.

As mentioned above, I tried to be neutral during the interviews and to give space to the participants' voices. However, this did not mean that I expressed no opinions at all, or kept strictly neutral. In many cases, the participants expected my sympathy and wanted my verification concerning the experiences they described. Many times as they spoke of their experiences in Iran, they kept saying 'you know what I mean'. In some cases when I had experienced exactly the same thing, I shared it with them to show my empathy.

At the same time, I tried not to be biased politically, although I sometimes showed my attitudes toward some socio-political trends in Iran. I think that trying to show a total neutral position can be harmful for the process of building trust and encouraging the participants to risk sharing their experiences. Iranians are usually politically minded, politically biased, and have lots of criticism regarding Iran's political system. If the interviewer shows no response to their criticisms and tries to act completely neutral, it could be interpreted as support for the current Iranian political system. This assumed support could affect the whole process of the interview, break the trust between researcher and participant, and increase the participant's level of self-censorship.

In one case I was talking to a participant who was in her early-30s at the time of the revolution, and she was speaking about women's legal rights in Iran. I told her that after she had experienced relative legal equality between men and women for some years before the revolution, it must have been hard for her to lose many of those rights after the revolution. She answered, 'it was some superficial freedom in the Shah's time ... but there was no freedom of speech before the revolution. There was fear of the government at that time too, although it got worse after revolution'. Then she told me how she felt horrified when one night she dreamed that the Shah died. She said, 'even now when I think about that dream I

feel fearful. ... At that time, I thought “what’s going to happen if someone knows about my dream?””

In this case, because I had referred to relative gender equality in the old legal system as a positive point, the participant assumed that I had a positive attitude towards the previous regime in Iran, and she tried to confront me with the negative aspects of Shah’s regime. Immediately I was afraid she would judge me as a political opponent. I tried to clarify that I realised the Shah was a dictator who violated many basic rights. I was worried that if she assumed I was a Royalist (or an advocate for bringing the Shah’s son to power), she would lose her trust in me, especially because she was involved in political activities against the Shah before the revolution. This example shows how keeping politics in the background of these interviews could be challenging. There was a danger of sending the wrong message even if you tried to be careful and used neutral language.

Arranging the place and time for interviews

Deciding where to do the interviews could be challenging. In general, people preferred to be interviewed at their homes, if the homes were private and not shared, perhaps because it was more convenient for them. However, some people were concerned about inviting an unknown interviewer to their homes, or they worried that other family members might hear what they said in the interview (Liamputpong & Ezzy, 2005). In that case, they preferred places that were more neutral, like libraries, public areas at the university, or cafés. For conducting my interviews, I always let my participants choose the place and time according to their convenience. Most of them preferred to be interviewed in a café in their neighbourhood, and a minority invited me to their places. Technically, cafés were not sufficiently private for conducting interviews, but as we were not speaking English it was less problematic for us. We knew that even if others heard us they could not understand our conversation. After finishing the interviews, we usually spent some time having a more personal conversation, during which the participants could have their turn to ask me some questions about my personal and social life here. In some cases, the chemistry was fairly good, and the participants sent me friend requests on Facebook or asked me to keep in touch even after completing the interviews. I was willing to respond to such invitations, but I always hesitated to offer them. I tried to keep some social distance with the participants, mainly for ethical considerations, which will be discussed more in the next section.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an integral part of any qualitative research. Ethics refers to the system of moral principles by which individual actions can be evaluated as good or bad and right or wrong. In the context of research methods, this means that a moral perspective needs to be chosen to inform the way researchers design and conduct their investigations (Denscombe, 2010). In this research, the system of ethical consideration was designed based on Massey University's 'Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants'. Prior to the start of the fieldwork, the potential ethical risks for conducting my fieldwork research were discussed with the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, which provided some essential advice to reduce potential risks. After addressing the committee's concerns, permission to conduct the research was fully approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern. The committee's concerns were mostly about reducing the risk of distress for participants and ensuring the safety of the researcher. For instance, they asked me to make a strategy to mitigate the risk of distress for my participants, such as providing them with a list of counsellors they could refer to free of charge if the interviews caused them any distress. Concerning my own safety, they urged me to advise someone of my whereabouts, to maintain mobile phone contact, and to consider my safety on entering private homes, particularly if other family members or associates were likely to be present. The committee also recommended that I should add statements to the information sheets regarding the retention and eventual disposal of my raw data. According to the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct (2015), the major ethical principles are respect for persons; minimisation of harm to participants, researchers, institutions or groups; informed and voluntary consent; respect for privacy and confidentiality; the avoidance of unnecessary deception; avoidance of conflict of interest; social and cultural sensitivity to the age, gender, culture, religion, or social class of the participants, and considerations for justice. Based on the nature of this study, the main ethical concerns were the gaining of informed and voluntary consent, data confidentiality, risk of harm to participants, and conflict of interest. This section discusses how these ethical principles were applied in the different stages of my research.

Informed and voluntary consent. According to the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct (2015, p. 8), 'Participation in any research project must be voluntary and based on an understanding of adequate and appropriate information about what such

participation will involve'. The potential participants should not be under any type of pressure to participate in the research. Although getting access to participants was challenging at the first stages of my fieldwork, I avoided pushing potential participants to take part in the research. There were both ethical and technical reasons for this reluctance. Ethically, participants should be free to accept or reject participation, and technically, participants who accept involvement due to pressure typically make a minimal contribution to the research.

In my initial contacts with potential participants (which were face-to-face meetings or virtual contacts through Facebook messenger), I provided some general information about the research project. If they showed an inclination towards participating, I provided them with written information sheets, either in Farsi or English according to their preference (see Appendices 4 and 5), and I asked them to contact me later if they were willing to participate. Therefore, the prospective participants were given an opportunity to consider whether to participate, free from any pressure from the researcher. This technique was especially useful in the cases of participants who met me face-to-face in private places, and who hesitated to say 'no' directly due to some cultural considerations. In some cases, if I had the participant's contact details, email, Facebook account, or phone number, I followed up with them to make sure they had not forgotten about my invitation to participate. This following up was more like a written polite reminder, rather than a push for a particular response.

Apart from the information sheets that I sent or handed to people when I asked them to participate, I gave the participants another information sheet and a consent form before beginning the interviews. I brought these forms in both Farsi and English, and normally asked them which language they preferred. Also, the most important parts of the information sheets were reviewed verbally, including the research topic, the participant's rights, the confidentiality of the data, and the way I would use, store and finally destroy the participant's raw data. After this review, I asked the participants if they had any other questions. This part of the interview was normally very smooth, and the participants hardly had any concerns. After going over all of these steps, I asked the participants to sign the consent form (appendices 2 and 5). Although all of the participants signed the consent forms, three of them did so without providing their family names.

Respect for privacy and confidentiality. The participants were assured in writing that any information given to the researcher in the course of the investigation had to be

treated as confidential (Denscombe, 2010). All information and materials, including audio records, notes, or any other types of documents that were transcribed, translated or analysed by the researcher, had to be kept in a safe place to ensure the privacy of the participants. In publishing the findings from the interviews, the identity of the participants had to be protected by use of pseudonyms, and no information that could lead to the identification of a participant could be published in the thesis.

The security of the data is of great importance in any qualitative research. The researcher is responsible to ensure that the collected information will not fall into the wrong hands or be used for any other purpose. According to the Massey University ethics code, all of the data should be stored in a secure place that is accessible by the researcher/supervisor only. In the case of this work, my supervisors did not want access to the data, so the data is accessible only by me. To guarantee the security of the data and protection of participants' privacy, the following strategies have been adopted.

- The consent forms and audio files were stored separately.
- The interviews were recorded by my MP3 player. After each interview, the audio files were transferred to my laptop, and then deleted from the MP3 player.
- Two copies of each interview (that is, two copies each of the audio and the transcribed word file), were stored.
- One copy was stored in my personal laptop, which is protected by a password, and is accessible only by me.
- The second copy was kept in a flash memory chip that has been used for this purpose only. The flash memory was stored in my desk shelf, which is locked under key.
- Each participant was assigned a suitable pseudonym.
- The pseudonyms were used in the transcripts and in the written thesis.
- No potentially identifying information (e.g., exact place of origin or current employment) was used in the written thesis.

Minimising the risk of harm. The most significant principle regarding research ethics concerns the harmful consequences that could result from the actions of researchers (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). According to this principle, the researcher should not

expose the participant to any unnecessary forms of harm such as ‘stress, fatigue, emotional distress or embarrassment’ (Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct, 2015, p. 7). In the case of this research, the risk of harm to the participants was/is very low, but it still existed. For instance, sharing life stories in the context of migration could remind the participants of painful, emotionally upsetting memories. In such cases, I always apologised to the participants for reminding them of those memories. Also, I was ready to provide them a referral for free counselling sessions (as suggested by the committee) if they experienced any serious emotional distress during the interviews. Fortunately, no such serious issues arose during my interviews. I avoided asking directly about traumatic events that may have affected the participants’ lives.

Moreover, as I mentioned in the previous section, I do my best to keep the data safe and anonymous. There is a minimal risk that the participants may become identifiable based on their stories as given in this research, because any details about their personal lives are omitted or changed to ensure their privacy and anonymity. Regarding concerns about attempts by the Iranian authorities to get access to these data, although I think the risk of such an attempt would be very low, I will not take any types of data in hard or soft copy or any retrieval device that has had data on it with me during any possible future visit to Iran. Also, I will not transfer any type of raw data through Facebook or email.

Avoidance of conflicting roles/interests. Researchers must avoid any project that puts them in a position of conflict between their activities as a researcher and their interests as a professional or private individual. To reduce this risk, I have avoided selecting interviewees from my close friends, as my primary impressions or prejudices about them could affect the way I analyse their data. However, I have accepted help from these friends in finding other potential participants.

Also based on this principle, I have always tried to keep some social distance with the participants. Occasionally, the sympathy between me and participants was quite strong, especially if they were students and of the same age. In these cases, the participants sometimes asked me to keep in touch or sent me a friend request on Facebook. Although I welcomed such invitations, I always hesitated to offer them, as I wished to avoid any conflict in roles. It could be possible that people were willing to share some parts of their personal information with the researcher, based on the assumption that they would never see her/him

again. So, in terms of research ethics, I felt that any other type of relationship beyond that of interviewee and interviewer should be offered by the participants.

Sample Size

Qualitative research samples are ‘an inch wide and a mile deep’. So, in general, the richness of the data is more important than the number of interviews (Padgett, 2008, p. 56). In this study, after conducting about 24 to 28 interviews, I grew satisfied with the richness and coverage of the data. At that stage, I had an overall idea concerning the similarities and differences of the participants’ narratives, and I could see the general themes that were dominant in the participants’ stories. After this number of interviews, I could tell that the participants’ narratives were basically repeating the same set of themes, and no new themes or insights were emerging. After this point, I stopped looking actively for participants.

The data from interviews did not cover all of the issues that I wish to collect data on, but there was no guarantee that doing more interviews would uncover data on those issues. For instance, none of my participants mentioned that they had experienced any sort of domestic violence after migrating to New Zealand. I knew that this problem must exist for some immigrants, but felt that conducting more interviews in the hope of finding some data on this issue was unlikely to succeed.⁵⁶

Liamputpong and Ezzy (2005) said that the sample size is large enough when it can support the desired analysis and the dimensions of the research interests. Some scholars have tried to determine the approximate sample size for data saturation needed for different types of qualitative research. For instance, Liamputpong and Ezzy (2005) indicated that most qualitative studies involve around 40 respondents, and Morse (1994) suggested that anywhere from 6 to 40 participants could be enough, according to the type of study. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) conducted a specific study to systematically document the degree of data saturation in qualitative studies. They suggested that data saturation could happen after 12 interviews if the study had fairly narrow objectives and involved one fairly homogenous population. Based on these criteria, I determined that my research on Iranian women in New Zealand could be based on a sample size slightly greater than 12, as this study involved a fairly limited focus of interest (experiences of immigration and emigration) and one fairly

⁵⁶ I met with an Iranian family consultant to see if she could facilitate my access to any participant with these sorts of experiences, but in considering the privacy of her clients, she felt unable to help me.

homogenous population (Iranian women who live in NZ). However, as I pursued my fieldwork further, I could see that I needed considerably more than a dozen participants to show the diversity of the experiences among participants with different backgrounds, age groups, religions, and so on. Earlier in my fieldwork, during the stage when I was having difficulty finding participants, I was looking for any person who met the basic criteria for my research. Later, after getting a base sample of participants, I started to get more selective, and tried to choose participants who would better represent the existing diversity of the community. For instance, later on my fieldwork I saw that I had interviewed a number of PhD students in Auckland, so I decided to avoid any more PhD students. I realised that I might become trapped in a pattern of seeing certain types of people, despite making an effort to expand my circle of contacts.

Also, even though I was looking for diversity, it was not always easy to find specific types of participants. For instance, I was looking for some participants who wear hijab here in New Zealand, but I did not come across any of these through the random process of introductions through contacts. It was hard to ask my contacts to introduce me to people who fit that description. I was worried that the interviewees might be told that I was looking for women who wore hijab, as this might raise some perceptions prior to the interview, and affect the type of data I could get. Fortunately in this case, one year after I finished the latest series of interviews, one of my non-Iranian friends who had converted to Islam suggested that I might like to interview the mother of one of her Iranian friends, who he knew from his mosque. In that way I was finally introduced to my only participant who wore hijab. Interestingly, this person had a very limited interaction with the Iranian community in New Zealand, and it was almost impossible to reach her through someone inside the community.

Obviously, in some cases I was unlucky. For instance, I could not find any participant who was a Christian before her migration from Iran. I came across a couple of participants who were Christian, but they had converted to Christianity after their migration. I was looking for a participant who had the experience of living as a Christian in Iran, to see how the particular experiences of this minority group might have influenced their decisions to migrate. Again, asking to meet someone who was Christian but not a convert from Islam could raise sensitive questions. I finally ended my work without including anyone with this experience.

Methodological Suggestions

As a final part of this methodology chapter and before introducing my sample, I would like to discuss a few aspects of my methodology that were shaped by the particular issues of Iranian migrants in New Zealand. Also, I would like to suggest a few tips for researchers who would like to do similar types of research with the Iranian community in the future.

One of the most challenging parts of my fieldwork, specifically in Auckland, was getting access to participants. A significant part of this difficulty was related to the absence of any Iranian community organisation. An additional challenge was the degree of distrust among Iranian migrants, mostly, due to the fear of official surveillance from their home country's government.

Although the lack of an Iranian community organisation could itself be related to lack of trust, there was another aspect to this issue. It has been previously observed that some Iranian migrants are reluctant to contact other people of their own ethnic background, and they prefer to limit their inter-community interactions as much as possible after migration. An important reason for this lack of interest arises from the concern that members of their own community could re-expose them to traditional patterns of behaviour that they had migrated to escape from (Shahidian, 1999). Such pressure from the community could be stronger for females, as Iranian social expectations might serve to reinforce certain gender-related concepts or rules from the country of origin.

Also regarding the issue of trust, some Iranians are concerned that their actions could come under surveillance by their home country's government. This suspicion is strong among some of migrants in New Zealand, and virtually absent among others. Consequently, there was a reduced chance that strongly suspicious migrants would participate in my study. One participant, however, openly expressed her suspicion of my motives for doing this research during our interview.

After considering my experience of doing fieldwork with the Iranian community in New Zealand, I would like to make three main suggestions for other insider researchers who seek to conduct research with the Iranian migrant community on socio-political topics.

First, it is helpful if a third person can introduce the researcher to the participants, rather than having the researcher directly approach potential participants at public events, or

by advertising the research project online. Trustworthy people who have a good reputation in the community could be very helpful, and it is important to try working through these people as much as possible. In the case of my study, I asked for help from people with good reputations and strong connections in the community, such as immigration specialists, lawyers, or the administrators of Iranian Facebook pages or websites in New Zealand. The third-person intermediaries could be either Iranian or non-Iranian, and it is good to have the mixture of both.

Also, over the period of pre-contact with participants, it is important to avoid putting any type of pressure on the contacts to participate especially if the researcher approaches them by her/himself. In inviting participants, researchers should consider that some contacts might be hesitant or shy to say ‘no’ directly, and it is important to consider the cultural concept of ‘*tarof*’.⁵⁷ If the researchers are not sensitive regarding this kind of reluctance, they might find that their participants will come to the interviews, but then provide incorrect information, or simply avoid saying much. In the case of this study, I experienced such problems with two of my participants.⁵⁸

Last but not least, it is important to leave the questions that might be considered politically sensitive or very personal for the later stages of the interviews. If the participants do not show enough trust, it is better not to ask those questions at all. In the case of my study, and considering both the order of incidents and the structure of the participants’ narratives, the smoothest way to do the interviews was to start by asking about pre-migration experiences, and then move to the post-migration experiences. Following this structure meant that the more sensitive questions (that were related to experiences of politics in daily life in Iran) were asked in the earlier stage of the interviews. To solve this problem to some degree,

⁵⁷ *Tarof* is an aspect of Iranian etiquette in which the true meaning of what is said is not stated in words, but through a shared set of expectations regarding politeness. *Tarof* refers to the concept of ‘denying your will to please your counterpart, however the will is only denied because of the custom and not to please the counterpart’ (urbandictionary.com). *Tarof* has a potential to cause misunderstandings between different parties (Valla, 2016).

⁵⁸ On one occasion I arranged an interview with a participant, and when I went to see her at her hair dressing salon, she said she was very busy at the moment, and asked me to contact her in a few months. I contacted her by text a few months later, and asked if we could meet up. She agreed and suggested a time. This time, when I arrived in her salon it seemed she was surprised to see me and was not eager to do the interview, although she did not say this verbally. We went to a nearby café, but when I started to do the interview, she either said that she could not answer particular questions, or she answered very briefly. After a while she told me ‘I’m sorry but, I’m not telling you the right information’. I stopped the interview at that point. After that, we had a little chat about different things, and she apologised for the inconvenience to me. It seems that without realising it, I had put some pressure on her to participate. Probably after the first time that she cancelled our interview I should have realised that she was unwilling, and was just reluctant to say ‘no’ out of politeness.

I started the interviews with some demographic questions, and continued with some general questions about the participants' lives. Then I started to ask a few questions that could be considered sensitive, and again moved back to less sensitive questions. I avoided asking more than two sensitive questions in a row, and tried to avoid discussing more than one sensitive issue in one interview. Although I tried to postpone the sensitive questions as much as possible, it was impossible to leave them all for the last stage of the interview.

This pattern worked for most of the interviews, and the participants mostly showed acceptable levels of trust. Only one participant showed deep suspicion regarding my motives for doing this research, and told me so directly. When I asked my second question (regarding her personal experiences with unequal gender laws in Iran), she told me that she had 'no doubt that I collected these data for Iranian government'.⁵⁹ At the end of the interview, however, she apologised and told me that she had judged me wrongly. She explained that when I asked a series of questions about her experiences in New Zealand, she realised that I was just collecting this information for a study. She told me that I should have asked the questions about her post-migration experience first.

Participants' Demographic Profiles

My participants consisted of 34 adult Iranian women, who arrived in New Zealand between 1979⁶⁰ and 2012, when they were 18 years old or older. At the time of their interviews, the participants were between 26 and 71 years old, with the average age being 38. They were between 20 and 44 years old when they first entered NZ, with the average age at immigration being 30. Their years of stay in New Zealand were between 2 and 28 years, with the average being 9 years. Regarding their migration status, 13 were New Zealand citizens at the time of the interviews, 15 were permanent residents, and 6 were on student or work visas. During their first entries into NZ, 14 of the participants arrived with partnership visas (either as immigrants who had married someone already living in New Zealand, or as wives of men who were the main applicants for immigration). Seven participants were on student visas, four were refugees, and the rest were on work partnership visas, family reunion visas, visitor

⁵⁹ I told this participant why I was asking her these questions, and how they related to the whole research project. I also reminded her about her right to withdraw from the interview at any stage, or to skip answering any questions that she did not wish to answer. Also, I told her that she could contact my supervisors and/or the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (whose contact details were given on the Information Sheets), as these supervisors could address any concerns she had over the nature of my study.

⁶⁰ This commencement date has been chosen because of the 1979 Iranian revolution and its vast effects on the lives of Iranian individuals.

visas or unknown. Their education levels ranged between high school diploma and PhD. Seven of the participants held high school diplomas, 12 had bachelor's degrees, 9 had master's degrees, and 6 were studying towards a PhD. In terms of religion, 23 were Muslims (including both practicing and non-practicing Muslims), 2 were Christians, 3 were Baha'is, and 5 were atheists, agnostics, professed to have no religion, or claimed to be spiritual rather than religious. One of the participants declined to answer this question. In terms of marital status, 23 were married, 7 divorced, 2 single/never married, 1 was de facto married, and 1 was a widow. Table 3 shows more detail about the demographics of the participants.

Table 3.

Profiles of the 34 participants

NO	Date of Birth	Year Entry	Age Entry	IMMG Status	Education	Religion	Marital status	Job	City
1	1986	2012	26	Student	Master's	Agnostic	Single	Student (PhD)	WLG
2	1979	2004	25	Citizen	HS Diploma	Muslim	Married	Housewife	AKL
3	1975	2000	25	Citizen	HS Diploma	Christian	Married	Hairdresser	AKL
4	1964	2009	45	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Divorced	Professional	AKL
5	1987	2013	26	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Married	Student (PhD)	HTN
6	1943	1987	44	Citizen	Bachelor's	No religion	Married	Retired	WLG
7	1965	2000	35	Citizen	Master's	Spiritual	Divorced	Professional	AKL
8	1984	2009	25	Resident	Bachelor's	Muslim	Married	Student	AKL
9	1979	2008	29	Resident	HS Diploma	Muslim	Married	Housewife	HTN
10	1980	2012	32	Student	Master's	Muslim	Married	PhD student	AKL
11	1980	2012	32	Student	Bachelor	Muslim	Divorced	Student	AKL
12	1979	2012	34	Work	Bachelor's	Muslim	Married	Casual	AKL
13	1961	1997	36	Citizen	HS Diploma	Baha'i	Widow	Chief	AKL
14	1984	2012	28	Student	Master's	Muslim	Married	Student (PhD)	AKL
15	-	2011	-	Resident	Bachelor's	Christian	Married	Student	HTN
16	1965	1987	22	Citizen	Master's	Baha'i	Divorced	Professional	AKL
17	1984	2009	26	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Married	Student (PhD)	WLG
18	1981	2004	23	Citizen	Master's	Muslim	Married	Professional	AKL
19	1983	2003	20	Citizen	Bachelor's	Atheist	De facto	Professional	AKL
20	1963	2003	40	Citizen	HS Diploma	-	Divorced	Hairdresser	AKL
21	1976	1999	23	Citizen	Bachelor's	Atheist	Divorced	Professional	WLG
22	1988	2008	20	Citizen	Bachelor's	Muslim	Single	Professional	WLG
23	1972	2005	33	Citizen	Master's	Baha'i	Divorced	Professional	AKL
24	1981	2009	28	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Married	Professional	AKL
25	1981	2009	28	Resident	Bachelor's	Muslim	Married	Professional	AKL
26	1966	2007	41	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Married	Professional	HTN
27	1980	2003	23	Resident	HS Diploma	Muslim	Married	Housewife	AKL
28	1982	2005	26	Resident	HS Diploma	Muslim	Married	Student	AKL
29	1985	2010	25	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Married	Professional	AKL
30	1981	2009	28	Resident	Bachelor's	Muslim	Married	Professional	AKL
31	1988	2008	20	Resident	Bachelor's	Muslim	Married	Job seeker	CHCH
32	1983	2011	28	Resident	Master's	Muslim	Married	Professional	CHCH
33	1980	2013	33	Student	Master's	Muslim	Married	Student(PhD)	CHCH
34	1955	1986	31	Citizen	Bachelor's	Muslim	Married	Professional	AKL

This chapter has outlined my choices regarding research methodology. In the next four chapters, I will discuss the research findings related to motivations for migration from Iran and the participants' post-migration experiences at both the personal and social levels.

Chapter Four: Emigration and Gender Inequalities in the Context of Politics

In this chapter, I discuss the main motivations for women's migration from Iran, based on my participants' points of view. Generally, their decisions to migrate were taken over a long period of time and a variety of reasons were involved. For each immigrant, certain specific incidents, reasons, and background factors were most central in the whole process. In the next two chapters, I will explore and analyse the central elements in my participants' emigration stories. In general, the main themes of this chapter are the participants' reported experiences with gender-related issues in Iran, the ways these experiences affected their daily lives, and the relationships between these experiences and their decisions to leave the country. Of course discussing this set of issues does not mean that this study ignores wider issues. Other aspects of the participants' motives will be explored in the next chapter.

I have done my best to present the participants' narratives in a way that is as close as possible to their actual voices, and to reflect on their experiences in the ways that they wish to be heard. However, all details that could make the participants identifiable have been removed or changed. Also, in some places the narratives have been reorganised, summarised, or a few words have been added for better coherence.

Migration as a Childhood Dream

Negin was the only participant who contacted me herself, and showed initiative in talking to me. While I was struggling to find my first participants in New Zealand, Negin sent me an encouraging message, saying that she was interested in my topic and would be more than happy to share her emigration story with me. She got my contact details from the 'Iranian Cultural Society of Wellington', an organisation that I had contacted a few months before, and had asked its president to forward my information sheets to eligible Iranian women in the city.

I was enthusiastic about talking with Negin, not just because of her interest, but more because she seemed to be a real story teller from our first interaction. In her first email after introducing herself, Negin wrote, 'I must be the first single female student who came to New Zealand by her own without knowing anyone here in the late 1980s'. This title that she gave herself, regardless of how accurate it was, told me a lot about her. It made me sure that a very special story would be waiting for me in the capital city.

As I expected, Negin was very welcoming and supportive to me. She considered me as one of the next generation of females who were following her to New Zealand on their own. She invited me to go to her place for the interview, and picked me up from my accommodation in the city centre.

Negin's place was a typical Persian home, of the kind where you take off your shoes without asking on seeing the handmade carpets on the floor. Most of my participants met me in cafés or shopping malls, so going to Negin's place was a good opportunity to experience a face-to face interview in a private place where no one else was present. Also, the Persian atmosphere of her home gave us a context for smoothly starting our conversation about her experiences in Iran and the reasons she left.

The concept of gender inequality was the central discourse in Negin's emigration story, and her idea of emigrating due to this concern came to her when she was only 11, on her first international trip, which was to Turkey. She said,

I got really sensitive about my limitations in Iran as a girl after our first family trip to Turkey. On that trip, when we passed the border by car and arrived to Turkey, suddenly I saw some girls of my age who didn't have scarves and wore colourful dresses. Then I asked myself why they could choose what they want to put on, but I couldn't. Later, I saw more girls from other nationalities over there, and I felt that we really had a lot in common. I was thinking I needed to go to other countries and discover more places. I was thinking how it could be nice to live in other countries and be free from all limitations in Iran. ... A few years later, when I was 15, we visited Cyprus, and I saw again how everyone was looking free and happy over there. I saw that girls and boys were together, without any problems. And again I started to compare that with the situation in Iran. I was quite young at that time, and I just saw the positive sides of everything over there. I saw everything black and white.

Although these trips were like a first sparkle for Negin's dream of migration, it also seems that from the time she was a teenager she gave a lot of thought to the inequalities between males and females in Iran. She said that her first encounter with concepts like gender equality or violence against women came through reading a magazine that was published before the 1979 revolution:

I found some old versions of women's magazine (*Zan-e Rooz*)⁶¹ in the basement of my grandmother's house. I read them over and over, as they were full of pictures and romance stories. Also, there were some articles about women's rights, the reasons for high rates of domestic violence against women in Iran, and how to stop that problem. These magazines made me familiar with some new concepts that I never heard before. Well, some of the materials were very superficial, but some of them were informative for me.

Negin's early life as a teenager coincided with the first decade after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The way she became familiar with concepts of women's rights was somehow reflective of the political situation of Iran, and the level of freedom of speech and the press in that period. During those years, all publications were government-run and strictly controlled to reflect the official ideology of the Islamic Republic. It was forbidden to discuss concepts of gender equality in the official publications, and these concepts could only be addressed from an Islamic point of view, and with a bias towards male rights.⁶² Therefore, as Negin said, one of the few ways of getting in touch with a different view was through publications from prior to the 1979 revolution.

Finally, Negin decided to emigrate when she was 16:

When I started high school, I had already made my decision to leave Iran. While all of my classmates were studying hard for their university entry exams, I was just studying English. My parents were really unhappy about that, and blamed me for not studying enough, but I keep telling them that I didn't want to go to university in Iran. After finishing my high school, I would

⁶¹ *Zane-e Rooz* (*Today's Women*) was the name of one of the most popular weekly magazines in Iran before the 1979 revolution, and was first published in 1964. The general outlook of the magazine was in line with the policies of the Pahlavi regime, and it mostly avoided direct discussion of politics. Most of the articles were dedicated to cooking, health and beauty, family life, or gossip. Occasionally, however, it also published some influential articles on changes in family law. The fully Islamicised version of this publication reappeared in 1980 (Khiabany, 2010, pp. 187–188).

⁶² The most common way of justifying inequalities between males and females in Islamic ideology has been shaped by a distinction between the concepts of 'equality' and 'justice'. Generally, it is claimed that as males and females are different both mentally and physically, they should be treated differently in terms of their responsibilities and rights. According to this idea, treating those who are different equally or treating those who are similar differently are both forms of injustice. Mortaza Mutahhari, a high-ranking cleric who was assassinated a few months after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, was one of the main proponents of this idea in Iran. His works have been highly influential in official justifications for inequalities between males and females in Iran after the 1979 Revolution. For more information, see Shehadeh, L. (2003), *Ayatollah Mortaza Mutahhari: The idea of women in fundamentalist Islam*.

go abroad for studying. I was thinking to myself that I need to go somewhere where I can be seen as equal to males. I wanted a place that would accept me the way I am, not a place that asked me to change before being accepted. I even thought about the type of dress that I wanted to wear there.

With laughter she added, ‘Now I can understand how naïve I was in those years. I was living on another planet’.

Negin said that she had fantasies about New Zealand as her migration destination after she saw an information book on migrating there.

