

**Decolonial Feminist Epistemologies of Border crossing: A Comparative Study
of Transnational Iranian and Iraqi Women's Life Writing**

Shima Shahbazi

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Program of International and Comparative Literary Studies
Department of Arabic Language and Cultures
School of Language and Cultures
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
The University of Sydney

2019

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

Shima Shabbazi

Abstract

This thesis looks at a selected corpus of life writing narratives of transnational Iranian and Iraqi women writers from a decolonial and intersectional perspective. I apply an interdisciplinary methodology of mixed textual analysis and auto-ethnography, looking at narratives of lived experience in a way that allows for contradictions, complexities and epistemic salience.

My intersectional analysis of memoir centres on the intersections of race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and faith as sites of both oppression and privilege. A decolonial approach to reading memoir as a genre allows to see the reality of lived experience, multiplicity of selves and contradictions as a site of critical and political inquiry. A decolonial approach is concerned with the coloniality of power, whiteness and eurocentrism and the ways in which power attached to eurocentrism informs structures, institutions, systems of thought and inquiry. I use these conceptual frameworks to look at the testimonial narratives of Iranian and Iraqi, Christian and Muslim women of color, first and second generation of migrants coming from different social locations. I critique the postmodern and postcolonial readings of the genre of memoir and argue for a realist post-positivist reading of this genre which takes into consideration the epistemic value of lived experience despite being conscious of the discursive formations of knowledge, and the contradictions in experience itself. I argue that the minorities' experience of border crossing raises a lot of inquiries that are of epistemological and political nature. This is why testimony narratives should be read closely. I look at the concepts of multiplicitous identity, world-travelling, homeland and borderland as travelling concepts in these narratives, show casing examples from these writings to argue that instead of calling transnational minority identities fragmented, we need to see their epistemic privilege which results from their critical perspective to life. The critical phenomenological perspective is the result of adaptability strategies that they have to deploy as border-crossers, new comers and people of color. Thus, not only should these narratives be read intersectionally, and in their context of production, but also in relation to other narratives. It is through the differences, self-contradictions and contradictions with mainstream knowledge that epistemic bodies are produced.

After analysing the multiplicity of selves and the concept of home, I demonstrate how the act of care work as a feminist practice emerges in form of political participation from across the borders.

For My Iranian corpus of study, I look at Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005), Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* (2017), Jasmine Darznik's *The Good Daughter* (2011), and Azar Nafisi's *The Republic of Imagination* (2014). My Iraqi corpus of study includes Leilah Nadir's *Orange Trees of Baghdad* (2014), Haifa Zangana's *Dreaming of Baghdad* (2009), and *City of Widows* (2011).

Building on decolonial feminist epistemology, this research contributes to the field of literary studies, introducing an interdisciplinary approach to reading the genre of life writing which despite critiquing lived experience as 'pure' knowledge, accredits women of color's testimonies as epistemically salient and does not label them as 'misery narrative', 'poornography for white shelves', or 'self-presenting, self-sexualizing narratives'.

*To those who know
Struggle
And
Never give up*

*And for Babajoon
Who passed two days after this*

Acknowledgements

I'd like to express my heartfelt thanks to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Lucia Sorbera who believed in me and my passion for this thesis. I am grateful for her time, availability, and mental support throughout the process. Many thanks go to my associate supervisor A/Prof Rebecca Suter, for her great support and feedback especially at the final stage. I am indebted to these women for understanding me and my struggles.

I would also like to thank the academics at Sydney School for Critical Social Thought, especially Prof. Allison Weir, Dr. Kiran Grewal, and Dr. Naser Ghobadzadeh for all the vibrant discussions and their encouragement.

I am grateful to my friends for all the laughter, company, coffee and fun in the last four years: Carolina Quesada, Alifa Bandali, Paul Esber, Gabriella Edelstein, Jess Blain, Rossella Ibrahim, Anthony Coxeter, Vick Souliman, Rowan Payton, Ahlam Mustafa, Rafi Alam and Muhammad Mozaffari. I learned a lot in each and every of our conversations and will remember them forever. Many thanks goes to Patrick Cronin for reading some of my chapters and giving me feedback. Jeremy Roff and John Feain were inspirational trainers who took care of sanity by pushing me to lift heavier weights and not to go mad at the final stage of PhD.

Many thanks to Dr. Nesrine Basheer, Dr. Farshad Zahedi, Cayathri, and especially, Dr. Robert Boncardo for their great support, friendly chats, and kindness. They were there for me when I needed kind ears to listen to my rants about life. Each and every one of our conversations contributed to the philosophical background of this thesis.

My heartfelt thanks go to Maryam Alavi Niya, my sister, flatmate, shopping company and friend without whose kind support, baked goods, and delicious food, this thesis would not have been possible. She taught me the art of getting-it-together, and I will forever be grateful to her. Many thanks also to Sepideh Noohi, for all her support, morning chats and terrible shows that cheered me up after work.

My most special thanks goes to three friends who were there for me, especially in the final stage, sat with me, and became the fresh eyes that I needed the most. Thanks to Daniela Panico for giving me strength when I was down and needed to be reminded that I can do this. I'm indebted to Claudia Sirdah, whose company is beyond friendship. She read my work, bought me happy cups, and helped me get where I am now with all the joy she brings to the world with her presence. Special thanks goes to Francesco Possemato, my colleague and friend who was there for me during my struggles, read my work, dealt with my verbosity and anxiety, and helped me with formatting. This thesis would have been impossible without these people, who are my family in Australia.

I am and will always be indebted to my family, who despite oceans of distance supported me every single day. My mom, Maryam has been my inspiration and hope all throughout the path of doing this PhD. My dad, Ehsan taught me the art of not giving up and staying strong. And, my little brother, Nima who is my best friend, supported me from across the borders and saved me every time I was close to falling down. Their incessant care and love cannot be repaid.

Last but not least, I am grateful and indebted to my partner, Dr. Ehsan Golahmar. He loved me for who I am, supported me from afar, helped me in all stages of this PhD, read my work, and reminded me every day, that what I do is important and is worth being away from him and my family. Without his support, none of this transnational life would have been possible.

Table of Contents

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review	18
1.1 Introduction.....	18
1.2 Life writing as a genre	21
1.3 Iranian diasporic/transnational/exilic autobiography	25
1.4 Arab women’s autobiographical literature	35
1.5 Transnational feminist politics and Middle Eastern women:	43
1.6 Muslim women’s life writing: misery narrative or pornography?.....	46
1.7 Muslim Woman as Other	49
1.8 Indigenous feminisms versus global sisterhoods:.....	52
Chapter Two: Critical Underpinnings	55
2.1 Introduction.....	55
2.2 Who they are and from where they speak: Transnational feminism and the politics of inclusion	56
2.3 Experience	61
2.4 Story-telling as feminist knowledge	62
2.5 Realist post-positivist approach to reading lived experience	66
2.6 Group identity.....	70
2.7 Epistemic credibility of experience.....	73
2.8 Transnational identity and the concepts of la facultad and multiplicitous self:.....	78
2.9 Assimilation and hometactics	81
2.10 Intersectionality and decolonial feminist epistemology	84
2.11 Methodology	90
PART I	92
Chapter Three: Epistemologies of Multiplicitous Selves in Iranian Life Writing Narratives: Beyond Schizophrenic Labels.....	93
3.2 Transnational identities: Multiplicitous or schizophrenic ?.....	95

3.2.1	Azadeh’s disfigured Iran and scraps of modernity	95
3.2.2	Trinkets, passports and backpacks: Epistemologies of refugee perimeters.....	106
3.2.3	Of daughters and mothers and stories untold.....	121
	Chapter Four: Dreams of Orange Trees and Chimeras of Home: Iraqi Women’s Narratives of War, Loss and Homesickness.....	127
4.1	Introduction.....	127
4.2	“Intimate terrorism” and terrorist intimacies: scent of orange trees and bullets in Baghdad	127
4.3	The multiplicitous body in the mirror.....	131
	PART II.....	137
	Chapter Five: Epistemologies of “Home” and Politics of Assimilation and “Hometactics”	138
5.1	Introduction.....	138
5.2	Bearing “untold” stories of home: Scent of jasmine, orange blossoms and taste of mulberry	140
5.2.1	Homesickness for a lipsticked-up sick home	141
5.2.2	“To be or not to be [grateful]”: Atonement for new roots and green shoots.....	145
5.2.3	Another unibrow from “Eye-ran”: Did you come before or after?	155
5.2.4	A <i>Republic of Imagination</i> or an imaginary republic?	162
	Chapter Six: Resistant Assimilation and Hometactics as Decolonial Practices: The Stories of Leilah, Ibrahim and Haifa.....	168
6.1	Introduction.....	168
6.2	Assimilating “willingly” and “easily”? : From Baghdad to Vancouver	169
6.3	Dreaming of the <i>City of Widows</i> : Going beyond nostalgia	182
	Chapter Seven: Transnational Political Feminist Activism as an Act of Carework: How Do Iranian Women Life Writers Write Democracy?.....	190
7.1	Introduction:.....	190
7.2	For whom the bells of democracy toll? Azadeh’s <i>domesticated</i> story of contemporary Iranian politics	194

7.3	The portrait of refugee as a human: What would democracy think of a <i>knowledge-worker</i> ?	208
7.4	When invisible women know politics.....	219
Chapter Eight: Liberation or Invasion? Democracy or Occupation? Political Carework and Decolonial Transnational Activism in <i>Orange Trees of Baghdad</i> , and <i>City of Widows</i>		225
8.1	Introduction:.....	225
8.2	Liberation through amputation: Pictorial testimonies of intervention in the city of orange trees	226
8.2.1	Is free election equal to democracy?	232
8.2.2	Sanctions are breaking our back!	235
8.3	We don't need no liberation! The problematics of speaking about oppression.....	238
Chapter Nine: Conclusions: "Theory in the Flesh"		246
Bibliography.....		250

Preface

I left Iran for Australia in 2015, feeling guilty about leaving home, while knowing that it was the only feasible option to do my research. My border crossing was both willful and unwillful. I had done a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in English Literature in the 2000s, a decade that was marked by the dominance of a populist regime, controversial elections, and severe sanctions. Access to knowledge was the biggest challenge, where we could not even purchase books from the international market. I just knew it was unfair to do a degree in English and not be able to easily find primary sources. My passion for comparative literature, a discipline that is politically considered airy-fairy these days in Iran, dragged me to the West.

I had no idea where I was going. It was only me and a purple suitcase, so many questions in my head and so much excitement for starting a PhD at a good university, and I knew I was going to miss home and everyone I had left there. It was extremely difficult to adapt to whatever that was called multiculturalism in Sydney. It was difficult to make friends, and to go out with people, and to answer all the questions about my background. I did not understand why people asked me if I was going to go back home after my PhD when I had just arrived. I knew very little about the politics of migration in Australia and about the Australian politics around indigenous people, the original owners of the land. The first few months was enough to get to know some of the everyday politics of the country.

Questions regarding one's background were just small talk, coming from different angles, and I felt obliged to respond to all questions. Conversations surrounding my homeland as my point of 'departure' were awkward and uncomfortable. They turned into sites of confusion, humiliation, and finally rage and trauma for me. It should not have mattered what people's background was. People from my part of the world were in Australia for a reason. Syrians and Iraqis had fled war and conflict. Iranians had fled sanctions and political oppression and these people were all working hard to pay their debts to a country that had 'housed' them, but barely felt like 'home'.

The background questions came relentlessly and as a naive idealist, I began with correcting people's assumptions about my country, my people (men and women), and daily life in Iran. But soon, I avoided any conversations going that direction, as I realized I could not force people into believing that I had not run away from my family, I was not accompanied by a male guardian, I was not home-schooled, and I did not feel oppressed back home. It was easy for people to blame their biased media and their geographical isolation for their ignorance. It was through these interactions, explanations, corrections, confrontations, and humiliations that I came to know of myself as an "angry brown woman." I have to agree, it was first assigned to me by a local Australian who did not expect me to react to his racist/sexist comment. It took me a while to realize why

I was angry and took much longer to learn how to validate my anger as a source of knowledge, as I will discuss in the body of thesis. From then onwards, I referred to myself as an angry brown woman, while knowing where this anger was coming from. I even signed my poems: *angry brown woman*.

Next life-changing statement (not even a question) came from a white man who assumed I was atheist. After being lectured or rather, ‘mansplained’ about the history of Islam and Rumi and Sufism, my confused self left the office, wondering if I identified as a Muslim woman. I did. Next encounter, when I was asked about my religious background, I responded “Muslim”. The response from the person who had questioned my religious identity was “oh, a progressive Muslim.” Progressive Muslim was a problematic term to me, especially because for some reason in my head, it was always paired with “backward” as a binary. I did not want to be any of those things, neither atheist, nor ‘progressive’ Muslim.

The next enlightening question came from other Iranian fellows in Sydney. I was asked multiple times what kind of visa I was on, if I had a permanent residency, and if I was planning to stay. Sometimes the questions went shorter into “are you a *planie* or a *boatie*?” Before getting to know about the multiple layers of meaning hiding in those terms, I used to wonder why it matters so much to people to know how I crossed the borders and got here. It took me a while to hear about Australia’s politics of dealing with asylum seekers and refugees even though I had already witnessed so many threatening phrases on Tehran’s Australian embassy website saying “you will not make Australia home.” Of course, the discourse of multiculturalism applied in Australia is different to the US, contextually, temporally and politically, but that did not matter. Once I started following the politics of refugeeness in Australia, I realized why I was always asked what type of migrant I was. The Middle Eastern background refugees in Australia had been represented as terrorists, criminals, rapists, etc.;¹ therefore, Iranian skilled migrants who are mostly highly educated engineers, general practitioners, dentists, and academics did not want to be associated with terrorists. They were repelled by whoever looked Iranian, linguistically incompetent (in terms of English skills), and underprivileged, and decided that that person must be “a *boatie*” and therefore, an embarrassment for community representation.

Part of this reaction was due to the representation of some asylum seekers as privileged people claiming legal persecution for ideological reasons, and life-at-risk in Iran, and had pretended to be asylum seekers while they were not. As I have not investigated into refugees’ cases, I will not be able to comment on those ones, even if they exist, but I could observe that a number of them could not be representative of all refugee cases. More important than that, migration is a human right issue and people should have access to that equally. The

¹ This representation was generally performed by the right-wing media, and entertainment industry, an example of which was a film titled *The Journey* which was funded by the Australian government as a propaganda to discourage asylum seeking from certain Middle Eastern background communities. For further information ref to: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/28/hard-to-watch-afghans-react-to-6m-australian-film-aimed-at-asylum-seekers>

final and the most important question is, how can we disregard the international causes of these dislocations when wars in the region, sanctions and the colonial/imperial histories are still in place. Whilst ‘good’ high skilled Iranian migrants or so-called *planies* in Australia were trying to turn Chatswood and Crows Nest² into the Californian Tehrangeles, singing praises of Persia and Persian identity, and claiming that refugees should not have sailed to Australia on the first place, refugees were being violated at detention centres in Manus and Naru islands and even UN could not put an end to Australia’s violation of human rights. During my stay in Australia, a few men died in detention, including an Iranian refugee man who set himself on fire. According to testimonies published in *The Guardian*, a number of women were raped. Refugees identifying as gay, bisexual and transgender were violated and abused in detention, and a number of them were sent back to Iran.

All these observations came along reading testimony narratives of Iranian and Iraqi women writers. I could not separate my research about transnational identities and border crossing from my lived experience and observation as a transnational Iranian scholar. Writing this thesis has not been an easy process for me; and the reason I insist on emphasizing the versatility of experience throughout this piece, and contextualizing it through a decolonial and intersectional viewpoint, partly results from my own transnational life. My Iranian passport has been very influential on the quality and quantity of the borders that I have crossed so far. As a highly privileged young woman,³ from a lower-middle class Iranian family and travelling on academic visitor visas, I have still had so many limitations crossing borders. I was banned from travelling to the United States for my fieldwork in 2017, on the basis of having been born in one of the eight countries which were affected by *Executive Order 13769*, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” I have been “randomly” checked at the airports, my passport has been thrown at me after having been checked with a magnifier, and I have been accused of having a fake passport. I have experienced institutional discrimination of multiple forms which “may” have resulted from my ethnicity, and I have been asked to report the title of my thesis to Australian Home Affairs office as a requirement for any Iranian higher degree research student. However, these experiences have all made me more passionate about the epistemologies of border crossing, and the situated-ness of transnational experience. My transnational experience has been nothing like my other international friends’, neither has it been similar to my Arab Muslim friends’, although we have always been placed in the same group identity: Middle Eastern.

Apart from airports, as one of the most remarkable examples of transnational spaces, academia as an intellectual sphere has been a very interesting case of observation for me. There has never been a fine line between gendered experience of oppression and its racial experience for me. When facing discriminatory

² Northern Suburbs in Sydney

³ I should define privilege here. Throughout this thesis, I do not refer to privilege as symbolic capital as Bourdieu has argued, I address privilege from the position of power dominance which is based on class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, generation, or basically, social location from an intersectional perspective.

behaviour, for instance, my passport being thrown at me at the check-in counter, I cannot draw a line between sexism, racism, Islamophobia, ignorance, bias, or just mere rudeness. It has been a mix of all; however, I used to interpret it as cultural difference in my first few encounters. It was through reading other people of colour life writing narratives, more specifically Muslim Middle Eastern background women, talking to other people of colour, more specifically Muslim, Middle Eastern, Latina, Asian (South, South East, Far East), and Southern European, and maintaining ethnographical observation in different social contexts, that I realized how social, racial, ethnic and national hierarchies are formed and shape our daily experience.

Apart from my own experience with borders, reading life-writing narratives as epistemic bodies has had a crucial role in forming my self-knowledge. Reading these narratives, while writing my own, has been therapeutic, in the sense that I was able to see the patterns of oppression and their reasons and ways in which to deflect them. Border crossing, as difficult as it is, provides the border-crosser with an epistemic privilege which is the result of the pains of border crossing.

The first time I decided to go back home was eight months after my arrival in 2015 and my anxiety had returned. I had no idea what I was going back to. I knew I called that place home, but I also knew that I had been away, and things had changed. Believe me though; a lot happens in the Middle East in an eight - month time span. I went back, and things had changed. I came back to Australia and it was again hard to adjust. This border crossing has been consistently taking place for four times so far, every year since 2015 and the anxiety is still there. The only place I feel calm, and I can call home is the airplane that takes me from one land to another. Airports are the most stressful spaces for me and so many people sharing my social location, because we feel very hypervisible there. But airplanes are different, because we have passed all security points to get there, and we can finally drink some coffee, watch a movie, or get some rest. I am writing this because for me, there has not been a resolution yet, about the meaning of home and how I perceive of belonging as a person. Belonging is some strange feeling that for me personally is defined by a lack of it. I can understand where I do not feel like I belong but finding a place where I feel I belong has been a challenge. Throughout these three and a half years, I have been reading narratives all of which discuss the same sense of home and the challenge of belonging as an ontological anxiety.

My eventful journey throughout this PhD granted me a chance to gain a great amount of self-knowledge and critical thinking. It exposed me to my greatest fears, vulnerabilities, biases, angers, and love. As intense as this research journey was, it became my poetry muse and gave me the pleasure of writing my heart out despite all my insecurities. I confess that I have lived my thesis in the past three and a half years and this is a good reason to start this dissertation with bits and pieces of my own lived experience of border crossing.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and I am grateful to them, past and present for hosting me. I write about the borders that we, as settlers, created on their land. I owe a lot to indigenous friends and scholars who taught me the art of 'listening', and 'resisting', and 'calling out' oppression. I would not have learned about 'decolonial epistemologies' if it were not from them. It was through reading their works and talking to them that I learned that channelling anger and frustration at the sight of oppression is an art. This dissertation is the beginning of a new journey for me, as a transnational Iranian woman scholar.

Chapter One:

Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

This thesis attempts to shed light on the epistemic value of lived experience and testimony as narrated through the genre of memoir. The body of life writing written by Iranian and Iraqi transnational women writers have been an important contribution to the genre of memoir due to the contested responses they have evoked, and the time period in which they have been published. Employing a realist post-positivist conceptual frame of experience, I read Iranian and Iraqi life writing narratives as microhistories filling the gaps of the contemporary grand-narratives of history. I demonstrate that despite the contradictions, social mystifications, and discursive constructions in the stories, there is an epistemic value to an autonomous experience which is lived, embodied, and narrated through stories. Although I empathize with the postcolonial scholarship on the genre of memoir and their discussions surrounding the white imperialist co-optation of women of color's testimonies (especially Muslim women's), I argue that the reduction of the genre to "pornography" for white shelves or "misery narrative" is an epistemic violence. Given the diversity of voices in the genre of memoir, the politics of publication, and the eventful gap between "telling" a story and "hearing" one, I argue for an intersectional analysis that makes a link between the social location of the author and the epistemic credibility of narratives. I demonstrate that despite the contradictions and limitations of perspective, these narratives still substantially contribute to decolonial feminist epistemologies.

My corpus of study consists of four Iranian transnational memoirs, including Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005), Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* (2017), Jasmine Darznik's *The Good Daughter* (2011) and, Azar Nafisi's *The Republic of Imagination* (2014) and Three Iraqi narratives, Leilah Nadir's *Orange Trees of Baghdad* (2014), Haifa Zangana's *City of Widows* (2011) and, *Dreaming of Baghdad* (2009). I do a close reading of these texts and a few journalistic diaries published online by some of their authors and others, including Haifa Zangana and Dina Nayeri. Apart from textual analysis, I also use an auto-ethnographical and ethnographic approach to reflect more on the experience of border crossing and transnational identities. I had some personal correspondence and meetings with some of the authors as well, who kindly agreed to talk about their experience as an auto-biographer and a border-crosser. I acknowledge that despite focusing on minority narratives, this thesis still analyses a very privileged body of experience and thus, it does not aim at representing or speaking for any group identity. I selected these narratives out of more than a hundred memoirs to maintain a decent level of diversity; however, they do not speak for the versatility of experience at the intersections of race, gender, class, ethnicity, generation, ability versus disability, faith, religion, and, sexual orientation.

The body of discussion in my thesis is divided into three parts, each of which focusing on a border crossing theme and each covering two chapters dedicated to the analysis of Iranian and Iraqi memoirs.

Following this introduction, I situate my research in the field of literary studies and feminist epistemologies by reviewing the literature on Iranian and Iraqi transnational literature and the genre of life writing. Chapter two takes the genre of life writing to the concept of lived experience, linking testimony to feminist epistemologies and border crossing phenomenologies. I draw on the theories of key figures in the fields of literary studies and feminist epistemologies, such as Linda Martin Alcoff, Satya Mohanty, Mariana Ortega, Gloria Anzaldua, Chandra Mohanty, Maria Lugones, and Paula Moya to conceptualize the lens through which I analyse the texts.

In Chapter 3, I use Mariana Ortega's feminist phenomenology and the concept of world travelling as an epistemic privilege, strategic playfulness and multiplicitous selves. The chapter begins with an analysis of Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* and her experience of return to Iran in the 2000s. I demonstrate the ways in which Azadeh navigates borders through her privileged social location as an upper-class second generation Iranian American. I explore how, due to the complexities of her social location, in some respects Azadeh travels the world without actual "world-travelling." Nevertheless, her 'in-between' experience and her voice as a second-generation Iranian American is important because it not only speaks for Azadeh as an individual, but also for the ways in which group identities are formed by hegemonic discourses such as whiteness, imperialism, and coloniality of power. The second memoir in this chapter is *Refuge* by Dina Nayeri, which presents a different type of border crossing and world-travelling. Niloo's border crossing experience as a refugee puts her in a different social location to Azadeh. Through her interactions with other refugees, listening to their stories, and sharing hers with them, Niloo gains self-knowledge about her multiplicitous self. She travels to different people's worlds and narrates their stories of resistance, homelessness, and their decolonial approach to power and whiteness. The last section of chapter three looks at *The Good Daughter* by Jasmine Darznik and her own lived experience along with her mother's—Lili. Jasmine's biracial identity and her privileged experience of border crossing is juxtaposed to Lili's first-generation migrant border crossing.

In chapter four, I focus on the themes of multiplicitous selves, epistemic privilege, and world-travelling in Iraqi narratives. In the analysis of *Orange Trees of Baghdad*, I show the ways in which Leilah's development of a multiplicitous self and her self-knowledge takes place at the point of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. I then look into Haifa Zangana's two narratives *City of widows* and *Dreaming of Baghdad*, and the critical decolonial knowledge that she produces in these works by story-telling. I investigate how Haifa's epistemic privilege and multiplicitous self arise from the pains of border crossing, both mental and physical, and how through writing she reconciles with memories of torture, displacement, and border crossing.

Part II, including chapters five and six, focuses on epistemologies of home and the politics of assimilation and hometactics. In chapter five, I analyse Azadeh's hometactics strategies both in the US and in Iran. I show the ways in which Azadeh's social and linguistic privileges and limitations benefit her in some conditions and fail her in others. I scrutinize Azadeh's different practices of homemaking, both in the US and Iran, to show the complexities of border crossing experiences and in-betweenness. In my analysis of *Refuge*, I analyse both Niloo's perspective of home and assimilation, and Nayeri's own voice, presented in her autobiographical article in *The Guardian*. I draw on the theme of 'gratitude complex' and Nayeri's decolonial and unapologetic critique of whiteness regarding the migrants' assimilation. I show that Niloo's perimeter, as the metonym for home, plays a significant role in her story and the story of other refugees in her auto-fiction. The final section of chapter five is a close reading of Darznik's memoir and her experience of homemaking in America as a biracial German-Iranian, compared to her mother's hometactics and assimilation practices as a first-generation Iranian migrant. Comparing all these women's hometactics and assimilation strategies, I show the ways in which everyone's practice is different to the other, and how assimilatory politics directly result from one's intersectional social location.

In chapter six, I compare assimilation and hometactics strategies employed by Leilah as a second generation British-Iraqi to her father's, and the different ways in which they perceive Iraq as home. Comparing Leilah's narrative to Haifa Zangana's *City of Widows* and *Dreaming of Baghdad*, I discuss the significance of considering social location in understanding border crossing subjects' homemaking and assimilation practices. Memory in the first generation of migrants and post-memory and genealogical nostalgia in the second generation have a great effect on the subjects' knowledge of home, where they make home, and the degree to which they assimilate.

