“I was just a housewife, a dentist and a servant”

The Lives of Professional Iranian Women in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the lives of highly-educated, professional Iranian women who migrated to Australia after the Islamic revolution of 1979 through in-depth interviews with 30 women in Melbourne. The study responds to two principal research questions: First, why and how do educated Iranian women decide to migrate to Australia? Second, how and to what extent does migration impact on educated Iranian women’s life at home and at work?

It is shown that these professional Iranian women migrated to Australia for a better life, and that in general their migration has been a positive experience, which has met their expectations. However, they have paid a high price to achieve this better life. Migration has led them to lose some of their connections with family and friends in Iran, and to an experience of hybridity. Migration forces these women to occupy a third space located neither in Iran nor Australia; rather it is a unique space that belongs only to these women. Yet these women believed this price was worth paying, and none wished to return to Iran.

This study highlights the roles of gender and education in migration studies, issues not well addressed in previous research studies. It shows that pre-migration experiences of gender discrimination can lead to positive experiences post migration, both in private and public lives. It also demonstrates that lifestyle migration theory can be extended to migration by non-Westerners and across borders. The thesis provides a new and original view of the migration of women, and particularly those who are skilled.
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DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The thesis has been copy-edited and proof-read by Dr Jillian Graham (Articulate Writing Solutions), whose services are consistent with those outlined in Section D of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice (ASEP). Dr Graham’s own fields of study encompass Musicology, Social History, Women’s Studies and Psychoanalysis.

Signed  ........................................................................................................................................

Dated  ........................................................................................................................................
“I was just a housewife, a dentist and a servant”
The Lives of Professional Iranian women in Australia

Chapter One: Introduction............................................................. 1

Chapter Two: Literature Review
Patriarchy: the politics and culture of gender in Iran.............. 8
2.1 Introduction..................................................................................8
2.2 Understanding patriarchy.............................................................9
2.3 Iran: a brief introduction.............................................................15
2.4 Iran and the construction of patriarchy........................................17
2.5 Women and access to higher education in Iran: pre and post Islamic revolution 21
2.6 Contemporary Iran: higher education and work for women........39
2.7 Conclusion..................................................................................49

Chapter Three: Literature Review
Migration decision-making and post migration experiences... 51
3.1 Introduction..................................................................................51
3.2 Deciding to migrate......................................................................52
3.3 Lifestyle migration: constitution of a better way of life..............54
3.4 The impact of gender and ethnicity on migration decision-making........60
3.5 Post migration experiences: gender, family and household...........64
3.6 Women, skilled migration and work experiences........................69
3.7 Hybrid experiences: the price of migration.................................74
3.8 Conclusion..................................................................................84
Chapter Four

The Research Method .................................................. 88

4.1 Situating myself as a researcher .................................. 88

4.2 Research design ..................................................... 92

4.3 Data collection ..................................................... 93

4.4 Interview schedule ................................................ 98

4.5 Data analysis ....................................................... 100

4.6 Ethical considerations ............................................. 103

4.7 Limitations of method ............................................ 103

4.8 The sample ......................................................... 106

Chapter Five

Motivations for Migration ............................................. 108

5.1 Introduction ......................................................... 108

5.2 Decisions and reasons for the migration ....................... 108

5.2.1 Migration due to an unhappy relationship ................ 109

5.2.2 Migration for education ....................................... 112

5.2.3 Migration due to discrimination in the workplace ....... 116

5.3 Migration for a better life ....................................... 120

5.3.1 Freedom of choice expression ............................... 121

5.3.2 Equal gender expectations ................................... 124

5.4 Discussion .......................................................... 127

5.5 Conclusion .......................................................... 128
Chapter Eight

“Me” as an Individual: Post Migration Experiences of Self-Identity

8.1 Introduction ................................................................. 172
8.2 The past and present self: feelings post migration ....................... 173
8.3 Discovery of self worth .................................................... 173
  8.3.1 Finding the self ....................................................... 174
  8.3.2 Prioritising oneself ................................................... 176
  8.3.3 Self-respect as a woman ............................................ 177
8.4 Believing in oneself ..................................................... 178
  8.4.1 Acquiring self confidence .......................................... 178
  8.4.2 Becoming mature and stronger ................................... 181
8.5 Self-expression post migration ....................................... 182
  8.5.1 Social emancipation: clothing and drinking .................... 182
  8.5.2 Freedom to speak .................................................... 185
8.6 Discussion ....................................................................... 186
8.7 Conclusion ...................................................................... 188

Chapter Nine

The High Price of Migration .............................................. 190

9.1 Introduction .................................................................. 190
9.2 Emotional responses: from decision making to migration ............ 191
  9.2.1 Feeling sad ............................................................. 191
  9.2.2 Feeling scared but hopeful ......................................... 193
  9.2.3 Feeling confused and lost .......................................... 196
9.3 Away from home: missing Iran ....................................... 197
Chapter Ten

Conclusion: “I was just a housewife, a dentist and a servant” 216

10.1 Why and how do educated Iranian women decide to migrate to Australia? .... 218

10.2 How and to what extent does migration impact on educated Iranian women’s lives at home and at work? ................................................................. 221

10.3 The price of migration................................................................. 227

10.4 Future research........................................................................ 229

References ...................................................................................... 232

Appendices....................................................................................... 252

Appendix A

Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E

List of Tables

Table 1: Pseudonyms and demographics..........................................................106
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Increasing numbers of Iranians are emigrating to countries across the globe, and particularly to Western nations such as Australia. The Islamic revolution of 1979 had a profound impact on the lives of Iranians. Recent studies (Ansari 2011; Aidani 2011) show that over six million Iranians are living in the West largely as a result of this revolution, and also because of contemporary political repression.

Iranian immigration to Australia before 1979 was mainly by service workers particularly in the oil industry. During the 1980s there was a major war between Iran and Iraq. This resulted in an increase in numbers of Iranian migrants to Australia. In 1981 Australia began a special humanitarian program for Bahai’s seeking escape from religious persecution in Iran, therefore, by the end of the decade around 2500 Iranians arrived in Australia under this and other refugee programs. During the same period many professionals also began to leave Iran as a result of post war economic shortfall and political hardships. In late 1990s while political and religious issues remained as major reasons of Iranian migration to Australia, many Iranians also arrived in Australia under skilled and family stream programs (Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship: Community Relations Section, Iran-born).

The latest census in 2011 reveals total of 34,453 Iranian-born people in Australia. Among this number 17.2 percent arrived between 2001 and 2006 and 30.1 percent arrived between 2007 and 2011. The largest populations of Iranians reside in New South Wales followed by Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland. Of the Iran born in Australia there was 53.6 percent males compare to 46.4 percent females. (Australian Department of Immigration and
Citizenship: Community Relations Section, Iran-born).

Iranian immigrants have been taught traditional, religious ways of thinking that form part of Iran’s cultural values and beliefs. These attitudes have also shaped the laws and policies that govern their lives. The social norms, roles and expectations in countries such as Iran with strict religious laws and tight traditional views stand in contrast to largely secularised Western countries like Australia. At the root of these contrasts is the patriarchal structure of Iranian culture that constructs norms, ways of thinking and values, shaping the identities and lives of individuals accordingly. This has impacted in particular ways upon Iranian people’s understandings of human nature and the gender order.

In Iran, women’s sexual and gender self-understandings and their lived experience are strongly influenced by the traditional beliefs and values of the patriarchal order. Concepts of subordination, sexual obedience within marriage and family roles as mothers and wives in cultures like Iran are regarded as attributes of the ideal woman (Aghajanian and Thompson 2013; Keddie 2003; Martin 2005; Sedghi 2007). Despite this, Iranian women have had good access to higher education; indeed the number of women attending higher education institutions in Iran has been steadily increasing, particularly following the 1979 Islamic revolution. Growing enrolment rates for women in colleges and universities have sparked widespread social and political debates in Iran. Studies that focus on highly-educated Iranian women reveal that even though education is not necessarily a pathway to employment, university studies symbolise a sphere of hope, a way to experience limited freedom beyond restrictive family environments, a possible pathway to financial independence, and on the
whole, provide a means of changing their social status (Rezai-Rashti 2011; Shavarini 2005; Shavarini 2006).

However, examination of the role of education on Iranian women’s migration decision-making has been largely absent from the critical literature. Professional Iranian women are marginalised in most general texts written about Iranian women. Their status in the West and their unique experiences are not well understood. An improved understanding of non-Western women and their different experiences in Western societies is required.

Of particular concern in this study is the development of an understanding of professional Iranian women in Australia. The voices of professional and/or highly-educated Iranian women who share their personal experiences before and after migration to Australia are heard. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 professional Iranian women residing in Melbourne, Australia, this study seeks to discover these women’s understanding and interpretation of Australian values, meanings and norms, and how what they see and experience in Australia impacts on their everyday lives. Gender identity challenges, skilled migration, and diversity are issues of particular focus.

A symbolic interactionist approach (Blumer 1969) to understanding human actions has been used in this study. According to this theory, individuals are realistic actors who live in both a real world and an interpretive (symbolic) world. Symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals, in their interactions with their surrounding environment, actively create symbols to make sense of and assign meanings and values to the world in
which they live, and develop a concept of larger social structures and of their self-concept. It is these ascribed meanings and values that shape an individual’s way of thinking and being in the world. Individuals are not born with a sense of self, but develop self-concepts through social interaction.

Perceptions of self as a mother and wife, and gender or family roles, for instance, are created by people through a system of symbols. Integrated sets of social norms or societal expectations about how one should or should not behave form unconscious guidelines that shape one’s identity and behaviour. However, cultures and their symbolic meanings are not fixed, but actively move towards the future and are subject to change. If social norms and societal expectations change, the meanings and interpretation of symbols may change. This theoretical framework was chosen for the study because its participants have experienced a new social world. In analysing their experiences and actions, attention has been paid to the symbolic meanings of both the old and new worlds.

The study examines how geographical displacement transforms Iranian women’s lives and identities. The change in gender relations as a consequence of migration impacts on the perception of self as a woman, and on the notion of womanhood. Through the act of migration, these women are shifted away from the familiar, subordinate role or position of object in their relationship. (Ahmadi- Lewin 2001; Ahmadi 2003; Aswad & Bilge 1996; Akpınar 1998; Barot, Bradley & Fenton 1999; Stier 1991).
The principal objective of this project is to explore the life experiences of professional Iranian women who have migrated to Australia after the Islamic revolution in 1979, and who have an Islamic cultural and/or religious background. Previous literature has mostly focused on the traditional, religious pressures on Iranian women inside Iran after the Islamic revolution. Yet the general social status of women in Iran has affected their lives even outside that context. The ways that education and professional status impact on the lives of this particular group of migrant women will be explored. Specifically, the impact of professionalism and migration on their personal lives, including their perception of themselves as individuals and their couple relationships, will be examined. This study also looks at how migration is structured around gender, and focuses on the different experiences of skilled migrant women. This investigation is crucial, because previous academic studies have paid little attention to this area.

The term professional is used in this study to refer to women who work at the top level of a profession, and whose jobs demand high-level skills and responsibilities. It uses Iredale’s (2001b, p.8) definition of professional: “highly skilled people who have a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field”. Islamic background refers to the cultural background of the participant women. The project’s primary research questions are, first, “Why and how do educated Iranian women decide to migrate to Australia?” and second, “In what ways and to what extent does migration impact on educated Iranian women’s life at home and at work?”
To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time such a study of Iranian women has been undertaken in Australia. Therefore this project makes a significant contribution to the understanding of diversity, how different categories of migrant women adapt to a new environment, and in this case how professional Iranian women have adapted to life in a secular nation.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of ten chapters. Chapters Two and Three summarise the existing literature on Iranian women, their history, education, identity formation and migration experiences. A critical reading of research to date is offered. Chapter Two provides useful background knowledge about Iran, and discusses patriarchy and its history in Iranian society. Chapter Three explores the literature on migration and post-migration experiences from a gender perspective. Chapter Four sets out the methodology adopted in the study, and the approach taken for data analysis.

Chapters Five to Ten set out the study’s findings in the form of narratives, which reflect the participants’ experiences before and after migration. A discussion follows. Chapter Five presents findings in relation to the participants’ motives for migration. Chapter Six discusses the findings regarding the participants’ experiences post migration in relation to their marriage and couple relationships. Chapter Seven focuses on the impact of migration on the participants’ professional lives and work experiences in Australia. Chapter Eight addresses the impact of migration on participants’ identities and perceptions of self. Chapter Nine examines the price these women have paid to achieve a
better life and whether they think this was worthwhile. Chapter Ten summarises findings from the study and recaps the arguments developed in the thesis. It discusses some limitations of the methods used, and suggests avenues for further research.

This study argues that in general, migration for these professional Iranian women has been a positive experience. Yet migration forces these women to occupy a third space. This third space belongs neither to Iran nor Australia, but is a unique space belonging to these women only. They have paid a high price to achieve a better life, but they think this was a price worth paying.

The following chapter provides background knowledge about Iran and analyses the history of patriarchy in the Iranian society.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

PATRIARCHY: THE POLITICS AND CULTURE OF GENDER IN IRAN

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide background knowledge about Iran including its history, culture, economic, political and educational systems and their relationship to the patriarchal gender order, so as to better understand the lives and experiences of Iranian women. For the purposes of this study, Connell’s (1987) definition of gender order has been adopted. She describes gender as transient, a product of everyday interactions, and thus it is socially constructed. Gender order is maintained through behaviours and practices and therefore it changes over time. Within this order, patterns of power relations, and masculinities and femininities, are shaped, with the most powerful and dominant at the top (Connell 1987).

The chapter begins by defining and theorising the concept of patriarchy before relating that to Iran and the Iranian patriarchal gender order. Next it provides a brief introduction to Iran as a country before reviewing the history of patriarchy in Iranian society. Education will then be the focus, and specifically the higher education of women before and after the Islamic revolution. This will be followed by a discussion about Iranian women’s education and work status in contemporary Iran. The chapter reveals how the status of Iranian women has seesawed through different periods over Iranian history; however, the gender order of Iran has been always patriarchal, both before and after the Islamic revolution. It is argued that Iranian women have had good access to higher education throughout history, but this access has not
changed their position in society; they are still expected to be wives and mothers rather than professionals and workers.

**Understanding patriarchy**

The concept of patriarchy was first systemically defined by radical feminist Kate Millet in the early 1970s, when many educated, young, white women active in Civil Rights, anti-war and student movements began to express their experiences by applying the language of oppression and liberation (Bryson 1999). This group of women maintained that women’s unfavourable experiences in households, employment, politics and cultural situations were not related simply to personal misfortune; rather they were widespread experiences shared with other women across all cultures, and linked to the general dominance of men over women and men’s abuse of power (Bryson 1999, p. 311).

Millet (1970) argues that in all known societies men’s power over women shapes the relationship between the sexes. She says patriarchal power is political not personal and it is so universal, so complete, so widespread, so continuous and therefore seems natural and invisible. Patriarchal power, she argues, is constructed through the process of socialisation, which begins in the family and reinforced by education, literature, and religion and also rests upon economic exploitation (Millet 1996). This suggests that patriarchal power is not limited to government, public worlds or paid employment but also extends into private lives and affects the most intimate relationships. It also means that patriarchy is not defined only within the family and it is not only about men’s family based power, but in different forms men exercise their power over women also in public lives. As such, patriarchal powers are
linked to both public and private lives and they cannot be separated because in both forms they subordinate women.

Of course the concept of patriarchy was not new to political theory, and many feminists before Millet had identified male domination over women. In recent decades, Millet’s definition and theories of patriarchy have undergone considerable criticism and reformulation (e.g. Feldman 2001; Hunnicut 2009; Walby 1990 and 1997). Some contemporary feminists have sought to explore the relationship between patriarchy and other social structures and systems such as class or race (e.g. Hapke 2013). Yet Millet’s analysis of female subordination and the introduction of the term “patriarchy” created a new, powerful perspective for many feminists with which they could analyse power structures across societies and possibly inspire more effective forms of political action (Bryson 1999).

While providing a thorough review of the concept of patriarchy is beyond the scope of this project, the study particularly draws on Walby (1990; 1997), Sharabi (1990) and Moghadam (2004) to understand and clarify the concept. Patriarchy is understood here as the privileging of men (as a group) over women (as a group) as a result of a specific gender order within a society. This specific order influences the lives of its people both structurally and ideologically across life in ways that in general lead to men’s advantage over women, and to discrimination against women.

The concept of patriarchy in the literature, particularly that of Asia and Europe, has divided
the term into two groups: classic patriarchy and neo-patriarchy. Kandiyoti (1988) defines classic patriarchy as a form of institution where senior men dominate all women and younger men in extended family relationships. In this form, the subordination of women is exercised through reproduction; it is maintained through kinship as well as through the sexual division of labour. The primary role of women in this ‘classic’ patriarchal context is defined as childbearing. However, as Moghadam (2004, p. 141) explains, their children are not considered women’s property but “those of the patriarchal family and especially the male kin” (Moghadam 2004, p. 141). Therefore, women themselves are considered as men’s property. Women are valued and honoured if they fulfill their prescribed roles, and the family honour is dependent on their virtue (Moghadam 2004).

Focusing specifically on the Middle East and Islamic countries, Moghadam (2004) notes that Islam privileges patrilineal bonds and encourages men to take responsibility for the support of their wives and children. In Arab culture with Islamic family law, a woman’s primary obligations are to maintain a home, care for her children, and to obey her husband. The man, on the other hand, is entitled to exercise his marital authority by restraining his wife's movements and preventing her from showing herself in public. This is the “patriarchal gender contract” (Moghadam 1998), or as Kandiyoti (1988) describes it, the "bargain with patriarchy". The patriarchal power begins with and is shaped within the family, and is legalised by the state in the form of Muslim Family Law. This law, which has common patterns across Muslim cultures, requires women to obtain the permission of their father, husband, or other male guardian to marry or seek employment. Only men can divorce unilaterally and without cause, and while women are given the right to own and dispose of property, they inherit less property than do men (Moghadam 2004).
Caldwell (1987) has described this region as a patriarchal belt, which includes areas in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey and Iran), and South and East Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan, north of India, and rural China). The patriarchal belt is characterised by male domination, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and the association of family honour with female virtue. In the Muslim areas of the patriarchal belt, the holy book *Quran* plays an important role in shaping a society’s gender order. The *Hadith* or *Quran* legitimise veiling and sex-segregation.

Yet classic patriarchy has weakened over time as agrarian societies have transitioned to modern societies, resulting in changes in employment, education, and citizenship associated with capitalism and the development of the modern state. Across cultures and societies modernisation has led to the emergence of women’s political movements, greater opportunities for education, employment and in general, women’s access to the public sphere. This in turn has helped them to achieve a certain level of equality with men (Hapke 2013). A new chapter in the literature on patriarchy has opened, incorporating the assumption that education and employment opportunities and general economic developments for women play an important role in gender equality in various societies (Hapke 2013). Nevertheless, as has been observed through history, patriarchal power has maintained women’s position in the family as well as in law, society and the labour market. Thus feminist studies have sought to explore the persistence of patriarchy, particularly as a form of shared power within society. This has led to the emergence of the new concept of “neo-patriarchy” (Hapke 2013).
Sharabi (1990) applies the concept of neo-patriarchy broadly to describe discourses, relations, and institutions in the Middle East, particularly the Arab world. He defines neo-patriarchy as a modernised patriarchy, a form of modern but traditional patriarchy that exists in the context of dependent capitalism. Within this context, the modernised contemporary family and the state are rooted in patriarchal values and patriarchal gender orders. In other words, state policies encourage and perpetuate the patriarchal family structure, but in a more modernised form (Sharabi 1990). Adopting this viewpoint, Moghadam (2004) studied changing family structures across the Middle East, observing that political factors, including state policy and legal systems or neo-patriarchal state practices, typically build upon and reinforce normative views of women and the family, often to legitimise their own power (2004, pp. 147-148). The study argues that institutions of power such as legal organisations play a significant role in the transformation of classic patriarchy to neo-patriarchy. In other words, family law, such as Islamic family law with its patriarchal context, is principally dependent on the type of political regime, the objectives of state managers, and the orientation of the ruling elites (Moghadam 2004).

In a similar vein, Walby (1990, 1997) analysed transformations of gender relations and the persistence of women’s inequality in different arenas of social life in western contexts. In her approach to understanding how gender relations and patriarchal structures undergo transformations, she provides a useful framework. This framework understands patriarchy as consisting of six structures: household production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions (Walby 1997). The different forms of patriarchy or gender orders are the result of a combination of these different structures (Walby 1997, p. 5).
In her model, Walby also distinguishes between public patriarchy and private or domestic patriarchy. In domestic patriarchy (classic patriarchy), women are excluded from public participation, and their main position is defined within households. In public patriarchy (neopatriarchy), women are not excluded from public participation, but are discriminated against and subordinated within the structures of paid employment, sexuality and the legal system. In public patriarchy, as Walby (1997) stresses, domestic patriarchy is still relevant, though it is not seen as the main structure. Walby’s (1997) key argument is that political action plays an important role in understanding the transformation from domestic to public patriarchy. She supports this argument with the example of the transformation in the West with the impact of first wave of feminism against the backdrop of increased demand for women’s labour (1997).

From this brief review, it can be argued that patriarchal structures and gender relations form in a society as a result of a combination of factors including family systems—marriage, couple behaviours and households; economic reasons such as property rights and access to recourses, the state and its political and legal systems; and sexuality and its unequal relations. Thus patriarchal relations and the gender order are not only related to the structure of one society, but also the ideology (cultural beliefs) embedded within that society. Structures and ideology mediate one another. Therefore in order to understand contemporary patriarchal relations in a society, we need to understand a combination of relations between structure and ideology embedded within that society (Feldman 2001). One could argue then that patriarchal ideologies might vary despite changes in structural conditions towards gender equality.
The following section will reveal the status of Iranian women throughout history, and will make it clear how cultural, social, political, legal and economic relations have formed and reinforced the patriarchal gender order in Iran in particular ways. It will be shown that this Iranian patriarchal gender order has caused the status of Iranian women to swing between modernisation and traditional patriarchal norms.

**Iran: a brief introduction**

Up until A.D. 637 Iran was known as Persia. Persian history is characterised by wars and invaders including the Turks, Genghis Khan and the Mongols, and most influentially, Arabian tribesmen. The strategic location and natural resources of the country meant that one empire after another overran it. The names of the main Persian Empires were the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sassanids (Kambin 2011, pp. 1-15).

The religion of ancient Persia was Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is one the oldest religions in the world and one of the first monotheist religions. The Iranian prophet Zoroaster founded the religion in the sixth century BC. This ancient pre-Islamic religion of Persia survived only in isolated areas, and in India where the descendants of Zoroastrian Persian immigrants are known as Parsis, or Parsees. According to Zoroastrian belief, the head of the manifest universe is Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord. The key idea of the religion is that the forces of good and evil, characterised by two divine figures, are conducting a long battle in which the forces of good will ultimately win (Rose 2010). The policy through the different empires of Iran was mainly to encourage local cultures to flourish within the empire, allowing the people to worship their own gods and to follow their own customs so long as their practices did not
conflict with the necessities of Persian administration. In general, Persia was a strong centralised state and a class society, based on Zoroastrian religion until the seventh century AD (Kambin 2011, pp. 110-114).

Shortly after the death of Khosrow II under the Sassanids’ Empire, the power of the Empire collapsed. Arab forces succeeded in taking the country in AD 637 and Islam replaced Zoroastrianism. The impact of Islam on Persian culture was undeniable. Many Persian and Greek writings were translated into the Arabic language and compulsory Islamic education in schools created new believers in Persian society. The different groups of Muslims who ruled Persia following this Arab-Islamic conquest included the Abassids, the Seljugs, the Mongol conquest, and the Timurian, Safavid, Zand and finally Qajar Dynasties (Kambin 2011, pp. 20-57).

The appellation in Iran that was called Aran was derived from an ancient tribe Aria, and the land where this tribe lived was referred to as the land of Arians (Haftlang 2003, pp. ii-1). Iran used to be called Pers by Europeans and Americans. The name “Iran” was given to the land by ancient Greeks, and was derived from the region in the southwest of Pers (Haftlang 2003, pp. ii-1).

Iran is located between the Caspian Sea in the north and the Persian Gulf to the south. The centre is made up of a desert plateau, which is bounded by elevated chains of mountains that begin in the Caucuses in Turkey and spread to Punjab in India. Despite many small rivers that flow from the mountains around Iran, there is only one large river, the Karun, which is 520
kilometres long and comes from the Zagros Mountains in the northwest of Iran, eventually flowing to the Persian Gulf. The country abounds with natural resources including gas and oil mines, which distinguishes it from the majority of Middle Eastern countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq (Haftlang 2003, pp. ii-1).

Iran is a land of varying climates. Because the land is located between chains of tall mountains, the humid winds from the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf cannot affect the inner regions of the country. The outer foothills of the Iranian mountains are therefore humid and the inner foothills are dry. The northern regions of Iran, close to the Caspian Sea, have a mild climate with higher rainfall than other regions. The Western parts of the country, however, have a more Mediterranean climate, and from West to East the temperature rises slowly. The southern parts of the country have the semi-desert climate with very hot summers (Haftlang 2003, p.17).

Iran and the construction of patriarchy

Women in pre-Islamic Iran (ancient Persia) played a significant role in the development of the country. They were responsible outside the home as well as for raising their children. They played a significant role in agriculture and participated in war activities as well as ruling the Persian Empire (Kambin 2011, p.17-18). The evidence of jewellery from ancient graveyards illustrates that physical appearance and the display of attractiveness were important to ancient Persian women (Kambin 2011, pp. 17-18). In other words, as well as working hard shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, Persian women were interested in exhibiting their femininity, charm and beauty (Kambin 2011, pp. 17-18).
Nevertheless, the historical analysis by Sedghi (2007) focusing on Iranian women’s lives and experiences at the turn of the twentieth century reveals that despite access to the public sphere and their contribution to the economy, Iranian women experienced disapproval from birth to marriage. The birth of a baby girl was less enthusiastically welcomed than that of a baby boy unless she was born to a wealthy family. A baby girl was associated with disappointment for fathers and in some cases resulted in punishment of the mother by her husband or close relatives, whereas a baby boy was celebrated with joy. In some families, giving birth to a baby girl was considered traditionally a nang (social disgrace) sometimes resulting in the baby being buried alive (Sedghi 2007).

Families required their daughters to remain virgins until marriage regardless of the family’s social background. As girls grew up, they learned that their sexuality, labour and productiveness were their only valued abilities, despite the reality that they had little or no control over their own bodies or labour. In marriage, women had respect only if they had children. A woman who was childless was looked upon as a burden. Inequalities were also demonstrated in the sphere of family inheritance. Daughters received half their brother’s share of inheritance. A woman with children inherited just a quarter of her husband’s estate, and one with no children received one eighth (Sedghi 2007, pp. 20-27).

Family or khanevadeh in traditional Iranian culture is recognised as the most significant institution in connecting people together. In traditional Iranian culture family takes precedence over all other social relationships (Nasehi 1985, pp. 557-562). In fact, marriage in Iranian culture is considered not only as the one and only right way of entry to sexual relationships, but is also viewed as an eternal journey that strongly connects two individuals
and their families for the rest of their lives. Historically in Iran marriage has become “essentially universal” for establishing and maintaining idealised family morality, which is integrated with Islamic values and pre-Islamic religion (Aghajanian & Thomson 2013). Given that marriage is strongly encouraged in Islam, highly valued as the most important social relationship and is a commitment forever in Iranian culture, divorce or talagh is considered to be a family misfortune and tragedy. Divorce has been strongly discouraged and stigmatised in Iranian culture particularly for women to the extent that parents tell their daughters that, “a woman will go to her husband’s house with her veil and come out with her kafan (shroud)”—the white cloth covering the body of a dead person to be put in the grave (Aghajanian and Thompson 2013, p. 113). It can be argued that in Iranian patriarchal culture guided by Islamic principles children’s socialization, particularly for girls is designed to ensure they understand and prioritise the importance of establishing and stablising family.

While in mainstream contemporary American or Australian society a sexual relationship before marriage and in general unmarried cohabitation is viewed as something normal and common (Lindsay & Dempsey 2009), in Iranian culture it is still a rare exception. In other words, virginity (bekarat), chastity (nejabat) and authenticity (good family reputation- esalat) are the most important factors for an Iranian man to consider in searching for a potential wife (Shapurian & Hojat 1985, pp. 67-74). In traditional Iran, if no satisfactory evidence exists that the girl was a virgin before marriage, the bridegroom’s family could have the marriage contract nullified (Arasteh 1970, p. 164).
Sedghi (2007) argues that in Shi’a Islam, permanent marriage is a commercial transaction in which the woman is the object of the contractual transaction, and therefore she is exchanged for a *mehr* or bride price. In the marriage contract under Islamic law, a price is approved in exchange for the object of sale (2007, p. 27). Sedghi (2007, p. 28) further notes that the bride price specifies the *saman-e boz* or the price for a woman’s sexual organs, and therefore marriage in traditional Iranian culture and under Islamic law is not for love but rather is legislation for sexual intercourse.

According to Islamic law, claiming the *mehr* can be done at any time after the marriage. However, it is specifically related to divorce, which is a rare event in Iranian society. If divorce occurs, women’s lack of social power prevents them from gaining their *mehr*. In the harsh reality of Iranian gender order, having grown up with poor social respect means that most Iranian girls only gain some economic and social value through marriage (Sedghi 2007, p. 28). This illustrates how the need for Iranian women to believe in marriage has been shaped throughout history. Iranian family law and the state legal system have historically encouraged women to gain value and respect through marriage in order to legitimise their own power. While it may appear that women have been given the right to claim their *mehr* at any time after marriage (modernised patriarchy), the deeply patriarchal ideology embedded in Iranian culture prevents women from using this power.

In the private sphere, woman in the early twentieth century in Iran was referred to as *Zai’feh*, (the weak sex) and her status is as *moti’eh* (obedient to men’s will). Because they spent most of their lives in the private sphere and serving the family, a common name for a wife was
Manzel or ‘the home’. Whether rich or poor, women were expected to devote their entire lives to the family. It was common for wealthy men to have several wives (Sedghi 2007, p. 26).

In terms of work and participation in the marketplace (in the early twentieth century), those few women who worked outside the family (alongside childrearing, sweeping and cooking) struggled against poverty. Most women in paid work were servants and received a lowly wage. The more economically secure women stayed home and devoted their lives to the family. But whether at home or in the marketplace, women encountered male domination and control (Keddie 2003; Martin 2005; Nashat 2003; Sedghi 2007).

The replacement of the Qajar dynasty by the Pahlavis in the 1920s restricted and challenged the clerics’ control over women’s sexuality and some aspects of male domination. The state and the patriarchal structure of Iran may seem to have moved towards modernisation in the following review; however, patriarchal values rooted in Iranian ideology persisted and were reinforced through the next phase of Iranian history. The new secular laws also confirmed the patriarchal and patrilineal nature of the society, albeit in different ways, through Shari’eh (the moral code and religious law of Islam).

**Women and access to higher education in Iran: pre and post Islamic revolution**

In 1921, Reza Khan Pahlavi’s military coup put an end to the Qajar Dynasty (the last Dynasty following the Arab-Islamic conquest) and he first became the prime minister of the country and later the king (Shah) of Iran. During his monarchy, Reza Khan Pahlavi attempted to improve the socio-economic status of Iran as well as make contributions to
Iranian culture. For example, he tried to reduce the role of foreign powers in the internal affairs of the country, developed a western system of education in Iran, made a strong, central government in the capital city of Tehran, and most importantly, he resisted traditional religious beliefs and encouraged a westernstyle clothing in Iran. In order to westernise women’s clothing, Reza Khan Pahlavi banned the *chador*\(^1\) and the *hejab* (veil, cover or modesty) in 1936 (Kambin 2011, pp. 60-66). Reza Khan Pahlavi’s regime was followed by that of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The Pahlavi dynasties ruled Iran until the Islamic revolution of 1979.

The Pahlavi dynasties attempted to westernise Iran by importing western science, technology, and even culture and manners to Iran. As part of the westernisation scheme, some improvement was seen in the status of women. As Sedghi (2007, p. 62) argues, “women’s emancipation meant state exploitation of gender as a measure to combat and contain religious forces and their supporters”. Women’s emancipation was used as a modernising image for the outside world as well as a legitimate foundation for westernisation within Iran. Following the Pahlavi regimes, gender was used to transfer the power from religious authorities to the Pahlavi domain and its government in order to accomplish its westernisation policies. This was evident in changes in women’s dress code, their admission to the labour market and most significantly, their access to higher education (2007, p. 62). It can be argued then that it was during the Pahlavi era that classic patriarchy began to transform into neo-patriarchy or modernised patriarchy.

\(^1\) The chador is a full-body-length semicircle of fabric that is open down the front. This cloth is tossed over the woman’s head, and she then holds it closed in the front. The chador has no hand openings, nor any button clasps, but rather it is held closed by the woman’s hands or tucked under the wearer’s arms. Where it is mandatory in any workplace or university as a form of hejab, it must be only black in colour.
In his efforts to appear modern, Reza Khan Pahlavi first tried to abolish any symbols of traditionalism such as the veil. In order to make the new policy acceptable, Pahlavi was seen in public flanked by his unveiled wife and daughter. Pahlavi then ordered the police to remove the chador forcibly from veiled women, and if necessary even to use scissors to shred their veils. Veiled women were forbidden on public transport and in most shops (Fathi 1985, pp. 108-109). One could argue, therefore, that even though it seemed like the changes were liberating for women, in effect this merely continued the control of women for political purposes—men in power using women as political tools. The difference was that male control shifted from the private to the public sphere, though private patriarchy remained in existence. Pahlavi recognised that education was essential for the progress of his country, and therefore made education compulsory for all children up to grade six. Boys and girls were allowed to sit next to one another in the classrooms, in contrast to the current situation, whereby educational institutions have been segregated by gender since 1979. Teaching basic science and foreign languages, including English and French, became common in high schools. Pahlavi also modified Iran’s court system by replacing religious judges with secular Western-style judges (Kambin 2011, pp. 60-66).

The first university in Iran, Tehran University, was opened in 1935 during the first era of Pahlavi power, with the purpose of educating both men and women. The goal of providing further education under the Pahlavi regime was to create more professionals, to westernise Iran and most importantly, to help the nation’s socio-economic condition. Notably, the education that Pahlavi promoted was secular and nationalistic, and western in form and content. Universities began to train doctors, lawyers and engineers as well as other professionals, all of whom could contribute to the economy and progress of the country.
(Aghajanian et al. 2007). It is also important to note that in the same year that Tehran University opened (1935), the government officially asked all foreign governments to call the country Iran instead of Pers (Haftlang 2003, pp. ii-1). In general, Reza Khan Pahlavi was mainly concerned with modernising Iran, and supporting women's rights was one of the quickest ways he could display Iran's progress to the outside world. Therefore it may appear that during Reza Khan Pahlavi’s era, women had greater freedom, consistent with his aspirations for modern Iran.

By the early 1950s and in connection with urbanisation, women’s work status and their participation in the labour market shifted from agriculture to the service sector. More women sought employment as teachers, nurses and midwives. Statistical figures from 1956 reveal that approximately 52 per cent of women working in urban areas had service jobs (Sedghi 2007). Family law and legal policies were also reformed and some aspects of marriage and divorce laws became secularised (Keddie 2007; Moghadam et al. 2009; Sedghi 2007). Although Pahlavi was uneducated himself, he sent his elder daughters and the Crown Prince (Mohammad Reza Shah) to Tehran Bahai’s elementary school rather than schools run by Muslims. Enrolment in traditional, Muslim schools reduced dramatically during his time in power (Sedghi 2007, p. 72). However, one contradiction was that Pahlavi himself did not permit foreign education for his daughters, although he did for his son. Overall, secular education and Pahlavi’s westernisation reforms in general did little to overcome the patriarchal structure of society (Keddie 2007; Moghadam et al. 2009; Sedghi 2007).

One of the characteristics of the patriarchal gender order that persisted under Pahlavi was Iranian ideology/culture and its family system. Despite advancement in the educational
system and access to higher education, many families preferred to establish their daughters in arranged marriages rather than to educate them (Sedghi 2007, p.72). Most of the new marriage laws, such as the agreement between the bride and the groom and the authorisation of women to marry aliens in the case of a divorce or cancellation of engagement, were applied mainly in urban areas and among wealthier families rather than among the poor and those living in the countryside (Sedghi 2007, p. 72).

Sexuality provided another means by which the Iranian patriarchal structure under Pahlavi was maintained and reinforced. During Reza Khan Pahlavi’s time, the death penalty was abolished for women. In some cases women used this advantage to save the lives of their male relatives or husbands by blaming themselves for murder or drug dealing, and so they went to prison instead of being executed. However, discrimination against women concerning moral issues such as adultery made them very vulnerable to sexual abuse by the police and jail staff. In the most famous modern prison, Qasr, built between 1920 and 1925, a separate women’s section was planned. Women’s prisons were merely the most underprivileged sections within men’s prisons (Afshar 2005).

Women’s subordination and sexual objectification in the private sphere also continued under the Pahlavi regimes. In conformity with the Shari’eh the husband maintained his absolute control over his wife and the new secular laws confirmed the patriarchal structure of the family and the society in general. As part of her wifely duties, a woman was still obliged to be sexually obedient to her husband. It was a husband’s right to receive “sexual gratification at times of his choosing”, regardless of a wife’s wish (Sedghi 2007, p. 74). The state policies
and family legal system also legitimised men’s power over women. The husband retained absolute authority to divorce his wife or wives in conformity with Shari’eh law, and legally children belonged to their fathers in the event of a separation (Sedghi 2007, p. 74). With regard to employment, a husband’s permission was still required: “A husband may forbid his wife to accept a job that is degrading to him or her” (Sedghi 2007, p. 74).