We had a family friend who had migrated to New Zealand in early 1980s, and we heard about this country from them. Later, my parents went to the New Zealand embassy in Tehran to find out about the country’s immigration programme. They brought home an information book about immigration to New Zealand that was full of amazing photos of natural beauty there. For a while, I tuned the pages of that book every day. I would spend hours dreaming about life in a house that overlooked bushes and trees, where you could hear birds’ melodies.

Although Negin was really motivated to leave Iran after finishing high school, she could not do so, because the foreign universities she applied to asked her to do a two-year program in the Iranian universities before starting her courses abroad. She did so, and when she was about to finish her two years in an Iranian university, she again contacted those universities in Auckland and Wellington to ask for admission. Both of those universities, however, rejected her application. As she explained,

It was disappointing that both universities rejected me, and reapplying wasn’t really easy. You know, that time was different from now. There was no email or Internet access, so all communications were by snail mail, or in the best situation by fax ... Reapplying needed lots of paperwork, doing lots of official translation again, and many other things that were both expensive and time consuming. Meanwhile, I wasn’t sure if it would work this time or not ... I told myself, well, maybe that’s my destiny and there is no way to escape from that.

At the same time, as Negin was in contact with those New Zealand universities, she sat for the bachelor's entry exam in Iran as well. After she was rejected by the New Zealand universities, she received word that she had passed the Iranian entry exam. She started her bachelor's programme, but during her first days in that university, an incident happened that pushed her again to pursue her emigration decision.

During the first days of my university, one time I put a long, medium brown overcoat on the top of my robe and went to the university. Before I entered the building, two female guards at the door stopped me and asked me to go to their office. Then they started harassing me and one of them asked, 'Why did you wear this colour on?' I was really shocked, and said I just have this coat and put it on. The other guard said 'No, we know why you put this overcoat on. You put it on because you are seeking to attract boys'. I felt really offended by those people, especially because they accused me that I'm seeking to attract boys. I considered all Iranian males as a part of the system that produces inequalities against women, so I was pessimistic about all of them. I thought I could only find the person who deserved my love outside Iran. By this background, it was really hard for me when those guards accused me of seeking to attract boys.

After that experience, Negin did not go to that university any more. She went back home the same day and decided to pursue her case with the international offices of foreign universities.

On my way back from university, I told to myself, no, my destiny shouldn't be like that. I should call those people at the international office and ask them why they rejected my application. Fortunately, on that day my cousin was at our place. She was growing up in the U.S. and spoke English fluently, so I asked her to help me to call those people. We called them, and finally I understood what the problem was. It was very simple: in my mail to them, I had written that I wanted to study in their college. The word 'College' in American English means, 'University', but in British English it means 'high school'. They rejected me simply because they were universities and not colleges in their own definition.

After solving this problem, Negin could get her admission from the university. She got her student visa, and finally moved to New Zealand when she was 23 years old.

Different Stories, Similar Milestones, Hijab

Negin's story highlights the importance of her experience with the university guards in her decision to emigrate. A number of the other participants described similar experiences with university guards or morality police, and the ways such experiences affected them were very similar to Negin's case.

Mina, 29, who came to New Zealand to do her PhD in 2012, mentioned her experience with morality police as the incident that drove her to leave Iran as soon as she could:

While I was in the process of applying for a U.S. student visa, once my friend and I were arrested by morality police because of a thing that, I don't know exactly what it was, but they called it 'improper dress' or 'unfavourable hijab'. It was a really annoying experience for both of us, and after that I decided to leave the country as soon as I could. At that time, I got admissions for master's studies from two universities, one in Sweden and the other in the U.S. I preferred to go to the American university, which gave me a scholarship. I applied for the visa, but my application was rejected. I was about to re-apply, but then changed my mind and went ahead with the plan for Sweden, because the process was faster and the chance of rejection was lower... Later, when I finished my master's over there, I got in touch with an influential professor in my field in New Zealand, and was offered a scholarship by the university he teaches in, so I moved to New Zealand.

In describing her incident with the morality police, Mina said,

My friend and I were about to go to an exhibition in the city centre. My friend's father gave us a ride, and dropped off us somewhere close to the exhibition, with the plan to join us later in the gallery after he found a car park. We were walking very fast to arrive there as soon as we could, when suddenly the morality police van pulled in front of us, and they asked us to stop. One of the officers got out from the van and said, 'Do you think you can escape from us?' We really didn't expect even any verbal warning from police, because

both of us were wearing very common dresses, especially my friend who was coming from work. But, unfortunately, they arrested both of us. We were the first people that they arrested, so they kept us in the van for about two hours until they made it full. Also, they took our mobile phones, so we were not able to contact my friend's father and let him know that we are not in the exhibition. Later they took us to the police station, and from there they called our families to let them know that they arrested us, and asked them to bring more conservative dresses for us. The whole process took about six hours, and it was one of my worst life experiences. We felt disrespected and humiliated, and we signed an official commitment to dress in a proper way, though no one told us what exactly was wrong with us.

Mina explained that she decided to emigrate mainly due to what she called 'the general lack of social and political freedom in Iran'. Although Mina did not directly raise gender-related issues as her main reasons for leaving the country, these issues shaped the context of the incident which motivated her to leave as soon as possible. Her experiences demonstrate how her motives for emigration were affected and fed by the specific gender policies that are related to hijab.

The morality police, in their current form, was established in 2007. According to official statistics from the former commander of Iran's Law Enforcement Forces, during 2013 alone nearly three and a half million Iranian women received warnings for their improper hijab from the morality police, and about 18,000 of them were prosecuted in court (Isna, 2014). The way that this section of the law enforcement service has behaved, and its balance of cost or benefit to society, have been the subjects of serious debate between different political groups since the establishment of this police force.

In general, the policy of mandatory hijab for women and the ideological or religious importance of this issue are accepted unanimously among Iranian authorities and policy makers. Political controversy and debates are mainly about the approaches used to apply this policy. With a few exceptions, the more moderate political actors in Iran are less strict about hijab. These people oppose the idea of using direct force to make women to wear more modest hijab. They advise leaving women alone so long as they meet the basic standards of public dress, including reasonable covering of hair and full covering of the body. This moderate group argues that the issue of hijab should be addressed more through cultural and

educational policies rather than by force. On the other hand, hardliners and the more conservative power holders believe that both physical force and cultural action should be adopted for controlling the issue of women's dress.⁶³

Despite the disagreements over methods for maintaining the dress code, it seems that both moderates and conservatives in Iran are aware of the social and international backlash over this issue. In 2014 the conservative-dominated parliament, tried to pass a bill to impose more lawful punishments for women who do not conform to the Islamic dress code, and to increase the level of penalties involved.⁶⁴ Due to the disagreements around this bill, it was sent to the Islamic Parliament Research Centre⁶⁵ for further assessment. In a comprehensive report (Arhami & Kalhor, 2015), this Centre recommended that the bill should not be passed, mainly because applying more direct force on the hijab issue and increasing the penalties could increase the gap between the citizens and the government, and cause greater public resistance. In particular, the Centre mentioned that according to various reports, some 71% of women in Tehran did not meet the required standards, and could be described as wearing a problematic type of hijab. Therefore, any attempts to emphasise the criminal aspects of this issue could generate resistance from these 71%. This report also claimed that despite the high expense of maintaining the morality police, this section of the law enforcement forces had failed to meet its basic aims, and its activities could not succeed in improving the level of hijab compliance (Arhami & Kalhor, 2015).

⁶³ For example, the moderate Iranian president Hassan Rouhani clearly criticised the harsh enforcement of hijab, and asked for more cultural solutions rather than physical ones: 'Do we think that elevating a society is [done] through vans and minibuses and policeman and soldiers? Culture is not made right by this ... the path to promote culture is through the clerics, the seminary, researchers and college professors. Is the path to modesty with a van? [referring to the vans which are used by morality police for transferring arrested women from streets to police stations] We don't have any other way? Our own women are the educators of society, the researchers and professors of society—you mean they don't know themselves how to establish modesty in society and promote the hijab?' (BBC Persian, 2014). A few days after Rouhani's criticism, the principal head of the judicial system, Sadeg Larijani [the chief justice of Iran], reacted by arguing, 'We all know that we couldn't change one's beliefs by force, but it is a mistake if we assume that the issue of loss of hijab could be solved just by cultural solutions' (*Deutsche Welle*, 2014).

⁶⁴ According to current law, not having proper hijab can be considered a crime, and 'women, who appear in public places and roads without wearing an Islamic hijab, shall be sentenced to ten days to two months imprisonment or a fine of fifty thousand to five hundred rials' (Article 638, Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five).

⁶⁵ This Centre is one of the most important official research centres in Iran. It operates as an independent research institute, which provides parliament with in-depth expert examinations of policies (An overview of the Islamic Parliament Research Centre, 2013). The Centre has access to classified information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Intelligence (Getting familiar with the Islamic Parliament Research Centre, 2014).

Clearly, not all of the women who had conflicts with the morality police decided to leave the country, or even thought about that. Women could react to this issue in various ways, but a notable number of my participants discussed their concerns about this issue as a factor that influenced their decision to emigrate. At least four of them said that particular experiences with the morality police and/or university guards were milestones in their migration decision process, and several others mentioned this issue as one of the background reasons for their decision. This group of participants described getting tired of dealing with the issue of hijab. They said that most days they had to spend a lot of time and attention to dressing, trying to see if they could meet the standards. In many cases they were not sure what would be accepted, and this uncertainty made their social lives hard, because they were afraid of falling into conflict with the morality police. For example, Sima, 35, said ‘Whenever, I wanted to go out, I should think about what to put on, to not get harassed by morality police, and because they don’t have clear standards, it was hard to get confident about your dress. This process was annoying for me and made me nervous’.

Another participant, Raha 32, said:

Once, when I was in the street, my scarf had fallen on my shoulder because of the wind. At that moment, the morality police arrived and they wanted to arrest me because of that. After some negotiations, they accepted to not arrest me, but they confiscated my ID and asked me to go to police station with either my father or husband the next day. The following day when we went to police station, they told me I should sit in five sessions of classes about hijab before could have my ID back. This was my second experience with morality police, and it made me feel really insecure. I didn’t do anything wrong, it was just because of the wind. Then later, when I applied for police clearance as a part of my documents for New Zealand immigration, I found out that they included this as a criminal record for me in my police certificate.

Family Law, Social Norms, and Emigration

Organised and non-organised gender inequalities in Iran had a number of effects on my participants’ lives. Like Negin, some of the participants were aware of these inequalities from the time they were children, and struggles with these unequal processes affected their daily lives in a general way. On the other hand, another group of participants felt that gender inequalities were not their main concern. They accepted these conditions as part of their daily

lives, until specific personal experiences of gender inequality made them determined to emigrate.

For example, Sima, 35, who came to New Zealand in 2012, told me how she got used to gender inequalities from her childhood on, until she decided to get a divorce from her husband:

I was born in a family where my parents always wished to have a son as their next kid, but this wish never came true. My mom finally gave up after she had borne nine girls. Then, when I was a child, I saw how my grandparents preferred their grandsons to their granddaughters. Later, when I got older, I saw that the boys at university had priority over the girls. At the work place, males got better positions, but their performance was not better. ... Even when I got married, I was supposed to respect my husband's family more than my own family. I accepted all of these things as a part of my life, but the situation got really complicated for me when I decided to separate from my husband.

In looking at Sima's story, we can see how unequal gender norms surrounded her from the day she was born. In fact, her birth was the result of her parents' wish to have a son. As she was growing up, she experienced more forms of discrimination, but she just adapted herself to the situation—until she had a direct encounter with Iranian family law. As she explained, she struggled to divorce her husband for about four years before coming to New Zealand:

Getting a divorce from your husband can be really annoying in Iran. Because my husband didn't agree to divorce me, I was expected to live with him. I went to the family court a couple of times and asked for divorce. The judge asked me if my husband beat me up, or if he was addicted to drugs, or if he got another wife, and I said no. He asked me, 'So why you don't want to live with him?' I said, 'I don't like him. We are too different from each other'. The judge told me that my reasons were funny: 'You can't ask for divorce with these reasons'.

We were doing some consultations with a family counsellor for about two years, but nothing changed. Our relationship was just getting worse and worse. After three years, I again asked for divorce. I told the judge that I didn't like

my husband's behaviour: 'I can't live with him. I am being damaged emotionally in this relationship and I am going to get sick mentally if I continue to live with him'. But the judge told me that my reasons were not enough for divorce. He told me the only way was to convince my husband to divorce me.

Sima's husband finally accepted that they could live in separate houses, but he did not agree to divorce her. After that, she applied for a student visa and came to New Zealand to do her post-grad studies, with the hope of finding a job here afterwards. She thought that if she had been able to get a divorce from her husband in Iran, maybe she would not have come to NZ:

It is not easy to start your life from below zero in another country when you are 33 years old. I had a good job in Iran with about eight years' experience. I had my own apartment, car, and friends over there. If I could be separate from my husband, maybe it was more logical to stay there.

The point that Sima raised about her inability to divorce her husband is related to Articles 1129,⁶⁶ 1130,⁶⁷ and 1133⁶⁸ of the Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These articles restrict the right of divorce to the husband, and allow a wife to ask for divorce only under certain conditions, such as the husband's addiction to harmful drugs, his desertion of the mutual home for at least six months, or his conviction for major crimes.

⁶⁶ Article 1129 says 'If the husband refuses to pay the cost of maintenance of his wife, ... the wife can refer to the judge applying for divorce and the judge will compel the husband to divorce her'.

⁶⁷ Article 1130 says 'In the following circumstances, the wife can refer to the Islamic judge and request for a divorce. When it is proved to the Court that the continuation of the marriage causes difficult and undesirable conditions, the judge can, for the sake of avoiding harm and difficulty, compel the husband to divorce his wife. If this cannot be done, then the divorce will be made on the permission of the Islamic judge'. Based on an additional section that was added to this article in 2002, the situations that qualified as 'difficult and undesirable conditions' were restricted to the following cases:

- 1- 'The husband's leaving of marital life for at least six consecutive months, ... without any acceptable reason'.
- 2- 'The husband's addiction to any kind of drugs or alcohol that damages the marital life, and his refusal or impossibility of compelling him to quit the addiction in a period prescribed by the doctor'.
- 3- 'Final conviction of the husband to five years, or more, imprisonment'.
- 4- 'Wife battery, or any kind of mistreatment of the wife that is intolerable in the wife's condition'.
- 5- 'Husband's affliction with incurable mental illnesses or contagious disease or any kind of incurable diseases that disrupt the marital life'.

⁶⁸ Article 1133 of the civil code says 'A man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes to do so'. The divorce, however, should come only after paying the wife's agreed 'mahr'. Mahr is an Islamic tradition that is recognised in Iranian law, and defined as a 'sum of money or other property which becomes payable by the husband to the wife as an effect of marriage' (Qaisi, 2001). This amount is usually claimed in the event that the husband divorces his wife, or upon the husband's death. This amount should be written in the marriage contract.

The difficulties that Sima faced when she tried to divorce her husband were central in her migration story. She explained that even if she could divorce her husband in Iran, it would be hard for her to live there as a divorced female. The difficulties that divorcees could face in Iran were mainly caused by social norms and cultural attitudes, and these difficulties were mentioned by another participant.

Niki, 50, arrived in New Zealand in 2009. She had left Iran in 1999, and was living in the U.A.E. for about ten years before coming to New Zealand. Also, she was living in England with her parents for a few years when she was a teenager. Like Sima, Niki was struggling to divorce her husband in Iran. After trying for more than three years, she was finally able to convince her husband to divorce her. Regarding this experience, she said,

During my divorce process, I was feeling highly intimidated by the unequal laws. I was living with my kids separate from my husband during those years. I was working and paying for our expenses, and my husband didn't accept any responsibility to pay for the kids. At the same time, my husband had authority over me. For instance, I was not able to leave the country during those four years, even for a short trip, because he banned me from travelling. Even my lawyer told me that he could ban me from working,⁶⁹ or going out from my home.⁷⁰ It was ridiculous. He didn't pay for the kids, and at the same time he could ban me from working. So who should pay for the expenses? Fortunately, he didn't place that ban on me, but I was worried what it could happen if he wanted to do that.

Although Niki experienced lots of difficulties in her divorce process, she finally decided to leave the country mainly because of her post-divorce problems.

As a divorced woman and a single mom, Iran wasn't a secure place for me. Being divorced and staying single after that wasn't socially acceptable. People looked at you in another way. Sometimes I was even harassed in the street with my kids, because I was alone. Again, it wasn't socially acceptable if I

⁶⁹ Article 1117 of the Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that 'the husband can prevent his wife from occupations or technical work which is incompatible with the family interests or the dignity of himself or his wife'.

⁷⁰ This restriction may be claimed based on Article 1105 of the Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which says 'In relations between husband and wife; the position of the head of the family is the exclusive right of the husband'.

wanted to live on my own, so I couldn't have my own place, and I was expected to live with my parents. Then if I wanted to stay in Iran, my parents would put pressure on me to re-marry soon. I didn't have a traditional family, but because of the social norms, they thought I would be more secure if I married again.

A few months after Niki's divorce was legalised and her restriction from leaving the county was removed, she went to the U.A.E. with her children to visit her sister. Her sister suggested that she stay there because of the difficulties she faced in Iran. Niki accepted this suggestion, found a job, and lived there for about ten years before coming to NZ. She decided to leave the U.A.E because it was almost impossible to get a permanent resident visa there. She particularly chose to come to New Zealand because it was an English-speaking country, and it was easier to get residency there than with her other options. She said, 'When I first arrived in New Zealand, I found it similar to England in 1970s, and it reminded me of the good memories from the time when I was teenager and lived there'.

In examining Sima and Niki's stories, we can see how the experience of divorce for women in Iran was directly related to their decisions to emigrate. As these difficulties were well known, some of the other participants never even tried to go through the divorce process in Iran, despite having great difficulties in their marital lives.

For example, Pardis, 49, who arrived in New Zealand with her children in 2000, explained her situation as follows:

I had very serious problems with my husband in Iran, but I never thought of divorcing him, because he was going to take the kids. Some months after I arrived here, my husband joined us as well. I was reluctant to live with him again, but I thought to myself, let's give him another chance. Here the law is equal, so maybe he will change his attitude. Unfortunately, nothing had changed. Our problem was much deeper than I had thought. Here, he was diagnosed with mental health problems, while in Iran they just said he got angry quickly.

Pardis split from her husband less than a year after his arrival in New Zealand. She thought that the impossibility of separating from her husband in Iran was indirectly involved

in her decision to leave the country. The more important motivation for her was her concern for her daughters:

I had two young daughters, three and nine. I didn't want them to experience the same limitations that I had. I wanted my daughters to grow up in freedom and equality, going to school without hijab, going swimming without limitation, dancing, having a boyfriend and having all the freedoms as single people that their boy peers have.

Pardis, Niki, and Sima's experiences were like different parts of the puzzle of divorce in Iran, and they reflected the different stages of this process, from pre-divorce to post-divorce situations.

As mentioned previously, the Civil Code of the Islamic Republic is shaped by Shia jurisprudence, and it puts the husband in a higher position in both marital life and in situations of divorce. Although some attempts have been made during the last two decades to reform these family laws, most of these attempts were either unsuccessful, or resulted in only minor changes. As an example of the unsuccessful attempts, a proposed bill to give women equal rights in applying for divorce was vetoed by the guardian council in 2000. An example of the minor changes is the limited reform of the child custody law. The original law stated that, in the case of separation between parents, daughters were to remain under the custody of their mothers until they were seven years old, and sons were to stay with their mothers until age two (Article 1169). After modest changes in 2002, the mother became eligible to keep custody of her children of both genders until they reached age seven. The legal guardianship of the children, however, remained with their fathers or their parental grandfathers.

Although women seeking divorce in Iran face serious difficulties with both the laws and the prevailing social norms, the rate of divorce is still high. The crude divorce rate was 2.1 per 1,000 persons in 2014, with a total of 163,569 divorces in that year. This means there was 1 divorce for every 4.4 marriages (Iran Registration, 2014).

Being divorced in Iran can affect a woman's social status in three main ways. First, it can destroy her social dignity and leave her regarded as a social outcast, mainly because marriage in Iranian culture is defined as a lifelong commitment. Women who do not stay in this relationship forever are viewed as breaking a fundamental rule, and they are often judged

as lacking in integrity and loyalty. They are often seen as vindictive, unforgiving, or unable to get along with others.

Moreover, society makes a considerable distinction between divorced and married women, based on their perceived sexuality. In one of the few qualitative studies on the construction and understanding of women's post-divorce sexuality in Iran, Zarei et al. (2013, p. 340) explained that the divorced women who participated in her research believed that in the Iranian context, men often viewed them 'as the best option to meet their unmet sexual needs' outside of marriage. This concept arose mainly because these women did not have a husband to protect them against other sexual demands, and they also lacked the barrier of virginity. This expectation seemed to make these women into 'dangerous sexual objects'. Other married women commonly feared that their husbands might have an affair with these divorced women.

The same study also suggested that it was harder for a divorced woman to find a job, although there is no written rule or regulation to prevent employers from hiring them. Finding a job can be really vital for these women, because they need to be financially independent after their divorces, and there is no specific organisation or centre to support them after their separation. Moreover, if couples have not signed a marriage contract agreeing to share the marital property, the wife is denied any share of that property, and her financial situation can become extremely fragile.

Clearly divorced women can be highly vulnerable and at risk of being marginalised from society. Although these social norms have been produced by society over time, and they cannot be considered as the products of any particular political system, it is still true that the present Islamic government has done nothing to discourage these norms. In fact, these norms have been reinforced by the generally discriminatory legal system and by the general failure to provide any programs of support and empowerment for divorced women.

Make the Unequal Equal on Paper

Only a small minority of my participants had directly experienced the process of divorce in Iran or had dealt directly with the existing family laws. However, many of the other participants also voiced complaints about these laws.

Pegah, 35, arrived in New Zealand in 2012 with a student visa. Although her motives for emigration were not gender related, she still shared some deep concerns about the unequal

marriage and divorce laws in Iran. When she decided to marry, she tried to make the situation for herself as equal as she could by stating a number of conditions in her marriage certificate. According to Article 1119 of the Iranian Civil Law, ‘the parties to the marriage can stipulate any condition to the marriage which is not incompatible with the nature of the contract of marriage, either as part of the marriage contract or in another binding contract ...’⁷¹

Pegah said that she had a really happy marriage, and the unequal family laws did not have a negative influence on her marital life. In fact, the way she approached those laws provided her with some positive outcomes. She explained that

Before our marriage, me and my partner agreed that both of us would have equal rights during our marital life and in the possible case of divorce, and instead I didn’t ask for any *mahr*.⁷² Negotiating about our equal rights gave me a chance to know my husband (who was my boyfriend at that time) better and understand how egalitarian he was.

Pegah’s agreement with her husband was the first stage in this process. Next, she needed to convince certain additional people in order to get these equal rights stated in her marriage certificate:

I was the first person in our extended family who wanted to have these conditions in her marriage certificate, so I talked to my parents about that and asked them to raise it with my partner’s parents. But they were not sure if that was a right thing to do or not. Finally, I convinced them, and both families agreed with that.

In the next stage, Pegah needed to find a marriage registration office that would issue this kind of certificate. As she explained,

It was so hard to find a registration office to accept putting these conditions in our marriage certificate. Finally, we found one who accepted to do it, so we booked an appointment for registration. At the day of wedding, when we were

⁷¹ The text of Article 1119 continues ‘for example, it can be stipulated that if the husband marries another wife or absents himself during a certain period, or discontinues the payment of cost of maintenance, or attempts the life of his wife or treats her so harshly that their life together becomes unbearable, the wife has the power, which she can also transfer to a third party by power of attorney to obtain a divorce herself after establishing in the court ...’

⁷² See footnote 67.

there with our families for registration, the officer again asked my husband publicly, ‘Are you sure you want to give your wife the right to leave the country without your permission?’ He said ‘Yes’, and then the officer asked him, ‘Are you stupid? She can leave you whenever she wants then’. At that point, my father-in-law came in the middle and said that we had agreed about all the conditions before, and they were fine for us.

Pegah said this experience was really stressful, and she was wondering what was going to happen if her husband did not sign the conditions.

I was lucky because my father-in-law was responsible enough to solve this problem, but many people could get opportunistic at these times and change everything at the last moment. For example, I think that if my father was in the same situation for my brother, he wouldn’t do the same thing that my father-in-law did.

Even obtaining these rights on paper could be challenging for many people. Then, applying these rights in practice was another story. Once when Pegah tried to renew her passport, she failed to do it on her own. The law still required her husband’s official permission,⁷³ even though her marriage certificate gave her the right to do it:

Based on the law, my husband should come to the registry office and sign the form to allow me to get the passport. But as he gave me the right to leave the country in our marriage certificate, I went there and used this certificate. I told the officer that my husband was at work and could not come to the office, but I had this permission from him. The officer didn’t accept it when I insisted on my right; the officer suggested that I should go to the court with my certificate and make an official complaint because the office was not accepting my right to get a passport based on my marriage certificate. Then, if the court asked the passport officials, they were going to process my documents. After this suggestion, I found it much easier to just ask my husband to come and do the signature.

⁷³ According to Article 18 of the Iranian Passport Law, married women must have their husband's approval to receive or renew their passports, and the husband can terminate this permission whenever he wants. Also, he can forbid his spouse from leaving the country, even if she holds a valid passport.

Although the applicability of marriage contract conditions is unclear, it still seems that adding them to a marriage certificate has grown quite popular recently, especially among middle class couples. Also, some of the online campaigns calling for women's equality have encouraged women to put statements of their rights into their marriage certificates, as this is the only existing way to limit the level of gender discrimination. Some of my participants told me that they regretted not putting such conditions into their marriage certificates. Some of them had tried to add such equal conditions after their marriages, but their husbands did not accept their requests. The most common conditions that women can stipulate in their marriage contracts (if their partners agree) are the right to study, to travel abroad, to apply or re-apply for passports, to work after marriage without their husband's permission, and to get a husband-authorised power of attorney to initiate divorce. Also, in case of divorce, marriage contracts can give a woman priority in deciding her children's custody, or provide her an equal share of family assets after marriage (Hussainkhah, 2007, September 19). Looking at the above-described experiences, we can see the relationships between discriminatory family law, social norms, and emigration. At least four of my participants decided to leave the country directly in response to these issues. Also, a larger number of participants expressed their concerns about these unequal laws and norms, even though they did not regard these issues as their primary motives for migration.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the motivations for migration from Iran which are related to gender inequality. In particular, we have discussed the various ways that organised and informal forms of discrimination toward women in Iran affected the participants' lives. Their issues with these regulations included the difficulty in maintaining different standards of behaviour in their public and private lives, the lack of clarity surrounding regulations of their social appearance, their frequent engagements with morality police, and the inequality of family laws. These discriminatory trends affected these women's lives in their different roles as daughters, wives, and mothers.

Although almost all of the participants experienced gender discrimination to some degree, some participants were more sensitive concerning this issue, and they decided to leave particularly because they could not tolerate this level of discrimination. Another group of participants explained that they had accepted these forms of gender discrimination as a part of their daily lives and tried to make compromises with them. However, at some point in their

lives, certain personal conflicts with those unequal norms and laws drove them to emigrate. Also, a large number of the participants said that their experiences with morality police or university guards concerning their dress and appearance in social places were among the concerns that motivated them to leave the country.

Although this chapter has focused particularly on motives for migration arising from discrimination against women, there are some additional issues the participants raised which can be considered as gender-related motivations in a wider social context. These issues will be raised in the coming chapter in relation to other motivations for migration.

Chapter Five: Emigration with Mixed Motivations in the Context of Politics

This chapter presents a range of motivations for migration from Iran, based on my participants' stories. While the previous chapter was focused on the gender-related factors, this chapter is mainly concerned with other expressed motivations for migration. Brain-drain, dual living, and belonging to a religious minority are the main three themes covered in this chapter. This chapter examines the participants' daily experiences related to any of these themes, and the ways that their decisions to emigrate were affected by these factors. However, considering these three issues as the central core of this chapter does not mean the exclusion of gender-related factors. Those factors are frequently interwoven with others and are still considered in the context of the participants' narratives.

'Brain Drain' in the Context of Emigration

Pegah was introduced to me by another participant, Neda. Neda was not much interested in answering my questions, but at the end of the interview she told me, 'I know I didn't give you the data you are looking for, but I have a friend who can tell you much more, and maybe you should talk to her instead of me. I'm sure she will be happy to talk to you, but let me ask her first and then give you her contact details'. Pegah and I exchanged a couple of emails prior to our meeting. Pegah told me that she was doing her PhD at a university, and was really interested in my topic from an academic point of view.

It was a wet and windy morning in central Auckland. Pegah and I planned to meet in a café in her university. I arrived a bit early and tried to be polite by waiting for her in front of the café, but the wind was too strong, so I went inside and waited for her there. I was watching the window, trying to see an Iranian-looking face in the crowd outside. Like most of my participants, I had not seen Pegah prior to the interview, and I had no idea what she looked like. I just assumed that if I saw someone who looked Iranian, it should be her.

I kept watching for about ten minutes, estimating the level of 'Iranianess' among people who were passing, thinking about visiting an optometrist to improve my eyesight and feeling afraid that I would lose a participant. Finally, I saw an Iranian face smiling at me. Pegah looked very energetic, confident, and friendly. Although it was the first time we had met, I felt a high level of chemistry between us. She had a strong voice and answered all my questions in great detail with lots of analysis.

My first discussion with Pegah, as with many other participants, was about her reasons for leaving Iran. She gave a combination of reasons, and discussed a wide range of social, educational, and financial factors. However, she started her discussion with a meaningful sentence that could explain a lot about her story. She said, ‘My husband and I both graduated from Sharif University⁷⁴ in Iran, and should leave the country by default’. The point which Pegah raised in her first sentence referred to the issue of brain drain from Iran. Iran is dealing with one of the highest rates of brain drain in the world. According to an International Monetary Fund estimation in 2006, an estimated 150,000 to 180,000 people were exiting Iran yearly (Chaichian, 2011; Karimi & Gharaati, 2013). The Iranian science minister, ‘Faraji Dana’, claimed that this number equalled an annual loss of \$150 billion to the economy (Mohamadi, 2014).