Part III, as the final section, focuses on the controversial theme of democracy, political care, and border political thinking. I concentrate on these themes because the Middle East and politics are inseparable and political practice is a recurrent theme in all narratives in my corpus. I am interested in how border crossing identities develop political agency in the new home, and how they translate democracy into their everyday practices of homemaking. Chapter seven covers Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* and her perspective of Iran's reform period in the early 2000s. I critique Azadeh's view of modernity and democracy as a Western ideal and argue that her representations of Iranian politics of that era fall into orientalist discourse of 'the West and the rest.' In my discussions of *Refuge*, I show that, by contrast, Niloo's political care is decolonial and she is more concerned with immigration policies, Islamophobia in the West, and the ways in which refugees are affected by them. In the final section of this chapter, Jasmine Darznik's transnational political carework took us back into history of imperial and colonial interventions in Iran, and compulsory unveiling of women in the Pahlavi

period. Her post-memory produces decolonial feminist knowledge about women's resistance prior to the revolution and adds to the diversity of experiences analysed in this thesis.

Chapter eight, as the final chapter, attempts to shed light on decolonial transnational political activism in Iraqi memoirs and critiques the binary of liberation/invasion. In my analysis of *The Orange Trees*, I demonstrate the ways in which Leilah uses intertextuality and polyphony to render a more objective criticism of the invasion and occupation, and to show the extent to which Iraqi people's everyday lives have been affected by the war. The section on *City of Widows* studies Haifa Zangana's strong decolonial feminist critique of the war, 'colonial feminism' in the name of liberation, and imperial women's NGO projects for Iraqi women's liberation.

Through a mixed methodology of textual analysis, auto-ethnography, and ethnography, this thesis encourages a sympathetic reading of lived experience narratives and acknowledgment of the epistemic value that life stories bear. My thesis constitutes interdisciplinary research and contributes to different fields of knowledge. As the corpus of study includes non-fiction life writing and microhistory narratives, this thesis is not only a contribution to the field of literary studies, but also history. As my main concern in the thesis is the concept of experience, this research intersects with the fields of feminist epistemology and phenomenology. The intersectional and decolonial approach of the thesis also places it in the field of critical race studies and ethnic studies. Focusing on Iranian and Iraqi narratives, this thesis is also a contribution to area studies, especially Middle Eastern Studies, although the methodology may be too unconventional for mainstream area studies disciplines. Finally, this thesis is a contribution to Migration and transnational studies as it covers first and second-hand stories of border crossing, assimilation, and integration.

There are so many dimensions to narratives of lived experience and this thesis only focuses on one, which is the epistemic value of "experience," and the ways in which it is represented by the auto-biographer. Although I am aware of the importance of readership and reception of the literature under study, I do not focus on those aspects of these transnational narratives, since it would take the study into a different direction. I am personally interested in tracing critical theories that arise from everyday life stories of migrants, and the ways in which they can be applied in policy-making processes surrounding immigration and border crossing.

1.2 Life writing as a genre

Memoir, life writing, autobiography, testimony literature and diary writing raise a genre that deals with representations of individual and social experience of the narrator. Sidonie Smith⁴ counts fifty-two genres of life narratives with one attribute in common: that "autobiographical subjects register, consciously and

⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives*. (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 2010), 183

unconsciously, their complicity with and resistance to the terms of cultural self-locating they inherit.” There exists a main distinction between autobiography and memoir as William Zinsser argues. Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens focusing on a time in the writer’s life that was unusually vivid such as childhood or adolescence or that was framed by war, travel or public service or some other special circumstance⁵.

This body of writing is very much taken for fact, history and truth. There are a number of controversial ideas regarding the legitimacy of the autobiographical literature. As Peter Hechs states, diaries and memoirs are important sources for biographers and historians because they provide first-hand accounts of public and private events and offer privileged access to the personality of the writers. Nevertheless, he continues that only a naïve historian would take every statement in a diary or memoir at face value because it is hard for us to be honest with ourselves, even harder to be frank with others and still harder to write the truth as we have seen it and preserve what we have⁶.

Gillian Whitlock⁷ also refers to various terms which are employed to refer to autobiography, such as life writing, life history, slave narrative and testimony and using each of these labels is useful as long as they highlight cultural and historical specificity; however, they could also be risky in some contexts (for instance black writers, white readers) as they might “reinforce the xenophobia in the uses of the term ‘autobiography.’” According to her and some other critics, ‘autobiography’ cannot be applied to narratives written by black women (indigenous and women of color can be included as well) since autobiography connotes classic narratives of “individualism” whereas life writing narratives of people of colour are shaped at the intersection of their race, gender, class, ethnicity, ability/disability and bears cultural and historical knowledge in relation to those intersections. Most women of colour life narratives position themselves as microhistory narratives against macro-narratives of colonialism, imperialism and universal patriarchy. As Whitlock argues:

Colonialism impacts at the point where the very sense of the possibilities for self-definition are constituted and autobiographical writing bears the traces of its origins in specific historical relations of power, rule and domination. It is uniquely placed to reflect back on how individuals are categorized and attached to identities, and how identities are invariably produced within the social, political and cultural domain. Autobiographic writing can suggest the multiplicity of histories, the ground ‘in between’ where differences complicate both across and within individual subjects.⁸

In the discussions of this genre, the question often raised is who has the legitimacy to represent, narrate and retell the experiences that may not only be individual but collective, or in other words, whose account of

⁵ Russel Baker and William Knowlton Zinsser, *Inventing the truth: The art and craft of memoir*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998)

⁶ Peter Hechs, *Writing the self: diaries, memoirs, and the history of the self*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013)

⁷ Gillian Whitlock, *The intimate empire*. (New York: A&C Black, 2000), 161

⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

experience can be read as truth if “experience” can ever be considered as an epistemological source. In that very regard and in the context of Indian life writing, Arnold and Blackburn maintain that subcontinental autobiographical narratives represent ‘a means for negotiating the irreducible dichotomy of the self-in-society; they are a narrative form for expressing and imagining an individual’s existence, which includes group identities and relations with others’.⁹

Apart from legitimacy, another question that is raised with regards to the genre of life-writing is the question of authenticity, truth and voice. Chambers¹⁰ suggests a mixed methodology for the analysis of lived experience narratives which includes both life writing narrative and interviews with the author. Despite the fact that life writing as a text and interview are both matters of representation and the question of authenticity of voice is always raised there, Chambers argues, that in the genre of Muslim life writing, there is great value in combining interview with a reading of the text. Even though some authors might misrepresent their own work, “interviews can also shed light on conscious and unconscious influences, political agendas, and stylistic intentions [by] presenting more circumscribed perspectives than their ambivalent, multivalent texts.”

The history of life writing as a genre and also a cultural practice has been contested by many critics in the field. Chambers highlights the long tradition of life writing among Muslims which goes back to the Prophet’s time, while in the West, it is a post-enlightenment phenomenon.¹¹ Align with that, Margot Badran debates that “Recording one’s life story is a centuries-old practice in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab and Islamic worlds.”¹² Conversely, critics such as Georges Gusdorf¹³ insist that autobiography writing was a ‘Western’ practice and the fact that it emerged in ‘the rest’ of the world is reminiscent of the success of Western imperial project. He also maintains:

[it] has communicated to men [sic] of other cultures; but those men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonizing to a mentality that was not their own. When Gandhi tells his own story, he is using Western means to defend the East.¹⁴

This claim is conflictual with Ghandi’s claimed aim of using autobiography to experiment with truth, rather than as a liberating tool, like what Gusdorf asserts. Ghandi uses autobiography not as a conventional mode of expression, but as a form of opposition to coloniality and imperialism. Other critics such as

⁹ David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, eds., *Telling lives in India: Biography, autobiography, and life history* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 22

¹⁰ Chambers, Claire, "Countering the 'Oppressed, Kidnapped Genre' of Muslim Life Writing: Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter* and Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*." *Life Writing* 10, no. 1 (2013): 77-96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹² Margot Badran, "Expressing Feminism and Nationalism in Autobiography: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Educator." In *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 274.

¹³ Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

Spengemann,¹⁵ Lejeune and de Mann only focus on Western canon of autobiography in their discussions and exclude the non-Western life writing.¹⁶ Some other critics such as Georg Misch¹⁷ argue that the genre of life writing defines any form of classification and therefore cannot fit in literary genres. Paul de Mann insists that “Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.”¹⁸ Finally, post-structuralist critics¹⁹ claim of ‘the death of the subject’ displaced autobiographer as a subject with an epistemically valid lived –experience. Sidone Smith and Julia Watson²⁰ emphasize that the challenges to “the concept of a unified, sovereign subject” which were offered by the poststructuralist theorists questioned the “cultural authority” of the Lyotardian “master narratives” including “the institution of canonical autobiography” and the notion of “Truth” with a capital T.²¹

In the studies of women’s life writing, the question of selfhood and subjectivity of the autobiographer is central. While some critics such as Leigh Gilmore²² argue that “men are autonomous individuals with inflexible ego boundaries who write autobiographies that place the self at the center of the drama” and by contrast, “women have flexible ego boundaries, develop a view of the world characterized by relationships and therefore represent the self in relation to ‘others,’” Sidone Smith²³ stresses that women life writers employ “the politics of fragmentation” to critique and question masculinist and patriarchal notions of the centred selfhood. Moore-Gilbert,²⁴ builds up his argument around postcolonial life writing, suggesting that the Western feminist studies of autobiography, as much as the Western male perspectives lack openness and flexibility towards the postcolonial life writing and the unique expressions of selfhood in those narratives. He argues:

[I]f feminist criticism of women’s life-writing characteristically ascribes the dispersal of the Subject to the specific patterns of cultural insertion and socialisation of Western women, the explanation is sometimes quite different in postcolonial life-writing. There, decentred subjectivity is often represented as one effect of the material histories and relations of colonialism, in which new and occasionally radically conflicting identities are inscribed in palimpsestic fashion on the subaltern, sometimes by force. Equally, in the context of debates about the relationality of auto/biographical Selfhood, it is extremely rare to find contemporary Western women’s life-writing espousing nationalism as an axis of (self-) identification. In relation to issues of embodiment, finally, it is even more unusual to find any discussion of ethnicity as a dimension of Western women’s auto/biographical subjectivity, whereas in postcolonial life-writing by both genders, this is a standard issue.²⁵

¹⁵ William C Spengemann and William C. Spengemann, *The forms of autobiography: Episodes in the history of a literary genre*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

¹⁶ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial life-writing: culture, politics, and self-representation*. (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁷ Georg Misch, *A history of autobiography in antiquity*. (London: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁸ De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-facement." *Mln* (1979): 930.

¹⁹ Such as Roland Barthes, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault

²⁰ Smith and Watson. *Reading autobiography*, 135

²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²² Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), xiii

²³ Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, identity, and the body: Women's autobiographical practices in the twentieth century*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 14

²⁴ Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial life-writing*, xxi.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xxi.

Moore-Gilbert presents a poetics of postcolonial life writing as a sub-genre in his book and highlights the self-consciousness of this genre in relation to “the genres within which it chooses to situate itself.”²⁶ Postcolonial life writing deploys the genre “to challenge the epistemological status of authorial /autobiographical identity... and thereby to contest the wider truth claims conventionally made by, and on behalf of, canonical autobiography.”²⁷

In this thesis, I attempt to build upon the abovementioned scholarship and critique memoir as a genre in the context of Iranian and Iraqi transnational women writers. My first aim is to decolonize the sub-genre of Muslim misery narrative by showcasing different voices of women who come from a variety of social locations, religions, ethnicities, classes, generations and faiths. I also juxtapose contradictory voices (both colonial and decolonial) and read them not only through the author’s intersectional social location, but also against grand narratives such as imperialism, coloniality of power, patriarchy and global justice. By using a realist post-positivist approach to identity, I critique both post-structuralist and post-colonial approaches to life writing as a genre, and suggest a mixed approach which includes an intersectional, decolonial and realist approach to women’s life writing narratives. This research does not intend to suggest any new categories or strict methodologies, but makes an attempt to portray the nuances that exist to Middle Eastern background women’s narratives that do not occupy any prior categories (except for the reductionist Muslim misery narrative). Iranian and Iraqi narratives are not even considered as postcolonial life writing due to the definitions of colonization and coloniality and the general claim that Iran has never been colonized (Iraq’s British mandate period is considered as colonization).

In addition to that, transnational and border crossing narratives introduce new notions of selfhood, selves in process, neither fixed and unified nor fragmented and disillusioned. Identities can be both socially, linguistically, theoretically constructed and real, which means they can refer to the social world and no matter where and when they are located and how much social power they have, they bear knowledge and epistemological privilege. Diasporic/ transnational memoir is a genre that is so reflective of diverse multicultural identities, and the works under study in this research are life narratives of the Middle Eastern women whose voices are heard through their memoirs and their legitimacy is questioned.

1.3 Iranian diasporic/transnational/exilic autobiography

Autobiography is considered as a dominant genre in the field of Iranian diaspora literature, mostly utilized by women writers and therefore adopting a feminine voice. These narratives of experience and history

²⁶ Ibid., xxvi.

²⁷ Ibid., xxii.

have encountered some controversial responses from the critics and audience. In this section, some of these contributions are to be presented to situate the importance of the subject in the field of historiography and Middle Eastern studies.

Regarding the notion of experience and its legitimacy in the genre of memoir, Amy Motlagh's scholarly article²⁸ is one of the most eminent contributions to the field. Calling this genre "autoethnography" she sheds light on the fact that the lines between the scholarly writing and memoir are not only blurred in some of these autobiographical works but also in the critical responses to these works which have questioned the authority of the writer and the legitimacy of 'her'²⁹ experience. She analyses the three responses to the Iranian American memoirs (*Reading Lolita in Tebran* being at the centre of attention) written by Fatemeh Keshavarz,³⁰ Hamid Dabashi³¹ and Negar Mottahedeh³² who have applied a memoirist's style of "self-revelation" to critique these memoirs.³³ Autobiographical works such as Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tebran* have been able to reach a wide scope of audience and therefore create "a race within the Iranian diasporic community to use this medium to convey the right message about modern Iran."³⁴ It is interesting that memoirs are products of multiple discourses but once they are produced, they become social acts that create other discourses of knowledge. These memoirs as accounts of personal experience are only considered authentic when there exists a referential notion of evidence or a reflection of the real.³⁵ The approach that the above-mentioned scholars have utilized to critique the Iranian-American memoirs as "wrong" experience of history is as subjective and self-experience-based as the memoirs might be. Motlagh critiques this approach and maintains that the scholars must exercise caution when they debate the agency of the autobiographical literature and its contributions to history and ethnography. As she states:

To use the memoirist's tools to develop and lend credence to scholarship unconsciously reinforces the dominance of the memoir as the go-to genre for information about Iran — ostensibly the very peril that Dabashi, Keshavarz, and Mottahedeh want to avoid — and leads to a potentially dangerous merging of the two categories. If diasporic (or émigré) intellectuals and academics are to avoid, as Chow cautions, privileging "their own minority in relation to

²⁸ Amy Motlagh, "Autobiography and Authority in the Writings of the Iranian Diaspora." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 411-424.

²⁹ Most of the famous and controversial Iranian diasporic memoirs have been written by women.

³⁰ Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More Than Lolita in Tebran: Reading More Than Lolita in Tebran*. (North Carolina: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2007)

³¹ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A people interrupted*. (New York: New Press, 2008)

³² In this regard, Mottahedeh writes: "It is likely, to my mind that Nafisi's efforts converge on a will to institute a transnational feminist ethics that is concerned with the lives and conditions of women elsewhere. But if this is so, a consistently ahistorical analysis of Iran — one that does not distinguish between past and present — cannot be the rallying call for efforts on behalf of Iranian women today. In the era of total war intent on the reversal of cultural trends through external force, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* as a representation of the state of current affairs is an indiscriminating gesture. It performs like a wound-up metal monkey on wheels as the warmup act for more theater of unprovoked war and another occupation." Negar Mottahedeh, "Off the grid: reading Iranian memoirs in our time of total war." *Middle East Research and Information Project* 9 (2004).

³³ Motlagh, "Autobiography," 413.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 415.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 417.

'the West'" over the shared goals of scholarship, they must be wary of the use of experience — however compelling — as foundational evidence.³⁶

Motlagh's compelling critique of the criticism of the Iranian American memoirs mostly centers upon memoir as a "genre" that has been doubly applied by the writers and their critics as well, to legitimize experience and their version of history as truth. As the theorist Philippe Lejeune ³⁷argues, memoir is the account of reality as it has been perceived by the author, therefore, it cannot be expected to present political correctness or historical accuracy. To him, biographies and histories aim for "[a]ccuracy [which] involves information" but we can only expect from the autobiographer or memoirist "fidelity [which involves] meaning."³⁸

There are different motives and purposes behind writing autobiographies and exposing the inner self to the public. In her other article titled ³⁹ "Towards a Theory of Iranian American Life Writing," Motlagh calls memoir a "diasporic technology" which is written by the members of the marginalized groups not for the purpose of breaking down the stereotypes but exploiting and reclaiming them. Focusing on Iranian diaspora writers, she argues that the first and second generation of these autobiographers utilize this genre differently. She assumes that the first-generation authors are still concerned about the depiction of a national story and the possibility of a return to power in the home country; however, second generation writers are affected by other goals such as a desire to "disabuse Americans of their stereotypes about Iranians, and to accomplish success within the institutional structures of democracy, capitalism, and state." However, the current memoirists express wariness of all institutions, finding within each a potential for the oppression of the individual. These memoirists' sense "the fragmentary nature of the world they live in" and simply want to claim that fragmentariness as their own condition.⁴⁰ She reflects Moaveni's experience of being marginalized both within the white community and the multicultural community and the way she took this condition as a privilege to define a new realm for herself as a memoirist to confirm her identity as a member of the Iranian diasporic community⁴¹.

Regarding the condition of exile and the genres that it fit in, Werbner, also emphasized by Motlagh, argues: "although the experience of exile is, in the first instance, personal and individual, long-term diasporas create collective literary genres [. . .] that are uniquely theirs."⁴² In case of Iranian diaspora which does not have a very long history in the US as say, the Latinos or the Chinese or the Afro-Americans, memoir becomes the

³⁶ Ibid., 424.

³⁷ Philippe Lejeune and Paul John Eakin. *On autobiography* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 190.

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁹ Amy Motlagh, "Towards a Theory of Iranian American Life Writing," *Melus* (2008): 17-36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31.

⁴² Pnina Werbner, "Introduction: The materiality of diaspora—Between aesthetic and" real" politics." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 17

genre they utilize to create a space of their own, to show resistance , to critique or to “correct” the public opinion about their ethnicity and race.

Since the boom in the Iranian diaspora autobiographical writing, there has risen a concern in the academia, especially in Iranian studies and comparative literary studies programs to study the ways in which this body of literature was born and received both in the West and the East. Within the body of the scholarship, there are very controversial, opposing readings of these works. This study requires an overview of the literature written on the mentioned body of writings to shed light on the significance of the current study and its novelty in the field.

To begin, Sanaz Fotouhi in her book⁴³ presents a map of the Anglo-phone literature of the Iranian diaspora. She argues about the distinctiveness of this body of literature which is the product of the unique Iranian diasporic experience. She calls for the three waves of emergence of the literature of Iranian diaspora which are the post 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis, post 9/11 and the post 2009 presidential elections and attempts to fill in the gaps of the existing scholarship on Iranian diaspora literature by pointing to the significant role of this body of literature in contributing to the discourse and rhetoric of English literature and by shedding light on the figures (authors) that have been marginalized despite their contributions to this scholarship. Her work tries to contextualize diasporic Iranian writing through known discourses of English literature and to present a landscape of these memoirs and fiction. She divides her book to a study of fiction as the narration of the past and history, Sufi poetry as universal and profound, memoirs as double-edged narratives, the writings about the generations of mothers and daughters and the Iranian masculinities and their hypervisibility versus invisibility. Her work as she mentions is a composite study in which issues and subjects are approached through a variety of perspectives offered by multiple texts.

As part of the literature on Iranian diaspora writing, Persis Karim in her thesis⁴⁴ examines the way in which women’s narratives of displacement and exile interrogate the historical and political ramifications of their alienation, looking specifically at the gendered aspects of that experience. Focusing specifically on postcolonial migration narratives, Iranian women’s autobiography in exile and diasporic literature, her dissertation brings into picture the critical narrative strategies and introduces a body of literature which proposes alternative ways of representing subjectivities and intersubjective relations that are based on tensions between local, national and transnational movements and histories. She chooses different kinds of dislocations as characteristic of

⁴³ Sanaz Fotouhi, *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora: Meaning and Identity Since the Islamic Revolution*, (London: IB Tauris, 2015)

⁴⁴ Persis Maryam Karim, *Fissured Nations and Exilic States: Displacement, Exile, and Diaspora in Twentieth-Century Writing by Women*. PhD Dissertation: The University of Texas at Austin, 1998.

twentieth century migrations and therefore her work can be considered as one of the pioneers in the studies of the literature of exile and more specifically, Iranian literature of exilic diaspora.

Calling autobiography a “soft weapon,” Gillian Whitlock⁴⁵ has dedicated two chapters of her book to Iranian literature of exile specifically bringing into picture the autobiographic memoirs of Azar Nafisi and Marjane Satrapi. She argues that “exilic memoirs bring to the surface a long history of fascination, mourning, obsession, and a co-presence that is an ongoing subtext in both Iranian and American imaginaries”⁴⁶ and that is why these memoirs have suddenly attracted so much attention in the US. According to her, the exilic memoirs reflect on and mystify history and place distinctively—both the past and the highly charged political present.⁴⁷ She considers the success of Nafisi’s memoir as a product of the War on Terror that helps to accelerate not only the spectacular success of a memoir but also the extraordinary celebrity of a professor.⁴⁸ She concludes that Nafisi’s work offers a gendered critique of the Islamic revolution in Iran that takes up the literary language of second wave Western feminism—the room of one’s own and the emphasis on the power of women to reconfigure and radicalize the private and domestic sphere—just in time to respond to a new phase of anxiety in relations between Iran and the West.⁴⁹ In her final chapter, she discusses the importance of comic autobiographies in shaping the consciousness of “the other” about us. She discusses that life narratives circulate as exotic commodities with economic exchange value and also emotional value and they can be seductive, deceptive or just a foreign body, producing demanding engagement that alters what we know about others and ourselves.⁵⁰ Although she does not consider the sudden thriving of autobiographical writings in the West as a coincidence, she does not call it “conspiracy”⁵¹ either, which actually contradicts her claims about literature being political and ideological. If autobiographical literature as Whitlock states “circulates as soft weapon” and tends to “personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen or unheard”⁵² and if she acknowledges “the colonial present”⁵³ it is expected to see a reference to ‘coloniality’ in relation to memory and history and the fact that autobiographical writings cannot always present fidelity to history and memory.

⁴⁵ Gillian Whitlock, *Soft weapons: Autobiography in transit*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Among the articles written on Iranian diaspora literature, Farzaneh Milani's work is a significant contribution to the field. In her article⁵⁴ *Iranian Women's Life Narratives*, she discusses the production, reception, co-optation and market commodification of Iranian women's life narratives and she counts four main factors for the success of these best sellers in the Western book market, including the familiarity of captivity as a theme, the allure of life narratives, a relative lack of translated books from Iran and other parts of the middle east and the American Audience's genuine desire to learn more about the region.⁵⁵ She begins with all the challenges on her way to write her dissertation on a feminist analysis of the life and works of Forugh Farukhzad, the Iranian poet who refused silence and exclusion all her lifetime and explains how life narratives were considered as "literary misfits"⁵⁶ in Iran at the time whereas self-narration was a favourite pastime in the American culture. With regards to the same tendency, she mentions Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* which is published as A "Memoir in books" in the US and a story of "Love, Books and Revolution" in England in accordance with the demands of the market. She poses the question if there is a distinction between fiction and non-fiction and if the auto-biographer is limited by facts, real life and need for accuracy and if coming closer to truth should be the ultimate goal of the non-fictive writer. She argues that a large number of the readers take the Iranian women's autobiographical accounts as "truth" therefore, it is legitimate to ask how these narratives are received in the West, who funds them, who promotes and co-opts them and we need to question "the distortions of truth, the betrayals of history, the politics of publishing and myth making and image engineering"⁵⁷ She then focuses on the theme of "captivity"⁵⁸ as part of the macro-narrative of the captive Muslim woman liberated by the Western democratic society. This theme is represented in Prison memoirs and hostage narratives which share the personal takes of survival and liberation but differ in the sense that the former is a testimony to women's agency courage and defiance while the latter is a narrative of victimhood, subordination and immobility, denying women's resistance and self-assertion.