In 1941, Reza Khan Pahlavi began to form a relationship with Germany, mainly to facilitate the construction of a railroad system across Iran. As activities between Iran and Germany increased over time, this became a concern for British authorities. For instance, with the aid of the Germans, Iranians revolted against the British government. Furthermore, a British-based corporation that ruled over Iran’s vast oil trade, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, began to fear that their Abadan oil factory in Iran, which produced eight million tons of oil a year, would fall into Nazi hands. The events around World War II further complicated the situation, as Russia desperately needed to transfer military equipment via the Iranian rail system. British forces entered Iran from the south and Russian forces entered from the north. On September 17, 1941, British and Soviet troops entered Tehran (Iran’s capital city) and forced Reza Khan to resign from power in favour of his son, the young Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Twenty-two year-old Mohammad Reza Pahlavi replaced Reza Khan as king of Iran in 1941. Reza Khan Pahlavi died in exile (Johannesburg, South Africa) in 1944 (Kambin 2011, pp. 66-70).

2 A city in Iran, 53 kilometres from the Persian Gulf.
Between 1941 and 1946, Iran was under occupation by Britain and the Soviet Union (Russia) as a result of a tripartite treaty signed in January 1942. The government’s power was significantly reduced, and the occupation greatly decreased Iranian independence. In addition, the demand for Allied forces put the country under economic pressure. This situation, which lasted until 1953, led the parliament of Iran (Majles) to experience a period of great instability. Over the 12 years following 1941, 31 cabinets and 140 ministers changed (Bakhtiar 1996, p. 28).

During this period of social uprising (1941-1953), the issue of nationalisation of oil dominated Iranian politics. In fact, after World War II when Britain’s situation as the strongest world power had diminished, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi aligned himself with the United States. In return, the USA kept the Shah in power by engineering and executing a coup in 1953 (Ali 2008, pp. 4-5). Following the coup, Mosaddeq, a popular elected prime minister of Iran, was removed from power. Mosaddeq had wanted to take over Iran’s vast oil reserves rather than allowing the USA or the UK to have control over them. In other words, the unsuccessful nationalist government, particularly the government of Mosaddeq (1951-1953), was linked predominantly with oil politics. In 1953, the CIA staged a coup that overthrew the nationalist government, and supported Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to rebuild his power again by establishing firmer control over the parliament. As a consequence, Iran’s social and economic status witnessed significant and rapid structural changes. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi increased the oil price notably, which led to massive industrialisation, urbanisation and the development of infrastructure in Iran (Bakhtiar 1996, pp. 29-32). It can be argued that in reality, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi reduced the power
of the parliament and gained back his own power to control the country (Rahnema and Behdad 1996, p. 48).

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s principal goal was to further transform Iran from a traditional, religious and feudal society to a modern, westernised and industrialised one as fast as possible (Ali 2008: 4-5). In order to do that, more higher education institutions were opened around the nation, in cities including Tehran, Shiraz, Esfahan and Mashhad, to create more expertise and skilled people to serve the new Iran. In fact, between 1963 and the 1970s, economic growth due to oil investment led to greater demand for professionals, specifically in civil engineering and related fields (Jackson & Malcolm 2011; Shavarini 2005).

In order to accomplish the goal of modernising Iran, close links were also forged with non-Iranian universities, particularly in the United States. Iranian students studying in European and American universities were returning to Iran upon graduation, transferring not only western academic knowledge and skills in technology, but also western culture and mannerisms. With respect to women, the provision of educational facilities—both at home and abroad—produced female engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, and other professional women in a great variety of modern-sector careers and positions. Higher education became a pathway to a better life and greater respect for both men and women. Holding university degrees, and in particular post-graduate qualifications, became symbolic of prestige, social achievement and led to higher status in society (Jackson & Malcolm 2011; Shavarini 2005).
However, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi continued his father’s (Reza Khan Pahlavi) program of westernising and modernising Iran, but failed fully to win the battle against the clergy with regard to the gender order. His reforms meant that women were recruited into the police force and trained as wards for women detainees, but this did not really help reduce the sexual abuse of female prisoners (Afshar 2005). Despite the possibilities he created for women to access higher education and work outside the home, they commonly faced sexual harassment at university and at work. Women were still expected to earn a promotion by flirting or providing sexual favours to their male superiors (Paidar 1997, p. 165). In addition, the same law regarding women’s participation in the labour market continued during Mohammad Reza Shah’s power: “A husband is entitled to prevent his wife from undertaking a profession or trade which is repugnant to the interest of the family or the honor and dignity of the husband or wife” (Fathi, 1985, pp. 117-118).

Even during the time of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s modernisation drives, some laws and policies relating to adultery and punishment stated that: “Whenever a husband sees his wife with a strange man in a compromising position and thereby murders or injures one of the parties or the two of them, he is exempt from punishment” (Sedghi 2007, p. 141). At the same time, the law stated that if a wife were to see her husband engaged in adultery leading her to murder him, she would be imprisoned for life. Surprisingly, if she murdered his companion, she received a reduced sentence of 15 years imprisonment (as cited in Sedghi 2007, p. 142). This means that although the crime was the same, the life of a man in Iranian culture was worth more than that of a woman. It may also suggest that when a husband kills his wife for
the same reason as a wife kills her husband, the life of the wife is not of equivalent value to
the husband’s companion in the second case.

The state also gave fathers and brothers the same rights over women as those of husbands.
Such policies were justified, since it was considered that these were men’s natural reactions to
events that harm their “pride, compassion, chastity, honor and prejudice” (Sedghi, 2007, pp.
142-143). In such a male-dominated society, women generally acted very passively in the face
of unfaithful husbands, while daily newspapers often printed stories about murderous
husbands, fathers or brothers that presented them in a positive light. If the situation with a
disloyal husband was unbearable for a wife to live with, and the woman had financial support
of some sort, she might seek divorce, but this was not necessarily a better destiny for her.
Divorced women were socially disgraced and considered as “second hand commodities”
(Sedghi 2007, p. 144).

Overall, despite the positive and rapid achievements made by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi
with his modernisation agenda, a contradiction emerged. According to Keddie (2000), one
important contradiction was the cultural dualism or division of society. She depicts the
situation in which on the one hand there was a group of people who were modern, secular and
highly westernised in dress, culture and politics. In relation to this category, the number of
Iranian students studying in western universities before 1979 was higher than that of any other
non-western country. On the other hand, there was a traditional group of people, who had ties
to the clergy and followed the traditional Islamic norms, including “top-to-toe” *hejab/chador*
for women (Keddie 2000). In addition to this cultural dualism Keddie (2000) explains that the
rapid changes under Pahlavis including rural and urban migration, major cultural and
economic dislocations and most importantly widening income gaps, brought much
dissatisfaction among Iranians.

Further studies on the history of Iran during the 1960s and 1970s observe that after the coup
in 1953 and the removal of Mosaddeq, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi became increasingly
interested in making Iran into the regional power of the Middle East. To do this, he undertook
social and economic reforms. The Shah’s modernisation plan was touted as shifting Iran from
the seventeenth century into the twentieth, making it an industrial nation (Ali 2008, p. 4-5).

Subsequent to the above situation, and underpinned by people’s dissatisfaction, Iran initiated
steps towards the revolution of 1979. Explosions of anger among millions of Iranian people in
the spring of 1978, first in the city of Tabriz and then in Qum, were credited to “obscurantist
mullahs” (Rouleau 1980, p. 1) hostile to the Shah's agrarian reform. This anger was followed
by strikes in factories, schools, universities and oil fields, which paralysed the state and
eventually led to the departure of the monarchy (Rouleau 1980, p. 1).

Khomeini was an Iranian cleric who first began his political activities directed against
Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s programs at Qum in the 1960s. Khomeini was arrested and
forced into exile in 1964 but continued his activities from Najaf in Iraq. With the agreement
of Iraqi’s government, Reza Shah Pahlavi deported Khomeini from Iraq in 1978. When
Khomeini was then rejected at Kuwait’s border, he travelled to Paris. A few months before
Khomeini left Paris for Iran in 1978, the daily British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
Persian-language program was broadcasting his messages and statements to the Iranian people. He was introduced as a sincere believer in freedom, democracy, justice and human rights, and as a social democrat. On his behalf, the BBC delivered his message that, “our motto is freedom, respect for human rights, including women’s rights and minority rights”. Furthermore, he added that he had “no intention of acquiring a governmental position. My duties will be confined to those of spiritual matters” (Ganji 2002, p. 36). Khomeini arrived in Tehran from Paris on the 1st of February 1979. He pronounced the incumbent Bakhtiar government to be illegal, and called for the strikes and demonstrations to continue (International Business Publications USA 2005, p. 123).

Ali (2008, p. 1) argues that the “Iranian Revolution was one of the most surprising events in 1979. Until then, Iran was thought to be a calm ship in the rocky waters of the Middle East”. However, in only a few months after 1979, Islamic, anti-western rules replaced the secular, modern elements of Iran (Ali 2008, p.1). Iran became a theocratic republic after the monarchy, a nation with elements of a republican constitution but effectively ruled by Muslim clerics. Iran’s new government’s system was composed of five main elements: the supreme leader who is head of the state and a member of the Muslim clergy, an elected president who is head of the government, a parliament with restricted powers, the Assembly of Experts containing a group of clerics that elect the head of state, and finally the Council of Guardians which can overrule the parliament (Aldosari 2007, p. 488).

The revolution of 1979 led millions of Iranians to migrate to different countries around the globe, with large numbers of people going to the United States. Before the revolution, Iranian emigrants to the United States and other countries were mainly professionals and students,
mostly as temporary residents. This was followed by a rise of religious minorities and high-ranking officers during the revolutionary period, and by refugees and family members of the previously-naturalised citizens in the post-revolutionary period (Mobasher 2006). During 1978 and 1979, nearly 14,317 Iranians migrated to the United States. The number of refugees and asylum seekers in America before the revolution was negligible. However, after the revolution this number increased dramatically (Mobasher 2006). The arrival of political refugees and immigrants post revolution opened an entirely new chapter in the short history of Iranian presence in the United States. Never before in the long history of Iran did so many people involuntarily leave their country. The emigration of Iranian people across the globe included men and women (Ansari 2011). This was in part because the new government’s policies had led to the disenfranchisement of women.

Khomeini’s regime was strongly against the idea of women in public roles. Immediately after the revolution, and before the formulation of a new constitution, one of the very first moves of the new regime was the stimulation of gender segregation and the reconstruction of existing family laws (Ali 2008, p. 1). According to Hoodfar and Sadr (2010, pp. 890-891): “The new regime’s ideologues envisioned an Islamic society based on gender apartheid, effectively eradicating the gains that women’s rights activists had made over seven decades” (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010, pp. 890-891).

Khomeini voided the Family Protection Law within two weeks of coming to power. The right to divorce, polygamy and temporary marriage (*sighe*) was encouraged for men. Temporary marriages are legal in contemporary Iran, initiated under the Islamic regime. They require a marriage contract like that of a permanent marriage. However, this terminates at the
expiration of the period stipulated. If the woman is a virgin, the permission of her father and father-in-law is still required. The age of maturity (puberty) for girls was set at nine years, and for boys at 14. Penalties of stoning and lashing were administered in the event that sexual relationships occurred outside official marriage, and compulsory hejab/veiling was announced for women when in public (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010, pp. 890-891). Women were also disqualified from becoming judges in accordance with Shi’a tradition.

*Hejab* for women became the most persistent symbol of the revolution and the fundamental policies of the Islamic state (Hoodfar 1992; Keddie 1991; Sedghi 2007). Many revolutionary participants warned unveiled women: “Wear a head scarf or get your head knocked”. Some of the slogans linked unveiling to men’s weakness: “Unveiling stems from men’s emasculation” or “Death to the unveiled woman and her cowardly husband” (Sedghi 2007, p. 199). The hejab became a symbol of power over women as the new government devalued secular, westernised women, considering them to be monarchical (*taqūti*) and indecent. Wearing the hejab in public became compulsory by law, and in 1983 in response to women’s opposition to re-veiling, the new Islamic law stated that a woman would receive 74 lashes for violation of the hejab laws, with the penalty increasing to 10 to 60 days imprisonment in 1995 (Sedghi 2007, p. 201).

Victims of double persecution, female prisoners were forced (and still are) to wear a black chador in conformity with their female guards, whether or not they were Muslim. Outside the prison system, Islamic justice imposed rigid social, moral and behavioural codes on women. The armed forces and many parliamentary organisations, such as the basij, arrested masses of
women and girls for adultery, prostitution or simply unlawful contact with men. Revolutionary Islamic courts condemned many women to execution and many others to physical punishment or imprisonment (Afshar 2005). Therefore, under both the Pahlavi and the Islamic regimes, the state has played a significant role in modifying and restructuring women’s sexuality and gender relations.

Spontaneously, women started to oppose the new regime and its rules, particularly in relation to compulsory *hejab*. This was demonstrated with one of the biggest movements of Iranian women in history. Although, the movement had some impact on the regime temporarily, the participation of a large population of women who wore a veil as a symbol of support for the revolution provided the regime with an excuse to ignore women as political agents (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010, p. 891). In general, despite all attempts by those Iranian women opposed to their subjugation, “the law continues to state that the value of a woman’s life is half that of a man’s; in court two women witnesses are equal to one man; and women inherit half as much as their male counterparts” (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010, p. 891).

Women’s access to the public sphere was significantly reduced under Khomeini’s regime, and state policies and new legal system encouraged and valued women’s roles in the domestic sphere. The education system changed, particularly for women. After the victory of the Islamic Republic and the replacement of the monarchy, women were obliged to return to pure Islamic behaviour. The government closed day-care centres that had enabled women to participate in paid work and indirectly forced women to shun educational and career goals. (Aghajanian et al. 2007, pp. 52-53).
After closing down the universities for three years, institutions were re-opened in 1982, but were based on the Islamic policy of segregation. According to the government’s view, women should work only in specific occupations, and as a consequence were permitted entrance only into education, health and related fields. This happened despite Ayatollah Khomeini’s gratitude for the noteworthy role Iranian women had played in the quick victory of the revolution (Aghajanian et al 2007, pp. 52-53). Paidar (1997) briefly but powerfully describes women’s situation post revolution:

Two years after the Revolution, *hejab* was in full force, women had lost the right to initiate divorce and have child custody, they have been barred from becoming a judge or a president, they could not attend school if they were married, they could not study and work in range of subjects and jobs, and they had been totally subjugated to male power (1997, p. 232).

Generally, women’s prescribed primary roles were as mothers and wives only. The new government’s rules—and particularly its family law in favour of men—dramatically reduced Iranian women’s status and their position in society. However, this situation changed slightly between 1980 and 1997, and after the Iran-Iraq war.

Iran was at war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988. Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, claimed that the reason for his attack on Iran was a territorial dispute over the Shatt al Arab, a waterway that empties into the Persian Gulf and forms the boundary between Iran and Iraq. The ceasefire in 1988, followed by the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, meant the start of a new chapter in Iran. The supreme religious leader Ayatollah Ali Hoseini Khamenei became leader of the Islamic Republic, and Hashemi Rafsanjani, a revolutionary leader who was very close to Ayatollah Khomeini, became the president of the country (Aghajanian et al. 2007).
In May 1997, President Khatami was elected by a large margin and with the overwhelming support of the Iranian people. Social and political changes, mainly for the benefit of women and the younger generations, began to occur.

During Khatami’s eight years as president, women were provided with greater educational and occupational opportunities, and in general were encouraged towards more social and non-household activities. Indeed, the most significant change with respect to women during Khatami’s presidency was that the regulations forbidding women from entering certain fields of study were modified. Women were provided with more access to study and work in different fields (Aghajanian et al. 2007, pp. 52-53). For example, a woman became Vice-President of Environmental Affairs in the government and some women became deputy ministers (Rezai-Rashti 2011, p. 49). According to Mehdizadeh and Scott (2011, pp. 148-149), a key consequence of this modification was the increased percentage of women attending universities to continue their studies. While in 1979, 49.36 per cent of university applicants were women, by 2002 this number was raised to 59.7 per cent (Mehdizadeh and Scott 2011, pp.148-149).

In 2003, the results of the national university exam, the *Kunkur*, revealed that 62 per cent of those who passed the exam and gained entry to university were women (Zahedi 2003). This imbalance generated significant social and political debate concerning the role of higher education for Iranian women. During these discussions, the Iranian parliament (*Majlis*) questioned whether limits on the number of women entering Iranian public colleges and universities should be re-imposed, especially in fields such as medicine and engineering (Shavarini 2006a, p.43). As Rezai-Rashti (2011, p. 85) explains, the parliamentary debates
and concerns about women’s education resulted in conflicting and contradictory roles for Iranian women: “On the one hand, women were expected to participate in increasing numbers in public life; but on the other hand, there were more restrictions over dress codes to preserve an Islamic moral order” (Rezai-Rashti 2011, p. 85). In fact, the Islamic government worried that if women performed better in education than did their male counterparts, the family structure that formed the basis of an Islamic society might be threatened (Shavarini 2006a, p. 43). Najmabadi (1998) argues that the parliamentary debate on this issue published in national newspapers was paradoxical:

Since its 1979 inception, the IRI (Islamic Republic of Iran) has strongly advocated educating Iranian women. Iran’s revolutionary leader, Ayatullah Khomeini (d. 1989), extolled the role of women as mothers and wives and as educated citizens of the Islamic Republic. Family is the foundation of a Muslim society, and women as mothers are to be educated so they can properly maintain the sacrosanct family unit (1998, p.113).

As the above quote illustrates, once again women’s primary roles as wives and mothers were exhorted and valued, and the role of education for women was to assist them in fulfilling those roles adequately. Women were encouraged to educate themselves, but at the same time they were expected to prioritise their roles as mothers and wives. No public participation or occupation for women was to be valued more than those highly-praised roles of mother and wife. It can be argued, then, that although some improvements and new hopes with respect to women’s situation emerged post 1997, many women showed a preference for, or were confined to, staying at home rather than participating in the marketplace. As Sedghi explains, after encountering gender bias or not finding suitable employment, many women lost their motivation, and as would be expected in following Iranian culture, they preferred to stay
home, drawing their identity from being wives, mothers and daughters instead of as individuals and professionals (Sedghi 2007, pp. 231-232).

Women’s status was lowered by the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005.

**Contemporary Iran: higher education and work for women**

In 2005 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president of the Islamic Republic, and has been one of the world's most controversial political leaders. He strongly supported Khamenei (Iran's supreme leader) and the Council of Guardians, a conservative body of unelected clerics and lawyers that maintains a firm control on Iranian society. He brought Iran into conflict with western countries, especially the United States, as a result of his continuing development of nuclear technology (Vakil 2011). The new government and its conservative social, political policies dramatically increased the number of Iranian migrants across the globe (Hakimzadeh 2006).

At the end of 2005, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated there were 111,684 Iranian refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern across the globe. The countries hosting the largest populations of Iranian refugees were Germany (39,904), the United States (20,541), Iraq (9,500), the United Kingdom (8,044), the Netherlands (6,597), and Canada (6,508) (Hakimzadeh 2006). Even though Ahmadinejad’s new social and political purposes led to unhappiness for both Iranian men and women, it was women’s status that was particularly affected. In reality, Ahmadinejad’s era began a new
chapter in Iran’s migration history that was undeniably linked with the disenfranchisement of women.

Ahmadinejad’s campaign started by renewing restrictions on women, including firmer control of their *hejab*. In addition to this, in 2006 Ahmadinejad’s government applied a 50 per cent quota for male students and 50 per cent for female students in the university entrance exam for certain fields such as medicine and dentistry. This plan was aimed at stopping the growing numbers of female students entering universities. The quota was justified as being supportive of family and religion (International Business Publications USA 2006, p.106). Women were once again confronted with the same challenges and contradictory policies experienced under previous parliaments, especially during the first decade after 1979 (Vakil 2011, pp. 168-169). Again under Ahmadinejad’s government, women faced both gender discrimination and an unfair economic system that was not conducive to the generation of employment, despite the fact that they had access to higher education (Rashti & Moghadam 2011, pp. 419).

In effect, the government could not ban higher education for women because of religion: Islam does not support the denial of education. However, higher education has not brought greater benefits for Iranian women in the labour market, and their labour market participation continues to be restricted. The majority of educated women maintain their traditionally-expected roles at home as mothers and wives, as it is difficult for them to find paid employment (Shavarini 2006a, p.43). Studies show that due to gender discrimination, the chances of educated Iranian women finding paid work are minimal. College-educated women find the social roles that remain assigned to them relegate them to the private sphere of their homes (Rezai-Rashti 2011; Shavarini 2005 and 2006).
Following the footsteps of culture has not only stopped many women from participating in the marketplace, but has also discouraged them from expressing themselves in the private sphere. A study by Moghadam et al. (2009) shows that although both men and women believe in peace as their ideal quality in relationships and in the family, in many families and relationships women are viewed as responsible for keeping that peace. According to Moghadam et al. (2009, pp. 45-46), peace in most Iranian families is maintained, “through women’s sacrifice, men’s needs are met at all times…she is here to live and sacrifice”. Women’s expectations of equality and the definition of mutuality are also affected by the patriarchal social structure. This study shows that some women gave up their profession to be a full-time mother and wife; they agreed with their husbands that if he works hard outside and she works hard at home, then they have equal rights (Moghadam et al. 2009, p. 46). This illustrates how male domination of the private sphere shapes marital power in Iranian culture.

The family institution is not free from the state and its patriarchal structure, or in other words, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, structure and ideology mediate one another. In the private sphere, Islamic law talks about protecting women and valuing them (neo-patriarchy), but at the same time the male-dominated nature of Islamic law gives the man the authority and power in the relationship.

Moghadam et al.’s study (2009) illustrates that although several Iranian couples reported that they believe in equality, the patriarchal structure of society limits actual equality between them. Participants in the study agreed that their wives are over burdened, but husbands did not perceive this as unequal. They justified it by saying that they have both accepted their responsibilities (2009, p. 47). Another theme among the responses reported in Moghadam et al.’s (2009) study is that some women may feel valued and respected by being fully in charge
of all household labours, giving them an illusion of power in the relationship. Reflecting this, some full-time housewives expressed in Moghadam et al.’s (2009) research that they believe men are not capable of doing housework properly, and when they do take on housework, the wives have to do the job again because it has not been done correctly (Moghadam et al. 2009, p. 48). This suggests that meanings and values embedded in Iranian society have become dominant in shaping Iranian women’s ways of thinking and being in the world. The societal norms and values of Iranian society (symbolic interactionism) seem to lead Iranian women to develop self-concepts as mothers and wives through social interactions. These roles (mothers and wives) became symbolic of an idealised woman in Iranian culture.

In a society like Iran “the way in which individuals view social institutions such as marriage and family is heavily guided by social norms, gender roles, ethnic identification and religious faith” (Hojat et al. 2000, p. 421). The importance of family in some cultures, and particularly in Islam, has defined and restricted female identity, and therefore decision-making legitimacy, to the familial role of mother and wife (Moghadam et al. 2009). According to the Indian feminist Narayan (2004):

Not only are the roles of wife and mother highly praised, but in cultures that take their values from religious institutions like Hindu or Islam, women are also seen as the cornerstones of the spiritual well being of their husbands and children. They are admired for their supposedly higher moral, religious, and spiritual qualities (2004, p. 215).

Narayan (2004, p. 215) goes on to explain: “In cultures which have this pervasive religious component, everything seems assigned a place and value as long as it keeps to its place”.

42
From the standpoint of a woman in such a culture, her place in society is valued only while she remains in her traditionally-prescribed place (Narayan 2004, p. 215).

As for women with higher levels of education, they might expect to find it much more problematic to accept their roles as mothers and wives than before being at university. After becoming educated and experiencing university, these women can find it difficult to return to their old roles as mothers and wives. On encountering barriers that limit them from being productive members of society, they might prefer to return to their roles in the private sphere. Therefore, increasing the level of women’s education has not really changed the patriarchal gender structure of Iran. Providing women with access to higher education seems rather to be a political tool to exercise modern patriarchy.

Rezai-Rashti’s study (2011, p. 87) reveals increasing unemployment rates for men and women, but that women were most impacted by this (particularly since 2005). Although women in Iran are not directly banned from pursuing careers upon graduation from university, the new government indirectly imposes barriers in order to make women return to their domestic roles.

Cultural and social issues in Iran also affect the status of women’s employment. For instance, the participants in Rezai-Rashti’s study (2011, pp. 90-95), who were all professional and highly-educated women, discussed their experiences pre and post employment. Although they were all employed, they spoke of the difficulties of finding a job and the challenges they faced after employment. One of the most important issues was the need to have personal connections to access the labour market. They asserted that most jobs are obtained through
knowing someone in a high position. They also talked about the difficulties in getting positions in certain fields due to factors such as being single, not wearing proper Islamic hejab (such as a chador), and the persistence of conservative attitudes and corruption in some government workplaces. Women who studied in technical fields (such as engineering) explained that they faced further discrimination in the workplace after being hired, because of their gender. The results of this study also show that those in authority in Iran put so many barriers in their way that women choose to stay in the same position rather than face additional challenges in order to become a manager or administrator (Rezai-Rashti 2011, pp. 90-95).

Thus the government’s concern is not based on women’s entrance into the labour force; rather it is that better-educated women potentially pose a threat to private (classic) patriarchy. Notably it would appear that the government cannot argue that Islam can withhold education from its people (Shavarini 2006a, p. 46); instead it utilises political, social and cultural powers to restrict the participation of women in labour markets, education and the public domain in general by assigning value to their roles in the family and giving them domestic agency. It can therefore be argued that this domestic agency creates a powerful incentive for the government to reject education. Education destabilises the security and approval gained through this essentially private role that is afforded public value as though it were beneficial for women. This is a collective priority for a stable society, which sees the education of women as a threat.

The above discussion has demonstrated that while Iranian women have had good access to higher education throughout history, because of the Iranian gender order, they have not
necessarily been able to enjoy all the benefits associated with an education. Higher education has not led Iranian women to take active roles in Iranian society to the same extent, as do men. Yet university experience for Iranian women is a source of academic, intellectual growth as well as personal or self-growth. In other words, higher education and university experience for Iranian women has the potential to channel them into the public domain and to access freedom from the dictates of family life (Shavarini 2005; 2006).

Shavarini’s studies (2005; 2006) of the role of higher education in Iranian women’s lives illustrate that higher education raises consciousness of gender for Iranian women. She found that Iranian women knew little about themselves before experiencing university: “University is the first, and sometimes the only space, where Iranian women have public presence” (Shavarini 2006b, p. 195). Within this public space, they began to know themselves and their relationship with wider society. It is not difficult to imagine that university and higher education offers hope for opportunities and change for a woman living in a conservative, restrictive Muslim society. Therefore, although higher education does not necessarily lead Iranian women to have careers and public positions, it is nevertheless certainly a road to an “awareness of alternatives” and possibilities in life (Shavarini 2006b, p. 195).

Shavarini’s (2006a) study shows that passing the university test and leaving their small hometowns and families to study in the capital city of Tehran introduces Iranian women to a whole new experience. For the first time in their lives, they are on their own and they can make their own decisions (2006a, p. 47). Nevertheless, Shavarini reveals that the campus lifestyle in Iranian universities is strictly guarded and student’s lives are controlled, and this
applies particularly to female students. Shavarini (2006a) describes the crowded dormitory buildings, with 10 very small, female-only rooms on each floor housing approximately 80 students. Landline phones are activated only between 3pm and 10pm and there are no computers in the building. Among the efforts of the school administration to control the desires of female students, the most surprising one according to Shavarini (2006a) is using kafir in students’ food. The school cafeteria uses kafir in the food, which is a natural herb believed to quell students’ hormonal activity (Shavarini 2006a, p. 48). This substance is also used in prison and military food. Despite steps taken by the school administration to control these young women, Shavarini’s (2006a) study shows that female students try to find ways to circumvent them.

Female students in Shavirani’s (2006a) study described going to the Internet café across from the university to chat with their boyfriends (via text message). Shavarini (2006a) analyses her interviewees’ lives outside the restrictive campus and in their private space of the Internet where they try to learn more about their boyfriends and perhaps about themselves. Although Internet websites are filtered in Islamic culture (especially pornographic and political websites), those western websites that remain accessible allow these women to gain exposure to “liberated women, to choices, possibilities and to what they are not, at least yet” (Shavarini 2006a, p. 49).

Shavirani’s (2006a) study also illustrates that these educated women would like to work after graduation rather than being confined to the home all day. This aspiration occurs even though they accept that in Iranian culture no paid work for women can compare with being a mother
and raising good children. It reveals that the women coming to Tehran for an education hesitate to go back to their hometowns after graduation because they believe that smaller cities and towns in Iran are more conservative than Tehran. They were concerned that if they want to use their degree after graduation to get a job in order to be independent, this might jeopardise their opportunities for marriage proposals. This is because they are aware that it is proper only for men to be the family breadwinners and, therefore it is expected and accepted as normal that educated women will just marry and stay at home (Shavarni 2006a, p. 51). This is evidence that within their environment, Iranian women assign meaning and value to marriage as an important part of their lives and identities. They are concerned that being independent financially may threaten their chances for marriage.

Studies (e.g. Shavarini 2005; 2006) show that although many highly-educated women might marry and settle down after graduation, an identity shift happens through their university experience, and this is reflected in their post-graduation life. Indeed, after what has been gained in university, these women cannot return to their pre-university lives. For instance, even if marriage was traditionally seen as a “forever” commitment in Iranian culture, recent reports illustrate that the divorce rate has been increasing steeply in Iran, and that marriages are ending early (Aghajanian & Thompson 2013; Yong 2010).

Despite gaining awareness and some empowerment through education and employment, studies show that traditional cultural values around gender roles in favour of men remain largely unchanged in Iran. In reality, women’s education and employment has not really altered cultural boundaries and restrictions on women and gender roles, but rather has added
more pressures and paradoxes to their lives (Bagherian 1990; Ghorayshi 1996; Kamali 2002; Moghadam 1998; Nasehi 1985). For example, regardless of their level of education and the type of profession, most participants in Ghorayshi’s study (1996, pp. 458-459.) reported that they are overwhelmed by being fully in charge of domestic duties as well as their outside careers. In such situations where women maintain full-time jobs outside the home as well as mothering, domestic and familial tasks, Ghorayshi argues (1996, p. 459) that women become very vulnerable as workers and are considered by employers to be less reliable workers than their male counterparts.

In effect, university experience and education have had an influence on Iranian women’s identities, and their awareness about life and about themselves. It has also led some to experience financial independence and to participate in the public social domain. However, it appears that the strong cultural, religious traditions and the legal prescriptions and proscriptions of Iranian society continue to prevent women from moving beyond their dictated roles towards a new identity.

In August 2013, Hassan Rouhani became the president of Iran and promised to balance realism and the pursuit of the Islamic Republic’s ideals. However, in the short period since his presidency, the status of women remains unclear.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide general knowledge about Iran and its history, together with its economic, political and educational systems and their relations with the
gender order. The chapter has attempted to enhance understanding of patriarchy, patriarchal factors and their persistence throughout Iran’s history. This deeper understanding of the concept leads to more sophisticated analyses of gender issues in society. As well as leading to a better comprehension of the lives and experiences of Iranian women, this establishes the context for the experiences of women who have participated in the study.

This chapter has addressed the fluctuations in Iranian women’s status throughout history; the development and awareness of alternatives through access to higher education during the Pahlavi reigns; their deterioration in status after the Islamic Revolution of 1979; new hopes and developments post 1997; and the loss of hope and status since 2005. It has revealed that Iranian women’s status has seesawed throughout history between disciplinary policies and emancipatory promises.

It has also been illustrated that Iranian women have had good access to higher education throughout recent history and even after the 1979 Islamic revolution. However, women are primarily valued and encouraged in their roles as mothers and wives within the private sphere. Even though Islamic religion encourages education for its people, including women, Iran’s socio-cultural values serve to prevent Iranian women from taking up active roles in society. This chapter has highlighted that not only have religious rules and laws influenced the Iranian gender order, but also that traditional cultural beliefs and standards have affected Iranian women themselves. The patriarchal gender order of Iran prevents women from reaping the benefits of their education, especially with regard to labour market.
Overall, it has been argued here that Iran has long been patriarchal, and that patriarchy has persisted and been reinforced in Iranian society through a combination of economic, political, educational, social and cultural factors. The patriarchal gender order of Iran is fundamental to the formation of Iranian women’s perceptions of self and their positions in both the private and public spheres. It has been revealed that although education for Iranian women has played an important role in their awareness of alternatives, their gender roles and socio-cultural status remain largely unchanged. Iranian women are still expected to be mothers and wives, not workers.

The following chapter will review migration literature and post-migration life experiences through the perspective of gender.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

MIGRATION DECISION-MAKING AND POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCES

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that Iran has a long history of patriarchy, and even though Iranian women have had good access to higher education, their position in society as mothers and wives has remained largely unchanged due to the Iranian patriarchal gender order. The objective in this chapter is to examine why and how people decide to migrate, and the impacts of migration on individuals’ life experiences. First an overview of the migration literature will be provided, with particular focus on lifestyle migration. Next the connection between gender, ethnicity and migration will be explored, with attention drawn to the extent to which sexuality, ethnicity and gender roles may affect migration decision-making. There will then be an examination of the impact of migration on gender identity, family and household, followed by skilled migration and migrants’ work experiences. Finally, this chapter explores the price of migration for a better life. The general discussion reveals that migration decision-making and migration activities should be analysed in the specific social contexts within which they occur. Not only does gender play an important role in migration decision-making, but post-migration experiences are also structured around gender. It is argued that changes in social context and circumstances can shift individuals’ perceptions of self, patterns of interaction in the
family and relationship and work status. This shift can be a positive shift, yet it can lead to an experience of hybridity.

**Deciding to migrate**

Humans migrate in the hope of a better life, some voluntarily and some involuntarily. Often they move as a consequence of unhappiness. People migrate to take advantage of economic opportunities and to advance their scale of living, to escape over-population or resource pressures, to access technology, or for political, psychological, religious, educational, medical and many other reasons (Ruback et al. 2004).

Push and pull factors refer to the motivation and circumstances under which people decide to move out (Froehlich 2008; Leuner 2008; Schoorl 1995). These factors either push citizens out of their country of origin, or pull them towards their destination. That is, while the push factors in the country of origin motivate the individual to move to the destination country, the pull factors of the destination country motivate and attract the migrant to move to better circumstances. Key push factors include national economic problems, war, natural disasters, the fear of losing employment or sustenance, demographic problems like over-population, political oppression (for example through dictatorship or injustice), religious oppression, persecution and warfare. Key pull factors include better climate, employment opportunities, higher salaries and political or religious freedom (Schoorl 1995, Froehlich 2008, Leuner 2008).
Migration therefore happens for both push and pull reasons—the push of unhappiness, insecurity and difficulties, and the pull of hope, a better life and opportunities. According to Marsella and Ring (2003), hope, a better life and opportunities are the fundamental causes of migration: “the beauty, the mystique and the wonderment of the human impulse to migrate” (2003, p. 9).

This general model for explaining migration has been criticised because of its emphasis on individual choice of destination as a process that is mainly constrained by, rather than related to, economic and socio-political factors (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 31). Feminist scholars argue that this model is blind to gender and cultural differences, and particularly to the situation of third-world women on the move (for example Phizacklea 1998). In addition, the view is criticised by structuralists, who give priority to structural laws, forms of social segregation and institutions that regulate movement (for example Castles 2009). These scholars argue that to understand migration, one needs to move beyond an analysis of individual push and pull factors and examine the social context that surrounds the decision to migrate (for example Papastergiadis 2000).

According to this view, which Papastergiadis (2000, p. 35) refers to, as a “non-mechanistic” perspective, the identity and subjectivity of the migrant are not secondary or subordinate to their social context, but formed within that context out of their own experience of movement and settlement (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 35). Migration therefore is not and cannot be bound to the mere act of movement.
Chapter Two revealed that Iran has a long history of patriarchy, which has led to women’s disadvantage, particularly in relation to their participation in the labour market and their use as human capital. The migration of Iranian women, therefore, can be the result of the social context in which they are living. To better understand the act of migration, migration decision-making needs to be analysed in connection with the individuals’ everyday lives and experiences in a specific social context. This means the migration of women from social contexts with persistent patriarchal structures such as Iran could be related to a decision to move for a better life away from patriarchal controls.

The following section outlines research on lifestyle migration while exploring how the basic characteristics of the lifestyle or better life are sought.

**Lifestyle Migration: constitution of a better way of life**

Lifestyle migrants may give up some of their material comforts, emotional comforts or even financial comforts for a more fulfilling way of life. Migration for them is an individual choice for a better life extending from the life before migration and continuing into life after migration. Thus lifestyle migrants form the group of people who choose to migrate in pursuit of a better life, rather than being forced to do so. This theoretical framework of migration observes migration from an individualised perspective—migration for personal reasons. To O’Reilly and Benson (2009b, p. 3), “Lifestyle migration is about escape, escape from somewhere and something, while simultaneously an escape to self-fulfilment and a new life—a recreation, restoration or rediscovery of
oneself, of personal potential or of one’s ‘true’ desires”. Before discussing lifestyle migration further, it is necessary to examine the issue of motivation and the role of imagining a better life in migration decision-making.

When studying migration and exploring the reasons why people move and what they experience post migration, it is important to take into account their experiences before migration, and most importantly, the role of the imagination and the dream of a better life before migration. Using ethnographic data from long-term fieldwork in Tanzania, Salazar (2010) studied the complex dynamics between culture and human mobility. He explored how cultural factors shape border-crossing movements, arguing that the research focus of migration should be extended beyond mere movement to, for example, what migration does or how it comes about.