Pegah explained that although she and her husband had a good chance to leave Iran after receiving their bachelor’s degrees, they decided to stay because they thought they should contribute to the development of their country:

We believed that we should help to make our country better, and did our best to do that for about ten years, but after a while we saw that both the limitation of free access to information and the economic instabilities made our life hard. For example, it was almost impossible for us in the last years to make financial plans for our life. We determined some financial goals, but at the end of the year we couldn’t meet them because the rate of inflation was much higher than our pay raise. Also, we were both promoted in our jobs several times, and more promotions weren’t applicable to us really. So, after a while we were just having a downturn with the inflation rate, and just struggling to keep the same level of life and not go backward.

Clearly these financial concerns were significant in Pegah’s and her husband’s migration decision, but she said that this was not the whole story:

I always had a dream of working for a decent international company, and I had all the abilities for doing that, but it wasn’t possible in Iran. Even the more simple things were not possible over there. For example, you cannot see

⁷⁴ The students of Sharif University of Science and Technology have an international reputation for their strong, prominent presence in high-ranking American universities among majors in engineering and science. For more information, see: Molavi, A. (2008), ‘The star students of the Islamic Republic’.

videos or movies online. The play button was a fancy, unavailable option for me over there. Whenever I wanted to watch a video on the Internet, even a short one, I should first download it, and it took really long. So, I usually put a video to download during the night, to be able to watch it in the morning. It was the same story about access to books and articles. It sounds funny, but during the first six months after my arrival here, I was still excited that I could play a video on YouTube. Again, during that first six months we spent lots of time in libraries and bookshops. We felt really fancy when we saw we could have access to all the books that we wanted, or we could buy the newest arriving books. Freedom of access to information was one of our life dreams, and it came true in New Zealand. In fact, it could come true anywhere, but just not in Iran. It doesn't matter where you are living, as long as you are not in Iran, you can have a fairly easy access to information and be connected to the world'.⁷⁵

In addition to all of these reasons, Pegah said that: 'At the end, both my husband and I were interested to do our PhDs in a high ranked university, and with highly qualified supervisors'.

So far, Pegah was giving at least three main motivations for her emigration. However, when we look at her story more closely, we can see how she grew discouraged about making positive changes in Iran. She increasingly felt that her attempts to make a contribution and improve her country were institutionally rejected by the political system, and this feeling played a central role in her decision. In particular, Pegah described one of the main incidents that motivated her to leave:

⁷⁵ Iran ranked 156 out of 192 countries in terms of broadband speed in 2014, as tracked by OOKLA, which performs broadband speed testing globally (Freedom on net, 2014). Also, Iran had the lowest average peak connection speeds in 2014, based on Akamai's report ('The state of the internet report', 2014, p. 15). From 2006, the Iranian authorities limited the bandwidth for home users to 128 kb/s, and all registered ISPs were ordered not to provide higher internet access speed for households (Reuters, 2006). Although the Iranian officials never gave a reason for putting a cap in the internet speed, it seems that this limitation was imposed to prevent access to multimedia content such as streaming audio and video (Aryan & Halderman, 2013, p. 2). During the past two years, this limitation was removed, and now ISPs provide home users with up to 2 mb/s. This speed is one tenth of the global average rate. In New Zealand the average download speed is 27 mb/s (Slabbert, 2015). Generally, the reformist and moderate political groups in Iran have discouraged limitations on internet speed, and the hardliners are against the public's access to faster connections. For example, see Sullivan G. (2014), 'Iranian cleric issues fatwa against the internet'.

When I graduated with my master's, I got hired by the Civil Aviation Authority. At that time, the reformists were in power and the new minister of Roads and Urban Development wanted to modernise the IT system in his ministry. As one of the first projects there, my colleagues and I designed a system for the Tehran airport, which would enable you to check the flight status from departure to arrival by texting the flight number to the airport, like the system we have here in the Auckland airport. Finally, after two years of hard work by our team, the system operated. I was so excited about that, and I assumed that, yes ... we are improving, and I was involved in establishing something new for my country. Whenever I had a flight, I texted my flight number and received back the flight status. I felt proud of myself, and this system was like my child. One day, however, when I texted my flight number, I didn't receive back anything. At that time I didn't work with the Civil Aviation Authority any more. I got worried about that system and called one of my friends. She was still working there, and she told me that the new minister, who was a hardline conservative, cut this system. He thought this system was a symbol of Westernisation, and he considered it a corruption made by reformists.

Pegah told me how she felt devalued and disrespected. She said that she felt her idea of helping to improve her country was just a hallucination, and that everything she did could be thrown out through political changes:

Now, my husband's current supervisor in a university in Canada is my ex-classmate. While my other classmates were studying and flourishing in the best universities in the world, I was engaged to design a system which was later eradicated by a narrow minded 'Risho'⁷⁶ guy, just because he didn't like it, or because he wanted to destroy the heritage of the former reformist minister. It was a big failure for me.

When Pegah talked about this incident as the most discouraging experience for her, she also spoke about another experience that was central to her decision to migrate:

⁷⁶ 'Risho' is a Persian (Farsi) term which means a person (male) with a thick beard. This term is mostly used with a negative meaning, to refer to hardliner people who are supportive of the Islamic government in Iran.

My second job was in a unique private company. This company was mostly run by former left activists, and it was completely independent from governmental sections, with its own rules. In this company, we could choose to wear or not wear hijab when we were in the office. This was a big bonus for me, because I was really frustrated by the strict dress code of the governmental companies. After a couple of years, however, our company tried to get involved in bigger projects, and doing this required making some connections in the revolutionary guards. So, gradually, new rules, including the dress code, changed in our company. Our manager, who was considered an atheist guy, started to grow his beard, and new people from the revolutionary guards came to our company very often. Once I was in the lift with one of these guys, and I didn't have my scarf on. He didn't tell me anything, but just looked at me in a way that I got his message. After that, I felt like my last stronghold was conquered. I said to myself, 'Look, there is no place in Iran for you that you can work regardless of politics and religion'.

After all of these events, Pegah's mind was completely overwhelmed with the idea of migration, but she still had not taken any practical action. She talked to her husband about it several times, and he agreed with the whole idea. Finally, after one of the speeches by Ahmadinejad,⁷⁷ her husband told her, 'I think the way that these people are going, [the Iranian government] it will end in a war, and if any war has been started, it wouldn't be a proper time for shifting. So, if we should go anyway, it's better to go earlier'.

Pegah said that after this, they launched their migration application for Canada, which involved a long process. In the meantime, she got her admission from her present university, and they moved to New Zealand.

Looking at Pegah's motives for migration, we can see how her decision to leave the country was warp and woof with the political context of Iran. Although Pegah was an apolitical person, and her job was hardly related to politics, she left Iran mainly for politics-related reasons. Based on her experiences, she thought there was no space for her in her country where she could do her technical job away from the strong shadow of politics and

⁷⁷ Ahmadinejad was the sixth president of revolutionary Iran (2005–2013), and he had an international reputation for his controversial speeches about the Holocaust, Israel, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Iran's nuclear program, etc.

religion. These experiences, and the ways Pegah interpreted them, show why she felt that her attempts to make a contribution to her country had been rejected by the whole system.

Other studies regarding the motivations fuelling brain drain from Iran also show that there is a substantial relationship between political- or social-related factors and brain drain. For instance, a study of 586 students from the four universities in Iran with the highest rates of brain drain showed that more than 66% of the study's participants expressed their intention to migrate, and about 60% of them mentioned factors related to 'insufficient social justice' as reasons for their decisions (Salmani, Taleghani, & Taatian, 2009). Another study (Panahi, 2012) involved 215 university faculty members in the Iranian city of Tabriz. These participants discussed the factors of repulsion or attraction related to brain drain, and they claimed that political factors were of leading importance in this process. This study found that the leading causes of brain drain included 'lack of civil liberties' (31% of the participants), 'dissatisfaction with the status quo' (26.7%), and 'low income' (19.97%). Other factors included 'lack of scientific research facilities, differences of political thought with the community, not honouring scientific knowledge, unemployment, lack of job security and lower hope for the future' (Panahi, 2012, p. 3012).

Sara, another of my participants, conveyed a story similar to Pegah's. Sara was 27 years old, and had done her master's degree in one of the best universities in Iran. She arrived in New Zealand with her husband in 2013 to do her PhD. Like Pegah, she spoke about the financial, educational, and social reasons for her migration, but she gave more emphasis to the social reasons:

These days in Iran, when you are looking around yourself, you see that many people are talking about leaving the country, or they already did that. So, migration is the dominant atmosphere. This atmosphere wasn't that important for me, but I was affected by it anyway. Moreover, the educational system was not satisfactory at all. As a student, you are extremely ignored in universities, and your points of views are not valued. Also, access to recent books and articles is really limited in Iran. Considering all of these things, even if you decide to study [in Iran], after getting your degree it's not easy for you to find a job, and if you find any, you are paid really low.

Sara said that although all of these issues were important for her, she could still have stayed in Iran, if the things she called her 'basic human rights' had been respected: 'My main

problem in Iran was that I have never been respected as a human, regardless of my religion, gender, etc. I should always change myself to be accepted in the society'.

Although Pegah and Sara shared similar experiences and motivations for their migrations, they were also narrating the various stages that educated elites in Iran may go through before leaving the country. Sara was eight years younger than Pegah, but they both left Iran at almost the same time. Sara worked in Iran for a short period, and had not experienced the same cycle of discouragement that Pegah went through during her eight years of working there. From her own experiences of working in Iran, Sara only mentioned her dissatisfaction with the particular dress code at her workplace, which required that she wear the chador⁷⁸ when she was teaching in one of the universities. Pegah's experiences and motives were more complicated.

Pegah said she had done her best to stay in Iran, because of her idea about 'contributing to the improvement of her country'. Sara, however did not mention anything about that concern. Obviously, people are individuals who can have different degrees of commitment to their countries, and can choose different ways to show this commitment. However, such differences can also explain the different political contexts that people experience when they decide to stay or to leave.

Pegah had decided to stay and work in Iran while the reformist government was in power (1997–2005). At that time, the general circumstances of the country were more stable compared to the later era when she decided to leave. Clearly, during the reformist era there was less tension between Iran and the rest of the world, as a result of President Khatami's call for dialogue with other countries and the policy of détente. During the presidency of Khatami, the sanctions against Iran were limited, and neither the United States nor any other country had imposed additional sanctions on Iran (Tazmini, 2009). Consequently, the whole economy was more productive and stable. Also, in terms of domestic politics, the reformists were 'emphasising civil society, political democratisation and development, public participation, freedom of speech ... which was particularly considered as an alternative discourse to challenge dominant revolutionary ideology'. These changes also offered 'greater official tolerance of social and cultural mores' (Tazmini, 2009, p. 66). Many Iranians,

⁷⁸ A large piece of cloth (normally black in public places) that is wrapped around the head and body, leaving only the face exposed.

especially those of the younger generation, were enthusiastic about this new discourse at some stage in their lives.⁷⁹

However, the situation during the time when both Pegah and Sara decided to migrate was quite different. Under the presidency of Ahmadinejad (2005–2013), Iran's foreign policy moved away from dialogue toward a robust and confrontational attitude toward the West. Over those years the nuclear negotiations did not go forward, and as a consequence of Iran's insistence on its nuclear activities, the sanctions towards Iran increased. By 2012–2013, Iran was experiencing one of the toughest sets of sanctions that the world community had ever imposed on any country (Irna, 2015). Consequently, Iran's economy was experiencing one of its hardest times since the 1979 revolution. The annual inflation reached a high of 34.7% over Ahmadinejad's last year in office (Reuters, 2013), and the Iranian currency lost two-thirds of its value due to the international sanctions (BBC, 2015).

In terms of internal politics also, the overall situation got tougher. During the presidency of Ahmadinejad, the hardliners seized power, and members of IRGC became more visible in political positions as ministers or provincial governors (Alfoneh, 2008; BBC, 2009). According to reports by Human Rights Watch and the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, basic human rights protection had 'deteriorated to new lows' during the first term of Ahmadinejad's presidency (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, 2009). Then the situation got even worse following the 2009 presidential election and its aftermath.⁸⁰ Although the statistics concerning people who left the country in the aftermath of that election are not clear, the Iranian deputy foreign minister, Hassan Gashgavi, estimated that 50,000 to 100,000 people left (*Deutsche Welle*, 2013). These people mostly left the country because they were prosecuted, threatened, and/or felt unsafe because of their activities and involvement in the election or the following demonstrations. None of my participants, however, could be considered members of this category.

⁷⁹ For more information about cultural, social, and political changes in Iran under the presidency of Khatami, see Tazmini (2009). *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the turbulent path to reform*.

⁸⁰ In June 2009, Ahmadinejad was declared the winner of Iran's presidential election, with 62% of the votes cast, and he started his second term as president. Mir-Hossein Mousavi, his nearest rival in that election, who was strongly supported by reformist groups, immediately questioned the election's results. The resulting protests were the most widespread since the 1979 revolution. Based on the data from Amnesty International, it has been estimated that in Tehran alone, up to three million people attended one demonstration held three days after the election. According to the official total, 36 persons were killed in protests. Other groups claimed that the number of deaths was at least 70. Also, more than 4,000 people were arrested after the election, including a large number of journalists and political activists (Amnesty International, 2009).

These two different political contexts should also be taken into account for interpreting Pegah's decision to stay in Iran from 2004, compared with her own and Sara's decisions to leave in 2011-2012. Although there is no reliable data to prove a direct correlation between these two political contexts and the rates of brain drain, some sources claim that under the presidency of Khatami this trend was at its lowest point, and it reached its peak during the Ahmadinejad era (Motevalli, 2014; Khajehpour, 2014).

Dual Life in the Context of Emigration

In looking at Sara's motivations for migration, we can see that she gave a major emphasis on what she called 'the lack of basic human rights in Iran'. In particular, she talked about the concept of 'changing yourself for being accepted in society'. This particular term was mainly concerned with the different systems of values in the private and the public lives of citizens in Iran. Basically, the Islamic government defines the laws and regulations with an aim of controlling both the public and private lives of its citizens in terms that are consistent with Islamic rules. Many people, especially those of the middle classes, carry a different system of values in their public and their private lives. Although they follow the official values and approved behaviour in public places (because they are enforced by common laws), they try to lead their private lives in the ways they wish. In some cases, they even try to create public spaces within their private areas which are not controlled by the government. As an example of making public places that are based on personally preferred systems of values, we can mention Iran's underground (or secret) restaurants. Some of these serve alcoholic drinks and other forbidden foods, and women can take off their hijab and dress in a more casual way in these restaurants. In addition, these restaurants provide a more relaxed environment for unmarried couples, who normally have to worry about the morality police in public restaurants (Aljiani, 2015).

In total, about half of my participants said that this dual system was annoying for them. Living two different lives, one publicly and the other privately, thinking in two different systems, and having to lie about who they are and how they live, is the common strategy for surviving under a government that attempts to interfere in the most private affairs of its citizens (Navai, 2014).

Shirin, who was 33 years old, was one participant who decided to migrate particularly because she could not stand this dual system any more. She actually emigrated to New Zealand twice. First, when she was 20, she arrived here with her family. After five years she

returned to Iran, and then came back again to New Zealand with her partner in 2012. Although Shirin's first emigration was a family choice, the second was her personal choice. As she explained, her mother's brother had been living in New Zealand since the 1980s, and they were eligible to apply for a residence visa based on the 'Sibling and Adult Child Category'.⁸¹ Shirin and her family were issued a resident's visa based on this category, and they moved to Auckland in 2003. Her parents returned to Iran a couple of years after their arrival, but they continued visiting New Zealand quite often. Shirin was working and studying here for about five years. Then, after finishing her bachelor's degree, she went back to Iran for a holiday, and decided to stay much longer:

When I went back to Iran, I didn't have any intention to stay. I just went for a visit and for doing some personal jobs, but I found lots of engagements over there. I had an apartment in Iran which was rented, and I had some difficulties with the tenants. I tried to sort out the problem, but it took much longer than I expected. At the same time, one of my friends suggested that I could work with their travel agency as a tour leader. I accepted, and got lots of engagements with this job. At the same time, I met a guy, my current partner, and our relationship was going very well. After a while, we decided to live together.

Cohabitation among unmarried couples is illegal in Iran and is considered a crime.⁸² For example, based on Article 230 of the New Islamic Penal Code, having sex without marriage is considered adultery, and partners who are involved can be punished by one hundred lashes (Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2013). Despite this prohibition, it seems that the number of young couples who choose to live together without marriage has been increasing in recent years (BBC News, 2014; International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, 2016).

⁸¹ Based on this category, siblings and adult children of New Zealand citizens or residents who had no other immediate family in their country of residence could join their families in New Zealand, if they had an acceptable offer of employment in New Zealand. This category was closed permanently on 16 May 2012, as a part of several changes in the Family Residence Category (Immigration New Zealand, 2010).

⁸² Although there are no official statistics on cohabitation, the fact that Iranian authorities openly debate this issue shows its prevalence. For example, the head of the Iranian supreme leader's office, Mohammadi Golpayegani, denounced this type of life as 'shameful', and called the authorities to 'fight strongly against this lifestyle' (Isna, 2014).

Shirin said that after she moved in with her boyfriend she realised how hard it could be to manage her private life based on her own system of values:

I was living with my boyfriend, and my family were absolutely fine with that, but I should hide this from most of my friends, colleagues, and even my boyfriend's family. Our neighbours in my boyfriend's apartment didn't know that I lived there. So, I should manage to hide myself from them when I wanted to go home. For example, when we came home together, he went first, and I was waiting for a while before going in, because we didn't want anyone to see us together in the building. If neighbours were on the stairs, I was waiting until everyone went, and then walked to the stairs. Once the security guard of the apartment saw me when I walked in like a thief on the stairs, and he looked at me in a very bad way. Or sometimes neighbours saw me and looked at me in a bad way. At first, I was fine with all of this, but after a while I got really exhausted. I didn't want to fight for these small things any more, and spend my energy to struggle for the things that I thought are my basic rights. I could make a bubble for myself and live in that bubble in a way that I wanted. For example, I could take a home in the north of Tehran or in one remote place in the north of Iran and isolate myself from society. That was the thing that many of my friends or cousins were doing over there in order to manage their lives in a way that they wanted, but I didn't like this lifestyle. I was a social person and I wanted to have a real social life, work, etc.

Sara also had the same experience of living with her boyfriend (her current husband) for about two years while she was in Iran, and her family had not been told about this up to the time of our interview. Looking at her experience of what we can call 'dual living', she said that she and her boyfriend were doing their master's degrees away from home in Tehran, and they were living together during that period:

It was very hard to manage this, especially because our families didn't know about it either. My parents rented a place for me with my friend, and they thought I was living there, but actually I was living in my boyfriend's apartment. We always had lots of anxiety lest my parents find out about that, or if our neighbours figured out that we were living together. We were very

cautious in our coming and going, and I needed to tell lots of lies to my parents and friends in order to manage this relationship.

As Sara said, in the end, she and her boyfriend decided to marry, because it was so hard for them to manage their relationship like that. She said ‘both of us preferred not to get married. We were too young for marriage, but it wasn’t possible to continue like that’.

Although both Shirin and Sara had similar experiences with managing their private and public lives in Iran, it seemed that the issue of double living was more tangible for Shirin. She particularly emphasised her experience of leading a double life:

I always say if you want to live in Iran based on existing laws, you became like a robot. So, you need to ban some laws in order to be able to live like a human. In Iran, everyone has two lives: a private one and a public one. The private one, which happens underground, could have the standard and variety that you can experience in Europe. You can have your own nightlife, parties, and anything that you want. As long as you have enough money, you can have the best possible private life in Iran. But there is another part of life which is public, and it could be completely different. For example, if you saw me in public when I was in Iran, you might think that I am even a religious person, because I had a quite tight hijab outside, but no one could imagine what I looked like when I was in a party with my friends, or no one could even think that I was living with my boyfriend, or even more that I was a lesbian at some stages. By having this private life in Iran, you are breaking two things at the same time: social norms and laws. I was fine with breaking those prejudiced social norms, but breaking the law was really hard, stressful and energy-sapping for me.

Shirin and Sara were not the only participants who raised this issue as the central concern of their emigration stories. At least three other participants, including Negin, 39; Faranak, 27; and Raha, 32, mentioned this issue as one of their main motivations for migration. For instance, Raha who arrived in New Zealand in 2012, said ‘both my husband and I couldn’t be ourselves when we were in Iran. We should dress, talk and treat people in a different way from ourselves. After a while, we got exhausted, and we didn’t like to put masks on our faces every day before leaving the home. Thinking about how to escape from this dual life, migration was like a sparkle of hope in our minds’.

The concept of dual life in Iran, and the way that Iranians deal with that, has been mentioned by other authors as well. Ramita Navai, an Iranian-British journalist, gave a detailed account of the different aspects of dual living through a life story of ordinary people who live in Tehran in her book *City of Lies* (2014). The points that my participants raised about their dual life in Iran are very similar to those that Navai mentioned when she explained in an interview:

In Iran you live two different lives. It's a kind of schizophrenic society. There's an inside, private life, and there's an outside, public life, and nearly everybody lives by these rules. You're two different people. So on a basic level, you have to lie about who you are when you're in public or when you're in private, depending on what kind of social group you've grown up in and that you live in. And that filters through to every single aspect of people's lives ... For example, many people in Iran drink. There isn't a corner of Tehran where you don't find booze. Yet of course you have to lie about it; otherwise you'll get in trouble ... (quoted in Worrall, 2014).

Similarly, Basmenji, in his book *Tehran Blues*, described the day-to-day life of the younger generation of Iranians, and the ways they are managing their paradoxical double life between the 'Western values that they are dying for' and the Islamic values that their government imposes on them (Basmenji, 2005, pp. 14–16). From a different perspective, Nafisi (2003) in her book *Reading Lolita in Tehran*^{83, 84} (which is a personal memoir of her life in Iran between 1979 to 1997), reflected on the challenges that females in post-revolutionary Iran have experienced in their daily battles with sexism, censorship, and the lack of personal freedom. Nafisi, who was a professor of English literature in Iran, later migrated to the United States. She resigned from her last academic job for several reasons, including frustration over the day-to-day control of her academic life, the high

⁸³ *Lolita* (1955) is the name of a novel by Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov. It tells the story of a middle-aged literature professor who develops a passion for a twelve-year-old girl named Lolita, 'who is forced against her will to endure a two-year, cross-country trip, ... with the man who calls himself her stepfather' (Grogan, 2014, p. 52). It seems that Nafisi views the relationship between this stepfather and Lolita as analogous to the relationship between the Islamic Republic and young Iranians, especially females. Nafisi explains that the story of Lolita is about 'the confiscation of one's individual life by another' (Nafisi, 2003, p. 33).

⁸⁴ Although the main theme of Nafisi's book concerns Western literature and the way that it is considered or understood by Nafisi's students (with many symbolic hints regarding the ways that the characters in these stories illustrate the reality of daily life and struggle in the Islamic Republic), at the same time her book includes many accounts of the author's daily experiences in dealing with the Islamic ideological system and the ways that she interprets its policies.

level of censorship, and the policies regarding mandatory hijab in Iranian universities. In regards to her resignation, she said, ‘How well could one teach when the main concern of university officials was not the quality of one’s work but the colour of one’s lips? The subversive potential of a single strand of hair. Could one really concentrate on one’s job when one is preoccupied with how to excise the word ‘wine’ from the Hemingway story?’ (Nafisi, 2003, p. 11).

The way that Nafisi describes her reasons for resigning from her job shows a clear perspective on how a set of systematic policies for controlling citizens (in terms of both their physical appearance and their intellectual freedom) are applied in Iranian universities.

After she left her job, Nafisi chose seven of her most committed students, all of them females, and invited them to her home for a series of Western literature readings every Thursday for two years. By doing this, Nafisi and her students tried to ‘escape the repressive regime by creating little pockets of their own freedom’ (Grogan, 2014, p. 57). They took off their mandatory headscarves and discussed many aspects of forbidden literature, free from the regime’s censorship. This account shows further evidence of how citizens in Iran try to create private public places of their own, free from governmental control. The fact that Nafisi left Iran for the United States in 1997 (and is currently a professor of English literature at Johns Hopkins University) illustrates the link between her story and the issue of immigration, even though migration is not a central theme in her book.

The Experience of Being a Minority in the Context of Migration

So far, we have discussed a range of motivations based on the participants’ personal experiences. In most cases, the decision to migrate was taken in response to several such factors. However, the experience of another group of participants needs to be discussed: those who decided or were forced to leave Iran for just one reason, namely their religion. A number of different religious and ethnic minorities are living in Iran, and they have experienced varying degrees of organised or non-organised discrimination due to being minority groups (Human Rights Council, 2016).

According to article 13 of the Iranian constitution, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are considered the only recognised religious minorities, and the government practices some level of toleration for them. People of these religions may perform their

ceremonies within the limits of the law. However, the Baha'i faith⁸⁵ (which is the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran) is not recognised, and its followers are deprived of basic citizens' rights, including the right to practice their religion communally, to access tertiary education, and to get employed in any governmental or permanent job.

Since the 1979 revolution, the Baha'i people in Iran have experienced a range of discriminations, persecutions, and even executions. According to an Amnesty International (1996), at least 201 Baha'is have been executed, most during the 1980s, apparently in regard to their religious beliefs. According to the report, 'They are not allowed to hold religious ceremonies or to practice their religion communally. Baha'i buildings, sites and centres have been confiscated and closed; the private and business properties of individual Baha'is have been confiscated, and Baha'is have been dismissed from government posts and schools' (Amnesty International, 1996, p. 3). Based on various estimates, about 40,000 to 50,000 Baha'is escaped from Iran in the first decade after the revolution (Gilda, 1989). As of the latest report by the Human Rights Council in 2015, about 80 Baha'is, including the 7 Baha'i community leaders, were being held in prison solely for their religious beliefs (Human Rights Council, 2016).

In considering the situation of the Baha'i minority in Iran, I was looking for some Baha'i participants in New Zealand to advise me about their experiences. I was expecting that the stories of Baha'i people could be different from those of my other participants, specifically in terms of their motivations for migration. Generally, the story of these people could be classified under the category of forced migration, although the details could be different in each case.

Parvin, 55, was the first Baha'i participant that I met. Normally, I did not have preconceptions about my participants before meeting them, but the fact that Parvin was a Baha'i made it unavoidable for me to have some expectations about her. She was automatically categorised in my mind as an 'other'. Before the interview, I tried to clear my mind of the dual Muslim vs. Baha'i concept, but it was almost impossible for me.

⁸⁵ The Baha'i faith grew out of the Shiite branch of Islam in 1863 in Iran, and it is considered one of the youngest of major world religions. This faith is the most internationally distributed faith in the world after Christianity, with an estimated six to eight million followers worldwide, who reside in approximately 235 countries (BBC, 2009) including about 2,637 in New Zealand. (Statistics New Zealand, 2018 [customised data based on 2013 census]).

Consequently, when I went to see Parvin, I had summarised her whole identity as something shaped by her religion.

During the first half an hour of our meeting I was a bit uncomfortable. Although I have not considered myself a Muslim, in this specific case I felt a bit guilty, wondering if my belonging to the larger Muslim community in Iran meant that I was somehow responsible for the way Baha'i people were treated there. What if Parvin considered me responsible for the things that happened to her in Iran? Although these assumptions motivated me to say something to absolve myself from guilt, in the end I decided to keep silent. As Parvin started to talk about herself, I felt more comfortable. She was very friendly, calling me 'my daughter', and she had many things in common with the other participants.

Despite the hard situation for Baha'i people in Iran after the 1979 revolution, Parvin stayed in Iran for 18 years after that. She only decided to leave the country in 1997, when the situation got really hard for her:

My main problem in Iran was that I had married a Muslim man, and it caused lots of troubles for both of us. During the first years of our marriage, things were going fine, but after some years our problems got serious. My husband's family and the people around us provoked my husband against me and humiliated him because of having a Baha'i wife. As a consequence, my husband put lots of pressure on me to convert to Islam. We were living together for many years and we had three kids, but it was like he just understood that I'm Baha'i. All of these things made my life like a hell. My husband was under pressure, and he transferred all of these pressures to our life. While I could see death in front of my eyes, I still couldn't even think about separation. Finally, we thought that maybe it's better for us to leave the country. It wasn't possible for all of us to go together. My parents and brothers were living in New Zealand for many years, so we decided that I and my kids would go there first, and if things were going well, then my husband would join us.

After Parvin finally decided to leave the country, one big obstacle still remained for her. As a Baha'i, she couldn't get a passport. As she said, she and her husband went through lots of hard times until she managed to get a passport:

The process of getting a passport took about eight months, and we were about to go to prison in this process. Also, my husband went through lots of troubles and got very annoyed in the processes of getting a passport for me. He went through lots of long interviews with the Iranian authorities and answering many questions. He needed to convince the officers why he couldn't make his wife a Muslim yet.

Finally, Parvin was issued a passport that was validated just for one exit from Iran, and she left the country with her three children in 1997. She said, 'When I went through the passport check in the airport, the officer threw my passport in front of me and said 'go away'. From the type of passport I carried he understood that I'm Baha'i'.

Parvin and her children arrived in New Zealand with a visitor visa, and they never returned to Iran. A couple of months after their arrival, Parvin's husband passed away in Iran. She said that 'after my husband passed away, his family contacted me over and over. They threatened me and asked me to return to Iran with my kids, but I didn't want to do that. I knew that if I returned they would take my children's custody, and I wouldn't be able to leave the country any more. So, I decided to stay here as a refugee'. Parvin and her children could not take anything from their property in Iran, including their business and their house, because she was Baha'i, and her husband's family took over their belongings. This deprivation of her property made the financial situation very hard for her family in New Zealand.

Although the political system made life difficult for Parvin, she said that not all of her difficulties in Iran came from the official restrictions against Baha'is:

Although my father was a Baha'i, when it came to women's rights he was worse than all Muslims. He was so patriarchal, and discriminated between his sons and daughters. After I finished high school, he did not allow me to study any more or go to work. He thought that working is not proper for a woman. Even I was not allowed to go outside alone. I should always be accompanied by a male, like one of my brothers or uncles. Later, I married a guy that he introduced to me, and the situation for me was almost the same after my marriage. So, when I was in Iran, I never got a chance to be independent.