Milani exemplifies Betty Mahmoudi's *Not Without My Daughter* and Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* as two instances of hostage narratives which are taken as authentic because they are written by native subjects and they rely on the authority of personal experience reinforcing the stereotypes and the fetishized images of the Muslim woman. As instances of the prison narratives, she mentions Shirin Ebadi's memoir *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Haleh Esfandiari's *My Prison, My Home* and argues that these personal accounts celebrate Iranian women's history of resistance, subversion and rebellion as much as they represent the post-revolution dogmatism, segregation, patriarchy and oppression. Milani ends her article

⁵⁴ Farzaneh Milani, "Iranian Women's Life Narratives." *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 130-152.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 136.

questioning the notion of singular truth and unified identity in the world of non-fiction.⁵⁹ Farzaneh Milani's article is one of the few 'critical' studies of Iranian diaspora life writings which on the one hand values experience as an epistemic repertoire bearing knowledge and on the other hand considers it as a realm that needs to be decolonized of the stereotypical and fetishized representations. Among the themes developed about the diaspora and exile literature, the debates surrounding Orientalism and Occidentalism have been dominant. There are a number of works discussing the image of the occidental "Other" in this body of literature. Laetitia Nanquette's scholarly work is one of the most recent works in this field that shares some mutual perspective with the one meant in this research. Her book⁶⁰ *Orientalism Versus Occidentalism* looks at literary texts not just as relevant to literary traditions and individual writing processes but also to socio-political issues. Focusing on the representation of the "Other," she renders a textual, contextual and discourse analysis of the literary works written about Iran and France. She bases her framework on the French imagology, Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism and Stuart Hall's politics of representation expressing that the image is used as the image of a foreigner, the image of a nation or society or the image of an author's sensibility.⁶¹ She stresses that Occidentalism as the study of the West cannot be a "reverse definition of orientalism"⁶² and as Bobby Sayyid⁶³ argues, "to propose occidentalism as its counterpart is to ignore the intimate relationship between power and knowledge. No doubt the "Rest" have stereotypical representations of the West, but the source of these representations is the West itself. A relationship of power is a relationship of unevenness." The corpus of the works studied in Nanquette's book includes both the texts of minor and major authors who are respectively underrepresented and canonized⁶⁴ and she applies a typological method for her analysis.⁶⁵ Through her typological analysis, literature benefits from being studied as a discourse and "it gains from its analysis of its creation and reproduction of types," because types are essential for apprehending cultural history and national issues.⁶⁶

'Language' is significantly highlighted among the notions debated regarding the autobiographical literature. As most of the diasporic autobiographical literature has been written either in English or French rather than in the mother tongue and the obsession with the mother tongue has been a key point in the memoirs, the author's linguistic capital should be discussed in relation to his/her identity politics and attempts to reclaim history. In this regard, Babak Elahi studies the relationship between language and identity in Iranian-American

⁵⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁶⁰ Laetitia Nanquette, *Orientalism versus Occidentalism: Literary and cultural imaging between France and Iran since the Islamic revolution*. Vol. 24. (London: IB Tauris, 2013)

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶² Ibid., 6.

⁶³ Bobby S Sayyid and Salman Sayyid. *A fundamental fear: Eurocentrism and the emergence of Islamism*. (London: Zed Books, 2003), 134.

⁶⁴ Nanquette, *Orientalism versus Occidentalism*, 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 164.

women's memoirs.⁶⁷ He maintains that these memoirists perform a translation of self across the boundaries of language since they narrate their journeys between Iran and the United States. Persian becomes “an artifact of the past.”⁶⁸ The trauma of exile and displacement manifests itself in the language, making it an “accented language” which reveals an “accented identity.”⁶⁹ As Taghi Modarressi⁷⁰ writes:

The new language of any immigrant writer is obviously accented and, at least initially, inarticulate. I consider this “artifact” language expressive in its own right. Writing with an accented voice is organic to the mind of the immigrant writer. It is not something one can invent. It is frequently buried beneath personal inhibitions and doubts. The accented voice is loaded with hidden messages from our cultural heritage, messages that often reach beyond the capacity of the ordinary words of any language. . . . On the plane returning from Iran to the U.S., a strange idea kept occurring to me. I thought that most immigrants, regardless of the familial, social, or political circumstances causing their exile, have been cultural refugees all their lives. They leave because they feel like outsiders. Perhaps it is their personal language that can build a bridge between what is familiar and what is strange. They may then find it possible to generate new and revealing paradoxes. Here we have our juxtapositions and our transformations—the graceful and the awkward, the beautiful and the ugly, sitting side by side in a perpetual metamorphosis of one into the other. It is like the Hunchback of Notre Dame trying to be Prince Charming for strangers.

To Elahi, Nasrin Rahimieh creates an accented language – a discursive exile – out of linguistic loss,⁷¹ Gelareh Asayesh produces a linguistic identity which cannot be counted as neither “hybridity” nor “assimilation” but an “oscillation.”⁷² Azadeh Moaveni writes about a “self” that exists in “English language” for her, neither in Iran nor in the US.⁷³ Elahi discusses that the English language of the memoirs narrates an accented identity which is after reclaiming the history;⁷⁴ memoirs as the narratives of the self are written with an accent and speak in a language in between and narrate the process of losing that accent.⁷⁵

The MELUS special issue⁷⁶ on Iranian-American writings edited by Rahimieh and Karim aims at opening a discussion surrounding the growing body of Iranian-American literature and the characteristics they share with the other American-ethnic writings. The Iranian American writing highlights issues with identity, gender relations, exile, war embargoes and stands against the polemical Islamic Republic of Iran. Choosing “life writing” as the main genre of literature, Iranian American writings situate “the authorial self within or in opposition to the stream of modern Iranian history.”⁷⁷ Taking a stance against the previous representations of Iranian women, this body of literature (voiced mainly by women) questions the “subjugation” of women while

⁶⁷ Babak Elahi, "Translating the self: Language and identity in Iranian-American women's memoirs." *Iranian Studies* 39, no. 4 (2006): 461-480.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 464.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 464.

⁷⁰ Taghi Modarressi, "Writing with an Accent," *Chanteh* Volume i (1992): 7-9.

⁷¹ Elahi, "Translating the self," 469.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 469.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

⁷⁶ Persis M. Karim and Nasrin Rahimieh. "Introduction: writing Iranian Americans into the American literature canon." *MELUS*33, no. 2 (2008): 7-16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

running “the risk of orientalisising contemporary Iran and offering voyeuristic and exoticizing views of Iranian women.”⁷⁸

Manijeh Nasrabadi⁷⁹ believes that Iranian-American women’s life writing is a form of knowledge production about the ways in which women subjects have experienced life in diaspora and how they are affected by the diaspora or exile conditions. She makes a link between gender and genre and sheds light on the melancholia of diasporic existence in narratives of return, such as in *Lipstick Jihad* and this melancholia has political potentials challenging “the Manichean opposition between the United States and Iran.”⁸⁰

Nasrine Rahimieh, in her autoethnographical article “Border Crossing”⁸¹ uses her own lived experience as a transnational scholar to critically engage with Bhabha’s concept of “unhomeliness”⁸² and Said’s “traveller”⁸³ metaphor for an engaged intellectual. She explores her multiplicitous identity, what she calls “hyphenated existence”⁸⁴ which “came to an abrupt end” right after 9/11. 9/11 events change the nature of borders and the practice of border crossing and border, as Ali Behdad eloquently expresses, “is not a metaphor of subversive transgression and radical hybridity ... but a site of policing and discipline, control and violence.”⁸⁵ Rahimieh experiences a process of losing “the remnants of her personal history,”⁸⁶ and “the language and voice” that facilitated her world-travelling and “comings and goings between the Iranian and Canadian selves.” She finally finds some sense of comfort and homeliness in Los Angeles where a large community of Iranians live, and she does not have to explain her Iranianness. Rahimieh questions Azar Nafisi’s “Republic of Imagination” where she believes differences do not matter. Witnessing local Iranian scholars’ limitations of border crossing, Rahimieh highlights the rights of access to that very republic of imagination, which is just not possible for certain identities, including Iranians.⁸⁷

Among other scholarly works on Iranian diaspora writings, Nima Naghibi’s article is an important contribution to postcolonial readings of memoirs. Her article, “Revolution, Trauma, and Nostalgia in Diasporic Iranian women’s Autobiographies”⁸⁸ emphasizes on the importance of considering Iranian women’s

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Manijeh Nasrabadi, "In search of Iran: Resistant melancholia in Iranian American memoirs of return." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 487-497.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 497.

⁸¹ Nasrin Rahimieh, "Border Crossing." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007): 225-232.

⁸² Homi K Bhabha, *Locations of Culture: discussing post-colonial culture*, (London: Routledge 1996).

⁸³ Edward W Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (New York: Vintage, 2012).

⁸⁴ Rahimieh, "Border Crossing," 229.

⁸⁵ Ali Behdad, *A forgetful nation: On immigration and cultural identity in the United States*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 144.

⁸⁶ Rahimieh, "Border Crossing," 230.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 232.

⁸⁸ Nima Naghibi, "Revolution, trauma, and nostalgia in diasporic Iranian women's autobiographies." *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 105 (2009): 79-91.

autobiographical writings as a “soft weapon” in Gillian Whitlock’s terms which is most often coopted as a propaganda and used in “engineering” ideas and forms of consent.⁸⁹ Naghibi focuses on the readership of such texts in the West and considers “the Western Imperial gaze”⁹⁰ as a reason for the success of Iranian memoirs. She states that “any critical engagement with Iranian women’s memoirs... needs to take into account their complicity as soft ‘weapons.’”⁹¹ Although her position against co-optation of memoirs in the West has multifaceted values, one could also ask, what if writing is the only weapon in the hands of these women and it is used as a form of resistance against narratives that marginalize them? How can these women writers benefit from writing as a platform for knowledge production? How should we, as scholars approach politics of production and reception alongside lived experience as an epistemic body?

Nima Naghibi’s recent book⁹² *Women write Iran* is a more sympathetic reading of Iranian women’s autobiographical writing and testimonial narratives. Naghibi, despite having been critical of the memoir boom in her earlier works, suggests that there is more to be said about the Iranian American memoirs and their political motivations other than an anti-imperialist critique which categorizes the genre of life writing into a neo-colonial agenda. In one of the chapters of the book, Naghibi uses the image of Neda Agha Soltan, the Iranian woman who was shot dead in 2009 uprisings in Iran as a signifier for freedom which brought forth a form of solidarity among Iranians all around the world and reminded many diasporic Iranians of their experience of exile and loss of home. She believes that Neda Agha Soltan’s death came to represent “the death of an imagined and presumably hopeful futurity”⁹³ for the diasporic community. Naghibi also studies the wave of prison memoirs and “the tension” between marketable prison narratives and the kind of compassionate and sympathetic audience the writers of these narratives are looking for in the new land/home.⁹⁴ Naghibi concludes that “Diasporic Iranian life narratives seek to elicit an empathic response from readers willing to hear, to know, and to respond to accounts of trauma, of testimony, and of memory.”⁹⁵ However, it is on the readers to decide which narratives they should engage with and which ones they should ignore.

Mojab, Taber, VanderVliet, Haghgou and Paterson’s article⁹⁶ “Learning through Memoirs” uses life writing for pedagogical purposes of learning and unlearning in classroom. They emphasize that life writing can be employed as “a pedagogy for engaging with others, a pedagogy for social justice and pedagogy for reclaiming

⁸⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 81.

⁹¹ Ibid., 82.

⁹² Nima Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

⁹³ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 169.

⁹⁶ Nancy Taber et al., "Learning Through Memoirs: Self, Society, and History." *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education (Online)* 29, no. 1 (2017): 19.

a history.⁹⁷ Via participant observation, they monitor the process of unlearning experienced by the readers, an example of which is a student reading an Iranian memoir titled *Ghosts of Revolution* and starting to question not only the pre-existing stereotypes about Iranian culture, but also to see the contradictions of liberatory organizations such as Amnesty International and their acts which goes against local cultures of resistance inside Iran.⁹⁸ Mojab et al conclude that

Memoirs not only raise deeper understanding and meaning of history, but also demonstrate epistemic (what counts as knowledge; how knowledge is negotiated and acquired) divergence that sheds new possibilities for history. Pedagogically, memoirs express a subversive solidarity and resistance to past ideological assumptions and beliefs about historical events.⁹⁹

1.4 Arab women's autobiographical literature

Apart from the Iranian diaspora/ exilic literary productions, this research is concerned about the literary works of the Arab women writers who are still, unfortunately, hardly known in some parts of the Western world. One of the most noteworthy strides in introducing the Arab women culture is the publication of the anthologies of works including short stories. Although my main focus in this research is on autobiographical literature, I find it worth mentioning that these collections have given some direction to the location of this body of literature in the larger sphere. Among these contributions, *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide*¹⁰⁰ is central. In their introduction to the work, Ghazoul, Ashour Berrada and Rachid point that their anthology is not only for the readers but could be a mirror for the women writers themselves as a self-reflection. Thus, regardless of their evaluation of these literary works, they have attempted to show that the entirety of this body of literature has added a “different perspective, a new tone of voice and a distinct sensibility formed over centuries of silence and oppression” in their patriarchal world.¹⁰¹

Another anthology which is one of the pioneers in this area of study is *Opening the Gates*¹⁰² which is a collection of the Arab feminist writing including essays, poems, folktales, short stories, memoirs, film scripts and lectures and etc.

Apart from the writings of the indigenous¹⁰³ women within the Arab world, the works of Arab diaspora, transnational, and exilic women writers have broadened the feminist epistemology of the Middle East.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁰ Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul and Hasna Reda-Mekdashy. *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*, (Cairo: American Univ in Cairo Press, 2008)

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰² Miriam Cooke and Margot Badran, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹⁰³ The term “indigenous” has been used in my thesis to refer to Iranian and Iraqi women, having been born to different ethnicities, to a certain race, so-called “brown” and Middle Eastern and living within the borders of the Iraqi and Iranian nation states. I choose to use the term “indigenous” instead

Providing new voices with new experiences and perspectives, the immigrant literature is attracting more and more readers in the world. Regardless of the different genres existing in the immigrant narratives, autobiographical writing tends to be a rampantly used genre among not only the Iranian diaspora writers but also among the Arab diaspora literary writers. Wail Hassan¹⁰⁴ has done a thorough analysis of the works written by the Arab-American and Arab-British writers emphasizing on the role autobiography has played in the articulation of the Arab American/British identity. His work investigates how key authors and texts can help us make sense of the main features of Arab immigrant narrative in the U.S. and Britain, and how to draw from that a critical framework for reading that tradition. Regarding the notion of canon, he mentions that “feminist and minority criticism questioned the traditional literary canon and brought to the attention of scholars women’s and minority writing, especially previously unknown or uncanonical texts, many of which were autobiographical, such as women’s letters, fiction, and diaries.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, “at a time when theorists like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault pronounced the “death of the Author”—as part of the poststructuralist critique of the transcendental subject of the Enlightenment— avant-garde novelists and those marginalized by gender, race, and/or ethnicity showed their vital signs through autobiographical writing and that is why autobiographical writing is considered as significant.”¹⁰⁶ Hassan argues that this is not the truthfulness of the autobiography that is questioned, but it’s the kind of discourse that it constructs.¹⁰⁷ Hassan charts a sort of history of ideas and explains that “minority and postcolonial studies have often succumbed to the desire to

of “local” because the use of “local” that has been done by the scholarly literature in the past twenty years implicates the binary of “local” versus “global”. This would not be coherent with the corpus of studies that I am referring to and would not reflect the discourse of the writers whose work I analyze in my thesis.

My preference for the term indigenous in this thesis should be read in relation to the term “transnational,” which embraces many political nuances, layers of privilege and oppression at work within the process of border-crossing, as I outlined in many passages of my textual analysis.

Defining indigeneity in the Middle East is a very difficult task, because the Middle East itself has gone through multiple stages of “pre-colonial” and pre-modern colonization. I am borrowing this term from First nation, indigenous and aboriginal scholars, to whom my work owes a lot in terms of conceptualization, because that would be a more nuanced term to refer to those populations born and living inside Iran and Iraq. This shouldn’t be read as an intention of equating the struggles of indigenous women in the Americas and in Australia to the struggles of Middle Eastern women, but rather as an effort of contributing to the travel of theories (to invoke Edward Said’s famous essay).

I am also reluctant to use the term “ethnic” because that would also bear different forms of racialization. There exists a plurality of ethnicities in Iran and Iraq. The ethnic categories of the Kurds, Turks, Turkmens, Lors, Arabs, Baluchis, Gilakis, Mazanis, Persians, and Armenians among others only cover a small range of identities within Iran. Iraq has a more complex categorization of ethnicities, namely, Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Yazidis, Iraqi Jews, Armenians, Afro-Iraqis, Bedouins, Persians, and many others. Using any other term apart from “indigenous” as an umbrella term to refer to all these ethnicities would face the accusation of wiping the nuanced ethnicity-related struggles of these women. For instance, a Yazidi woman, in the contemporary context of Iraq, living under terrorist violence and gendered oppressions needs to be distinguished from an Arab Iraqi living in Baghdad, or, an Iraqi Jew. I used the term indigenous, first, because of its etymological meaning. Oxford dictionary defines it as: “originating, or occurring naturally in a particular place.” Secondly, it is because it has been pertinently used by North and South American and Australian indigenous scholars to build up solidarities based on First People’s “lived-experience”. At the same time, this thesis questions the use of the term, and it is apt to ask if we would not need another umbrella term to refer to the Iraqi and Iranian populations; however, this would require a separate dissertation, only focusing on developing a term, given how nuanced the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and religion are within those borders and in the current situation of the Middle East.

¹⁰⁴ Wail S Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

construct narratives of triumphant resistance that overlook complicity, melancholy, defeat, reactionism, and failure.”¹⁰⁸

Rather than reading the tradition of autobiography writing as a heroic or revolutionary narrative of resistance, his book has instead sought to locate strategies of resistance as well as currents of complicity within the complex matrix of cultural, ideological, commercial, religious, and political forces that have shaped Arab immigrant writing in the U.S. and Britain since the early twentieth century. He depicts how the critiques of identity elaborated by Rihani, Said, Soueif, and Alameddine coexist with powerful identitarian positions, whether entrenched in the dominant discourse, such as those of Rihbany, Rizk, and Ihab Hassan, or resistant to it, like Ahmed’s and Aboulela’s. Throughout his work he shows “how Rihani reinvents the novel by hybridizing it linguistically and intertextually through the use of the Arabic language and the *maqama* genre; how Gibran amalgamates Hindu ideas, biblical style, and Nietzschean aphorisms into his latter-day prophetic parables; how Rihbany splits his life story along generic lines; how Turki blurs the distinction between memoir and journal and all but erases the autobiographical subject; how Ihab Hassan fragments the autobiography through postmodern aesthetics; how Soueif subverts several genres of Orientalist writing and develops a poetics of translation that can illuminate the work of bilingual writers everywhere; how Aboulela reconfigures the romance along Islamic lines; and how Alameddine blends sacred and profane narratives and proposes storytelling as an epistemology in its own right.”¹⁰⁹ He insists that these autobiographical accounts have not all been critical of orientalism but some have also contributed to it.

In her book *Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora*¹¹⁰ Jumana Bayeh focuses on novels published by Lebanese diaspora authors in Lebanon’s post-civil war era. She discusses the concept of “place” as her main motif and debates three variations for this concept as “the city”, “the home” and “the nation state” as presented in the novels. Bayeh also focuses on the domestic sphere and she manoeuvres on the fact that the traditional definitions of home as immobile and immovable are changing to new definitions of domesticity based on mobility.

It is argued by many scholars that autobiographical literature has been and still is the dominant genre of writing in the literature of diaspora. Life writings are prevalent in the body of Arab Anglophone literatures as well. As Layla Al Maleh¹¹¹ states in her comprehensive overview, Arab Anglophone literature gained its popularity right after 9/11 and that was a “visibility filtered through terror.”¹¹² Although the pioneers of Arab

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 220.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 221.

¹¹⁰ Jumana Bayeh. *The Literature of the Lebanese diaspora: representations of place and transnational identity* (London: IB Tauris, 2015).

¹¹¹ Layla Al Maleh, "Anglophone Arab Literature." *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* 115 (2009): 1.

¹¹² Ibid., 2.

Anglophone literature were accused of mysticism, naiveté, primitivism, excessive idealism, or self-exoticizing, they did reflect a sense of collective optimism, celebration, and exultation in their works despite the pains of dislocation. They represented their metropolitan hybridity which was very much appreciated by the Western audience who was “disenchanted by the growing materialism of the West and lamenting a purer, virginal, pre-industrial world.” While adding diversity to the literary spectrum, “they did not betray their cultural memory, deny their own past or prove disloyal to their country of origin; rather, they viewed both past and present critically.”¹¹³ According to Al Maleh, autobiographies became and remain popular because they show how historical and political forces shape personal identities.¹¹⁴

Al Maleh identifies three trends for Arab Anglophone literature in her survey, including: “the *Mahjar* (early-twentieth-century émigrés in the USA); the Europeanised aspirants of the mid-1950s; and the more recent hybrids, hyphenated, transcultural, exilic/ diasporic writers of the past four decades or so who have been scattered all over the world.”¹¹⁵ She introduces the major Anglo-Arab writers from Britain, United States and Australia and presents an overview of their major works and reception in the West. One of the interesting points that she discusses is that Anglophone Arab discourse in Britain is mostly “female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character.”¹¹⁶ This trend can be noticed in the body of Iranian diasporic/exile literature as well and one of the aims of this research is to debate if transnational literature takes a feminine/ feminist voice mostly and what are the reasons determining it. Al Maleh mentions the challenges on the way to studying the Anglo-Arab literature:

Much has been said and is still to be said on how the growing global cultural interface and interaction is having an effect on the formation of new geo/socio/political and intellectual boundaries that foreground the formation of new genealogies of identity zones and domains. New alignments and affiliations constantly shift borders, causing them to recede, encroach, blur, overlap, or disappear altogether. Within this mesh of permeable and interlacing lines, critics must find it increasingly hard to link authors who write in English from various and constantly shifting locations in the world to specific identity groups, particularly if the selection needs to be done from an endless list of current jargon and nomenclature: national / transnational / translocal / multilocal / territorialized / deterritorialized / crosscultural / multicultural / acculturated / minor / emigrant / exilic and diasporic...¹¹⁷

Among the studies that have been done on Arab diaspora literature, Steven Salaita’s scholarship is noteworthy. He problematizes the categorization of Arab American literature¹¹⁸ as a cultural, historical given and studies it as a “political” category which is mainly a way for this literature to find a niche and an audience and a way for critics to pursue coherent forms of investigation of that literature. He considers engaging with

¹¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁸ Steven Salaita, *Modern Arab American fiction: a reader's guide*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 7-8.

Arab American literature a significant way to come into a relationship with the Middle Eastern ways of being, and challenging the stereotypes commonly found in the American popular culture.¹¹⁹

For Salaita, Arab American literature should be considered as a category like Native American Literature. He calls for the decolonization of this body of literature from the prevalent cultural and religious stereotypes; as he argues,¹²⁰

Efforts to devise an Arab American literary criticism or promote an Arab American Studies need carefully to be decentred from provincial notions of ethnic atavism and situated instead in comprehensive interethnic dynamics. Such a move will not devalue Arab American discreteness. On the contrary, it will help illuminate Arab American discreteness by rejecting invented concepts of a racial essence and by contextualizing Arab America within the multifarious processes that helped form the idea of discrete ethnic identity in the United States.

Salaita believes that literature can be a good motivation for the inclusion and formalization of Arab American studies in the West and therefore, abolishing the stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. He asserts that an Arab American Studies program might be a local corrective wherever it can be established as it can bring to surface the numerous stories and experiences of the Arab community as a minority, whether they lean toward monoculturalism or multiculturalism. Literature then for him is a useful philosophical source to confront or even help resolve the various disjunctions between perceptions of Arab Americans and their heterogeneous realities.¹²¹

The motive behind writing autobiographies is proposed to be a lack of “self-confidence and a sense of empowerment” which the Arab women writers have tried to overcome by positioning themselves side to side the male master-narratives¹²² and writing history from their own perspective. What fascinates most scholars is that Arab autobiographical literature, just like the Iranian body, has been born at the right time in terms of reception in the West, and the right time happens to be post 9/11.

Leilah Abu Lughod’s *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*¹²³ as one of the canonical ethnographical studies on Muslim Women questions the white saviour discourse in the War on Terror. She critiques the publication of the autobiographical narratives of Afghan, Iranian and Iraqi women in the West and the ways in which they have been co-opted as victimhood narratives and misery pornography.

As Geoffrey Nash argues, the autobiographies are produced at a moment of receptivity, that is to say, they answer to and engage with a Western fascination with the exotic other which includes the oriental (most

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁰ Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 6.

¹²¹ Ibid., 152.

¹²² Fadia Faqir and Shirley Eber, eds. *In the house of silence: Autobiographical essays by Arab women writers*, (Reading: Garnet Pub Limited, 1998), 2.

¹²³ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim women need saving?*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013)

importantly) Muslim woman and the popular literature that centres on her oppression, exploitation and sexual 'slavery' behind the veil as it is known in traditional Orientalism. Although exploiting English language has given these writers more freedom in terms of representing their gender, sexuality and all the homeland's cultural taboos, they still face some restrictions which are not limited to Arab autobiographers but the Western biographers as well. Nash notes that Female practitioners of autobiography in the West have also had the problem of finding for themselves a new space in the traditional, male-dominated canon and this issue is not just limited to Arab women writers. Compared to those faced by women writers of Arabic autobiography, these obstacles may be less extreme, but they are no less germane to the writers' identities as women.¹²⁴ As Dinah Manisty argues, before the autobiography boom, women's autobiography (including both Arabic and English) were drawn to the peripheries for lacking 'the supposed cohesiveness and coherence of male autobiography.'¹²⁵ However, women began writing as form of resistance to male dominance of the narratives, and being critical and resistant, their works come from female collective memory and not just an individual experience. According to Manisty, "a woman cannot experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined by the dominant male culture [...] This alienation from her cultural representation is what motivates her writing."¹²⁶ Therefore, their "experiential history" functioned as "counter-memory, a means to renarrativize the past and to break the silences of the official history."¹²⁷

Nash considers Anglo-Arab autobiographical writings as a translation from Arab culture to English language. Treating these writings as translation, he draws on a strand of translation studies theorists who 'use translation as a metaphor to explain processes of colonization and decolonization' and credit translation with being 'both at the service of imperialism and a site of resistance.'¹²⁸

Nash suggests that the English texts represent Arab women using opportunities of education and life in the West to escape the social and cultural limitations of their own societies. Initially enthusiastic about and desirous of assimilation to Western culture, the subjects of these cross-cultural narratives grow to experience rejection as a result of the racist, hegemonic and sometimes male chauvinist elements of that same culture. Often there follows within the writers, feelings of loss and guilt for aspects of the native culture that are buried within themselves but which they might feel they have abandoned or disowned. At times critical of Western triumphalism and the aggression and distortion of colonial and neo-colonial politics, the subjects emerge into a state of 'in-betweenness' in which they simultaneously embrace and reject aspects of Western-led modernity,

¹²⁴ Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab encounter: fiction and autobiography by Arab writers in English*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 157.

¹²⁵ Dinah Manisty, "Negotiating the Space between Private and Public: Women's Autobiographical Writing in Egypt." *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild (1998): 272-73.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹²⁷ Sidone Smith, *Subjectivity*, 39.