Salazar (2010) takes a “cultural mobilities” approach to migration, which concerns how personal migratory experiences are tied into the cultural web of ongoing discourses of belonging, separation and achievement, power, nationalism and transnationalism. He argues that the imagination and dreams of a better life are at the root of many (if not all) individual movements to unknown destinations. Salazar writes that “It is fashionable these days to imagine our life-world as being in constant motion, with not only objects and people, but images, ideas and cultures too travelling in every direction across the planet” (Salazar 2010, p. 54). He explains that in spite of the many kinds of forced migration, migration and human motilities involve positive outlooks, expressing an ability to move, freedom of movement and a tendency to change (migration based on personal choice for a better life). This, according to him, interprets three hypotheses
commonly spread via discussions about globalisation: (1) there is (increasing) mobility; (2) mobility is a self-evident phenomenon; and (3) mobility generates change (Salazar 2010, p. 54). In fact, “most cultural representations of mobility almost automatically link voluntary horizontal or geographical mobility with vertical—economic (financial), social (status), and cultural (cosmopolitan)—climbing” (Salazar 2010, p. 54). Salazar argues that because all forms and types of mobility are intensely embedded in wider cultural and socio-economic structures, mobility always needs to be analysed in the specific context within which it occurs. For the case of people in Tanzania, for instance, his study illustrates that imagination of the good life serves as an essentially creative act that facilitates migrant stability to move beyond existing structural imbalances of power and economic constraints. The study shows that:

Cultural imaginaries – whether true or false, or somewhere in between – have real enough effects. Importantly, imaginaries are so widespread and popular because they give people at least some feeling of control in a world where they increasingly feel controlled (Salazar 2010, pp.64-65).

By “cultural imaginaries”, Salazar refers to a sense of collective meanings that are shared amongst the members of a society. These symbolic meanings are imaginary because they create a sense of community (nation) for the members of that society, but those members have not necessarily met nor heard from other members in the nation (Anderson 2006). Yet in their minds they imagine themselves as a community that shares the same meanings and culture. This suggests that migration to the West and other destinations can be a symbolic imagination shared by the members of specific cultures—a symbolic idea that life somewhere else, or in the West in particular (for non-westerners), is better than the life at home. For Iranian women, the West might symbolise hope for a freer life away from patriarchal controls.
In this sense, as well as relating to physical movement, migration is about imagining the move from one locality to another and back. It can therefore be argued that migration always involves imagining a better life on the other side; it is about the process of imagining that life is better there than here. To clarify, Salazar’s Tanzanian study (2010) reveals that mobility imaginaries, especially of the West, were shared by large sections of the Tanzanian population. In that context, “the West” referred to a list of countries associated with certain features such as a high level of development, wealth, social security and political power. According to Salazar, many Tanzanian people have not travelled abroad and most of their cultural tales of mobility are based on other people’s movement (relatives/friends) or on what they observe via the mass media (popular culture). Therefore, for Tanzanian people, “the West” did not stand for a specific geographic location with homogeneous cultural traits and historical background; it was more a general dream. Migration for them was an imaginary act linked not only to a “better education and more money but fame, victory, respect and admiration” too (Salazar 2010, p. 57). From Salazar’s study, it can be derived that the migration decision of educated Iranian women begins with imagining a better life in the West. Thus their migration might not have been initially shaped towards any specific destination in the West, but rather the decision may have initially been based on a more general dream for a better life in the West. Due to their experience of gender discrimination, the West, particularly for Iranian women, might refer to a list of countries associated with a less patriarchal structure than that existing in Iran.

Viewed in this light, for lifestyle migrants, (as for other migrants), the desire for a better life is influenced by their imagination. In other words, the imagination of what a
particular destination might offer individuals and the mystery of what they might be able to make of themselves and their lives there form the decision to migrate (Benson 2011, pp. 224-225). Appadurai (1996) argues that imagination, or as he calls it the “wellspring” of migration, inspires individuals to move beyond their borders, which in turn influences their experiences along their migration route and after arrival at their destinations. This means that there is another aspect of mobility rather than just the act of physical movement, or as Salazar (2010, p. 56) argues, imaginative travel should be considered as a central feature of migration. Migration always presupposes some knowledge of or at least rumours of “the other side”.

Benson and O’Reilly (2009a, p. 610) argue that searching for the good life is an important theme in lifestyle migration. Similar to Salazar (2010), Benson and O’Reilly argue that in addition to the well-documented flows of refugees, asylum seekers, and labour migrants, contemporary migration is witnessing an increasing number of relatively privileged migrants, or as they call it, “the relatively affluent twenty first century migrants” (2009a, p. 610), whose relocation is prompted by the belief that they can find a better way of life elsewhere.

According to Benson and O’Reilly (2009a, p. 610), in migration studies analysis of “retrospective” narratives is important because they emphasise “individualised, self-realisation narratives of the decision to migrate”. In essence, lifestyle migration is presented as way of taking control over life or emancipating migrants from restrictions, empowering them to live lives more true to themselves: migration in order to overcome a traumatic event such as a death, for a change in working status such as retirement, or in
general for a particular event or circumstance. For any of these personal reasons, “life after migration is presented as the antithesis of life before migration, not only generally, but also on a more personal level” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a, p. 610).

The lifestyle migration framework highlights the historical and material conditions that facilitate migration decision-making and movements towards more nuanced understandings of relocation within the context of individuals’ lives. Although in this framework the decision to migrate remains important (to reveal the basic characteristics of the better lives sought), it more generally emphasises how migration fits into individual lives. Lifestyle migration investigates migration as an act of “one choice along a lifestyle trajectory extending from life before migration and into the future of life following migration” (Benson 2011, p. 224). Lifestyle migration not only studies the migration decision but also, more importantly, explores and explains the culturally-framed meanings particular destinations have for individuals, and experiences of life following migration. According to Benson, lifestyle migration is therefore naturally a product of western individualism; it is about the individual pursuit of happiness (Benson 2011, p. 224). This excludes non-westerners from lifestyle migration. According to the literature cited above, lifestyle migration generally happens in the context of western society to western society and mainly refers to people moving within a society, not moving between societies and from non-western to western societies. However, it can be argued that if lifestyle migration is about people escaping for personal reasons from something or somewhere towards a new and a better life and to self-fulfillment, it is related to individuals’ social context. Therefore literature on lifestyle migration can be extended to lifestyle migrants across cultures. Gender-related issues in non-western
countries such as Iran could be linked to migration by Iranian people, particularly women, to Western societies for a better life. The following section examines the role of gender and ethnicity in migration decision-making.

**The impact of gender and ethnicity on migration decision-making**

Gender and ethnicity play important roles in migration decision-making. Various forms of identity including gender can influence migration behavior. The gendered division of labour, power and resources constructed in different cultures (ethnicities) and societies are important factors in understanding migration (Hampshire 2002; Hoang 2011).

Gender identity is a form of social identity (Zucker & Bradley 1995). In the process of gender identification, gender expectations are a constant and “powerful force” (Anderson & Taylorp 2008, p. 305), that can influence the behaviours of men and women, even though not everyone may follow them completely (Anderson & Taylorp 2007, p. 305). Gender is often assumed to be natural, something that we are born with, but sociologists emphasise that it is actually socially constructed: “Discourses are productive of the identities which they appear to be merely representing” (Butler 2002, p. 98). Gender can be understood as referring to actions by males and females that are socially constructed through constant repetition. Sociological theories argue that through social interactions in everyday life people sort each other into the category of “male” or “female” on the basis of visible physical characteristics (such as women wear skirts, men do not) (e.g. Goffman 1977; Schilt 2010; Westbrook 2009;). This is what Westbrook and Schilt (2013) call “gender determination” a broader conceptualisation that goes beyond visible characteristics. Gender determination happens at
the level of everyday interaction as well as through widely shared beliefs about what
behaviours are appropriate or normal for each gender (Westbrook & Schilt 2013). Gender
identity has been formed in every cultural and ethnic group. Collectively, it is the social
expectations and gender norms and values within each social context and its culture that
define gender role behaviours, and these shape the gender identities of its individuals. Iranian
women’s self-understandings are shaped by the Iranian patriarchal gender order. Symbolic
gender roles such as mother and wife are idealised in Iranian culture. This means gender
identification should be analysed within the specific social context in which it occurs.
Therefore gender identity is connected to ethnic identity.

Ethnicity, a form of identity, is widely associated with culture, descent, language, group
memories and histories. The concept of *ethnie*, can be defined as:

A named human population with myth of common ancestry,
shared historical memories, one or more elements of culture [for
element example religion, customs or language], a link with a homeland
and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members
(Hutchinson and Smith 1996: p.6).

This definition reveals that ethnicity is linked to an individual’s past and specific culture,
shared ideas, social practices and norms. Most importantly, “a sense of solidarity” and “a link
with a homeland” indicates how members of particular ethnic groups recognise themselves
and others as belonging or not belonging to their group, because they feel an intense bond of
solidarity to a particular nation and its members. Sharing historical memories and elements of
culture among an ethnic group means that there is an inter-related link between ethnicity and
gender.
Barot, Bradley and Fenton (1999, p. 15) emphasise the importance of female tasks (for example household responsibilities and nurturing children) as “ethnicity maintenance”. These authors discuss the sexual division of labour, and how men and women take different economic roles within their ethnic communities. Within these boundaries, a division of labour forms whereby women’s responsibilities lie mainly in the home sphere where networks of ancestry and kinship are maintained. Women are in charge of passing on to future generations, particularly to girl children, cultural rules and practices. This implies that women with a different ethnic origin may experience different gender identification, or in other words, gender and ethnicity can work together to produce inequalities between men and women during their processes of identification. The above discussion supports the theoretical framework of this study, that perceptions of self—gender roles or family roles for instance—are created by people through a symbolic system. Social norms or societal expectations create rules that dictate how people should behave and shape individual identities. Therefore Iranian women, as an example of an ethnic group, experience a particular gender identification, and this particular gendered, ethnic identification may influence their migration decision-making in particular ways.

Research shows that social identity shapes male and female agency in migration (for example Hampshire 2002; Hoang 2011; Lee 2013; Rajiva 2013). Family structure, marital status and the gender structure of a particular social context play important roles in the migration decision-making of individuals (for example Hampshire 2002; Hoang 2011). Studies show that in general married men find it easier to make the decision to migrate because of the authority accorded to them as breadwinners, and because of the gendered division of labour that is often weighted in their favour. Although unmarried women show concern for their
sexuality and marriage prospects, they appear to have more agency in migration decision-making than that of their married counterparts (for example Hampshire 2002; Hoang 2011). This suggests that in a patriarchal social context such as that in Iran, being single and not being dependent on a male partner provides women with power and agency in migration decision-making and around their lives in general. This is an important factor in analysing women’s migration. The migration of women, particularly non-western women, can be dependent on their marital status.

Previous studies argue that the migrant is neither a purely rational decision-maker nor a victim of macro-level forces beyond his or her control. Like Salazar (2010), other scholars focus on cultural factors in migration decision-making (for example Hampshire 2002; Hoang 2011; Lee 2013; Rajiva 2013). They argue that migration decision-making always takes place in a specific context where people’s agency is facilitated or constrained by various socio-cultural structures. For example, in the case of Vietnam, where the family plays a crucial role in the society, Hoang argues, migration analysis needs a greater focus on the socio-cultural structures and dynamics within and beyond the household. Hoang’s findings demonstrate that among women themselves marital status is an important marker of agency in migration decision-making. In contrast, either on purpose or innocently, the vast majority of male migrants de-emphasised the involvement of spouses in their migration decisions. Men’s accounts in general were not as detailed as those of their female counterparts. This may be due to the fact that men’s labour migration is not as problematic as women’s and therefore their experiences are more straightforward. Individual testimonies also suggested that the patriarch’s power in
household decision-making was taken for granted. The ability to make decisions reflected
the man’s power in the household (Hoang 2011, pp. 1450-1451).

Gender (as well as ethnicity) plays an important role not only in migration decision-
making; post-migration experiences are also structured around gender. Migration can
have different meanings for men and women. Even opportunities and barriers in the new
home can be gender-related. Men and women with the same cultural background may
develop different strategies in the process of acculturation in the new home country.
Changing gender relations as a result of migration might impact on Iranian women’s self-
understandings. Away from the familiar cultural, religious and patriarchal gender roles,
Iranian women may negotiate their positions in the family and in society. In other words,
Iranian women’s understanding and interpretation of western norms and values may
impact on their everyday lives.

Post migration experiences: gender, family and households
Humans are the products of their environment and of the socio-cultural forces that shape
that environment. However, cultures and their symbolic meanings are not fixed, but
rather actively move towards the future and are subject to change. If social norms and
societal expectations change, the meanings and interpretation of symbols may change, so
transitions of meaning or symbols may occur. Thus the move away from familiar life and
social roles causes immigrants to seek new identities and to develop strategies to cope
with the demands of new social and cultural forces. Social roles, including gender roles,
are not fixed.
Several studies indicate that Iranian women have a better chance of adjusting to western societies than men (Ahmadi 2003; Ahmadi-Lewin 2001; Mahdi 1999; Mahdi 2002; Tohidi 1993). Mahdi’s (1999) study of Iranian immigrants in the United States reveals that men and women achieved equal economic success in the United States, but women gained much greater success than men in a social sense. Men lost many of the privileges they enjoyed in Iran, including their authority, the privileges accorded to them in marriage and the domination they had at home and in society. Women, on the other hand, not only escaped the harsh policies of the Islamic Republic such as mandatory veiling and strict dress codes, but also gained autonomy, social and educational skills, and a clearer sense of their sexuality, individuality, and identity (Mahdi 1999, p.75). Iranian women in fact gained the possibility of overcoming their lack of power.

In a later study, Mahdi (2002, p. 212) concludes:

Migration to new land has meant a breakdown of traditional norms for Iranian women. While Iranian immigrant women are moving away from traditional understandings of gender roles and sexuality, they are developing their own unique synthesis of attributes and values representing the cultural realities of both their past and present (Mahdi 2002, p. 212).

Mahdi explains that the structure of the new culture and society and the feeling of being between two cultures (origin and the host) allowed them “to freely choose and pick” between the original and adopted cultures (Mahdi 2002, p. 212). Gender has had a larger influence than other variables on these migrants’ new identities.

It may be that for women from environments such as Iran where adherence to traditional, religious gender roles is of primary importance, migration can be explained as an
emancipatory process. It allows a newfound freedom from sexual apartheid, patriarchal control and strict social rules towards women. For these women, as Tohidi (1993, p. 184) argues, migration becomes a process of developing a new personal identity. This new personal identity may impact on these women’s socially constructed view of sexuality.

According to Weeks (1986, p. 24), “Sexuality only exists through its social forms and social organisation. Moreover, the forces that shape and mould the erotic possibilities of the body vary from society to society”. Therefore, sexuality is constructed differently within different socio-cultural contexts, and it can be argued that changes to gender relations due to migration may also challenge migrants’ views on sexuality. Ahmadi’s (2003) study, for example, demonstrates that for Iranian immigrants to Sweden, migration was also about gaining more knowledge about their sexuality. Several female respondents commented that because of unfortunate experiences in previous marriages, they now believed that having sexual relations prior to marriage played an essential role in the process of getting to know one’s future partner, and felt that it should be an unavoidable premarital ritual (Ahmadi 2003, p. 695). This suggests that these women’s perceptions of sexuality and premarital sexual relationship shifted after migration.

Ahmadi (2003) found that male dominance in sexual relationships was weakened post migration, and greater individual freedom for women was gained in relation to family. Ahmadi’s study makes it clear that Iranian women residing in Sweden did not view virginity as a concern for the family anymore, but rather considered it as a kind of personal responsibility to have control over and freedom of choice regarding their bodies.
This attitude makes it more difficult for men to use the symbolic value of virginity as a means of exercising power (Ahmadi 2003, p. 700). About Iranian women who reside in the United States, Tohidi argues that “the opportunity to become self-reliant and to develop a personal identity is often considered the most positive consequence of migration” (Tohidi 1993, p. 184).

Although different gender structures post migration may impact on several aspects of individual life including identity and agency, the biggest influences of migrant women’s newfound gender identity are those on family and couple relationships. Social institutions such as family and marriage, which are also products of the social environment, are influenced by migration and new gender identities. In fact, one of the most significant challenges of migration is working out how to negotiate changes to family norms and gender role expectations. These changes are particularly difficult to manage because they are not only about individual adjustment to the new location, but are also about relationships with intimates. “Social Roles, including family and gender roles, are never fixed. They are negotiated within the new circumstances and are renegotiated if there is any further change in those circumstances” (Mahdi 1999, p. 51).

Migration research has examined sources of family disharmony post migration (Ben-David and Lavee 1994; Gopalkrishnan and Babacan 2007; Hooghiemstra 2001; Pettman 1992; Trovato 1986). Trovato argues that the “rapid social change” of migration reduces harmony in families and may weaken the family values developed prior to migration. The greater the changes, the greater the weakening of the family, the increase in individualism
and the possibility of marriage termination (Trovato 1986, p. 208). As migration is a complete life change, it alters the couple’s previous ways of dealing with disagreements and also changes the attractions of marriage that may have existed in the old life (Ben-David & Lavee 1994, pp. 133-146). This means that after migration, couples negotiate new ways of being in their marriage that align with the new cultural environment. Individuals’ roles and behaviours shift through interaction with new sets of gender norms and values in a new society.

Many Iranian families experience post-migration relationship problems due to the stress of new social norms and expectations, the pressures of cultural adjustment, financial responsibilities, the leaving behind of loved ones, lack of family support, nostalgia, and changes to status and identity (Ahmadi 2003; Darvishpour 1992; Mahdi 1999; Mahdi 2002; Nassehi 1995; Shahidian 1999). Mahdi’s study found that Iranian men experience challenges to the traditional bases of men's authority post migration. The study shows that while Iranian women gained power and status post migration through higher education and occupational success, Iranian men lost authority, and their roles as sole wage earners diminished. Immigrant men often shared the task of providing for their families with their wives and thus lost the monopoly on decision making in the family (Mahdi 1999, pp. 61-62). Norms in western culture including certain legal rights that benefit women, the view that men and women are equal, and the possibility for financial independence encouraged women to act differently than before. Studies show, for example, that in several cases Iranian women initiated divorce post migration (Darvishpour 1997; Darvishpour 1999). This de-emphasises the importance of marriage as an essential element of the Iranian woman’s identity that was formed in Iranian society.
Interestingly, despite the Iranian women in Tohidi’s study (1993) living in Los Angeles feeling satisfied with their lives, Iranian women migrants were still subjected to criticism from people in Iran, who accused them of causing marital instability, becoming “Americanised” (gharbzadeh), and losing their “originality” (esalat) and “Iranian female virtues, including obedience, chastity, patience and self-denial” (Tohidi 1993, pp. 194-195). Tohidi also suggests that even single Iranian women, who migrated alone, felt shame and guilt for developing an “American-influenced identity” (Tohidi 1993, p. 184). Although they have left their families behind, if they successfully adopt an American identity they are often rejected by the home culture (1993, p. 185). This emphasises the influence of a particular social context and ethnic origin on the lives of individuals after migration. Despite the criticisms experienced in Tohidi’s study (1993), the act of migration appears to have had a positive impact for Iranian women, who found it empowering.

**Women, skilled migration and work experiences**

The migration literature tends to neglect women, especially married women. It has been argued that in migration decision-making, women are usually followers of the family or migrant husbands (Cerrutti & Massey 2001; Thadani & Todaro 1984). In the past few decades, feminist perspectives have been gradually incorporated into migration studies (Donato et al. 2006; Morokvasic 1984). These studies found that not only have women—both single and married—undertaken internal and international migration in growing numbers, but they have increasingly participated in migration as autonomous economic migrants (Castles & Miller 1998; Hugo 1994). Yet studies of skilled migrant women
from various ethnic backgrounds and understandings of different experiences between men and women in skilled migration is largely absent from the academic literature.

In addition, scant attention has been paid to the gendered transition experiences of highly-skilled migrant women (Donato et al. 2006; Purkayastha 2005). Yeoh and Willis (2005) make a strong argument for more research in this area, noting that existing work on the devalued and often racialised labour of unskilled women must be complemented by a greater focus on professional and entrepreneurial women, who remain largely absent in the broader analysis of transnational elites. In fact, the impact of international migration on the lives of professional women has been largely absent from the academic literature, although there is now a considerable body of literature on gender and migration (Yeoh & Willis 2005).

The few studies in existence on the migration experiences of professional women focus mainly on the negative impacts of migration on their careers, such as downward occupational mobility and/or a re-orientation away from professional life towards the home and family (Hardill 2002; Iredale 2001; Man 2004; Salaff & Greve 2006; Suto 2009). Moreover, the research that does look at the ways in which migration affects skilled migrant women is generally both quantitative and/or employment-oriented (for example Adsera & Chiswick 2007).

Those few qualitative studies of the post-migration experiences of professional women mostly suggest that international migration damages their careers. Cooke (2007), for example, explores the experiences of professional Chinese women migrants in the United
Kingdom. Cooke’s study reveals that Chinese professional women, who had graduated from China's top-ranking universities and were well established in their careers, dropped dramatically in their professional lives, as in Britain their domestic work increased (Cooke 2007, p. 55). Similarly Meares’ (2010) qualitative study of professional South African female migrants to New Zealand showed that international migration tends to have a negative impact on the careers of highly-skilled migrant women and a concomitant increase and/or intensification of their work at home. The study showed that employment effects include downward occupational mobility, decreases in income and damaged career prospects, career re-direction such as re-training or employment as cultural brokers, and under-employment or unemployment. The study argued that post-migration professional women tend to have more household and/or childcare responsibilities which influence their participation in the public sphere (Meares 2010). Non-western women and even professional non-western women, however, do not form a homogenous group. Professional non-western women from various ethnic backgrounds, such as professional Iranian women, may have different work experiences post migration than other non-western professional migrant women. Previous work and the more general lived experiences of these women in their particular social context may lead them to experience different professional lives post migration. These women might migrate as skilled and independent from their family or husbands, in which cases it is likely that they migrate mainly to improve their professional status and to use their human capital. The literature has not addressed the experiences of these different groups of women.

Turning to the Australian migration research, the Longitudinal Surveys of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) demonstrates that migrants with high levels of human capital, as
measured by English language ability, education, work experience and skills, show
greater success in labour market participation than other immigrants (Cobb-Clark &
Chapman and Iredale 1990; Cohort 1999; Cobb-Clark 2000; Richardson et al 2002).
Human capital theories argue that competition in the labour market is facilitated by
individual productivity, which is dependent on the investments made in human capital
either through education or training. This is crucial to economic growth due to the fact
that it increases the return on income (Mincer 1978). The role of gender, nonetheless, is
largely absent in these studies. Although these studies observe the experiences of both
professional men and women post migration, they fail to address the differences of these
experiences depending on gender. Yet, Chiswick et al. (2002; 2003; 2005) found a useful
theoretical framework to explain the migration experiences of skilled people in Australia.

Based on a statistical analysis using data from LSIA, scholars sought to explore the
occupational adjustment of migrants over a three-and-a-half-year time period following
migration. Their findings revealed that migrants experience a “U” shape pattern of
occupational mobility. This was particularly true of skilled migrants from non-English-
speaking backgrounds, both male and female. In this pattern, migrants first experience a
decline in occupational status from their previous jobs, due to lack of skills
transferability. This is followed by a subsequent rise in occupational status after an
average time of three and a half years at the destination, once they have learned the
language, and adapted and modified their skills (Chiswick et al. 2003, p. 49). However,
this very large-scale study, like many others, has not offered any understanding of
differences between men and women’s experiences of skilled migration in Australia.
Even though the study included both men and women, the role of gender in skilled migration was not a focus.

Other Australian studies argue that cultural aspects can also influence migrants’ employment prospects. These studies maintain in particular that the LSIA surveys primarily focus on English language ability as a key determinant of labour market success, and there is no discussion of the ways in which birthplace factors and cross-cultural barriers can contribute to unemployment levels in the Australian labour market. Ho and Alcorso (2004), for example, assert that highly-skilled female migrants are less likely to be in the workforce than their male counterparts. Three and a half years post migration, they note, the proportion of women who had withdrawn completely from the labour market and were involved exclusively in home duties had more than doubled. In a later study, Ho (2006) describes that although her highly-educated Chinese participants had high levels of employment in China, in Australia a much smaller proportion was engaged in paid work, while their share in domestic duties had increased substantially.

There are very few studies that compare migrants’ professional outcomes in the destination country with their experiences prior to migration. Even those analyses focusing on comparison of pre- and post-migration work experiences mainly explore the impact of cross-cultural barriers on employment prospects (for example Hawthorne 2001; Ho & Alcorso 2004). For example, these studies argue that in the Australian labour market, migrants from English-speaking backgrounds (ESB) generally achieve higher employment rates, higher-paid and higher-status jobs than migrants from non-English-
speaking backgrounds (Alcorso & Ho 2004, p. 248). However, these studies have not explored the experiences of professional non-western women such as Iranian women in a western, more secularised labour market. Cultural aspects can also be related to previous patriarchal employment experiences; therefore, a more secular, less patriarchal social context can have a positive influence on women’s work experiences after migration.

Despite all the possible positive shifts that may occur in an individual’s life as a result of migration and changes in social context, migration can also involve paying a high price. The following section will focus on this issue.

**Hybrid experiences: the price of migration**

This section focuses particularly on identity experiences post migration. The term identity here refers to identity in its general sense as constructed and understood through its variety of expressions. Identity contains a variety of aspects including (but not limited to) gender, culture or ethnicity (Lawler 2008, pp. 1-2). Yet in a very general sense, we all know that every human being has an identity. In fact, the root of the term ‘identity’ comes from the Latin *idem*, the same word from which the word ‘identical’ stems. We are the same from birth to death, so we are identical to ourselves but also we are identical to others. We all share one identity as humans but within this there are subsets such as woman, man, American, Australian, Muslim, Christian and so forth. This also suggests that every human is unique and different from others (Lawler 2008, pp. 1-2). Therefore ‘identity’ can be defined, very generally at this point, as a notion that is about sameness and difference.
Hall (1995, p. 65) argues that identity is our sense of who we are and although this sense of who we are is not fixed and cannot represent the whole of us (us more at our personal level; the connections between how we see ourselves and how others see us or what we want to be and how much control we have over that), we still have to take on an identity to be able to get “somewhere/anywhere” (Hall 1995, p. 65). In other words, identity, whatever it is, shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it. Thus, identity matters but for most it is a mundane part of everyday life. “It is not a fixed thing; it is in constant transformation because meanings refuse to be finally fixed” (Hall 1995, p. 65). However, we need resolution of some sort—a good enough working sense of who we are.

In support with this study’s theoretical framework, Jenkins (2008) suggests that identity can only be understood as a “process”—as “being” or “becoming” (2008, p. 5). This means that identifying who we are and who others are is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction. Therefore human identities by definition are social identities. This suggests that changes in social context and circumstances can lead to changes in meanings through different interactions, and so can lead to changes in our process of identification. Jenkins describes identity not as a “thing” (Jenkins 2008, p. 5) that somebody can have or not; it is something that one does: “It is a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities; it is a process/identification- not a thing” (Jenkins 2008, p. 5). With our identity, we position ourselves in a community or society through identification with, and attachment to, those who we see as similar, through characteristics such as class, race, sexuality or religion. In this way, we also distance ourselves from those who are not similar to us (Jenkins 2008, p. 5).
Identification is a process in which we identify others and ourselves through structures of power (socially-defined roles) and also through our own ideals, values and beliefs. So when someone identifies with us, we may not necessarily become identical to that person. However, as one identifies him or herself through values, norms and beliefs, he/she is developing a sense of self. This sense of self represents a collection of aspects of identity associated with personal feelings. One then understands who he/she is in relation to others. In this approach to self-awareness through our relationships with others, and through experiences, background history and memories, identity formation is in process (Zastrow 2009, p. 59). Expressed differently, identity formation is a lifetime process in which we determine who we are and what we want out of life (Zastrow 2009, p. 59).

The concept of self is central in symbolic interactionist theory, because it “represents the primary individual component in the society/individual relationship” (Darling 2000, p. 82). Through the process of role taking (for example as mothers and wives) individuals come to see themselves as others see them. Therefore self-concept is a product of symbolic interaction. Self-concept, as Cooley (1964) simply but powerfully defines it, is like a “looking-glass” or mirror, a glass that reflects definitions received from others. It can thus be understood that individuals’ perceptions of self and their behaviours form in relation to the reflections (positive or negative) they receive in the social looking glass.

Returning to the discussion of identity experiences post migration, Marsella & Ring (2003) state: “When you leave home, you know what you leave behind, but not what you will find” (2003, p. 9). Thus no matter whether migration is decided by force or by choice, it will impact on everyday life, including on identity experiences. Migration is
indeed a very stressful process. The stress starts with the ‘push and pull’ forces that lead to migration and increase when early processes of migration, such as departure, arrival and readjustment, commence (Marsella & Ring 2003, p. 9). Marsella and Ring (2003, pp. 9-10) argue that even in the most positive circumstances, migration is a shocking process; it is a journey with unforgettable stories that will be retold again and again later. This suggests that it is critical to understand the connection between life before and after migration and the extent to which these life experiences and the potential for their perpetuation in future life may impact on individuals’ everyday life and identity experiences in negative ways. Migration of individuals from a particular social context does not only affect their migration decision-making, but post-migration resettlement experiences are shaped by individuals’ original social context.

It was stated above that lifestyle migration is an individual choice for a better life, extending from the life before migration and continuing into life after migration. Yet as the following quote powerfully shows, achieving this better life may come at a high price:

>You start to get to know people [in the new place] and so you lose that initial excitement and wow and wonder, um, I think yeah after that wears off a bit, probably the home-sickness kicks in a bit and um, and you know, in a funny way you start to compare everything to back home and think it doesn’t measure up in the same way as when you come home . . . it was a bit of a grass is always greener (Easthope 2009, p.76).

The above quote is from Susanne, one of the young Tasmanian interviewees in Easthope’s (2009) study of the identity construction of young Tasmanian returned
migrants. The quote well demonstrates the ambiguity of identity (the sense of comparison) as well as its sense of stability (gaining familiarity and settling). It shows that even though Susanne was stable in one place as she gained some familiarity over time, her imagination was still in motion; she constantly compared here to there, even though she may have known it was “just a bit of greener grass”. Indeed, when Susanne was away, she wanted to come home to Tasmania and yet when she visited home, her experience was less satisfying than she imagined it might be.

Memories of home become pleasant only after one has been away for a while. In other words, the imagination process for migrants does not stop with the physical movement towards and arrival at the destination; shortly after settlement in a new place, the process of comparison, or a new form of imagination, emerges. The expression ‘new form of imagination’ here means that in this new process, the individual has lived the reality of both here and there, but after being away for a while, there is a tendency to romanticise what was left behind. As Easthope (2009) points out, in studies of migration, it is important to take account of the ways in which it impacts on social life and on identity. It is crucial to ask the question “Is increasing mobility leading to increasingly dislocated identities?” (Easthope 2009, p. 62). In other words, in what way and to what extent does the migration process and migration experience affect the nature of identity construction? Mobility is considered a fundamental aspect of social life and migration is a complex process requiring a consideration of both structural factors and individuals’ agency. Nevertheless, in studies of migration it is not only important to examine why and how people migrate but also how individuals understand, experience and negotiate their
migration. To answer his question, Easthope’s (2009) study claimed that our identities are incomplete, relational, and hybrid as well as constructed in relation to place and mobility.

The term “hybridity” in this study refers to the cultural phenomenon of the mixing of unique entities. Hybridity according to O’Hearn (1998, p. xiv) creates “a third, wholly indistinguishable category where origin and home are indeterminate”. Simply defined, hybridity is “a making one of two distinct things” (Young 1996, p. 26). This study refers to this concept mainly to reveal elements of contradiction and conflict within the two cultures and embodied in the individuals after the experience of migration. Sakamoto (1996) claims that “giving up the desire for a pure origin, hybridity retains a sense of difference and tension between two cultures, but without assuming hierarchy. It is not just new identity but a new form of identity” (Sakamoto 1996, pp. 115–116). From this brief definition it can be understood that a sense of hybridity is not a negative or different identity experience; rather it is a sense of coexistence or living with two identities at the same time. Therefore, as Barker (1999, p. 73) claims hybridity is not about “essential” identity but it is part of widespread “cut ‘n’ mix” cultural forms in the context of globalisation.

In Easthope’s (2009) study, interviewees drew upon notions of fluid, mobile identities and identities informed by attachment to place simultaneously. Easthope argues that in discussing the nature of identity in late-modern times it is not sufficient to focus on those aspects of identity that are influenced by mobility; nor it is sufficient to address those aspects of identity that are influenced by place. In fact, both place and mobility are
important in understanding identity. Identity maintains its attachment to the past as well as continuing its connection with the future. In the process of “becoming” rather than “being” as Hall says (1996, pp. 4-5), identities continue to correspond to their origin in the historical past. Identities linked to origins in the historical past in the process of “becoming” may not necessarily continue matching, but still they continue, “corresponding”. Or, as Hall (1996, pp. 4-5) aptly declares, “Identities are not the so-called returned to roots but a coming-to-terms with our “routes”.

This means that changes in social context and circumstances may shift individuals’ perceptions of self, thereby shifting patterns of interaction in the family/relationship; yet this shift is not free from its attachment to the past. Migration can be an escape from patriarchal controls towards a better life, but the emotional bonds and identity attachment to the past remains, continuing into future life and impacting on migrants’ everyday life experiences.

By extension, it can be argued that to fully understand the nature of human life experiences post-migration, we should verify that the life in mobility has been modified in connection with the place (home). The place or home where one is born and raised still influences everyday life and identity experiences post migration. In other words, as Easthope (2009) puts it, “the more we rely on the cosmos for our development, the more we desire the hearth” (Easthope 2009, p. 75). In this light, as George and Fitzgerald (2012) similarly argue, with the passage of time in a new country, familiarity is gained, many milestones are passed, adaptations are made, and certain aspects of life in the new home become preferable. However, it seems that the longer one is away from one’s place
of origin, the greater the power of its imaginations and memories (George and Fitzgerald 2012, pp. 249-250).

Riley (1992, p. 20) asks, “Is it possible that the greater power of place lies not in inhabiting it but in remembering it?” In fact, without memories we belong to everywhere but nowhere; all places are alike but unfamiliar (Rubinstein 2005, p. 112). George and Fitzgerald (2012) explain that through immigration we lose our identity and it is built up again slowly in a new place. In this process of identity reconstruction, memories of the past play an essential role in that they preserve self-identity and provide “the critical thread for continuity into the future” (Chaudhury & Rowles 2005, p. 13). This means we maintain ties to old lives as well as continuing building ties with the new.

Hall (1987, p. 44) writes: “Migration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to” In another study Hall reflects on the sense of loss, noting, “every diaspora has its regrets” (Hall 2008, pp. 349–350):

> Although you can never go back to the past, you do have a sense of loss. There is something you have lost. A kind of intimate connection with landscape, and family, and tradition, which you lose. I think this is the fate of modern people – we have to lose them, but [we believe] we are going to go back to them (Hall 2008, pp. 349–350).

The constant connection between home as a place of birth and home as a place of settlement with its cultural differences creates a sense of hybridity. Papastergiadis (2005) argues that hybridity is not a new form of virtue and purity. Hybrids are ambivalent; they are not saints. If the sense of ambiguity is taken away from hybrids, this will not only create a false sense of
hybridity as a feeling that is driven by the “dual desire of connection and separation”. In fact, he argues that in hybrid thinking, nothing exists in an absolute state, and there is in this hybrid position the creation of a third space that facilitates understanding of cultural transformation. The fluid nature of hybridity allows individuals to constantly redefine their position and it is within this fluidity that a third space emerges where other elements encounter and transform each other (Bhabha 1994). This third space does not point to an ideal stage of accomplishment, but rather to the process of critical interaction that occurs within and against the structure of a binary. According to Bhabha (1991), this third space is a site of translation and negotiation. He writes: “By exploring this third space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (Bhabha 1991, p.39). This is to say that the third space is a somewhat liminal space, one that is removed from its original context and moves beyond the borders of the generally accepted definitions of “Iranians” or “Australians”. This space, however, creates new possibilities to embrace a whole new or different form of identity. This is not an identity that is cleanly split into two parts; rather it contains elements of those two parts, those “parts” in this study referring to aspects of both Iranian and Australian culture.

Hybrid thinking, therefore, is a process of re-negotiation of identity and culture, of insertions within and between the classical structure of identity and culture to change an understanding of the dynamic of these categories (Papastergiadis 2005, p. 61). A quote from Gu Xiong, a Chinese multi-media artist living in Canada, well summarises the sense of hybridity:
When living in one culture, you always dream of another, more ideal one than your own. However, after you have experienced this other culture, your dreams of it are broken by a strange, newfound reality. Losing the comforts of your inherent culture, you wander back and forth between the two, not knowing which you belong to, unable to establish roots in either (Gu Xiong in Zacharias 2003).

Nevertheless, the question remains that if the heart and the good memories always belong somewhere else—to the place that the immigrant calls home—why do immigrants choose to stay in the host country rather than returning to the homeland? In other words, can the hybrid belong? Studies show that physical visits to the homeland can sometimes have the opposite effect on immigrants. After being away for a while, the changes that have happened in the homeland over time (such as parents having passed away, old house being inhabited by strangers, new social roles, gender roles, etc.) can be quite shocking and difficult to accept for many immigrants (Ganga 2006; George and Fitzgerald 2012; Marcus 1992). Studies show that after such experiences, not only is the homeland no longer home, but many immigrants come to consider the host country as home. For instance, George and Fitzgerald’s study of European immigrants in New Zealand showed that for many immigrants, a physical visit to the homeland was a profound experience that made them realise they would now be unable to live back in the home that had been remembered and cherished during all the years away. Many interviewees in George and Fitzgerald’s (2012, p. 251) study who had visited their former homeland at least once said, “I could not live there any more” (George & Fitzgerald 2012, p. 251). While the bond with the past and the ambivalent expression of identity remain and can be perpetuated, nonetheless with the passage of time the hybrid can settle down in one place,
a place where he/she can feel at home and belong. This suggests that migration for a better life cannot occur without a cost, but after settlement into a new place and with the passage of time, migrants may feel happy about their decision and not wish to return home.