Susan, 50, another Baha'i participant, had a situation similar to that of Parvin. She also was born in a Baha'i family, and she left Iran when she was 20 because of the prejudice against her religion. She was about 15 when the Islamic revolution occurred in Iran, and after that, life got really hard for her as a teenager:

At the time when I was about to finish my high school, my family was arrested and put in prison to [make them] convert to Islam. My mother was put in prison, and got a sentence of life in jail. Also, everything that we had, our money and house, was confiscated. We were told that if we just converted to Islam, everything would go away and we could live our normal life, but we didn't take this option, because that was a belief that we followed at that time. I was about 18 when, with great difficulties, I finished my high school. All of my friends who associated with me or with other Baha'i students were called by the principals and school authorities, and asked not to associate with us.

Susan's description of the day her mom was put in prison and their house was being confiscated showed the level of fear and insecurity that she went through. She said that the fact that her father had passed away and her mother was in prison made her even more vulnerable:

When our house was in the process of confiscation, people from the revolutionary guards were coming to our house very often. At that time my grandmother was living with me and my younger brother. From all the guys who were coming to our house, one guy showed sympathy and mercy to us. He called me 'my sister', and told us don't be worried. He encouraged us to go to the revolutionary court, and he made a complaint with the hope of getting us forgiven. Then later, we heard that this guy was looking to take our house for himself, and he raised this with one of his masters. He suggested that if he married me, he could live with me in this house. When we heard about that, we were all shocked, and I went to another city to live with my uncle for a while.

After finishing her high school, there was no chance for Susan to go to university or to work, because of her religion, so she couldn't imagine any future for herself in Iran. She said,

My mom had been forgiven and released from prison after three years, but she was concerned about me a lot. During the time she was in the prison, she saw lots of young girls there and witnessed their difficulties, so she was afraid that it might happen to me too. Considering all of these concerns, and also the fact that I wasn't able to study or work in Iran, we decided that it's better for me to leave the country. So, in 1987, me, my uncle and my cousins passed the Iranian border illegally and entered Turkey. After staying two years in Turkey as refugees, we arrived in New Zealand in 1987.

Looking at Parvin and Susan's stories, we can see how their experiences were different from my other participants, both in terms of their whole life stories and the ways that those experiences were connected to migration. For these two Baha'i participants, the legal and social consequences of following a specific faith were the only major reason for migration. Baha'is in Iran are deprived of many minimum basic rights that are granted to other citizens. This fact makes their religion the primary obstacle for them, but it does not mean that these people have not experienced other sorts of inequalities. Actually, a Baha'i female in Iran can be faced with at least three levels of rights deprivation at the same time. The first level of deprivation could be experienced by almost all of citizens, regardless of their gender or religion, due to the general lack of political and social freedoms. A second level is based on gender discrimination, which is common to women only. And the third level of deprivation specifically affects Baha'is because of their religion.

Such discrimination on the grounds of religion is not limited to Baha'is in Iran. The followers of other minority religions that are recognised under the Iranian constitution also face some degree of discrimination. In this study, I did not collect any data from other religious minority groups⁸⁶ who have migrated to New Zealand. However, some data from other studies of Iranian migrants in the United States have suggested that many followers of other minority religions have also decided to migrate due to religious discrimination. For instance, a study of Iranian female migrants in the United States referred to a Jewish participant who said that 'living in Iran just became [after the 1979 revolution] an unwise

⁸⁶ The fact that the Iranian community is small in New Zealand makes it hard to get access to participants from minority religious groups. Specifically, the number of Iranian Jews in New Zealand is very small. The number of Iranians who are practicing Christianity is higher, and this study included two Christian participants, but they had converted to Christianity after their immigration.

option for Jews. It is not that Jews were being actively persecuted, but there was a general feeling of anti-Semitism that had grown incrementally since 1979' (Hashemi, 2006, p. 81).

Another study on the migration experience of Iranian females in the United States referred to a Christian (Assyrian) participant who mentioned forced hijab-wearing as one of her motivations for migration, along with the fact that the Islamic Republic imposes Islamic laws on all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations (Nourallahi, 2009). It should be considered that the lack of religious freedom in Iran can also affect the Shia Muslim majority population, if they do not practice or fail to show commitment to religious practice. Therefore, although the members of minority groups may experience discrimination based on their religions regardless of their levels of commitment, the members of majority religious groups can also experience discrimination, due to lack of commitment to their religion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the motivations for migration from Iran have been discussed under three main themes, namely brain drain, dual life, and minority religious status. Under the category of brain drain, we discussed the experiences of two participants who were considered highly intelligent professionals in Iran. We saw how their decisions to emigrate were made in response to a variety of social, political and economic factors that limited their personal potential. Although the problem of brain drain from Iran has been driven by multiple factors, the politics-related factors are perhaps primary. At least a quarter of my other interviewees also described frustrations and difficulties regarding education and subsequent employment, which contributed to their decisions to leave Iran in hope of finding greater freedom and opportunity.

Under the theme of 'dual life' in Iran, we have discussed the participants' experiences of managing two different lives, one private and the other one public, based on two different systems of values. This section explained how the participants struggled to deal with systematic governmental efforts to interfere in their private lives, and how these struggles affected their decisions to emigrate.

The last theme in this chapter concerned the experience of being a religious minority in Iran, and particularly being Baha'i. The Baha'i participants in this study declared that they left Iran mainly because of the difficulties they faced for following that specific religion.

These people's motivations for emigration were different from those of the other participants, both in terms of being mono-factorial, and in terms of being less voluntary.

Although the main three themes of this chapter concern different categories of motivations for migration, in a bigger picture we can see how all three categories are connected to specific socio-political policies of the Islamic Republic in Iran and its lack of social justice. In general, however, policies such as limiting people's social freedom, controlling their social and private lives, interfering in the personal aspects of their lives, and intimidating or punishing those who fail to follow religion-based rules, are all common themes in the experiences of the participants described in this chapter. These policies are enforced in order to mechanically shape the visible and invisible aspects of society in the way that the political system dictates, rather than letting society be the way it is.

Chapter Six: Personal Experiences of Immigration; Personal Identity and Gender-Power Relations

The previous two chapters discussed the participants' motivations for emigrating from Iran, and how this process has been shaped by the social and political context of Iranian society. As discussed, the participants decided to migrate for many complex reasons, but all of them sought the similar goal of changing their lives for the better. In this chapter, we will examine how the participants experienced the process of migration, and how they have personally changed after coming to New Zealand. In other words, we are going to see how the participants' identities as individuals and as women have changed in New Zealand, and how these changes have affected the private and public dimensions of their lives.

Previous studies have taken various perspectives in analysing how the migration experience affects women. Two of the most common perspectives adopted in studies of women who have migrated from developing countries to Western societies concern the themes of 'emancipation' and 'oppression'. The first perspective assumes that migration generally leads to greater empowerment for women (Abadan-Unat, 1977; Bhutani, 1994; Zentgraf, 2002; Zirakbash, 2014). As an example of this perspective, we can mention a study on the post-migration experiences of Salvadoran women in Los Angeles. Zentgraf (2002) suggested that these women generally felt less judged and regulated than they did in their old homelands. They felt more relaxed in the course of carrying out their roles as workers, wives, and mothers in the public spheres of their host country. According to Zentgraf (2002), most of these women explained that despite their hardships in the United States, they felt more empowered, and they experienced greater independence and confidence. Also, the employed women among these migrants believed that their work was more valuable in the new social context, and their financial contributions were more respected by their families. In terms of legal rights and protection from domestic violence, these women argued that the United States compared favourably with El Salvador, as U.S. law was on the side of women.

Another view suggests that migration can reinforce gender inequalities between males and females, and inequality may continue after migration (and can even worsen), because migration can provide a context for new sorts of discriminations. (Man, 1995; Perilla, 2002; Bahattachajee, 1992; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Abraham, 2005; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000). For instance, some studies have claimed that migration can increase the risk of domestic violence against women. According to this argument, certain factors are conducive to

violence, and these factors are endemic to the conditions of migrants: social isolation from the host society, the absence of family support, and non-permanent legal status (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Abraham, 2005). Raj and Silverman did a comprehensive review of studies regarding the incidence of violence against immigrant women in the United States. The most significant factor identified in these studies concerned the women's legal status as immigrants: 'non-citizen immigrant women are recognised as being at increased risk for domestic violence due to their lack of legal rights' (Raj & Silverman, 2002, p. 10). More importantly, these women typically feel they must remain in abusive relationships, for fear that they or their children will otherwise be deported. As Raj and Silverman (2002, p. 21) explained, 'undocumented women fear that if they ask for help, the health or social service provider will turn them in for deportation'.

In another study, Man (1995) discussed the difficulties that Chinese immigrant middle-class females faced in Canada, and the ways that immigration disempowered these women. She explained how unemployment or underemployment of Chinese females after migration (often due to their lack of Canadian work experience and the reluctance of employers to recognise their degrees), made these women financially dependent on their partners. Also, the lack of a support system at home (either from members of their extended families or from hired help) placed an increased workload on these women's shoulders, which made their day-to-day lives extremely difficult.

Although both of these perspectives shed light on significant aspects of women's migration experiences, the polarised nature of these views makes it essential to recognise a third perspective. This perspective involves a middle position, and seeks to explain migration as a mixed experience of gains and losses for women (Kurien, 1999; Hugo 2002; Dasgupta, 1998). In a study for the Creating Hindu-Indian Identity project in the U.S.A., Kurien (1999) provided a good example of research that combined two contradictory views concerning the effects of emigration on women. This study portrayed migration as a 'mixed blessing experience' for Indian females, and it argued that emigration tends to cause both gains and losses in different areas of women's lives. As Kurien explained, on one hand Indian women commonly played critical roles after migration in terms of their financial and cultural contributions to their families and communities. Most of them took jobs to support their families, and they acted as custodians of their families' cultural heritage. On the other hand, these women were still expected to meet traditional Indian standards, by which women should serve as 'self-sacrificial' mothers and wives. While on one hand they took on more

social and public responsibilities (which could make them more empowered), on the other hand they remained burdened with all the private or family responsibilities expected in their country of origin. Living up to all of these responsibilities put greater burdens on these women, but they saw little or no gains in terms of their rights (Kurien, 1999, pp. 649–650).

Although Kurien focused on the ways that emigration could bring both positive and negative consequences for each migrant woman, other studies like that by Hugo (2002) have tried to examine the factors that can make the emigration experience different from person to person. In a study to investigate the diverse effects of migration on families in Indonesia, Hugo mentioned factors such as legal immigration, entering the work market in the host country, autonomous status (from the extended family), and long-term migration as some of the factors that could increase the chances of empowerment for women after immigration. At the same time, the variations in cultural context of the host country, the rates of social and economic change in the nations of origin and destination, and the characteristics of the women and their families, were also taken into account (Hugo, 2002, pp. 27–28).

In reviewing all the above-mentioned studies, and in considering the ‘multi-faceted and complex nature of women’s position’ (Meares, p. 38), we can agree with Hirsch that there is never ‘just one answer to the question of how migration affects gender’ (Hirsch, 1999, p. 1347). Migration does not always lead to either loses or gains for women, and it can be a mixture of loses and gains in different areas, for different people.

According to the participant experiences presented in this chapter, we can say that in terms of personal and intra-family interactions, the immigration experience for Iranian women in New Zealand has commonly been a mix of gains and losses. Some Iranian female migrants to New Zealand have faced new kinds of discrimination or hardship, and others have experienced significant emancipation. Moreover, in some cases the same person has experienced gains at one stage and losses in another stage of her experience, or different effects in different areas of her life.

Changes in Self-image

Almost all of my participants mentioned that they had changed in positive ways, both as individuals and as women, after their migration to New Zealand. Although their perception of their own personal development could result from various factors such as ageing, changes in economic circumstances, or post-migration hardships, any of these experiences could make

them feel that they were growing stronger. Therefore, this section seeks to focus only on changes that the participants believe resulted quite directly from their experience of migration and/or their process of acculturation.

Self-confidence. One of the main themes that emerged in the participants' comments about changes in their personalities was related to their levels of self-confidence and independence. Although these two factors could be considered together (as one can affect the other), I discuss self-confidence and independence separately, because they can involve distinct sets of issues and experiences.

Studies reporting that migration empowers women usually mention the co-relation between negotiating women's traditional gender roles and increasing their self-confidence. (Zentgraf, 2002; Zirakbash, 2014). For instance, Zirakbash (2014) reported that Iranian female migrants in Australia experienced a general 'development of self-worth and self-respect after migration'. These women felt that such change in their lives was related to the changed social and cultural context in Australia. Where gender discrimination in Iran had caused these women to feel disrespected, the freedom and equality they experienced in the new context allowed them to discover greater self-worth and self-respect. Discovering enhanced self-worth after migration could challenge these women's old family patterns, in which mothers and wives were expected to sacrifice their own interests, rather than prioritising themselves (Zirakbash, 2014, pp. 177–189). Therefore, the mentioned increase in these women's confidence after immigration could lead them to reject the traditional gender roles that they knew in their home country.

In my study, the participants reported a greater variety of experiences in terms of their self-confidence in the new context. Almost one third of the participants mentioned that they had grown more confident as a result of their immigration experiences. Some of them did not report any change in their levels of self-confidence. A few said that they felt less confident after immigration. The participants who migrated on their own, either as single persons or as women who came without their husbands, generally placed more emphasis on the importance of self-confidence in their personal development after migration. For example, Mina, who came to New Zealand in 2012 to do her PhD, said

I got more confident here, and I really enjoy this confidence. When I think that I could go to a new country which is so different from my home country, study there, survive there, and settle down there, I feel much better about myself.

Immigration made me able to see different people from all around the world, communicate with them, and have a good access to information globally. All of these make me able to have a better perspective and higher confidence.

For Mina, the process of gaining more confidence was generally related to dealing with new challenges, and it was less dependent on the changed context of the host country. In other words, Mina put more focus on her own achievements in the processes of migration, regardless of the host country's context regarding gender equality. However, some of my participants specifically mentioned that they felt more confident about being a woman in New Zealand than they had in Iran.

Ana, 36, who arrived in New Zealand in 2009, said

I had a matriarchal family in Iran. The family gave me the idea that as a woman you could do everything, but I could see that this pattern didn't work in practice in society, so it was hard for me to believe it. When I migrated, I saw that in practice females could do many things equally to males, and this increased my sense of confidence about myself as a woman.

Like Ana, Ziba, 45, said that she gained more self-confidence as a woman after her migration, because she saw that she could do many more things than were available to her in Iran, and she could play more roles in actual practice:

Here, I saw that whatever males do, I could do also, so I got more confidence in myself. Although I believe that people here are going too far in equality between males and females and they shouldn't be considered 100% the same, because they are different in some ways. Males could do some types of work better, and females can do other types of work better. But the fact that I am considered equal here by males in terms of my social rights, and the fact that I didn't get humiliated, or accused of being weak or dumb because of my gender, gave me much more confidence compared with my life in Iran.

The points that Ana and Ziba raised suggest that their increase in self-confidence was mostly related to the social context and the facts of life in the host society, rather than resulting from their own particular achievements. In these cases, we see how moving from a context of discrimination (particularly of gender discrimination) to living in a more equal

social context could increase people's self-confidence, regardless of their own personal achievements. This observation does not suggest that Ana and Ziba had less personal achievement in NZ than Mina. It just highlights the importance of the New Zealand social context in building their self-confidence. Also, these differing experiences suggest that the increase of the participants' self-confidence after migration could come from at least two sources: the greater gender equality in the host country's social and cultural context, or the experience of personal agency and achievement, sometimes arising from meeting the challenges of migration itself.

In contrast to these accounts, a few participants mentioned that they felt less confident, at least at some stages in their lives following migration. For example, Pardis, 49, who arrived in New Zealand in 2000, said

My biggest sense of loss after migration was that I could not express myself. I had many things to say, for example at my workplace, but I didn't say them, because I could easily get accused that English was my second language, and I couldn't understand well. Maybe that was right, but it took all my confidence. I was very eloquent when I was in Iran, but here I was afraid to talk, because I thought that maybe I will make a mistake. So, I was a follower most of the time. Recently, things got better. Now I am working in a management position with a team of eight people, and there is no one on top of me at the work place. I just need to send a monthly report to my manager.

Like Pardis, Negin, 39, who arrived in New Zealand in 1998, felt less confident during the first years she was working in New Zealand. She said:

At work I wasn't confident enough, because English was my second language. For example, when I was in presentations or workshops, the slides always changed before I could read them properly. I was slower than most of my colleagues, and it affected my confidence. Even, at some stages I was afraid to write reports, because I thought I could make grammatical mistakes. For several years I was asking myself when I could get to be like others (Kiwis). Now I say maybe never, but that's fine. Now I am more relaxed about these things.

These data suggest that the lack of English language proficiency, or at least the perception of that, was the most important challenge to the participants' self-confidence following immigration. Although studies have been done about the importance of English language competence for enabling migrants to succeed in their host countries, these studies have paid insufficient attention to the way that language skills can affect the migrant's overall confidence.

Regarding the importance of English language abilities in the migrants' occupational performance, Ho and Alcorso (2004, p. 245) indicated that, in the Australian job-market, 'those from English-speaking backgrounds achieved considerably better outcomes than those from non-English-speaking backgrounds'. Studies like this specifically categorise people based on their original language. Migrants who speak English as a second or third language are compared with native English-speaking migrants, and one group is found to perform worse than the other. In this rather binary perspective, language skills are treated as inherent personal qualities, and the differing levels of English proficiency among non-native speakers are largely overlooked. From a different perspective, a study by Henderson, Trlin, and Watts (2006) analysed the recruitment norms for hiring professional employees in about 300 organisations in New Zealand. This study indicated that most of these employers were 'choosing a near native speaker level or higher for senior positions' (2006, p. vi).

However, in addition to the general importance of English proficiency for entering the job market, Zirakbash (2014) found that Iranian professional females in Australia mentioned other ways that English proficiency affected their professional lives and their confidence at work. Some of Zirakbash's participants, particularly those in the medical field, mentioned that English proficiency was a strong requirement in finding a job in general, and a specific hindrance to finding work in their particular fields of expertise. The participants who were working in other fields did not report facing such strong requirements for English proficiency. Instead, some of them felt that their English language abilities affected their self-confidence on the job.

In this research project, I did not directly investigate the importance of English language competence in the participants' occupational performance. Instead, I tried to see how the participants' language barriers could affect their overall confidence after immigration. My findings suggest that although English was not a first language for any of my participants, only some of them felt that their language abilities affected their overall

confidence. I collected no data about the level of my participants' English abilities, but the fact that both Negin and Pardis did their tertiary education in New Zealand, and that they had worked here for years, suggested that their level of English proficiency should be acceptable. Their language skills should be similar to or higher than the average level among the other participants. Therefore, we cannot identify a clear relationship between the level of the participants' English abilities and their self-confidence. It seems that the reasons why some participants felt less confident about their language skills were actually more related to other factors, such as employers' and colleagues' expectations in their particular line of work, or their own perceptions of their language ability, and not simply the level of their knowledge or performance.

For instance, participants who felt less confident because of their language skills might have had higher expectations of themselves. They may have habitually compared their English language abilities with the abilities of native speakers, and judged themselves on that basis. Therefore, while language might be a greater challenge for some people than others, in some cases the main challenge is the high expectations that people make of themselves. This kind of self-judgement may be especially detrimental to the self-confidence of intellectually sophisticated, highly educated women (Zirakbash, 2014, p. 158).

Another important aspect of this issue is the way that this lack of confidence over English skills can affect the women's general confidence, or sense of independence in their day-to-day lives, or their intra-family relationships. There is a possibility that low self-confidence in the workplace can cause women to feel less assured in general, and consequently make them feel disempowered in their intra-family relationships. Just as gaining more self-confidence after migration can make women better able to negotiate their traditional roles in their families, so a decrease in their level of confidence in their workplaces and social relations may induce them to accept more inequality in their family roles. This possible pattern of a relationship between lack of self-confidence at work and acceptance of unequal family roles at home appeared to me later, and after I had finished my fieldwork. Therefore, I have not collected any particular data on it, and I just raise it here as a possibility for more investigation. I will discuss this pattern more in my conclusion chapter.

Becoming independent. In some cases, a change in the social context, such as moving from a patriarchal culture to a more egalitarian culture can make people feel more confident. In most cases, however, the positive changes in self-confidence among my

participants resulted from their experience of growing more functionally independent after migration. In other words, some people gained a greater feeling of confidence without actually becoming more independent, but those who actually grew more independent found an internal basis for feeling more confident about themselves. These people gained a direct experience of enhanced confidence based on their personal achievements, rather than just picking up the feeling of independence from the people around them, or from the social context.

Around half of my participants mentioned that they became more independent after their immigration. This increased sense of independence was common for the women who had migrated on their own and for those who migrated with a partner. For participants who had migrated as single women, their sense of independence was mostly related to the fact that they had started to live on their own here. They moved from living with their parents when they were in Iran, to feeling responsible for all aspects of their lives in NZ. The participants who had been living with their partners in Iran and moved to New Zealand as a family also mentioned that they grew more independent here, because they could see that their contributions, especially in terms of financial support, were more essential than when they lived in Iran.

For example, Raha, who arrived in Christchurch in 2011 with her husband, said,

I always worked, both here and when I was in Iran, but when I compare these two together, I think I wasn't really independent when I was in Iran; maybe I just pretended that I was. Over there, I was working, but I wasn't really dependent on my income, and at the end it was expected that someone else should pay for me—either my father or my husband. You know, this attitude was very common in Iran, that women could work, but they were not responsible for the living costs of their families, because that's the male's responsibility. But, this trend changed here. After immigration, I worked because I really needed to have an income, and it wasn't possible to put all the financial responsibilities on the shoulders of one person. So, now I feel that I am really independent, and even more, I feel that I could live by my own and my income without the support of anyone else. That was a thing that I could hardly see when I was in Iran.

This point that Raha mentioned has been echoed in many other studies, which have also found that women's financial contributions to their families gain them greater personal autonomy and independence after migration (Foner, 1998; Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Zentgraf, 2002). For instance, immigrant women often reported gaining more control 'over budgeting and other realms of domestic decision making' as well as providing more assistance in their households due to their regular financial contribution. Also, there is some indication of a correlation between a smaller wage gap between partners, and a greater willingness of males to contribute in the domestic work (Pessar, 1999).⁸⁷

For Raha and most of my other participants, the trend of growing more independent was a gradual change. Whether they came alone or as a family, most participants in this study started to build up their lives in New Zealand based either on some savings prior to their migration, or with some support from their families during their first years after migration. These sorts of financial backing, along with the participants' skills and work experience, helped them to experience a smoother process of settling down and growing self-reliance in the new country. This gradual trend was the most common experience among my participants, but some of them had to adjust more suddenly. Parvin, 55, who discussed her experience of emigration in the last chapter, followed a different path after she arrived here. Prior to her migration, Parvin had been protected by her father, and later by her husband:

I have changed a lot in the process of migration. When I was in Iran I was too dependent on my family. After I finished high school, my father didn't allow me to work. He said we had enough money so there was no need for me to work, and he always supported me financially. Things were the same after my marriage. This time my husband supported me financially. But when I arrived here, in just a few months everything changed. My husband passed away suddenly in Iran, a couple of months after our arrival, while I was expecting that he would join us soon. After that, I remained alone with three young kids here in New Zealand, without any financial back up, skills, or language knowledge. I still had my family here, my parents and my brothers, but I couldn't count on them that much, as they were struggling financially themselves. They helped me a lot, but at the end it was my responsibility to

⁸⁷ There is some controversy around the claim that women's paid employment necessarily improves their situation after migration. For more information, see Meares (2007, pp. 39–42).

establish a new life for my kids and myself, and I did that. I worked very hard, sometimes working in three different shifts, doing a cleaning job in the day, and at nights just going from one restaurant to another and washing dishes ... It was so hard, and I experienced lots of difficulties in this process, but at the end I'm so happy that I could stand on my own feet. I stayed here, raised my kids, and made a better life for my family. I'm so proud of myself for doing all of these things.

Parvin said that after all of these hardships, she found out how capable and strong she was:

My situation here was different from many other migrants. Going forward wasn't easy for me. If I wanted to go one step forward, first I should make that step and find my balance, and then make the next step, and I did that. When I moved out from that society and those family dynamics, I could see my abilities and prove them to others.

Various changes to the financial circumstances of my participants and their families after immigration affected their sense of independence. In the case of Parvin, we can see how she quite suddenly moved from being a person who was highly dependent on her father or husband, to being someone responsible for all financial and non-financial aspects of her life and her family's situation. Obviously, these changes happened mostly because of the financial difficulties that she and her family went through. It seems that in such cases, practical realities are more important than cultural beliefs. Although Parvin's father had prevented her from working when she was in Iran, in New Zealand he helped her by looking after her kids so she could work. These changes were likely to happen as a consequence of the financial realities of living in exile, rather than as a trend of acculturation in the host country. However, the role of financial concerns in these changes should not lead us to ignore the cultural changes involved. Although these shifts in self-reliance may have started with the women's initiatives, they entailed quite significant changes in their men's lives as well.

The Emerging 'Feminine Aspect' of Personality

The emergence of something the participants called the 'feminine aspects of their personality' was another experience that some of them pointed out as they discussed their post-migration changes in personal identity.

Theoretically, there is no straight-forward scale to determine what is more ‘feminine’ and what is more ‘masculine’, but there is some agreement on biological and gender differences in human behaviour (Hyde, 2005, 2007; Eagly & Wood 1999). These differences are important not only on their own, but also because they are ‘amplified by cultural beliefs and roles’ (Hyde, 2007, p. 261). According to social-structural theory, ‘a society’s division of labour by gender drives all other gender differences in behaviour’ (Hyde, 2007 p. 260). Therefore, social structures, and particularly the different roles that women and men occupy, are constructed gender differences in behaviour (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

There is great diversity across cultures and societies regarding typical male or female types of behaviour. However, there are some widely shared self-perceptions regarding the prevailing stereotypes for behavioural differences between the sexes (Persson, 1999). For example, people of many cultures tend to view males as more aggressive, dominant, active, competitive, and instrumental, whereas females are more likely to be seen as warm, submissive, passive, and cooperative (Pishghadam et al., 2016). These stereotypes, however, are less common in the more economically and socially developed countries (Persson, 1999).

In the context of Iran, we can recognise at least three different streams in regards to definitions of femininity and masculinity: the official or governmental view, the traditional and normative view (which may involve a combination of culture and religion), and the more feminist or Western view. Any of these views can have their own effects on people’s self-perception. In this study, ‘femininity’ refers to whatever the participants defined as feminine. Their comments suggested that their concepts of femininity included at least two main aspects: appearance and behaviour, and these aspects were mostly defined in terms of the commonly mentioned stereotypes.

Regardless of their definitions of femininity, some of the participants mentioned that they used to censor some ‘feminine aspects of their personality’ when they were in Iran, and that these censored aspects started to re-emerge after their migration. In particular, they said that they used to act like males when they were in Iran, as a way to be taken more seriously, specifically in the workplace. Pegah, 35, who arrived in New Zealand in 2012, said:

I think I had learnt to eliminate the feminine part of my personality. For example, I always tied my hair to the back of my head, and it is hard for me now to keep it open, but gradually, I’m trying to do that. Or, it was hard for me to put on skirts, but now I have started to put them on, so I have started to

try these changes. I'm really feeling good about that. I feel my long struggle against the feminine aspects of my personality is going to get less here. In Iran, you should act like a male. If you show femininity, it wouldn't be good for you. For example, over there, if I had argument with someone at work and my tears rolled down, I felt that all my prestige was gone. But, here I don't feel like this. I think I could have emotions and still be accepted.

Another participant, Sima, 35, also mentioned that she returned to her sense of 'femininity' after her migration, and that previously she tried to act like a male:

For protecting myself and showing that I'm strong, I needed to act like a male, and even be aggressive sometimes. I really didn't want to be like that. I think that aggressiveness was something affected during my whole life. After migration, I have started to go back again to my feminine personality, and I really like that shift.

According to the participants' accounts, they started to generally challenge the traditional gender stereotypes of their home society, and move towards adopting patterns that were more equal. However, they also recovered some aspects of what they regarded as their 'feminine personality', which they hid in their home country for practical reasons. So, the post-migration changes that participants experienced were not just about walking away from traditional gender images and towards gender neutrality. It could also be a matter of what they called 'being yourself', and recovering parts of what they deemed a feminine identity that had been hidden.

Interestingly and somewhat paradoxically, this change could be related to the fact that gender stereotypes are less powerful in more gender-equal countries (Farvid, 2017). Therefore, in the New Zealand social context of *less* gender differentiation, Iranian women felt *more* able to embody (their female) gender difference. In other words, these participants thought that they were free to express what they defined as the 'feminine aspect of their personality', and because the gender roles were less powerful here, they were less likely to be judged or underestimated based on the expectations that these clichés might raise.

From Collectivism to Individualism

Another aspect of personality change that some participants mentioned involved a gradual shift from collectivism to individualism. On one hand, individualism refers to a

lifestyle or culture that ‘focuses on rights above duties, a concern for oneself and immediate family, and an emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfilment’ (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p. 4). In contrast, the core element of collectivism involves making the group central instead of the individual: ‘Collectivism implies that group membership is a central aspect of identity, and [the most] valued personal traits reflect the goals of collectivism, such as sacrifice for the common good and maintaining harmonious relationships with close others’ (Oyserman et al., 2002, p. 5). In terms of self-expression, collectivism tends to indicate that ‘restraint in emotional expression, rather than open and direct expression of personal feelings, is likely to be valued as a means of ensuring in-group harmony’ (Oyserman et al., 2002, p. 5). Families, clans, ethnicities, or religions are some of the sorts of groups that may foster a collectivist mentality. Generally, Western societies⁸⁸ are considered to be more individualist, and Asian, African, or Middle Eastern societies are considered to have more collectivist cultures (Forsyth, 1999). Migration is one of the areas in which Eastern and Western cultural divergence around the concepts of individualism and collectivism shows itself. Ahmadi (1998, p. 220) suggested that the differing ways that migrants from collectivistic countries and Western people relate to the individual and the social group often cause certain forms of identity crisis or self-redefinition among the migrants.