¹²⁸ Malena, cited in Nash, 189

and also attempt to produce a dual Arab and feminist identity that is constructed out of women's cultural practice recuperated from their own Arab past. The political crises and events against and out of which such autobiographies are written, it should not be forgotten, often led in the world outside to statements and counter-statements of cross-cultural contestation, in which the 'female issue' is not infrequently invoked. The writings that Nash has discussed may be unavoidably caught up in this *kulturkampf*, however much their authors might wish to avoid it. But setting up crude binaries like the West versus the Arabs/Muslims/Third World, or Western feminism versus traditional patriarchy, hardly does justice to the experimental, diffuse, individual voices developed within this writing.¹²⁹

One of the best contributions to the Arab women's autobiographical literature is Nawar Al Hassan Golley's edited collection which includes a number of writings on the Anglo-Arab writers. In her edited volume, She has not only reviewed and debated the challenges of writing of autobiography but she also highlights the challenges on the way of 'reading' these works. Reading autobiographical literature, the issues of self and subjectivity, the private and the public, ethnicity, nationalism and transnationalism and postcolonialism intersect, setting up a polyphony of readings that overlap, challenge and digress from each other.¹³⁰

Among the scholarship that Golley has collected, Daphne. M. Grace's article¹³¹ on the Arab women's prison narratives is most relevant to the present study. Concerning the traumatic experience of imprisonment and exile, Nawal el-Saadawi and Haifa Zangana are examples of the autobiographical writers narrating their prison memories. She mentions that the writer of autobiography can break the postcolonial binary of truth/untruth and just stick to the eclectic fragments of memory and use them for the purpose of the construction of the past¹³² and writing history. Autobiographies like postmodern fiction can be paradoxical and contradictory because "lying is never simply opposed to truth but is a sort of hybrid overlapping of different registers of narrative, a 'rhetoric.'"¹³³ Therefore, memory can be "culturally disruptive" as Sidonie Smith points.¹³⁴ Grace draws on Smith's idea that autobiography is a kind of manifesto, a public performance or announcement of an individual's interpretation of experience on behalf of and as part of the larger groups, mapping borders of public-private and personal-political.¹³⁵ However, it (autobiography) is considered bold and indecent in the Arab world and it is not recognized as "literature." Thus, Arab women writing autobiographies are in a way

¹²⁹ Ibid., 189.

¹³⁰ Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Arab women's lives retold: Exploring identity through writing*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), xxvii

¹³¹ Daphne M Grace, "Arab Women Write the Trauma of imprisonment and Exile." *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing* (2007): 181.

¹³² Ibid., 181.

¹³³ Bill Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of a Colonial Culture*, (London: A&C Black, 2001)

¹³⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader*. (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 433.

¹³⁵ Daphne M Grace, "Arab Women Write the Trauma of Imprisonment and Exile." In *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing*, ed., Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 182.

subverting the dominant hegemonies, reclaiming agency and negotiating “textual, sexual and linguistic space.”¹³⁶ Writing prison literature depicts even a stronger form of resistance because captive narratives have a documentary aspect and the readers tend to believe in the reality of the literature of suffering.

Leila Ahmed’s autobiographical work is considered as a canonical work in the Arab Women’s writings. Bernadette Andrea’s article¹³⁷ discusses Leila Ahmed’s obsession with the metaphors of boundaries between the imperialist West and anticolonial nationalism of Nasser’s Egypt. As Andrea argues, Ahmed delineates a transcultural model of the harem that contests patriarchal and feminist orientalist projections.¹³⁸ Ahmed shifted her identification from the false universal of “whiteness” to the politicized model of the woman of colour upon confronting the deeply ingrained anti-Arab and anti-Muslim attitudes of the mainstream American feminists¹³⁹ and that is why she is considered as one of the pioneers of indigenous feminism.

In *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiography*, Golley¹⁴⁰ explores the representation of female subjectivity and the construction of identity in a selection of autobiographical writings by Arab women, using feminist narrative theory and discusses the ways in which Arab women writers use the private sphere, the best representatives of which being hijab and harem, to enter the public sphere. She has attempted to question the reductions and show what is seen as unified and homogenous from outside could be very different and unrelated from within. She also proposes that feminist narrative theory can only be universally useful if it takes into account “the cultural differences and the cross-racial, regional, social and economic boundaries.”¹⁴¹ In her both works, Golley has tried to fill in the gaps in the scholarship of Arab women writings of the self by situating her study in the colonial discourse and the intersectional formation of self-image, using feminism and Marxism. She also draws on Chandra Mohanty’s postcolonial-feminist theories and states that feminist theory is colonial when it studies “Third World woman” as a monolithic subject regardless of class, ethnic or racial location.¹⁴² Golley considers these autobiographical texts written by Arab women in the realm of “writing back” discourse and an alternative to “orientalism.” These works write back to both the West and more importantly to the “Arab” patriarchy.¹⁴³ She also argues that we are not living in a postcolonial age but in a mixture of colonial and postcolonial (due to the interventions of the US in some regions in the Middle East) and patriarchy and colonialism are two analogous and inseparable discourses in which women’s rights have always been an issue.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 185.

¹³⁷ Bernadette Andrea, "Passage Through the Harem." *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing* (2007): 3.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴⁰ Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab women's autobiographies: Shabrazad tells her story*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁴² Ibid., xiii.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 13.

Regarding Iraqi lived experience narratives, Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali's strong work about Iraqi women has tried to challenge the myths, stereotypes and misconceptions about the Iraqi women and to bring the resilience of these women into more visibility. In her own words:

This book is about the past, about how history is constructed and how it is used. It is also very much about the present. In the context of the aftermath of the invasion in 2003, the escalating violence and sectarian tensions, contestations about power and national identity, history becomes a very important and powerful tool. Contesting narratives about what happened in the past relate directly to different attitudes towards the present and visions about the future of the new Iraq. They relate to claims about rights, about resources, and about power. More crucially, the different accounts of the past lay down the parameters of what it means to be Iraqi, who is to be included and who is to be excluded. History justifies and contains both narratives of unity and narratives of divisions and sectarianism.¹⁴⁴

Putting together a number of narratives (micro-narratives) of the Iraqi dispersal, all based on women's personal life stories, Al-Ali renders a polyphonic historiography of Modern Iraq. The significance of her scholarship in the field of Middle Eastern women studies lies in her inclusion of the common feminine voice, the first-hand experiences of war, oppression and sanctions and her highlighting of the role of women in the contemporary history of Iraq.

1.5 Transnational feminist politics and Middle Eastern women:

In the introduction to their edited volume, *Women and War in the Middle East*,¹⁴⁵ Nadjé Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt raise questions and provide responses surrounding the influence of Western interventions, multilateral political bodies and NGOs on "gender roles/relations/identities" in post conflict Middle East.¹⁴⁶ They also analyse the impacts of transnational feminist movements and solidarities on local women's empowerment. Additionally, they address the impact of transnational feminism on "conflict resolution," "peace building" and "post-conflict reconstruction processes."¹⁴⁷ The authors of this volume unanimously point out the significance of transnational feminist politics and the ways in which they operate contradictorily as either intensifying or ameliorating gender inequalities in the Middle East. They maintain that "certain feminist organizations that are transnational in their method are not necessarily transnational in their politics, working with neocolonial, capitalist and militaristic government agendas."¹⁴⁸ Henceforth, the structural inequalities and gendered violence can be augmented and re-appropriated by transnational feminism if coloniality of power is not taken into consideration.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁵ Nadjé Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt. *Women and war in the Middle East*, (London: Zed Books, 2009).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 260.

*New approaches to Migration?*¹⁴⁹ critiques the concepts of transnational, community, and home to challenge the “essentialized imaginings” of those concepts.¹⁵⁰ Applying different ethnographic comparative approaches, this book, renders a unique critique of the postmodern conceptualization of transnationalism in relation to political refugees. The sceptic conceptualization of transnationalism “along with the sometimes painfully conflicted narratives of identity and belonging expressed by members of refugees diasporas” produces new conceptual categories, namely “ambivalent transnationalism” or “forced transnationalism.”¹⁵¹ Different refugee diasporas have been interviewed and observed and according to the authors a common “sense of fragmented selfhood” and “a feeling of living in a limbo,” rather than “hybrid subjectivity” is expressed by these people. Some chapters of this volume, edited by Al-Ali and Koser, focus on political practice of diaspora communities and the ways in which they influence political conditions at home and may result in a “regrouping of diasporas by means of an uncertain politics of return.”¹⁵² The book, comprehensively contributes to reconceptualization of “the meanings of ‘home,’” not only from the view point of “movers” but also “stayers,” “state-centered actors,” etc. It also highlights the ways in which “politics of difference produced by race, class, and gender relations,” religious, ideological and generational formations affect transnationalism and transnational identities.¹⁵³

In their edited volume, *Between the Middle East and the Americas*¹⁵⁴ Shohat and Alsultany have compiled scholarly works that shed light on “the ambivalent and contradictory presence of Middle East in the Americas.”¹⁵⁵ The book is a study of immigration of Arabs and Muslims to the ‘Americas’, emphasizing on the Middle Easterner’s presence in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. The writers take into account the context of War on Terror and the ways in which it “has turned Middle Easterners into villains in a kind of horror movie.”¹⁵⁶ The main focus of the book is the “production, consumption, and circulation of discourses about ‘the Middle East’ in the Americas as a continuum.”¹⁵⁷

Nayel’s *Alternative Performativity of Muslimness*¹⁵⁸ employs a feminist ethnographical methodology to shed light on Sudanese women’s experience of Black African Muslimhood in the context of diaspora (UK). Using

¹⁴⁹ Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser. *New approaches to migration?: transnational communities and the transformation of home*. (London: Routledge, 2003)

¹⁵⁰ Michael Peter Smith, “preface,” *New approaches to migration?: transnational communities and the transformation of home*, ed., Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser. (London: Routledge, 2003), xi

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁵⁴ Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsultany, eds. *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The cultural politics of diaspora*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013)

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵⁸ Amina Alrasheed Nayel, *Alternative Performativity of Muslimness: The Intersection of Race, Gender, Religion, and Migration*. (Berlin: Springer, 2017).

intersectionality and performativity as tools, the book demonstrates the ways in which Sudanese women “performatively bring their Sudanese and their Muslim identities into being.”¹⁵⁹ These women’s identities are constructed at the intersections of the categories of Black/African/ Muslim/Arab/Migrant/Immigrant refugees. The author emphasizes on using feminist ethnography as the methodology “to challenge the discourses that produce colonial images of the ‘other’, and one-sided and homogenous categories of Muslims in the UK.”

Halleh Ghorashi in her article “Giving Silence a Chance”¹⁶⁰ highlights the significance of life-story as a methodology not just content. She uses life story together with autoethnography as tools to do justice to refugee voices in her research. She stresses on the significance of life story in creating a space for listening to untold stories of refugees. She also argues that “if the concept of identity is not seen as a static idea, but rather as a process, the life story becomes one of the few methods that can grasp this process-like character.”¹⁶¹ Ghorashi interviews Iranian women political refugees residing in the US and Netherlands and compares their experience and life history in terms of feelings of displacement and belonging and concludes that Iranian refugee women in the US feel more at home and less treated like “the Other” compared to Iranian refugee women in Netherlands and she names an existing community of Iranians as the reason for such feelings of inclusion in the US.

Moghissi and Ghorashi in their edited book¹⁶² *Muslim Diaspora in the West* critique the culturalist approach of dominant discourse in Western democratic societies towards Muslim migrants and believe that the foundational values of democracy, such as “openness and tolerance of the other”¹⁶³ are beginning to be eroded by the dominant discourse. They maintain that culture is only one aspect of life Muslims share with others in cosmopolitan societies and “ethnicity transcending”¹⁶⁴ connections need to be made and the processes of inclusion and exclusion should be contemplated more. Despite their criticism of the essentialist approach to Muslim cultures and their emphasis on a difference-based approach, their volume lacks mentioning of hegemonic whiteness and its influence on the creation of Islamophobia and demonization of Muslim cultures. The rhetoric of the book, emphasizing on “difference” and recommendations for transcending ethnicity read as moderate and apologetic while the reader expects more of a radical approach to Islamophobia as a form of racism.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶⁰ Halleh Ghorashi, "Giving silence a chance: The importance of life stories for research on refugees." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 117-132.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁶² Haideh Moghissi and Halleh Ghorashi, eds. *Muslim diaspora in the West: negotiating gender, home and belonging*. (London: Routledge, 2016)

¹⁶³ Ghorashi, “Giving silence a chance,” 215.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 215.

1.6 Muslim women's life writing: misery narrative or pornography?

One of the arguments regarding the Iranian memoir writings and their widespread popularity in the West is that they have contributed to the discourse of orientalism and imperialism, by highlighting the voice of the Muslim woman oppressed and held captive within the borders of homeland. Among the critical literature written about this body of literature Hamid Dabashi's article is fiercely critical. He begins his argument with "collective amnesia"¹⁶⁵ which accompanies a strategy of *selective memory* and he considers the body of memoirs published and flooding the US market as a particularly powerful case of such selective memories. He argues that this body of literature, perhaps best represented by Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), "ordinarily points to legitimate concerns about the plight of Muslim women in the Islamic world and yet put that predicament squarely at the service of the US ideological psy-op, militarily stipulated in the US global warmongering."¹⁶⁶ He calls Nafisi's book the "*locus classicus*" of the ideological foregrounding of the US imperial domination at home and abroad and counts three qualities for it which are firstly, banking on a collective amnesia of historical facts surrounding successive US imperial moves for global domination and therefore, whitewashing of the literary, secondly, exemplifying the systematic abuse of legitimate causes (in this case the unconscionable oppression of women living under Muslim laws) for illegitimate purposes; and thirdly, an "Oriental" woman's articulation through the instrumentality of English literature, while deliberately casting herself as a contemporary Scheherazade. He claims that Memoir writings such as Nafisi's seek to provoke the darkest corners of the Euro-American Oriental fantasies and thus neutralise the cultural resistance to the US imperial designs both at home and abroad and the noble struggle of women all over the colonised world to ascertain their rights against both domestic patriarchy and colonial domination. For Dabashi, the transmutation of Azar Nafisi from a legitimate critic of the atrocities of the Islamic Republic of Iran (against women in particular) into an ideologue of the US empire-building project is a crucial lesson in how the new breed of comprador intellectuals is being recruited and put to immediate use for the ideological build-up of imperialism. Therefore, he considers the popularity of such memoirs in the US politically-oriented and their production as a service to Western colonialism.

Dabashi's *Brown Skin, White Masks*¹⁶⁷ highlights the role of the "comprador intellectuals" in legitimizing imperialism through writing. As "native informers" these intellectuals produce knowledges about their homelands that justify the imperial domination of the West over the cultures of their countries of origin. Dabashi exemplifies writers such as Ayan Hirsi Ali, Salman Rushdie, Fuad Ajami, but more specifically, he directs his attention to Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* which he considers as "the most cogent contemporary case of positing English Literature as a means of manufacturing trans-regional consent to Euro-

¹⁶⁵ Hamid Dabashi and Foaad Khosmood, "Lolita and Beyond." *ZNet: The Spirit of Resistance Lives* (2006).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks (The Islamic Mediterranean)*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

American domination.”¹⁶⁸ As a response to such forms of knowledge produced by some Iranian intellectuals, Dabashi wrote his book *Iran without Borders*¹⁶⁹ which is a critical review of two centuries of Iranian intellectual history, defying the racialized, stereotypical and Islamophobic representation of Iranians as a nation. In contrast to what Western imaginary knows of Iran and emphasizes about it, Dabashi focuses on the civil society and the ways in which they have navigated public sphere through different forms of cultural production. He demonstrates that generations of Iranian intellectuals, activists, poets, writers and film makers have formed a sort of cosmopolitan culture in different locations in the world that transcend the “fetishized borders, fictive frontiers and violently ethnicized identity.” Therefore, the civil society has created a transnational and “gender and class conscious” community in “character and culture.”¹⁷⁰

Among the literature written on Iranian women’s life writing, Hamid Dabashi’s work as part of the postcolonial critique of Muslim women’s life writing is central in my literature review. In his foreword to Haifa Zangana’s memoir, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, he mentions Zangana’s voice as the only direct voice of Iraqi women published in the West and considers the rest of writings “In conjunction with the US-imperial apparatus that has invaded and conquered Iraq” and written by an army of embedded anthropologists who have” now cornered the market of writing about Iraqi women.”¹⁷¹ He also states:

She (Zangana) speaks for both our nations. Brutalized, cut to pieces in body and soul.... When I read *Dreaming of Baghdad*, I couldn’t help but wonder: why is it that Iran has not produced a Haifa Zangana in exile, but instead a platoon of self-sexualizing memoirists infantilizing a nation, whitewashing the harsh struggles of a people.¹⁷²

As mentioned earlier, women’s stories which have been written and retold in order for the new knowledges to break into the dominant epistemologies, could be co-opted by the systems of oppression and be used against the genuine purposes in their mind. Among the works critiquing neoliberal multiculturalism and literature and co-option of feminist knowledges, Jodi Melamed’s¹⁷³ contribution is significant. She bases her study of *Reading Lolita in Tebran* on the fact that “knowledges that emerge in the name of women are deployed just as readily within normative systems and by hegemonic comparative analysis as they are deployed for oppositional purposes or by critical comparative analysis.”¹⁷⁴ “Identity politics” and “multiculturalism” are considered as effective normative systems that have helped the neoliberal multiculturalism projects which have led to more racializations in the West. Melamed discusses how neoliberal multiculturalism takes advantage of

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶⁹ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation*, (New York: Verso Books, 2016).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷¹ Hamid Dabashi, “Foreword,” in *Dreaming of Baghdad*, ed. Haifa Zangana (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009), ix.

¹⁷² Ibid., viii-ix.

¹⁷³ Jodi Melamed, *Reading Tebran in Lolita*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.

the knowledges in the name of women such as women of color feminisms while it bears values antithetical to those epistemic bodies and also how literature is co-opted to trumpet the racialized and gendered discourses in the intellectual spaces. Nafisi as an integrated immigrant intellectual has applied “the codes for racialized and gendered differences as assimilative multicultural order” which makes global north’s hegemony and more particularly, US, look just and superior.

She mentions that color lined racial formations have been replaced with new privilege and stigma-based criteria which are more ideological, economic and cultural and thus, racial identities such as black, Asian, Latino, Muslim, etc can be placed in both stigmatized and privileged positions. This “unevenness of neoliberal multiculturalism and racialization gives it “the power to racialize without being racist.”¹⁷⁵ This is how *Reading Lolita in Tebran* as a literary work is appropriated and functions as a neoliberal project to empower colonial knowledge.

The canon building project which *Reading Lolita in Tebran* accredits, is a form of epistemic violence as it secures the authenticity of the epistemes of dominance and consent as the best values for past, present and future. By casting the “great books” as encompassing the “truth” of Iranian woman and their daily oppressions, *Reading Lolita in Tebran* reinforces the presumed inclusiveness, universality and excellence of great literature.¹⁷⁶

In relation to the same postcolonial critique of memoir as a genre, Sujatha Fernandes looks at Afghan Women’s Writing project in Kabul, mentored by US-based curators which publishes Afghan Women’s creative writing online in form of stories and she questions how curated stories “can act as a form of soft power and how appeals to global sisterhood and sameness can at times make liberal feminist gestures complicit with imperialism.”¹⁷⁷ These stories are emphasized to be “unmediated” by male relatives or media and therefore, a representative of the direct voice of the Afghan women and the white middle-class mentors are not considered as mediators of the of the voice in AWWP. Culture is mostly blamed in these stories for the status of afghan women and within this orientalist narrative, Afghan women are made into ideal subjects for a “market democracy”¹⁷⁸ and therefore, the narrative of free Western women which is a liberal feminist ideal is once again highlighted.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷⁷ Sujatha Fernandes, "Stories and Statecraft: Afghan Women's Narratives and the Construction of Western Freedoms." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 3 (2017): 645.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 658.

There is another trend in the literature on Muslim women's life writings that refers to this genre as "Muslim misery narratives."¹⁷⁹ Taking into account writings with the narrative of the trapped Arab princess, the refugee Muslim woman having been forced into marriage and now saved by a Western man, this literature refers to works such as Ayan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*, Anon Beauty's *Not Easily Washed Away: Memoirs of a Muslim's Daughter*, Bilquis Sheikh's *I Dared to Call Him Father: The Miraculous Story of a Muslim Woman's Encounter with God* and so many others as examples. These works with their exotics titles, together with Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and Mahmoudi's *Without my daughter* occupy the Middle eastern fiction shelves in the Western bookshops which British-Syrian novelist Robin Yassin-Kassab refers to as "Harem Fantasy for Whites."¹⁸⁰

1.7 Muslim Woman as Other

Studies on literary writers of Muslim background in the West are entangled with the scholarship that addresses Islamophobia and War on Terror as a form of racism. Yassir Morsi in his recent article¹⁸¹ "The free speech of the 'unfree'" sheds light on the ways in which Muslims erase themselves in their discussions of free speech. Employing an autoethnographical approach, Morsi critiques the liberal fantasy and the ways in which many Muslims are forced to speak the liberal language to alleviate white anxieties about the threat of terror. As he argues, "the reality is that many Muslims feel the pressure to speak the liberal language and erase ourselves as threats, erase how freedom has a particular racial meaning. We feel the need to say the right things. We must repeat our belief in society's 'democratic' promises."¹⁸² This is all due to the fact that free speech with no punishment or explicitness are not the privileges that "minorities in radical politics' would be able to hold. For a Muslim to speak as if they are free is to erase their body and to separate themselves from "the orientalist web that gives 'Muslim' its informative meaning."¹⁸³

In *Radical Skin, Moderate Masks*,¹⁸⁴ Morsi focuses on the compulsion to be a moderate Muslim. Once again, he writes his experience into his scholarly work, employing autoethnography as epistemic resistance. Morsi writes for Muslims, people of color and those who are willing to resist structural racism, Islamophobia and hegemonic whiteness. He highlights that freedom and voice for a Muslim are achieved through resisting the white gaze, not satisfying it through 'wearing moderate masks.' This is because no matter how moderate Muslims claim to be and to what extent they play the game with whiteness, be apologetic for every act of

¹⁷⁹ Claire Chambers, "Countering the 'Oppressed, Kidnapped Genre' of Muslim Life Writing: Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter* and Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*." *Life Writing* 10, no. 1 (2013): 77-96.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸¹ Yassir Morsi, "The 'free speech' of the (un) free." *Continuum* (2018): 1-13.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸⁴ Yassir Morsi, *Radical Skin, Moderate Masks: De-Radicalizing the Muslim and Racism in Post-racial Societies*. (New York: Roman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017)

terrorism that take place in the world and take responsibility for all Muslims and repeat “not all of us are terrorists,” Muslims are either radicals or they have to be moderates for the white gaze. Morsi reveals his own journey of being an Islamic scholar and learning about “the role and function of religion in the dissemination of colonial knowledge”¹⁸⁵ and the necessity of a decolonial approach in any discussions of Islamophobia and War on Terror.

As the Iranian and Arab autobiographical literature deals with the representation of Muslim woman, some contributions to these images are worth discussing here. Mino Moalem, another critic in this field,¹⁸⁶ addresses the post-revolutionary and post 9/11 stereotypical representations of Islam and the Muslims as fanatical and fundamentalist and pre-modern and problematizes the production of fundamentalism and Islamic nationalism as product of the modernity. Moalem applies a postmodern and transnational approach to shed light on the significance of gender in Islamic fundamentalism in post-revolutionary Iran. She argues that the narrative of an Islamic ummat, both national and transnational, relies heavily on the bodies of women and their mediation between the “we-ness” of the Islamic ummat and the “other.” Indeed, women become ideological subjects and their bodies are engaged or “ideologized” to rework the disappointments and failures of overarching dichotomous notions of identity in modernity by suppressing cultural hybridity or forms of in-betweenness.

Consumer capitalism has incorporated this transnational reworking of the nation in its inexorable march to produce new consumer subjects.¹⁸⁷ She debates that both feminist and Islamic fundamentalist discourses through their representational practices, have created subject positions that are exclusive, and conceal power relations among women. She also elaborates on the Islamic feminism of Iran which is hybrid and has fundamentalist elements parallel to following the lines of the universal feminism which has taken stances against patriarchy. Furthermore, she elaborates on the idea of martyrdom as a process of remasculinization which emerged in the symbolic language of gender identity¹⁸⁸ but which cannot create agency for women, however, she mentions Veiling as an important part in this domestication, racialization and genderization of fundamentalist ideology.¹⁸⁹ She maintains that women perceived their acceptance of veiling not as a sign of either passivity or religiosity but rather as a gendered invitation to political participation and as a sign of membership, belonging, and complicity¹⁹⁰ in the Islamic state.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 150.

¹⁸⁶ Mino Moalem, *Between warrior brother and veiled sister*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 110.

In decolonial feminist epistemologies, alternative knowledges about concepts of equality, freedom and agency are central. Mino Moallem,¹⁹¹ examines the discourses of equality within difference in post-revolutionary Iran and the ways in which Iranian women negotiate their everyday life practices strategically to make use of that discourse. She argues that both secular and practicing religious women in Iran have attempted to develop strategies to navigate the binary notions of “traditional/modern, East/West, backward/developed, religious/secular and equality/difference”¹⁹² and work together, within legal limitations, towards challenging both modern and traditional discourses of gender equality and difference. Moallem stresses that “the limits imposed upon women with regard to gender differences and sex segregation have not prevented Iranian women from being present in all aspects of social life.”¹⁹³ The feminist practices of Iranian women after the revolution have created challenges to liberal modernity’s ideals of equality and at the same time, Islamic republic of Iran’s patriarchal regulations of difference. Therefore, it is incumbent on transnational feminists to see/listen to indigenous feminist knowledges and practices by Iranian women before prescribing any liberatory practices towards gender equality and emancipation.