It should be noted that the studies cited above have all analysed migrant identity experiences through a genderless lens. Indeed attachment to home, experiences of hybridity, and the third space can have different meanings for men and women. This constitutes a gap in the current literature.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to examine why and how people decide to migrate, and how migration impacts on individuals’ lives at home, work and on a personal level. It has been demonstrated that in general migration happens both for push and pull reasons—the push of unhappiness, insecurity and difficulties, and the pull of hope and a better life elsewhere. It has also been highlighted that migration is not, and cannot only be, about the act of movement. In analyses of migration decision-making, it is necessary to take into account the migrant’s subjectivity, identity and experiences that have been formed in a particular social context. The individual’s cultural history and personal experiences in a particular social context may impact on migration decision-making. This knowledge is important, because it helps us better to understand the migration decision-making of the women who participated in this study.
The chapter has also focused on lifestyle migration, and it has been shown that the current lifestyle migration literature focuses on the migration of western people only, and refers to people moving between societies rather than between cultures. It was suggested, therefore, that the framework for lifestyle migration should be extended to non-western migrants and to people who move across cultures. Lifestyle migration means to escape from somewhere or something to self-fulfillment, and to a new and a better life (O’Reilly & Benson 2009b). Therefore it should not and cannot be limited to western migrants. This is a critical statement, particularly in light of the demonstration in the previous chapter that Iranian women have long been discriminated against in Iranian society because of their gender. This means that their migration may be the result of their social context and in order to escape from patriarchal controls in the hope of a better life. The chapter has also shown that gender and ethnicity play important roles in migration decision-making, and claimed that gaps remain in the literature regarding gender, ethnicity and migration—particularly skilled migration. For example, in Chiswick et al. (2003), the role of gender is not addressed; the study does not consider gendered experiences connected with skilled migration to Australia. It has also been asserted that previous research about migration experiences in Australia has not included Iranian women. This may in part be due to the fact that there are fewer Iranian female migrants than in other migrant groups such as for example European, Chinese and Vietnamese. This thesis aims to fill these gaps in the literature.

The chapter has shown that social roles, including gender roles, are not fixed. Not only does gender play an important role in migration decision-making, but post-migration experiences too are structured around gender. It has been argued that for women coming
from countries such as Iran, where adherence to traditional, religious gender roles is of primary importance, migration can be an emancipatory process. Migration for these women means a newfound freedom from patriarchal controls and strict social rules, and becomes a process of developing a new personal identity (Tohidi 1993, p. 184). Changes in social context and circumstances can shift individuals’ previous patterns of interaction with the husbands, their attitudes towards the household and their perceptions of self. In this sense, migration can be seen as a positive experience, particularly for women migrating from a patriarchal context. However, it has also been pointed out that the achievement of a better life through migration does not come without a price.

It has been suggested that migration can lead individuals to experience a sense of hybridity and to occupy a third space. This third space and sense of hybridity do not necessarily constitute a negative experience, but it means that migrants occupy a space between the place of origin and their new home, and this is associated with ambivalent feelings. The physical movement from one place to a new destination does not stop the imagination process. The chapter has revealed that after migrants arrive at a new place, a new form of imagination begins. There is a sense that when the immigrant has lived the reality of both social contexts (here and there), there is a tendency to romanticise what was left behind. The literature has not discussed the different experiences of hybridity between men and women.

**Research Question**

This study aims to answer two questions. First, why and how do educated Iranian women decide to migrate to Australia? Second, how and to what extent does migration impact on
educated Iranian women’s life at home and at work? Before answering these questions, it is necessary to describe the methodology adopted in this study. This is the objective of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for this study. It begins with an introduction to the researcher and her position in relation to the study. The research methodology and qualitative research design are then described. Next, the methods of recruiting and data collection are summarised, as are the topics covered during the interviews with participants. The ways in which the data were analysed and the ethical considerations of the study are then explained. Finally, the chapter reflects some limitations of the method used, and introduces the sample.

Situating myself as researcher

As with most researchers, my approach in this study is informed by my own experiences and history, and the values and assumptions embedded in those. The goal in situating ourselves in our work is to reveal to readers how our research agenda and personal history shape our observations in the field and consequently the conclusions we draw and the reports we write (Kirsch 1999). This creates knowledge for the readers to understand what factors formed the research questions at hand and also to understand the research findings in their specific cultural and historical moments. In fact, feminist standpoint theory explains that situating oneself in research is a critical move in pursuing ethical research because what we believe counts as knowledge depends heavily on our social, cultural and historical past (Kirsch 1999; May 2001; Wescott 1990). Here I provide an
overview of my personal experiences as a subject who is located in a similar position as that of my research participants.

I was born in Iran one year after the Islamic revolution, and grew up in the very traditional city of Esfahan, though not within a particularly traditional or religious family. I finished high school at the age of 18 and enrolled in a Bachelor of Architecture degree in a private university located two hours away from the city centre of Esfahan. A black chador, which is a full head-to-toe body covering, was compulsory at this university, which accepted only female students. Apart from a few male staff members, there were no other men on campus. One sunny Wednesday morning, during the second semester of my first year at university, a guard woman at the main entrance of the university was searching students’ bags before allowing them on campus. On that particular occasion, I had few DVDs of western movies in my bag, which I intended to lend to my friend, and these contained nudity and sexual references. The guard discovered the movies in my bag, and I was sent to the university herasat, a repressive body in every Iranian university and government workplace that spies and reports on students and government employees. There I was bombarded with questions, and was asked, among other things, where I had obtained the movies. I was then sent home, and told that I was not allowed to attend university until I heard the herasat’s decision. Two days later, I received an official letter from the university stating that I could no longer continue my education at that university.

Eighteen months later, in the year 2000, I sat for the university exam again and moved to Iran’s capital city, Tehran, to study towards a Bachelor degree in Visual Arts (drawing and painting) at the Tehran College of Arts. My decision to study fine arts was related to
my desire to express my emotions and words using the canvas as my medium. However, due to Islamic restrictions, many of my works were not allowed to be exhibited, particularly if they portrayed a nude female body, or even a woman with uncovered hair. I was surprised, and at the same time disappointed, that our life models for figure drawings or paintings were women wearing the hejab (cover), and we had no opportunity for anatomical study. Nevertheless, my four years of study fostered my creative abilities, while at the same time developing my social consciousness and conscience. In those four years, I learned to be much more independent. Living in a bigger city with a more open-minded culture helped me to find my way and decide upon the next stage of my life.

I wanted to travel overseas, but had difficulty acquiring my father’s permission, as he was very much against the idea. According to Islamic law, as a single female I required my father’s permission to leave Iran (or that of my Godfather had my father not still been alive). If a woman is married, and wishes to leave without her husband, her husband’s official permission is required. After a one-year battle with my father, he eventually gave me the official permission and warned me that the signature meant “I am not his daughter anymore”. I finally left, alone, in mid 2006.

Having observed and developed an understanding of social pressures in Iran, such as the compulsory wearing of the hejab and other domestic, gendered cultural pressures and limitations, I decided to undertake a Master of Arts degree in Australia in 2007 to 2008, focusing mainly in the area of women’s studies. I took subjects such as gender studies and sociology, which enriched my knowledge of feminist theory, culture and identity, while also giving me a wonderful opportunity to read the works of the key thinkers in the
field. My Master’s thesis focused on Muslim-born³ professional women from diverse ethnic backgrounds and their challenges and opportunities in Brisbane, Australia, and I felt deeply privileged to have the opportunity of hearing their fascinating personal stories. Because I have a similar cultural background to my participants, they felt comfortable and confident about sharing their experiences with me.

I migrated to Australia to start a new and better life, and to be the person I wanted to be. Australia gave me the opportunity to do this, and to enrich my knowledge about myself and about life in general. Yet I often feel that my background and history form a shadow that follows me wherever I go. Sometimes I try to imagine how I might have been different had I been born in Australia.

As a single Iranian woman studying towards my PhD, and after living in Australia within a western culture for seven years, I still sometimes feel confused about who I am, like a woman situated somewhere between the Iranian and Australian cultures, or between no culture and a nowhere zone. Despite the fact that I was not a religious, closed-minded or conservative person before leaving Iran, I have faced a number of different situations and experiences in western culture, which have made it a challenge to find a clear sense of who I am.

This, along with the experience of my position as an educated Iranian woman, has shaped my choice to do this project.

³ Muslim here does not necessarily refer to Islam, but rather to cultural background.
Research design

This is a qualitative study, with data acquired through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 30 Iranian women migrants to Australia. The goal was not to estimate statistical parameters, but rather to understand women’s lived experiences. The primary objective of qualitative analysis is to produce comprehensive, in-depth information which seeks to understand the meaning of experiences by comparing and contrasting the multiple realities of personal interactions and perceptions (Flick 2009, pp. 13-16). For sociologists, understanding and reporting how and why people behave as they do involves analysing and presenting reality. A sociologist shares or reports what she/he has observed and what it means. This constructionist framework requires sensitivity to our own as well as to participants’ subjective standpoints or perspectives. In this study, attention is paid to how participants understand and assign meaning to their experiences. In other words, it concerns how experiences or realities are socially constructed (Marvasti 2003, p. 5).

As this study aims to provide a detailed description and analysis of the quality, or substance, of human experience (Marvasti 2003), a qualitative approach was required. The study of the migration experiences of professional Iranian women required a qualitative approach because this study neither looks for correlations among variables nor tries to establish a trend (quantitative). Participants in this study have experienced a new social world, and, in analysing their experiences and actions, attention was paid to the symbolic meanings of both the old and the new worlds. Symbolic interactionism requires
a qualitative methodology, which allows participants to reflect on and explain the meanings they ascribe to experiences (Blumer 1969; Denzin 2001).

Merton and Kendall (1946) developed the focused or semi-structured interview format in 1940. According to them, the focused interview should have a flexible schedule. The interviewer should refrain as far as possible from making early evaluations, and should use a non-directive, conversational style of questioning, developing depth step by step. Questions should be designed to reintroduce earlier topics so as to gain further insights, and the subject is encouraged as often as possible to explain in more detail. This leads to revelations of individuals’ intense experiences (Merton & Kendall 1946, p. 552). Interviewees must also be given the opportunity to introduce topics of their own. Merton and Kendall refer to this as open-ended questioning, which allows participants greater flexibility, and to feel comfortable in expressing their points of view. Therefore this interview style is ideal if the intention is to focus particularly on a subject’s viewpoint. In summary, the semi-structured interview method allows participants to interpret and make sense of their experiences, and to speak about what is important to them (Ezzy & Liamputtong 2005, p. 14).

Data collection

The sample consisted of 30 Iranian women, who ranged in age from 25 to 50. An email advertisement and flyers were used to identify potential participants (see Appendix C). In addition, advertisements were placed around Swinburne University and at the Melbourne Iranian School. This method worked well, and 16 participant women were recruited. The
sample then snowballed, which means that subjects already recruited suggested other potential participants. This procedure is appropriate when members of special populations are difficult to locate, which is true of highly-educated Iranian women. The researcher collects data from the participants he/she has been able to locate, and then asks those individuals to introduce other people they know (Babbie 2013). I was aware that this method might increase risk of revealing information to members of a network or subgroup (Babbie 2013). In order to avoid such problems, when my research snowballed I expanded my contacts to a number of subgroups rather than one single group. This prevented me from becoming dependent on a single network. I was also very careful with confidentiality of information both within and between the subgroups. The women interviewed were also asked to distribute flyers with a view to putting the researcher in touch with other women. Each of them did this, which helped to accumulate a list of people who were interested in participating in the study.

This study only focused on professional women. Iredale’s (2001b, p. 8) definition of the term ‘professional’ was used: a category of highly-skilled people who have a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field. To find potential participants, the study searched for women who could potentially be professionals such as doctors, university lecturers, and those with university degrees and/or who held senior positions because of their high-level skills or extensive experience in their respective fields. All women in the study had high levels of education and training for professions as doctors, dentists, university lecturers, nurses, lawyers and engineers.
The participants were Iranian women who had migrated to Australia for family or personal reasons following the Islamic revolution. This choice was made in order to be able to examine the impact of migration and a new social context on these women’s personal life experiences. The women had all lived in Australia for a minimum of two and a maximum of 15 years. These parameters were chosen in order to include women who had experienced life under the Islamic government of Iran before their migration to Australia, but who had lived long enough in Australia to be able to reflect on their experiences in the new environment. As mentioned above, the women were aged between 25 and 50 so that they were old enough to be working and to have gained postgraduate qualifications, but young enough to still be active in labour market.

After the first contact with participants via email or phone, those who were interested in the study were sent a project information sheet (Appendix A), and then contacted face to face to set up the interview (Appendix B). Their participation was completely voluntary and all were given the opportunity to withdraw their participation at any time. None did so; indeed all the women showed a keen interest in participating. All were sent a letter of thanks by email following their participation (see Appendix E).

The interviews concentrated on the everyday life experiences (both public and private) of these women in Melbourne, Australia (see Appendix D for the interview questions). The questions were expressed in simple, clear language and were easy to understand. When they responded “yes” or “no” only, they were asked to expand. This provided the opportunity for the participants to answer some questions very briefly, or if they wished,
to express themselves more fully. The length of their responses was left up to them, so that they could express themselves in a way they felt comfortable.

All interviews were conducted in English. It is important to note that as the researcher is able to speak both English and Farsi (Persian), some women preferred to express themselves in Farsi, particularly if the question involved emotional responses. However, due to the potential for inaccuracy in translation, all women were asked to speak in English only. As highly-educated women who had passed an English test, and who took active roles in Australian society as professionals, none of the participants had difficulty in communicating in English. This is acknowledged as a limitation of this study, that responses may have been richer if interviews had been conducted in Farsi.

The interviews took place between July 2010 and February 2011 in public venues, either at Swinburne University, or at the participant’s workplace during their working hours. The interview time was scheduled for around 45 minutes to one hour according to the participant’s preference as to date and time. However, there was no specific limit to the interview time, so as to allow participants the possibility to expand on particular questions if they wished to do so. All information provided by participants was recorded with their permission using a digital recorder.

It is acknowledged that as a female Iranian, I share a common position and similar experiences and perspectives with the research participants. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p.16) note that logically, qualitative research methodology cannot be isolated from the
ontology, subjectivity, politics, ethics and social position of the researcher. One way in which Oakley (1981) rejects interviewing as a method of data collection is when interviewee is an object and source of data for the study and the interviewer is the subject of knowledge and has no interaction with the participants. It has been argued that in order to have a successful outcome from interviews, the researcher needs to share a common position and experiences with participants. Sharing a common language, social position and experiences enhances the possibility for the interviewer to “hear” what is already said and, more importantly, what is “left unsaid” (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002, p.16). Indeed, lack of common experiences and conditions can prevent understanding of the participants (Finch 1984; Letherby 2003; Riessman 1987). Feminist research acknowledges that the personal characteristics and experiences of the researcher have an effect on the research (Letherby, 2003). Oakley (1981) proposes a “participatory model” in which both interviewer and interviewees share identities and experiences, to increase rapport and reciprocity in the interview process. “Social science research is thus always and inevitably a social interaction in its own right” (Stanley, 1990, p. 8).

Therefore, my position as an insider assisted greatly in the collection of data in this project, since the participant women may have had more trust and felt more comfortable in sharing their experiences with someone to whom they could relate culturally. In fact, having had similar experiences and sharing a set of common symbols in the old life and the present life led to more effective communication between the researcher and the interviewees. On some occasions during interviews, the women made comments such as: “You know how this is in Iran” or “You have experienced this yourself”. This level of connection further enhanced the depth of participants’ responses, as they felt I could understand their culture and where they
came from. This also resulted in longer interviews, sometimes lasting two hours or more, as most of the women were very open, and appeared comfortable sharing their experiences with me, including those of a more sensitive nature.

Nonetheless I am aware that when researchers share involvement and common experiences, this raises concerns about the impact of personal views and expectations on the research process (Burgess 1991). In fact, feminist standpoint argues one of the limitations of interview method of data collection is that our gender personal experiences, age, ethnic background or social status all impact on our perspective. Thus, “no point-of-view is ‘neutral’ because no one exists unembedded in the world” (Narrayan, 1989, p. 262). To clarify my role and place in this project, as a professional investigator I attempted to hear the silences and understand them by observing the personal lives of a particular group of women, but I did this with a powerful awareness that I was not totally apart, nor different from the respondents. There will be, in fact, an effort to establish a connection between investigator and respondent, not as an emotional blending but through an intellectual understanding and emotional recognition. In other words, I did not search for stories or perspectives that matched my own, but considered them as unpredictable and various, while still acknowledging that my participants and I shared some experiences. I am aware that my final achievement will not and cannot be the final, whole truth, as is the case with any knowledge (Abbott 1997; Moore 2009).

**Interview schedule**

Participants were then asked about their past and their migration decisions. This section began with a broad question: “Why did you decide to migrate to Australia?” This general
The next round of questions focused on family and work, and the impact of migration on these. The women were asked how migration had affected their families and relationships. They were invited to talk about their marriage or couple relationships before and after migration and how they thought these had changed or been affected by living in a new environment. They were then asked how these changes in their couple relationship post migration had affected their general views about marriage and family. A similar question was then asked regarding extended family and friends living in Iran, and how migration had impacted on those relationships. Finally, participants were asked about their education and whether it had had any influence on their migration decision. They were also asked to what extent their education was beneficial or detrimental in
getting work in Australia, and how, in general, they compared, their professional lives pre and post migration.

The last sets of questions concerned self and identity experiences post migration. These began with the extent to which participants saw themselves differently in Australia than they had in Iran. The question was framed in a general way to ascertain how each respondent visualised herself differently in the old life and the present life. Where the narratives were short, or limited to “yes” or “no” responses, the women were asked: “Do you think that there are any differences between your “self” at work and in private life? If yes, why? And then: “Do you think you express yourself differently in Australia than you would in Iran?” For the issue self-expression, it was clarified as referring to ways of dressing, communicating and so on. Where the scenarios described involved different perceptions of self and changed identity post migration, the women were asked: “Do you think you ever can be 100% like an Australian woman? (Why yes and why no?)” Finally, participants were invited to comment on the questions and add to their narratives if they wished.

Data analysis

Thematic data analysis was used in this research project. Thematic analysis searches across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2006). Unlike other methods such as narrative analysis or grounded theory, thematic analysis is not related to any pre-existing theoretical framework; thus it can be used across different theoretical frameworks (although not all), and can also be employed to do different
things within them (Braun & Clarke 2006). This is appropriate for a study based on symbolic interactionism.

Thematic analysis can both reflect reality and unpick or unravel the surface of reality (Braun & Clarke 2006). To make the theoretical position of thematic analysis explicit, themes and patterns in this study were identified inductively (for example, Frith & Gleeson 2004). In this approach, the themes were not necessarily related to the questions that were asked of the participants; neither were they driven by the researcher’s theoretical interest in the area or topic (Braun & Clarke 2006). Instead, this study’s data was coded without trying to fit them with the researcher’s analytic preconception. The analysis was therefore data driven. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that as a researcher, it is not possible to free myself entirely from theoretical and epistemological commitments, or as Braun and Clarke argue (2006, p. 84): “data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum”.

In order to identify the themes, the study used a semantic or explicit approach. In this way, the themes were identified within the explicit meanings of the data and it focused on what participants said. The aim was for the analysed data to show patterns in semantic content that can be summarised and interpreted with an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton 1990), also in relation to previous literature (Frith and Gleeson, 2004).
To initiate this process, the interviews were each transcribed on the same day as they occurred. This helped in recognising the themes and codes emerging in each story and in looking for connections with previous interviews. It also helped retain in memory many aspects of interpersonal interaction and nonverbal communication (for example facial expressions, body language) that could not be captured in audiotape records, but which were potentially important aspects of the data analysis.

Interviews were transcribed word for word using the Microsoft Word software, and hard copies were used for thematic analysis. All interviews transcribed for the purposes of this project will be kept in both hard and soft copy format for future access for up to five years. It is important to point out that, in order to maintain the accuracy of the data, grammatical errors in the direct quotes were not corrected, but were transcribed exactly as they were expressed. The emphasis in the analysis of the data was on “what is said” as opposed to “how” or “for what purpose” (Riessman 2008, pp. 53-54).

In analysing the transcribed interviews, I immersed myself in the data so that I was extremely familiar with the depth and breadth of its content. I read the data many times, searching for meanings, patterns and so on. This was done because it is crucial to read through the entire data set thoroughly before beginning any coding, as ideas and possible patterns are better identified with more readings. In fact, analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set (Braun & Clarke 2006, pp. 86-87).
**Ethical considerations**

It is acknowledged that some topics covered in this research were of a sensitive and personal nature, particularly those relating to family and relationships. Participants were advised about the aim of the study and the nature of the questions beforehand, so that they were able to make an informed decision to participate in the study. In addition to the project information sheet (Appendix A), each woman was provided with the phone number and email address of lifeline, so they could contact this organisation in the event of any discomfort.

The project was approved by the Swinburne Human Research Ethics Committee before recruiting or interviews commenced. It was expected that no participant would become distressed by the content of the questions, as both the study flyers and notices and the plain language statements stated in some detail the nature of the questions to be asked. However, it was made clear to each participant that should she feel distressed in any way, she could stop the interview, and would then be asked whether she wished to continue.

Participants were advised that confidentiality would be carefully protected. In order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, each one has been assigned a pseudonym.

**Limitations of method**

The strengths of the methods used in this study are also their weakness. The present study has limitations in relation to sampling, interviewer effect, and presentation of analysis.
One of the key limitations of the interviews is that the sample is small and based only in Melbourne. Therefore the findings are indicative only, and cannot represent the entire population of Iranian women in Australia. Indeed, while this small qualitative study has revealed some significant findings, it is impossible to reliably generalise the results of these findings to all situations, including to other cities or states in Australia and all professional Iranian women. Furthermore, this small number of participants was selected from those Iranian women who had Muslim backgrounds. This was done on purpose in order to focus on one specific cultural background. However, it is acknowledged that in a broader sample, the responses of Iranian women from other religious backgrounds would be likely to vary from those discovered here.

Another possible limitation to this study arose as a consequence of some participants’ concern regarding the possibility of their being identified, and the risk of negative consequences within the workplace or family. They held these concerns in spite of the fact that all efforts were made to ensure anonymity. In this regard, the women who chose not to respond to some questions or not to participate at all, would probably have been able to contribute to a fuller understanding of women’s post-migration life experiences. The hesitation to participate in the study or to answer certain questions was particularly the case for divorced women, and for those whose migration was politically motivated. How to reach these women without placing them at risk remains a real challenge to researchers and to the women themselves.

In addition, because of restrictions in time, the experiences of professional male migrants and unskilled women were not included in this study. It should also be acknowledged that
since I, as the researcher, had a similar background to the participants in terms of experiences and history, there was the potential for interviewer bias that could have affected the data generated. Even though I was privileged to share a similar culture and history with my participants, this cultural relationship could possibly have influenced the women to share or avoid certain experiences, feelings and stories.

It is further acknowledged that the study could have given some attention to the impact of migration on participants’ religious beliefs. However, for non-believing participants (the majority), there was a concern about becoming involved with a religious project. Indeed some participants, particularly those who were invited by email with the consent form attached, showed initial reluctance to get involved with the project. For example, some said: “If being Muslim is necessary for this research, I am not suitable for that”. As my cultural background is similar, I was able to understand their concerns, and decided to avoid asking questions that related to religion. For this reason, it was emphasised repeatedly during the process that the term ‘Muslim (born) women’ referred in this study to cultural background, and not to Islam itself. Nevertheless, the possible absence of some rich information regarding the influence of migration on religious beliefs is recognised.

In addition, at the time of interview no demographic questions were asked in regards to participants’ socioeconomic background. Even though all women mentioned that they have urban backgrounds there is no information about their family upbringings. More demographic information about socioeconomic status of these women such as their parents’ level of
education and/profession or whether they grew up in traditional, religious families could have led to more-in-depth data analysis.

The Sample

Apart from their marital status, the women in this study are demographically similar to each other. All 30 women were born and raised in Iran, all were all highly educated, and all had life experiences following the revolution of 1979. They had all been living in Australia for between two to 15 years, and all were active in the Australian labour market in their own fields. Table one sets out the participants’ demographic information (with pseudonyms used).

Table 1: Pseudonyms and demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of years living in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roya</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Computer engineer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taraneh</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Industrial designing engineer</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahar</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>PhD student and lab supervisor</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahal</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Clinical Psychologist</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghazal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marjan</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Mechanical engineer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shila</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Lab technician and PhD student in mathematics and physics</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Eight years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golnaz</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Years Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>IT expert</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pari</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>University lecturer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hana</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>PhD student- lab supervisor</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasti</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Structural engineer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>English teacher and translator</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neda</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>English translator</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sogol</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Computer engineer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asal</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Computer engineer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshi</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niloufar</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gita</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>English translator &amp; a tour guide</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baran</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kati</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Nine years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Computer engineer</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Three years</td>
</tr>
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<td>Arezou</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahsa</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Mathematics tutor and PhD student</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehri</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>English teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nine years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikou</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fariba</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setareh</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Electronic engineer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Eight years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solmaz</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gisou</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Civil engineer and university lecturer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Five years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in this study. The following chapter will focus on findings related to motives for migration among professional Iranian women.
CHAPTER FIVE

MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION

Introduction

When studying post-migration life experiences, it is important to consider migrants’ past experiences and to discover who decides to migrate and for what reasons. This chapter presents interview findings related to motives for migration among this group of highly-educated, professional Iranian women. It focuses on the participants’ past (pre-migration) life experiences, as these are fundamental in understanding participants’ post-migration experiences. It first examines who decided to migrate and for what reasons. The discussion continues on to establish whether or not participants expected a better life in Australia and how they defined this better life. It will be demonstrated that the majority of women in this study were the principal migration decision-makers, and that they initiated migration because they expected better lives in Australia. This can mostly be attributed to these women’s pre-migration experiences of gender discrimination in both their private and public lives. A better life for these women therefore primarily refers to the potential for freedom from discrimination.

Decisions and reasons for the migration

Of the thirty participants in this study, four were single, two of whom migrated with their parents. The remaining women were married or in a relationship. Fourteen women from this latter group said that migration was their decision rather than their husband’s. The remaining twelve partnered participants mainly migrated to Australia because of their
husband’s status as a holder of either a student visa or a permanent residency permit. However, five of these twelve participants had already applied for migration to other countries such as Canada or America before they met their husbands. Therefore they had already decided to migrate, and it was only the destination that changed through their subsequent marriages. Some of these women arrived in Australia holding a temporary visa such as a business or student visa, but at the time of interview, all participants were either permanent residents or held Australian citizenship. Although some women in this study migrated to Australia to accompany their husbands, none was against the idea of migration nor reluctant to migrate. The women migrated for various reasons including unhappy relationships, opportunities for education and work, and to escape gender oppression. In general, the key motivation for migration was the hope for a better life.

Migration due to an unhappy relationship

Some women said that family tensions such as being in an unhappy relationship or having an abusive husband were their primary reasons for migration. Family law in Iran does not favour women with regard to their rights to divorce and custody of their children. Based on Islamic law, these women did not have the right to make independent decisions around their marriages or to decide to leave their marriages. The wife based on the Islamic law can refer to the court and request a divorce only under certain circumstance. If it is proved to the court that the continuation of the marriage will cause intolerable difficulty and hardship, for the sake of avoiding harm and difficulty, the judge can compel the husband to divorce his wife. If it is not possible to compel the husband, then, the wife shall be divorced by permission of the judge (Iran Human Rights: Documentation Centre). In addition, social pressures and stigmas attached to a being a
divorced woman in Iran, together with difficulties in respect to child guardianship, prevented these women from leaving their unhappy relationships. Kati for example, stated that her decision to migrate was mainly based on the opportunity to escape from family problems:

Of course I was not happy with the social condition of Iran but I was also very unhappy about my marriage and also the little town that I was living in Iran far from my own family and my hometown [...] I just wanted to escape from that little city that I was trapped in. [...] my husband actually was from that little town. When we married the first thing he did was taking me away from my family and we moved to his hometown. I tried a lot after my marriage but he didn’t agree to move back to my town. So, that was my main aim to migrate, to escape from a problem and to find a solution for that.

She emphasised that:

It was my decision to migrate but my husband agreed as well otherwise I could not do that for sure. He was always the one making the final decision.

By “social condition” in Iran, Kati was referring to the compulsory hejab for women, the uncertain future for her child and lack of opportunities for women’s professional development. Kati stressed that she was feeling very lonely in that family. Both her husband and her in-laws had control over her life. She wanted to take her husband away from his family to reduce their control over their lives. She also thought that it may improve their relationship as a couple. She knew that she could not convince her husband to move back to her hometown; therefore she decided to convince him to migrate to another country.

Arezou also had an unhappy relationship in Iran. She said that her husband was an abusive man and was unemployed. Most of the time he was very grumpy and aggressive,
and his excuse for his bad behavior was always related to a lack of work opportunities in Iran. Arezou considered that part of her husband’s anger and grumpiness was related to his unemployment, which affected his confidence and sense of manhood. She felt he might have better employment opportunities in Australia, which in turn may help to improve his behaviour and their relationship. She was concerned about her children’s future in Iran. She said that her eldest daughter’s dream was to become a heart surgeon, which was not possible for women in Iran. Arezou wanted to migrate and give her daughter the opportunity to follow her dream. Above all, she emphasised that her primary motivation was that members of her family already resided in Australia. Arezou’s mother and brother had migrated to Australia ten years before and although she had the opportunity to join them, her husband had not permitted it. Arezou was living in an unhappy relationship in Iran without family support. She pushed for the family to migrate because it would give her husband the chance to prove himself, and give her an opportunity to leave the marriage if that did not happen. She felt she could not initiate a divorce in Iran “because I wanted my children…I could not have them if I was divorced in Iran”. She continued:

…It was my decision to migrate to Australia but I can say that we migrated when “He” [her husband] finally agreed to migrate! My husband was the person who was always saying the last word. He was the one who always made the final decision. So, we finally left Iran when he decided to leave.

Both Kati and Arezou migrated to Australia as skilled migrants; they passed the required English test, completed all the paperwork and sponsored their family. They highlighted their capabilities by saying that migration was their decision, while at the same time pointing out their lack of power, that their decision was still dependent on their husband’s
agreement. They both stressed that their husbands made the final decision. Kati and Arezou also acknowledged later that if they had not had the skills and qualifications that they did, they would not have been able to migrate. The desire to migrate would not have been enough. Pari, another participant in an unhappy relationship and a primary migration applicant, further verified this:

I am a nurse, so, there is always a high demand of work for this profession. Without my job and skills firstly there was no way that I could apply for Australian residency and secondly, I could not survive in Australia without my job. Having this sense of security in mind, I went ahead with my decision.

Elsewhere in the interview, Kati revealed that if she had not been sure she would be able to find a job in Australia so that she could “survive”, she would not have thought about migration: “If I did not have this job (dentist), I could not apply for Australia at all! After all, I owe my decision and my action to my qualification”.

Those participants who initially moved to Australia as postgraduate students and for higher education talked about their undergraduate study experiences in Iran. They shared stories of how the academic environment of Iran led them to decide to leave the country to pursue higher education and to experience studying in a western country.

*Migration for education*

For several women, further education and employment prospects were the primary motivations for migration. The pressures for women because of Islamic law and political issues in Iran meant that there were few opportunities for professional development, and fewer connections and access to international academic sources. Gita asserted:
In Iran you don’t enjoy studying. I always wanted to see how people study in western countries. In Iran even study is by force and fear. YOU MUST DO IT! You must have a degree because everyone else does, you cannot even choose your field of study, and you must choose what has more prestige in public’s eyes to make your family proud and happy. And in university itself, it is all about stressful exams or passing irrelevant compulsory religious units because YOU MUST pass them […] So obviously you don’t enjoy learning when it is not about your passion. I was really curious to experience studying in a western country where I could only focus on my passions.

Gita’s emphasis on the word “must” showed her frustration with living in an atmosphere of control. Migration meant escaping from all those forceful and fearful “musts” towards liberation and the possibility to focus on herself and to experience a world beyond restrictions. It was interesting that those women who had studied at the most prestigious universities in Iran, such as Sharif, Shadid Beheshti and Tehran Universities, stated that migration to a western country to pursue postgraduate education or for work was a very common move among students. Migration for them was an expected step following graduation. They believed they were following the pathways of their friends. Gisou, for example, noted:

The environment of our university was of course very effective in my migration decision as most students leave Iran for further education or work after their bachelors or maximum their Masters. It was very rare to see [name of her university] graduates to stay in Iran. So, as most of my friends left Iran, it was a kind of motivation for me.

Like Gita, Gisou revealed that she was not happy with the education system in Iran. Her migration decision was largely the result of the bad experience she had in Iran when beginning her PhD:

It was my personal decision to migrate. I was single at that time and I wanted to go overseas and continue my education. I was a PhD student in Iran and I was in my second year when I decided to quit and leave Iran.
When asked why she resigned from her PhD in Iran, Gisou replied:

I sat for that difficult doctorate exam twice and I passed it each time but failed in the afterwards interview which was mainly about religious and Islamic matters. When the third time, I eventually passed both the exam and the interview, I realised that my supervisor was selected for me and the research topic was chosen for me. I had to work on something that it was not my area of interest at all. So after one year studying in that system I decided to quit.

Gisou pointed out that she was “single at that time” (of migration), which implies that her decision was not dependent upon a male partner’s approval, though she still required her father’s permission to leave the country. Gisou’s story suggests that had it not been for her desire for further education, and her aspiration and its related experiences, she would not have thought about migration. As a talented, determined and intelligent woman who fought for three years before finally achieving her goal, Gisou found it unacceptable to work on a topic and with a supervisor that were not of her choosing. She stressed that she passed the difficult academic exam, which was about her skills and knowledge, but failed because of her performance in the interview focused on Islamic matters. In order to pursue education at a doctoral level, candidates in Iran have to pass an entrance exam. If they pass the written exam, they are then called in for an interview. High numbers of candidates fail the interview and cannot get approval to commence their doctoral studies. Many Iranian students believe that the questions are designed to select only followers of the Islamic government, even though the government maintains that this requirement is because of limited space and resources. Although Gisou did not say so directly, by “studying in that system” she was referring to the Iranian educational system in which she felt her skills, talents and agency as an academic person were not respected.
Another participant, Tara, explained her situation:

I particularly migrated here for life progress. My educational progress was reached to its peak in Iran and there was no more room for improvement, no more opportunity! I was achieved the maximum that I could in Iran and obviously I wanted more. […] I liked to study more. I got my Masters in Iran but I didn’t enjoy it. I didn’t like the university system in Iran. […] I had a good job there. Maybe I was working in one of the best computer companies in Iran. But I was not happy any more. So, that was the main reason for me, to improve my life status; to study more and to achieve more.

Like Gisou and Gita, Tara studied in a highly-ranked university in Iran. She observed also that migration was very common among her friends after graduation. Like several other participants, Tara admitted that having access to the Internet during her years at university had a great influence on her migration decision:

They [government] think they are very smart by creating Internet filters, but they forget the fact that they are dealing with the selection of highly intelligent people. We could find a way [breaking the filters] to access what we wanted [laughing].

Taraneh agreed that using the Internet and having overseas-trained lecturers at university “opened her eyes into another world”. She continued

We had a fantastic lecturer at university who was trained in America before the revolution […]. He taught us that there are different ways of living […] and we have to follow our dreams.

These findings suggest that because of their high levels of education, these women had more opportunities to make migration decisions than less-skilled women. Shavarini (2006a, p. 49) explained that although a lot of websites were filtered in Islamic culture
(pornographic and political websites), there are still western websites accessible that allow Iranian women to be exposed to “liberated women, to choices, possibilities and to what they are not, at least yet”. As Taraneh’s words demonstrate, for the women in this study, using the Internet was about “opening their eyes into a different world”. University gave these women an insight into and understanding of different ways of living, and the pursuit of further study facilitated their imagination of life in the West.

Migration due to discrimination in the workplace

Those participants who had worked in Iran stated that the unpleasant work atmosphere was an important factor in their migration decision. Roya said that she was so serious about her migration decision that she would have left Iran without her husband if he had not agreed to join her. For Roya, better job opportunities and an improved financial situation took precedence over anything else:

… I was the person who decided to migrate. I passed the English test and followed all the application process. I was so serious about my decision even if that my husband didn’t want to join me […]. I was working really hard in Iran. Both my husband and I were working hard and we were both professionals, but I was not happy with the quality of my life! We were working so hard to just pay the rent! We could not travel at all […]. My skill was in demand in Australia and I had much better job opportunities here with much better payments. So, that was why I chose Australia for migration.