For example, in regards to the concepts of individualism and collectivism, my participants mentioned that they were defining more boundaries between themselves and others. They were growing more aware concerning their individual rights in their various roles. They also reported a growing tendency to show their disagreements with others in a more active way. Nilo, 35, who arrived in New Zealand with her family in 2013, said that:

Immigration taught me how to reduce the effects of other people, regardless who they are, in my life, and how to be more individualistic. Before that, I allowed others to be involved in my life a lot, but now I know how to define a boundary for others and manage my relationships with my family and friends.

⁸⁸ Although New Zealand is categorised as one of the most individualistic nations (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), the levels of individualism and collectivism are noticeably different among different ethnic groups in this country, specifically in terms of internal family behaviour. In this regard, ‘New Zealand Europeans ranked the lowest, followed by Chinese and Māori, ... and Pacific Islanders, according to their collectivist value orientations and behavioural preferences towards their family’ (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2012).

Nadia, 31, who arrived here in 2009, raised a similar point: ‘Recently, I became like Kiwis. I define boundaries for myself and don’t allow my friends to get involved in my private space too much’.

Both Nilo and Nadia emphasised that as a part of their acculturation experience, they started defining more boundaries with others and giving themselves more personal space. Becoming more individualistic happened mainly in terms of their personal relationships. Other participants, however, mentioned more social aspects of this shift. For example, Salma, 28, who had been living in Auckland since 2008, mentioned that after her immigration she became more aware and sensitive about her personal rights.

Here, I’ve achieved more awareness about my own rights and I pay more attention to my rights as a human, as a customer, as a student, as an employee, etc. Overall, since my migration I am a better person. Although here I got individualistic and sometimes even selfish, at the same time I care more about others’ rights as well.

Moving from collectivism to individualism after immigration can be considered a consequence of both migration itself and of the acculturation process. Parya explained in some detail how changes in her personality happened for her, particularly in terms of moving from collectivism to individualism:

I have changed a lot after migration. Specifically, my values system, the way that I communicate with others and myself, and my emotional communication have changed. For example, before [emigrating] I just saw my parents as my mother and my father, but now I more see them as human beings, regardless of their relationship with me. Maybe all of these changes weren’t directly the consequences of migration, but they happened here. One of the things that I had in New Zealand was my loneliness. Here, during the time that I was alone, I was thinking a lot about myself, and paid so much attention to myself. I revalued myself and my values, to see once again what is right and what is wrong. I threw out the things that I didn’t like and kept the ones that I liked, and the point was that I had freedom to choose. In Iran, you should accept many parts of your culture [in terms of the cultural aspects of your personality] even though you don’t like them, because those things are considered as dominant values over there, but here I could have a choice.

Other changes in the participants' personalities that involved movements from collectivism to individualism concerned their willingness to more actively show disagreement when they did not like something. This change could also be interpreted as a gradual move from being obedient to being more rebellious in both social and personal contexts.

Nava, 35, who came to New Zealand in 2004 after marrying her husband (who was already living here) said:

I had always been a quiet person and accepted whatever others said. I was afraid to discuss my preferences or make a trouble by talking about what I wanted. I kept doing the same after my immigration, but gradually I decided to change that, and now I am not the same person anymore. Now I have my voice and say what I like and what I don't like. I don't let others impose on me the things I don't want anymore. Everyone, even my husband, tells me that I have changed a lot, and they say they like my new personality more than my past one.

Like Nava, Maryam, 30, also mentioned that she lacked assertiveness prior to her immigration. She said:

When I was in Iran, if my rights had been violated, I always kept silent. Although I was sensitive about my rights, I had never expressed my dissatisfaction [when others violated my rights] and I keep it inside myself. This trend was more visible in my relationship with my husband and his family. If they said something that made me upset, I always compromised on that, but now I have changed my attitude. I think, why should I compromise myself and my preferences? The only outcome of all these compromises is that you are being ignored, others will decide and think instead of you, and no one respects your opinions. So, I changed my attitude. Now, if someone says something that I don't like, I wouldn't keep silent anymore. I say my own opinion and express myself, and expect others to respect my preferences. This is a very important evolution for me, and I can see the reflection of this change in my personal life. Even my marital life was at one point in danger because of my new approach.

Several participants spoke about getting more individualistic after migration, but Maryam was the only one who mentioned that this individualistic approach affected her marital life. This issue will be discussed in the next section.

Other researchers (Ahamadi, 1995; Darvishpour, 2002) have also mentioned that moving from less individualistic societies (like Iran) to more individualistic societies could cause identity crises, especially for women, and that such crises could affect family life. These researchers have argued that the social and cultural rules in the more individualistic societies are shaped around the idea that citizens are independent individuals, and such rules tend to contradict the idea of collectivism and mutual care. The effort to reach a balance between individualism and collectivism can generate conflict within the family, and stimulate identity crises for women, especially where collectivist values strongly emphasise women's responsibilities in the family.

In this section, we have discussed how the participants' personalities changed after their immigration. In some cases, it is hard to determine whether these changes were specifically caused by the experience of migration, or they were correlational with other factors like age. It could be argued that as women age, irrespective of whether they are migrants or not, they become more confident in their opinions and in speaking them to others. Obviously, the ways that the participants' personalities changed could influence their interactions with both their families and the wider society. In the next section, we examine how these personal developments, alongside the new social context, have affected the marital dynamics and interactions of my research participants in NZ.

Couple Relationships

Through the process of settlement in the host country, gender roles and family relations undergo continual renegotiation, as couples rebuild their lives in the new society (Espritue, 1999). Regardless of the nature of these negotiations, they happen as the consequence of two different processes: immigration and acculturation. The practical changes in family living arrangements, sources of income, and social status happen through the process of migration itself. It is the behavioural changes involving adaptation to the norms and ideologies of the new culture that happen mainly through acculturation (Jibeen & Hynie, 2012).

Regarding the nature of acculturation, post-immigration negotiations over lifestyle can be discussed under the previously mentioned framework of emancipation or oppression. Some studies have highlighted the ways that immigration can change the power relations within families in favour of women (Abadan-Unat, 1977; Bhutani, 1994; Zentgraf, 2002; Zirakbash, 2014). Other studies have indicated that the existing inequalities between couples tend to continue, or even to get worse following immigration, and attempts at changing the original pattern of their relationships can produce high levels of tension, instability, and divorce in migrant families (Perilla, 2002; Bahattachjee, 1992; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Abraham, 2005; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000).

In this section, we examine how immigration to NZ affected couple relationships for my participants, or brought changes in the participants' understandings of their roles and rights as wives or partners. For this particular discussion, single participants (who were either separated before migration or had never been in a relationship) are excluded. Of the 34 participants in this study, 19 were married or in a relationship at the time of the interviews. These 19 participants have been divided into 3 categories. The first category includes those participants who were married or in a relationship in Iran, and then immigrated as a couple. The second category includes participants who married or became engaged to an Iranian partner who was living in NZ, and then moved here to live with their spouse. The third category contains participants who got married after their migration to NZ either with Iranians or New Zealanders.

In general, the participants in the first category described various ups and downs in their relationships. It seems that the experiences of the participants in the second and third categories were smoother.

Post-migration relationships. Overall, most of the participants who migrated with their partners reported that they became closer friends with their partners after immigration. Although the sense of being alone in a new country could make these couples' relationships more intimate, this was not always the whole story. As mentioned above, two main types of change could challenge couple relationships after immigration. Changes such as new family living arrangements, different sources of income, shifts in social status, and the stresses or pressures of living in a new context were all direct outcomes of immigration itself. On top of these changes came the factors related to their trends of acculturation.

Most of the participants in this study confirmed that they had experienced significant changes in their family dynamics. Some of them found these changes challenging, and they mentioned tensions and instabilities in their relationships as a consequence of these changes. None of the participants, however, permanently separated from their partners after migration.

Unlike in my findings, some other studies on Iranian migrants in Sweden (Ahmadi, 2003; Darvishpour, 2002), Canada (Shahidian, 1999), the U.S.A. (Hojat, Shapurian, Foroughi, Nayerahmadi, Farzaneh, Shafieyan, et al. (2000), and Australia (Zirakbash, 2014) have reported high levels of instability and/or divorce among Iranian immigrant couples. For example, Darvishpour (2002) noted the high rate of divorce among immigrant groups in Sweden. He pointed out that while Sweden has one of the highest divorce rates in Europe and in the world, this divorce rate is even higher among migrant groups in the country. According to his findings, Iranians are the ethnic group with the second highest rate of divorce in Sweden. Another study, which focused on Iranian migrants in the U.S.A., noted that divorce rates among Iranian immigrants in that country (in 1993) were more than six times higher than in Iran (Hojat et al., 2000). The most commonly suggested reasons such high divorce rates after migration are, first, the Western nations' greater cultural acceptance of divorce, their more liberal family legislation, and the reduced financial dependence of females on their husbands in those countries. The second set of reasons involved the ideological changes that are a part of an acculturation process (Hojat et al., 2000; Darvishpour, 2002; Shirpak, Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011).

Most of these previous studies have noted the importance of differentiating between the problems that couples bring with them from their home country, and the problems that arise in the new country as a consequence of migration (Darvishpour, 2002). It seems that any type of pre-existing tensions in a marital relationship can intensify after a migration, and they often intensify specifically because of differences between men's and women's patterns of acculturation (Shirpak, Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011). In the case of my participants, the couples' relationships generally continued their previous pre-migration patterns. None of my participants (save one who is described in a note below) mentioned any sort of serious

tensions⁸⁹ before migration, and their patterns of family life tended to continue after migration. If the couples had egalitarian relationships before migration, they continued that lifestyle after migration. If the power relationship between partners was unequal before migration, they often experienced some challenges in the new country, and most of them moved towards greater equality in their relationships.

The most fundamental observation in studies that have found increased tension among couples after migration is that females usually have a faster trend of acculturation than males (in cases where the culture of origin and that of the host country are noticeably different). Various studies (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Abraham, 2005; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Rodriguez, 1995) have indicated that female immigrants usually acculturate into their new societies and modify their gender roles more quickly than male migrants. These studies have not suggested any particular reason for this tendency of females to acculturate faster than males. However, it seems that in terms of gender roles, females have a greater investment in adopting the new roles of the host society if the host country's standards are more favourable to women, and if adopting those standards helps women to move toward more equal relationships. Immigrant women are therefore more likely to reject the traditional gender norms of their original homelands. This kind of cultural initiative by women commonly meets resistance from their male family members, and some studies have indicated that the women's acculturation can result in male efforts to retain dominance, specifically by coercive means including violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002, p. 370).

In my research, I did not collect any data from my participants' male partners. Therefore, I was unable to compare their trends of acculturation with those of their female partners. However, some of my participants emphasised that after migration, both they and their husbands had changed. If there was a different pace of acculturation between the women and their male partners, they did not consider it noticeable. However, some of the participants mentioned that this gap in acculturation became wide and problematic during visits back to their home country.

⁸⁹ Only one of my participants got separated from her husband after migration, and this participant was excluded from this section, because her separation was mainly due to problems she already had in Iran. She clearly said that she had serious problems with her husband while she was in Iran, but never appealed for divorce because of the unequal family legislation. She separated from her husband shortly after their migration to NZ. In her case, therefore, it was not a cause-and-effect relationship between separation and migration, even though the liberal divorce law in New Zealand facilitated her divorce. The story of this participant is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Maryam's experience illustrates how embracing the ideology and expectations of the host country in terms of gender roles could affect a couple's marital life, specifically in the context of the home country. In the previous section, I discussed how Maryam's personality changed after migration, and how she started to grow more self-oriented. She mentioned that the effects of all the practical, social, and personal changes in her marital life were quite evident. At one point, she felt that her marital relationship was in danger because of her new personality. In general, Maryam remarked that her attitudes about herself and her rights as a female had changed a lot since her migration, and that this change was the main context for other changes that happened in her personality:

When I was living in Iran, everything looked normal to me, and I didn't feel any important sorts of inequalities between males and females. But after immigration my attitudes changed a lot. A part of that change could refer to the point that I saw a different situation here, and I started to compare it with my own situation also. I have better access to information here compared with Iran. The high level of censorship over there limited my access to a huge range of information. I am sure that if I were still in Iran, I would have not been as egalitarian as now about male and female rights. Here, I read a lot about that, and after a while, I just started to understand what happened to me when I was in Iran, and what could be happening here also.

Maryam explained that her different ways of thinking and acting had not caused a great deal of tension in her marital life in New Zealand. Instead, it was most problematic during her first trip back to Iran with her husband after their migration:

When we were in Iran [before migration], normally my husband was the one who made the final decisions and I accepted. Later, when we moved here, we were both students, and gradually we started to make decisions together. In New Zealand, we normally discuss different things together, and then make a decision. But last year when we went to Iran together, I saw that things had changed rapidly. We were coming from different cities in Iran so, we decided [during this trip] that each of us was going to our own city and spend time with our own family, and then later we all joined together for few days. While we were both happy about this decision, after a few days my husband asked me to join him. I didn't accept it, because I wanted to see more of my family

after two years. So, I insisted that I wanted to stay with my own family, and the consequences of this insistence were much more than I thought. I was expected to be as obedient as before, and accept my husband's decision. For not being like that, I was labelled as a rebellious wife who did not care about her marital life.

Maryam said she was shocked by the way that her family relationship changed after a few days in Iran. She said she never saw her husband like this before:

I was shocked by the way those things got serious. No one saw that I wanted to see my family after two years. The whole story for them was that I was not accompanying my husband, so I had changed. Then they asked, why she has changed? Then they answered, maybe because she is studying. Then they said, why she should study at this stage? Woman shouldn't study too high; if she does, she is not obedient any more. I was even threatened to not be allowed to study any more.

Maryam said that at the end, she surrendered and joined her husband a few days after he asked her, although she didn't want to do that: 'I didn't have any other choice really. I think the situation [context] in Iran forced me in this way. I am sure this could never happen here for me'.

This point that Maryam raised about fluctuations in her relationship in two different contexts, and specifically the fact that her husband treated her in an authoritarian way while in Iran, but did not do the same in New Zealand, was also mentioned to some degree by two other participants.

For example, Raha, 33, who had been living in New Zealand since 2011, explained:

I think the environment is toxic in Iran for a couple's relationship, and your partner could get affected from this environment even if he is not really a patriarchal person. When we were in Iran for a visit last year, I could see this toxic environment better. For example, I could see how my brother-in-law's language with his wife was humiliating, while his wife couldn't see that, and after a few weeks I could see the same changes in my husband's language as well. It was later in our trip, and I don't know if he would change more if we stayed longer or not.

Raha's experience in this case was milder than Maryam's, but it seems that both women were talking about the same trend, with the same sorts of causes. In terms of the reasons for these changes, Maryam said:

I think it doesn't matter how a man is educated, how intellectual, or how many years living away from home. If he grew up in an Iranian environment and Iranian family, he has a sexist context behind his mind, and he couldn't see males and females equal. So, whenever he finds a suitable context, he would go back to his roots. It is like a fire under the ash.

Like Maryam, Raha spoke about the change in context:

I think context is very important. In the new context [of NZ], my husband learned to respect me more than what his culture taught him, and again, when he returned to that patriarchal context, he followed the dominant trend over there. I think even he himself wasn't aware of these changes. Really, he just followed the trend.

In talking about these different contexts, Raha also mentioned the changes that happened to her husband as a consequence of his acculturation in the new context. Although she did not mention whether she and her husband both had the same pace of acculturation, it seemed that she was happy with her husband's adaptability in the new context. Another participant, Nilo, particularly mentioned the changing power relationship between couples after migration, and her own experience with that:

After a while living here, men feel deflated because of the things and rights that they have lost, and on the other hand women feel they are more powerful now because of the rights they achieve here. So, males are forced to change their manner step by step; there is no other option for them.

Nilo then referred to her experience with her husband here, and the time that they came close to separating after their migration:

It was a period of six months here when my husband and I had some serious problems, and we were thinking about separation. At that time, whenever I told my husband we should get separated, he told me: 'That's fine, let's go back to Iran and do it'. And of course, I didn't accept it. I told him, you are going to ban

me from leaving the country if we go back to Iran. At the end of all arguments, my husband moved backward and accepted my points, and I think that probably it was because he saw that here I have more options. He saw that I'm not going back to Iran for divorce, and he knew that I could ask him to leave the home or call the police, and say that I don't want my husband to be here. I never told him these things verbally, but both of us knew about it, and I think it was important in the way that we solved our problem.

Maryam's narrative showed how the more equal family legal system in New Zealand could balance the power relations within her family, and increase the power resources for women. In the case of my participants, these changes in power relationships helped women to balance and define more equal relationships with their partners.

Some other researchers, however, have mentioned this legal equality as a source of serious tension and instability in families. For example, Darvishpour (2002, pp. 280–283) has argued that the more liberal and equal family law system in Sweden (compared with that in Iran), and the way that this system could change power relations within families, prepared the ground for conflict, violence, and divorce for some Iranian families in Sweden). However, Darvishpour also mentioned that the way that couples react to such changes in power relations can be also related to other factors such as social class, financial situation, or personal attitudes. Therefore, it seems that although the change of context can bring some changes in family power relations, the ways that partners solve their conflicts in critical situations tend to be different case by case. In most cases, it is the women who most welcome the changes in gender roles after their migration. This, however, is not always the case. My participant Nadia, 30, said that she preferred the traditional way of gender roles rather than the Western style, and it was her husband who questioned this. As Nadia explained,

My husband likes me to be more like the Western women. He encourages me that I should start working, earning money, and being more independent, but I still have my Iranian traditional attitudes about gender roles at home. For example, I think the male (husband) should be the breadwinner of the family and support his wife financially, and the wife should be doing the household chores. I have some conflicts over these things with my husband. He wants me to help financially, and ... I told him whenever I start working outside you should help me in the house chores, but now you don't need to do so.

Other researchers (Shirpak, Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011) have also mentioned this point, namely that some of their female participants preferred their husbands to follow the traditional system of gender roles in their family, rather than the Western system. This, however, is simply mentioned to illustrate the variety of experiences, and it does not represent a common trend among my participants.

Immigration as a Result of Marriage

As mentioned above, one group of my participants moved to New Zealand because they got married to someone who was already living here. Most of these participants were introduced to their partners by a friend or a family member, developed a long-distance relationship for a while, and then they normally visited their partners shortly before getting married in Iran. Only one of the participants said that she had never met her partner before coming to New Zealand. Six out of the 19 married participants in this study can be categorised in this group. It seems that the overall migration experience for these participants was more relaxed than it was for those who migrated together as established couples. The fact that these participants' husbands had already established themselves and settled down in New Zealand meant that these women faced fewer challenges in terms of getting settled after migrating. Almost all of them said that they had the full support of their husbands during the first years of their lives in New Zealand, and their husbands helped them to grow familiar with the new situation and context of New Zealand.

In comparing the situations of these women with the experiences of those who migrated along with their partners, we can see that those who came as couples went through a much harder time, because neither partner was established in NZ, and the process of getting settled was longer and more stressful for them. Some of these participants mentioned that they experienced tensions in their relationships during their first year after migration, mainly because both of them were under too much pressure, which made them less tolerant toward each other.

Although the migrating couples experienced more difficulties fitting in and settling down, it seems they had a chance to re-establish their relationships in a new situation. In this new place, neither partner had an established position compared to the other partner. In contrast, the women who started their lives in New Zealand with a partner who was already here entered a type of relationship that was basically defined before their arrival. They

entered situations where their husbands were the more established and influential members of the partnership, ironically reproducing gendered relationships familiar in Iran. Factors such as being more unfamiliar with the culture, the language, and the social trends of new society made these women feel more dependent on their husbands—at least during the first years after their arrival. Also, this unequal power relation, which was mainly related to a temporary inequality in experience, could be further intensified by Iranian culture-induced gender inequality.

My participants in this group did not mention any specific type of gender inequality in their relationships. However, compared to the other groups of participants, they were clearly more dependent on their husbands. For instance, among the six women in this group, only one was working full-time. Two others were working casually; two were not working at all, and one of them was a PhD student. Also, some of these participants, regardless of the amount of time they had spent in NZ, tended to view the host country from their husband's point of view. This trend was especially clear in my interviews with two of these participants, who repeatedly referred to their husbands' views when answering my questions. For instance, Sara, 37, who had been living here for the past ten years, repeatedly mentioned her husband's attitudes over the course of our interview. Once, as we discussed some of the more hidden types of racial discrimination, I asked her how sensitive she was if she was treated differently in a café or restaurant. She answered, 'I am not that much sensitive and normally don't pick it up but, my husband is very sensitive and normally mentions it to me when he thinks that's happening'. When I asked if she was attending Iranian events in New Zealand, she said, 'My husband never likes to attend, and I don't like it either'. Also, two of the participants in this category said they thought that females have considerably more rights than males in New Zealand. They suggested that New Zealand society is unfair to males, even though they did not mention whether their husbands shared this opinion.

Marriage after Immigration

The third group of couples were those who got married or started their relationships after they migrated to New Zealand. Five of the 19 married women in this study fit into this group. Four of these women are/were in a relationship (marriage) with New Zealand men,⁹⁰ and one of them married an Iranian man she met in NZ. All of these five participants said that

⁹⁰ Three out of four participants with New Zealand partners had a Pakeha partner, and the ethnicity of the other participant's partner is unknown to me.

they lived with their partners before they got married. Two of the participants in this group later got separated, including the one who married an Iranian husband.

Three out of the four participants who had married New Zealanders had experienced being in a relationship (either marriage or casual) with an Iranian partner previously, either in Iran or in New Zealand. These women particularly mentioned that they found their current relationships more equal than their previous ones. They said that their New Zealand partners considered them social equals. For example, Parya said:

I think Iranian guys assume that they are really a first gender, and they should always have the higher position in relationships, while it wasn't like this in the case of New Zealander guys. They might also think in a same way, I don't know, but at least they never say it directly or show it. I think in relationships with Iranian guys, things were more extreme, well ... they were more romantic than Western guys, but they also forced you to do the things that you might not like. Also, your private space was not respected. But with guys here, everything looks more normal, and you still have your private space in the relationship.

All of the participants who experienced relationships with both Iranian and New Zealand males (either as life partners or casual boyfriends) mentioned that they were treated more equally in their relationships with the New Zealander partners. Not all of them, however, were happy about all aspects of this equality. For example, Pardis, 49, who was in a casual relationship for eight years with a New Zealander (of British origin) said:

I was in a relationship with a British guy, like a boyfriend, [not living together] for about eight years. He was a very nice guy, but he was seeing things too equal between us. For example, I worked hard to make him understand that when we were dining out, he should pay for me, or when my car is broken he should help me to fix it, or if I have financial problems he should support me.

Pardis, explained how she felt about gender equality in couples' relationships:

I am more traditional person rather than feminist. I don't want things being as equal as some feminists want. I like tradition, and especially I like some sorts

of respect that females have in our culture. For example, I like that males take care and look after females [their partners].

Pardis mentioned that when she was in a relationship with a New Zealander, she never got that sense of being looked after properly, but since she was seeing another Iranian guy, she could feel this sense again without having to ask for it. Pardis's experience in this case shows how intercultural couple relationships can be experienced differently by different Iranian females. In other words, not all of the women in this study reported enjoying or being able to cope with what they called 'absolute equality between partners'.

Although I have raised this issue as an intercultural matter, my participants felt that the same tensions over gender roles could also be seen among couples who came from the same culture. For instance, couples who are both born and grew up in New Zealand could still have different perspectives about the ways that gender roles should affect their lives, or the different expectations that they might have from their male or female partners. Therefore, the participants' views of how far couples should go in terms of equality of roles and responsibilities were not necessarily a matter of ethnicity only. Still, this issue can be more confusing when it appears in the context of intercultural relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how immigration influenced the participants' personal identities and their family relationships. In terms of changes in personal identity in the new context of NZ, the participants mentioned several sorts of changes in their levels of confidence and independence. Also, some of the participants mentioned that they were growing more individualistic since their migration, mainly because of the less collectivistic culture of the host country.

In terms of changes in couple relationships, I considered the various married participants as having three kinds of migration situation: 1) those who migrated with their partner as a couple, 2) those who migrated due to marrying a partner who was already living in NZ, and 3) those who came as single women, and started their relationships after migration. The findings show that the first group of participants experienced more ups and downs in their relationships than the other two groups. Although the participants' experiences were different case by case, as a general rule the couple relationships were continuations of their previous relationships as established in their original country. If the participants were in

equal types of relationships before their migration, they continued this style of relationship in NZ. Those who had unequal relationships in Iran sometimes experienced difficulties following their migration, but they generally reported moving toward to more equal relationships in NZ.

To summarise, as with many other social phenomena, migration can be experienced differently case by case and person by person. Where the immigrants come from and where they go to, as well as their personal conditions of class, education level, marital status, or other personal characteristics, are all influential factors in shaping their immigration experience. Therefore, it is not advisable to generalise the experiences of the participants as fitting either the theme of emancipation or of oppression. However, in terms of changes to their personal feelings of identity and their marital relationships, the participants' experiences mainly illustrated movement in a positive direction. In addition, it should be considered that even though migrants coming from a specific ethnic origin or country could share certain similar post migration experiences, similarity of cultural background was not the fundamental factor. As was mentioned previously, participants coming from one origin country still have different backgrounds in terms of class, family, and life situation in their home countries. The lengths of time they had spent in the host country and their particular personality traits could also lead to widely differing experiences. Therefore, the country of origin is just one factor, which should be considered in relation to the other mentioned factors.

Chapter Seven: Social Experiences of Immigration; Redefinition of Social Identity, Otherness, and Exclusion

Chapter Six discussed how the study's participants experienced changes in their sense of personal identity following migration, and the ways that these changes have affected their family interactions. In this chapter, we will discuss how Iranian female migrants go about making a new social identity, and other aspects of their social interactions in New Zealand. In particular, we are going to see how they introduce themselves in their first interactions with the people of the host country, and their experiences of discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion. In terms of public life, we will explore the ways they redefine their relations with official institutions in the host country.

Although this chapter and the previous one both look at the post-migration experiences of Iranian female migrants, the last chapter focused on the participants' changing attitudes towards themselves or their partners. In this chapter, the focus is on the participants' interactions with others. In general, the term 'others' refers to people who are originally from New Zealand, or to those of European origin and descent who are living in New Zealand.⁹¹ Also in this chapter, the role of gender is not as central as it was in the last chapter, mainly because the social context is more strongly related to ethnic identity than to gender.

Ethnicity, Identity, and Migration

The question of 'identity' is one of the most complex social issues, especially in societies that are ethnically diverse. Although psychologists and sociologists have used this term mainly in terms of 'understanding selfhood or individuality' (Adams & Marshall, 1996, p. 429), anthropologists tend to understand identity mainly in relation to ethnicity and culture (Brettell & Sargent, 2006). Although it is not easy to find a consensus on the definition of ethnic identity, Barth (1969, p. 14) gives one of the most classical definitions, and describes ethnic identity as having a dialectical nature. He argues that individuals do not process their ethnic identity on their own: 'instead, ethnic identification must be dialogic in the sense that it is created, preserved, reaffirmed, and even rejected through a continuous set of contrasts between one's own group and others' (Tseng, 2002, p. 386). This dialectical view can also be traced in more recent definitions of ethnic identity. For instance, Nagel (1994, p. 4) argues that ethnic identity is a 'dialectic played out by ethnic groups and the larger society'. As Hall

⁹¹ The participants did not mention any specific experiences with Māori.

puts it, ‘ethnic identity’, is shaped under a ‘dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations—i.e., what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is’ (Hall, 1990, p. 222). In this perspective, ethnic identity has a fluid nature. It can change according to several factors, including variations in audiences, situations, or contexts, as well as changes in external social, political, and economic forces. This dynamic view of identity sheds light on the reality that ‘identity is the matter of becoming as well as being, and is never complete, always in process, and constituted within, not outside, representation’ (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

Thus, ‘identity’ is a product of a dynamic process, in that it is both optional and mandatory. In other words, although people can define their personal or group identity in a specific way, and they may put more emphasis on some aspects of their identity than on others, the surrounding larger society can label a group according to its own generalised understanding of the group’s collective identity. The stereotypical views about ethnicity and gender that are held by the majority of people in the wider society are often based on publicly visible or audible features (such as skin colour, dress, accent and spoken language, customs, and so on). Such forms of ‘public’ identification of social groups (especially of minority groups) are hard for the ‘identified’ group to escape or resist.

In reaction to being ethnically labelled, people generally have two choices to make: ‘first, whether to accept the labelled box, and second, whether to accept the meaning that is socially represented as the content of that box’ (Deaux, 2002, p. 9). Although it is not easy to totally reject the stereotypical views based on visible or audible features of public identification, people can still negotiate concerning what label they receive, and what content that identity label includes. People may choose to minimise the salience of some controversial aspects of the group they belong to, in response to contextual factors such as negative stereotypes, or to practices of discrimination against a particular category of people. Likewise, they may highlight certain aspects of their identity that they consider to be more positive (Pittinsky, Shih, & Ambady, 1999; Jamarani, 2012). Later in this chapter, I will discuss the ways that Iranian migrants in New Zealand redefine their social identities, and how those ways can be compared to the above-described pattern. However, before doing this, it is essential to briefly discuss two of the most important aspects of what we call ‘Iranian identity’: nationalism versus Islamism.

Iran is generally considered to be a homogenous Islamic country. Actually, however, the country has two important, interwoven layers of history and collective identity: ‘a deep pre-Islamic layer overlaid with an Islamic, Shia layer’ (Mozaffari, 2014, p. 1). These two layers have shaped the primary elements of Iranian identity: nationalism and Islamism. Although nationalism has been mostly focused on the pre-Islamic history of the country, and has regarded this heritage as the most important feature of Iranian socio-political identity, Islamism has focused on religion as the primary feature of identity. Therefore, a tension between nationalism and Islamism is an important feature of Iranian identity⁹² (Saleh & Worrall, 2015).

This duality in the Iranian discourse of self-identification has existed for many centuries, but during the last century the various political regimes have wavered between emphasising either the Islamic or the pre-Islamic aspects of this identity, for the sake of legitimising their own political claims and ideologies.