Kiran Grewal in her article¹⁹⁴ analyses the debates surrounding Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a widely recognized activist and writer and an acclaimed figure in the West but ignored or derided by postcolonial feminists. These contradictory feedbacks are said to be due to her provocative and often offensive¹⁹⁵ statements regarding Islam and Muslim immigrants in the West. But Grewal argues that studying Hirsi Ali is essential as it can reach to arguments regarding a truly decolonized anti-racist, feminist politics. As she states, Hirsi Ali fits well with the particular, arguably dominant, Western discourse of ‘Clash of Civilizations’ between the ‘enlightened West’ and the ‘barbaric’ Muslim world.¹⁹⁶ She sees a need for postcolonial feminism to demonstrate an ability to engage with a diversity of women’s voices in a constructive way rather than avoiding, ignoring or simply dismissing those messages that are politically unpalatable. This is important for two reasons. The first is political: there is a need to counter the accusation of a ‘moral blindness’ or ‘excessive political correctness’ that is all too often levelled at those who attempt to combat racist, sexist and neocolonial structures of power.

The apparent unwillingness to respond to certain genuine concerns has created a space for those who assert that they are simply speaking the ‘unpleasant truth’, male violence in immigrant communities, the misogyny of fundamentalist Muslim regimes, the subjugation of women in the name of ‘tradition’, and use such ‘truths’ to legitimate particular discourses of superiority and human rights that are themselves exclusionary and

¹⁹¹ Mino Moallem, "The Unintended Consequences of Equality within Difference." *Brown J. World Aff.* 22 (2015): 335.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 336.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁹⁴ Kiran Grewal, "RECLAIMING THE VOICE OF THE 'THIRD WORLD WOMAN' But What Do We Do When We Don't Like What She Has to Say? The Tricky Case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali." *Interventions* 14, no. 4 (2012): 569-590.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 569.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 571.

oppressive¹⁹⁷. Furthermore, she argues that part of the problem Hirsi Ali poses to postcolonial feminism is a result of postcolonial feminism's own trajectory. By emphasizing the voice of the 'Third World woman' as an antidote to paternalistic white feminism, postcolonial feminism has at times fallen into the trap of celebrating 'authenticity.' Not only does this often place too heavy a burden on the shoulders of non-white women to emerge as representative of a new and enlightened racial and gender order, it also leaves many of us speechless in the face of a figure like Hirsi Ali who uses the language of 'lived experience' to justify an intolerant and exclusionary message. Moreover, Hirsi Ali's existence seems to pose the question: why shouldn't a conservative worldview held by a black woman be possible?¹⁹⁸

As argued by Grewal, or Hirsi Ali there can only be one way to access the individual freedom and subjectivity she desires. She cannot be anything other than the 'Muslim woman' unless she reinvents herself in the likeness of the ideal of abstract individual subject: a construct of European Enlightenment. There are also very clear rewards for her in doing so. Moreover, Hirsi Ali's positioning of her 'emancipation' as only possible through a 'Europeanising process' is not only a result of Western discourses of civilization but also the overly essentialized counter-identity that is often constructed as a form of resistance to the old colonial order. Hirsi Ali seems to demonstrate a feeling that she cannot be a feminist and a Muslim, a liberated individual and an African.¹⁹⁹

Haleh Ghorashi²⁰⁰ identifies the dogmatic secular emancipation discourse of Hirsi Ali as one also found common among many Iranian feminists living in exile. She points to innovative ways in which women within Iran are working within the strictures of the theocratic state. Yet when situated alongside the asserted freedom Hirsi Ali and others claim to have fought for and won (albeit with the 'help' of the West), these women's constant processes of negotiation seem far less appealing.

1.8 Indigenous feminisms versus global sisterhoods:

In her book titled *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*,²⁰¹ Nima Naghibi explores the ways in which discursive representations of Iranian women as "abject, repressed, and paradoxically as licentious" are consolidated as "unquestioned truths."²⁰² Naghibi critiques first world feminist empowerment which she

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 570.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 572.

¹⁹⁹ Kiran Grewal (2012), *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 14:4 586.

²⁰⁰ Gorashi, Halleh (2003) "Ayaan Hirsi Ali: daring or dogmatic? Debates on multiculturalism and emancipation in the Netherlands," in *Multiple Identifications and the Self*, ed. Toon van Meijl and Henk Driessen, (Utrecht: Stichting Focaal, 2003), 163.

²⁰¹ Nima Naghibi. *Rethinking global sisterhood: Western feminism and Iran*. (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 2007).

²⁰² Ibid., x.

believes to be dependent on the subjugation of “Persian women.”²⁰³ Naghibi demonstrates that the history of feminism in Iran is “intertwined” with the history of imperial expansion and class oppression. She also examines the “confluence of the discourses of modernity, global sisterhood, and subjugated Persian womanhood” in the works of Western feminists and Pahlavi feminists (who she calls state-sponsored feminists).²⁰⁴

Naghibi emphasizes on literature as an apparatus used by colonial and imperial discourses. She refers to Sara Mills’ argument surrounding women’s travel writing and the significant roles they played in the construction of “discourses of difference.”²⁰⁵ Naghibi moves away from the binary representations of veil and focuses her argument in two historical moments of enforced unveiling (1936) and veiling (1983) and debates surrounding these movements.²⁰⁶ She develops the concept of “female bonding” as a form of indigenous Iranian feminism that has taken form in “post-revolutionary” Iran.²⁰⁷ By studying women’s homosocial spaces in films and other cultural productions, Naghibi traces new articulations of indigenous feminism that is independent from Western feminism and the pre-revolutionary state feminism.

Indigenous feminisms need to be used as knowledges from the global south and developing in the locations of struggles to inform transnational feminist activisms concerned with Iranian and Iraqi women. There should be a bridge between transnational Iranian and Iraqi feminism with indigenous feminisms to locate different forms of oppression, liberation, freedom and agency. However, gender-based feminism cannot be the only tool to locate those oppressions and problems. Mino Moallem calls for new paradigms to study Muslims in the West. As she argues:²⁰⁸

New scholarly paradigms are needed to study Muslims in the West, since neither modernist notions of identity nor taken-for-granted notions of area studies are able to grasp the complexity of an unstable and contested world of meanings, identities and subjectivities. As a field of knowledge production, Middle Eastern studies is marked by the absence of a certain postmodern scholarship that could potentially equip it to meet these challenges—in particular, colonial and postcolonial studies, transnational feminist theories, and transnational cultural studies. . . . In recent years, new forms of Orientalism, along with racism vis-à-vis Middle Eastern peoples and cultures, have found currency in a reinvestment in the civilizational tropes of Islam and the West.

Given the rise of Islamophobia in the West and its particular influence on Muslim women, new paradigms should also be included in feminisms that question the reduction of Muslim women and Islamophobia to “veiling” practices only and are more concerned with the reasons of dislocation, forced

²⁰³ This binary of the subjugated Persian woman and the liberated Western woman is what comes across Naghibi’s study of Western women’s narratives of Persia.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., xvi.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., xviii.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., xxix.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., xxx.

²⁰⁸ Moallem, *Between warrior brother and veiled sister*, 19.

migration and border crossing of Muslims. As Shahrzad Mojab²⁰⁹ argues, feminism is necessary for any anti-imperialist project. In order to develop an inclusive and anti-imperialist feminism, decolonial tools are also necessary to question and identify Eurocentric ideas in concepts, frames of knowledge and practices of knowing. Decolonial feminism is a prerequisite for anti-imperialist projects, because it provides us with the tools to identify and contextualize the ideas that are presented as 'universal.'

²⁰⁹ Shahrzad Mojab, "Introduction: gender and empire." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 2 (2010): 220-223.

Chapter Two:

Critical Underpinnings

“It’s very important for me to tell politics like a story, to make it real, to draw a link between a man and his child and what fruit he had in the village he lived in before he was kicked out and how that relates to Mr. Wolfensohn at the world bank.” Arundhati Roy

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to embrace a decolonial and intersectional analysis of life writing narratives of the transnational women writers from Iran and Iraq. Given the long-lasting historical connections between the two neighbouring countries, these two nationalities are chosen for the corpus of study because this research aims to critique the idea of the Middle East as a monolithic identity for people living there or across borders, and to problematize the popular genre of Muslim women misery memoirs. Although the two countries as homelands to these writers, have commonalities in culture, religion, gender identities and share in national and international social issues such as wars and sanctions, they could also represent the differences and complexities of national and transnational identity politics.

Mention should be made of the decolonial feminist epistemology approach that is embraced in this research, which, in the context of Iran and Iraq, might sound ambiguous to some readers as a decolonial approach conventionally applies to the study of regions that have been officially colonized whereas, in this research, a decolonial approach is being used in accordance with Linda Martin Alcoff, Walter Dignolo and Anibal Quijano’s scholarship as a critique of the coloniality of power and knowledge.²¹⁰ Therefore, coloniality²¹¹ as a frequently used term in this research does not refer to expansionism in the traditional sense but is mostly concerned with exclusion, othering and demonization of the non-white identities and epistemologies. These micronarratives intervene into the expansive history of grand narratives that exert their power through certain identities, memories and experiences.

This research celebrates polyphony, multiplicity of knowledges and diversity of experiences in the micro narratives of history and tries to render an intersectional perspective of indigenous²¹² and transnational

²¹⁰ See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

See also Walter D Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking." *Cultural studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 155-167.

See Linda Martín Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance." In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), 397.

²¹¹ According to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, coloniality and decoloniality “refer to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization and decolonization.” When talking about coloniality, we are concerned with hegemonic Western institutions and discourses that are themselves resulted by coloniality. As Torres mentions, if coloniality refers to the above-mentioned notions, then decoloniality refers to “efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies, of differences that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowldges, counter-creative acts and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and open up multiple other forms of being in the world.”

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality." *Franz Foundation* (<http://franzfoundation.org>) Accessed 27 (2017). 10

²¹² The term indigenous in this project does not refer to indigenous Australians or first nation Americans (North and South) and Canadians. It has been used in a more general sense of the word and in this very context refers to multiple Iranians and Iraqi ethnicities.

experience of Iranian and Iraqi women living in the West. These microhistory narratives are taken to be “new epistemologies” that have survived and have been “published” in the West although some of which are bluntly critical of the Western imperialism and its attempts of “epistemicide.”²¹³

One of the main concerns in this study is the importance of story-telling as a way to let in “the experience of the world that is not permitted into dominant knowledge paradigms.”²¹⁴ Transnational women writers have used this approach to reproduce the knowledge about their homeland or their parents’ homeland (if they are second generation diasporic writers) and to challenge the power dynamics that are behind the exclusion of their knowledge or their “epistemicide.” They bring a counter-hegemonic perspective of the homeland which is not all that compatible with the pictures portrayed through Western media in the past years.

My thesis draws on microhistory accounts, life narratives and memoirs that include multiple perspectives of the experiences of ordinary people at different turning points of history. The voices belong to women and men of different ethnicities, classes, different education and family backgrounds and privileges or to put it short, different social locations.

2.2 Who they are and from where they speak: Transnational feminism and the politics of inclusion

In the discussions of Transnational feminism, A review of the literature on the Third World feminism, women of color feminisms and politics of inclusion is crucial, as it would demonstrate the reasons why the current transnational feminist movements are more lenient towards intersectionality and decoloniality.

To start with, Third World Feminism has been controversially critiqued by different political stances and disciplines.²¹⁵ As Uma Narayan²¹⁶ puts it, “Third World feminist” refers to feminists who built up their feminist views and are involved in feminist politics in Third World countries.²¹⁷ Third world feminists develop their political views and feminist perspectives through their activism and involvement in the Third World

²¹³ Epistemicide is a term coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in his *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* and is defined as “the murder of knowledge” by which he means “[u]nequal exchanges among cultures [which] have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it.” In case of the European expansion, Santos argues that “epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide. The loss of epistemological confidence that currently afflicts modern science has facilitated the identification of the scope and gravity of the epistemicides perpetrated by hegemonic Eurocentric modernity.”

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. (London: Routledge, 2015), 92

²¹⁴ Sherene Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

²¹⁵ Aware of the connotations and the contested politics attached to the term “Third World,” I deliberately use it in my research in line with Mohanty, Russo and Torres’s reference of the term to “colonized, neocolonized or decolonized countries... whose economic and political structures have been deformed within the colonial process, and to black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous peoples in North America, Europe, and Australia. Chandra Talpade Mohanty et al., eds. *Third World women and the politics of feminism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), ix.

²¹⁶ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating cultures: Identities, traditions, and Third World feminism*. (London: Routledge, 2013).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

national realities and they address women's issues in those countries. However, one of the main challenges that they have to face is that they are usually accused of "Westernization" and rejection of local cultures; also, in case they are transnational, they are questioned for speaking as an insider while they live outside.²¹⁸ Being a Third World feminist and speaking from inside is story telling for Narayan. As she argues:

Telling the story of a person whose life is intertwined with one's own, in terms different from own, is often a morally delicate project, requiring accommodation and tact and an ability to leave room for her account even as one claims room for one's own. Re-telling the story of a mother culture in feminist terms, on the other hand, is a political enterprise. It is an attempt to, publicly and in concert with others, challenge and revise an account that is neither the account of an individual nor an account "of the culture as a whole," but an account of some who have power within the culture. It is a political challenge to other political accounts that distort, misrepresent, and often intentionally fail to account for the problems and contributions of many inhabitants of the context.²¹⁹

Telling a "counter story" then, is a "political act," breaking the dominant narratives which exclude "voices, concerns, and contributions" of the voices of dissent.²²⁰ According to Narayan, third world feminists are the daughters and feminists to their homeland and accusing them of being outsiders is failing to see the complications of the juxtaposition of conformity and conflict, love and loyalty that they feel towards homeland.²²¹ Being a Third World feminist does not equal being a middle class, Westernized woman. It does not imply that we accuse our traditional cultures as backward and valorise Western culture as progressive. It is to see how women's issues are vulnerable to co-option by both the colonialist and nationalist and anti-colonialist agendas.²²² It is to point out how the image of Third World woman (Indian woman in Narayan's study) is constructed by Victorian feminists (white imperial feminists) and Indian nationalist men (local nationalist Third World men in general).

Narayan critiques and problematizes the idea of Third World feminist as "outsiders within"²²³ they are considered as insiders as they are "familiar with and also affected by the practices, institutions, and the politics they criticize. They are also active citizens within their respective national landscapes, whose political analyses and protests have been crucial to making issues affecting women into matters of national awareness and concern."²²⁴ Third World feminists belong to nations and countries and denying the idea of nation and discourses of nationalism as patriarchal constructs is just to allow these dangerous discourses to grow with

²¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

²²⁰ Ibid., 10.

²²¹ Ibid., 10.

²²² Ibid., 18.

²²³ Ibid., 32.

²²⁴ Ibid., 33.

more fortitude. It is essential that feminists intervene in such discourses to bring more equality, opportunity, support and protection for women rights in Third World countries and more global justice to the world.²²⁵

In case of Iran, as a relevant example to this discussion, the images of women are both constructed by the Islamist revolutionary men and their patriarchal Islamicizing agendas and imperial white feminism re-emerging in form of social media transnational campaigns, which is after saving Iranian women from compulsory hijab. The diversity of feminist voices inside the country and within the transnational and diaspora community and the political complexities surrounding the usage of the term “feminism” in Iran have led to a feminist praxis that is different to many other Third World countries. The tension among different voices has resulted in constructive debates among feminists and women’s rights activists, challenging both nationalist and Islamist patriarchal discourses about women and their social lives.

Shireen Roshanravan²²⁶ uses Ella Shohat’s²²⁷ term “multifaceted plurilogue” to emphasize the importance of reading differences within women of color theories as a genre of unified thoughts. She discusses how “Plurilogued engagements bring these conceptual strategies and understandings of multiple oppressions together, not to resolve or rank them, but to more effectively ascertain the complexities of, and varied coalitional strategies for, resisting the racialized, heteropatriarchal oppressions of global capitalism and colonialism.”²²⁸ In order for the epistemic disobedience²²⁹ to enact and fight the Eurocentric coloniality of knowledge and silencing of the women of colors’ knowledges, she suggests plurilogue and argues:

Although Mohanty, Alexander, and Lugones have also developed methods for reading and resisting multiple oppressions with the goal of forging anti-imperialist, cross-cultural, feminist coalitions, I offer the plurilogue as a meta-methodological device for clarifying and amplifying the relational differences among Women of Color methods. Differences among the scholars’ frameworks provide the creative tension to move the plurilogue. Engaging these differences clarifies the political orientation of each approach to a decolonizing feminism and the collective strategies each motivates. In this capacity, plurilogued engagements better enable us to utilize Women of Color strategies against racialized gender oppressions.²³⁰

²²⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

²²⁶ Shireen Roshanravan, "Motivating coalition: Women of color and epistemic disobedience." *Hypatia* 29, no. 1 (2014): 41-58.

²²⁷ Ella Shohat, *Talking visions: Multicultural feminism in a transnational age*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

²²⁸ Ibid.,41.

²²⁹ Epistemic disobedience is a term firstly used by Walter D Mignolo in his article “Epistemic disobedience,” independent thought and decolonial freedom and it means to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology by shifting the geography of reason. It is detaching from the universal ideas that have been imposed on the world as neutral and objective knowledge, such as the claim that “first world has knowledge, Third World has culture.” The hubris of the zero point is a term primarily used by Santiago Castro Gomez in 2007. Zero point means the detached and neutral point of observation (objectivity).

For further information, see: Walter D Mignolo, "Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7-8 (2009): 159-181.

Civil disobedience is also a term that was coined by Henry David Thoreau in his 1848 essay to refer to his refusal to pay tax to the American government as he did not want to be part of the war prosecuted in Mexico and the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civil-disobedience/>

²³⁰ Roshanravan, “Motivating coalition,” 57

Chandra Mohanty,²³¹ as one of the most significant voices in women of color feminism focuses on how Western feminism has represented Third World women as powerless victims of socioeconomic discourses, victims of male violence, universal dependents, victims of the colonial process, victims of Arab familial systems, victims of Islamic code and victims of economic development process.²³² She considers this narrative of victimhood problematic, reductive and too simplistic because it defines women as “objects-who-defend-themselves” and men into “subjects-who-penetrate-violence” and the society into “powerless (read women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people.”²³³ Thus, formulations such as “cross-cultural study of women” or “exploitation of women by men” are ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions because all they do it to reinforce binary divisions between men and women.

Mohanty proposes new questions and concern for feminist historiography and epistemology such as “who produces knowledge about colonized peoples and from what space/location? and “what are the politics of the production of this particular knowledge?”²³⁴ Thorough theorization of experience, she suggests that historicizing and location political agency is a necessary alternative to formulations of the “universality” of gendered oppression and struggles. This universality of gendered oppression is problematic, based as it is on the assumption that the categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible.²³⁵

Mohanty critiques voices such as Robin Morgan’s²³⁶ who emphasize on the individual voice of a woman (all around the globe) as a victim and truth-teller fighting a “common condition” caused by universal patriarchy.²³⁷ To Mohanty, Morgan’s argument surrounding women’s “privileged access to the real and “the truth,” is an essentialist reduction and open to critique. Morgan’s use of sisterhood as terminology is problematic as it universalizes the nature of oppression women receive into gender oppression and therefore, their resistant movements into only anti-patriarchy movements. For Morgan, history is a patriarchal construct written by men, about men and women should reclaim a “herstory”, separate and outside of “his-story.” However, Mohanty problematizes this claim and argues that women’s representational absence from history does not make women insignificant social actors in history. Morgan’s herstory as separate and independent of history is problematic because it takes away women’s agency, their historical resistance while handing over all history to men and suggesting that women “have been universally duped.”²³⁸

²³¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

²³² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 24.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

²³⁶ Robin Morgan, ed. *Sisterhood is global: The international women's movement anthology*. (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1984).

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

This version of the experience of struggle is defined as both “personal and ahistorical.” It is taken to be coming from the individual body or the psyche of a woman or from a general preconstituted collective. For Mohanty this definition of experience is problematic because it is seen as first being “immediately accessible, understood, and named and the complex relationships between behaviour and its representation are either ignored or made irrelevant” and it therefore collapses into “discourse,”²³⁹ and second, “since experience has a fundamentally psychological status, questions of history and collectivity are formulated on the level of attitude and intention.”²⁴⁰ For her, the general idea about the sameness of experience among women in the world is problematic. As she puts it:

If the assumption of sameness of experience is what ties woman (individual) to women (group), regardless of class, race, nation, and sexualities, the notion of experience is anchored firmly in the notion of the individual self, a determined and specifiable constituent of European modernity. However, this notion of the individual needs to be self-consciously historicized if as feminists, we wish to go beyond the limited bourgeois ideology of individualism, especially as we attempt to understand what cross-cultural sisterhood might be made to mean.²⁴¹

As she points out, the unity of women is not a natural and psychological given, but is something that has to be strived and struggled toward in history. She suggests that the historical forms of oppression should be studied not separately but in relation to the category of women. She proposes “feminist solidarity” or “coalition” as a replacement for “universal sisterhood,”²⁴² which she has been critical of, for the fact that sisterhood implies the experience of being a woman as a universal experience, which can create “an illusory unity” free from meanings attached to gender, race, class, age and certain historical moments.²⁴³

As a transnational feminist, she questions the politics of being an “absent elite” at home and a minority and radicalized other in the West and maintains that for her there is no clear or obvious fit between geography, race, and politics she is always required to define and redefine these relationships. “Race,” “Asianness,” and “brownness” as social constructs are not embedded in her as she states; however, histories of colonialism, racism, sexism and nationalism as multiple axes of oppression, together with different layers of privilege (class and status) are at play in her relation to white people and people of color in the United States.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Ibid., 114-115.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 115.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 115.

²⁴² Ibid., 115.

²⁴³ Ibid., 118.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 135.

2.3 Experience

The concepts of experience and testimony are two key points of inquiry in microhistory narratives. Experience and its epistemic credibility²⁴⁵ have been dismissed by the poststructuralists just as it was by the early logical positivists and this dismissal is justified by the fact that experience is “replete with historically and culturally specific mediations” and it is taken as “that which is in need of explanation rather than which can provide explanation.”²⁴⁶ However, post-positivism rejects post-structuralist view of the epistemic vacuity of experience and advises a need for “a more sophisticated account of what experience consists in and how it works in the production of knowledge, in order to account for the variable mediations of experience.”²⁴⁷

When talking about women’s experience, their testimony and memories, truth is always questioned and their experience as episteme is challenged. In understanding the memory narratives as eye-witness and lived experience accounts, the question of truth is relevant; however, as Alcoff argues, this does not imply that “we can jettison the political account of the ways in which truth is framed, narrativized and even made possible.”²⁴⁸ Therefore, memory is not just the product of self-experience, but it is affected by the socio-politics of each discourse at a specific epoch of history. As Alcoff maintains:

The pursuit of truth will be enhanced if we come to a better understanding of how the domains of knowledge emerge, are delimited and constrained by the peculiar ways in which concepts are formed in different historical moments, this means that we can make an epistemic evaluation of contrasting notions of the relation between sexual practices and identity.²⁴⁹

Testimonial episteme is a notion that needs to be discussed here. According to Alcoff, in the modern tradition of Western epistemology, and still today in mainstream Anglo-American epistemology, testimony is hardly theorized at all. But when it is, it is considered a “legitimate source of knowledge” only if the claim has been independently verified. Hence, assessing the epistemic reliability of others requires assessing the epistemic justification of their testimonial claims.²⁵⁰ The reasons given for this are the same as those used to require “individual autonomy for rationality”: we cannot be certain as to whether the other is leading us astray, so we must rely only on ourselves.

²⁴⁵ Linda Martín Alcoff, "On judging epistemic credibility: Is social identity relevant?" *Engendering rationalities* (NY: SUNY Press, 2001): 53-80.

²⁴⁶ Linda Martín Alcoff, "New epistemologies: post-positivist accounts of identity." *The sage handbook of identities* (London: Sage, 2010): 152.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁴⁸ Linda Martín Alcoff, "Experience and Knowledge: The Case of Sexual Abuse Memories." In *Feminist Metaphysics*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 209.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁵⁰ Alcoff, Linda Martín. "On judging epistemic credibility: Is social identity relevant?" *Engendering rationalities* (2001): 56–57.

2.4 Story-telling as feminist knowledge

“Story telling” has been emphasized by feminists as one of the ways of sharing individual and group experience. Stories and narratives are a viable alternative to patriarchal/Eurocentric forms of knowledge. Edward Said argues that “Narrative introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision.”²⁵¹ Narrative lets a story unfold, rather than trying to encompass everything under the single view of the dominant group and challenges the sterility and permanence that has been assigned to histories by “vision.”²⁵² Story telling as Razack argues, is used by the feminists to engage “the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms”²⁵³ and to “br[ing] into the open” the “power dynamic” behind such exclusions.²⁵⁴ However as some other feminists argue,²⁵⁵ story-telling could be coopted by the discourses of power with sexist, racist, homophobic and Islamophobic enthusiasms.

Women of color’s stories, analogously to white women’s story sharing, have also been referred to as “the politics of everyday life” and historical epistemic bodies.²⁵⁶ For women of colour migrants and border-crossers, story-telling becomes even more of a political act, as their stories are not only about their gendered and raced bodies, but also about belongings and homemaking. As Mohanty eloquently puts it, the home question and the ways in which migrants and immigrants “understand and define home is a profoundly political [question.]”²⁵⁷

Among story-telling theorists, feminist standpoint theorists have emphasized the epistemic repertoire in women’s daily experiences and have highlighted the importance of “finding ways of speaking [about women’s experience] and ways of speaking it politically.”²⁵⁸ Standpoint theorists such as Sandra Harding have emphasized on the complex nature of experience and the “struggle to articulate the forbidden, ‘incoherent’ experience that makes possible new politics and subsequent analysis”²⁵⁹ Women articulate their experience in form of stories, and mostly in bonding spaces where they can feel a sense of solidarity with other women and the comfort to share stories. Storytelling, thus is an effective strategy that can transform women’s daily

²⁵¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 240.

²⁵² Said makes this argument about the ways in which the Orient has been made “synonymous with stability and unchanging eternity” through Orientalist vision. *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁵³ Razack, *Looking white people in the eye*, 36.

²⁵⁴ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a feminist theory of the state* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 92.