Roya said she had applied for Australian residency because she had skills and qualifications which at the time were reflected in the list of preferred occupations for migrants to Australia. Having entered the labour market in Iran as a professional, skilled woman, only to discover that her expectations were not met, Roya decided to migrate to Australia, where she felt her qualifications would be better valued.
For Bahar the situation was more complex. She described in detail how her work experience had led her to decide to migrate:

In Iran my biggest dream after graduation was getting a job in a biotechnology institution, which was the most well known biotechnological institution in Iran. When I finally got into that place and started working, I gradually realized that even that place is a place like the rest of the society. That workplace had the biggest impact on me to decide to leave Iran. […] When you see the best possible place to work in your area of interest that runs like that, you think to yourself that there is no more reason or goal to stay any longer in Iran. You expect that a science institution should mainly focus on research. But when you see for example that a governmental person [referring to president of Iran] comes for a visit, they stop the whole system and turn off all the machines for security reasons […]. The whole laboratory was looking like a kindergarten to me when they put a carpet on the floor just for someone to walk through and have a visit […]. When they do not care about the country’s budget that it has been spent for those samples and when you stop those machines it means that you have to start all the process again, you think to yourself how they can care about the people living in that country? I was feeling that I am a clown working in that place. They could set me when to start and when to stop like a doll, No one really was caring about the results, we were all clowns.

Bahar expected a different life once she got her dream job in a place where everyone was professional like her, and where she could focus on her passion. When she realised that even professional work environments were controlled like “the rest of the society”, she was left with no choice but to leave the country. According to Bahar, all the professional staff, including her, were acting like “clowns” who had to behave in an unprofessional manner just to show off. She felt like a radio-controlled “doll” that starts and stops acting when told. In fact, by describing herself as a “doll”, Bahar highlighted the controlled environment in Iranian society, since the word “doll” conjures up the idea of an empty-headed plaything with a human figure that can be shaped or set in a way that is desired.
She felt insulted that her knowledge and skills were devalued, not only in society in general, but also in her professional environment.

Women who studied in technical fields, such as engineering, faced difficulties in finding jobs in Iran following graduation. According to Marjan:

> It was a mutual decision between my husband and I to migrate and it was more because of the social situation that we had in Iran. But the initiate thoughts and the initiate decision was mine. We were both very unhappy mainly because of the social situation of Iran. […] Also my area of study was not something that I could easily find a job specifically as a woman. As a female aerospace engineer, the only job that was available for me was in military area where I should cover myself head to toe in black chador as a compulsory type of hejab, with no respect as a woman in a religious and political place were majority were men. I was really disappointed after my graduation […] I finally decided to get a job as research assistant at university but everyday I was feeling what a waste!

Hasti, a structural engineer, echoed these words:

> In Iran, as a female structural engineer I could not find any job in my level. I could not be a project leader and building inspector because I was a woman. Men in Iran cannot take a female inspector serious. Specially when you are pregnant and you cannot climb a ladder! I should work for men that did not have even half of my skills and knowledge.

It seems that job opportunities and gender discrimination in Iranian workplaces were related to particular fields of study. Marjan’s work experience in Iran shows heightened difficulties for women living in Iran’s religious and conservative environment which shapes workplaces. It implies that those with religious affiliations might not accept nor respect women as professionals. Both Marjan and Hasti’s stories suggest that in Iran, the prevailing attitude is that men are generally more capable of performing technical jobs
than women. There was a definite bias against Hasti in her role as a building inspector, particularly during her pregnancy. These women’s statements make it evident that for Iranian women, their education and skills do not necessarily guarantee they will find satisfying jobs and gain respect in the public domain. Despite the difficulties these women experienced, however, they had been able to access higher education in Iran, even in technical fields, and did manage to find jobs in a related field. However, their knowledge and skills were neither recognised nor respected.

Some of the women who had been able to find jobs in male-dominated positions revealed that they had needed to hide their femininity in order to maintain their positions. These women reported that they had to work twice as hard as men to prove their abilities. They further explained that they had to dress themselves in strict Islamic outfits and behave in masculine ways in order to prevent attracting men. Failing to do so could jeopardise their position. As Tara said: “… I had to be a man to be able to survive at work. I had to wear a man’s mask to work”.

Although Kati’s main reason for migration was related to family issues, social factors played an important role in her decision to leave. Her frustration with the social system in Iran was also related to her work participation:

I had to lie to be able to open some doors for me. If you don’t lie in Iran most of the time you cannot promote or do anything. Also because I was a woman, I was always passive and I was always behind everything. I had a feeling in Iran that I am not and I cannot be myself, I was nobody in that country and I could not open my pathway there! There were always restrictions.
Kati clarified her statement as follows:

I hated lying! Apart from my family-in-law’s interfering and my unhappy marriage, maybe it [lying] was one of my other major reasons that I wanted to migrate. For surviving in Iran you have to hide the truth sometimes so you can reach to your goal. Even the life inside and outside the house is different. As government emphasises on the Islamic law and people don't like the strict rules. They oblige you to lie about your lifestyle…you must pretend you are following the Islamic rules and you support the government.

Kati felt that in Iran, “because she was a woman” she was “always passive” and was a “nobody”. It is significant that she described life “inside” and “outside” the house as different in Iran, and that sometimes she had to “hide the truth” (that she was not an Islamic follower) for the purposes of “surviving”. She was “obliged to lie” and could not be “herself”. Indeed, upon entering into the public sphere, Kati realised that achieving a promotion was not related to her skills and knowledge, but rather to her ability to show support for the government and to follow Islam.

**Migration for a better life**

According to the findings presented above, the participants’ reasons for migration were varied and complex. Yet for many, establishing a better life in Australia was the overriding motive for migration. The majority of participants declared that they expected a better life in Australia. Their definition of “a better life” and their expectations of Australia mainly depended on these women’s past experiences of discrimination. There were two interrelated themes in the participants’ definition of a better life. For the majority of women freedom of choice was the first and most important expectation. The second was the hope for gender equality.
Expectations for freedom of choice

Participants described “freedom” in different ways, but for all it was related to having autonomy and becoming closer to their ideal selves. They wanted to be emancipated from the roles and rules dictated to them in Iran, and to focus on who they aspired to be. Kati emphasised freedom of speech:

I did not migrate for having freedom to go to nightclubs or drink or dance or to have multiple boyfriends. But I migrated for freedom of speech. I did not want to swallow my feelings or my anger anymore; I wanted to talk about them […]. I wanted to have freedom of choice […] I was never able to choose anything for my life. My whole life just happened to me and I just went with the flow. I didn’t even like dentistry [she is a dentist], but I had to choose something that was very top in public’s eyes for my parents and dentistry was the maximum that I could achieve by my score at that time but it wasn’t something that I liked.

At the forefront of her response was Kati’s comment that freedom for her did not mean “drinking”, “dancing” or having “boyfriends”. For Iranian men, including her husband (who is discussed in the next chapter), such options did mean freedom. For Kati, freedom meant “not swallowing her anger” and being able to talk freely about her opinions and feelings. She explained that if she was unhappy with something at home or at work in Iran, she could not complain or express her feelings, as they would have been disregarded. She revealed that there were times at home and at work that she was “absolutely bottled up” but still she had to “swallow her anger”. Freedom for her also meant the right to choose. Kati pointed out that she migrated to Australia at the age of 33, and up until that time, nothing in her life had been her choice, including her marriage and her field of study.
Like Kati, Taraneh remarked that she had to “swallow” her feelings. She believed that no-one [referring to the Iranian government] could “control” her “thoughts” or beliefs, but still she found that “it was very hard to accept that situation”. For Taraneh, freedom meant having the choice to be herself. She wanted to be happy and to laugh freely without being judged by others as a “bad woman”. A better life for Taraneh was just about having “basic human rights”, like “laughing in the streets”:

I wanted to be free from other people’s judgments. I was always worried of what I am wearing, what I am saying… I always convinced myself that they [government] may be able to control everything but not my thoughts and my mind, but still it was very hard to accept that situation. I had bad experiences that people were talking behind my back. I was always worried about what I was saying or doing. […] When I was walking in the streets I could not even laugh freely! Hundred of times in public I told myself: ‘do not laugh’ because men in Iran judge you as a bad woman if you laugh in public and it happened many times that cars stopped for me like that I was a prostitute woman.

Taraneh was labelled as a “bad woman” in Iran because she was happy, but to her, happiness was a “basic human right”. Although happiness and laughter are part of her identity, they are not considered as appropriate behavior for women, therefore, she was looked upon as a “prostitute” in Iran. Laughter for women “in public” in Iranian men’s eyes and according to Taraneh means deliberate behavior for offering sex (and mainly in exchange for money). This suggests that ideal Iranian woman should reveal her happiness in her private home only and not in presence of stranger men. The patriarchal structure of the society created a barrier between Taraneh’s imitation of a “good” woman and her true self in her “thoughts”.
Several other women spoke correspondingly about “freedom from judgments”. For Nahal, a better life meant:

… When you can achieve your dreams. When your mind is relax and you can focus on your goals. When you can work hard and live a good life as a result of your hard work; you can enjoy your achievements. Where you are not concern of other’s judgment and you live for yourself. That is what I expected to achieve in Australia.

Roya found the atmosphere of being afraid of “others” was “beyond her tolerance”:

Better life is freedom for me. I couldn’t understand why you should explain your personal things to others. Why should I choose my clothes based on what others dictated to me! Why the relationship of my boyfriend and I should have been a secret from others? I just couldn’t stand it. It was just beyond my tolerance.

Other women declared that a better life for them meant independence and freedom from control. Growing up in a culture like Iran’s, these women reported that they had not gained the courage to make decisions about their lives because everything was always decided for them. Ghazal, who migrated to Australia to accompany her husband following their marriage, had this to say:

I was so much dependent to my family that I was not able to decide for even a small thing by myself. My field of study, my husband… my whole life was chosen for me without that I even notice that! So, I migrated for a better life and this better life for me was when I could decide independently and take the responsibility of my decision.

Other women who felt similarly noted that cultural traditions meant disrespect for women in Iran, and dictated that their lives should always be dependent on others. Some explained in detail that no matter how old or educated a woman was, in Iran, her life was dependent on her parents—specifically her father—until marriage, when it became
dependent on her husband. Migration for these women was a step towards maturity and individuality and away from social and family control. These reports support previous research which shows that although Iranian women experience identity shifts and become aware of alternatives after becoming educated, the patriarchal gender order in Iran prevents them benefitting from their education (for example Rezai-Rashti 2011; Shavarini 2005 and 2006).

**Equal gender expectations**

The second central theme in participants’ definitions of a better life was gaining equal rights with men. Having experienced gender discrimination in both their private and public lives, these women expected to gain equal opportunities in Australia. A better life for some women meant freedom from gender discrimination. They expected better job opportunities and financial prospects, and most importantly respect and a sense of identity as a woman.

Baran, for instance, explained that she could not enjoy her life with the little money that she was earning in Iran, even though she was highly educated and working very hard. Additionally, she had to live with her parents due to her status as a single woman, even though she was 29 years old and financially independent. According to her, a better life meant, “being independent, working hard and earning good money and being treated as an adult regardless of your gender”.

Several other women likewise linked their equal gender expectations to their professional lives. Some women particularly emphasised that they did not experience as much
discrimination in the family as they did in society, and especially at work. Gisou attributed her experience of less discrimination in the family to the fact that her parents were not “religious” or “traditional”. For Gisou, a better life meant “a life without stress and social discrimination against women”. She continued:

I grew up in an open-minded family and my parents were not traditional or religious at all but in social life I had many problems specifically when my level of education increased. They didn’t allow me to do tutoring because I was a woman and civil engineering field was mainly for men. I couldn’t find a job even in private companies […]. I was so young at that time, only 24 years old when I finished my Masters and I was so disappointed.

She highlighted an important point: that her difficult experiences in the public sphere increased as she achieved higher levels of education. It is noteworthy that she was given the same opportunity as her male counterparts to study in a technical field (civil engineering). She had an equal chance to study in this field at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Yet this was only an illusion of equality. After graduation, Gisou was strictly limited in her ability to find a job in her profession due to her gender. Her report also suggests that the higher these women’s level of education, the harder it was for them to accept discrimination. For those women who, like Gisou, came from less religious and traditional families, this was even harder.

This resonated with several other women’s statements that because of their gender, their professional status was disapproved of and not respected following graduation. These women were given the chance to achieve higher education; however, the promise of a better life and financial prospects thereafter was merely a mirage. Marjan maintained that in Iran “you just work so hard for nothing”:
... Better life for me was freedom and having respect in society. I could not accept something that did not make any sense for me. I was always arguing that why should I cover myself in public and there was never an answer for me except “because they say so”!! It was really frustrating like at school and even university that we should listen to religious lessons and pass the related exams. Something that you do not believe in and you do not accept but you should study about that by force and sit for its exam and pass it by force again. Also, you study so hard in Iran, but when you graduate there are no options to use your achievement. You just work so hard for nothing!

As a highly-educated woman, Marjan could not accept the rules as dictated, and was searching for answers as to why she should or should not do certain things. She was “frustrated” that she had to behave in certain ways just because “it was said so”. She also expressed her frustration with religion, something she did not “believe in” but had to follow by “force”. A better life for her, therefore, meant freedom from forced controls. It meant being respected as a human who could make choices.

Asal stressed that not only could she not accept Iran’s strict laws—specifically the ones against women—but that she had always fought for her rights. She emphasised, however, that this was to no avail:

I was always a woman, even in Iran, that could easily raise my voice if I was discriminated because of my gender. For instance when at work in Iran I realised that female employees’ salary is less than men, my friend and I fought for our right and did not stop our fight for a long time even though that we did not win eventually [laughing]. But I was happy that at least I stood up for my right [laughing].

Asal admitted later that she did not decide to migrate under the illusion that gender discrimination would be completely non-existent in Australia. Nonetheless, she believed that if she fought for it in Australia, “she could win her right”. These women did not
expect Australia to give them full equal rights, but at least they might have the opportunity to achieve equal rights.

**Discussion**

Traditional studies have neglected women—especially married women—in migration decision-making, and it has been argued that if they migrate, they are usually following their migrant husbands (Cerrutti & Massey 2001, Thadani & Todaro 1984). Other studies have found that not only have women—both single and married—joined internal and international migration in growing numbers, but that they have increasingly participated as autonomous economic migrants (Castles & Miller 1998, Donato et al. 2006, Hugo 2000 and 2002, Morokvasic 1984). According to the findings discussed above, the majority of the women in this study had played a core role in migration decision-making.

It is argued, however, that these women could not have enacted their decisions to migrate without their skills and qualifications. These women applied to migrate to Australia either as skilled migrants or for higher education purposes. They were the primary applicants, had passed the English test and had completed all the required paperwork. Their migration, therefore, was dependent on their education.

Hampshire (2002, p. 24) notes that “by far the most important single determinant of migration behavior is gender”. She argues that the gendered division of labour, power and resources constructed in different cultures and societies are also important factors in understanding meanings attached to migration (2002, p. 25). Hoang (2011) found that migration decisions always take place in a specific context where people’s agency is facilitated or constrained by various socio-cultural structures. In Hoang’s (2011) study,
unmarried women appeared to have stronger agency in migration decision-making than did their married counterparts. In contrast, this study shows that the majority of the married women played the principal role in decision to migrate. As shown above, these women’s education was certainly an important factor, enabling their agency in migration decision-making. Yet they still required their husband’s permission to enact their decisions because of the patriarchal Iranian context in which they lived.

It was argued in Chapter Three that migration always involves expectations and imaginings of a better life of the other side—it is about the process of imagining life from here to there for better. The findings in this study demonstrate that all these women expected a better life in Australia. Salazar (2010) argues that because all forms and types of mobility are intensely embedded in wider cultural and socio-economic structures, mobility always needs to be analysed within the specific context in which it occurs. In the case of these professional Iranian women, experiences of gender discrimination played a crucial role in their migration. This form of migration (lifestyle migration), according to Benson and O’Reilly (2009), encompasses the idea of taking control over life, or emancipating them from restrictions and empowering them to live lives “more true to themselves” (2009a, p. 610). Participants in this study were “lifestyle” migrants. They all migrated to escape from controls and to achieve freedom to discover their personal potential and follow their true desires.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the past experiences of the participant women: who decided to migrate and for what reasons. It was found that more than half of the women in this study
played the central role in migration decision-making. Experiences of gender discriminatory experiences within and beyond the household were primary reasons for their migration decisions.

The chapter also examined whether these women expected a better life in Australia and how they defined this better life. It was discovered that these women decided to migrate to Australia for varied and complex reasons. Nevertheless, they had all migrated for a better life. The experience of gender discrimination in Iran had a great influence on these women’s definition of a better life and on their expectations of Australia. Two interrelated themes emerged in these women’s definitions of a better life. First, they expected to achieve freedom of choice in Australia. They wanted to become emancipated from control and to gain autonomy in making decisions about their lives. Second, they expected to achieve equal opportunities with men in Australia. They expected freedom from gender discrimination.

The following chapter will examine whether changes in circumstances and contexts have influenced participants’ marriage and couple relationships.
CHAPTER SIX

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE: MARRIAGES POST-MIGRATION

Introduction

This chapter addresses interview findings related to marriage and relationships. Chapter Five revealed that many of the women in this study had initiated their migration. Chapter Six investigates participants’ views of marriage and family, and whether and how changes in circumstances and contexts affected their patterns of interaction with their spouses/partners. The ways in which migration had affected couple relationships are examined first. The discussion continues by exploring whether living in Australia had an impact on participants’ understandings of marriage and family. In light of the findings, it is argued that migration to Australia has enabled these women to develop the rights and the agency to re-negotiate their positions as women in the family, and to make decisions around their relationships that were not possible in Iran.

By couple relationship this chapter refers to the heterosexual relationship between two people who share an economic, social and emotional bond, whether or not it is associated with official marriage or partnership. The focus of attention in this chapter, therefore, is on husband and wife and/or partner relationships, and not on relationships with children.
The impact of migration on couple relationships

This chapter concentrates on married, in a relationship or separated participants, and excludes single participants. As mentioned in Chapter Five, of the 30 women participants in this study, 26 were, or had been, married. Most women in this group had been married for more than two years, with the shortest marriage duration being one year and the longest 20 years. At the time of interview, six of these women were divorced. These six had been married for more than 10 years and been in Australia for at least four years. An additional 12 participants were still married at the time of interview, but were unhappy and were considering their options.

The majority of these 26 participants agreed that migration had an impact on their relationships. Some participants who got married in Iran, but did not live together before migration, commented that they had faced some challenges and arguments like every other couple that starts living together for the first time, and they thought this was not really related to migration. Other participants reported that because they had been alone in Australia and primarily in the company of their husbands, they became emotionally closer after migration. This was not the case for other participants, who remarked that although they became closer friends at the beginning of their life in Australia, things had changed after a short while.

Migration made the relationship better

Many of the participants said that they had rights in Australia that they had not had in Iran. How they handled those rights in the context of their marriage depended on their particular marital circumstances. After migration the women were able to actively make
decisions about their lives that they had not had the power to enact in Iran. Having new rights impacted differently on those participants whose marriages were strong than on those whose marriages were less solid. For those participants in solid marriages, the development of their rights and agency strengthened the marriage, provided that their partner also developed respect for them. For Shila (41) and her husband, for example, the move to Australia and the realisation that she had equal rights with men as a “human” and a “woman” improved her already strong marriage:

I think migration made our relationship better. We both learned a lot from the culture and society here. My husband learned how to respect me and I learned that as a human and a woman I have the same rights as well as him. In Iran we don’t know that we have rights as well as men. We have to learn it. […] Migration was in general very helpful and informative. Iranian men, don’t know how to show their love, they have never learned that. They don’t know how to respect a woman and they don’t know that women have some rights as well as them.

In Australia, Shila learned that as a “woman”, she had rights. These rights changed her husband’s view of her. The Australian culture helped her husband to learn about equality between men and women, and this in turn helped him learn how to express his love and respect for her. For Shila, once people knew that women have equal rights to men, they must be able to respect women as they would men. Her framing of the situation was that when in Iran, she and her husband had not known that women should be treated equally; therefore they did not expect it or enact it. Once they knew, their behaviour had to change. This view was not necessarily shared by other participants.

For Bahar, migration also led to a stronger bond in her relationship. However, she was not sure whether migration made her relationship better or worse, but she was sure that it
proved many things to her. Bahar explained that she applied from Iran for Australian
permanent residency as a skilled migrant. While she was waiting for the result of her
application, she encouraged her boyfriend to come to Australia on a student visa. Bahar’s
boyfriend (now husband) arrived in Australia first as student. Two years later Bahar
joined him as a permanent resident.

Although Bahar did not believe in official marriage, she had to formalise her relationship
to be able to sponsor her boyfriend to stay permanently in Australia. She reported:

When I encouraged him [her boyfriend] to leave Iran with
temporary visa I knew that he could go and never come back […]
it was a test for many things. I knew that my permanent visa
application would take a long time and it took two years. I knew
that he had freedom of choice; other choices and he could decide
not to want me any more. But, he waited for me and he chose me.
This was the most important thing for me to find out for myself if
his feelings, and the meaning of love and friendship for him, were
the same as they were me; if he really wanted me and chose me
for who I am.

Bahar continued:

I think in the past couple of years and through the process of
migration we proved to ourselves and to each other that
regardless of the name of our relationship [husband and wife] and
where and in what conditions we live, we love each other
unconditionally, we are true friends. It was important for me to
know this.

This was not necessarily the case for the other participants. Roya also had a solid
marriage. One year after they migrated to Australia, Roya’s husband went back to Iran
for a visit, and then asked her to return to Iran. Her newfound agency is apparent in how
she dealt with his request:

…He promised me to provide me a good life in Iran if I go back.
I said that I need three days to think. After three days my answer
was ‘NO’. I was sort of just establishing my new life in Australia
so, I said I am not going to quit my path here and I am not coming back!

Roya’s husband returned to Australia after that, and they continued to have a solid relationship. Nevertheless, when asked what she would have done if her husband had decided to stay in Iran, Roya responded emphatically:

I would have definitely stayed in Australia. I knew that if I were back, nothing would have changed. You always romanticize it when you are away from your country. [...] I knew the things that I was missing were just because I was away from them.

Ben-David and Lavee’s (1994) research revealed that one of the key stresses upon the marital dyad post migration is the escalation of interpersonal conflicts, which happens as a result of difference of opinion regarding migration. For Roya, different positions in relation to migration did not lead to separation and termination of the relationship, but rather to a stronger bond and friendship. The difference between Roya in Iran and in Australia is significant. Despite living separately for one year, Roya did not leave Iran until her husband agreed to join her. After only three days of reflection in Australia, she made the decision to stay in Australia even if her husband decided not to return. She had a good job, had improved her English and had begun to establish her life in Australia. She did not want to change this for the “good life” that her husband pledged to provide for her in Iran. Roya was empowered and became independent in Australia. Fortunately for Roya, the second separation made her relationship even stronger. However, for most participants in this study, migration led to their relationship drifting further apart.
Migration made the relationship drift further apart

Iranian-Islamic culture views divorce as a tragedy and a last resort, especially when there are children involved. While divorce is not a desirable outcome in Australia, it is socially acceptable, and family law favours women, particularly in terms of child custody arrangements. Emancipation from the stigmas and taboos attached to divorced women in Iran, economic independence and awareness of their rights empowered some of the participants to leave their relationships. Kati, a dentist and mother of one child, was one of those who became closer to her husband in the beginning, but this did not last:

When problems and pressures of real life began and we had nobody here to share our problems with or ask for help, we both started to become grumpy and it raised arguments and challenges.

For Kati, migration opened up new opportunities for both her and her husband:

My husband started to look at other women and started cheating on me. The environment of Australia opened my husband eyes to see other women more freely, he didn’t have this opportunity in Iran and of course in that little city that we were living and in that Iranian, limited culture. The whole environment did not permit him to do this. He was like a blind man that suddenly his eyes opened. He started drinking every night! He definitely changed due to the new environment.

Kati was very eager to speak, raising deeply personal and emotional issues. She was married and had lived with her husband, also a dentist, for 14 years in Iran. Kati finally initiated a divorce, though she struggled with this decision. Even though she had been unhappy in her marriage from its inception, she was going against a lifetime of Iranian norms around marriage:

I knew something was wrong from the beginning … even right after my marriage when I signed everything I went into my bedroom and laid down on my bed and asked myself: what did you do to yourself Kati? And I cried. I was absolutely blind and didn’t
know what I am doing! After 10 years of my marriage when I was already in Australia, I thought, I have had enough. But like many other Iranian women who think they should come with a white dress to their husband’s house and leave with a white dress, I was trying to push my thoughts away. Which was absolutely wrong. Maybe because I had no support in Australia, or maybe because I was unable to think correctly at that time. To be honest, three years after that thought, I finally decided to separate.

Migration revealed a very unexpected and different side to Kati’s husband. Her story recalls the mini-migration that young women experienced in Shavirani’s study (2006a), which found that as young women moved from rural isolation to urban diversity, they changed in positive ways. But here, away from a traditional and religious culture, and in the secular culture of the West, Kati’s husband had a different definition of freedom. He showed other characteristics that had not emerged for nine years in Iran due to its cultural boundaries.

A similar experience was articulated by Arezou, a head nurse and mother of three children, who declared that things got better at the beginning of life in Australia but changed after a short while. Arezou was also unhappy with her marriage from its inception. Unlike Kati, however, Arezou kept the idea of divorce secretly in her mind, in case the situation with her husband did not improve after migration. Arezou’s husband was unemployed for most of her married life in Iran, which he attributed to a lack of opportunities. According to Arezou, “For my husband, Australia and freedom and opportunities meant gambling, casino and lies […] but fortunately here he could not be as dominant as he used to be in Iran”. Arezou had in fact pushed for the family to migrate because it she felt it might give her husband the chance to prove himself, while giving her

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4 The second white dress is referring to death. In Islamic culture the corpse will be wrapped in a white clean sheet before burial. This is a common expression in Islamic culture, which means as a married woman, you only leave your husband’s house when you die.
the opportunity to leave if he did not. She felt she could not initiate a divorce in Iran, “because I wanted my children…I could not have them if I was divorced in Iran”.

After migration Arezou’s husband and relationship did not improve. However one of the key changes to her relationship was that her husband “could not be as dominant as he used to be in Iran”. She initiated a divorce. The western context gave her power in the relationship that she could not access in Iran. Ghaffarian (1998) suggests that pre-existing tensions in a marriage might worsen post migration as a result of men’s and women’s diverse approaches to adaptation to western culture. For Kati and Arezou, their pre-existing marital problems worsened after migration, resulting in divorce. Both were happy that they had divorced.

Two years after her divorce, Arezou re-married to an Australian man. At the time of interview, she had been with her second husband for nearly nine years, and she described him as “an absolute angel”. When she was asked if she could compare her ex-husband with current husband, Arezou responded simply but poignantly: “My ex- husband loved me for himself, for what I could do for him, but my current husband loves me for myself, for who I am”.

As mentioned earlier, an additional 12 participants were also in unhappy relationships, though their marriages remained intact at the time of interview. For some of these women, family ties in Iran were still a factor in decision-making around their marriages. For example Taraneh, lives apart from her husband but has not divorced him because neither she nor her husband wanted to tell their parents that the marriage had failed.
Although Taraneh was emancipated enough to make decisions about her life, her cultural background and family in Iran still affected her in Australia. She hid her life in Australia from her parents and in-laws because her life choices were not acceptable in Iran. She still visits her husband and speaks with his family regularly to create the illusion of happiness. Taraneh initiated her response by saying: “I do not understand what signing a paper really changes about the relationship”. Like Bahar, Taraneh did not believe in official marriage but had to formalise her relationship in order to be able to bring her boyfriend to Australia:

Before migration we never lived together. After we got married we applied for Australian permanent visa and while we were waiting for the visa I was still living at my parents and he was living with his parents. I think we came here together and we both were new here, so it made us closer to each other at first because we started solving problems together and I think we started to know each other sooner than if we wanted to live together in Iran. However, it was just the beginning and things changed a lot after a short while!

At the time of interview, Taraneh was still officially married to her husband but they had not been living together for more than one year. Taraneh was in another relationship, and like Arezou, thought that the new relationship was much better than her first relationship. She went on to explain:

… From the beginning I was not sexually attracted to my husband. He was like my brother [laughed]. I had a feeling that there was something wrong […]. I told my husband that maybe we should visit a doctor, because he was not sexually attracted to me either! … My husband always insisted that we were just stressed about our visa and as soon as we arrive in Australia everything would be fine. We arrived here but nothing changed! We got closer as friends but we still were not attracted sexually to each other. After a while, because I was socializing more, working professionally and responsible for living expenses, and he was mainly studying, our relationship changed to being more like a mother and son [Laughed]. Now it is like we are each other’s family here but we are not husband and wife anymore although we are not officially divorced yet.
Another eleven women were also unhappy with their marriages, but at the time of interview they were still married, and unlike Taraneh, they were still living with their husbands. Most of the women in this group were married just before migration and started living with their husbands in Australia. For this group, the time since migration was between two and five years. For instance Leila, was married just few months before she migrated to Australia and she had been living in Australia for just over two years. Like Kati and Arezou, Leila stated that she was unhappy with her marriage from the start; however, she pointed out that she was not complaining before migration. After migration Leila began to manifest her unhappiness and to express her expectations of her husband. The new environment enabled Leila to see other women’s situations and to develop new expectations of herself and her husband:

…When I was living in Iran my expectations of my husband and of myself were less than what they are here in Australia. In Iran maybe I could compare myself with other women around me and could think that my life is much better than theirs. [...] If my husband was doing something for me in Iran or helping me with housework, it was a bonus for me. But when you see other women here, when you realise your rights for equality your expectations and struggles develop.

Leila continued:

I was not a girl to argue with my parents or disappoint them and I believed that they always wanted the best for me. I married my husband only because I did not want to break my parents’ heart. They believed that my husband is a good person and has potentials to be a good husband. I did not love him from the first step, but did not have any complain either. Migration opened my eyes in so many levels and now I expect more from him. Now when I look around myself and other women, I feel I have been wasted. I had a lot more talents and potentials that never been used or discovered due to my early marriage. I deserve much more than this!

Migration made Leila’s relationship with her husband drift further apart, but her statement did not suggest an inclination towards divorce or other options. This was
possibly linked to the short duration of both Leila’s marriage and the time since migration (two years). Some other women in this group, however, openly stated their willingness to leave their marriages if they did not improve. Gisou, was among them:

Both my husband and me still trying to make each other more satisfy. And I think as long as we are still trying, or at least I am still trying it is good! But if one day we stop making efforts to solve the problems that would not work for me anymore and I will definitely divorce.

The realisation that in Australia they had the right to equality and the right to make decisions for themselves about their marriages empowered these women. They evoked the language of ‘rights’ in their discussions about what had changed for them after migration. This idea of ‘rights’ as something they had not had in Iran but were entitled to in Australia made them unwilling to contemplate returning to Iran. These newfound rights also led participants to analyse their pre-migration understanding of marriage and family.

**Post migration understanding of marriage and family**

This section explores the impact of migration experiences on participants’ general views about marriage and relationships. It particularly investigates whether or not these women’s cultural understandings of marriage and family changed post migration. In other words, this section examines to what extent the post-migration experience of rights and agency might have influenced participants’ marriage decisions or partner choices if they had the chance to go back to their younger selves. For those women who left their former relationships, it examines how this newfound knowledge might impact their future options.
A majority of the women reported that they would not have decided to get married if they had the chance to return to an earlier stage of life. Some of the women stated that if for any reason they had wanted to get married but they had their current knowledge, at least they would have chosen to marry at a much older age than they did in reality. These women also reported that their decision would have been made with eyes that were wider open. Those who had daughters commented that they would not like their daughters to marry in the same way as they had. However, a few participants conveyed that their perceptions of marriage and family had not changed much post migration. This group mostly maintained their pre-migration views of marriage and relationships.

Migration did not change the earlier view of marriage

Only a few participants said that migration had not changed their views on marriage and family. These women maintained that this was mostly due to the fact that they had been very open-minded and liberated about marriage even in Iran. For instance, Roya said that even in Iran she would have been much happier if she could have lived with her husband without being officially married. She added that in general she did not believe in marriage, but only got married because her family was traditional:

Migration hasn’t really changed my view. I was always very liberated about marriage and relationships … If I didn’t have a traditional family I would have lived with my husband just as partners and would not have married him. I knew him just for one year when I got married and I didn’t think that it is enough. I told him that we have to formalise our relationship only because we both have traditional families, but it doesn’t mean that we necessarily live together forever […]. It has worked well so far and we are still living together [laughed]. If it didn’t work, I would have definitely divorced him […]. I did not have the right in Iran to live with my husband without official marriage, but, if I could, I would have definitely used that chance.
Interestingly, like Roya, several participants stressed the importance of living with the partner and or/potential husband before moving into the commitment of marriage. This group of participants, however, said that they had not had the same view in Iran. This fresh perspective on marriage emerged for these women after migration and as a result of a new environment.

*Migration changed the cultural view of marriage*

As stated above, many of the participants reported that they wished they could have lived with their husbands before making the decision to marry. Gisou laughed as she said: “In that case I would have never married him”. Kati, who was a classmate with her husband for six years in Iran before marrying him, explained:

> If I had a chance to go back, I would have not married at all but if for any specific reason I wanted to marry with my current view I would have lived with that person for a while before jumping into marriage that quickly. Because the sexual relationship itself, I believe, is a big part of a marriage and for me it was an absolute failure! […] I think that the compatibility of the two people should be very match to make that two people closer to each other.

Several times during the interview, Kati highlighted the importance of the sexual relationship in marriage. She described her husband as an “aggressive” and “abusive” sexual partner and her sexual experience as “painful” and “unpleasant”. Importantly, Kati learned after migration that she had the right to express her sexual desires:

> …I did not know in Iran that women have the right to have sexual pleasure. I learned that I have the right to speak about my sexual needs, or the right to consult my sexual problems with someone and ask for help…. I have the right to have a BETTER life […] If I could go back to the earlier stage of my life, I would have put my rights on priority for sure and considered them more seriously.
Ghazal also noted that she would have not married if she had a chance to go back to her younger self, “at least not at that very young age”. Like other participants who started their married life in Australia, Ghazal made the following observation:

What I thought about my husband was completely different with what I saw from him in real life after marriage and after we lived together in Australia. We have both realised that we are very different and perhaps we were not a ‘good match’.

At the time of interview Ghazal was still living with her husband but she was considering her options. Her newfound rights and agency in Australia led Ghazal to analyse her marriage her choice of life partner:

I ask myself everyday whether my choice was a right one or not? I look at my husband and ask myself is this person a right person for me? […] I think I married very soon; I was only 23 years old. I didn’t know anything about men. Perhaps if I experienced sex before marriage and that relationship could not end up with marriage or serious commitment it could have been emotionally very harmful but now I think it was worthwhile if I could experience that. At least I could know men a little bit more and I could explore my sexuality. I was absolutely blind! I feel that I missed some best parts of my life as a consequence of my early marriage.

Ghazal stressed that her husband was a good man and a good person, and that she had not necessarily experienced an abusive relationship. Nevertheless, Ghazal said that before migration she felt she had to love her husband due to the fact that he was not controlling her life. In comparison with other women around her in Iran, Ghazal thought that she was very lucky to be married to a man like her husband. After migration Ghazal’s perspective of love and marriage changed due to the new environment:

… Couple of years after my marriage and when I was in Australia, I just realised what love means. I didn’t know really what is love before that. I had no knowledge about chemistry or soul connection or sexual relationship. Maybe it was good to experience love when I was a teenager. That sort of love belongs to that age that I missed it and instead I straight jumped into marriage blindly.
When Ghazal was asked what it was she had experienced in Australia that created a new understanding of love for her, she said she was unable to share that information. The emphasis placed by Kati, Ghazal and others on living with the potential life partner and gaining sexual experience before marriage suggests that in Australia these women do not view virginity with the same importance it was accorded in Iran. As Ahmadi’s study (2003) revealed, the sexual culture of Sweden had influenced Iranian migrant women’s views on sexuality. For the majority of Iranian women living in Sweden and participating in Ahmadi’s study, virginity was viewed as a kind of personal responsibility post migration rather than as something that might potentially jeopardise the family honour. In other words, while in traditional, Islamic Iranian culture depriving a woman of her virginity before marriage could bring shame on the family, following migration maintaining or losing one’s virginity became a matter of personal choice for Iranian women. After migration and in a new environment these women found the autonomy to control their own bodies and to explore their sexuality.

Like Ahmadi (2003), this study found that after migration these women no longer viewed marriage as central to women’s lives. For example Gisou said: “Living in Australia, I learned that marriage is not the main goal of a woman’s life”.

Like Kati, Gisou was her husband’s classmate at university. Gisou and her boyfriend (now husband) got married in Australia, and even though she was unhappy, at the time of interview her marriage was still intact. She explained:

My husband and I were classmates in Iran in our bachelor and masters programs and we knew each other for nearly six years before we got married. [...] I thought because I knew this person
for a long time at university and his age was quite close to mine and we had similar educational backgrounds, we would be a good match. Now I think I did not see everything at that time and I was more emotional than logical […]. If I had my current view I would have looked at my decision more logically and would have seen everything with more details.

Gisou continued:

My father of course knew how much I wanted this person but surprisingly in the airport when he was seeing me off he told me: ‘Gisou, don’t put your main goal on marriage. Even if you don’t marry, nothing big or strange will happen’. That day I was really offended with my dad’s advice and I thought what an advice that a father can give to his daughter! […] Today, I think how open-minded was my dad and how lucky I was to get that advise even though that I didn’t understand what it meant! Now I can see that my dad was absolutely right! Nothing strange really happens if you don’t marry even if you are a woman. This is not the main goal of a woman’s life!

Gisou realised that being a woman was not necessarily related to being a wife. After migration, marriage was no longer viewed as an essential part of life for these women, nor was it associated with their identity anymore.

Similarly, Marjan’s new perception was that in general marriage was an unnecessary part of life, but in her view this was because marriage was all about “fighting for rights”.