The Pahlavi regime (1925–1979) defined a sort of official national identity for Iranians, by emphasising the values of modernity, combined with the country’s pre-Islamic heritage. This sort of self-image minimised the importance of Islamic tradition in Iranian identity. The Pahlavi regime’s narrative sought to evoke Iranian national pride and to build a particular sort of modern nationalism, by combining the old civilisation of Persia with Western culture. The Islamic Republic, however, redefined the country’s official identity based on Islamic history and Shia values. Its leaders sought to minimise the pre-Islamic aspects of Iranian identity. The current narrative involves weakening any sense of pride in the nation’s pre-Islamic history, and redefining a new sort of nationalism based on a Shia Muslim identity.

According to the available data, most Iranian migrants in Western countries are secular⁹³ individuals (Stirling, 2018; Mobasher, 2006; McAuliffe, 2005). These migrants generally try to emphasise the national rather than the religious aspect of their identity, and to define themselves mainly in terms of their nation’s more ancient cultural characteristics. In

⁹² Although Islamism and nationalism are the most important discourses in Iranian identity, the concept of being Iranian is more complex than this. Iran is a multi-ethnic state with several ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. Persians, who are the most dominant ethnic group, make up around half of the population, followed by Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, and Turkmens (McAuliffe, 2005). Incorporating different ethnicities into mainstream, Persian dominated discourses of Iranian identity has been always been difficult for national leaders in Iran (Saleh & Worrall, 2015).

⁹³ The term ‘secular’ refers to people who are either not practicing Muslims, or who regard their religion as a purely private matter.

their social lives, these people typically seek to minimise or deny their religious identity. Some Iranian migrants identify themselves by using the term ‘Persian’ instead of ‘Iranian’, as a way to place more emphasis on the national part of their identity (as based on historical origin rather than religion). The data collected for this research project confirm that Iranian immigrant women in New Zealand mainly follow this pattern. In other words, they try to negotiate both the identifying label and the content of their ethnic identity in the host country through their daily interactions with New Zealanders.

Negotiations over the definition of ethnic or national identity normally start with questions from people of the host country, such as: ‘Where do you come from?’ or ‘Do you want to return home or not?’ Generally, the participants mentioned that they do not like these sorts of questions, especially if they are asked repeatedly and must be answered at least once a day for year after year. These questions remind the participants persistently that they are seen as ‘others’ in their daily interactions with the host society. Some participants, however, take these questions as opportunities for defining themselves in the way that they would like to be defined.

Participants’ Self-identification

This section focuses mainly on how Iranian migrant females in New Zealand answer the question: ‘Where are you from?’ and on the ways that this self-identification can be interpreted, based on the intersecting social and political contexts of both Iran and New Zealand. Overall, in answering this question, 14 out of the study’s 34 participants said that they are ‘Persian’; 12 of them said they are ‘Iranian’; 3 of them said they are from New Zealand; 3 of them used both terms, ‘Persian’ and ‘Iranian’; 1 of them said ‘I’m from Cyprus’; and 1 participant said that she normally does not answer this question.

Persian vs Iranian. ‘Iranian’ and ‘Persian’ are the most common terms of self-identification among Iranians. The number of participants who introduce themselves as Persian instead of Iranian is somewhat over-weighted in my research. Other studies that discuss Iranian identity in other countries have reported different balances between these two terms. Jamarani’s study (2012) of Iranian women in Australia mentioned that about 40% of her participants introduced themselves as Persian, compared to 20% who used the term Iranian. Daha (2012) suggested that 82% of second-generation Iranian-American adolescents labelled themselves as ‘Persian’, and only 2% of them used the term ‘Iranian’.

Although these findings come from limited studies and should not be assumed to characterise whole communities of migrants in those countries, it seems there is a clear correlation between the prevalence of negative images associated with Iran in the host country, and the number of Iranian immigrants who self-identify as Persian (McAuliffe, 2005). Especially in the U.S., the name of Iran is strongly associated with the hostage crisis of 1979, so Iranians there commonly try to distance themselves from that negative association by calling themselves Persian instead of Iranian (Mobasher, 2006).

Participants in this research project mentioned a number of reasons for calling themselves Persian instead of Iranian. Their reasons included a wish to avoid being identified with the negative international image of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the desire to emphasise their (historical and cultural) nationality instead of their religion. A more practical reason was to avoid confusion between the names of Iran and Iraq, as the participants felt that many New Zealanders make no clear distinction between these nations.

Mahsa is one of the participants who introduces herself as Persian. She is 55, and has lived in New Zealand since 1997:

When someone asked me ‘where are you from?’ I normally said I’m Persian. I don’t like to say I’m Iranian. When you say I’m Iranian they look at you as a terrorist, or they think that women over there are putting on a burqa, or we are living in the Sahara and riding a camel. Persia is a nicer term. It reminds you of Persian carpets or Persian cats. Sometimes when I said I’m Persian, people said ‘Wow, you have nice carpets’.

Another participant, Sima, 40, who has lived in New Zealand for 16 years said,

I normally said my race is Persian and I’m from Iran … of course the history of Iran was nicer at that time and this term is more acceptable. Sometimes I’m not feeling good when I say I’m from Iran. I’m worried about others’ judgment, especially because of the image that the media presents about Iran … but my feeling has its own ups and downs. When I have more confidence it is not important for me, but when my confidence comes down, it gets more important.

In these two cases, we can see that the participants are trying to redefine both the label and the content of their identity. These people believe that the term ‘Persia’ receives a better immediate reaction than ‘Iran’, and this difference can shape the rest of the conversation with

a person of the home country. If migrants use the term ‘Iran’, then people talk to them about Islam, war, or politics. When they use the term ‘Persia’, they are changing the basis of the discussion. Although most of the participants who identified themselves as Persian gave similar reasons for doing so, some of the participants mentioned that New Zealanders often confuse Iran with Iraq, so they prefer to use ‘Persian’ as a way to differentiate themselves more clearly.

The participants who introduce themselves as Iranian are also aware of the political load of this term. However, they believe that it is simply inaccurate to describe themselves as Persian.

Sara, 32, who arrived here in 2003, explained,

Well, I think that politically, Persia is a wrong term. I know that this term has a better reputation, but that’s fake. When you say ‘I’m from Iran’, it normally gets mistaken with Iraq, so first you should clarify that Iran is not Iraq. Then people ask if we have war in Iran or not? And you should say, ‘No, at least no war in the last 30 years’. So, you know, the immediate reaction to the name Iran is really strong, and it could affect your whole conversation. During the first years that I was here, I used to say ‘I’m Persian’, because at that time I had just arrived here. I wanted to settle down and it was important for me how other people were thinking about me. But these days, I’m not caring any more how others will think about me based on my ethnicity, so when someone asks me where I am from, I just say I’m from Iran.

In a similar way, Faranak, 28, who has been living here since 2012, said,

I think people who say we are Persian are escaping from the realities of their own country. Iran is a more realistic term. Of course I’m always worried when I say ‘I’m from Iran’. I’m afraid that others will judge me based on my nationality. For example, last year I wanted to rent a place with two other people. I liked both the house and my flatmates, and I really wanted to take it. So, when one of the flatmates asked me where I am from, I said I’m from Iran. And then I unconsciously started to say that, look, but I’m like you guys. I’m not Muslim. If you want to drink or party it’s absolutely fine with me. I’m just a normal person.

These two participants prefer to use a label that they believe is more realistic, but they are aware of the backlash the term receives. They prefer to keep the label of their Iranian identity, and just negotiate over the content of their identity box. So, they identify themselves as Iranian, but they either choose to ignore the backlash, or else they try to absolve themselves of the presumptions that could be associated with this term. These sorts of clarifications and corrections of clichés commonly happen without any question being raised from the other party. In some cases, these explanations seem to simply exaggerate the situation, or just attract more attention to the identity label that the speaker wants to redefine.

The term ‘Persia’ has lots of nostalgic associations for many Iranians, especially those who are older. Most of the participants who introduce themselves as Persian come from the generation that was born before the 1979 revolution in Iran. The younger-generation migrants are less likely to identify themselves as Persian. This could reflect the way that the older generation remembers the time when Persian identity was officially promoted in Iran, and the country had a positive international reputation. Therefore, this term could serve to remind them of those days.

As mentioned above, most of my participants preferred to identify with the national aspects of their identity, rather than the religious aspects. Therefore, some of them chose to describe themselves as Persian, and some of them introduced themselves as an Iranian—but with some clarification that they were not practising Muslims. Alongside these two groups, there was another group of participants who took this claim one step further, and tried to prove themselves to be non-Muslims.

Nava, 35 who has lived in Christchurch since she arrived here in 2013, said,

I normally introduce myself as an Iranian rather than Persian, but I’m trying to clarify that I’m not Muslim. I mean I’m not practising Muslim. I don’t have any problem with my nationality, but I don’t like to be considered as a Muslim, and I would take any single opportunity to show that. For example, whenever I go out with my New Zealander friends, I drink. Or if it’s not really a drinking time, I try to order something which has alcohol in it. While I’m not really keen on drinking, I just do that to send this message that I’m not Muslim.

In general, many of the participants tried to establish a secular social identity, and they had some concern to avoid being considered a practising Muslim. However, almost all mentioned that they had never felt embarrassed because of their nationality. They were only sometimes embarrassed because of the recent international reputation of their home country and the way that Iran's politicians were portrayed in the media.

Rashin, who had been living in Cyprus for 13 years before coming to New Zealand, was the only participant who said that she was embarrassed because of her nationality. She normally said that she is from Cyprus rather than Iran. She explained,

I'm embarrassed to say I'm Iranian. I'm embarrassed because of all the things that the Islamic Republic has done ... As a woman, I felt humiliated by the Islamic law. That's why I put away my Iranian identity. Also, I converted to Christianity from Islam. If someone asks me where you are from, I say 'I'm from Cyprus'. Sometimes people say, 'Wow, you have a beautiful country, why did you come here?' ... I think many people have perceptions about Iranians. They think Iranians are fundamentalists and terrorists.

Although Rashin was the only participant in my research who said she denied her Iranian identity, it seems that some Iranian migrants in other countries do the same, as a technique to ease their transition into the mainstream society of their new country. McAuliffe (2005, p. 192), in his study of the second-generation Iranians in the three cities of Sydney, London, and Vancouver, noted that his participants mentioned knowing a number of Iranians who made 'use of Italian identity as a surrogate for Iranian identity, to explain their dark appearance in the white population'. From this perspective, belonging to the Italian community was a more acceptable national ethnicity than being Iranian.

Religious Identity

As mentioned above, Iran is generally considered to be a homogenous Islamic country, but most Iranians in the diaspora consider themselves secular. McAuliffe (2007, p. 41) reported that the largest group of his research participants with Islamic backgrounds in Sydney, London, and Vancouver were either completely secular or culturally Muslim, which meant they 'are looking at Islam as less a religion than a moral code embedded within Iranian identity'.

Another study also indicated that many Muslim-born Iranians living in the United States are not proud of their religion, and they do not look to religious values or rituals as ‘a guide to their family and social life’ (Mobasher, 2006, p. 101). Based on that study, about 46% of Iranians with an Islamic background (out of a sample of 487) were not practising Muslims. Jamarani (2012, p. 87) found almost the same percentage of Iranian non-practising Muslims in Australia. She found that 47% of her participants (out of a sample of 15, all females) were non-practising Muslims, compared with 20% who said they are religious, and 33% who considered themselves as having no religion.

Although my study’s sample is not representative of all Iranian-born women in New Zealand, its findings also indicate that the majority of the participants who were born Muslim did not consider themselves to be practising Muslims. A total of 17 out of 31 participants with Islamic backgrounds mentioned that they were not practising Islam in their daily lives, compared to 5 participants who considered themselves followers of Islam. Also, 5 of the participants introduced themselves as atheists, agnostics, of no religion, or spiritual. Two of them had converted to Christianity, and one participant did not disclose her religious affiliation.

For examining the participants’ orientations towards Islam in this section, I use at least three terms: Non-practising Muslim, practising Muslim, and orthodox Muslim. By ‘non-practising Muslim’, I refer to participants who said that they are not practising their religion. ‘Practising Muslims’ refers to participants who said they are practising to some extent, but mostly looking at their religion as a private matter regarding their personal relationship with God. ‘Orthodox Muslims’ refers to participants who are following their religion actively, both personally and socially. During my interviews, I did not inquire into why a participant did or did not follow the Muslim religion,⁹⁴ so I cannot provide any specific reasons for their choices. However, I could see that their processes of becoming non-practising people did not seem directly related to their emigration experiences. In other words, most of the participants did not mention that emigration made any substantial change to their level of religiosity.⁹⁵ Their attitudes toward religion seem to have been formed before their immigration, and the

⁹⁴ During the interviews, the reasons for migration were discussed in a political context, which has its own sensitivity. Therefore, I decided to avoid adding another sensitive topic (i.e., religion) to the interviews.

⁹⁵ Except for the two participants who converted to Christianity from Islam after migration.

only difference that some of them mentioned was that in New Zealand they felt more free to show or declare the fact that they were not following Islamic religious practices.

Many of these non-practising participants reported feeling motivated to show that they were not following Islam. They wished to resist being categorised or defined by local (New Zealander) expectations of Muslims. This resistance could have several motives, including a desire to avoid exposure to hostile attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, which had grown more common following the 9/11 attacks (Hopkins, 2007, Aslan, 2009; Yasmeen, 2007) and the more recent attacks by Islamist extremists in Europe. In addition, many Iranian migrants wish to avoid being identified with the negative international image of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mobasher, 2006), or to avoid other negative stereotypes about Muslims, and particularly stereotypes about Muslim women.

Although New Zealand is commonly seen as more tolerant of ethnic differences than many other Western countries, it is still fairly common that females with an Islamic identity, regardless of their ethnicity, may experience ‘specific kinds of prejudice and social exclusion’ (Dobson, 2015, p. 223; Jasperse & Etal, 2011). Therefore, New Zealanders, like people in many other Western societies, are prone to lumping all women from Muslim-majority countries (and even Muslims who are originally from New Zealand) together into one stereotype, based on either irrational fears of terrorism, or on presumptions about oppression of Muslim women. Female Muslims in New Zealand generally identified more according to their religion than by their ethnicity, although only a quarter of the Muslim population in New Zealand was born in this country (Statistics New Zealand, 2014), and the rest of them come from many different nations. The 75% of Muslim females who are migrants tend to feel marginalised both for being migrants and for being Muslims. Also, migrants from Muslim-majority countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are perceived more negatively than immigrants from non-Muslim countries in the same regions (Jasperse & Etal, 2011). As mentioned above, five of the participants in this study mentioned that they were practising Muslims. However, the sorts of Islam that these people practised could be considered ‘secular’ forms of Islam, which were basically concerned with defining their personal relationship with God in their private lives, rather than in their social relations.

Islamic identity, Muslim Women vs Iranian Women

The way that the Iranian women in this study defined their religious identity, and the way they reacted to existing stereotypes about Muslim women and the anti-Islamist

discourse, was different from the mainstream approach that most Muslim women in Western societies have adopted. Muslim women from most other mainly Islamic countries have generally sought to find a balance between maintaining their Muslim identity and accommodating themselves to the practices of their host society (Ozyurt, 2013; Sirin & Katsiaficas, 2011; Ali & Sonn, 2017; Akhtar, 2014). Iranian migrants are far more likely to dissociate themselves from Islam. A large number of Iranian female migrants simply do not consider themselves to be Muslims. Those who do consider themselves Muslims usually regard their religion as a purely private matter, and seek to avoid showing any outward sign of Muslim identity.

We can see the difference in approach between Iranian migrants with Islamic backgrounds and most other Muslim female migrants by comparing the ways that Muslim women negotiate their religious identities. For instance, Ali and Sonn (2017) investigated how Muslim females of diverse origins in Australia negotiate ‘negative representations of Islam’ in their daily lives. Although some of them asserted their Muslim identity by practising an Islamic dress code and some of them did not, all of them sought to challenge existing stereotypes regarding Muslims, and particularly the way that Muslim females are viewed as a homogenous group. Many of these women consciously aimed to demonstrate that they did not fit those stereotypes. They practised this approach in their daily lives by seeking to show that although they were Muslims, they were not overly moralistic; they were not dressed in a certain way, they were open to working in ‘non-Muslim’ careers such as jobs in the wine industry; they could take senior job positions; and in general they were good, responsible, caring citizens.

This approach (of seeking to accept but redefine Muslim identity) differs from the way that most of my participants dealt with their Islamic identity. Generally, those who participated in my study chose to either disavow any Islamic identity, or to make their Islamic faith a strictly personal and private matter. Some participants tried to shift attention from their religious affiliation toward other aspects of their identity, and some sought to publicly disavow any relation to Islam. Those who identified themselves as Muslims practiced their religion in a secular, strictly private way, and showed a clear reluctance to get involved in any sorts of public or social negotiations regarding their religion. This reluctance can be attributed to the relationship that Iranians have with the Islamic government in their home country, and their experiences with the social practice of Islam. It seems that where religious practices are required by the state, people have a more intense desire to either reject or to privatise religion.

On the other hand, the approach that Ali and Sonn (2017) described among Muslim females in Australia can be considered as a sort of political action in defence of Islam. This is an approach that almost all of my participants tried to avoid.

Only one of the Muslim participants in this study was practising an Islamic dress code, which made her religion socially visible. This practice brought her a different set of social experiences in New Zealand than were reported by the other participants. The way that this participant dealt with her religious identity resembled the practice that one could find among Muslim women from other countries. She tried to maintain her heritage as a Muslim in her new society, showing her Muslim identity in a publicly visible way, and trying to represent her religion in a positive light by demonstrating friendly, caring behaviour towards others.

Mahta, 61, who arrived here with her family in 1986, had been following an Islamic dress code since she was young in Iran.⁹⁶ She said,

In 1980s when we arrived here, religion was less an issue than now. You hardly could see any anti-Islamic or anti-Muslim attitudes among New Zealanders. I remember that in my daughter's school, everyone was welcoming us and telling us that they are happy to see people like us (Muslims) here. They said that my daughter could bring knowledge [or diversity] for our students here. Even the mother of one of my daughter's friends at school sent me a letter and said that we like your culture and your country, and we would like to be more in contact with you ... They helped my husband to find a job here ... It's interesting how things turn against Muslims in the last thirty years.

Mahta, who was working in a medical occupation, felt that in recent years she had faced some unpleasant experiences because of her Islamic identity, especially at her workplace. She explained, 'These days, clients are asking more and more the questions, like where did you get trained? For how long are you here? How did you come here? Even once someone told me to wash my hands before touching their child'.

Although these sorts of comments from clients at work were inappropriate and could be considered a type of racism, these comments did not directly refer to Mahta's religion.

⁹⁶ She was practising the Islamic dress code before it became mandatory following the 1979 revolution.

When I asked Mahta why she thought that these comments were targeting her religion rather than her ethnicity [or the fact of being a migrant], she said ‘It is just the way I feel about that’.

Although it is hard to interpret the exact meaning of such biased comments, some other researchers have claimed that people with an Islamic identity are often defined as ‘others’ just on the basis of their religion, and not on their ethnicity (Dobson, 2015, p. 229). Therefore, even if a woman is originally a New Zealander who converts to Islam, particularly if she wears hijab, she may be automatically considered a non-New Zealander. This observation could offer support to Mahta’s point of view, or to her feeling that the unpleasant comments she received at work were targeted at her religion rather than her ethnicity. The data collected by Jasperse and Etal (2011) indicated that only 15% of New Zealanders believed that it is acceptable for a woman to wear an Islamic-style head covering in public. This finding seems to demonstrate a clear relation between the ‘frequency of wearing Hijab and greater perceived discrimination’ (2011, p. 14).

Another aspect of Mahta’s experience as an Iranian wearing hijab involved her relations with other Iranians. She said that she received negative responses from members of the Iranian community in New Zealand because of her hijab:

Sometimes, some Iranians asked me what do I want to prove with my hijab, ... I don’t want to prove anything, that’s just my own belief. Or sometimes people tell me, ‘If you wanted to be like this [wearing hijab], why did you leave Iran?’ ... Well I just migrated because I was looking for better things, like everyone else that came here. For you [the ones who asked her], the better thing is leaving your country and not wearing hijab. For me the better thing is leaving the country and wearing hijab.

So, it seems that Mahta’s hijab served to exclude her from both her ethnic community and from the wider New Zealand society. The way that some Iranians reacted to her hijab could be related to the political meaning of hijab among Iranians,⁹⁷ and the fact that mandatory hijab-wearing has been considered a symbol of the Islamic Republic’s power for

⁹⁷ The use of hijab as a political symbol developed during the Islamic revolution, and it became a major aspect of Islamic Republic’s identity. Over recent years, and especially after the 9/11 attacks, the political aspects of hijab have received increased attention internationally. Before these terrorist attacks, wearing a headscarf was commonly regarded as a symbol of ‘women’s oppression’, but now it is widely regarded as a tool for some sorts of Islamic activism (Ali & Sonn, 2017).

the last four decades. This interpretation may be supported by Mahta's description of how other Iranian migrants respond to her style of dress:

Iranians here are thinking that if someone puts on a scarf, then she is the Islamic Republic's representative, or somehow dependent on the government ... The first years that we were here [in the 1980s], the Iranian community was so small, and the Iranian government hadn't opened its embassy here yet. In those days, sometimes Iranians contacted me for help with government services. They called me and said, 'We want to change our passports', or 'We lost our passport, can you help us?' They were thinking I could help because I am connected with the Iranian government. ... These sorts of judgments damaged me emotionally.

This experience suggests that some Iranians automatically assume that other Iranians who wear hijab must have some sort of official connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and based on this assumption, they take a specific sort of relationship towards them. Although this conclusion is based on only one participant's experiences, it appears that females who wear hijab can be defined as 'others', both for the way they are practising Islam and/or for their assumed connections with the Iranian government.

As Iranian intra-community issues were not a part of my research, I did not ask my participants how they felt about other Iranians who were practising the Islamic dress code here. However, some mentioned they could grow impatient if they were criticised by orthodox Muslims in New Zealand.

Nava, 33, said,

Sometimes I heard that religious people who are coming here [from Iran] judged or criticised others who are not wearing hijab or not practising Islam, and even sometimes criticising the whole society [New Zealand]. These people have no right to do that ... if you don't like it here you can go back to Iran. Everything was okay for you there, you had no problem ... If you are a religious migrant, and this society gives you facilities and freedom to live here, you can't question others because they are not like you.

Generally, some non-practising migrants tend to define religiously observant Muslims as 'others', and set a boundary that excludes them socially, based on their religious beliefs.

This ‘assimilating’ group of migrants may consider themselves part of the host society, and therefore different from the orthodox-religious others. In other words, where non-practising Muslim Iranians treat religion as a basis for excluding people who practise it from their own ethnic community, their critical attitude toward religion can also give them a stronger sense of belonging to the surrounding host society, which is more secular. This stance presumably gives them a stronger chance of being seen as belonging in the host society.

So far, we have discussed the process of identity-making as the various forms of differentiation between self and others, and the ways that Iranian migrant women introduce themselves in their first interactions with New Zealanders. We have considered how asserting an Islamic code of conduct can exclude Iranians from their own ethnic community. Next we look more closely at the participants’ experiences of interacting with New Zealanders, and specifically at situations where they have felt exposed to prejudice, exclusion, or social inequality because of being a migrant.

Prejudices, Discrimination, Exclusion

Discrimination and/or inequality is one of the most common topics treated in migration studies (Faria, 2002; Graham, 2001; Bastia, 2013). The saying that ‘inequality caused emigration, and immigration caused inequality’⁹⁸ expresses this linkage in a simple way. In chapters four and five, the ways that inequality and/or discrimination caused immigration were discussed in detail, based on the participants’ experiences. In this section we discuss how being an immigrant can involve being treated in a discriminatory, unfair, or unfavourable way. Examining these experiences does not suggest underestimating the participants’ positive experiences in terms of receiving support, help, opportunities, and welcome in their daily experiences as migrants in New Zealand. However, their encounters with discrimination are part of their experience, and such encounters influence their shifting sense of identity.

Although racial discrimination can be observed in almost any society, ethnically diverse societies probably have a better context for reflecting on and dealing with this problem. New Zealand, like many other diverse societies, has historically featured both

⁹⁸ This phrase came from the workshop ‘Migration and Inequality’ held by ‘Engaged Social Science Research Initiative’ at the University of Auckland, December 2016.

institutionalised and non-institutionalised types of racial discrimination, especially towards non-British immigrants and indigenous people.⁹⁹

The government recently reported that ‘racial discrimination is the most common form of discrimination that people experienced in New Zealand’ (Statistics New Zealand, 2012, p. 4). According to official statistics, about 10% of New Zealanders (over 15 years old) report experiencing some sort of discrimination, and 6% believe that their ‘skin colour’, ‘nationality’, ‘race’, or ‘ethnicity’ are the causes for those experiences. Asians¹⁰⁰ report the highest levels of racial discrimination,¹⁰¹ and the most common context for experiencing such discrimination is the career or work environment (Statistics New Zealand, 2012).

Another study on the nature of discrimination in New Zealand suggested a similar picture. This study (Butcher, Spoonley, & Trlin, 2006) also found that Asian migrants experienced the highest incidence of discrimination, and the main social situations where discrimination occurred were when seeking employment and when dealing with co-workers on the job. The study suggested that the biggest job-related obstacles for immigrants lay in gaining recognition for their academic degrees or their professional experience gained overseas, in achieving English language fluency, and in dealing with social attitudes toward certain foreign accents. While Middle Eastern and Muslim migrants have faced some prejudice as a result of their religious practices, especially the females who dress as Muslims, these people have commonly experienced an extra dimension of discrimination since the terrorist attack of 9/11 (Butcher, Spoonley, & Trlin, 2006, p. 48, p. 29).

It should be noted that not all New Zealanders look at immigration issues in the same way. Age, level of education, and ethnicity can affect people’s attitudes towards migrants. Younger citizens are generally less tolerant of immigrants and less supportive of immigration

⁹⁹ For instance, prior to the *1938 Social Security Act* in New Zealand, Māori people were denied a range of welfare benefits to which they were legally entitled. Prior to that time, deputy registrars were instructed to apply a wide range of mechanisms to make Māori access to pensions extremely difficult. A large number of Māoris were therefore removed from the pension rolls, and those who managed to stay on the rolls were paid only two-thirds of the amount paid to Europeans (Consedine, 2001). Even after the 1938 Social Security Act, ‘official ambivalence over Maori rights’ continued, and while Māori leaders assumed that this legislation treated Maori and Pakeha equally, the act actually contained an important loophole that allowed the persistence of discrimination (McLure, 1998, p. 85). Also, there was a long history of official discrimination (1881 to 1944) against Chinese (or ‘Asiatic’) migrants through anti-Chinese laws, such as imposing entry taxes on Chinese immigrants (1881), excluding them from pension payments (1898), or blocking them from family allowance payments (1926) (Manying Ip, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ The census undertaken by Statistics New Zealand (2006) defines the eight largest Asian ethnic groups as people of Chinese, Indian, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Sri Lankan, Cambodian, and Thai backgrounds.

¹⁰¹ Considering the fact that Asians constitute a large proportion of immigrants, their higher frequency of reports may not necessarily mean that they are more exposed to prejudice individually.

than older people. People with tertiary education generally have more liberal attitudes towards immigration-related issues. In terms of ethnicity, people of Maori-descent generally have less positive attitudes toward migration than people of non-Maori descent (Spoonley & Gendall, 2010. p. 156).

The participants in this study described a range of experiences related to racial discrimination. Although some of these experiences involved the more hidden sorts of prejudice, other experiences were quite straightforward. In line with the findings of the two other mentioned studies (Butcher, Spoonley, & Trlin, 2006; Statistics New Zealand, 2012), most of the discriminatory experiences that were mentioned by participants in this study also happened at their workplaces. Moreover, as a general rule, most of the participants mentioned that if they were treated differently, unfairly, or unfavourably, they initially regarded it as a response to their racial difference.

Niki, 50, who has been in New Zealand since 2009, and was working as a regional manager in one of the universities in Auckland, reported a typical experience of racism at the workplace:

I had a problem with one of my employees in my previous job; she didn't like me and she showed that in practice. For example, sometimes when I was talking to her she didn't answer, or when I ask her to do something in particular, she told me 'I can't do that', or 'I don't have time'. Things were just getting worse and worse over time, so once after two years, I told her, let's talk together and see what is our problem. She told me she could say it one sentence: 'Go and think who you are, what you do and what you say'. Later I made a complaint to HR about her, and she got reprimanded, but nothing changed in practice. Later, I resigned from that job, not just because of her, but she was definitely one of my reasons.

Aida, 52, a hairdresser, who had been living in Auckland since 2005, had a similar experience in a different work environment:

Once, when I just started my work at a salon, my employer asked me to bring two models in order to show her my hair dressing skills. While one of my models was a Kiwi, the other one was an Iranian. When, I was working on the hair of the Iranian model, we were talking together in Farsi. When that person

left, my employer, who was an Australian lady, asked me why I didn't talk to her in English. I told her that she (the model) started the conversation and I couldn't shift the language. But, she started to offend me and said, 'Here is not your backward country to do whatever you want'. Anyway, after a short argument she fired me.

Both of these experiences could be defined as clear cases of 'racism in the work place'. Regardless of the contents, there were two important facts about these two experiences. First, they happened in two completely different work contexts, which suggests that racism can happen in very different sectors of employment, both public and private. Second, these offenses happened between people of different ranks in their work places, which shows that migrants can experience discrimination from either supervisors or from subordinates.

Other experiences of racial discrimination are less straightforward, especially when secondary factors such as language proficiency are involved.

Pardis, 49, who had been here since 2000, had an experience with her manager that illustrates how thin the border can be between racial discrimination and secondary related factors like English proficiency. She mentioned an experience in her previous job that involved writing some letters with a template, and her manager assumed that any errors of her own must be due to her subordinate's lack of English knowledge.

My manager always asked me to show her my letters before I sent them, and normally asked me to change some things. Once I copied one of the letters that she had already written for the same purpose, and just changed the names of receiver and sender, and put it in the envelope to send it. Before I sent the letter, she just came and asked me to show her the letter. She grabbed the letter, brought out her red pen, and started to underline the parts to be changed. She didn't even let me speak to tell her that it was her own letter. When she finished the correction, I told her that I had always assumed she had a personal problem with me, and not with my English writing. And now I was sure about that, because it was her own writing, not mine. I just changed the names. She didn't say anything. Later she came to me and said, 'I'm sorry, maybe my own English abilities have improved since the time I wrote that letter'.