²⁵⁵ Shari Stone-Mediatore, "Storytelling/Narrative." In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. (Oxford:OUP 2016), 934

²⁵⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: IUP,1991), 39.

²⁵⁷ Mohanty, *Feminism without borders*, 126.

²⁵⁸ Dorothy E Smith, *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. (Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1987), 58.

²⁵⁹ Sandra Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 282.

experience of oppression and resistance into “feminist knowledge”²⁶⁰ and therefore, create liberatory narratives. The logic of standpoint theory, according to Harding, demands that “the subject of liberatory feminist knowledge must also be the subject of every other liberatory knowledge project.”²⁶¹

Transnational, multicultural, indigenous and women of color feminists have all emphasized the significance of feminist knowledge, arising from women’s “marginalized experience”²⁶² and narrated through stories. As Torres writes about Latina autobiographers, these women write their experience into stories, creating not “monolithic selves” but a self “as a member of multiple oppressed groups, whose political identity can never be divorced from her conditions.”²⁶³ Torres believes that women of color do not only write about multiple forms of oppression but “rather, [they] theoriz[e] their experience in radical and innovative terms”²⁶⁴ by rejecting the “partial, social, and political theories”²⁶⁵ that fail to address the complexity of their social location and the reality of their everyday lives.

Indigenous scholars such as Dian Million have foregrounded “emotion as embedded knowledge”²⁶⁶ and the significant political role Canadian First Nation women’s “first person and experiential narrative” has played in changing “shame” into “social change.”²⁶⁷ First Nation women coming forward, acknowledging and sharing their experience via stories, “illuminated a space for both men and women to speak one of colonialism’s nastiest “domestic” secrets” which was a century of “genocidal child abuse.” Thus story-telling and sharing felt knowledge functions as a decolonial methodology which works not only for decolonizing colonial histories but also the ways in which we ‘study’ those histories in academia as the “gatekeeper” of the system. It is important to highlight, as Million argues, that “we feel our histories as well as think them.”²⁶⁸

Chandra Mohanty also accentuates “the centrality of rewriting and remembering history as “a process which is significant not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history, but because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of

²⁶⁰ Stone-Mediatore, “Storytelling,” 936.

²⁶¹ Harding, *Whose Science?*, 285.

²⁶² Stone-Mediatore, “Storytelling,” 936.

²⁶³ Lourdes Torres, “The construction of the self in US Latina autobiographies.” *Women, knowledge, and reality* (London: Routledge, 1996): 130.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁶⁶ Dian Million, “Felt theory: An Indigenous feminist approach to affect and history.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 71.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

politicized consciousness and self-identity.”²⁶⁹ Through story-telling and writing “new political identities” are forged and [writing] becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself.”²⁷⁰

Not only do story-tellers rewrite history but also they do resist the systems of power and the ways in which they exercise dominance on civil society. Prison narratives are a good example of such epistemic bodies, challenging the “dominant patriarchal capitalist modes of functioning.”²⁷¹ Kavita Panjabi distinguishes between Third World women’s testimony and autobiography and emphasizes on the “radical social action” which testimony calls for.²⁷² Prison stories, critically connect “the concentrated experiences of prison life to the everyday oppressions of women [...whilst] issuing a warning against the idealization and thus distancing, of prison experiences.”²⁷³

Story-telling is not only empowering to the individual who tells the story but also to the readers of that very story who share the same experience. As bell hooks argues, “story-telling becomes a process of historicization. It does not remove women from history but enables us [women] to see ourselves as part of history.”²⁷⁴ hooks stresses that confession and memory need to be incorporated into our stories and theorization of our experiences because they can bridge the gap between “identity” and “culture, history and politics.”²⁷⁵

But how do stories contribute to theories of knowledge for feminists? As Lorraine Code proposes in her essay, “Stories convey something about cognitive and moral experiences [...] that slips through the formalist nets of moral principles and duties, or standards of evidence and justification.” She continues with a modest proposal which encourages that “by taking stories into account, theorists will be able to repair some of the rifts in continuity... between moral theory and moral experience, and theory of knowledge and cognitive experiences.”²⁷⁶ However, there is not one single ‘true’ story and people and their stories are “epistemically interdependent.”²⁷⁷ Every individual has their own certain way of experiencing the world and “telling such

²⁶⁹ Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," 34.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 34.

²⁷¹ Kavita Panjabi, *Probing "morality" and state violence: feminist values and communicative interaction in prison testimonios in India and Argentina*. na, 1997, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*. (London: Routledge, 2013), 168.

²⁷² Ibid., 151.

²⁷³ Ibid., 153.

²⁷⁴ Bell Hooks, *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 189.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 190.

²⁷⁶ Lorraine Code, "Experience, knowledge, and responsibility," in *Feminist perspectives in philosophy*, ed. Morwenna Griffiths and Margarette Whitford, (London: Macmillan, 1988), 201.

²⁷⁷ Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical spaces: Essays on gendered locations*. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 183.

stories locates epistemology within the lives and projects of specifically situated, embodied, gendered knowers”²⁷⁸ whose experiences are “mediated by their locations within particular spatial temporal points.”²⁷⁹

The question that can be raised here is whether all stories are credible and if all story-tellers produce knowledge with a certain level of epistemic responsibility. To put it simply, and as some scholars ask (As mentioned in literature review Nima Naghibi for instance raises this question), which stories and which writers should we as readers and critics engage with? The concept of epistemic responsibility is pertinent to this discussion. Lorraine Code argues that “people singly and collectively—indeed singly *because* collectively—are *responsible* for what and how they know, on an understanding of responsibility that is as epistemological as it is ethical and political.”²⁸⁰ Code’s epistemic, moral and political hypothesis creates an ecological subject who is “self-critically cognizant of being part of and specifically located within a social-physical world that constrains and enables human practices, where knowing and acting always generate consequences.”²⁸¹ Code’s ecological subject, who happens to be the responsible story-teller in the context of my study, acknowledges the partiality of their knowledge and the consequences of the knowledge they produce through not only epistemic but also moral and political accountability. The interrelation between the epistemic, moral and political has also been emphasized by other epistemologists like Jose Medina. As he maintains, “The mistake of intellectualism is to think that by changing the epistemic, the ethical and political will follow, whereas in fact people’s concepts and cognitions may not control all their emotions, moral characters, and political attitudes.”²⁸² Thus, it is necessary that a “deep transformation and restructuring of people’s epistemic, moral and political sensitivities” take place so that injustices affecting communication, such as “hermeneutical injustice” could effectively be addressed.²⁸³

These theories are relevant when co-optation of Third World women’s stories, for instance, is considered as an obstacle for knowledge production and the reception of that knowledge. The responsible story-teller and the responsible reader both acknowledge that stories’ knowledge claims are mediated by moral and political values while at the same time, stories are bearers of epistemic values. To develop an understanding and response towards co-optation while acknowledging the epistemic value of stories, scholars including Alcoff and Gray and Razack’s theories are central. Responsible story-telling for Razack requires a ratification of “the differences in positions between the teller and the listener, between telling the tale and hearing it.”²⁸⁴ There are other processes in between telling and listening, which includes collecting, curating, interpreting and

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 155.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 169.

²⁸⁰ Lorraine Code, *Ecological thinking: The politics of epistemic location*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ix.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 5.

²⁸² José Medina, *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and the social imagination* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 90.

²⁸³ Ibid., 91.

²⁸⁴ Razack, *Looking white people in the eye*, 36

distributing, to name a few, and these processes do affect the epistemic aspect of the story once it reaches the audience. As Razack argues:

There are land mines strewn across the path wherever stories are used that it should never be used uncritically, and that its potential as a tool for social change is remarkable, provided we pay attention to the interpretive structures that underpin how we hear and how we take up the stories of oppressed groups.²⁸⁵

The interpretive structures that Razack mentions have also been foregrounded by Alcoff and Gray. For them, experience is not “pretheoretical”, “separate or separable” from theory, and both theory and experience are “political” as well.²⁸⁶ They also maintain that story-tellers need to become the “theorists of [their] own experience” and become cognizant of the ways in which their subjectivities are “constituted by [their] discourses.”²⁸⁷ The stories we tell are not confessionals coming from “autonomous spaces” with no interpretation involved; they are interpretations of ours that can personify us as “victims.”²⁸⁸ Two examples of this could be *Reading Lolita in Tehran*²⁸⁹ or prison narratives such as *My Life as a Traitor*²⁹⁰ which insist on presenting a strong lived perspective of being a woman in Iran but the ways in which the stories are interpreted by the storyteller and written in words (even the politics of publication and distribution aside) turn the confessional into a victimhood narrative. Separating stories from theory and reducing story to the “good” emotional and personal side and theory into the bad abstract and detached side disparages storytelling and its liberatory outcomes.²⁹¹

2.5 Realist post-positivist approach to reading lived experience

The concept of experience is the key point in Realist Post-positivist theory of identity.²⁹² Satya Mohanty²⁹³ starts by critiquing the essentialist (I may call it traditionalist epistemologists’ view from now on) view of identity which assigns the same identity to different members of a social group, considers it unchanging and based on shared experiences.²⁹⁴ The problem with this view, according to Mohanty, is that “it ignores the historical changes and glosses over the internal differences within a group by privileging only the experiences that are common to everyone.”²⁹⁵ Mohanty also critiques the postmodernists’ view that identities are

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁸⁶ Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray. "Survivor discourse: Transgression or recuperation?." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 2 (1993): 283

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 284.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 284.

²⁸⁹ Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A memoir in books*, (NY: Random House, 2008).

²⁹⁰ Zarah Ghahramani and Robert Hillman. *My Life As a Traitor: A Story of Courage and Survival in Tehran's Brutal Ervin Prison* (London: A&C Black, 2012)

²⁹¹ Also see Paul Apostolidis, *Breaks in the chain: What immigrant workers can teach America about democracy* (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 2010), 4.

²⁹² Due to the length of the phrase, from now on it will be abbreviated into RPPTI.

²⁹³ Satya P Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: on "Beloved" and the postcolonial condition." *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 41-80.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 42.

all constructed, fabricated and therefore cannot bear any objective knowledge.²⁹⁶ He defined experience as “the variety of ways humans process information.”²⁹⁷ He proposes a naturalist-realist account of experience which, if properly interpreted, can source objective knowledge with epistemic value. He proposes:

[I]nstead of conceiving identities as self-evidently based on the authentic experiences of members of a cultural or social group (the view that underlies identity politics) or alternatively conceiving identities as all equally unreal to the extent that they lay any claim to the real experiences of real people, because experience is a radically mystifying term (this is the postmodernist alternative), we need to explore the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location. To do this, we need a conception of experience that is cognitivist, as I have been suggesting, a conception that will allow for both legitimate and illegitimate experience, enabling us to see experience as source of both real knowledge and social mystification...Identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways. It is in this sense that they are valuable, and suggest why we need to take their epistemic status very seriously. For it is in them, and through them, that we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, that we give texture and form to our collective futures. ²⁹⁸

The best advantage of this approach for my project is the fact that this realist reading of lived experience allows for both legitimate and illegitimate experiences. It acknowledges contradictory emotions, feelings and experiences as natural to human nature and does not try to impose pure logical interpretations of identities. Emotions in this approach are interpreted as something between “conscious reasoning” and “reflex-like instinctual responses to stimuli.”²⁹⁹ Emotions have epistemic salience because they “fill the gaps between our instinctually driven desires on the one hand, and our fully developed reasoning faculties on the other.”³⁰⁰ This is what we might experience every day in our judgements of the world, the people around us, the political decisions we have to make, and the phenomenological observations we make. Our decisions, experiences and definitions of identity are based on both logical interpretations of the world and our emotions. To wipe emotions off judgements does not make them objective. Our emotions have roots in our experience of the world and our embodied existence and they do affect our understanding of our social location and our relationalities. We need new definitions for the concept of objectivity to be able to explain this. We also need a decolonial approach to the concept of objectivity in order to address the universal lenses that we have embraced and based on which have interpreted different phenomena so far. “Shifting the geographies of reason,” in Mignolo’s words, or “unveiling and enacting geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge”³⁰¹ and embracing alternative indigenous forms of knowing are important tools to rethink and revise and unlearn our previous self-knowledge and “objective” knowledges.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.,42.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁹⁸ Mohanty, “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity,” 54-55.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 49.

³⁰¹ Walter D Mignolo, “Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7-8 (2009): 159-181.

RPPT's objectivity claim is not equal to neutrality. An objective analysis of experience, according to Mohanty³⁰² is one that is open to subjective and theoretical biases, differences, interests and contradictions and instead of treating those biases as counterproductive and limiting to interpretation and meaning making processes, it takes them as "epistemically productive and useful."³⁰³ Therefore, objectivity in RPPT is not the same as the Foucauldian concept of objectivity which is "ahistorical and impossible to attain."³⁰⁴ Our values are socially and historically embedded, so as they are open-ended and partial.³⁰⁵ Mohanty's postpositivist conception of "objectivity is a social achievement rather than an impossible dream of purity and transcendence; it is based on [his] evolving understanding of the sources and causes of various kinds of error."³⁰⁶ Mohanty uses post-positivist objectivity to explain the value of cultural identities. According to him:

Cultural identities are good everyday instances of our deepest social biases; even when they are openly espoused, they are often based on submerged feelings and values, reflecting areas of both sensibility and judgement. They are neither to be dismissed as mere social constructions, and hence spurious, nor celebrated as our real unchanging essences in a heartless and changing world. We have the capacity to examine our social identities, considering them in light of our best understanding of other social facts and our other social relationships.... On the realist view I have been advocating in this book, when we strive for objectivity in inquiry (whether in academic disciplines or in everyday life) we seek to produce an account of the socially based distortions as well as the socially based insights that constitute our presuppositions, including our more sophisticated "theories." An examination of these distortions and insights will help us develop more general naturalistic accounts of "truth" as well as "error," accounts on the basis of which we formulate our understanding of "objectivity" as an ideal of knowledge.³⁰⁷

Thus, as Paula Moya also explains,³⁰⁸ identities have epistemic significance, and a good theory of identity does not push identities into a black and white binary, either dismissing or celebrating their value; however, it transcends beyond those biases and interests and through those contradictions, explains "where and why identities are problematic and where and why they are empowering."³⁰⁹

The post positivist approach to identity attempts to avoid the "overly homogenized notions of experience and assumptions of infallibility, problems that follow from unmediated approaches to knowledge"³¹⁰ This approach does not argue for an absolute relation between identity and knowledge under any circumstance; however, it maintains the assumption that "identities might be relevant in any context, but holds that the

³⁰² Satya P Mohanty, "Can our values be objective? On ethics, aesthetics, and progressive politics." *New Literary History* 32, no. 4 (2001): 803-833.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 804.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 809.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 815.

³⁰⁶ Satya P Mohanty, *Literary theory and the claims of history: Postmodernism, objectivity, multicultural politics*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 147.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

³⁰⁸ Paula ML Moya and Michael Roy Hames-Garcia, eds. *Reclaiming identity: Realist theory and the predicament of postmodernism*. (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2000), 17.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

³¹⁰ Alcott, "New epistemologies," 156-157.

question of their relevance needs to be asked and evaluated in each context.”³¹¹ The post positivist account of identity “revises and reconstructs the way in which social identities are understood.” This approach becomes plausible if identities are seen as “explanatory theories” rather than fundamental metaphysical posits³¹² or along the lines of the concept of hermeneutic horizon which according to Alcoff ³¹³ defies being imagined through mono-cultural hermeneutics and seeks to be imagined as “the heterogeneous amalgam of one’s affective relations to macro historical events (such as slavery and genocide) along with cultural discourses both textual and visual , to which one has access , as well as one’s own individual and personal history and set of experiences.”³¹⁴

In her introduction to *New Epistemologies*, Linda Martín Alcoff also ties the post positivist accounts of identity to experience, self-knowledge, social location, group identity and epistemic salient. She argues:

Post-positivist approaches to the formulation of social identities are relatively new developments that were formed in reaction to the inadequacy of poststructuralist and postmodern deconstructions of identity, on the one hand, and the implausibility of Cartesian based modernist accounts of the self, on the other (Moya and Hames-García, 2000). Neither the modernist nor the postmodernist theoretical traditions gives sufficient scope for the role that an individual’s particular social identity plays in shaping their subjectivity, experience, or knowledge (Alcoff, 2006; Siebers, 2008). To remedy this, the metaphysics of post-positivist realism has been applied to the realm of identity theory in order to provide a mediated approach to experience and knowledge combined with a modified realism about identity (Mohanty, 1997; Moya, 2002).³¹⁵

Giving a historiography of self-knowledge, she discusses that for Descartes, self-knowledge is the most reliable and resistant to doubt knowledge claim³¹⁶ and the Cartesian self-knowledge is considered to have overturned “authoritarian epistemologies of all sorts.”³¹⁷ Kant is believed to have had an “imaginative reconstruction of the role of the self in knowledge.” For Kant, “experience is always the product of perceptual content together with extra-perceptual concepts, such as causation, that are more imposed on the world than they are derived from it. This account substantially increased the human contribution to knowledge and thus the role of the self in not only perceiving but also constituting the true.”³¹⁸ However, Hegel renders a more radical opinion of self-knowledge, arguing that it is a contextualized, historically and culturally embedded self that mediates and constitutes knowledge.³¹⁹ Therefore, for Hegel and Kant, self-knowledge is a prerequisite for knowledge. However, for Foucault, selves are constructed through discursive practices, which suggests self-

³¹¹ Ibid., 157.

³¹² Mohanty, “The epistemic status of cultural identity,”72.

³¹³ Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible identities: Race, gender, and the self*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

³¹⁴ Alcoff, “New epistemologies,” 159

³¹⁵ Ibid., 144-162.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 147.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 148.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 148.

³¹⁹ Ibid.,148.

knowledge is elusive and a pursuit of self-knowledge is historically and culturally contingent. Thus, not only is the individual knowledge context-based, but also those very contexts are determined by power/knowledge relations.³²⁰ Critiquing Foucault's idea of self-knowledge, and drawing on the experiences surrounding women's movements, slaves' narratives, Alcoff³²¹ argues that self-knowledge does play an autonomous epistemic role in achieving knowledge and it is not overall socially constructed but has a "reserve of autonomous experience."³²²

2.6 Group identity

Group as a determinant for identity has been rejected by Poststructuralists on the basis that it reifies human beings.³²³ Foucault also rejects the existence of group identity with a metaphysical and political justification, saying that "Group identities are in some cases at least, he suggests, false reifications of indeterminate experiences that work to coercively coordinate behaviour through hegemonic cultural discourses."³²⁴

One of the notions that my study problematizes is identity politics. Identity politics originally started with a constructive aim of categorizing people based on their identities for the purpose of demanding equal rights for oppressed/marginalized groups. However, this model of categorization got a lot of critique from different schools of thought. Among these critiques, the theoretical critics of identity politics argue that identities are product of social practices rather than natural arguments; they define identities as "ideological fictions" imposed from above in order "to control and divide populations."³²⁵ They also add that the "salience" of identity should be eliminated and not institutionalized, if we are after reaching more equality.³²⁶ Identity politics treats history as a grand narrative in which the voices of the minoritized people and their lived experience has been lost throughout history.

As minoritized peoples critique, revisit and rewrite dominant oppressive narratives through voicing their subjective lived experience, it is essential to have a realist perspective of experience here. As Alcoff and Mohanty argue, "the legitimacy of some subjective experiences is based on the objective location of people in

³²⁰ Ibid., 149.

³²¹ Ibid., 150.

³²² Ibid., 150.

³²³ Wendy Brown, "States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity." (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 153.

³²⁴ Ibid., 153.

³²⁵ Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty, "Reconsidering identity politics: An introduction." In *Identity politics reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3.

³²⁶ Ibid., 3.

a society; in many crucial instances, “experiences” are not unfathomable inner phenomena, but rather disguised explanations of social relations and they can be evaluated as such.”³²⁷ Moya also argues:

Identities are markers for history, social location, and positionality. They are always subject to an individual’s interpretation of their meaningfulness and salience in her or his own life. And thus, their political implications are not transparent or fixed. They are like theories as Mohanty has put it. They can be tested for their ability to reveal and explain aspects of our shared world and experiences. Thus identity claims cannot only be specious, narrow and incorrectly described, but they can also be plausibly formulated and accurate. ³²⁸

Alcoff, Mohanty and Moya have formed a realist perspective of identity which argues for social identities to be considered as “lenses through which we learn to view our world accurately.”³²⁹ Although it is true that social identities can be “mined in distorted ideologies”³³⁰ and influenced by local, global and glocal hegemonic macronarratives, they are not still fully impose on us by the society. We negotiate our social positions and understanding of the world through the positive identities that we create for ourselves.³³¹

The realist view of the identity and therefore the epistemic value of the experience has also been questioned by some critics. Rosaura Sanchez³³² expands the question of positionality of the experience which has been critiques by the critics. She explains that position and positionality might provide a partial view of life and the word in general and that could be argued as “an understanding grounded in the social spaces within which one is situated” and in the narratives by which one is limited. However, she maintains that would be a truth to every one’s life as we are all immersed in social and discursive positions. The epistemic value of experience has been questioned for its partiality but Sanchez questions this argument and asks “isn’t knowledge all partial?”³³³ Therefore, what we need is not an impartial, objective experience of the world, but “reflexivity” and “accurate awareness” that our knowledge of the world is partial due to the positions we take in life and the positionality that social and historical narratives and practices impose on us. We can, instead of throwing away lived experience as partial biased knowledge, have a critical view of the reality of our experiences. We can acknowledge that we might be right or wrong about the ways in which our social positions allow us to understand our surroundings ad at the same time, have a realist perspective “which allows for new epistemologies, critical alternative cognitive frameworks born out of incongruent lived experience”³³⁴ and start to believe in the relational character of identities.

³²⁷ Ibid., 5.

³²⁸ Alcoff and Mohanty “Reconsidering identity politics,” 6.

³²⁹ Ibid.,6.

³³⁰ Ibid.,6.

³³¹ Ibid.,6.

³³² Rosaura Sanchez, "On a critical realist theory of identity." In *Identity politics reconsidered*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 42-43.

³³³ Ibid., 43.

³³⁴ Ibid., 43.

In order to understand the relationship between identity and experience, we need to have a solid definition of experience here. Gadamer defines experience as follows:

[U]nits of experience are themselves units of meaning. [T]he notion of experience ... implies a contrast between life and mere concept. Experience has a definite immediacy which eludes every opinion about its meaning. Everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life.³³⁵

Dominick LaCapra³³⁶ also discusses the relation between identity and experience. According to LaCapra:

Identity should be neither idealized as always beneficent nor demonized and seen as a (if not the) source of the ills of the modern world. Nor should it be conflated with identification in the sense of total fusion with others wherein difference is obliterated and criticism is tantamount to betrayal but identity does involve modes of being with others that range from the actual to the imagined, virtual, sought after, normatively affirmed, or utopian.³³⁷

Identity formation for LaCapra is a complex process-oriented notion, which “does not exclude the importance of difference and differentiation with respect to experience.”³³⁸ LaCapra refers to experience as a multifaceted notion which includes “the experience of self, other or analyst (historian, critic, theorist) and object of study-an issue that is especially important in the study of the past or of other cultures and that may be obscured when the subject and object of research are presumed to be identical.”³³⁹

LaCapra notes that “experience” as a concept has never been defined and it has always been taken for granted that people know what experience means.³⁴⁰ He refers to experience as a “black box” or an “extremely loose and encompassing concept” which seems to function as a residual concept:

(Experience) is what remains or left over when meaning and language do not exhaust their objects. Experience as undefined residue might be argued to hold a position analogous to that of divinity or the sacred in negative theology, to wit, “something” that may only be defined by what it is not.³⁴¹

There is a variety of definitions for the concept of experience which LaCapra addresses in his article. Experience could be defined according to Satya Mohanty as what “refers very simply to the variety of ways

³³⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Truth and method (J. Weinsheimer & DG Marshall, trans.)" (New York: Continuum 1989), 59-61.

³³⁶ Dominick LaCapra, "Experience and identity." In *Identity politics reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 228-245.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

³⁴⁰ There is a body of phenomenological literature surrounding definitions of experience. For instance, Husserl defines it as “the power that guarantees the existence of the world.” See, Husserl, *Hua*. 16, 290. As Keller interprets him, Husserl recognizes a “perpetual level of experience that is independent of one’s cultural background.” (46) Heidegger also associates knowledge claims with human everyday experience. Pierre Keller, *Husserl and Heidegger on human experience*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Martin Heidegger, *Being and time: A translation of Sein und Zeit* (New York: SUNY press, 1996).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

humans process information.”³⁴² It could be “what has been experienced; the events that have taken place within the knowledge of an individual, a community, mankind at large, either during a particular period or generally.”³⁴³ It has also been defined as “knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone.”³⁴⁴ LaCapra emphasizes on the concept of “undergoing”; according to him, “undergoing something characterizes someone having the experience, those (perhaps unconsciously) identifying with (even being haunted or possessed by) him or her, in distinguishable ways, those empathizing with him or her while recognizing and respecting alterity and even resisting identification.”³⁴⁵ He believes that “the process of undergoing or “going through” is crucial for an acceptable definition of experience.³⁴⁶

One of the forms of lived experience which has been addressed by LaCapra is Trauma. Trauma can cause “radical disorientation, confusion, fixation on the past and out of context experiences³⁴⁷. I address Trauma in my critical framework as some of the life-writings that I study in this research are narratives of incarceration, rape, war and human loss. These extreme experiences, whether earned or unearned, can turn into founding traumas, as LaCapra suggests, and they would form foundations for personal and collective life. He mentions slavery and holocaust as examples of founding traumas for group identities³⁴⁸ and expands on the political aspect of founding traumas which is the ways in which oppressed groups of people reclaim a history and turn that very history into a more “enabling basis of life in the present.”³⁴⁹

2.7 Epistemic credibility of experience

Linda Martin Alcoff and some other feminist epistemologists such as Loraine Code and Lynn Hankinson have argued for the importance of testimonial knowledge in relation to social identity and whether social identity is relevant to the epistemic credibility of testimonial knowledge.³⁵⁰ For her, social identity is those “social markers of identity” that cultures employ, namely, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class and religion.³⁵¹ Alcoff argues:

[testimonial] knowledge raises different sorts of epistemological questions than direct perceptions, questions not about perceptual reliability or perceptual memory but about trust and the basis of interpersonal judgment, credibility and epistemic reliability. We cannot often directly assess the processes by which the other on whom

³⁴² Mohanty, *Literary theory and the claims of history*, 205.