Marjan, knew her husband for a few years before getting married to him, as did Gisou and Kati. She formalised her relationship only a couple of months before migration, and they started living together in Australia. Like Gisou, Marjan was in an unhappy relationship, but was still living with her husband at the time of interview. She compared her past and present views of marriage:

Before I got married, I believed that you must know your partner first and then decide for marriage. Now, I think I just deceived myself that I thought I knew him! (Laughed). […] That five years was just deceptive because now I believe that until you live with someone at one place you don’t know him! You can be good for
10 hours in one day, you can be the person that she likes or he
likes. Even if you go for a short trip, how many days is that trip?
[…].

Marjan carried on as follows:

If I had a chance to go back, I would have not married at all
(laughed). I don’t know what would have been my feelings if I
would have turned 40 and I was still single but at this stage, if I go
back I would not marry. […] In general I am against marriage now
because I think when you marry you should always fight for your
rights. […] I believe that if my husband thinks he can do
something or he has the right to have something, I have the same
right as well. And I fight for it (laughing).

Marjan recalled that since she was 18 years old, her parents had restricted her life because
of her gender. These restrictions included being home before it was dark, and pressure to
get married after she graduated from university. She maintained that she had to deal with
a similar situation even now that she was married, though this time with her husband and
in different ways. For instance, she pointed out that her husband was able to have a day
just for himself or with his friends, but she was not afforded the same right, and she was
fighting for that right.

Discussion

Individuals change their social roles in response to changes in circumstances and contexts
(Mahdi 1999; Rajiva 2013). In marriage, migration can disrupt previous patterns of
interaction between couples (Ahmadi 2003; Ben-David and Lavee 1994; Gopalkrishnan
& Babacan 2007). This was true of the participants in this study, whose views on
marriage changed post migration, enabling them to renegotiate or exit their marriages if
they chose to. Whereas in Iran divorce is seen as unacceptable (Hojat et al. 2000), once
they settled in Australia, some participants did choose to end their marriages in the hope of improving their lives.

Two themes underpinned participants’ experiences, whether or not they elected to stay in their marriage. First, most participants found that migration and the discovery that they had rights as Australian citizens changed their views on the position of women in the family and in society. Second, this gave them the agency to make decisions around their relationships that were not possible in Iran. The participants were able to re-negotiate their relationships to make them more satisfying, and they were able to leave them if this was not possible. Those participants who remained in unhappy relationships felt more empowered to take control of their relationships in Australia than they had felt in Iran. None wished to return to Iran.

A majority of the women reported that they would have decided not to get married if they had the chance to return to an earlier stage of life. How they analysed their attitudes towards marriage and partner choices varied among participants. However, there were two main themes that emerged in their responses. First, after migration, the majority of participants believed that having a sexual relationship and living with the potential husband prior to marriage was very important. These women discovered that sexual satisfaction was a significant factor in a successful marriage, though they had not been aware of this in Iran. They found the right and autonomy to express their sexual desires, and realised that they could experience sexual pleasure. Second, after migration many of these women understood that the woman’s identity was not linked to marriage alone.
Conclusion

This chapter explored whether changes in environment could challenge patriarchal domination within the family. Living away from home and the familiar culture can contribute towards a shift in individual aspirations towards gender equality and freedom of choice. The issue of whether or not migration had affected the relationships between the women and their partners was examined.

It was demonstrated that migration had led to a stronger bond for most participants whose relationships had already been sound in Iran. While those in bad relationships became closer temporarily, due to lack of family support and pressures of migration, they drifted apart after settling in Australia. It was also revealed that migration empowered these women to leave or re-negotiate their bad relationships.

These findings show that living in a western culture such as Australia had a great influence on the majority of participants’ views on marriage and family. The majority of women in this study would have approached marriage differently or not married at all if they had the chance to return to their younger selves armed with their current views and knowledge.

The following chapter will explore the impact of migration on participants’ professional life and experiences of work in Australia.
CHAPTER SEVEN
POST MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the impact of migration on participant women’s marriage and couple relationships. It was shown that overall, migration had a positive impact on these women’s couple relationships even though some still chose to end them. Migration had given these women the rights and agency to re-negotiate their positions as women in the family and to make decisions around their relationships that had not been possible in Iran. This chapter explores the impact of migration on participants’ professional lives. As noted in Chapter Four, the term “professional” in this study refers to Iredale’s (2001b, p. 8) definition: “highly skilled people who have a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field”. The chapter investigates first how and to what extent education/qualifications and work experiences in Iran were beneficial or detrimental to getting work in Australia. The personal experiences of these women at work are then examined, and whether or not they had met their work-life expectations in Australia. Chapter Five revealed that for many of the participants, a better life meant achieving a higher occupational status and more particularly, gender equality at work. This chapter argues that despite the initial challenges of re-establishing a professional life in a new place, the majority of women have gained respect, greater recognition, and equality in relation to gender in the workplace. Migration had a positive impact on these women’s professional lives and met their expectations for an improved professional life in Australia.
Occupational mobility: transferability of skills and qualifications

Prior to migration, all the participants had established themselves in their professions. In Iran, they had all had careers related to their qualifications, even though those professions or positions were not necessarily ideal, satisfying or at their expected levels of seniority. Gaining recognition for overseas qualifications was not easy, with all participants having to pass an English test and undertake further training after settlement. Sometimes extra education or procedures were required in order for them to be able to obtain local registration in Australia, especially in medical fields. At the time of interview all women’s overseas qualifications were recognised, their occupations and skills had been transferred successfully to Australia, and all were working in their own fields. None of these women remained unemployed for more than one year after their arrival in Australia. Because of financial support from their husbands, families or sources in Iran, none of these women had been required to work in poorly-paid jobs during the initial settlement period in order to earn an income to support themselves.

A small number of participants were not fortunate enough to enjoy occupational mobility. They were able to maintain their previous occupational position in Australia, but they did not experience career advancement. This was because they held overseas qualifications and/or lacked network connections in certain fields, and specifically in medical fields. Nonetheless, some women experienced decreased occupational mobility initially, due to language difficulties or cross-cultural barriers. Despite the initial decreased mobility for some, most women experienced an increase in their occupational status in Australia over time.
Migration led to experiencing no occupational mobility

A small number of women stated that their occupational status remained relatively stable through their initial settlement period. Due to their skills being in high demand in Australia, having had work experience in Iran and having passed the required English test prior to migration, finding work was relatively unproblematic. These women were mostly in engineering fields, and unlike women in medical fields, were not required to undergo formal processes of registration to work in their profession. Overseas trained health professionals such as doctors, dentists or nurses must be first registered by one of the Australian state or territory medical boards to be able to practice in Australia. This involves achieving a designated minimum score in the Academic (not general) English test IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or OET (Occupational English Test) as a first compulsory step towards the registration process (Harris 2011). Candidates then must sit for the Australian relevant (medical, nursing, dental) council examinations, which contain two parts: written examination to test the knowledge of overseas graduates in the required field followed by clinical examination to assess their procedural skills (Birrel & Schwartz 2007; Douglas 2008). Three of the women in medical fields prepared themselves for the required registration exams prior to migration, and therefore obtained Australian local registration relatively quickly. These three did not experience decreased occupational mobility in Australia; the level of their positions remained the same as in Iran. Despite recognition of their qualifications and their contributions to work in their field, these women believed that their opportunities for advancement were limited in Australia because they held overseas qualifications. Kati, for example, a dentist, stated:
Maybe if I was in Iran I could be a specialist now. It is quite impossible for me as an overseas graduate to become a specialist in Australia. Because the recommendations that they need here, we cannot provide them [...] You need to have connections with people to recommend you, which mainly happen during undergraduate study. I know that my chances here are zero if I want to be a specialist. I go to some seminars to just improve my knowledge but that is all. In addition, for having my own clinic, it is very difficult here….for me unfortunately in this field, I am the same general dentist that I was in Iran with no progress! Here if I want to have my own clinic I need a lot of money. I mean A LOT!! It needs a lot of paperwork. You need to know people in the filed [dentistry] and have a lot of connections. It is a really hard job! Quite impossible!

Kati went on to say that her score was in the top ten in the Konkour (the standard national test used as one of the means to gain admission to higher education in Iran), and that she believed in her talents and abilities. She emphasised that if it were not for the limitations she faced in Australia as an overseas graduate, she could have progressed her career beyond being a general dentist. She explained that because of the different educational system in Iran—particularly in her field of study—gaining entry into specialty programs in Australia was a very complex and almost impossible process. In Iran, Kati studied dentistry for six years and achieved a doctorate degree. In Australia, after passing the required exams and gaining local registration, Kati’s degree was recognised as a Bachelor of Dentistry, though her title remained as doctor. In Australia, Kati had to apply to do a Master’s degree in order to gain entry into a specialty dental program. For her this signified a decrease in her occupational status. The different system of education in Australia meant that she had to go back to university. For financial reasons, particularly after her divorce, Kati could not resign, nor reduce her work hours in order to return to university for an advanced degree. According to Kati, the need for letters of academic recommendation showing Australian qualifications added further to the complexities of the application process for graduate specialty programs.
Nikou, also a dentist, similarly thought that she could have reached the level of specialist had her opportunities not been limited because of her overseas qualifications. She too believed that in Australia she was “the same general dentist as she was in Iran”. Fariba, a nurse, agreed that in general in Australia, professional progression was a more difficult and slow process. Fariba had a Master’s degree in the nursing field in Iran; however, her degree was recognised as being equivalent to an Australian Bachelor of Nursing. Nevertheless, Fariba’s position level remained similar to what it had been in Iran. She said:

My position as a nurse is quite the same as it was in Iran even though that my post graduate degree was not recognised here […] I like to get advancement position but it is very difficult for me to go back to university and re-do my Master degree again.

The above narratives show that the education attained in the home country was beneficial for these women’s career success post migration. It also indicates that these women’s career self-management and the amount of effort they put into preparation for the required assessments influenced their career achievements after migration. However, their high expectation of success meant that attaining only equivalent positions to those held pre migration was neither adequate nor satisfying. It could be interpreted that although these women successfully updated their qualifications to Australian standards, the reality was that they remained restricted to those positions most in demand in Australia. It seems that in particular fields such as the medical professions, overseas-trained skilled migrants are indirectly controlled or limited regarding entry into advanced positions.
Migration led to experiencing initial downward occupational mobility

Some women experienced decreased occupational mobility initially (see Chiswick et al. 2002; 2003; 2005). They attributed this to language barriers. For some, however, the initial drop did not last very long and in a relatively short time they achieved higher positions than they had held in Iran. Mahsa, for instance, revealed:

> When I came here at first and when I finally got a job after about one year, I dropped in my position level a little bit from what I held in Iran. In Iran my responsibility was to manage two or three developers. Here, at first I was a normal developer in the company, like in graduate level. That was logical actually, because of the language problems that I had. The better and better I could speak the more responsibilities and higher positions I achieved. And now I am back not only to the same level which I had in Iran but maybe even higher. I feel that the quality of my supervision and my role here compare to what it was in Iran is a lot better.

Mahsa’s experience well demonstrates the “U” shape pattern described by Chiswick et al. (2003). Although she initially experienced a decrease in her career status, she achieved an even higher position once she improved her language skills. Mahsa said that her qualification was recognised shortly after her arrival in Australia. Yet according to her, the language barrier affected the outcomes of her job interviews, in that she was not seen as competent enough to take the job. The language barrier, however, did not mean that these women had to put their lives on hold for long. Mahsa and several other women maintained that in less than one year, their English abilities improved and that language was no longer a hurdle in finding a job in their fields. Many of the women said that although the language barrier was a challenge for them, it was a natural part of the process of adapting to a new place, and that it was not the biggest hurdle. Shila, for instance, stated that the initial drop due to the language barrier did not worry her, as it was a “rational expectation”:
In the beginning I dropped in my professional level, which was logical. My degree needed to be registered in Australia, which was not that hard but even when I passed the technical exams, my English was not good enough yet to start a job in the same level of profession which was understandable.

In Iran, Shila had been a high school physics and mathematics teacher. In Australia she needed some time to adjust to the new language, which did not take longer than one year. During that year, Shila was able to obtain at least 10 job interviews, but according to her, lack of ability in English, together with her unfamiliarity with Australian interview etiquette, prevented her from securing employment. In addition, she could not apply for any teaching positions in the beginning, as her qualification required local registration. After one year, having met the local standards and armed with improved language skills, she found a job as a physics lab technician. This she said, represented a decrease in her career status, which impacted on her self-esteem. Yet Shila did not remain at the bottom of the “U” for a long time, and did not give up pursuing her dreams, deciding to acquire further education in Australia. Holding a Master’s degree from Iran, she applied for a PhD program and received an offer. At the time of interview, Shila had graduated with her PhD and had been working as a research fellow at a university. According to her, this was a much higher position than she had held in Iran. Reaching the top of the “U” took Shila nearly five years.

Similarly, Pari decided to continue her education to PhD level, as her position in Australia was not as high as it had been in Iran. She obtained registration as a nurse in Australia after one year, and found a job shortly after that. Holding a Master’s degree in nursing, Pari had been a lecturer at a private university in Iran. This was not possible in Australia; she required higher education in order to be eligible to teach at university. Like
Fariba (also a nurse), once she met the local standards, Pari’s degree was recognised as a Bachelor of Nursing. Pari spent one year at the bottom of the “U”, and practiced as a nurse until she began her PhD. Her husband was the main source of financial support during her PhD candidature, while she pursued her teaching career as a sessional tutor at university for four years. She eventually reached the top of the “U” after she graduated with her PhD:

I was working as a lecturer in Iran even though that I only had Masters degree. So, that was very difficult at the earliest stage that I had to stay at home and look after my child, then I had to start from the beginning and sitting on the English test and go for the registration and redo what I had done in the last 10 years. When officially after one year I was registered as an Australian nurse, I should go back to hospital, as with my Masters degree I could not get an academic position in universities. However, I gradually found these whole things as parts of my journey and tried to use all the new challenges and experiences to grow and thrive spiritually and socially; especially the challenges I had during my PhD study. I am a bit of challenge-minded person; so, after a while having a very stressful time started to think about the positive aspects of my challenges.

Even though Pari experienced many challenges during her settlement period, she did not give up the pursuit of her teaching profession in Australia. This was despite the fact that teaching is heavily embedded in the local language, and therefore skills in this field require a greater command of the dominant Anglo-Australian English language than do other occupational fields. It took Pari a long time, but she eventually re-entered her profession in Australia, having in the meantime achieved the higher qualification of a doctorate degree. It seems that Pari’s personal determination to regain her dream career helped her overcome all the barriers in the new place. The challenges of settling in a new country ultimately worked to Pari’s advantage, resulting in a higher career position. However, the individual agency along with societal and institutional barriers in the new
place influenced each woman differently. Each of these women’s diverse personalities led to different experiences during their settlement period.

For Taraneh and Gisou, for example, the case was different from the experiences of Pari and Fariba. After living in Australia for three years, Taraneh believed that her abilities were still not the same as they had been in Iran due to the language barrier. This was despite the fact that her qualification was recognised shortly after her arrival in Australia and that she was able to find a job relatively quickly at the same level as her pre-migration position. This was mostly because Taraneh’s field (industrial engineering) was at that time in high demand by the Australian government. Although Taraneh did not spend any time at the bottom of the “U”, she felt that she had experienced downward mobility due to what she perceived as her lack of competence in English:

I feel my abilities here are not the same as back home. Maybe it is because of my language. In Iran I could handle lots of things at one time, but here I cannot do the same. I am not a multi task person here. And also on top of the language is the familiarity and connections in the field that you can have in your own country. For example, if I want to call the city council it is much easier for me to do it in Iran. I know how the system works there, I have connections and I know the people [...].

Likewise Gisou expressed:

I had a good level of English when I migrated and I have improved a lot since I am living in Australia but still I have some problems. [...] I have a very good knowledge of Iranian history, the art, and the Persian literature. In Iran I could talk about all these things proudly in Persian but here sometimes I feel I can only smile and I have nothing to say or add to the conversation. My intellectual conversations here are mostly limited to work and mainly about civil engineering related topics. It makes me sad. Very sad!

The language barrier affected Taraneh’s self-confidence at work. She felt that she could not fully perform her duties due to her lack of English proficiency. She explained in
detail that as an industrial design engineer, she felt “embarrassed” when she could not explain the requirements of a project on the phone to council members. She said that the language barrier prevented her from having in-depth conversations at work with her colleagues, and from answering the phone. Taraneh felt that if she could not understand a strong Australian accent on the phone, she might come across as incompetent, or as a “stupid engineer”. As a highly-educated, professional and knowledgeable woman, Gisou felt sad that she could not be as good at English literature, arts or history as she was in her native language. In reality, the language itself was not as much of a challenge for Gisou as it might have been for many other migrants. The challenge was Gisou’s high expectations of herself as an intellectual, highly-educated woman. For Gisou, the source of sadness was that her high expectations of herself were beyond her competence in the English language.

*Migration led to experiencing upwards-occupational mobility*

The majority of the women in this study believed that their occupational status had increased in Australia. This was despite their experiences of initial occupational downward mobility. Shila, for instance, who experienced initial downward mobility due to her weak English, compared her position in Australia following her PhD graduation with what it had been in Iran:

After graduating from my PhD and of course with higher educational level, better abilities in English and with my work experiences and skills prior and after migration, I have to say that now I am in a much higher position professionally compared to what I was in Iran. I must admit that social wise and income wise I am in a much higher position now.
Participants in technical fields, like Gisou and Marjan, emphasised that their professional life had definitely risen to a higher level in Australia. This was due to the fact that they could use their degree qualifications as springboards for exploring different careers, and were not limited to research work anymore. Gisou spoke about this:

I was research assistant in Iran and I am a university lecturer here with a much higher income. I owe this position to my PhD that I acquired in Australia. But I was not obliged to do any further education in order to find a job. Even with my masters degree I could find a job anywhere that required my skills […] My degree is not limited to academic research like Iran, I can work at university or in a private company or even in a mining area or in anything or anywhere that they need my skills and knowledge.

Gisou emphasised that she was not “obliged” to update her qualifications in order to re-enter her profession. It was her choice to acquire further education to enrich her knowledge and experience in her field. Unlike Iran, in Australia Gisou’s gender did not influence her ability to find a job: her “knowledge and skills” did. For Gisou, this meant an increase in her career trajectory.

Hasti, a structural engineer, found a job in her own field immediately after her settlement in Australia. Her knowledge and abilities were valued by Australian employers, and for her, that meant career development:

In Iran after a lot of attempts I finally found a job as a building inspector but my role was limited to certain inspections only and I was working under a supervision of a male manager whose qualification and knowledge was less than mine. My first position in Australia was also under supervision of someone else but in a short period of time, once my abilities were proved to the company I achieved the management position. At the moment more than 10 builders are working under my supervision and my inspections and projects are not limited to certain circumstances.

At first, Hasti’s occupational mobility remained level, as she found a job in a similar position within a very short time after moving to Australia. Once the quality of her work
and her level of knowledge were recognised, she experienced upward mobility. In Australia, Hasti’s gender did not work against her finding work and achieving promotion as it had in Iran.

The findings show that, in general, the field of occupation impacted on participant women’s experiences of professional re-settlement in Australia. While proficiency in the English language was a strong requirement for certain professions, and therefore created a hurdle for some women in finding a job in their fields, it did not affect women in other professions as much. Unlike women in medical professions, the majority of participants in technical fields acknowledged that their professional position had improved in Australia. The new work environment allowed these women to utilise their full human capital in a variety of ways. This was in contrast to their experiences in Iran where gender discrimination had worked against their employment options. For these women, the opportunity to find a job in a field of work that had been primarily male dominated in Iran meant a huge improvement in career status.

**The experiences of work in Australia**

Apart from the issues of employment outcomes and recognition of skills and qualifications, it was necessary to explore whether participant women’s expectations of professional life in Australia had been met. This was important because the majority of women in this study migrated for a better life, and for some women, this better life meant freedom from discrimination at work. Participants shared details of their work-life experiences in Australia and compared them with their experiences in Iran. The findings (in this specific participant sample) highlight the role of gender in these women’s work
experiences post migration. They illustrate that despite all the challenges, in Australian workplaces all these women met their expectations of a better life. They gained gender equality, a new sense of professional identity and respect.

Challenges in adjusting to a new setting

For some immigrants not only adjusting to a new language but to a new culture and new system can be very difficult. Moving into a new educational or workplace system means the immigrants are “outsiders” who do not know how the new system operates (Geisen and Bekerman 2011). The new work environment caused some women to experience challenges in adjusting to new rules and regulations. These women maintained that the challenges were ultimately enlightening and enriched their professional experiences. Pari, a registered nurse who finally won a position at a university as a lecturer (the position she had held in Iran) after graduation with her PhD, explained in detail her teaching challenges in the new work environment:

When you teach, there are a lot of other things [not just the teaching strategies], which you are dealing with. You need to be sort of aware of people's culture to understand them properly. I was able to understand my people in Iran only by having looked at their eyes; but that didn't happen to me in here for a long time. Now, I am starting to get in there [smiling]. Also, there are some other differences in terms of following fairly different guidelines and the ways you communicate with the students. You should be very careful about the ethical aspects and 100% respecting the confidentiality and personal space; which should be applicable in any situation in here, but I guess it is more highlighted when you work with young generation. Another difference is dealing with very broad variety of cultures and nationality; which is sometimes really challenging and I love this challenge, I learned a lot here and I am a better teacher I guess.

Pari’s unfamiliarity with the new culture and work environment initially led her to experience particular challenges. However, these challenges ultimately made her feel she
was a “better teacher”. She was happy with her decision and ultimately perceived all the obstacles in the new place as having advantaged her professional life. Not only were language skills important in Pari’s work as a lecturer, but communication styles, patterns and behaviours had to be learnt from scratch. This requires a lot of time before they can be understood and successfully delivered. Pari adapted to this new cultural environment, even though it was not easy to learn new ways of communication and new idioms. None of these hurdles prevented Pari from securing employment in her field.

Fariba, a nurse, likewise appreciated the challenges in the new work environment that in the end made her feel like a “better person and a better nurse”:

It was interesting in the beginning for me that here everyone is equal. There is no one as a boss that sits all day behind a desk and orders the rest of the staff what to do. In my job personally as a nurse, it was challenging in the beginning that if I was responsible for a patient, it meant that I have to do everything by myself. We do not have a position in hospitals here for someone who only cleans the beds or serves tea or etc. […] working as a nurse in Australia was challenging and added extra pressure on my role initially, but I have to say that I learned a lot. I am a more responsible, more humble and more knowledgeable nurse here. I am a better person and a better nurse here.

Although working in a new cultural environment initially added “extra pressure” to Fariba, she thought that in the end it had affected her professional status and her personality in positive ways. Fariba explained the hierarchy of positions in Iranian hospitals. In each ward there were people employed exclusively to serve tea or clean beds. Doctors looked down on nurses, who were expected to obey their orders, though she in turn could order the cleaners, considered to be in a lower position than hers, to clean patients’ beds, or the abdarchi (a janitor who works in the kitchen) to bring her tea. Initially it was surprising to Fariba that she had to make her own tea and clean her
patients’ beds, but she adapted to her new cultural environment, and considered overall that she had improved both personally and professionally. These women realised that unlike Australia the Iranian work environment was highly stratified. Despite facing challenges to adjust to the new rules and regulations, experiencing a sense of equality impacted these women’s views of their host society and of themselves in a positive way. On several occasions, participants mentioned that extra responsibilities and working in an environment where all staff had the right to receive equal treatment eventually made them feel better and more humble people.

**Experiencing equality in gender**

The majority of participants valued the equality in gender and career development they experienced in Australia. Being treated as equal and afforded equal opportunities in different sectors reinforced participants’ senses of self and career identities, allowing them to grow professionally and to achieve their career goals. Tara said:

> In Iran I had to be a man to be able to work and survive! Here you can be a woman, you can be yourself and work and progress. Here I do not need to wear a man’s mask to work. I can keep my femininity and work, and succeed. It feels good.

In Iran Tara had to sacrifice her femininity in order to “survive” in her job. In her department, Tara and another woman were the only female employees among at least 15 men. She had to alter her behaviour and mannerisms to be more masculine in order to keep her position at work. She explained that she had to behave as if she were tough, and to present herself very “plain” (directly). Despite wearing a *hejab*, which had to be black, Tara could not wear any make up, perfume, high heels or anything that represented femininity because this might attract her male colleagues and ultimately jeopardise her
job. Gita stated that in her field of work, which was also male-dominated in Iran, she received no “respect” as a female:

As a female tour guide, in Iran I had no respect. Some jobs in Iran are simply not suitable for women. Here there are no differences between men and women.

In Chapter Five, Asal was quoted as saying that one of her main reasons for migration was the opportunity for freedom from discrimination at work. She admitted that she did not expect Australia to be completely free from discriminatory practices against women, but she did expect that in Australia she would have the opportunity to fight for her rights and to achieve them. The following statement indicates that Asal’s expectations were met in Australia:

In Iran I was always fighting for my right, specifically at work, but as I said earlier, I was only happy that I had stood up for my right [laughing]. Because I never achieved anything [laughing]. Here, if I feel I am discriminated I will do the same; I will stand up and fight for my right. But the difference is that here I can achieve what I fight for. It may take time, but I know that I will eventually win. This is a big difference between Iran and here.

Taraneh, who earlier in this chapter spoke about her lack of integration in her new work environment due to her weak English, revealed the following:

In Iran maybe it was much easier for me to make a phone call to the city council but I have to say that in Iran when I call the city council no one takes me serious [laughing]. You have made a call but you have done nothing [laughing]. But here if I make a phone call to the city council even if that my English is not perfect, I can really do something by my phone call. They care about my knowledge not my language skills or my gender.

As an industrial design engineer, Taraneh explained that in Iran a female opinion or request was not taken seriously. This suggests that although she was familiar with her own cultural environment and with the language, Taraneh was not able to use her human capital to its full extent in Iran. In Iran these women’s gender was working against their
professional prospects. In contrast, although they encountered barriers in finding employment in a new cultural environment and in another language, these barriers did not make them feel disadvantaged in their work in Australia. Taraneh was able to use her full human capital in Australia even though she perceived that her lack of ability in English ability still prevented her from fully integrating into her new work environment.

Hasti’s experience in this regard was similar:

Here as a structural engineer I am a building inspector and I have been a leader of many building projects in Australia. This is including the time that I was pregnant for my second child and was not able to go for all inspections but I was still the project manager. I have the qualification and knowledge and that is all matters here.

Earlier in this chapter, Hasti spoke of the many attempts she had to make in Iran before finally getting employment as a building inspector, and that because she was a woman, she was restricted to certain roles. She said that she had been working under the supervision of a male manager who was less qualified than her for the job. She stressed that not only had she experienced upward occupational mobility since migration, but she was also able to maintain her position as a project manager during her pregnancy. Like Taraneh, Hasti emphasised that the big difference between Iran and Australia was that in Australia, her skills and knowledge shaped her professional prospects, not her identity as a woman.

Experiencing a new sense of professional identity and more respect

Participants repeatedly mentioned that in Iran, the quality and consequences of the work carried out were not taken seriously. Like the rest of society, workplaces were intensely
controlled by external powers (referring to the Iranian government). The aim of work in Iran, according to these women, was not to improve anything but to satisfy the government. They felt this attitude was “disrespectful” of their knowledge and qualifications and led them to feel that they were “wasting” their time. As did several other women, Shohreh explained that in Iran she felt that her talents and knowledge were not respected and that the whole work system lacked principals:

I think the work here is more real. In Iran I do not know how many projects we started and we never finished them […]. I never could finish a project in Iran! I worked there for five years. No one ever used the plans or quotes that I was written! Here everything is real. You have the budget, you have due time, you have to work, you have to deliver it and people really use the result of your work. Everything is real, so that is what I really enjoy about working in Australia. […] In Iran I had a feeling that I am just wasting my time! All those documents and quotes and plans that you created were just useless! Here I feel my knowledge and skills are respected and I am really doing something that it is useful and practical for people.

Shohreh went on to explain that in Iran they could spend weeks or months on a particular project and would then have to stop due to insufficient budget or lack of access to required material. According to her there were no deadlines for completion of plans, and they could be left unfinished “forever”. This situation could not satisfy Shohreh, despite the fact that she was earning a salary. She felt that she was not helping anyone or improving anything with her knowledge, and this affected her sense of professional identity. The new work environment had given Shohreh a renewed sense of professionalism. It made her feel respected because her professional knowledge and intelligence were being put into practice in the real world.
For Fariba, the Australian work environment helped develop her social and financial position, but most importantly it helped her acquire a sense of worth and increased self-esteem as a professional person:

As a female nurse I feel much more professional here in Australia. I like the fact that here everyone is equal at work, not only between men and women but also among all staff at work. I am happy that here I am not the doctor’s servant like what I was in Iran. I am not working for doctors but working with them as part of the team. I have much higher income here as well as greater respect and higher recognition […]. No one looks down at me anymore because I am a nurse. I feel I am doing something important for people and I am professional.

For Fariba, her sense of worth and being treated with respect took precedence over financial prospects. She earned a much higher income than she had in Iran, but of most importance for her was that she is not a “doctor’s servant” anymore. The respect she received made Fariba feel valued and useful. She acquired a sense of individuality in her profession because she was no longer employed to perform duties for people who acted as her master.

Hasti, a structural engineer, noted that being heard and valued in the Australian work environment gave her a new sense of professionalism:

Here when I go for inspections of different building projects almost all workers are men. But they respect me and they must listen to me even if that they do not like to listen to a female leader […]. Maybe some Western men do not take a female project leader serious either, like Iranian men but the difference is that the work system here forces them to respect the leader regardless of the gender, nationality or anything else. I felt valued here and for the first time after years that I was graduated, I felt professional when I started working in Australia. It feels real.

Hasti felt that Iranian and Australian men’s perceptions of women might not be very different. What made the difference was that in Australia, institutions of power exist that
remove gender-related barriers from the labour market. Once she was in Australia, her professional advice was regarded as important and taken seriously. Hasti, “for the first time” since her graduation, felt professional. Her sense of professional identity did not feel imaginary as it had in Iran; it felt “real”.

Some women who opted to re-enter university in Australia for higher education noted that in Iran, even with their current qualifications, they would not have received the same professional respect as they have in Australia. Nahal, who had a master’s degree in psychology from Iran, decided to continue her education in Australia and complete a PhD. She was uncertain whether she would have gained the same level of respect and recognition in Iran had she gained her PhD there:

In Iran I could not work at this level of profession. I mean my professional life is much better than what it was in Iran. Mainly because Australia has given me the opportunity to study at higher level of education [PhD] and gave me the opportunity again to work at this professional level whereas in Iran I may never had this opportunity […]. As a clinical psychologist, I receive a lot more respect here and I earn very good money. I only had my masters in Iran, but I doubt even if I had the PhD, I could have this level of respect in Iran.

By completing her PhD in Australia, Nahal achieved a better financial position and developed a greater sense of professional worth. This, she felt, could not have been achieved in Iran. Both Kati and Niko (dentists) revealed earlier that they thought their professional progress was limited in Australia due to their overseas qualifications. Both added later in the interview that despite this, they were happy with their migration decisions. According to them, a female dentist in Iran was perceived as less capable than a male dentist. As they explained, the majority of Iranians prefer a male dentist, particularly for surgery and complex procedures such as root canal treatment. Even
though Kati and Nikou found it difficult in Australia to gain entry into specialist dental programs, they thought they had achieved a “more respectful” sense of professional identity.

**Discussion**

Using data from the LSIA based on statistical analysis, Chiswick et al. (2002; 2003; 2005) studied migrants’ occupational adjustment over a three-and-a-half year period, and revealed that migrants experience a “U” shape pattern. According to this pattern, migrants first experience a decline in their occupational status due to a lack of skills transferability. This is followed by a rise in occupational status after an average time of three and a half years at the destination. After this, migrants are more likely to be able to transfer and utilise their skills, thereby eliminating their downward occupational mobility. The employment experiences of the majority of participants in this study followed this “U” shape pattern of occupational mobility. In agreement with Chiswick et al.’s research project (2003, p. 49), many of the women in this study initially experienced downward occupational mobility, which they attributed to their non-speaking English backgrounds. It has been shown, however, that the field of occupation of these women had a great influence on their employment experience in Australia. Women in technical fields experienced fewer barriers than those in medical professions with regard to local registration and professional development. While women in medical professions maintained their pre-migration professional positions, they found it particularly hard to progress into higher positions because of their overseas qualifications. In contrast, after migration the majority of women in technical fields showed an improvement in their professional positions over time.
Some other Australian studies argue that cultural aspects can influence migrants’ employment prospects. Ho and Alcorso (2004), for example, maintain that highly-skilled female migrants are less likely to be in the workforce than their male counterparts. Three and a half years post migration, they note, the proportion of women who had withdrawn completely from the labour market and were involved exclusively in “home duties” had more than doubled. In a later study, Ho (2006) says that although many of her highly-educated, Chinese participants had been employed in China, in Australia, many fewer were engaged in paid work, while their share in domestic duties had increased substantially. The findings in this study contrast with Ho’s conclusions. However, in this study, only professional women who were active in work were interviewed, and they were not asked specifically about their domestic duties. The two studies are therefore difficult to compare in this regard.

The data presented in this chapter suggest that professional migration experiences are shaped around gender and cultural experiences. The women in this study were able to use their full human capital at work in Australia, and overall, their occupational status progressed after migration. They had not had this opportunity in Iran because of the cultural environment in existence there that supported gender discrimination.

**Conclusion**

The factors shaping occupational mobility in skilled migration have been the focus of previous research. This chapter sought to explore a fresh and different perspective on migrant women’s professional life experiences. The findings suggest that, despite the initial challenges, migration mostly had a positive impact on the professional lives of the
women in this study. It was shown that in many cases, the positive achievements and upward mobility of these women had much to do with their personal motivation and the level of their determination to re-establish their professional positions in a new place. Their positive outlooks and sense of improved professional identity post migration were largely related to their professional life experiences pre migration. The experience of discrimination at work due to their gender prior to migration played an important role in these women’s perceptions of their positive experiences in the Australian work environment. All of the women felt that they had met their work-life expectations in Australia. They were moving towards gender equality at work, had found a new sense of professional identity, and had received greater respect and professional recognition.

The following chapter examines the impact of migration on participants’ perceptions of self. It explores participants’ everyday experiences of personal identity, both in their private and public lives.
CHAPTER EIGHT

“ME” AS AN INDIVIDUAL:
POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF SELF-IDENTITY

Introduction

The previous two chapters explored the impact of migration on participant women’s couple relationships and work experiences. Both chapters found that migration in general had a positive influence on these women’s lives. This chapter explores how and to what extent migration has influenced participants’ perceptions of self. It discusses interview findings related to participants’ everyday experiences of personal identity, both in their private and public lives. The self in this chapter refers to aspects of identity associated with personal feelings, a process of awareness about ourselves through our relationships with others, experiences, background history and memories, as well as our values, standards and beliefs (Zastrow 2009, p.59). The chapter first examines whether participants feel differently about the women they were in Iran and the women they are in Australia. Observations follow regarding whether these women express themselves differently in Australia than they would have in Iran. It is argued that on the whole, migration has had a positive impact on these women’s perceptions of themselves as individuals. Migration has given them an opportunity to explore their inner lives and to discover identities of which they were not aware in Iran. It is demonstrated that these women value their newfound selves more than their old ones, and they are more confident. In Australia these women have become emancipated and have found new and
different ways of self-expression. The right to make their own choices was not available to them in Iran, and these women value this new opportunity.

**The past and present self: feelings post migration**

This section explores the participants’ personal thoughts and feelings about their inner, private selves post migration. In other words, it examines the impact of the new environment on these women’s perspectives of themselves. It reports the ways in which the women described their identity after migration.

All 30 women in this study believed that they felt differently about the women they were in Iran and the women they are in Australia. Overall, this new sense of self after migration was a positive experience and helped them to develop independent identities. There were two principal themes reported by the majority of participants in their discussions of identity experiences post migration. First, most emphasised that they had discovered a new sense of self-worth after migration. Second, for many, this discovery had led to an increased belief in themselves.

**Discovery of self-worth**

The discovery of self-worth was the first main theme that emerged in participants’ responses. Being away from Iran, with its traditional, patriarchal beliefs and values, together with altered gender relations as a result of migration, led to a change in the self-perceptions of these women.
Finding the self

For the majority of women in this study, the post-migration sense of self was not only an experience of shifting identity, but an experience of “finding or discovering”. They repeatedly talked about a new self that they had “discovered” or “found” within themselves post migration. Kati, for instance, stated:

I think post migration in general I am a better person. I love myself more. I respect myself more. I know my rights. I found myself …migration maybe helped me to find myself and gave me the ability finally become free from that wrong person in my life [my husband]. And when he was out of my life, it was like that the curtains opened and I could just see myself better. I had time to spend for me. I had time to think about myself […]. Before that, I was just a housewife, a dentist and a servant! I was just a person who should give service to others […]. I am a happier person, healthier woman and it is easier to deal with me now, I was a very introvert person before. I am much more outgoing and sociable now, a much more open person.

For Kati, migration enabled her to leave her marriage, which led to positive changes in her life. That decision led her to gain self-autonomy and to find herself. She described her husband as the “wrong person” who had acted as a barrier (or curtain) that prevented Kati from finding her own identity for many years. Kati depicted her husband as a kind of dark shadow. When he stepped out of her life, she was released from a cage. For Kati, migration initiated a process of self-discovery. This led her to re-evaluate her self-worth, and to develop “love” and “respect” for herself; it altered her view of Kati. She described her new self as a “happier” and “healthier” woman in comparison to with the “woman in a shell” that she felt she was before.