As previously mentioned, racial discrimination or prejudice against some specific ethnicity or race is not always obvious. Sometimes these sorts of behaviour and feelings can be more hidden and indirect. Shirin, 33, described some kinds of behaviour that she considered hidden types of racial discrimination.

In my tailoring class, I'm in contact with a few people that I think are carrying on some sort of hidden racism. When you are looking at these people, they are very nice. They are talking to you and laughing. But sometimes they are saying things or acting in a way that shows they feel superior to me. For example, when they are talking about fashion, they are always talking together and asking each other's points of view. But when they want to talk about terrorism, lost airplanes or ISIS, they are talking to me. Why should I know what was in the mind of a person who possibly hijacked that Malaysian airplane—because I am coming from Iran I should be expert in hijacking? Or because I'm from the Middle East I should know about ISIS? No, I can know as much as those people about fashion.

In addition to these general stereotypes, Shirin also mentioned another sort of discriminatory assumption that she believes some of her co-workers are practising:

Sometimes I see that by default, I am considered as a guilty person. For example, on that tailoring course, sometimes we take each other's work things by mistake. You know, when you are tailoring and working close together, it is common that people take each other's scissors or measuring tools or other things by mistake. In this case, normally the first person who gets asked about the lost stuff is me. It might be unconscious, but that's happening. It seems that because I am different, I should be the one who made a mistake.

As described above, most of the participants mentioned that if they were treated differently, they would automatically attribute it to their race. Therefore, racial discrimination, especially in its more hidden forms, is not just something that is reflected in the behaviour or attitudes of those who express racism, but it is also related to the attitudes of those who receive such treatment. In other words, the issue of racial discrimination is not just about how other people see me; it is also about how I think other people see me. Therefore, while one person (either as a subject or object) could consider one specific behaviour or attitude to be discriminatory, another person would not. Beyond that, the same person could

consider something discriminatory at one stage in life, but see it differently at another stage. In this regard, some participants referred to their own shifting attitudes about what is discriminatory or what is not, as these attitudes have changed in different stages of their lives. Negin, 39, who had been here since 1999, explained,

In my first job I had a low confidence, and I considered every single unpleasant comment or behaviour as a racist one. Even, sometimes I was thinking that I shouldn't be here, because no one accepts me. But now I'm less sensitive, and I think I have found my own place ... Now I'm not thinking that the only reasons for people's unusual behaviour is related to the fact that I'm a migrant. It might have been a different reason. Maybe that person is just feeling unwell, or maybe she just had a bad day, or some other thing.

Therefore, when it comes to the more hidden types of racial discrimination, it is hard to distinguish between assumptions and facts for the participants. It seems that the migrants' self-esteem plays a central role in shaping the way they interpret other people's actions or comments. This is not to suggest that racial discrimination is something that victims can 'will into non-existence' by simply feeling better about themselves. As mentioned above, there are instances of clear and undeniable racism in the participants' accounts.

Although the above-described experiences of racial discrimination or prejudice mostly happened in the context of work, some participants also mentioned some experiences or comments that they have received in public places, such as in the streets or during public events. The nature of these experiences is usually less complex than the experiences in the workplace. For instance, a couple of participants mentioned that when they were talking loudly in a park or in a street with their Iranian friends, someone approached them and reminded them that this is New Zealand, and they should speak English. On a few occasions, some of the participants found that their property managers or security staff made jokes about their ethnicity, asking the participants if they were carrying a bomb.

Racially related issues can have differing layers. Although some sorts of behaviour, comments or assumptions can be defined as more or less clearly discriminatory or inappropriate, there are other sorts of behaviour that are intended as expressions of sympathy and/or attempts to understand another person's culture, but they cause offense and misunderstanding. Pegah, 35, who has been here since 2012, mentioned an experience she

had with another migrant who was from India, which illustrated this kind of misunderstanding.

In our school, I was in touch with a lecturer who made me annoyed in a very special way. She was talking to me a lot about my religion. She was Christian, and she was trying to manage my relationships with others based on her understanding about my beliefs. For example, once she told me that she had asked my supervisors to be careful, and not to offend me by shaking my hand. Or sometimes she was talking to me about my body shape, or encouraging me to drink skim milk. ... Once I decided to tell her that I'm not happy about her comments. I told her, I know you want to be nice to me, but my religion, my body and my eating habits are my personal issues, and I don't like you to talk about them with me. She told me, 'I assumed because you are an Eastern person that you are like me. I didn't know that you are like Western people'.

Pegah said that she didn't consider this experience as a type of racism, but she got annoyed at being expected to have fewer boundaries or less entitlement to personal privacy because of the place she was coming from. This particular experience happened on a personal scale between two migrants, and it could be considered a consequence of simple generalisation. However, such generalisations can also happen on a bigger scale. Generalisations of this sort can appear as side-effects of over-emphasis on the similarities between minority group cultures, or as presumptions about people's cultural values and stereotypes. In other words, labelling immigrants based on the place they come from, and expecting that they all have similar levels of commitment to certain elements of their culture is commonly offensive.

These types of generalisations can be commonly seen in the ways that some applications for immigration, especially applications for partners to immigrate, were rejected or challenged by immigration officers, based on their understandings of the applicants' home country cultures. In some cases, applicants faced expectations that they should follow standards presumed to apply in their native culture. One of my participants gained New Zealand citizenship, and applied for her male partner in Iran to immigrate. She had lived with this man for two years in Iran (without being married), and they wished to continue their life together in NZ. She found her partner's visa application rejected, without asking her to provide more documents. The immigration officers explained that they assumed all legitimate

couples must be married in Iran. In another example from Canada (which was disclosed to the media), the visa application of a married couple was rejected, and the legitimacy of their marriage was questioned by their case officer, because the female (from Bangladesh) was a divorcee, and was two years older than her partner who lived in Canada (Keung, 2016).

In the previous two sections of this chapter, I have discussed the ways that the participants defined their social identities in the course of daily interactions, and how they have experienced various degrees of exclusion or discrimination. In the next section, I will briefly look at another scale of such issues, to see how Iranian migrants redefine their relations with official sectors of the host country.

Political Trust and Migration

New Zealand is often considered one of the least corrupt and most trustworthy societies in the world. Based on the Transparency International Report (2018), New Zealand was ranked as the least corrupt country internationally in 2017, while Iran was ranked number 130 in the same index. This huge gap between the two countries in terms of corruption levels and the quality of the public institutions raises questions about the ways that migrants from Iran might redefine their attitudes and levels of trust toward the public sector in New Zealand. According to my findings in this study, almost all of the participants declared a high level of trust in the New Zealand government and its public services. Their levels of trust towards the government was higher than that found among most members of New Zealand society. I acknowledge that in this case, I am comparing a non-representative sample of participants from my qualitative study to a probability-sampled quantitative data survey. However, both of these studies indicate a similar pattern.

High levels of political trust among migrants. A number of previous studies (Röder & Mühlau, 2011, 2012; Maxwell, 2009, 2010; McAllister & Makkai, 1992) have indicated that the first generation of migrants from countries with lower institutional quality, arriving in reasonably well-governed destination countries, tend to show higher levels of trust, and sometimes ‘undue trust’ in government and public sectors, compared to the native-born members of the host society. Maxwell’s (2010) study of political trust and satisfaction in 24 European countries found that ‘first-generation migrants have the most positive attitudes’ towards government, while second-generation migrant-origin and native-origin people showed similar scores regarding political trust and satisfaction. In another study, Maxwell (2009) claimed that British Muslims showed higher levels of trust in Britain’s government

than Christians, mainly because Muslims were more likely to be migrants, and members of ethnic minority groups in Britain had more trust in political institutions than most native people.

Although the above-described studies are mostly limited to European countries, the outcomes of studies from Australia (McAllister & Makkai, 1992) and the United States (Wenzel, 2006) also confirm the same sorts of difference between the levels of trust among native and migrant individuals. McAllister and Makkai studied five migrant groups in Australia, and found that ‘immigrants socialised in countries lacking continuous democratic traditions have greater political trust …’ (McAllister & Makkai, 1992, p. 271). According to that study, no immigrant groups showed noticeably less trust than Australian-born participants, and the Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian groups showed significantly higher levels of trust.

Regarding the possible reasons for this ‘overconfidence’ of immigrants, most of the previous studies refer to ‘reference point theory’. According to this theory, migrants tend to compare the institutions of their host countries with those of their origin country, and mainly based on this comparison, they develop more confidence in the institutions of their host country. Also, ‘trust in the institutions of the host country is expected to be larger the poorer the quality of home-country institutions relative to those of the host country’ (Röder & Mühlau, 2012, p. 780). Another explanation for the mentioned gap (in trust for political institutions) between migrants and native-born individuals could be related to a tendency for the native-born members of the host countries to under-estimate the trustworthiness of their public-services, and of their governments in general.

To estimate the levels of political trust among my participants in New Zealand, I asked them two particular questions. First, I asked the degree to which they were willing to share their private and financial information with government officials in cases of collecting statistics. Also, I asked if the participants thought that the New Zealand was involved in systematic spying on the citizens’ communications, such as their emails, phone calls, or text messages.

In answering the first question, almost all participants declared that they placed a high level of trust in government officials, and that they were willing to share their information and data with public sector representatives. In contrast, almost all of these participants confirmed that they could not trust the government officials when they were living in Iran.

After coming to New Zealand, they changed this attitude towards the government, but they did not report any specific process of overcoming their previous distrust. They simply replaced mistrust of their old government with a high level of trust in the government of the host country. The absence of any specific process of overcoming the distrust they previously felt could be explained by the already mentioned ‘reference point theory’, and by the fact that the performance of public institutions and governments in the host country is not judged on its merits, but instead by comparison with the governments which the migrants left (Stefanie Andre, 2014).

Although part of the high level of trust among participants could arise from comparisons between the public institutions of the host and the origin countries, my participants also mentioned some evidence-based reasons for their feelings of trust. For instance, some of the participants mentioned the high level of transparency, the free media, and the low level of corruption that they detected in New Zealand. Some participants said that they had never heard of any cases of government officials misusing the information that citizens had shared about themselves. While all of these factors gave the participants reasons for trusting the public administration system, none of them mentioned any specific, personal experiences which contributed to their feelings of trust.

Regarding the possibility that the New Zealand government might do mass surveillance, more than half of the participants indicated that they did not think mass surveillance was happening in New Zealand, although it might happen to some particular people who were under investigation for some specific reason. Some participants said they were unsure if mass surveillance was systematically happening in New Zealand, but even if it was happening, they would not be concerned about it. In contrast, most of the participants believed that mass surveillance was definitely happening on a regular basis in Iran.

The reasons why the participants were not concerned about different sorts of spying on citizens were mainly related to their basic attitude of ‘trust in the government’. They believed that any information collected by the government would not be used against them and felt confident that such information would be used to help people rather than to harm them. For example, Sima, who has been living here since 2000, said:

For several years, I was thinking that no one was tapping citizens here, but recently it has come out that it is just possible that we do get tapped here. Also, some information might be exchanged with the U.S., but it doesn’t

bother me ... I don't think the New Zealand government has any intention to harm us.

Another participant said, 'I don't think government is absolutely trustworthy here, but thanks to the free media and human rights organisations, you can be confident that if you get caught unfairly, your voice could get heard'.

These participants were saying that they trusted the government to do the right thing, even if it is taking some actions which are not sufficiently transparent. This kind of permissive attitude toward the government could suggest a level of trust that might be termed 'undue trust'.

As I mentioned above, the Iranian migrants in this study showed more trust in New Zealand's governmental operations than the average New Zealander. Based on data from Kiwis Count survey, about 43% of New Zealanders expressed a high level of trust in public services (State Services Commission, 2017). Also, data from Colmar Brunton (2016) showed that only around 12% of New Zealanders expressed complete trust or a great deal of trust in local government. Although the Kiwis Count survey and the Colmar Brunton measured the factor of trust in a more general way (unlike the more particular questions used in this study) the gap in confidence levels between the general public and my small sample of immigrants was still clear. Also, according to the Colmar Brunton (2016) survey, Asian New Zealanders are more likely than New Zealand citizens of European origin and Maori to express a considerable degree of trust in government.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed some social aspects of the participants' post-migration experiences in New Zealand in terms of social identity-making, experiences of discrimination or exclusion, and issues of trust towards the government. In terms of identity-making, we have explored how and why most participants tried to minimise their religious identity (and instead emphasise other aspects of their identity) in their initial daily interactions with New Zealanders.

In the second section of the chapter, we examined participants' experiences of 'race-related' discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion, as they deal with such issues in both visible and hidden forms. The findings show that while these experiences are diverse, the largest number of racially discriminatory incidents were experienced in work-related contexts.

Moreover, most of the participants mentioned that if they faced any sort of discriminatory behaviour, they automatically related it to their difference in race. They also discussed how their own changes in self-understanding and levels of confidence have shaped the ways they interpret possibly discriminatory incidents.

In the last part of this chapter, we examined another scale of social relations, to see how the participants have redefined their attitudes towards official sectors of the host country. Particularly, we aimed to understand how participants dealt with the issue of mistrust, as they moved from an Iranian environment of almost total mistrust for the government. Interestingly, most of the participants declared that they have a very high level of trust for official sectors and authorities in New Zealand. The level of trust that the participants declared was apparently higher than the average level of trust in government among people born in New Zealand.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to explore the life experiences of Iranian females in Iran and New Zealand in relation to the issues of migration and its political context. I engaged with my research questions and the narratives told by the study's 34 participants, applying the lens of politics to better understand the pre- and post-migration experiences of Iranian women who have moved to New Zealand since 1979. Throughout this research, I aimed to examine the main causes of immigration for Iranian women and their processes of acculturation in New Zealand. To conclude this work, I connect the main findings (as reported in my four data chapters) to my research questions and to the study's political framework. This chapter indicates the implications of my findings and proposes possible directions for future research.

Motivations for Migration

Chapters Four and Five presented a holistic view on the process of emigration by Iranian women, from their initial ideas about migrating, to actually leaving and starting new lives elsewhere. This process was discussed in relation to the political and ideological context of the country of origin. Although several previous studies have considered the effects of Iran's political context on women's emigration (Hashemi, 2006; Zirakbash, 2014; Ghorashi, 2003), to the best of my knowledge none of these studies have provided a holistic, detailed, cause-and-effect view on the motivations for emigration in relation to political and ideological factors. The distinctive contribution of this study is its examination of the structure of Iran's prevailing political ideology and its governmental system, showing how its gender-related policies can be experienced in the daily lives of ordinary female citizens, and how these experiences affect women's choices regarding emigration. This perspective is useful not just for understanding the reasons why Iranian women choose to leave their country, but also because it provides fresh insight into the lives of ordinary citizens in Iran and the ways they are dealing with the political system. This perspective is important because few academic studies to date have directly presented Iranian women's day-to-day experiences in relation to their political context. For most previous researchers, it has been difficult to gain open and candid access to women's experiences, mainly due to concerns over the high degree of censorship in Iran.

Emigration and the politics of gender inequality. I have divided my participants' motivations for migration into two main categories, namely gender-related factors, and

factors that are not specifically or mainly related to gender. Concerning the gender-related factors, the previous chapters have shown how state-backed gender inequality in Iran affects the daily lives of ordinary women, and how such constrictions can motivate them to leave their country. The types of discriminatory regulation that my participants most commonly discussed concerned the requirements for wearing hijab, and the women's daily interactions with morality police in terms of the female dress code.

The participants' narratives articulated frustration over this system of control, and their experiences of systematic humiliation. Many spoke of feeling unsafe in the streets, and of their daily concern that they could get arrested for failing to meet the often arbitrary standards of the morality police. It is important to avoid minimising the issues regarding the hijab dress code by considering this issue as a purely religious matter. Clearly, the hijab-related restrictions are more matters of politics than of religion, both for government officials and for Iranian women. Part of the tension over dress codes between the government and Iran's women concerns the constant uncertainty over what styles of dress could be deemed Islamic or non-Islamic. Another aspect of this issue involves the parameters of 'civil disobedience', and how women may use their bodies to make political or social statements against a repressive regime. Although my participants in this study did not specifically report making political statements through the ways they presented themselves on the streets, their statements conveyed considerable resentment against governmental control, and they commonly spoke of efforts to evade the restrictions imposed by the morality police.

For the Islamic Republic's officials, controlling how women dress in public is definitely a matter of political control and legitimacy. The Islamic government considers control over how women present themselves in society as a primary measure of its power over the nation. In other words, if the rulers cannot control how women dress in public, and if they cannot impose Islamic standards for their appearance, then the whole concept that Iran is an Islamic country could be thrown into doubt. This doubt could undermine the public mandate for having an Islamic government at all. Therefore, the way that females present themselves socially is taken as a test of the Islamic Republic's legitimacy and authority. We can see that the struggle over the female dress code is a political battle over power between women and the Islamic government, which is run almost exclusively by males.

Of course, hijab-wearing can also be a matter of religion, and many people of both sexes consider it an important obligation for Muslim females. Therefore, women generally

find that both political and religious forces are pushing them in the same direction. These forces augment each other to impose limitations on females. The combination of legal and religious traditions makes things harder for women, because it requires people who want personal freedom to struggle against both religious traditions and political objectivisation.¹⁰²

Another aspect of state-backed gender discrimination that the participants mentioned was the unequal family and civil laws, and how these laws affected their day-to-day lives. These unequal laws and norms were experienced in different ways by different participants. For instance, some of the participants were engaged in applications for divorce, and they decided to leave the country because of their frustration with the unequal divorce laws. Other participants had no particular legal issues, but they were concerned that the gender-biased laws could affect them.

The current Iranian civil and family law code was introduced after the 1979 Islamic revolution. This code is heavily based on the Shia version of Sharia law, and it favours males in many ways. As we discussed in Chapter Two, although the Iranian parliament¹⁰³ has made various attempts to moderate some aspects of Iranian family law for greater gender equality, these attempts have seldom succeeded, because the political system is designed to give ultimate authority over legislation to a non-elected ‘guardian council’ of male clerical authorities. Therefore, even in periods when a majority of the elected officials have favoured institutional reform, and when the parliament has passed various bills to moderate gender inequality, many of those reforms were blocked by unelected authorities. The structure of the system therefore renders it quite unfeasible to work for change in women’s legal status through the ballot box or through political activism.

As explained above, almost all of my participants mentioned gender-related inequality in both their private and public lives as a primary motivation for emigration. However, some of the participants were motivated to leave the country for reasons of a different kind.

Emigration as a rejection of the socio-political system. Many countries are struggling to keep their wealthiest or most talented people from emigrating to other nations. However, Iran is facing one of the highest rates of ‘brain drain’ of any developing country in the world (Carrington & Detragiache, 1999; Chaichian, 2011; Salmani, Taleghani, & Taatian,

¹⁰² Clearly, there are some Iranian women who do not seek such freedoms, and who want to practice their Islamic dress code as a part of their religion obligations. There is some question about how much these people support freedom of choice regarding hijab for other women.

¹⁰³ Especially the sixth parliament (2000–2004) tried to reform a number of gender-discriminatory laws.

2011). No doubt the better educational and financial opportunities available in other countries are significant pull factors for this group of migrants. However, we should not underestimate the importance of the socio-political push factors for motivating people to leave Iran. The ways that better educated or more talented people can become discouraged by the political and ideological system were discussed in Chapter Five. For instance, one of the participants explained how she wanted to contribute to her country's development, and was ready to forego seeking the better financial and educational opportunities that she might gain in other countries. She felt that she was basically an apolitical person, who only wanted to help by applying her technical skills in a professional career. She found, however, that the strong ideological aspects of the system blocked her efforts, denying her even the satisfaction of helping to solve practical problems. Clearly, this was one of many cases in which a rigid ideological system could work against its own interests.

On one hand, the Islamic Republic needs to harness the talents and energies of its new generation. Its officials hope to empower the nation through advances in technology, science, and engineering, especially in strategic fields such as physics, chemistry, IT, and aerospace technology. Generally, Iran finds it difficult to gain access to such knowledge and technology from foreign sources, because of the various sanctions on Iran. The Islamic Republic clearly needs its best minds to meet its economic and political goals and to deal with the internal shortages caused by sanctions, but the government's ideological priorities often render it unable to meet the minimum demands of its highly talented professionals. Interestingly, these departing professionals are most commonly leaving for the United States (Chaichian, 2011), which Iran's leaders view as one of their greatest ideological enemies.

Furthermore, it is well recognised, in the development literature that women's agency is an essential component of wellbeing for all and the 'empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development for many countries in the world today' (Sen, 2001, p. 202). Therefore, it looks essential for the Iranian government to better use the capacity of its female educated workforce for pursuing its 'Development Plans' and the achievement of the economic ambitious such as 'economy of resistance and steadfastness',¹⁰⁴ economic independence, turning sanctions in to new opportunities and so on.

¹⁰⁴ The Iranian supreme leader named the Iranian year 1395 (March 21, 2015 to March, 21 2016) as the year of 'economy of resistance and steadfastness'. The following year was similarly named the year of 'economy of residence, employment, and national production'. These years were named to encourage the nation's economic independence and reduce what Khamenei called 'vulnerabilities of Iranians in the face of the enemies'. Although the Iranian supreme leader always encourages economic independence and the use of all internal

While the number of Iranian females who pursued tertiary education outnumbered males in recent years (*Tehran Times*, 2017) the rate of female employment is considerably lower. Based on United Nations human development report in 2015 the ‘labour force participation rate’ for females in Iran was 16.2% compare with 72.7% for males (Jahan, 2015). Also, another study, shows that from an ‘overall amount of 79,617 university tenure track position holders’, in 2009, only 18.25% were female and 81.75% were male (Rahbari, 2016).

Another motive for migration that most participants mentioned was Iran’s general lack of social and political freedom, and the fact that citizens are unable to choose the kind of lifestyle they want. The political system’s efforts to control citizens’ private and public behaviour was a major reason my participants decided to emigrate. Many said that they felt unable to live in the ways they wanted, either socially or privately. For instance, some participants mentioned the difficulties they experienced living with their boyfriends in Iran, saying that although living with their partners was both illegal and socially unacceptable, they were ready to face the social consequences for that disobedience. Even so, they had serious concerns about the legal penalties that could be involved.

Many of the participants’ narratives on managing their double lives in Iran provided vivid pictures of what it has been like for women to live under a political system that seeks to control their private lives. Although any sort of governmental control over private life can be challenging, this trend has been especially problematic in Iran, because the values and lifestyles of the younger middle-class generation are completely different from those of their political leaders. Many younger-generation Iranians who were born since the 1979 revolution grew up questioning the rules imposed upon them. In the 1980s, during the war between Iran and Iraq, the Iranian government urged women to bear an ‘army of twenty million males’. The government encouraged higher rates of fertility and restricted access to birth control. As

resources to achieve economic growth without dependence on foreign countries, he never encourages or recognises women’s employment and the role it can play in economic growth. For an example of the way he looks at the issues of female employment and tertiary education, I refer to some sections of his speech given on ‘Women’s Day in Iran’ in April 2014. He said, ‘Female employment is not a major issue, ... we are not against it, I myself am not against their employment, or that they get management positions, as long as it does not contradict with those major issues [their responsibilities for the home and family]. If there is a contradiction, then the priority lies with the major issues. [Also] there are some professions that are not commensurate with a woman’s makeup, so they shouldn’t pursue those. One thing to do is to avoid imposing on women [an] education that leads to those jobs. On the issue of universities and education, some people make a lot of noise about discrimination in education; such discrimination is not a bad thing everywhere ... this discrimination is justice itself ... (Khamenei.ir, 2014; Center for Human Rights in Iran, 2015).

a consequence, the population growth rate increased from 1.7% in the years before the 1979 revolution up to 3.9% during the first decade after revolution¹⁰⁵ (Abbasi, Mehryar, Jones, & McDonald, 2002).

Ironically, this huge increase of population, which the government hoped would provide massive human resources to serve the ideological goals of the Islamic Republic, produced a baby-boom generation that mostly rejected the whole ideological system, and expressed a strong inclination toward Western-style values (Basmenji, 2005; Mahdavi, 2010). This new generation grew up under the policies of the Islamic Republic and was educated in a school system modified to promote state-backed religious values. Yet vast numbers of these students grew increasingly critical of the state-backed ideology.¹⁰⁶

My participants' stories show that the lifestyles they were looking for resembled the lifestyles commonly seen in Western countries, and such personal dreams led them to consider migration. Of course, many people who are unsatisfied with governmental control of their private lives¹⁰⁷ are unwilling or unable to leave their country. People may react in different ways for a variety of reasons. Although migration is definitely one of the responses that people consider, others might choose to stay and actively confront their nation's inequalities, to demand their personal and social freedom.^{108,109} Many others chose to stay and try to build their lives without challenging the authorities.

The common attitude of disillusionment with theocratic political ideology is one of the main differences between most Iranian migrants and many of the migrants from other Islamic-background countries. Iranian migrants are very commonly looking for a more Western lifestyle, and they are usually ready to embrace many of the norms, freedoms, and values of their host countries. So although many other migrants with Islamic backgrounds are concerned over how they can preserve their Islamic identity in a Western context, probably most Iranian migrants feel that their attitudes and values are already more compatible with

¹⁰⁵ As a consequence of this policy, 70% of Iran's population was under the age of 30 in 2001.

¹⁰⁶ This young middle-class generation was also highly educated. For example, by 2010 a full 84% of young Iranians in Tehran either had a university degree, or were studying towards one (Mahdavi, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ By acknowledgement of those who are supporting and/or accepting these policies.

¹⁰⁸ There are also some activists who have decided to emigrate (or were forced to emigrate) and who continue their political activism from overseas.

¹⁰⁹ We can see an example of actively challenging governmental laws that violate personal freedom of choice in the case of women who are protesting against compulsory hijab wearing by removing their headscarves in public and waving them on sticks like flags of protest. For more information see Kamali Dehghan (2018), 'Tehran hijab protest: Iranian police arrest 29 women', and (Aljazeera, 2018), 'Iran arrests 29 women for not wearing hijab in protests'.

Western social norms than with the norms of traditional Islamic societies. Hence, much of the recent research on ‘Muslims in Western societies’ (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Yasmeen, 2007; Alrasheed, 2013; Ozyurt, 2013; Sirin & Katsiaficas, 2011; Akhtar, 2014) intersects only tangentially with my study.

Another motive for migration that my participants discussed appeared in the accounts of Baha’i participants. Although the rights of other religious minorities, such as Zoroastrians, Christians, or Jews, are officially protected by law, the Baha’i faith is regarded as an illegitimate heresy. This religious community is subject to official persecution, even though it is the country’s second-largest religion, after Islam (Bluett, 2005). The followers of this faith have faced numerous social or professional restrictions for over 100 years, and such persecution has intensified since the 1979 revolution.¹¹⁰ The serious violations of this community’s human rights have been denounced by many nations around the world,¹¹¹ and large numbers of Iranian Baha’i asylum seekers have been accepted as refugees by many countries.

The life experiences of Baha’is in Iran have been recorded in various international reports and documentaries, and some academic research has specifically examined the experiences of Baha’is emigrating from Iran since the 1979 revolution (Bluett, 2005; McAuliffe, 2005; Talebi & Desjardins, 2012). Even so, there are several reasons why it was important to examine the experiences of Iranian Bahia’s in New Zealand in this study. First, the narratives of Iranian Baha’is who have migrated to New Zealand have not been previously examined in the academic literature, and their stories needed to be heard and considered. Also, the migration of these participants must be categorised as a forced rather than a voluntary migration. Therefore, these participants represent another dimension of the migration experience, which differs in many ways from that of the other. These participants felt that they were pushed into migration. They seldom had time for detailed preparations, and their narratives of post-migration experiences reflected a relatively unplanned process of adjusting to new challenges in their host society. Also, Baha’i women represented the only

¹¹⁰ The persecution of the Baha’i religion is not new. Since the emergence of this religion in the middle of nineteenth century, its followers were subjected to several waves of persecution. However, their situation was improving to some degree during the last decades before the Islamic revolution (Bluett, 2005).

¹¹¹ For examples of such international reports, see page 14 of the United Nations report regarding the situation of human rights in Iran (United Nations, 2017), and page 194 of the Amnesty International Report for 2016/17. (Amnesty International, 2017).

religious minority group among my participants,¹¹² and it was important to see how their experiences of being members of an Iranian religious minority affected their lives differently in both Iran and New Zealand.

It is important to consider that the decision to leave one's home country permanently is almost never a single-cause phenomenon. People have a spectrum of motivations for migration. Even though we can easily see that some sorts of motivations were considerably more influential than others for this study's participants, their narratives indicated that most of them were motivated by economic and professional goals, and/or by a desire to live with freedom and equality. In the specific process of making their decisions to migrate, socio-political concerns were commonly the most decisive factors that drove them to turn their dreams of migration into real action.

It has been often argued that there are always gains and losses in any story of migration. Although migrants can achieve gains in some areas, they may also suffer losses in other areas. The main focus of Chapters Six and Seven was the post-migration experiences of my participants. These women reflected on their achievements and challenges, and they considered the particular ways that their post-migration lives were more equal, more free, or more constrained than their pre-migration lives.

Immigration, Personal Identity, and Family Power Dynamics

To identify the effects of migration on the personal lives of my participants, we discussed the particular ways that the change of social context affected their perceptions of themselves as individuals and as women. We also explored how these changes in perception, alongside the changes of social and political context, could influence these women to reconsider or re-negotiate the power relationships within their families.

The existing literature regarding the effects of migration on women, and particularly women who have migrated from developing countries to Western societies, has been generally polarised between two main perspectives, one emphasising emancipation, and the other emphasising oppression. The findings of this study, however, suggested that the experience of migration for Iranian females, in terms of the changes to their personalities and interfamily relationships, has involved a mixture of both emancipation and oppression. Based

¹¹² Two of the participants in this study were Christians, but they had converted to Christianity after they migrated to New Zealand, so they had never known the experience of living as a religious minority group in Iran.

on the participants' narratives, we can see that some Iranian female migrants to New Zealand have experienced new kinds of discrimination or hardship. Others have enjoyed significant gains in terms of freedoms and opportunities. In many cases, the participants experienced gains in some areas, and losses in other areas of their lives. Therefore, emigration has presented a spectrum of loses and gains in different areas for the participants in this study.