³⁴³ La Capra, “Experience and identity,” 231.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁵⁰ Alcoff, “On judging epistemic credibility,” 53-80.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

we are relying has obtained their knowledge. We cannot know with certainty how they obtained their knowledge nor do we necessarily have the expertise to know what a reliable procedure would be for obtaining certain kind of knowledge. Therefore, we must assess the other person in a more general way before we can afford them an authority in any epistemic matters. Thus, knowledge based on the testimony of others requires assessing the epistemic reliability of those offering the testimony.³⁵²

One of the questions that is raised by Alcoff and other post-positivists is whether social identity is a legitimate feature to take into account when assessing epistemic credibility.³⁵³ Alcoff argues that social identity markers such as race and sex are not under ones control and therefore cannot make any reference to a person's agency or subjectivity, unless to their status as adults.³⁵⁴ She also maintains that categorizing people based on their social identity and, putting people in ethnic and racial categories and assessing their claims of epistemic credibility based on those categories is a feature of discrimination, as we are assuming that people with 'similar' background, race, gender, ethnicity etc., have similar experience as well. Therefore, identity politics for Alcoff, could function as a continuation of oppression and not as amelioration.³⁵⁵

On that note, Satya Mohanty states that "social locations facilitate or inhibit knowledge by predisposing us to register and interpret information in certain ways. Our relation to social power produces forms of blindness just as it enables degrees of lucidity." this statement has been interpreted by Alcoff as follows:

Identity does not determine ones interpretation of facts, nor does it constitute fully formed perspectives, but it yields more than mere questions... identities operate as horizons from which certain aspects or layers of reality can be made visible. In stratified societies, differently identified individuals do not always have the same access to points of view or perpetual planes of observation. Two individuals may participate in the same event, but they may have access to different aspects of that event. Social identity operates then as a rough and fallible but useful indicator of differences in perpetual access³⁵⁶.

Therefore, identities benefit from a complex process to be formed, in a way that they are mediated by an individual's agency, and they are not just experienced or perceived. Identity as Alcoff maintains, is "not merely given to an individual or a group, but is also a way of inhabiting, interpreting, and working through, both collectively and individually."³⁵⁷ Through a hermeneutic account, Alcoff defines identities as constituted by "a horizon of foreknowledges within which experience is made meaningful ad from which we perceive the world and act within it. Identities are thus not supposed to but incorporate individual agency.³⁵⁸

Taking into account all the discussions above, we understand that social identities are relevant to a point and they do embrace epistemic credibility; however, reducing identities to categories and groups would

³⁵² Ibid., 56

³⁵³ Ibid., 60

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 60

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 61

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 69

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 62.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

be as much dangerous as not taking social identities into account. Alcoff's interpretation of identities as horizons that bear knowledge would provide an efficient critique of identity politics and a good defense for the epistemic credibility of lived experience. Identities need to be seen as a process, not as fixed positions. As LaCapra points out, "identity formation is a matter of recognizing and coming to terms with one's subject positions, coordinating them, examining their compatibility or incompatibility, testing them, and either validating them by a process of reproduction and renewal or transforming them through questioning and related work on the self and in society."³⁵⁹

In the discussions of experience from a post-positivist perspective, Shari Stone-Mediatore's voice is prominent. In her discussions on "revaluing of experience,"³⁶⁰ she critiques Sandra Harding and Joan Scott's ideas surrounding the notion of experience and its relevance to historiography. Harding's statement "Our experience lies to us" suggests both the individual's experience of the world and the theorist's analysis of that individual's experience within a social group are ideologically, historically and socially constructed.³⁶¹ Scott also argues that this is only through discursive practices that individuals perceive difference and they reach a certain level of awareness with regards to their identity, interests, desires, and existence. For Scott, as Mediatore announces, there is "no experience outside the discourses that delineate identities, naturalize desire, [and] divide the personal from the political."³⁶² Thus, basically, even if the subjects are self-aware, identifiable and knowable objects, they have been constructed into those qualities through all those discourses and practices. Resultantly, Scott believes that "experienced-based epistemologies" have constrained historiography.³⁶³ As Mediatore reads her statement, Scott assumed that historians and historiographers who were after documenting the experiences of the marginal groups and underrepresented voices, have treated experience as a "foundational concept" and have failed to question the epistemic status of experience.³⁶⁴

Having discussed Scott's and Harding's critique of experience, Mediatore suggests a new approach for reading experience (memoirs in this context) and that is using Chandra Mohanty's concept of experience. As she argues, "we need a different concept of experience, one that does not treat experience as indubitable evidence but nevertheless recognizes experience to be a resource for critical reflection."³⁶⁵

Chandra Mohanty—like Satya Mohanty, Linda Martin Alcoff, Paula Moya and Shari Stone-Mediatore—is against homogenizing notions of identity and the positivist/essentialist attitudes towards

³⁵⁹ LaCapra, "Experience and Identity," 238.

³⁶⁰ Shari Stone-Mediatore, "Chandra Mohanty and the revaluing of "experience."" *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 116-133.

³⁶¹ Harding, *Whose science?*, 287.

³⁶² Stone-Mediatore, "Chandra Mohanty and the revaluing of "experience," 118.

³⁶³ This should be problematized, since post-structuralism is very critical of historiography as a grand narrative.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

experience. These critics, who I may call post-positivist/realist circle from now on, recognize the importance of the stories of experience and dismiss the “epistemological incorrectness” that has been assigned to experience by poststructuralists and positivists. Chandra Mohanty and other post-positivists) do not consider discourse analysis as the only approach applicable to reading narratives of experience. Instead, she focuses on those testimonies, life writings and microhistory accounts as subversive narratives that can contribute to the dominant macronarratives. Mohanty believes that underrepresented social subjects gain empowerments through the process of knowledge production, namely, writing testimonies and story-telling and those very social identities and their stories need to be studied in the context of both local and global discourses.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, Mohanty reflects that daily lived experience is not only shaped by grandnarratives and hegemonic discourses, but it does include multiple forms of resistance to those very hegemonic discourses. As a result, lived experience narratives or microhistory narratives in other words, can be narratives revisiting, rewriting, reinterpreting and critiquing history and the hegemonic narrative forming those histories. Mediatore, in addressing the concept of experience in Mohanty’s scholarship, asserts:

Critical knowledge and political consciousness do not follow automatically from living in a marginalized social location; they develop only with the struggle against oppression, when this struggle includes the work of remembering and renarrating obscured experiences of resistance to, or tension with, social and cultural norms. Such experiences are not transparent or prior to language, for they contain contradictions and take shape in reaction to culturally given images and stories. Therefore, the narration of such experience is no mere reporting of spontaneous consciousness. On the contrary, it involves rethinking and rearticulating obscured often painful memories, and forging connections between those memories and collective struggle. Mohanty’s insight is that this arduous and creative process of remembering, reprocessing, and reinterpreting lived experience in a collective context—and not the mere “substitution” of one interpretation for another—transforms experience, enabling one to claim subjecthood and to identify with oppositional struggles.³⁶⁷

In the discussions of subjecthood, the notion of agency is a hallmark issue for Mohanty and Mediatore in the context of marginal experience narratives. Mohanty considers the experience narratives as important means for marginalized people, especially Third World women to express their political and epistemic agency. Political agency, according to her, is not only a product of the political struggles of an autonomous self, but can be achieved through solidarities and alliances across class, race and national boundaries and in the context of discursive colonization, which is not always political and could also be cultural.³⁶⁸

Taking these discussions into account, Mediatore proposes a Mohanty-inspired notion of experience: “the experience that facilitates oppositional discourses consists of tensions between experience and language, tensions that are endured subjectively as contradictions within experience—contradictions between

³⁶⁶ Stone-Mediatore, “Chandra Mohanty and the revaluing of “experience,” 116-133.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁶⁸ The notion of cultural colonization is one of the key concepts that I approach in my decolonial feminist epistemology framework, arguing that although we might assume that, according to many critics Iran has not been politically colonized, the nation have experienced cultural colonization for decades. Also, the question of political colonization could also be challenged based on the very recent CIA reports about the 1953 coup which overthrew Mosaddegh’s democratic government and intensified the oppressions of the monarchy regime over people at the time.

ideologically constituted perceptions of the world and reactions to these images endured on multiple psychological and bodily levels.”³⁶⁹ Therefore, reading experience becomes a task that requires epistemic and moral responsibility. As Mohanty maintains, “the point is not just ‘to record’ one’s history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant.”³⁷⁰ A responsible reading of experience according to Mediatore³⁷¹ is one that does not reduce the stories of experience to empirical evidence or to mere rhetorical constructions; however, one must attempt to fruitfully use these narratives to spot the contradictions in one’s own experience and narrations of it. A realist theory of identity, as Paula Moya explains,³⁷² treats identities as:

[politically and epistemically significant because they can trace the links between individuals and groups and the central organizing principles of a society. Consequently, theorizing the process of identity formation can reveal the complicated workings of ideology and oppression....The most basic claim of the postpositivist realist theory of identity is that identities are both *constructed* and *real*: identities are constructed because they are based on interpreted experience and on theories that explain the social and natural world, but they are also real because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world. Identities are thus context-specific ideological constructs, even though they may refer in non-arbitrary ways to verifiable aspects of the world such as skin color, physiognomy, anatomical sex, and socioeconomic status.]

Moya points out the epistemological confusions in postmodernism which miss out on the interconnections and relations between location, identity, experience and constructions of knowledge. Unlike Chela Sandoval,³⁷³ a postmodernist Chicana feminist, Moya does not agree that all truth claims are “complicit with oppressive authoritarianisms” because she believes that a realist theory of identity can allow us to see, verify and revise those truth claims. Moya considers this statement a denial of knowledge and believes that considering “the drive for truth” as always being a quest for “a brand of domination”³⁷⁴ as an epistemic violence as this reduction of experience to an oppressive inclination takes away the epistemic value of experience and the truth value that exists in it. This critique is in line with my critique of the postcolonial scholarship on narratives of lived experience and the ways in which politics of publication and the neoliberal capitalism of the West has been represented as the pivotal reason for memoir publications. The realist theory gives me the opportunity to be critical of both the traditionalist epistemologists’ view of lived experience as the only source of knowledge and the postmodernists who question the truth value of experience and postcolonialists who give so much credit to the hegemonic discourses and consider narratives of experience as serving the politics of dominant imperial narratives. The Realist theory that I use in the study of lived experience narratives emphasizes that our politics cannot be read through our experience, because we interpret our experiences differently.³⁷⁵

³⁶⁹ Stone-Mediatore, “Chandra Mohanty and the revaluing of “experience,” 128.

³⁷⁰ Mohanty et al, “Cartographies of Struggle,” 25-26.

³⁷¹ Stone-Mediatore, “Chandra Mohanty and the revaluing of “experience,” 131.

³⁷² Paula ML Moya, *Learning from experience: Minority identities, multicultural struggles*. (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2002), 86.

³⁷³ Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 2000).

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷⁵ Take Holocaust and Zionism as an example.

Alcoff's concept of "hermeneutic horizon" is very useful when we approach identities and experience.³⁷⁶ As she argues, our experience is part of our hermeneutic horizon that we carry with ourselves and we use it to interpret our new experiences. Part of that experience is related to our group identity (race, ethnicity, gay/lesbian, etc), part of it is related to our social location (class for instance) and part of it is embodied (color, disability etc.). We cannot study identities using only hermeneutics; we need phenomenology to bring the body into discussion, because our visibility/invisibility and physical manifestations are crucial in shaping our experience. I will elaborate more on the phenomenological approach to identities in the following section.

2.8 Transnational identity and the concepts of *la facultad* and multiplicitous self:

In this section, I would like to use Latina feminist phenomenology and theories of Gloria Anzaldua, Mariana Ortega, Paula Moya and Cherrie Moraga to discuss transnational identity and multiplicitous selves.³⁷⁷ Gloria Anzaldua in her celebrated book *Borderlands: la frontera* explores her in-between identity, experience of living on the border of Mexico and the United States and her relation to the history of both lands. Her discussion of multiplicity of selves is a kind of corrective to Western phenomenological philosophy. Her ideas surrounding multiple identities have been used by postmodern theorists of identity such as Deleuze and Guattari in their discussions of Nomadic identities.³⁷⁸ Postmodernists³⁷⁹ generally believe that capitalist modernity has fragmented identities, nationalities, ethnicities and experiences in general and this is why Anzaldua's mestiza identity is advocated by these theorists.

Following up these theorists, Mariana Ortega uses Anzaldua's idea of the mestiza's multiplicity of the selves and "la facultad" to make an argument about multiplicitous selves. The question of multiplicity is significant when we are addressing cultural identity, transnational identities and mixed identities because our lived experience is the result of the intertwining of the world and the self, and our relations to both.³⁸⁰ Unlike Heidegger who believes that a self "must be conceived in terms of *being-in-the-world* rather than in terms of being an epistemic substance" Ortega believes that a conscious human being is plural, and between the worlds

³⁷⁶ Alcoff, *Visible identities*, 9.

³⁷⁷ Term coined by Mariana Ortega in Mariana Ortega, *In-Between: Latina feminist phenomenology, multiplicity, and the self*. (NY: SUNY Press, 2016).

³⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988).

³⁷⁹ However, this critique of capitalist modernity turned into a universal lens for looking at identities, and therefore, led to pathologization of identities and creation of conditions such as borderline personality syndrome. Unlike Latina phenomenologists who celebrate the multiplicity of selves in transnational, biracial and mestiza identities, Western phenomenology considers it as a condition that needs to be treated as it creates anxieties and loss of a sense of morality. The Eurocentric philosophy is still affected by Western ideas of having a unified self and is against a decentered, fragmented self. Mestiza identity is significant to this thesis because it refers to identities that include multiple selves, including the conqueror and the conquered. This will come up in the discussions of biracial identities in *Orange Trees of Baghdad*.

³⁸⁰ I guess there is still something between the world and the self that makes that relationality work. I cannot name it and am aware that more research needs to be done in this regard but I do know that it is not a center like in traditionalist epistemology and it is not a de-centered identity like in poststructuralism. It could be a de-centered center that shifts position among our multiple selves.

(multiplicitous selves in multiple worlds).³⁸¹ The multiplicitous selves that she introduces in her work are not limited to transnational subjects only. As she argues:

While the account of multiplicitous selfhood offered here is to be understood as a general account of self—that is, all of us are multiplicitous selves—this work pays particular attention to those multiplicitous selves whose experience is marked by oppression and marginalization due to their social identities, those selves that have not figured prominently in the pages of philosophical discourses. Even though all of us are multiplicitous, some multiplicitous selves—those who are multicultural, queer, border dwellers, and whom Anzaldúa names *los atravesados*—experience more of what she describes as “psychic restlessness” and “intimate terrorism” due to their marginalization and oppression.³⁸²

The “intimate terrorism” that Ortega mentions is a term Anzaldúa brings forth in her argument surrounding the new mestiza consciousness. It is “the violence and fear of the life of in-betweenness”³⁸³ The experience of seeing and being in multiple worlds is not an easy experience for the transnational/border crosser subject. Maria Lugones calls the same experience “world travelling,” and she believes the world traveller’s self has a hermeneutic dimension, since this self that travels worlds is constantly interpreting and reinterpreting these worlds that she occupies and is continuously resisting against the dominant logic pervasive in these worlds.³⁸⁴

The transnational subject or the new mestiza as Anzaldúa calls her, grows an intuition through world travelling that she names “*la facultad*.” As Ortega explains:

La facultad is the unconscious sense of what is helpful or hurtful in the environment, of what is behind everyday phenomena. According to Anzaldúa, it is an ability that is honed by marginalized selves given the continuous experience of fear, danger, and what she calls tears in the fabric of the everyday mode of consciousness that threaten one’s freedom and resistance (Anzaldúa 1987, 39). A life of fear and danger at the borderlands, then, gives rise to a “sixth sense,” the survival practice of *la facultad* (Anzaldúa 1987, 39). Paradoxically, while a life at the borderlands can give rise to this unconscious capacity, it can also lead to a more reflective everyday existence due to these everyday tears or ruptures of norms and practices. One of the main sources of anguish for the new *mestiza* is precisely that, unlike Heidegger’s *Dasein*, she does not have a nonreflective, nonthematic sense of all the norms and practices of the spaces or worlds she inhabits. Thus, she does not always navigate her daily existence primarily in terms of know-how, as we have seen that Heidegger claims *Dasein* does. While she might indeed have a sense of norms from one culture, she may not have a sense of the norms across borders, thus having a very different experience than that described by phenomenologists such as Heidegger.³⁸⁵

The multiplicitous selves described above constantly experience “not being-at-ease” or witnessing “tears in the fabric of everyday experience” while engaging in practices that are non-reflective or “ready to hand”³⁸⁶ for the dominant group.³⁸⁷ These selves are at a constant process of negotiating their multiple selves

³⁸¹ Ortega, *In-Between*, 51.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁸⁶ A term by Heidegger. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and time: A translation of Sein und Zeit* (New York: SUNY press, 1996).

³⁸⁷ Ortega., *In-Between*, 61.

to build up new agencies in multiple worlds. In the context of my study, it is important to see how these negotiations of selves or “tactical strategies” works and what kinds of privileges transnational women should give up or achieve in order to achieve the agency of a writer, speaker, or narrator of the group identity experience.³⁸⁸ It should also be mentioned that not all transnational subjects experience the same not-being-at-ease moments because their experiences are hugely affected by relations of power and narratives which shape “the construction, understanding, and regulation of our various social identities.”³⁸⁹ The more marginalized and oppressed social identities are, the more they experience the intimate terrorism. A good example to elaborate on this claim is the difference between the discomforts that an asylum-seeking woman feels at the JFK immigration office and those experienced by an academic woman with an academic visitor visa in the very same office. These two cases, coming from different social locations (even if they share racial, religious, gender identity, sexual orientation and, etc.) they would definitely experience border very differently.

The experience of border crossing, feeling ill at ease and growing a sense of adaptiveness can be productive for the mestiza or the transnational subject. As Anzaldúa states:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.³⁹⁰

The adaptiveness that Anzaldúa is concerned about is interpreted differently by Latina phenomenologist feminists. Theorists such as Anzaldúa, Lugones, Ortega and Moya share the same view about the multiplicitous selfhood and characterize that by multiplicity, plurality, ambiguity and contradiction. However, they have disagreements about the temporality that affects the process of identification. Paula Moya argues that overcoming fragmentation and the multiplicity of the selves is a victory for women of color.³⁹¹ Ortega reads Moya’s argument as a temporal desire for a truer identity and considers it as an essentialist perspective:

From a perspective that takes into consideration the temporality of the multiplicitous self, my main point here is that a traditional linear model of temporality as a sequence of “nows” does not do justice to these selves that occupy multiple social locations and that understand themselves by way of various identity markers...The temporality at work in multiplicitous selves is one in which the past, present, and future are interrelated in the sense that Heideggerian existential phenomenology describes. Thus, rather than thinking of multiplicitous selves as understanding themselves as going from one identity to the other—to the truer, more accurate identity as Moya desires—and thus following the account of a “now” that becomes a past and is taken over by another

³⁸⁸ Lugones refers to “tactical strategies” that a subject performs when involved in “street-walking theorizing” to resist and disrupt multiple forms of oppressions and marginalizations. María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/peregrinajes: Theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

³⁸⁹ Ortega, *In-Between*, 71.

³⁹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: la frontera*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 79.

³⁹¹ Moya, *Learning from experience*, 95.

“now,” multiplicitous selves have multiple social locations that inform their self-understanding in various ways. Just as an existential phenomenological account of temporality takes all the moments of time—past, present, future—as intertwined or interrelated in our experiences, the multiplicitous self that inhabits multiple positions might be aware of all or some of her different social identities at any given time. As noted, this self is decentred, and different social identities or characteristics are highlighted at different times. While she might in some instances regard one of those identities or characteristics as more salient, this is not always the case. It is not necessarily the case either that she is better off moving toward what Moya describes as a truer identity.³⁹²

She argues that the multiplicitous self should be celebrated as it is, and the fragmentation and multiplicity makes her world travelling and relations easier. When a transnational subject moves worlds, it is not just moving to another world and assimilating, but she is moving into another set of relations and the new world might not have a space for her to be in and experience relationality. Ortega has two problems with Moya’s work: One is that she thinks Moya uses temporality and a forward going approach to a truer identity and second is that she thinks Moya does not see the advantages of having multiplicitous selves and only focuses on negative aspects such as alienation and scatteredness.

Ortega believes that the multiplicitous self is decentred, it is not always volitional and sometimes it is produced by anxieties (forced migrations for instance). What makes a transnational subject a good world traveller (as we can travel without world travelling, for instance, we can go to Caribbean and still go to MacDonald’s for dinner) is having developed both receptivity/adaptiveness and also critical thinking.

2.9 Assimilation and hometactics

Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that has not only produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.
Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*

“No way. You will not make Australia Home” The commander of Operation Sovereign Borders, Angus Campbell

The multiplicitous self that Anzaldúa’s new mestiza has developed makes her capable of questioning the definitions of not only light and dark but also home. ‘Home’ and ‘belonging’ question is almost every new immigrant’s daily preoccupation. In the United States, home as “felt knowledge”³⁹³ was epitomized in Ellis Island as an “Isle of Hope”³⁹⁴ while also referred to as “Isle of Tears” for those who were never able to make America home. Australia’s border protection control policies warn immigrants of certain backgrounds (mostly of Mulsim background of course) that they will not make Australia “home” and the ‘No Way’ logo can be found in most Australian embassy websites as a welcoming start to immigration applications. Ali Behdad very aptly begins his book *A Forgetful Nation* with the image of Ellis Island Museum of Immigration and its

³⁹² Ortega, *In-Between*, 180-182

³⁹³ Million, "Felt theory," 53-76.

³⁹⁴ Behdad, *forgetful nation*, 2

“monolithic and patriotic narrative of immigrant heritage [...which] eclipses both the violent history that characterizes the peopling of America and the actualities of the nation’s immigration policies.”³⁹⁵ “Historical amnesia towards immigration” Behdad argues, has been essential for the construction of the myth of America as a “nation”³⁹⁶ because it does obscure reasons such as the “political economy of immigration” and “xenophobia.”³⁹⁷ The myth of America as a hospitable and xenophilic nation benefits from immigrants and their contribution to “the political project of national identity.” Behdad maintains:

Immigrants are useful to the political project of national identity, through an exclusionary logic that defines them as differential others and also through inclusive means of identification that recuperate them as figures of cultural conformism, exceptionalism, and regeneration. Assimilation as a more subtle denial of difference has been integral to how the United States has imagined itself as an immigrant nation. Since the founding, the notion of cultural and political assimilation has always accompanied the myth of immigrant America, as newcomers have been “domesticated” and forced to lose their old national “skins” to become American citizens.³⁹⁸

Assimilation then, has been defined as losing one’s old skin and growing a new one which accords with the new location. Phenomenological Feminists of color, such as Edwina Barvosa, Mariana Ortega and Paula Moya, to name a few, have questioned the concept of assimilation in relation to belonging. For instance, Barvosa argues that cultural assimilation “is not necessary to foster and maintain national identity³⁹⁹ and political cohesion” and instead “[a] maintenance of robust immigrant ethnic identities foster[s] stronger and more productive immigrant identification with the United States and its major political and social institutions.”⁴⁰⁰ Rather than considering “biculturalism” as an asset, Anglo American philosophy considers it as a “contradiction” and therefore detrimental to the unity of the self and agency.⁴⁰¹ Following Anzaldúa, Barvosa argues that the contradictions among multiple selves and identities makes them more capable of critical thinking and creative thoughts and therefore, assimilation in the conservative sense of the word (as what Huntington puts forward)⁴⁰² is not necessary.⁴⁰³ Ethnic migrant identities are capable of developing American ethnic national identities while they still hold their heritage identity; therefore, assimilation in the sense of giving up all the previous ethnic identity is not necessary.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 10.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 12.

³⁹⁹ Barvosa states that national identity is “defined in terms of knowledge and a commitment to the political principles and laws that define the nation’s political system of governance.”

Edwina Barvosa, *Wealth of selves: multiple identities, mestiza consciousness, and the subject of politics*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 31

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 33, 81.

⁴⁰² He considers that immigrants’ multiple identities are detrimental to the American democracy. Cited in Barvosa, *Wealth of Selves*, 18.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 18.

This is one of the main arguments of Dina Nayeri in her *Refuge*, where she questions Western liberal values that emphasize equality and freedom but practically exclude ethnic identities who are not willing to negotiate all of their ethnic background.