Several other participants reported that post-migration analytical thinking about self had led them to develop more intimate friendships with themselves. Many participants
stressed that after migration they felt “closer to themselves”. This was expressed through statements such as: “It is like an exploration within yourself” and: “You discover a new view of yourself”. While Mehri stressed the impact of culture and society in Iran on the understanding of “who you are”, she claimed that the process of “exploration within the self” post migration was like seeing the self from inside:

In Iran you are more the person that others and society judge you and see you, whereas here you are more the person who you are comfortable with. It is like seeing yourself from inside to outside. It is more the reality of you but not the one that others think or judge.

For Maryam, a combination of different factors post migration had led her to feel “more at peace” with herself. Although she felt age might also be a factor, she said that having a sense of “security” and “safety” about the future and “finding herself” were essential factors in the “peace” she felt in her present life:

I am more at peace with myself. I don’t know is that because of my age as I am getting older and I am getting more relaxed about many things in life or is that the impact of migration? I just know that I am more relaxed than before. I feel my life is more stable here. My relationship, my financial situation and in general my life is safe and secure from any point. In Iran I did not have this sense of security about future! Also I think I found a lot more potentials in myself and through finding these potentials I found myself [...].

Once Maryam discovered her capabilities, her sense of self changed. She renewed her sense of self through searching within herself and finding her potential. According to Maryam, this was an opportunity that Australia gave her: “to discover who I am, not who others think I am”. Mehri found this new person a more “comfortable”, capable and strong woman, someone who was not alien to her. These women seemed to discover something new and positive about themselves that had been hidden from them for many years. They discovered positions of power, trust and familiarity.
**Prioritising oneself**

Most women reported that after migration they learned to prioritise themselves sometimes. In Iran they had never thought that they could put themselves before others. Like others, Niloufar emphasised the importance of self-worth, which she said she had discovered after migration:

> Being here I have realised that I have to value and even prioritise myself. When I am tired why should I put myself through the pain for other people?

Instead of expending all her energy in helping her family, in Australia, Niloufar invested her energy in herself as well. According to her, her family considered this post-migration change in her as “selfishness”. She explained that in Iran, a woman “is only born to give service to others”. She described the “others” as members of her family of origin, and her husband and kids. For Niloufar, this change did not mean “selfishness” or less regard for others, but having regard for herself as well.

Several other women similarly reported that in Iran their lives had been dedicated only to others. After migration, Gita learned to pay more attention to her own needs. She realised that she needed first to treat herself with respect before she could treat others in the same way:

> In Iran I was living for others. I was always doing things just to make “others” happy or satisfy. Here, I live more for myself. I have the first priority here, then my immediate family and later the rest of my family back in Iran and friends. But I am the first priority here! […] In Iran I never had time for myself. Here I learned that if I am not well, if I am not good for myself, how can I be good for someone else? In Iran sometimes the year was gone and there was no “Gita”, no time for her through the whole year! Because she was always for others!
Moghadam et al.’s research (2009, pp. 45-46) shows that in most Iranian families (living in Iran), the peace is maintained through women’s sacrifice of their own desires and aspirations. Narayan (2004, p. 215) also argues that in cultures where values are formed around religious institutions such as Islam, a woman’s role as mother and wife is not only highly praised, but also “seems assigned a place and value as long as it keeps to its place”. The statements above reveal that after migration these Iranian women developed more analytical thinking, and in applying that, learned to prioritise themselves before others; they re-negotiated their prescribed place and value. Like Kati, Gita mentioned that life post migration enabled her to spend some time by herself and to be “good for herself”, something that she had “never” done in Iran. This indicates that those roles that were perceived as essential and beneficial to women in Iran seemed to diminish in value after migration. These women’s values regarding their personal wellbeing and satisfaction changed as they learned to prioritise themselves.

*Self-respect as a woman*

Some participants expressed the view that life after migration had given them the opportunity to change their perceived identities as women. Taraneh, for instance, noted the following:

> As a woman, I feel I am relaxed now about my gender, about being a woman [laughing]. In Iran there were many differences between men and women. There were many situations that I felt I had to do something or not to do something only because I am a woman. Like being quiet, polite, being obedient. I think in Iran being a woman makes you by default a guilty person [laughing].

Identities are constructed and produced “within” rather than “outside” discourse, in specific historical and institutional sites and “within” specific discursive formations and
practices (Hall 1996, pp. 4-5). Taraneh’s statement shows how her perception of being a woman was rationally shaped within the Iranian context. Her expression of guilt implies feeling bad about being a woman. Taraneh’s sense of self “as a woman” was associated with “guilt”; she felt culpable and inadequate, and therefore obliged to follow gender expectations. However, as Hall explains (1996, pp. 4-5), identity is a process of “becoming” rather than “being”. Therefore, it is neither fixed nor permanent. After escaping the cultural influence of Iran, Taraneh felt “relaxed” about being a woman. Several other women’s narratives echoed Taraneh’s experience of feeling more comfortable about being a woman. This newfound confidence in turn led the majority of these women to believe in themselves.

**Believing in oneself**

The second important theme discussed by most women was that of believing in oneself. It was repeatedly mentioned that the discovery of self-worth and self-respect after migration had led them to have new aspirations and to set new goals in life. They developed a faith in their abilities and this helped them to build more confidence in themselves.

**Acquiring self-confidence**

Tohidi (1993, p.184) argued that for Iranian women who reside in the United States, “the opportunity to become self-reliant and to develop a personal identity is often considered the most positive consequence of migration”. This was also the case for the women in this study. All participants responded that after migration they acquired autonomy and self-assurance. They frequently compared their selves before and after migration to
emphasise the opportunity they achieved post migration to develop their personal identities. Tara for example, reported:

    The biggest change happened in me after migration was my self-confidence. Before I could not be this confident about myself. Now I feel I believe in myself much more than before.

Other participants mentioned that after migration they became aware that their “old selves” in Iran had actually been suffering from depression. They related this to lack of confidence and trust in their own capabilities. They explained that gender discrimination in Iran had caused them to lack respect in themselves and their abilities. In comparing past and present, these participants talked about themselves in the third person, as if they did not know their old selves anymore:

    Shila had depression in Iran and she didn’t know that. The whole system in Iran that is against women, leads you towards depression. If I want to talk about the reasons it will take hours. But the whole system is not a healthy system. You are always stressed, always scared […]. Enough to say that you are just engaged but you cannot hold your husband’s hands in the public. You scare that somebody at work sees you and you lose your job because you are not officially married yet!

    Shila went on to explain:

    I didn’t know how to communicate with my husband to make my life better, to have a better relationship. I didn’t know that one kiss or a smile could change a lot of things. Our culture didn’t teach us these things. We scare to kiss in front of our children let alone in the public! Love is prohibited in Iran for women. I don’t remember that in Iran I could say to my husband that I love him or ever approached him to kiss him. I had no confidence in myself even in my private life to express my emotions to my husband!

After migration Shila learned that in Australia, the expression of love for another (love based on sexual desire) was not immoral or sinful, as it was perceived in Iran. She also realised that it could improve her relationship with her husband. After migration, Shila
developed more confidence and strength within herself through showing her emotions and love.

Golnaz similarly recast her experiences in Iran as depression, which she also linked to cultural and social boundaries. For Golnaz, though, further education and the opportunity to follow her dreams in Australia were the things that most positively influenced the development of confidence in herself. She also talked about herself in third person:

Golnaz was so depress in Iran. I didn’t realise at that time how depressed I was but now looking back; I know that I was depressed. I used to get up every morning asking myself, what should I do here? I liked to continue my education but I told myself you are married and you have children; you are too old to go back to university and if you go what will happen next? When they stop you to achieve your goals and your dreams never come true you get depress […] Here, I went to university and did my Masters and slowly I found myself. I felt happier and much more confident. Now I believe that I can do whatever I want, no matter how old I am. Age doesn’t mean anything for me like it did in the past. I believe in myself and I know I can achieve my dreams at any age.

In culture like Iran’s, as a married woman with two children in her early 40s, Golnaz felt too old to go back to university to pursue higher education. Within the Iranian context, Golnaz believed that her primary role was to dedicate her life to her husband and her children. Once she was given the opportunity in Australia to follow her dreams, she began to search within herself and discovered a new self. This self was focused on her, and she discovered that she could set goals and achieve them at any age or phase of her life.
**Becoming more mature and stronger**

More than half of the participants acknowledged that their general knowledge about life had grown after migration and they felt more “responsible” about the decisions and actions they make in their lives. In turn, this sense of responsibility made them feel “strong” morally and intellectually. Gisou referred to this as a “big change” in her life, which she related to the fact that because her family of origin was not living in Australia, she had learned how to rely on herself for everything in life:

Migration was a big change in my life. I have changed a lot-t-t-t-t! I am a much stronger person now. In Iranian culture you live with your parents and you don’t have any responsibility until you get marry. When I came here, it was a big shock that I had to solve all my problems just by myself! For the first year I asked my parents to help me financially although it was not the only problem. I still had other problems like I had no one to share my sadness or loneliness with and it was really hard for me. The second year I could not let myself to ask for financial support and I had to solve it myself like the rest of the problems. So I had to work really hard and in the meanwhile I got married, so I had my personal life, my work and money issues, my studies and so on so on. All these challenges made me a different person, a much-h-h-h-h stronger person.

In the absence of family help and the challenges of adjusting to a new place, Gisou had learned how to rely on herself in a number of ways. Even though initially it was a “big shock” for her, she was happy that it had ultimately helped her to become a “much stronger” person.

Roya began her sentence with her name (third person), making it seem like she was talking about two different Royas:

Maybe Roya is still Roya but this Roya definitely knows more and she is more experienced […]. When you live in a village your knowledge and experiences are limited to that village. When you
see the rest of the world you grow up and you become more mature.

Roya described Iran as a “village”, a small place that was detached from the “rest of the world”. She pointed out that in Australia she is not another person, but that her inner qualities and level of awareness about herself and about life in general had developed. Once these women’s knowledge of self and life extended beyond the walls of Iran, they attained different mental and emotional qualities, and felt stronger and more empowered. This newfound strength gave these women the means to find new ways of expression.

In the following section, the extent to which feeling different about themselves in Australia has influenced these women’s expressions of self is addressed.

**Self-expression post migration**

All participants reported that they express themselves differently in Australia than they would have in Iran. This new expression included bodily presentation, clothing, and different ways of communication, among others. Of the various new ways of expression, social emancipation and freedom of speech were the two major themes mentioned in the majority of participants’ responses.

*Social emancipation: clothing and drinking*

The theme of social emancipation was raised by the majority of participants in their discussions of self-expression. For these women, having the right to choose what they would wear in public and being able to wear colourful or more revealing clothes was considered a new way of self-expression that was acquired in Australia. Neda noted:
I hate black and brown, which were the main two colors that we could wear in Iran. I was born in war period […]. My life was really limited when I was a teenager […]. Here I can wear pink, yellow, whatever color!

Neda explained that during the war period (referring to the Iran-Iraq war) when she was in high school, the hejab rules for women became considerably tighter. In her school they were allowed to wear only a black or dark blue mantua (Islamic uniform), which had to be loose and not reveal the contours of their bodies. They had to wear the mantu with a black maghnae (the tight version of a scarf that reveals the contours of faces and hides the hairline and neck) and black or dark blue trousers that had to cover the shoes and be very long and loose. Every morning, according to Neda, there would be someone sitting in front of the school entrance door with the purpose of approving the girls’ appearances. As Neda explained, if the girls did not meet the school standards, they would not be allowed to go to school and would be sent back home. Neda said she did not ever remember feeling “pretty” when she was a teenager. She emphasised her hairy face, her “thick and messy” eyebrows and the “moustache” she had during her teenage years. Had she chosen to wax her face in order to remove the unwanted hair, she would have been expelled from school. She added that “those days seem to be very old now, but deep inside the memories still make me sad”.

Neda felt that her youth had been “wasted” in Iran, and still in her mid 30s these memories hurt her. According to Neda, the time that she should have been flirting with the opposite sex and feeling attractive as a young girl were “wasted” in a society where she was banned from having any contact with men, from whom she was made to hide her beauty. These women were deprived of male contact in the Islamic culture, and were shrouded in conservative Islamic attire in public, and even more strict and conservative
attire at school and university. Even though the past memories and the “wasted” youth still saddened Neda, she was happy that in Australia she is free to choose colourful outfits and to explore her beauty and femininity.

For Roya, the freedom of expression in Australia extended beyond public presentation. Having been raised in a traditional family in Iran, Roya was limited in her choice of clothing, even at home. Having grown up in a traditional and, in her own words, “quite religious” family, Roya’s statement shows that a big change had occurred since she came to Australia:

I couldn’t wear certain clothes even at home and in front of my family because they are very traditional and quite religious. I couldn’t drink in front of them and still they don’t know that I sometimes drink here. Still I wouldn’t wear the revealing clothes if I travel to Iran, but here I got used to the new way of clothing, a bit different I mean. More revealing and I feel comfortable in them. Of course not at work and in my office, maybe it comes back to our culture but I don’t want to look ‘sexy’ at work. But outside work I am very open in clothing now.

In Australia Roya chose to drink alcohol in social gatherings and found it “enjoyable”, even though in Iranian culture and Islam alcohol consumption was prohibited. Not only was she no longer forced to wear the *hejab* in public, but she chose to wear more expressive and glamorous clothing.

For Malyheh, who came from a more open-minded and less traditional family, the case was slightly different. Malyheh also said that she drank alcohol in Australia, but that she could not yet do so in front of her family in Iran. According to Malyheh, in their private family gatherings in Iran, men could drink, but it was not seen as appropriate for women. With regard to clothing, though, Malyheh was happy that there was no pressure on her in
Australia to look “fashionable” at social gatherings. She enjoyed being herself without being judged based on her body image and outlook:

I am more comfortable here in any ways. I wear what I feel more comfortable in whereas in Iran you wear clothes or you do a lot of make up just for others. Doesn’t matter if you don’t feel comfortable in your clothes in a party but you should look fashionable and beautiful as a woman. Women should look pretty for men.

The above quotes suggest that family upbringing influenced these women’s post-migration ways of expression. In the absence of family and cultural pressures, Roya liked to show her beauty through dressing more expressively. On the other hand, having been under pressure for a long time to look “pretty” and “fashionable” at family gatherings, in Australia Malyheh had redefined her notion of beauty to encompass the idea of simplicity—being herself and being natural. Depending on their past experiences, these women chose different ways of expression in their new lives, and Neda, Malyheh and Roya were all happy and more “comfortable” with their newfound ways of expressing themselves.

*Freedom to speak*

The power to speak was the second major theme reported by the majority of participants. It was constantly expressed by participants that they valued the opportunity in Australia to express their opinions and thoughts freely. Tara emphasised that in Iran she could not talk about her opinions, even with her family and in her private life:

In Iran I should keep silent in many situations even inside my family, I cannot say my opinion even when I travel to Iran now. Here I am free to talk openly about my opinions.
While this was the case for many of the participants, for Marjan it was different. Marjan stated that she “always fought” for her right even in Iran. She continued that she was still the same person, but in Australia the reaction of her audience was different:

I always fought for my rights even in Iran. I always argued for what didn’t make sense to me. And I am the same person here. But, the difference is that in Iran you talk about your idea but who is listening? Who cares about what you think? [Laughing]. Here when I argue, they listen. The argue back and we learn something.

Once these women found the right to speak “freely”, their self-perceptions changed. Tara had needed to “keep silent” in their family gatherings in Iran. “Keeping silent” and being forbidden from holding and expressing opinions implies not existing. Marjan “fought” to verify her existence by expressing her opinions even though no attention was paid to her. In Australia, Marjan realised that her opinion was valued; not only could she express her thoughts and feelings, but she had the opportunity to be heard.

**Discussion**

Previous studies show that Iranian women adjust more successfully to western societies than do men (Ahmadi 2003; Ahmadi-Lewin 2001; Mahdi 1999; Mahdi 2002; Tohidi 1993). Mahdi’s study of Iranian immigrants in the United States revealed that men and women enjoyed equal economic success in the United States, but women were much more successful in a social sense. The study claims that not only had women escaped the harsh policies of the Islamic Republic such as the mandatory veil and strict dress code, but they had gained autonomy, social and educational skills, and a clearer sense of individuality and identity (Mahdi 1999, p.75). Iranian women had in fact gained the possibility of overcoming their lack of power. As Mahdi (2002) argues:
Migration to new land has meant a breakdown of traditional norms for Iranian women—while Iranian immigrant women are moving away from traditional understandings of gender roles and sexuality, they are developing their own unique synthesis of attributes and values representing the cultural realities of both their past and present (Mahdi 2002, p. 212).

Mahdi explains that the structure of the new culture and society and the structure of these women’s hybrid identities and feelings of being in between zones allowed them “to freely choose and pick” between the origin and adopted culture (Mahdi 2002, p. 212).

This study of professional Iranian women in Australia correspondingly revealed that participants had gained a clearer sense of individuality and identity post migration. It was shown above that they had overcome their lack of authority and developed self-esteem. All 30 women said that they valued their new selves more than the old ones. For the majority of women in this study, the post migration sense of self was not only an experience of shifting identity, but one of self-discovery.

There were two inter-related themes in the participants’ discussions of self-identity experiences post migration. First, the majority of women gained self-worth post migration and developed “love” and “respect” for themselves. Migration seems to have altered their views of self. The second important theme raised by many women was that of self belief. The development of self-worth and self-respect after migration helped these women to build confidence in themselves and to have more faith in their abilities.

As did the previous two chapters, the findings in this chapter revealed that gender had a large influence on these women’s experiences post migration. For women coming from environments like Iran where adherence to traditional religious and gender roles had been
of primary importance, migration was an emancipatory process. There was a newfound freedom from sexual apartheid, patriarchal control and strict social rules. As Tohidi (1993, p. 184) argues, for these women, migration facilitated the process of developing a new personal identity. It is arguable that migration and the secular context of Australia have had impact on Iranian women gender status towards greater egalitarianism. Yet, these experiences might have been expressed differently in diverse contexts and even though women’s status might generally improve with migration it does not necessarily mean they gain gender equality (see for example Espiritue 1999; Kurien 1999).

Conclusion

This chapter explored how and to what extent migration had influenced participants’ perceptions of self. It found that all 30 participants felt differently about the women they were in Iran and the women they became in Australia. They reported that in comparison with their past selves, their present selves in Australia were “happier” and “healthier”. The chapter also examined whether these women expressed themselves differently in Australia than they would have in Iran. The findings show that in Australia these women became liberated to explore their senses of self through new ways of expression. It showed that overall migration had had a positive impact on these women’s perceptions of themselves as individuals. They acquired the opportunity to explore their inner selves and to discover identities they had not known in Iran. Migration also led these women to become emancipated and to gain the right to choose: to dress how they wanted, to drink and to speak freely. They found new and different ways of self-expression. They had not had these rights in Iran.
The following chapter investigates the price the participant women have paid to achieve the expected better life and whether they think that price was worthwhile.
CHAPTER NINE

THE HIGH PRICE OF MIGRATION

Introduction

The previous four chapters unpacked the reasons for migration and the extent to which participant women’s lives have changed. It revealed that for the majority of women in this study migration was a decision made in the hope of a better life, and overall it has had a positive impact on their lives and they are happy with their decision. This chapter investigates what price these women have paid to achieve this better life and whether they think that price was worthwhile. In other words, the discussion in this chapter extends beyond the issues around how migration came about and whether migrants achieved a better life post migration. First participants’ emotional responses to migration are examined, as are their feelings about leaving Iran. Following that is an investigation of what participants miss about Iran and whether migration has had any impact on their relationships with extended families and friends living in Iran. The discussion continues with an exploration of the role of cultural background in participant’s everyday life experiences, and of whether these women think they can ever be completely like western women. It is argued that these women paid a high price to achieve a better life. Migration has forced these women to occupy a third space, which belongs neither to Iran nor Australia. However, these women believe this high price was worthwhile.
Emotional responses: from decision making to migration

This section observes the memories and in-depth feelings of participants on their day of departure from Iran. It explores their personal stories of difficulties associated with separation from friends, families, memories and their home country. Participants were asked to express their feelings about the act of migration. The majority of women remembered their migration day as a very difficult and unhappy day. Although for all migration was a choice, they were happy to migrate, and had hopes for a better life, none had particularly fond memories of their migration day. How these women recalled their memories and described their sad feelings was different depending upon individual emotional attachments to Iran. Four predominant emotions emerged in the women’s responses: sadness, feeling scared but hopeful, confusion, and feeling lost.

Feeling sad

Most participants’ recollections of their departure days were centred around being at the airport, which they said was very “difficult” and “sad”. These sad feelings were mainly related to leaving behind their loved ones, their familiar culture and for some even the Persian language. Gisou for example stated:

My departure day from Iran was a DIFFICULT day! Very difficult! Migration is not just about changing your living place. It is a massive change in your life. I put all my of family, friends and my parents behind me…I was going to face a totally new culture, a totally different language. It was hard.

Kati talked about her feelings when she was boarding the plane to leave Iran. She looked down and was briefly silent, and then said:
I cried a lot in the airport and I was still crying on the plane looking for my seat [...]. I said to myself: damn to Islamic Republic of Iran! I put behind my family, my mother tongue, and my country...I think there is no need to migrate if you are happy in your own country. Migration is not a NEED. There are things in life that you like to have but there are other things that you NEED to have. Migration for me was not a “need” but I chose to migrate. I don’t know how to explain it.

Kati stressed how much she loved her family, her country and Persian literature. She said that if she could have tolerated her life in Iran, including the need to tell lies everyday (pretending to be an Islam follower), her abusive husband and discrimination against women, she would have never decided to migrate. She continued: “At least if I could accept for my son to grow up in that environment, I would have not left”. In previous chapters Kati was quoted as saying that her migration was for herself, for a better relationship, for “escaping” from the family-in-law and from the unpleasant social conditions for women in Iran. She decided to migrate by imagining a better life in Australia, but as she was leaving Iran, she appeared to be having second thoughts. In the above quote Kati underlined her role as a mother, that she could have perhaps tolerated all those unpleasant situations if it was only about her, but she could not accept that environment for her son. This suggests that although in Australia these women had learned to prioritise themselves and to respect their own needs, they still valued their children’s happiness over their own. She blamed the “Islamic Republic” for her migration decision. Apart from working as a dentist, Kati said that she taught Persian literature voluntarily at a Persian school in Australia on her weekends to maintain connections with her homeland and with what she was missing.

Kati chose to migrate to “escape” unhappy things in her life, to begin a new life and to follow her true desires. However, as she took the first step towards her new destination,
she realised how much she was attached to her home country. Therefore, she showed her strong emotions by shedding tears, and her anger by cursing the Islamic government as being responsible for her decision. After her arrival and settlement in the new place, she searched for ways to maintain her attachment to her place. Interviews with both Kati and Gisou revealed their attachment to the Persian language, and that these women feared losing their roots and their bonds with the past. This shows that the sense of place or home and the bond with the past still influenced the identity construction of these women post migration. This attachment to the past may have helped these women to continue into the future with their newfound selves that had been discovered in their present lives. As Hall (1996, p. 4-5) argues, in the process of “becoming” rather than “being”, identities continue to “correspond” to the historical past: identities are not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms with our “routes” (Hall 1996, pp. 4-5).

Feeling scared but hopeful

Some women mentioned that they were very “scared” on the day of departure from Iran even though they had hopes for a better life. For these women the initial excitement and the wonder of migration were replaced by fear at the airport as they started thinking of what might happen to them after arriving at the unfamiliar destination. The women focused on the feelings they had on the plane and their emotions before arriving in Australia. Arezou, for instance, revealed that she was “very scared” when leaving Iran and was uncertain about what might happen to her in Australia. This was despite the fact that migration was her decision and she was the primary applicant.
Arezou migrated with an unemployed, abusive husband and three small children. As discussed in Chapter Four, Arezou’s mother and brother were already residing in Australia and this was part of the reason that she wanted to migrate. She explained that she was not relying on her husband at all to be helpful after their arrival in Australia, and that her mother living in Australia was very ill and elderly. She said that she counted only on her brother to help her re-settle in her new home; he was her “only hope”. Arezou was feeling very lonely in Iran, and with the words “only hope”, she referred to someone in the family whom she could rely on to help and protect her in her time of need. Her brother had told Arezou that Australia was “heaven on earth”.

Arezou was moving to a new country and bringing with her three dependent children. In addition to that, she had to look after her very ill mother. After crying silently for a moment, Arezou said: “How will I accept it? That was the question I asked myself on the plane”. Arezou’s emphasis on the word “scared” might indicate that although migration was her decision, it was a very tentative one. She was uncertain about her ability to cope with the new environment while she had the responsibility for three children and a very ill mother. Her opinion that her brother was the “only hope” to help her re-settle shows her intense feelings of loneliness; she was not relying on her husband in any way, even though he was migrating with her. She asked herself how “she” would accept the new life. This may suggest that Arezou had thoughts of separation at the time of migration, even though she was quoted in Chapter Four as maintaining that she was migrating with the hope of a better relationship with her husband.
The “heaven” in Arezou’s statement resonates with the description of migration by Marsella and Ring (2003: 9): “the beauty, the mystique and the wonderment of the human”. However, as they expressed: “When you leave home, you know what you leave behind, but not what you will find” (2003, p. 9). Arezou continued that she did not know what exactly “heaven” meant for her brother until she arrived in Australia. According to Arezou, “heaven”, for him meant “misusing the freedom: to drink alcohol and to sit at home, making excuses not to work and using the government’s budget for living”. She had high hopes of her brother helping her, but as soon as she saw him at Melbourne Airport, she said that she “knew that he couldn’t be any help; he was an alcoholic, unemployed person…I knew that I have to rely only on myself again!”.

The words “loneliness” and “scary” were similarly reported in several other participants’ discussions. For these women, feeling scared about arriving in a new place was not necessarily related to unfamiliarity with that place. It was mainly related to being away from family and friends. Pari said:

I had a combination of different feelings but mainly I was scared that I have been left alone. I was going to miss my family, friends, my work and all my good connections. However, I tried to be hopeful.

Roya knew that she was going to lose a lot of “precious” things, which according to her were intimate family and friends. In her case, she was sure that the better life in the new destination would compensate for what was lost. However, she was not then aware of the difficulties she was going to experience in the new home to achieve that better life:

Migration is in general about hope and excitement but it is scary. When I look back I should say it was one of the hardest experiences I ever had in my whole life. I knew it is going to be hard but I had no idea exactly how hard! Maybe if I knew it is this hard I would have not decided to migrate at all. When you
decide to migrate, you should make sure why you are leaving. You are going to lose a lot of precious things and at the same time you gain some other precious things. You should make sure those things that you are gaining worth over those things that you are losing. For me at least I can say it worth it!

The mystery of migration, the imagination of a better life, and the lack of information and knowledge about a particular destination seem to have helped these women formulate their decisions to migrate. If Roya had known exactly how hard migration was going to be, she said she might have never decided to leave Iran. Migration was much more difficult than Roya had imagined, yet she still emphasises that it was a worthwhile decision.

_Feeling confused and lost_

Some women refused to talk about the memories they had and feelings they experienced at the airport. They found it confronting to remember that particular day when they said goodbye to their loved ones. They talked about their feelings when the plane was landing in Australia, and their memories of the first day of living in Australia. For these women the excitement of migration was replaced with confusion just before arriving at the destination, and they felt “lost” after their arrival. Bahar explained that it was really hard for her to talk about the moment when she was leaving Iran. This was particularly because she was leaving her ill mother behind. However, she talked about her memories of the moment when the flight captain announced that they would be landing at Melbourne Airport in a few minutes:

> It was the moment that I realised how confuse and lost I am. I cannot describe that moment! It was so hard! The next day when I was walking in the city, everything was nice and beautiful. The weather, the sky was so blue and the buildings were tall and magnificent. But I was like a dead person in heaven. That is exactly how I can describe myself on that day. I mean what I was
seeing was very nice and beautiful but I was not part of those nice things. People were happy and doing their normal daily activities, going to work, shopping etc. But I was like a lost person that didn’t know anything or anywhere except that I could realise that it is a nice place, like heaven.

Likewise, Ghazal related her feelings of confusion and being lost. Yet she described herself as a “blind” person, someone who did not know where she was:

More than anything I think I was confuse when we were landing in Australia. Even after one year living in Australia I was still confuse. It was a big shock for me. I can describe myself like a blind person. I was completely lost.

Like Arezou, Bahar described Australia as “heaven”, but herself as a “dead person” in heaven, someone who was in a beautiful place, who could see everyone and recognise that it was a beautiful place, but who could not be seen herself. She could not enjoy that beauty because she was not part of it. In describing herself as being like a “blind” person, Ghazal was referring to a lack of knowledge or information about something or somewhere. Salazar (2010) argues that the West for Tanzanian people did not stand for a specific geographic location with homogeneous cultural traits and historical background; it was more a general dream. It seems that for Ghazal and Bahar, migration was also a general dream. These women’s expectations of Australia were based on imagining a better life, but it seems that they did not have enough knowledge about Australia; they initially felt as if they did not belong in the new place.

Away from home: missing Iran

Although the majority of participants in this study acknowledged that they were expecting a better life in Australia and that their expectations had been met, some were uncertain whether they were truly happy in their new lives. Two main reasons featured in
many participants’ explanations of their ambivalent feelings in their present lives. First, most explained that migration had weakened their relationship with extended families and friends back in Iran. Second, many women reported that missing their mothers was the major reason for their ambivalent feelings in their present lives.

**Relationship with extended family and friends in Iran**

Most participants declared that after migration they tried very hard to maintain their relationships with close friends back in Iran, but because of distance, the passage of time and their busy lives in Australia, they had lost almost all of their good friends back in Iran. Several participants also mentioned that migration had weakened their bond with their siblings. This was explained by the different lifestyles and/or life experiences that had led to gaps in understanding. Gita felt that migration had weakened her sense of “love”:

> I feel like I have lost some sense of love in my heart! I used to care about everyone and everything. I was so emotional and caring person. I was always the first person calling for friends and family’s’ birthdays. Now I cannot even remember the dates of occasions. I met my brother here last year after three years but I was not the same person anymore. We were very close before in Iran but now it was like that there was a glass between us. We were not that close anymore. The love was somewhat missed ….not disappeared, but it was not the same any more.

As Gita described her feelings, the depth of sadness could be heard in her voice. The love between she and her brother had grown through sharing memories and common experiences they had in Iran, but after migration the distance and the two different life experiences created a gap—a “glass” between them. According to Gita, the love between them had not disappeared, but the “glass” prevented her from feeling it anymore. It seems
that migration divides people’s lives into two sections, and while the two lives are still connected to each other, the feeling of closeness is missing.

Likewise, Leila was very sad at losing her close attachment with her sister after migration:

I feel migration has created a gap between my siblings and me. It hurts and at the bottom of my heart I feel really sad about that. Specifically with my sister because we were so close and now I feel that it is not the same anymore. For my parents, I lost my father when I was here and my mum has lost her memory and she doesn’t remember me anymore. It is a big challenge everyday for me to convince myself that I am not involve in my sister’s life anymore and I’d better concentrate on my life here, but it is hard to accept the reality that we are not close friends anymore.

Leila continued:

I am keeping all of my good memories from Iran and I really miss those days. But I know everything has changed, the people, the situation… nothing is the same anymore.

Leila explained that a few years after she left Iran, her father passed away, and soon after that her mother lost her memory as the result of a stroke. Leila was informed about both sets of bad news via phone calls from a distance. She said that since then, every time the phone rang, she expected bad news from Iran. Although Leila is now a stranger to her mother, she travels to Iran every year to visit her. She continued: “My mum does not know who I am but I know who she is”. Nevertheless, Leila met her expectations in Australia, and lives with the “good memories” of Iran while “convincing” herself that nothing would be the same if she went back, so that she can “concentrate” on her life here. Indeed, as Easthope argues (2009), when one is away from home, she/he wants to
go “home”, yet, when she/he visits home, her/his experience is not as satisfying as she/he imagined that it would be. Although Leila’s bond with the past remained, and she had ambivalent feelings, she tried to accept the changes that had happened to her homeland over time so that she could continue into the future and feel at home in her chosen place.

Leila went on to say:

> Although you enjoy living here and you love doing the things that you like to do in Australia but still your good memories are belonged to somewhere else. When you have still family there, the bond is still strong to Iran. Though, your home is Australia. But you never forget where you are coming from and you cannot deny it. You even miss your neighbors, the streets. Your home is here but your heart and mind is belonged to somewhere else.

Arezou echoed these sentiments in saying: “My home is here, the peace is here but my soul is somewhere else.”

Migration led Leila to discover potential and abilities that she had not been aware of in Iran. Nevertheless, she was unsure about her sense of belonging. Both Leila and Arezou chose Australia as a place to live, yet many of their more precious memories were of Iran, and their hearts remained there. Migration led to these women to experience the “dual desire of connection and separation” (Papastergiadis 2005, p. 61).

It is noteworthy that like Leila, Arezou drew attention to her material self that migrated with her, but that her essential, spiritual being had been left behind, and it is Iran where she thought it really belonged. On the other hand, she emphasised that “home” was in Australia, and while this gave her a feeling of peace, like Leila’s, her soul still belonged in Iran.
**Missing the mother**

Missing their mothers was another important reason for many women’s feelings of ambivalence about their present lives. Most participants stated that migration made their bond with their parents—and specifically with their mothers—closer. These women highlighted the role that their mothers played in their lives, and that this was very much missing in their lives post migration. According to these women, missing their mothers sometimes caused them to question whether they actually did have a better life in Australia.

Shila thought that her mother’s value was beyond price and comparison. Putting all her achievements in Australia on one side and her mother on the other side, she questioned herself regarding whether all those “precious” things that she had achieved were worth the loss of her mother: “I have many things here that I could not have in Iran, but I don’t have my mother here, so I am not sure, do I have a better life here?” Similar to that, Hana said:

> There is really nothing about Iran that I miss except my mother. But my mother means everything to me. So, I have lost everything to have this better life. Do I really have a better life? I don’t know.

For Asal, both migration and her age contributed to her feelings of missing her mother. She said that if she had been asked five years ago, she would have said she was “100%” sure that she was happy about her life in Australia, but at the time of interview she was not sure:

> As I am getting older, I feel more the need of my family specifically my mother. Maybe at this stage of my life, my mother is a much greater need for me than freedom or safety. If I am not happy now it doesn’t mean that I want more money or
bigger house or etc in my life but life is not just about better facilities and freedom. For me, missing family is getting more important now.

The above quote suggests that the longer the individual is away from the original home and the older she/he becomes, the more she/he feels the need to connect with her/his origins and roots. As Hall (2008, pp. 349–350) states: “Although you can never go back to the past, you do have a sense of loss. There is something you have lost. A kind of intimate connection with landscape, and family, and tradition, which you lose”. Yet he (1987, p.44) also maintains that: “Migration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to”. This is well reflected in Asal’s answer to the question of why she didn’t return to Iran to live:

> When you have children here, your husband, and your job and your whole life is built up here, it is almost impossible to go back. I already left everything behind once and started all over again. How many times you can do this in your life?

It was more complicated for Bahar, who revealed that part of her migration decision was to follow her dreams, which had been her mother’s wish:

> I have a very ill mother in Iran now that I am not able to even hear her voice on the phone. But she always wanted me to continue my education. I could never imagine that I can be this far away from someone that I dearly love when she is in bed and so ill and she needs me but I have to stay here and continue what I am doing just to make her happy. I may even not have the chance to see her again but how I am keep going here just for this love, is just the ability and strength that I was never been aware of that.

Bahar’s mother lost her speech due to her illness. Bahar explained that she went back home every year to visit her mother but they could communicate only by exchanging looks. However, she was certain that her mother felt proud of her achievements in Australia.
Asal thought that migration had led to her “missing” and “losing” the warm love in her heart, but it seems that it also led her to discover a new sense of love. This was also the case for Pari:

I really miss my family specially my mother. I really wish I could have her here. But I can see her around everyday. I can feel her in my everyday life no matter if in reality she is living miles away from me.

Pari had convinced herself that her heart and her soul were close to her mother, no matter where she lived. Because her mother was in her heart, she was with her everywhere, everyday, and that gave her peace. In contrast with Asal, it seems that “love” for Pari post migration had moved to a much deeper level; it had moved beyond a huge need to become spiritual. The difficult experiences of migration seem to have influenced these women in a conscious and emotional sense. Bahar explained later on that she thought she was a more “logical person” post migration, and that she “feels and understands much better now what missing someone really means”. Bahar gained strength through emotional awareness and understanding of the meanings of her feelings; this made her a more “logical” person.

The impact of cultural background: experiencing hybrid identity

This section explores whether the past experiences and the old selves were still influencing participants’ present lives. It also investigates whether participants thought they could ever be entirely like an Australian woman. Most women in this study acknowledged that the relevance of the past was still apparent in their everyday lives and experiences of identity. Despite the fact that in previous chapters these women repeatedly stated that they had changed a lot post migration, their prior experiences still strongly
affected their daily lives. How and to what extent the past was influencing participants’ present lives varied dependent on a number of factors including individual values, beliefs and personal experiences.

Iranian identity and cultural values

Some women said that maintaining some parts of their Iranian identity was essential for them in their lives post migration. These aspects of identity included keeping the family of origin’s names, some cultural values, and religious or personal beliefs. Some women, for example, asserted that their names—and particularly their surnames—were important for them as names represented a part of their Iranian identity. They affirmed that it was difficult for many Australians to pronounce their names correctly, but they were unwilling to change them, as these names helped maintain a connection with their families and place of origin. Kati said: “My surname is the only part of my Iranian identity that I do not wish to change…it stays with me until I die”.