In terms of individual changes, one of the main themes my participants discussed concerned the shifts in their levels of self-confidence. In this area, they reported a wide variety of experiences. Almost a third of them experienced a boost in their confidence following their emigration. Some others reported no significant changes in their levels of self-confidence, and a few experienced declines in self-confidence after migration. The participants who migrated on their own (either as single persons, or as wives who came without their husbands) generally reported finding greater levels of confidence and personal development after migration.

Previous studies indicating that migration can empower women (Abadan-Unat, 1977; Bhutani, 1994; Zentgraf, 2002; Zirakbash, 2014) usually stress a correlation between the increase of women's confidence and the context of the host society. In the case of Iranian female migrants, most of these studies (Zirakbash, 2014; Tohidi, 1993; Mahdi, 1999) have reported that these women usually experience a general increase of self-worth and self-respect after migration, largely due to the more liberal and gender-equal contexts of their host countries. This attitude was also evident in some of my participants' accounts; however, it was not their main narrative. My data suggested that some participants felt greater confidence after migration, and they attributed this feeling more to their personal achievements in the host country than to the social environment around them. In other words, they felt more confident after migration because of the things they accomplished by themselves (including the act of migration), and not just because of the more equal social context (although their achievements were facilitated by the more liberal and gender-equal context of New Zealand). This sense of self-reliant change was especially strong for the best-educated participants. Therefore, although we should not deny the importance of a more gender-equal social context, we should also consider that a significant part of these women's increased confidence after migration came from their own achievements and agency.

Another group of participants reported feeling less confident after migration. They mainly referred to the language barrier and difficulties with proper communication that they

faced as the causes for their decline in confidence. Although numerous studies have shown the importance of English language proficiency for the success of migrants in English-speaking host countries (Hawthorne, 2001; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Henderson, Trlin, & Watts, 2006), there is a gap in the literature concerning the ways that lack of English proficiency can affect the migrants' personal and interfamily relationships. In this study, at least two main themes emerged in this regard. First, although English was not the first language for any of the participants, some were far less confident about their English skills than others. There was no doubt that these participants had different levels of English proficiency. However, even in cases where the participants had close to the same levels of proficiency, they commonly had very different levels of confidence in their abilities. It seemed that this discrepancy between language skills and self-confidence was related to the participants' own expectations of themselves. Even those with strong skills could be highly self-critical, and this problem with self-judgment seemed to be more common among women with higher levels of education.

Also in this study, a theme emerged that I did not formally investigate, because I grew aware of it only after the data collection was done. I began to see how the lack of confidence in English skills could affect the women's overall confidence and sense of independence in their day-to-day lives, and particularly in their family relationships. In other words, the lack of social confidence arising from difficulties with a new language in the workplace could make the women feel powerless in their personal relations as well. This loss of confidence could put them in a weaker position in their family relationships. It should be noted that men could also face this problem (however, this was not the focus of this study). Potentially, if men felt less confidence both socially and in their workplaces, they too could feel a loss of confidence and respect in their family relations. Clearly, more research is needed to clarify and deal with this issue among migrant families, to see how these trends could affect or balance power relations in families.

Another important theme regarding the participants' post-migration changes in personality concerned a shift toward greater individualism. Whereas Middle Eastern cultures are generally much more collectivistic than the prevailing Pakeha culture of New Zealand, most of the participants in this study mentioned that they had grown more individualistic in both their social and family relationships since migration. As with the other post-migration changes previously discussed, this trend towards greater individualism could also happen either due to the personal experience of immigrating, or as a part of the acculturation processes in the new society. In other words, the participants could grow more individualistic

because of the way that individualism is institutionalised and encouraged by the host country's liberal context. The participants' individualism could also increase because migration gave them more time away from their extended families, most of whom were still in Iran, and this separation gave them more space for themselves. Regardless of the reasons for this change, becoming more individualistic in terms of family relationships meant that the participants were moving away from their traditional cultural pattern in which they were expected to be self-sacrificing mothers, wives, and daughters. They were starting to place more value on their own desires as independent individuals.

In general, it appeared that participants who came with partners (or as couples) tended to continue their pre-migration patterns of relationship. If the couples had equal relationships before migration, they kept the same style after migration. If the power relationship between partners was unequal before migration, they faced some challenges in the new country, and in most cases moved toward greater equality in their relationships. In terms of rebalancing unequal relationships, my data suggested that the host society's liberal context played a central role, and the ways that participants benefited from this context differed from the ways that shifting social contexts affected their self-confidence.

For instance, some of the participants mentioned that during trips back to their home country, they experienced fluctuations in their relationships. In particular, these women's partners started to revert to the dominant (and domineering) pattern of gender relations in their home country, but the women strived to retain their new patterns of equalised relations as developed in their host country. These reports seemed to show that the more equal family legal system in New Zealand tended to balance the power relations within families, to increase the social resources available for women, and to provide them with ways to re-negotiate their rights and roles within their families, often in ways that had not seemed possible in Iran.

My participants' reports suggested that both the various changes in their personalities following migration and the gender-equal context of the host country helped them to balance and define relationships of greater equality with their partners. Some other researchers, however, have mentioned that legal equality can be a source of serious tension and instability in migrant families. For instance, some studies on Iranian migrants in Sweden (Ahmadi, 2003; Darvishpour, 2002), Canada (Shahidian, 1999), and the U.S.A. (Hojat et al., 2000) have reported high levels of instability and/or divorce among immigrant couples. These

researchers have argued that the more liberal and equal family law systems in these countries (compared with the system in Iran), and the ways that these systems can change the power relations within families, often prepared the ground for conflict, violence, and divorce among Iranian families.

To understand the reasons for these different outcomes, I suggest considering several factors. First, we should consider that the ways couples react to changes in power relations may also be related to factors such as social class, financial situation, or personal attitude. In view of the variations in previous research findings, it seems that although changes of context can bring some alterations in family power relations, the ways that the partners solve their conflicts in critical situations tend to differ case by case.

Also, it is important to consider that the previous literature has suggested a pattern: males normally show a slower trend of acculturation to new social environments than females (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Abraham, 2005; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Rodriguez, 1995), and this difference in the pace of acculturation could be an important factor in post-migration intra-familial tensions. In this study, I did not collect any data from my participants' partners, and therefore I cannot make judgments about the male partners' trends of acculturation. However, some of my participants mentioned that their husbands or boyfriends had undergone noticeable changes in their attitudes toward gender roles following migration. Therefore, there is a possibility that couples who achieve greater balance in their relationships after migration may experience less tension, because they take steps towards acculturation at a fairly equal pace.

Last but not least, we should consider that most of the studies that have reported high tension and growing divorce rates among Iranian migrant couples were conducted in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Therefore, it is possible that this trend involves a generational issue that is less prevalent among younger couples. The younger generation of Iranian couples are generally more Westernised, and have more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles¹¹³ (Edalati & Redzuan, 2010). Some of my participants also discussed forming intercultural relationships, involving Iranian females and New Zealander males. The limited number of my participants who formed such relationships reported finding higher levels of gender equality and greater recognition of their rights as equals. It should be emphasised, however, that my

¹¹³ It should be mentioned that divorce has grown more common among the younger generation of Iranian couples inside Iran, but in this study we are considering divorce and instability as a consequence of migration.

data in this area were not deep enough for drawing any conclusions, as few of my participants had experienced relationships with Western males. In the future, I think that more research on the nature of intercultural relationships is essential. There is some evidence which suggests that these relationships can be more equal in terms of gender relations, but they may also feature inequality in other aspects of the partnership. The fact that the males in these relationships with migrant women often have considerably more power, knowledge, and influence in terms of the dominant language, culture, or rules and regulations in the society where the couple lives, can give the more indigenous partner a more powerful position in the relationship. Therefore, there is a potential that immigrant females may experience greater inequality in these types of relationships. Also, it is important in future research to investigate whether such relationships can help immigrant females to gain more recognition and acceptance as insiders in the host country.

Immigration and the Politics of Redefining Social Identity

In this study, we also looked at the participants' post-migration social experiences, and discussed the ways that these female migrants redefined their social identities in the new context of New Zealand. In this area, at least two main themes emerged. First, we saw that after migration the participants' centres of social identity shifted from their gender to their ethnicity. In their pre-migration experiences, being a female (with its various legal and cultural implications) was central to the social identity of these women. After migration, their ethnicity or 'otherness' became the most visible aspect of their identity.

Another theme concerned the fact that most of the participants sought to create a secular or non-religious type of social identity for themselves after migration. In particular, they reported concerns about being categorised and judged according to the expectations that local people might have toward Muslims. In this study, the formation of 'social identity' is treated as a dialectic process of interaction between the members of minority groups and the wider society around them. The participants discussed how they negotiated the content, and in some cases the labels (Iranian/Persian), for their identities, especially during their initial interactions with others. Most of this study's participants suggested that they tried to shift the centre of their social identity away from its more controversial associations, and particularly away from those aspects of their identity that were associated with Islam or the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most of them sought to emphasise the less controversial aspects of who they were, such as the more ancient features of their national identity. As a part of this

attempt, many of the participants took to introducing themselves as ‘Persian’ rather than ‘Iranian’. Those who chose to introduce themselves as Persians explained that the name ‘Iran’ was generally associated with the Islamic Republic, and with Islam. They felt that the term ‘Persian’ was less politicised and that it would receive a better immediate reaction. These findings are consistent with those of various other studies on Iranian migrants in Canada, the United States, and Australia (Mobasher, 2006; McAuliffe, 2005). Therefore, it seems that despite the different political contexts of those various host societies, Iranian migrants are following relatively similar patterns for constructing their social identities in nations around the world.

Another important feature of Iranian social identity in New Zealand concerns the fact that most of my participants were not practicing Islam. This finding is also consistent with that of other studies on Iranian migrants in other Western societies (McAuliffe, 2007; Jamarani, 2012; Mobasher, 2006). Generally, Iran is considered an Islamic country, and Iranian migrants in New Zealand are usually assumed to be Muslim and/or culturally Muslim. Actually, however, only a small minority of my participants were practitioners of that religion. It is important to consider that for my participants, being non-practicing Muslims was not related to any post-migration changes in identity, or to any part of their acculturation process. Very few of them were practicing the Islamic religion prior to their migration, and the only difference after they came to New Zealand was that they felt more free to openly show their feelings about religion.

Most of the participants in this study felt that being critical towards religion and/or being secular gave them a closer sense of belonging to the wider host society, and they did not associate much with conservative devout Muslims of any nationality. This suggest that the minority of participants who did retain an Islamic dress code and/or regarded themselves as orthodox Muslims could find themselves excluded from their own expatriate community. Given that social identification is dialectical, and hence arises from practical and perceived differences from others, then the Iranian immigrants in this study tended to define (or redefine) themselves through their attitudes towards religious orthodoxy more than through reference to their nation of origin.

The attitudes of Iranian female migrants towards religion and the ways they re-define their social identity in New Zealand generally differ from the usual approach to identity construction taken by most Muslim women in Western societies (Ali & Sonn, 2017;

Yasmeen, 2007; Alrasheed, 2013; Kirmani, 2009). The most common approach that Muslim female migrants take in constructing their social identities involves seeking ways to reproduce or maintain their Islamic identities in their new contexts often in the face of discrimination or racism. This is seldom the case among Iranian female migrants in Western societies. As almost all of my participants explained, they had a specific concern to define a secular social identity for themselves after migration.

The findings of this study, therefore, bring a different set of insights to the literature in New Zealand concerning the ways that Islam and Islamic backgrounds influence women's reconstructions of their post-migration social identities (Bahiss, 2008; Dobson, 2009; Kadri, 2010; Jessen, 2010; Hartono, 2011). It should be noted that although this study did not particularly focus on the participants' relations to Islam, these migrant women's engagement with and connection to Islam (both as a religion and as a political issue) were very important aspects of their stories. This study has illustrated that migrants with Islamic backgrounds can define various contradictory types of social identity after migrating to Western societies, and these redefinitions can be based on their different pre-migration experiences and religious affinities and not only from' acculturation to their new countries.

Possibilities for Further Research

In examining the findings of this study and considering its limitations, I can identify several gaps in my findings, which suggest possibilities for further research.

First, in order to gain greater understanding of emigrant couples' post-migration relationships, and of the ways that their new country's context can affect their perceptions of gender roles and personal identity, it would be helpful to interview both the female and male partners. In this regard, I recommend a further qualitative study to see how post-migration challenges can affect couples, especially in terms of their levels of self-confidence, and the ways that changes in confidence can change the power relationships in families. My data suggested that some post-migration challenges, and specifically difficulties with English language proficiency, could reduce women's self-confidence following migration, and this could leave them feeling powerless inside their families. This same issue and process could also be experienced by these women's male partners, and future studies should seek to consider the experience of both the male and female members of migrant couples, to see how issues related to confidence can affect the power relations inside families.

Another aspect of post-migration family relationships that should be further investigated is the pattern by which families move to new countries. The traditional pattern of international migration was male dominated, with males typically going abroad first to establish a new home and livelihood, and the females later joining their men for a family reunification. This pattern has clearly changed over the past several decades, but until recently it was still common among Iranian migrants. Specifically, it was common for single Iranian men to migrate abroad, establish themselves there, and then return to Iran to marry or reunite with Iranian wives, and take them to their new country. There has always been some concern over the danger that such marriages would establish socially unequal marital relationships. Perhaps in response to those concerns, women in recent years have increasingly sought to change this pattern. The numbers of single women who migrate from Iran have risen greatly, and some of these women completely reverse the traditional immigration pattern by first establishing themselves in a new country, and then traveling back to Iran to choose a husband who will migrate to join her. It is important to do more research concerning these patterns of migration, marriage, and family formation. We need to examine how the power-relationships in these migrant families differ from those in other types of migrants' families, and how new patterns of marriage affect women's sense of agency.

In terms of how migrants redefine their relationships with the official and political institutions in their host society, several questions need further attention. Specifically, there is a considerable gap in the current literature in New Zealand concerning the post-migration political behaviour of migrants who come from nations with non-democratic political systems, and/or from political systems with lower levels of institutional quality or higher levels of corruption. The limited amounts of data that I collected in this study suggested that Iranian migrants to New Zealand typically demonstrate a remarkable degree of trust towards official organisations in the host country, which represents a reversal of their usual previous attitudes toward government institutions in Iran. This study, however, did not gather enough data to explain the process of trust- building after migration. It would be worthwhile to do more quantitative studies regarding the political attitudes and behaviours of migrants coming from non-democratic political systems, to see how they receive, understand, and interpret the institutional and political system in New Zealand. Such future studies could examine these migrants' political orientations, their voting behaviour, and their expectations from their host society's political system.

Final Words

The ‘Muslim woman in the West’ has become a target of considerable political controversy in countries such as Australia, France, and the U.S.A, although less so in New Zealand. Her religion, dress-codes and political allegiances are all questioned for political reasons. However, the participants in this study, as women from an orthodox Islamic regime, show us quite a different political orientation and set of issues. These are women who have migrated in part as an act of ‘voting with their feet’ against an oppressive theocratic political regime. Most of these women have literally ‘thrown off’ those aspects of their former lives that would mark them as Muslim women in Western societies. These women are seeking to assimilate, rather than struggling to maintain a ‘Muslim identity’ or an Islamically correct way of life in a potentially hostile or anti-Islamic environment. Although the whole issue of Muslim women’s identities in the West could be considered as a political matter, the efforts of my participants to assimilate and redefine secular social identities for themselves are also political.

From a political point of view, this set of findings puts a different spin on the multicultural ‘politics of diversity’ or the tension of inclusion/exclusion that is commonly assumed in New Zealand. These women, like other immigrants, confront the problems of diversity, difference, and inclusion, but their aim is ‘to fit into’ a liberal-democratic socio-political environment, as that is what they were looking for. Although they experience a range of difficulties in making their transition, most of them achieve their objective quite well.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet (English)

Project Title: Iranian women in New Zealand (NZ), their motivations for immigration, and trends of acculturation.

Thank you for showing interest in this project. My name is Parisa Kooshesh, and I am an Iranian PhD student at Massey University (Albany campus). I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research project, which will discuss the experience of immigration for Iranian women in New Zealand. Please read this information sheet before deciding whether to participate or not. If you do decide to participate, I sincerely thank you. If you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you, and I thank you for considering my request.

What is the study about?

Although a large number of studies have been done on the topic of immigration in New Zealand, there have been no studies concerning Iranian migrants in NZ society. It seems that Iranians, as a small minority group, are neglected in social research in NZ, partly because Iranians are commonly identified under the categories of Muslims and Arabs. However, as you know, despite having religious or regional similarities, the cultures of Iranians and Arabs are profoundly different.

This study has two main purposes:

- considering the motivations of immigration for Iranian women
- exploring the experiences of Iranian female immigrants in New Zealand

Who can participate in this study?

I am looking for 20 to 30 Iranian women living in New Zealand who meet the following criteria for taking part in this research:

- Were 18 years old or older on arriving in New Zealand.
- Arrived between 1979 and 2013 in New Zealand

Among women who meet these criteria, some 20 to 30 will be chosen to represent various groups in terms of marital status, age, ethnicity, religion, class, and time spent in New Zealand.

What is going to happen in this study?

The main data in this study will be collected from individual face-to face, semi-structured interviews. Your participation in the research will consist of two interviews, which may take about 90 minutes for the first session and 60 minutes for the second one. There will be a one month gap between the two meetings. The interviews will be held at a location and time convenient for you. For instance, you may prefer to visit me at your place, my place, or at a third location like a café.

My hope is to audio-record the interviews, but you can ask for the recorder to be turned off whenever you wish. The audio files will be labelled with your pseudonym (not your real name), kept in a secure place during the research work, and will be destroyed by me, the researcher, at the end of the work.

All the interviews will be transcribed and translated by me alone, to ensure your privacy. Your transcribed interviews can be returned to you if you wish for any type of editing.

What are the discomforts or risks?

There are no risks expected for this study. Your privacy is of great importance for me. I assure you that all the information you provide is confidential, and your identity will be protected by pseudonyms in all parts of the research. Also, to further protect your privacy and confidentiality, I will change or omit any personal information that may make you or your family identifiable.

What are the benefits of the study?

The achievements of this research will be beneficial in many ways for all Iranian immigrants, particularly the ones who live in NZ. First of all, this research is going to build an understanding concerning the motivations for our immigration and our experiences in the host country. This could help the host society to have a better understanding of our experiences and the ways we deal with our problems. Also, this research could help to communicate our challenges and desires to policy makers in New Zealand and Iran, and to allow our concerns and insights to influence public opinion. Your participation on this

research could empower our small community in New Zealand and make it better organised and united.

Participants' Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question, or end the interview at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- withdraw from the study at any time up to one month following your second interview

How can I join the study?

You can participate in this study by contacting the researcher (Parisa Kooshesh). The contact details are provided below.

Participants' concerns and questions:

Any concerns or questions regarding the nature of this study at any stage of the project can be sent to me or the project supervisor.

Researcher contact details:

Parisa Kooshesh

Mobile Phone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Associate Professor Grant Duncan E-mail: l.g.duncan@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Project Title: Iranian women in New Zealand: Their motivations for immigration and trends of acculturation

This consent form will be held for a minimum of four years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I may choose not to continue with the interview process, or withdraw information without giving a reason, within a month after the completion of interviews.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: Date:

Full Name – printed

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

Demographic Information

- 1) Date of Birth:
- 2) Place of Birth:
- 3) Education:
- 4) Marital status:
- 5) Ethnicity:
- 6) Religion:
- 7) Occupation (if applicable):
- 8) Length of residence in New Zealand:

Interview Points:

- The reasons of emigration for Iranians
- The reasons for choosing New Zealand as a destination
- The general feeling of the participant about Iran before emigration
- The current feeling of the participant about Iran
- The general feeling of the participant about New Zealand before immigration
- The current feeling of the participant about New Zealand
- The effects of gender policies on the participant in Iran
- The possible experiences of gender discriminations in Iran
- The effects of gender unequal laws on the participant's personal and social life in Iran
- The processes of decision making for immigration – who was involved (other family members?)
- The possible specific incidents which encouraged the participant to emigrate
- The main challenges and problems which the participant has faced in New Zealand
- The possible changes of the participant's roles (as a sister, daughter, mother, wife, daughter-in-law) within the family since migration to New Zealand
- The possible effects of equal laws on the personal and social life of the participant in New Zealand

- The possible experiences of sexism or racism in New Zealand
- The possible cultural or religious difficulties in adapting to the new society
- The possible identity challenges in the new society
- The cultural effects of the new society on raising children
- The possible changes in dressing habits since the participant has arrived to New Zealand
- The most positive and negative aspects of living in New Zealand
- The participant's perspective on the future

Appendix 4: Information Sheet (Persian)

هموطن عزیز سلام

من پریسا کوشش دانشجوی مقطع دکتری در دانشگاه مسی شعبه آلبانی می باشم . موضوع پایان نامه من تجربه مهاجرت زنان ایرانی به نیوزلند و روند انطباق فرهنگی آنها با محیط جدید می باشد. جهت انجام بخشی از این پروژه نیازمند مصاحبه با تعدادی از زنان ایرانی ساکن نیوزلند به عنوان مشارکت کننده می باشم، خواهشمندم پس از مطالعه اطلاعات پیش رو در این صفحه نسبت به مشارکت یا عدم مشارکت در پروژه تصمیم گیری نمایید. پیش‌آپیش از اینکه بخشی از وقت خود را جهت مطالعه این صفحه اختصاص داده اید از شما متشرکرم.

موضوع تحقیق:

اگر چه تحقیقات زیادی پیرامون موضوع مهاجرت به نیوزلند طی سالهای گذشته از سوی دانشجویان ، موسسات تحقیقاتی و نهادهای دخیل امر مهاجرت صورت گرفته است، اما تاکنون هیچ تحقیق مستقلی در خصوص ایرانیان مهاجر به نیوزلند انجام نشده است. در کلیه تحقیقات صورت گرفته ایرانیان در زیر گروههای دینی (عمدتاً مسلمان) یا قومیتی (خاورمیانه ای) مورد بررسی قرار گرفته اند و این هم گروهی سبب گردیده تا تقاوتهای آنان با گروهای قومی مثل اعراب نادیده گرفته شود اما همان گونه که می دانید ایرانیان به رغم منطقه و دین گاهما مشترک با گروهای عرب دارای تقاوتهای ساختاری با سایر مردم خاورمیانه می باشند. از این رو به نظر می رسد که ایرانیان به عنوان یک گروه کوچک مهاجر در نیوزلند در اغلب تحقیقات مورد غفلت قرار گرفته اند و انجام یک مطالعه مستقل در خصوص آنها ضروری است.

این مطالعه به شکل خاص به موضوع زنان مهاجر ایرانی در نیوزلند می پردازد و دو هدف کلی را مد نظر دارد:

- انگیزه های مهاجرت زنان ایرانی
 - روند انطباق فرهنگی زنان ایرانی در نیوزلند
- چه کسانی می توانند در این تحقیق مشارکت کنند؟

حدود 20 تا 30 زن ایرانی که هم اینک در نیوزلند زندگی می کنند برای انجام این مطالعه مورد نیاز می باشند. مشارکت کنندگان می بایست دارای این ویژگها باشند:

- در زمانیکه به نیوزلند مهاجرت کرده اند حداقل 18 سال داشته باشند.
- بین سالهای 1979 تا 2013 به نیوزلند آمده باشند.

از میان افراد واحد شرایط حدود 20-30 نفر بر اساس ویژگی هایی مثل وضعیت تاہل، سن ، قومیت، دین ، طبقه اجتماعی و مدت زمان اقامت در نیوزلند مورد نیاز می باشند به گونه ای که بتوانند تنوع قومیتی ، مذهبی و طبقاتی در ایران را منعکس نمایند.

روند تحقیق به چه صورت می باشد؟

بخش عده اطلاعات در این تحقیق از طریق مصاحبه فردی و رودرو با مشارکت کنندگان جمع آوری می شود . مشارکت شما در این تحقیق شامل دو مصاحبه مجزا خواهد بود که اولین مصاحبه حدود 90 دقیقه و مصاحبه دوم حدود 60 دقیقه به طول می انجامد. فاصله دو مصاحبه حدود یک ماه می باشد . محل و زمان انجام مصاحبه با توجه به اولویت و آسایش شما تنظیم خواهد شد. به عنوان مثال شما می توانید محل ملاقات را در منزل خودتان ، در محل اقامت من و یا در محل سومی مثل یک کافی شاپ (قهوه خانه) تعیین کنید.

مصاحبه من با شما بر روی یک mp3 player ضبط خواهد شد اما شما می توانید هر زمان که مایل به ضبط صدای خود نبودید تقاضای خاموش کردن دستگاه را بنمایید. در این صورت من مصاحبه با شما را تنهایا یادداشت خواهم کرد. تمام فایلها با نام مستعار شما نامگذاری شده و در مکانی دور از دسترس دیگران نگهداری خواهد شد و در پایان کار تحقیق کاملا پاک خواهد شد.

در مرحله بعد مصاحبه توسط من نوشته شده و ترجمه خواهد شد. کلیه مراحل تحقیق جهت حفظ حوزه خصوصی شما توسط شخص من انجام خواهد گرفت. شما می توانید در صورت تمایل متن پایانی مصاحبه را خوانده و نسبت به انجام تغییرات مدنظر اقدام نمایید.

خطرات یا مشکلات احتمالی مشارکت در این تحقیق چیست؟

خوبشخانه هیچ گونه خطر یا مشکلی مشارکت کنندگان در این تحقیق را تهدید نمی کند. حفظ حوزه خصوصی شما در این تحقیق از اهمیت شایانی برخوردار می باشد. اینجانب به عنوان محقق این پروژه به شما اطمینان می دهم که پاسدار اطلاعات شخصی شما بوده و محترمانه بودن آن را تضمین نمایم. اطلاعات شما به هیچ وجه تحت اختیار هیچ فرد یا نهادی قرار نخواهد گرفت. همچنین به جهت محافظت بیشتر از حوزه شخصی شما هویتتان در کلیه مراحل تحقیق به وسیله نام مستعار حفظ خواهد شد.

مزایای این تحقیق چیست؟

نتایج این تحقیق از جهات متفاوتی هم برای ایرانیان مقیم نیوزلند و هم برای سایر ایرانیان مفید خواهد بود. همان گونه که اشاره شد غیاب یک تحقیق مستقل از جمعیت کوچک ایرانیان در نیوزلند سبب شده تا فرهنگ ایرانی و ظرفیتهای مهاجران ایرانی به درستی شناخته نشود. این تحقیق تلاش خواهد نمود تا یک چارچوب علمی جهت توضیح دلایل مهاجرت زنان ایرانی و روند فرهنگ پذیری آنها در نیوزلند طراحی نماید. چنین چارچوبی می تواند به جامعه میزبان (نیوزلند) کمک کرده تا درک بهتری از تجربیات و مشکلات ما زنان ایرانی در نیوزلند به دست آورد. همچنین این تحقیق می تواند چالشها و مشکلات ما را به نهادهای دخیل در امر مهاجرت در نیوزلند منعکس کرده و تصویری جامع تر و واقعی تر از ایرانیان را پیش روی آنها قرار دهد. مشارکت شما در این پروژه به توأم‌نمد سازی جماعت مهاجر و روبروی رشد ایرانی در نیوزلند و سراسر جهان یاری رسانده و زمینه اتحاد و هم‌دلی بیشتر میان ایرانیان مهاجر را فراهم خواهد نمود.

حقوق شما به عنوان مشارکت کننده در این تحقیق چیست؟

- شما می توانید از پاسخ دادن به هر پرسشی که مایل نبودید خودداری نموده یا مصاحبه را در هر زمان که مایل بودید پایان دهید.
 - شما می توانید در هر مرحله از تحقیق هر گونه پرسش یا نگرانی در خصوص پروژه را با من یا با استاد راهنمای من در میان بگذارید.
 - شما می توانید در هر مرحله از مصاحبه تقاضای توقف ضبط مصاحبه را نمایید.
 - شما می توانید طی یک ماه از انجام مصاحبه از مشارکت در این پروژه انصراف دهید.
- چگونه می توانید در این تحقیق مشارکت کنید؟**

شما می توانید از طریق ایمیل یا شماره تماس من که در پایین صفحه آمده است تمايل خود جهت مشارکت در این پروژه را بیان نمایید.

سوالات و دغدغه های شما

هر گونه پرسش ، دغدغه یا گرانی در خصوص ماهیت این تحقیق را می توانید با استاد راهنمای من در این پروژه یا شخص من در میان بگذارید.

اطلاعات تماس من :

آدرس ایمیل :

پریسا کوشش شماره موبایل :

[REDACTED]

اطلاعات تماس استاد راهنما در این پروژه:

آدرس ایمیل : l.g.duncan@massey.ac.nz

Associate Professor Grant Duncan

با سپاس فراوان

Appendix 5: Consent Form (Persian)

رضایت نامه

عنوان پروژه : انگیزه مهاجرت زنان ایرانی به نیوزلند و روند انطباق فرهنگی آنها
این رضایت نامه حداقل به مدت 4 سال نگهداری خواهد شد.

من نسبت به مطالعه فرم اطلاعات تحقیق اقدام نموده و نسبت به جزئیات تحقیق و مشارکت در این پروژه آگاهی دارم همچنین پرسش‌های من جهت مشارکت در این تحقیق به شیوه ای قانون کننده پاسخ داده شده است و من از حقوق خود جهت هرگونه پرسش بیشتر در خصوص این تحقیق آگاه می باشم.

من نسبت به حق خود جهت انصراف از ادامه مشارکت در هر مرحله از مصاحبه و یا انصراف کامل از مشارکت در این تحقیق حداکثر ظرف مدت یک ماه از انجام مصاحبه بدون ارائه هیچ گونه دلیلی آگاه می باشم.

با اینکه مصاحبه ضبط شود موافق / موافق نیستم .

با اینکه در این مصاحبه هر گونه تصویری از محل مصاحبه یا برخی نمادهای فرهنگی گرفته شود موافق / موافق نیستم.

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