For several other women, the maintenance of some cultural or religious values in their present lives was particularly important. These values mainly related to marriage and relationships. For example Baran, one of the single participants, emphasised that she preferred to maintain some of her cultural values with regard to marriage and sexual relationships:

I just cannot accept to have a casual relationship just for the fun of it…I mean I do not see any problem anymore to have sex before marriage but at the same time I cannot accept sleeping with someone without a serious commitment.
Niloufar, also single, noted that it was important for her that her family approved of her partner at the time of her marriage. She also added:

I am still living with my parents and I personally don’t see any problem with that. I like this part of our culture that children leave their parents’ house when they get married.

These women also explained that they would prefer their future partner to be Iranian. This was because they would share common cultural values and language. Another single participant, Tara, mentioned that she would like her future partner to “believe in God”. She explained that being Muslim was not necessarily as important to her as it was in Iran, but that it was critical for her future partner to have some religious faith. Because of her cultural background, Tara believed that having religious faith would lead to a stronger marriage.

Chapter Six revealed that after migration the majority of married, coupled or divorced participants realised that having sexual relationship and living with the potential husband before marriage were very important. They had discovered that sexual satisfaction was a huge factor in a successful marriage, and they had not been aware of this in Iran. In contrast, the words of these four single women suggested that some Iranian values still shaped their understandings of marriage and their choice of partner. Marital status seems to have played an important role in shaping these women’s choices regarding the maintenance or rejection of cultural values in relation to marriage. The impact of cultural values was also still evident in some participants’ understanding of gender roles and household responsibilities. Mahdi (2002, p. 212) argued that:

Migration to new land has meant a breakdown of traditional norms for Iranian women- while Iranian immigrant women are
moving away from traditional understandings of gender roles and sexuality, they are developing their own unique synthesis of attributes and values representing the cultural realities of both their past and present.

The findings in this study support Mahdi’s argument that after migration these women developed their own unique combination of values and roles that represented both their past and present lives. However, some women acknowledged that despite all the positive changes they had made in their lives post migration with regard to understanding gender roles and household responsibilities, their cultural upbringing and traditional norms still influenced their everyday lives. Nahal expressed:

[…] in terms of cleaning my house I sometimes like to be more easy, but it is hard to change it! Or like I keep asking my son: did you make your bed? Did you do your homework? it is like I want to be a perfect mother and perfect wife […]. And everything in my house should be always perfect. I can’t change it, although I know it is not the right way but I still cannot change myself when it comes to households.

Moghadam et al.’s study (2009) illustrates that some Iranian women (residing in Iran) felt valued and respected through being fully in charge of household labour. They found that being a leader in the house had given these women an illusory sense of power in their relationships. Their study showed that some of the full-time housewives believed men were not capable of doing housework, and they preferred to take control of all the housework to avoid having to do again those jobs the men had not done well enough (Moghadam et al. 2009, p.48). Some participants in this study expressed similar opinions. Leila reported:

I sometimes rather do things myself than letting my husband to do that. Even sometimes when I give him a job to do, later I will go and check it to make sure it is done properly […]. In fact, I prefer most of the times to do things myself than asking him to do any house works.
There were very few women who referred to religious values as constituting part of their Iranian identity. Three women mentioned that they used to pray in Iran but had stopped after migration. While two of the women simply said they did not believe in praying anymore, for Shila the case was different. She felt that she had lost part of her identity through ceasing to pray. She believed that when she used to pray, she had been an emotionally stronger person. When asked why she had stopped praying after migration, she claimed that her new life was too busy, and there is no time to think about religion. She added, however: “I am sad that I don’t pray anymore, I feel I have lost something!”

*Self-expression and ambivalent feelings*

Tohidi (1993, p. 185) notes that despite the fact that Iranian women residing in America found the act of migration positive and empowering, they were often criticised by family members back home for not following traditional roles. She argues that although these women had left their families behind, their lives in America were still impacted by the family members remaining in Iran. If they successfully adopted an American identity, they are often rejected by their home culture.

Many participants said that even in Australia they had to hide their new expressive selves when they were within Iranian communities. They revealed that at Iranian gatherings, they needed to revert to their conservative and less expressive selves. Gita, for example, articulated:

> If I am in Iranian gatherings I try not to wear revealing or open clothes. People talk behind your back! You don’t want to become the center of attention or the center of people’s conversation.
This was also the case for Mahsa. She said that not only did she present herself differently at Iranian gatherings, she also expressed her thoughts differently:

I think when I am in Australian gatherings, I am free to talk about anything and I am sure that nobody judges me. But when I am with Iranian friends I have to be careful about what I saying or doing. And it doesn’t feel comfortable.

Several women said that they drank alcohol at Australian social gatherings, yet avoided drinking at particular Iranian gatherings, especially if they were in Iran. Niloufar was one of these women:

At times I drink alcohol here but when I travel to Iran or even when I am in Iranian gatherings even in Australia, I prefer not to drink.

For some participants, this situation was more complex. Asal revealed elsewhere in the interview that she used to wear the *hejab* in Iran, even at indoor gatherings. She changed a lot after migration, however. She took her *hejab* off and began to explore her femininity through more expressive dress. Like other participants, Asal reported that at Iranian gatherings in Australia, she tried to wear less revealing clothes. Outside Iranian communities, she maintained that even though she had changed a lot, she still did not feel comfortable in certain clothes such as swimming suits:

If I go for swimming, I prefer to wear more covering swimming suits particularly if I am taking my son with me. Maybe it is because of my background that I like to be more covered! I don’t know! …I just don’t feel comfortable in swimming suits specifically the bikinis. I wear tight shirts and shorts preferably!

Papastergiadis (2005, p. 60) argues that hybridity is not a new form of virtue and purity. Hybrids are ambivalent, not saints. If the sense of ambiguity is taken away from hybrids,
then this will not only create a false sense of harmony, it will also preserve the original fear of difference. Therefore, the identity of hybrids is structured by ambivalence. The above story well represents the sense of ambiguity in Asal’s identity. She took her *hejab* off in Australia, and began to explore her femininity by wearing more revealing and fashionable clothes; yet she felt “uncomfortable” showing her body. She stressed that she felt more uncomfortable when she went swimming with her son (six years old). This emphasis may suggest that Asal’s sense of discomfort in a swimming suit was not related to her physical appearance, but to cultural influence. In fact, the “uncomfortable” feeling may have evolved from the conservative and/or religious viewpoint that women should hide specific parts of their bodies from men. This sense of ambiguity was also apparent in Ghazal’s statement:

> I have changed a lot after migration but at work I still feel that I am a bit shy […]. If at work they ask me to do something I think I “MUST” do it whereas I can say that this is not my job or I don’t have time right now to do it […]. It is still hard for me to say “NO” sometimes.

The hesitation to say “NO” was also the case for some other participants. It was shown in Chapter Nine that participants had learned to prioritise themselves post migration, something they had never done in Iran. Roshi declared that even though in Australia she had learned to prioritise herself, at times she felt guilty about doing that:

> I feel happy that I have changed and learned to prioritise myself but at times I feel guilty and think maybe I am becoming a cold person […]. Because before I used to help everybody around me even if that I was tired or I couldn’t. On the other hand, I think that is my right to sometimes say No or I can’t.
These women had changed post migration; however, it seems that their identities continued to correspond to their historical past. Even though they were empowered by their newfound rights, they felt “guilty” for not following Iranian cultural norms.

*Being like an Australian woman*

Papastergiadis (2005) argues that in hybrid thinking nothing exists in an absolute state, and in this hybrid position, a “third space” is created. This third space does not constitute the ideal stage of accomplishment, but rather is the process of critical interaction that occurs within and against the structure of a binary. Hybrid thinking is a process of renegotiation of identity and culture, inserted within and between the classical structure of identity and culture in a way that alters the understanding of the dynamic of these categories (Papastergiadis 2005, p. 61). Participant women in this study experienced hybridity after migration to Australia, and this hybridity influenced their identity both at home and at work.

None of the 30 women in this study thought that they could ever be completely like Australian women. They often reported that there were parts of their identity that were shaped by their formative years spent in Iran. They constantly stressed cultural differences, memories and life experiences in Iran and their huge role in forming aspects of their identity that would exist for the rest of their lives. While all the women acknowledged that they could never be fully like Australian women, many also admitted that neither could they feel completely like Iranian women ever again. Pari, for example, articulated:
I will never be like an Australian woman, same as I would never be like an Iranian women again! I am a mixture of Western values and Eastern values. I cannot be either of them […].

Pari continued that she was happy to have acquired this “third identity”. She explained that this “third identity belongs to me and it is unique; no one else has experienced that”.

Pari considered this third space to be an advantage that enabled her “to understand both cultures and to choose between the two cultures only those aspects of them that I like”.

Likewise Taraneh expressed that she had achieved a third identity that was a combination of both Iranian and Australia identities. Like Pari, she was happy with this achievement. Taraneh explained in detail how cross-cultural differences played an important role in keeping her in this third space:

I don’t actually want to be 100% like Australian woman! I think I like to keep some parts of my Iranian identity. I am coming from a whole different culture with different experiences and I think why I should forget them? And how I can completely adopt the culture of this new country? […]. A simple example is that even though I know about Christmas or Santa how can I understand or feel that like an Australian child? […] It is hard to explain it but my identity is something in between: Iranian-Australian. It is funny but an example of my current identity is that I don’t think anymore that cooking is my duty, but by default I like to cook [laughing].

Taraneh’s statement suggests that in their private lives these women may have followed traditional roles, but the difference in Australia was they knew their rights and that there were alternative choices. In Australia Taraneh realised that cooking was not her prescribed role as she had thought it was in Iran. Here, she did not feel guilty if she refused to cook, though she still chose to take the cooking role at home. So, while her behaviour had not changed, the meaning she made of it had.
Interestingly most of the women acknowledged that in their professional lives, they had completely Australian identities. Gisou, for instance, commented:

In my professional life, I think I am and I can be completely like an Australian woman but in my personal life I think never. Because I lived in Iran for 25 years and there are parts of me that cannot be wiped out even if I live here for 50 years.

These women said that at work they expressed their opinions and thoughts more freely than at home. Some stated that they felt happier at work because they thought they were closer to their ideal selves. Their reasoning for this was that at work they could focus on their work and felt professional and confident in comparison with their more “introverted” selves at home. This indicates that there were differences between the women’s selves at work and at home. Although these women acknowledged that they expressed themselves differently in Australia than they would in Iran, it seems that even in Australia there were differences between their social and personal selves. In fact, discovery of their professional selves caused complications for some women’s personal selves. Leila said:

I can never be like an Australian woman simply because I have not born here. I am still not in peace with myself and I might never be. I have struggles in myself. [...] I realised that there were things that I wanted to do much earlier in my life. When you turn 40 as a woman, this sort of feelings start to developing in you. Where I wanted to be at 40 years old, I am not now. Who I am now and what I have now, I wanted to have them 10 years ago. I liked to have my education and a very good job when I was 30…when you move outside Iran and re-start your professional life here you just realise your potentials and your abilities and you see that you could do much more but instead you have responsibilities of your family now. You could study more and be a more successful woman, you could do a lot more and even change the world. So, you ask yourself if you could do all of those things 10 years ago where was your life now? Where could you be now? And when you see that other issues like early marriage, children and etc affected your life and you cannot do a lot of those things that you liked to do, …you feel sad. You feel sad and it hurts deep inside but at least I know now that I could
do a lot more if I had the opportunity. I discovered my abilities, so at least I can say that this discovery about myself worth the challenge that I have inside me.

Finding a new professional self led Leila to experience new challenges in her inner self. The discovery of her level of competence and of her rights had developed new and higher expectations in Leila about herself. She obviously did not have the opportunity to revert to her younger self and live a different life informed by her newfound self, and this made her “feel sad”. Yet, she thought that knowledge meant power, so the challenge was worthwhile.

Discussion

Easthope’s study (2009, p. 78) suggests that our identities are incomplete, relational, and hybrid as well as constructed in relation to place and mobility. She argues that in discussing the nature of identity in late-modern times, it is not sufficient to focus only on those aspects of identity that are influenced by mobility; nor is it sufficient to address those aspects of identity that are influenced only by place. In fact, both place and mobility are important in understanding identity. The findings in this chapter suggest that to fully understand the nature of human identity post migration, it is necessary to verify that the identity of mobility is constructed or modified in connection with identity of place. The ‘place’ where one was born and raised still influences identity construction post migration.

Despite all the positive changes that occurred after migration, this study reveals that the past was still relevant and present in these women’s everyday lives and their identity experiences. The findings in this chapter endorse Papastergiadis’s (2005) idea of a hybrid
position: the position where nothing is in a certain place. And it is through this uncertainty that the third space is created. This third place had given participants the opportunity to find a third identity that they commented belonged neither there nor here, but to them only. In spite of the ambivalent feelings associated with this third space, these women regarded their migration as a positive experience; they thought their achievements outweighed their negative experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the price these women had paid to achieve a better life, and whether they thought that price was worthwhile. It was suggested that achieving a better life in Australia posed difficult and contradictory emotions for the participant women. Past experiences, along with the migration decision and its complex feelings—hope, confusion, excitement and fear—followed by a confrontation with the reality of a new home had led these women to experience ambiguity and ambivalence in their everyday lives. It showed that these ambivalent feelings in turn impacted on other aspects of their lives, such as their inner happiness and the relationship with extended families. These findings illustrate that migration created gaps in understanding, and weakened the relationship with siblings, relatives and close friends living in Iran. The important role of the mother was highlighted through migration, since for most participants, missing their mothers was one of the major reasons for unhappiness post migration.

It was also shown in this chapter that past experiences and prior selves still influenced participants’ present lives. These women had changed a lot post migration, but their prior experiences were still evident. It was argued that migration forced these women to
occupy a third space belonging neither to Iran nor Australia. These women had paid a high price to achieve a better life, but they thought it was worth paying.
The findings in this study reveal that educated Iranian women decided to migrate in order to make better use of their human capital and to be emancipated from patriarchal controls. They wanted to escape gender discrimination and move towards a better life. It is clear that their migration was related to their previous lives and to the social context in which they were living, and that migration influenced both their private and public lives. In general, migration for these women had been a positive experience. Nevertheless, migration forced these women to occupy a third space. This space is neither Iran nor Australia, but rather it is a specific in-between space belonging to these women only. They are neither Iranian nor Australian, and they are both Iranian and Australian. Through their migration they have developed hybrid identities, and their sense of themselves has changed. They have paid a high price to achieve a better life, but one they thought was worthwhile.

This study used a symbolic interactionist approach (Blumer 1969) to understand better the experiences of the women participants. This theoretical framework argues that individuals, in their relationship with the surrounding environment, assign meanings and values to the world in which they live in order to make sense of their daily lives. In accordance with this theory, it was expected that participants’ perceptions of self as a mother and wife, identity formation, and gender and family roles would change their meanings and values after migration. This expectation was held because of the changes they experienced in their social context and environment and through new gender
interactions in Australia. This theoretical framework was selected because the women in this study had experienced two different social contexts. The theory helped to explore whether a transition of meaning and symbols had occurred after migration.

The broad aim of the study was to examine closely the everyday lives of a particular group of women using a qualitative approach. This was in order to identify positive and negative experiences of their lives post migration, and to shed light on the extent to which changes in circumstances and social context influenced an individual’s life in terms of their perception of self, identity in a general sense, gender role and work status. It focused on the lives of highly educated women only. This was because the role of education in women’s migration decision-making—particularly that of non-western women—and its impact on their lives after migration was previously largely absent from the literature.

There were two primary research questions in this study. First, why and how do educated Iranian women decide to migrate to Australia? Second, how and to what extent does migration impact on educated Iranian women’s life at home and at work? The following section presents findings related to the first question. It begins by detailing the participants’ experiences prior to their migration to Australia. It explains their motives for migration, and the ways in which they expected life to be better in Australia. In order to answer the second question, attention is drawn to the participants’ post-migration experiences. First a summary is presented of the findings regarding the impact of migration on couple relationships and marriage. This was to find out whether changes in circumstances and context had affected individuals’ patterns of interaction with their
partners. An outline of results relating to the impact of migration on the lives of these professional women follows. Next is a recapitulation of the findings regarding the impact of migration on identity and self-perception. The aim of this was to uncover whether participants feel that they were different women in Iran than they are in Australia. The section concludes by considering what the findings indicate about the price these women have paid to achieve a better life, and whether the price they paid was worthwhile.

**Why and how do educated Iranian women decide to migrate to Australia?**

Unlike the traditional migration studies that downplay the role of women—especially married women—in migration decision-making (for example Cerrutti & Massey 2001; Thadani & Todaro 1984), the majority of the participants in this study were key decision makers in relation to their migration. They could not, however, have enacted their decisions to migrate without their skills and qualifications, nor without the permission of their husband or father. Those women in this study who were the primary applicants for migration to Australia either applied as skilled migrants or for the purposes of undertaking higher education. Therefore the findings highlight the role of education in women’s migration. There are few studies on the role of education in leading women to migrate, particularly from non-western to western nations. This study found that higher education opened these women’s eyes to the broader world, and to the possibility that they could occupy a place beyond the home. In this sense, it raised their consciousness and led them to question their place in Iran’s patriarchy. Education gave them professional aspirations. It also enabled them to migrate to Australia in their own right as skilled migrants, a path that would have been banned had they not been educated.
Previous studies (for example Kamali 2002; Shavarini 2005; 2006) discussed the lives of educated Iranian women following graduation from university in Iran, and found that although university experience led to an identity shift for Iranian women, and in some cases even to financial independence, Iranian traditional and cultural values around gender roles remained largely unchanged. The majority of educated Iranian women still marry and settle at home, following in the footsteps of Iranian culture.

This study has provided a fresh look at the experiences of these women after attending university and gaining a higher education. It was found that one of the principal outcomes for Iranian women of having obtained a university education and work experience was that they were able to make a decision to migrate. This suggests that their identities had shifted, as had their awareness of possibilities. When these women realised they could not use their full human capital in patriarchal Iran, and that higher education had not changed their status either in public or in private life, they decided to migrate. Many of the participants reported experiencing gender-related discrimination at work, and a lack of ability to progress professionally. This led them to consider their options.

All the women in this study migrated with the expectation of a better life in Australia. As did Salazar’s (2010), this study found that migration and migration decision-making are deeply embedded in wider cultural and socio-economic structures, and therefore need to be analysed within the specific contexts in which they occur. For the women who participated in this study, experiences of gender discrimination and the patriarchal social context in which they had previously lived played a crucial role in their migration. Migration for this particular group of women can be conceptualised as a form of lifestyle
migration (Benson & O’Reilly 2009), towards emancipation from discrimination and empowerment to take control over their lives. The Iranian patriarchal context and these women’s past experiences of gender oppression at work and home led them to decide to migrate. Ironically it was the education and skills acquired in Iran that had empowered them to act on their decision.

As indicated above, in terms of migration theory, this study focused on lifestyle migration. According to O’Reilly and Benson (2009b), this means to escape from something or somewhere to a new and better life. Based on this definition, this study argued that lifestyle migration should not and cannot be limited to western people or western nations, as it is in the current literature. Indeed lifestyle migration can be extended to migration of non-western people and across cultures. The migration of educated Iranian women is considered here to be a form of lifestyle migration because it happened as a result of their patriarchal social context; they migrated in the hope of a better life away from patriarchal control.

All the women in this project migrated for a better life. For them, this better life mainly meant freedom from the discriminatory experiences they had experienced in Iran, and the newfound opportunity to become active agents in their own lives. Their expectations of Australia, therefore, were split into two main areas: first, to achieve freedom of choice and to be able to make decisions around their lives, and second, to achieve gender equality. Therefore this study highlighted the role of gender as well as education in migration decision-making. It upholds previous research (for example Hampshire 2002) that the gender orders in specific contexts play an important role in migration decision-
making. This study, however, supports previous studies in a different form. While previous studies (for example Hampshire 2002; Hoang 2011) emphasised men’s power in specific social contexts as taken for granted, not only in household decision-making but also in migration, this study emphasised women’s agency, particularly in migration decision-making. It agreed with previous findings that migration is structured around gender and happens as a result of specific gender orders in particular social contexts. However, the interpretation in this study was that women decided to migrate due to the patriarchal gender structure of Iran. In addition, these women possessed the agency to act on their decision because of their high-level skills and education.

It was discovered also that not only was migration decision-making formed around gender, but post migration experiences were also gender structured. The following section summarises the findings in relation to the ways in which migration impacted on the lives of professional Iranian women at home and at work.

**How and to what extent does migration impact on educated Iranian women’s lives at home and at work?**

In order to answer the second question, the study explored the impact of migration on the women’s families and marriages, professional life and their selves as individuals. The findings suggest that changes in circumstances and social context influenced individuals’ social roles and interactions with their spouse. They revealed that changes in conditions could challenge patriarchal domination in the family. Living away from home and the familiar culture can shift individual aspirations toward gender equality and freedom of choice
(Ahmadi 2003; Ben-David & Lavee 1994, Gopalkrishnan & Babacan 2007; Mahdi 1999; Rajiva 2013), and can disrupt previous patterns of interaction between couples.

With regard to the impact of migration on family and marriage, this project extracted two major themes from participants’ narratives. First, in Australia these women discovered their right to negotiate their positions in the family and in society. Second, these newfound rights as Australian citizens gave them the agency to make decisions around their relationships and to elect whether or not stay in their marriage.

After encountering western culture following their migration to Australia, most women in this study altered their traditional views on marriage. Although in Iran there is a stigma attached to divorce—particularly for women—and it is seen as unacceptable, in Australia these women were now free to make decisions about their marriages, and to divorce if they were not happy. For those in unhappy partnerships, ending their bad relationship in Australia represented a move towards a better life. The divorced women were unanimously happy about their decision and none of the women wished to return to Iran. Some women remained in their relationships despite being unhappy with them, but reported that they felt they had more control over their relationship than they had in Iran. They echoed the sentiments of their divorced co-participants in saying that they would leave their marriages if there was no improvement.

Although marriage and family is seen as the most important social relationship in Iranian culture (Nassehi 1985), this study showed that the majority of women would have decided not to get married if they had a chance to go back to their younger selves. This
suggests that for these women, marriage is no longer linked to a woman’s identity as it was in Iran. In addition, a sexual relationship with a potential husband before marriage was now seen as essential for these women. This is in contrast with Iranian and particularly Islamic culture where a woman’s virginity is a prerequisite for Iranian men searching for a potential wife (Shapurian & Hojat 1985). This means that these women’s views on marriage and being a good woman, or symbolic of an ideal woman, changed after migration. As Ahmadi’s (2003) Swedish study found, not only did most women emphasise the importance of having a sexual relationship before marriage, most also stressed that sexual satisfaction in a relationship could greatly contribute to the success of the marriage. These women had not been aware of this in Iran. They did not know that women had the right to experience sexual pleasure. The issue of the right to sexual pleasure was not mentioned in previous studies relating to the post-migration sexual experiences of non-western immigrants (for example Ahmadi 2003), and particularly for non-western female immigrants.

Overall, the findings regarding post-migration family/marriage experiences suggest that for those participants who enjoyed good relationships in Iran, migration led to a stronger bond with their partners. For those women in bad relationships, however, migration planning sometimes led to a temporary improvement in their relationships due to lack of family support and pressures of migration, but they became distanced once they settled in Australia. Migration and discovering new rights in Australia empowered these women to either leave or renegotiate their relationships.
This study’s findings echo those of Chiswick et al. (2002; 2003; 2005), that skilled migrants experience a “U” shape pattern of occupational mobility over three and a half-years following arrival at their destination because of a lack of transferability of skills. However, it rises again after this period. Most women in this study did indeed experience this “U” shape pattern of occupational mobility. They initially experienced a decline in their occupational status, which they attributed to their non-speaking English backgrounds. However, the women’s experiences varied depending upon their occupation. Those in technical fields experienced fewer obstacles for local registration and professional development than did those in medical fields. Women in medical fields—such as nursing and dentistry in particular—stated that professional development and promotional opportunities were rare if not non-existent in Australia because their qualifications had been obtained overseas and were not recognised. This was in contrast to women in technical fields who reported professional progress and promotions to more senior positions post migration.

The results of this study differed from Ho and Alcorso (2004) and Ho (2006), who found that cultural aspects did negatively influence participants’ employment prospects in Australia. These studies argued that housework and family maintenance doubled after migration, and that for this reason, highly-skilled female migrants were less likely to be in the workforce than their male counterparts. This project revealed that the women’s experiences of professional life post migration were linked to their gendered and cultural experiences in their previous lives in Iran. However, unlike the claims in previous literature, these experiences led participants in this study to gain autonomy in Australia and use their full human capital at work. This option was not available for them in Iran.
because of gender inequality and social restrictions for women. These women’s expectations of work in Australia were met, and overall their professional lives improved after migration. However, because this study was limited to professional women, the views of women who were skilled but not currently in the workforce due to family/domestic duties are not included, and may differ. This shows that although this study’s findings on this issue differ from those of previous research, more research is needed to explore whether these findings are more broadly applicable to Iranian women migrants.

Overall, this study has provided a fresh and different view of professional migrant women’s work experiences. It has been suggested that these women’s pre-migration gender-discriminatory experiences at work had a central role in their positive outlooks and sense of improved professional identity post migration. These positive work experiences in Australia included gaining gender quality, respect, a sense of professional identity, income and so forth. These women did not think that gender perceptions were different in Australia, particularly those of Australian men. Rather they thought the differences between Iran and Australia and their positive achievements within the Australian labour market were related to Australian institutions of power that reduce gender-related barriers in the workplace. Australia is also patriarchal, but these women argued that they were able to achieve successes at work that were not possible in Iran because in Australia they have the right to work and use their human capital more fully in the workplace.
Previous studies had not adequately addressed the relationship between gender and migration, and particularly skilled migration. This study attempts to fill this gap. Australian skilled migration studies have not specifically addressed the experiences of Iranian women skilled migrants. This study, to the best of my knowledge, is the first Australian research study on the experiences of this particular group of skilled migrant women.

Two major themes emerged in this study regarding the participants’ self-identity experiences in Australia. First, these women found self-worth post migration, and demonstrated enhanced self-respect. Second, they felt more confident and believed in themselves more following migration. Migration for the participants in this study also seemed to involve a process of developing a new personal identity (Tohidi 1993; Jenkins 2008, p. 5). Knowing who we are in relation to others provides meaning. As meaning always involves interaction, the findings support the idea that changes in social context and interactions can change meanings, and can influence the process of identification.

The findings corroborate previous literature showing that Iranian women migrants not only escape the harsh policies of the Islamic Republic such as compulsory veiling and strict dress codes; they also gain autonomy and a clearer sense of individuality and identity after migration (Ahmadi 2003; Ahmad-Lewin 2001; Mahdi 1999; Mahdi 2002; Tohidi 1993). This suggests that migration to the West may cause similar changes to a person regardless of their destination country. This study supports Mahdi’s argument (2002, p. 212) that:
Migration to new land has meant a breakdown of traditional norms for Iranian women. While Iranian immigrant women are moving away from traditional understandings of gender roles and sexuality, they are developing their own unique synthesis of attributes and values representing the cultural realities of both their past and present (Mahdi 2002, p. 212).

The participants in this study reported that they had gained a clearer sense of individuality and identity post migration. All these women discovered a new self within themselves in Australia that they respected more than the old self.

In summary, the findings suggest that these women’s post-migration positive identity experiences have been shaped by both gender and their pre-migration experiences. Migration has made these women feel emancipated from the traditional, religious and patriarchal gender order of Iran. These women have found new ‘selves’ in Australia that are “happier” and “healthier” than before. This suggests that they feel differently about themselves now they are in Australia, and this difference is positive. The newfound woman in Australia is free to express herself in new ways, and to experience a different way of life. She is free to drink, to wear more revealing or more colourful clothes, to express her own opinions, to fight for her rights, to communicate freely and to leave relationships, among other things.

**The price of migration**

The study has shown that although migration on the whole had a positive impact on participant women’s lives, their previous lives still shape their everyday experiences. Consistent with the findings in previous literature (Papastergiadis 2005), the participants in
this study confessed to experiencing a hybrid identity, occupying a third space where nothing is where expected. This suggests that while the participants’ lives in Australia had been freed from conservative, patriarchal control, a connection with their past lives was maintained. Their identities and perceptions of self were influenced by mobility, but at the same time also influenced by their place of origin. This also supports Easthope’s argument (2009) that identities are incomplete, relational, and hybrid as well as constructed in relation to place and mobility. Thus one’s identity post migration cannot be fully understood without analysing it in connection with the past.

Therefore while meanings and values can change as a result of new interactions and in a new social context, those meanings are still in relation to the past and its social context. The experience of hybridity in Australia has influenced participants’ identities both at home and at work. Many of the women feel fully Australian at work but Iranian at home. With regard to households and domestic duties, it was found that these women’s behaviours had not necessarily changed in line with Australian gendered norms and values, yet the meanings assigned to them had.

The findings illustrated that migration can create a gap in understanding between the participant women and their extended families back home, and may weaken relationships with siblings, relatives and close friends living in Iran. This gap happened as a result of different meanings and values associated with living in two different social contexts. Migration highlighted the important role of the mother, as for the majority of participants, missing their mothers was one of their reasons for unhappiness post migration. This experience might be
different for men. Attachment to home and previous lives was also shaped by gender. These changed relationships are part of the price the women paid for their better life.

The study found that being situated in the liminal space between Iranian and Australian culture led the participant women to experience hybridity. The women have experienced a new form of identity that embraces elements of both Iranian and Australian culture, without a sense of hierarchy between the two. Most women in this study were happy to live within this third space, as it gave them the opportunity to find a third identity belonging neither to Iran nor Australia, but it is a unique identity that is theirs alone. Therefore this space led the women to move beyond being defined as Iranian or Australian, and opened the possibility to consider a whole new being. Even though being in this third space created ambivalent emotions and ironic feelings for these women, overall they thought that their migration was a positive experience. Although they have paid a high price to achieve a better life, they felt that it was worthwhile. Overall it has been a positive experience and no-one wished to return to Iran.

**Future Research**

The findings from the present study indicate some useful directions for research. The study has demonstrated the usefulness of the qualitative method that asks open-ended questions, and allows individuals to share their stories in the context of the situations in which they live. Through this method, the participants in this study had the opportunity to articulate their feelings about the process of developing a new way of being. Further qualitative studies are recommended, including more research on the role of education in women’s migration, and investigations aimed at understanding women’s different cultural backgrounds and their
diverse life experiences. In particular, a more in-depth study of gender diversity is needed, including the varied experiences of different groups of women, particularly skilled and unskilled migrant women.

There is a gap in the literature that aims to understand the differences between men and women skilled migrants. Findings from the present study provide rich information about the experiences of female Iranian skilled migrants in Melbourne. However, a larger-scale study, using similar methods, could yield a better comprehension of the differences between Iranian men and women skilled migrants across Australia. Iranian men and women in similar occupations could be interviewed separately to examine the different impact of migration on their professional lives. Such studies could also focus on family and marriage post migration and explore the extent to which migration influences Iranian men’s and women’s perceptions of marriage and their relationship with their spouses.

While this study has examined the lives of skilled Iranian women in Australia to highlight the role of education in these women’s life experiences, a more thorough investigation is required in future to compare these findings with the experiences of unskilled Iranian female migrants in Australia. This would further highlight the role of education in women’s lives, and their experiences of identity, particularly in debates around non-western women.

**Conclusion**

This study has observed why and how highly educated and skilled Iranian women decide to migrate, and how migration and living in a different social context has influenced their
everyday lives and identity experiences. It was discovered that professional Iranian women migrated to Australia for a better life and to escape Iran’s patriarchal society and its attendant discriminatory practices. In general, the participants thought that their migration was a positive experience, and that their pre-migration expectations of life in Australia were met. However, migration affected these women’s relationships with their extended families in Iran and created gaps in understanding due to the different social contexts. Migration also led these women to experience hybridity and a shift in their senses of themselves. They paid a high price to achieve a better life. Migration forced them to live in a third space that is neither Iran nor Australia, but is constructed by elements of both cultures, opening the possibility to acquire a third identity belonging only to them. Therefore these women felt the high price was worth paying because of what they had achieved, and none wished to return to Iran.
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To whom it may concern;

My name is Farnaz Zirakbash. I am currently a PhD candidate at Swinburne University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project, which is supervised by Assoc/ Prof. Karen Farquharson.

This research is about everyday life and identity experiences of professional Iranian women living in Australia. I want to hear from you about your life experiences as a professional woman in Australia both in public and private domain. I am also interested in what you think the impact of migration is on your personal understanding of ‘self’ as a woman and whether you think your past life back home has affected your current life at new home in any ways.

Should you agree to participate, an interview will be organised with you at a convenient location. You will take part in an interview of around one hour. All the questions will be open-ended and you may wish to not answer some or wish to talk further on specific questions. The interview will be recorded and I will type up our conversation. If you wish, I can contact you after the interview so you can read or listen to it and make any changes before it is included in the research. I will not include your name or your place of work, or anything that might show who you are in any published material or in any discussions about the research findings. Published material will include a report from my university and an academic paper. Student researcher and her supervisor will keep all data collected for this study for 5 years before being destroyed. Accordingly, your responses will only be accessible by me and Assoc.Prof. Karen Farquharson.

Your participation is thoroughly voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. This means that even if you change your mind in the middle of the interview or after that, we can stop it at any time. Before we start the interview, I will ask you to sign a form for giving me the permission to record your voice.
This research is a valuable opportunity for you to share your experiences and I do not feel that there is any risk to you in taking part in this research. Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of below contacts:
Farnaz Zirakbash: 0430191234 or Assoc Prof Karen Farquharson: 92145889
Or email at: farnazzirakbash@swin.edu.au

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122.
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au
Appendix B

Swinburne University of Technology

Consent Information Statement

The lives of Professional Iranian women in Australia

Principal Investigator(s):

Supervisor: A/Prof Karen Farquharson
Investigator: Farnaz Zirakbash

Agreement

I (name of participant) .................................................................

Have read and understood the information provided in the form of disclosure. I have been provided a copy of the project information statement and this consent form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. Please circle your response to the following:

- I agree to be interviewed by the researcher  
  Yes  
  No
- I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device  
  Yes  
  No
- I agree to make myself available for further information if required  
  Yes  
  No

3. I acknowledge that:

(a) My participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation; (I have been informed that in event of my decision to withdraw from the research, all data related to me will be completely destroyed and will not be incorporated in any stage of the research).

(b) The project is for the purpose of research and not for profit.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant: .................................................................

Signature & Date: .................................................................
Email advertisement:

My name is Farnaz Zirakbash and I am a PhD student in sociology at Swinburne University. I am originally from Iran and studying professional Muslim (born Muslim and not necessarily religious) women lives and their experiences in Australia as for my PhD thesis. I am interested in stories of professional Iranian women and their possible identity challenges in Australia. If you are an educated or professional Iranian woman, I would appreciate interviewing you for my research project. Your participation would be in the form of an interview of around one hour. If you know anyone who might be interested in participating in this research, please feel free to forward this email.

Looking forward for your reply,

Kindest Regards

Farnaz Zirakbash
Tel: 0430 191234
farnazzirakbash@groupwise.swin.edu.au
Faculty of Life and Social Science
Appendix D

Interview Schedule

Demographic information collected from participants at the beginning of the interview will include:

1) Age
2) Level of education and type of occupation
3) Number of the years living in Australia
5) Marital status
   • How long
   • Number of children

Questions that participants will be asked:

The past and migration

• Can you tell me why you migrated to Australia?

• What did you expect Australia to be like?

• What did you hear about it?

• How did you feel about migration? (eg excited, fearful, hopeful, confused)

• Did you expect a better life in Australia? (Have you?)
• What is your definition of a ‘better life’?

• Is there anything that you miss about Iran? (If there is anything other than friends and family that they miss)

Family and work: the impact of migration

• How did migration affect your family relationship in Australia? What I mean is if you have migrated with your family what sort of impact has the migration had on relationships with those who migrated with you, (eg your husband)?

• Has migration affected your relationships with your friends and family in Iran? (In what ways)

• Do you think migration has had any impact on your general views about marriage and family? (In what ways?)

If it has not, what made your general view about marriage and family so valuable that nothing can change it?

• Do you think that Iranian traditions and culture still affect you? (In what ways?)

• How did migration affect your professional life?

• In what ways did your education prepared you for your current occupation? How has your level of education been beneficial or detrimental to getting work?

• Do you think that your education in Iran had any influence on your migration decision? (In what ways?)
Reshaping ‘self’: challenges and experiences

- Can you tell me how you feel about your past and present ‘self’? What I mean is; can you tell me about how you feel about the woman you were in Iran and the woman you are now in Australia?

- Do you think that there are any differences between your ‘self’ at work and in private life?

- Do you think you express yourself differently in Australia than you would in Iran? (eg your bodily presentation as a woman: clothing, make up etc, or your way of communication at home or at work).

- Is there any part of your ‘Iranian identity’ that you have tried not to change? (If so, can you tell me why? Has this been difficult?)

- What specific challenges (small, large) have you encountered living in Australia?

- What is your ideal woman? (If you want to make a list of your ideal woman for example).

- Do you think you ever can be 100% like an Australian woman? (Why yes and why no?)

- What did you think about the questions? Is there something else you would like to add?
Appendix E

Swinburne University of Technology

Letter of Thanks

The Lives of Professional Iranian Women in Australia

Principal investigator(s): Farnaz Zirakbash & A/Prof Karen Farquharson

Dear (name)

Thank you for taking part in the research project, ‘the lives of professional Iranian women in Melbourne-Australia’. Through sharing your experiences you have contributed to greater understanding of Iranian women’s experiences in the West. Your participation is very much appreciated.

Should you wish to receive a copy of the final report, or any publication that come about as a result of this project please do not hesitate to contact me at: farnazzirakbash@swin.edu.au

Kindest Regard,

Farnaz Zirakbash

Student researcher

And

A/prof Karen Farquharson

Senior lecturer in sociology, Academic leader & social and policy studies