Like Barvosa, Mariana Ortega also questions a politics of location “that merely assumes individual subjects as already belonging to a location” because that version of belonging “is quickly interpreted by way of specific identity markers.”⁴⁰⁵ Ortega argues that there are “complex ways in which an individual is said to belong to a social location” and if belonging is interpreted based on certain identity markers, there is the danger that that location is “home” to some identities and a “barred room” for those who do not “belong.”⁴⁰⁶ Belonging then, cannot be interpreted based on identity markers such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc., but it should take into account the complexity of the selves we bear in us. As she puts it:

Given the complexity of the selves as well as the complexity of spaces of belonging (in terms of their members as well as criteria for membership), there is no sense in which one can be said to *fully* belong. There are only different senses of belonging depending on which markers of identity are chosen. Full membership and belonging—the safe, comfortable home—is indeed an imaginary space in need of demystification.⁴⁰⁷

For border crossing multiplicitous selves, a definite place of belonging is an illusion because belonging is not about home anymore but “homes.”⁴⁰⁸ A sense of full belonging is almost a myth for such identities because homemaking for them is a process that does not take place in one location only but multiple locations and whereto they travel. However, the myth of belonging cannot be fully ignored as it is very powerful. Ortega argues:

It cannot be denied that even for those multiplicitous selves who are border-crossers and world-travellers, the home question is still a question. Perhaps it is even a more painful question precisely because that home seems harder to find or cannot be found given one’s multiplicity. Yet, despite the determination of this will to belong that might provide a feeling of security and comfort, we cannot avoid recognizing the limits and pitfalls of such security, namely, the reification of certain identity categories as opposed to others and thus the expulsion of those who do not fit a version of authentic belonging.⁴⁰⁹

To come over these feelings of loss and lack of belonging, multiplicitous selves develop “hometactics.” Hometactics for Ortega are “practices that we develop as we travel our various worlds and that we can later repeat or maintain.”⁴¹⁰ These practices are strategies of survival, feeling more at ease, of homemaking and making new locations share memories with our previous homes. These practices could be as simple as making the dishes our grandmothers used to make for us when we were kids or using tablecloths and curtains we have brought with us from previous homes because color and light actually do matter in our feelings of belonging to a space.⁴¹¹ In short, as Ortega clearly states, “the aim of hometactics can be understood as the production of a sense of familiarity

⁴⁰⁵ Ortega, *In-Between*, 195.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴¹¹ When I interviewed Sepideh Farsi, an exilic Iranian film-maker based in France, she told me that she prefers Athens as a location for her film settings because the light is very similar to the light of Tehran and it does affect the story line. Hometactics is not only practiced for residence aspects of homemaking but also for creative art, because creativity is also affectively inspired by a sense of belonging to a space.

in the midst of an environment or world in which one cannot fully belong due to one's multiple positions and instances of thin and thick not being-at-ease."⁴¹²

Assimilation and the practices towards achieving it, as argued by Ofelia Schutte and some other Latina feminist phenomenologists, should be respectful of the diversity of ethnic group identities and the cultural, historical and linguistic values that they contribute to multiculturalism, otherwise, a violation of group identity rights is at stake. Her debate surrounding group rights comes from a "conception guided by the principles of a culturally pluralist, democratic society. Such a conception recognizes that to deprive human beings of favorable conditions by which they can be recognized for their specific linguistic and historical-cultural achievements and contributions is to inflict a degree of violence on them"⁴¹³ Paula Moya also argues that assimilation, as a "predetermined norm" can be "epistemically and morally detrimental."⁴¹⁴ Embracing Satya Mohanty's realist conception of multiculturalism as "epistemic cooperation,"⁴¹⁵ Moya argues that "cultural diversity is a valuable characteristic of an ideal society—for epistemic, not merely sentimental, reasons."⁴¹⁶ Therefore, assimilation in the conventional sense of giving up previous identities, would be an epistemic violence on group identities who are developing new senses of belonging through hometactics.⁴¹⁷

2.10 Intersectionality and decolonial feminist epistemology

Studying the writings of women of color requires a kind of framework that could do justice to the uniqueness of their experience of different axes of oppression. Intersectionality, assemblage theory and inclusive feminism could provide that kind of framework required. Intersectionality, theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw⁴¹⁸ is "a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color."⁴¹⁹ Intersectionality was the beginning of Black feminism intervening into feminist liberatory movements whereby the intersections of gender and race were emphasized, not only to disrupt whiteness but also the colored masculinist and patriarchal frames. Feminists like Sirma Bilge, Jasbir Puar, Ann Garry, Patricia

⁴¹² Ortega, *In-Between*, 203.

⁴¹³ Ofelia Schutte, "Negotiating Latina Identities." In *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Pablo De Greiff, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 61–75.

⁴¹⁴ Moya, *Learning from experience*, 201.

⁴¹⁵ Mohanty, *Literary theory*, 240.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴¹⁷ Ghassan Hage in his book *White Nation* discusses the different ways people experience multiculturalism in Australia. According to him, migrants are more exposed to the "social equity" aspects of multiculturalism, whereas White people are more concerned about the "cultural, identity politics" aspects. Multiculturalism for white people could vary from seeing "more Asian faces in the streets" or "more diversity in the restaurants" and food culture. Hage believes that multiculturalism is "merely a different way of reinforcing white power."

Hage, Ghassan. *White nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. (London: Routledge, 2012), 18-20.

⁴¹⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics." *U. Chi. Legal F.* (1989): 139.

⁴¹⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *The public nature of private violence* (1994): Stanford Law Review, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul., 1991): 1296.

Hill Collins and many others have contributed so Crenshaw's intersectionality theory.⁴²⁰ I briefly refer to a few voices in this section.

The questions raised by Brah and Phoenix in their article reveal the significance of intersectionality as a framework in studies concerned with women of color, especially Muslim women of color post 9/11. They ask: "What kinds of subjects, subjectivities, and political identities are produced by this juncture when the fantasy of the veiled Muslim woman "in need of rescue", the rhetoric of the 'terrorist,' and the ubiquitous discourse of democracy becomes an alibi for constructing new global hegemonies?"⁴²¹ These questions are the main reason why I am embracing an intersectional framework in my study of transnational and migrant Iranian and Iraqi women writers published after 9/11. Intersectionality as a tool that gives us access to the epistemic value of the lived experience of women of color functions as a lens that not only does embrace the gendered aspect of lived experience, but also the racial, classed and ethnic dimensions of it. The other questions raised by Brah and Phoenix such as "What is the impact of these new modes of governmentality on the lives of differentially exploited, racialised, ethnicised, sexualised, and religionised humans living in different parts of the world?" or "What do these lived experiences say to us – living as we do in this space called the West – about our own positionalities, responsibilities, politics, and ethics?"⁴²² are the questions which I attempt to provide responses to with regards to my Iranian and Iraqi case studies.

According to Anne Garry, intersectionality as a framework has some benefits and limitations. One of the benefits is the way intersectionality focuses on different identities being impacted by a multiplicity of oppressions and privileges and it acknowledges the unacknowledged privileges such as the blessings of remaining ignorant about the marginalized people. Intersectionality does not provide a structural analysis of the identities and their complex experiences, (which makes it a less epistemically violent approach). It is not a theory of power and oppression, neither a theory of identity formation or agency. It does not abolish the identity categories, instead, makes those categories messy and fluid. It does not call for the same degree of intensity for each of the intersections. However, it has limitations that need reconsideration. Intersectionality cannot be exemplified as an intersection with single axes of oppression. Instead, it can be considered a roundabout with multiple axes of discrimination and oppression. Those who are subject to all kind of oppression might be blessed with some privileges too, which they can use to mitigate the degree and intensity of the oppression they have been subject to. Instead of cars, Garry uses mountains to expand on her model of intersectionality:

Once we have mountains we can replace vehicles with liquids to show the ways in which some oppressions or privileges seem to blend or fuse with others. Different liquids—milk, coffee, nail polish, olive oil, beet borscht, paint in several colors—run down from different places at different altitudes into roundabouts. Some of the

⁴²⁰ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*. (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2016).

⁴²¹ Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix. "Ain't I A woman? Revisiting intersectionality." *Journal of international women's studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 83.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 84.

liquids run together, some are marbled with others, and some stay more separate unless whipped together. For me, this image captures intersectionality better than many others, but it still cannot capture agency well.⁴²³

Garry also critiques Lugones's idea of gender and the multiplicity of gender in her version of intersectionality and argues, if the aim of intersectionality is to make women of color more visible, Lugones's logic of purity and the categories that she defines will not allow for differences. Garry suggests a family resemblance intersectionality which argues for one gender category (not multiple genders for women as Lugones had argued for a separate gender for black women and another for white women). However, within this one category, women maintain different gender roles, sexual orientations, race, class, (and I add religion here). She claims that oppressions are very often inseparable from people's lives and therefore, people's lived experience becomes very important. Using this one category of gender does not mean that she means to impose any homogeneity on this category. She asserts that her approach could work better than Lugones's because it is a more communicative framework and uses more everyday terms in theoretical and practical context.

Having discussed the realist post positivist accounts of identity and intersectionality theory, I would like to elaborate on decolonial feminist epistemology as a central theoretical approach that I use in my thesis. The reason why I use this approach is because not only does studying life writing as a genre need a decolonial methodology but also intersectional feminism. Decolonial theory identifies Eurocentric ideas in concepts, frameworks and practices of knowing and decolonial feminism identifies certain male models of interaction, concepts and methodologies, however, it is not only concerned about gender but is embracing of other intersectional axes of oppression such as race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, location and etc. Decolonial feminism is not about casting aside all Eurocentric concepts (such as gender categories) from feminist repertoire but it is concerned with contextualizing those concepts and ideas and acknowledging difference; in other words, it questions universality while encouraging pluriversality. Regarding gender categories and their colonial construct, Oyeronke Oyewumi, the Nigerian feminist explains:

I'm not suggesting that gender categories are necessarily limited to the West, particularly in the contemporary period. Rather, I am suggesting that discussions of social categories should be defined and grounded in the local milieu, rather than based on universal findings made in the West.⁴²⁴

The reason why I am concerned with a decolonial approach to gender categories in this research is the fact that the universal gender definitions have been very influential on the conditions of women living in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Iran (both historically and in the contemporary age) and those very definitions have affected women's agency and their identity baggage, the division of labour in their homelands and therefore, their migration. Decolonial feminist epistemology, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty also suggests,

⁴²³ Ann Garry, "Intersectionality, metaphors, and the multiplicity of gender." *Hyppatia* 26, no. 4 (2011): 833.

⁴²⁴ Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ. *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*, (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 1997), 16

identifies assumptions about the category of women and critiques methodologies that portray a common picture of women and undermine differences. It also critiques postmodernist feminism and its claims surrounding inherent problems of representation. As much as decolonial feminists appreciate postmodernism's addressing of power relations in epistemologies, they are critical of the decontextualized way that critique was performed and therefore led to "epistemic nihilism", "emphasis on fragmentation over macro analysis of power" and essentialist critiques of identity. Postmodernists reduced identity to a crisis of representation and they moved down methodologies from a metaphysical level to a linguistic one and finally concluded that the epistemic claims of knowledges cannot be improved and objectivity can never be achieved.

Decolonial feminist epistemology addresses coloniality of power in the realm of ideas, subjectivities and practices and resists the denial of coevalness.⁴²⁵ It is concerned with the "locus of enunciation", which means, instead of just thinking about "who" is speaking, it asks where and to whom it is being spoken and therefore, attempts to figure out the ways in which hierarchies can be subverted and transformed. The coloniality of power which decolonial philosophers such as Enrique Dussel⁴²⁶ and Anibal Quijano⁴²⁷ place at the center of their discussions is a way to situate in history and geography the very particular form of domination of the modern era. The coloniality of power affects decision making processes at a global level, extra national and communal levels and leads to displacements, forced migrations, reproduction, and at an epistemic level, it generates coloniality of knowledge and subjectivity, ways of knowing and being (onto-epistem-ology)⁴²⁸ and processes of meaning making.

Regarding decolonial studies of gender, Linda Martin Alcoff uses the Breivik case to discuss why deconstructing gender needs a decolonial analysis.⁴²⁹ Breivik is a Norwegian far-right terrorist who committed a mass murder in 2011, killing 77 Norwegians in an act of opposition against Islam and feminism which he blamed for "European cultural suicide."⁴³⁰ According to Alcoff, the Breivik case shows that feminism is targeted because it weakens masculinity and loosens borders to multicultural influences and migrations. Hence, Norwegian women's bodies should be controlled in order to maintain the ethnically exclusive borders of the country. This argument represents the fact that gender oppression cannot stand as a gender-alone kind of oppression but stands at the intersections of race, ethnicity, immigration, LGBTIQI justice, religion etc. and

⁴²⁵ Denial of coevalness is a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referents of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of the anthropological discourse. It is considered a methodological faux pas promoted by the hubris of Western coloniality and imperialist hegemony. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Denying the denial of coevalness is to believe that there is a multiplicity of modernities not just one and rather than temporalizing space, it suggests spatialization of time (where it is rather than when it is).

⁴²⁶ Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)." *boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 65-76.

⁴²⁷ Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

⁴²⁸ Paula L. Moya, *The social imperative: Race, close reading, and contemporary literary criticism*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), 30.

⁴²⁹ Linda Martín Alcoff, "Decolonizing Feminist Philosophy," forthcoming in Margaret A. McLaren, ed. *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield International: 2017).

⁴³⁰ <https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence/>

gender deconstruction needs a decolonial critique as so much of the deconstruction has been done through the universal lenses.

The concepts of freedom and agency as some of the key points in studies of gender need to be revalued and revisited through a decolonial perspective as well. As Alison Weir⁴³¹ argues in her “Identities and Freedom,” “freedom” as one of the central concepts that defines Western modernity needs a decolonial critique. Individual freedom as a right has been drawn from the binary of mastery/slavery in the Eurocentric perspective. However, the indigenous theories of freedom emphasize on the concept of relationality. This implies that one’s agency comes from a kind of freedom that is not just individual (only what that individual wants), but it comes from a kind of freedom in relation to other people’s freedom.⁴³² Therefore, the notions of agency, autonomy and freedom do not work within the binary frame of the oppressor/oppressed or the master/slave, but they are situated within a more relational frame. That speaks to the challenges that are addressed in life writings under study in this research and the ways in which notions of gender, race, ethnicity and religion are addressed in the transnational context.

As acknowledged earlier, I am not using the term “decolonization” in this thesis, but “decoloniality” and I borrowed this term from Nelson Maldonado-Torres and his "Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality", in which he distinguishes between the two terms (decolonization and decoloniality). Maldonado-Torres argues that Colonization and coloniality are two different things. He defines these conditions as follows:

Colonialism and decolonization are usually depicted as past realities or historical episodes that have been superseded by other kind of socio-political and economical regimes. In this way, colonialism and decolonization are locked in the past, located elsewhere, or confined to specific empirical dimensions [...] In contrast, coloniality and decoloniality refer to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization and decolonization. Because of the long-time and profound investment of what is usually referred to as Europe or Western civilization in processes of conquest and colonialism, this logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power is intrinsically tied to what is called “Western civilization” and “Western modernity.”⁴³³

I am using “decolonial”, not as a metaphor, but as a methodology to approach lived experience as a counter narrative to the coloniality of power and the universal concept of modernity and democracy, which has divided identities into “us” versus “them” and has affected the flow of capital and wealth distribution in the

⁴³¹ Alison Weir, "Identities and Freedom: Power, Love, and Other Dangers." *Philosophy Today* 61, no. 2 (2017): 423-438.

⁴³² This argument can be used for my analysis of the agency the transnational narrator develops after crossing borders back to the original homeland. Also, the notion of relational freedom can be used when critiquing the Western perspective of freedom. An example of this is the perceived idea of Muslim woman as ‘unfree’ even if she claims to be free. She is unfree because the definition of freedom in the West is different, so is it in the Islamic Sharia law and if a woman identifies as culturally Muslim but not practicing, it is hard to place her in any of those definitions.

⁴³³ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality." *Franz Foundation* (<http://franzfoundation.org>) Accessed 27 (2017). 10.

world. I am aware of the indigenous scholars' usage of the term decolonization and its accountability to "Indigenous sovereignty and futurity" and not to that of the "settlers."⁴³⁴ As Tuck and Yang argue,

Breaking the settler colonial triad, in direct terms, means repatriating land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolition of slavery in its contemporary forms, and the dismantling of the imperial metropole. Decolonization "here" is intimately connected to anti-imperialism elsewhere. However, decolonial struggles here/there are not parallel, not shared equally, nor do they bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved - particularly not for settlers. Decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable.⁴³⁵

Indeed, decolonization is incommensurable and this thesis has no intention to wipe out the significance of land to indigenous sovereignty. In fact, while this thesis is about people who have left their "lands" due to complex forms of intersectional oppression, it "does not" focus on "land" at all, due to the same concern (anxiety) surrounding the incommensurability of decolonization for indigenous populations. Yang and Tuck maintain that "describing all struggles against imperialism as 'decolonizing' creates a convenient ambiguity between decolonization and social justice work"⁴³⁶ and it is an "equivocation" when all people of color refer to "decolonization" as a goal, and it should be considered as a settler's "move towards innocence," when applied by non-indigenous identities.⁴³⁷ I do understand that argument, and the fact that not all forms of anti-imperial and anti-colonial moves can be counted as "decolonization." However, this is exactly the reason why I have not applied the term decolonization and instead used "decoloniality". I cannot use anti-colonial because that would have also been problematic, due to the pre-existing argument in the scholarship, based on which, Iran and Iraq have never been "properly" colonized. "Anti-coloniality" would have also been problematic as it would have wiped out the experiences of other identity groups, such as Indians, or South Africans, for instance and their struggles against colonization (in both senses of the term, expansionism and exclusion). My use of the term "decoloniality" is concerned with coloniality of power, as Mignolo calls it.

Regarding my critical framework, I had to adopt a mixed approach which is concerned with both decoloniality and intersectionality, to be able to address all the complex aspects of these border-crossing identities from "Iran" and "Iraq", in a post 9/11 context, invasion and occupation of their homeland, and severe sanctions. I embrace decoloniality as a methodology, because it accommodates my conceptual framework with the nuances that address the ontology of coloniality and power relations that affect the ways in which these identities exist, both within the borders of their homeland, and beyond. For instance, Persians

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁴³⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁴³⁶ Ibid 17

⁴³⁷ Ibid 17

“thinking” that they are “white” in the US cannot be addressed, if decoloniality is not embraced to address “hegemonic Western institutions and discourses that are themselves resulted by coloniality.”⁴³⁸

There is of course the need for a separate critical theory, to the one the indigenous scholars use to address decolonization and colonization complexities. However, that would require a massive research, to only address questions surrounding the nature of oppression, the sources of oppression, and the co-optations of oppression. An anti-imperial methodology would not be enough to address all these complexities, given the internal catalysts in Iran and Iraq causing people’s movements, mobilities and immobilities. An anti-fundamentalist religious approach would also be an epistemic violence, because it would essentialize these women’s experiences, question their agency and ignore the imperial and colonial discourses that have caused their displacement.

This thesis has no intention of comparing decolonial struggles of Indigenous peoples to the struggles of Muslim and non-Muslim Middle Eastern women. Despite the prolonged anxiety around having practiced any equivocations, or epistemic violence, this thesis would still embrace a decolonial approach. It would have not, if it were not written in a settler-colonial state and had not been inspired by indigenous resilience and struggles for sovereignty and the indigenous scholars’ research, paradigms and methodologies.

2.11 Methodology

In this research, I apply a mixed methodology of textual analysis, autoethnography and ethnography. Initially, I was planning on using the interviews for which I received ethics approval and consent from participants. However, in the final stretch of the work I realized that focusing on the politics of publication and the reception of the life writing narratives in the social context of the West is not my concern anymore. I decided that I preferred to look at these narratives as theories and applying an autoethnographical and at the same time a realist post positivist close reading of the texts, while maintaining an intersectional and decolonial lens would do more justice to these narratives. The transnational Iranian and Iraqi life narratives have been read intersectionally, taking into consideration the social location of the author as the person who has experienced these memories or has inherited them as post-memory. In my fieldwork, which was not limited to a few weeks in London but a three year observation of diaspora life in Australia as well, I observed the intricate ways in which migrants of first and second generation define, resist, or maintain their home identities. World-travelling as one of the main theories that I borrow from Mariana Ortega is what I witnessed in my observations of migrants. To understand hegemonic whiteness and racial Islamophobia in multicultural societies, Textual analysis of life narrative did not provide me with enough tools to understand the ways in which story-telling

⁴³⁸ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality." *Franz Foundation* (<http://franzfanonfoundation>) Accessed 27 (2017). 10

and story distribution work politically. Autoethnography has armed me with an understanding of why experience matters, and how what we claim as lived experience is understood by people who do not share our social location.

In the following chapters, I analyse the texts, adding my own interventions of an Iranian woman of color who is understood to be a transnational scholar, despite limited access to and mobility in the transnational sphere.

PART I

Chapter Three:

Epistemologies of Multiplicitous Selves in Iranian Life Writing Narratives: Beyond Schizophrenic Labels

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I carry out a phenomenology⁴³⁹ of multiplicitous selves and border crossing identities. I analyse the multiplicitous selves of life writing narrators as presented in their narratives. I will compare and contrast how intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, faith, generation, and geo/socio-political location of these narrators affect their experience of border crossing and their transnational identity. I argue for the ways in which the writer needs to be strategic, in order to be able to publish her life story. This chapter benefits from Mariana Ortega's theory of feminist phenomenology, world travelling as an epistemic privilege, and strategic playfulness. I will also dedicate a section to story-telling as a self-discovery strategy and the systemic co-optation of life writing as a popular genre in the West, and then I will refute the reduction of the genre into strategic essentialism, using the concepts of unknowability, epistemic violence, epistemic oppression, and epistemic smothering.⁴⁴⁰ As previously mentioned in my methodology, I approach life-writing from a decolonial and intersectional feminist perspective, because apart from the above-mentioned intersections, the history of colonization and the ongoing coloniality of power affect the formation and maintenance of transnational identities of Iraqi and Iranian migrants.

I discuss the concept of multiplicitous selves and epistemic privilege through feminist phenomenology and epistemology in six life-writing narratives of Iranian and Iraqi women writers. These narratives include: Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005), Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* (2017), Jasmine Darznik's *The Good Daughter* (2012), Haifa Zangana's *Dreaming of Baghdad* (2009) and *City of Widows: An Iraqi woman's Account of War and Resistance* (2009), and finally, Leilah Nadir's *The Orange Trees of Baghdad* (2014).⁴⁴¹

The main themes of this chapter include critique of the label of schizophrenic identities⁴⁴² as opposed to multiplicitous identities, contesting identity politics and group identity from a post-positivist realist

⁴³⁹ Phenomenology, according to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, is defined as the "study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience." Accordingly, Phenomenology is concerned with "conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view." This field of philosophy is distinct, but related to epistemology, which has been defined as "the study of knowledge."

⁴⁴⁰ These concepts have been introduced by Kristie Dotson and will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

⁴⁴¹ The reason why I have a big corpus of study is because I am planning to analyse diverse voices coming from diverse social locations, while they all share national, racial and gender identity to a great extent. Apart from nationality, gender and race, I will focus on intersections such as class, ethnicity, generation, language, and age in my analysis of multiplicitous identities.

⁴⁴² Schizophrenia as a politically-loaded term for identities has been critiqued by many critics, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Jameson defines schizophrenic experience as "an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time."

perspective, story-telling as an act of epistemic responsibility and opening the path for self-discovery. A section would be dedicated to politics of biraciality and second-generation multiplicitous selves. The next theme would be the epistemologies of “foreignness” and the politics of visibility, invisibility and hypervisibility. I also discuss the epistemologies of roots, uprooting and re-rooting of in-between identities. Another section will focus on the concepts of émigré, refugee, exilic, transnational and diasporic identities according to the definitions and recognitions rendered in these life writing narratives. Epistemologies of in-betweenness will be another section which argues the concepts of spatiality, temporality and interpersonality of the experience of in-betweenness; and finally, the last section of this chapter will cover the experience of those identities stuck in between, and the ways in which identities refer to their ancient heritage in certain social locations defining their identities.

Each section would be discussed through an analysis of the excerpts from the case study life narratives and the mixed methodology⁴⁴³ of the thesis which has already been introduced in the second chapter. It is worth mentioning that not all life writing narratives of this study necessarily address all the above-mentioned themes and this, in itself, speaks for the versatility of experiences. However, I attempt to bring close evidence from most of the texts, when discussing each of the themes, as I find it crucial to have a more versatile portrayal of the voices of the genre of life writing when I propose a critique of the genre and offer a new mixed methodology for reading the genre of memoir and life writing. Finally, as a reader of these narratives who is employing an autoethnographical method as well, I try my best to have the following quotation from Alcoff’s “the problem of speaking for others” in mind:

Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says. To whom one is accountable is a political/epistemological choice contestable, contingent, and as Donna Haraway says, constructed through the process of discursive action. What this entails in practice is a serious and sincere commitment to remain open to criticism and to attempt actively, attentively, and sensitively to “hear” (understand) the criticism. A quick impulse to reject criticism must make one wary.⁴⁴⁴

The critic, and the autobiographer are both accountable for the knowledge they share with an audience. In reading and writing about Iranian and Iraqi life narratives, there is a great deal of accountability that needs to be taken. ‘Saving Muslim women’ grand-narratives, Islamophobia and Western discourses around women’s rights can still co-opt honest testimony narratives through their ‘honesty’ disclaimers. Although this research does not focus on readership of life writing, it still does recognize that testimony narratives and scholarly work on testimonial knowledge has to be open to criticism, because of the political and epistemological accountability that knowledge producers are morally expected to take.

⁴⁴³ The analysis of Multiplicitous selves requires a ‘multiplicitous methodology’ if I may call it. As I mentioned in the second chapter, autoethnography informs my close reading of the texts. The analysis therefore, does not only include the voice of the autobiographer, but the critic as well who is reading the memoirist’s experience through the lens of her own experience and social identity.

⁴⁴⁴ Linda Martin Alcoff, “The problem of speaking for others.” *Cultural critique* 20 (1991): 25-26

3.2 Transnational identities: Multiplicitous or schizophrenic?

3.2.1 Azadeh's disfigured Iran and scraps of modernity

I start this section with the concept of multiplicitous selves and the experience of living and crossing the borders as discussed in the critical framework chapter. Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005) is considered as a return narrative and has been read and critiqued by many Iranian studies scholars and it is quite well-known in the United States. *Lipstick Jihad*, is a second generation diasporic memoir of Azadeh growing up in the United States and going back to her homeland in the 2000s, when Iran was undergoing conspicuous political and social changes. From the very beginning of the memoir, Azadeh expresses her confusion about her identity and the ways in which she has to deal with it in different locations. Her memoir begins:

I was born in Palo Alto, California, into the lap of an Iranian diaspora community awash in nostalgia and longing for an Iran many thousands of miles away. As a girl, raised on the distorting myths of exile, I imagined myself a Persian princess, estranged from my homeland—a place of light, poetry, and nightingales—by a dark, evil force called the Revolution.⁴⁴⁵

Coming from a middle to upper-middle class family⁴⁴⁶ who used to reside in northern Tehran before the revolution, Azadeh imagines herself as a Persian princess, in the exotic status, well-fitted into the American 1970's version of whiteness. As a child, she sees and hears about the pangs of nostalgia expressed by her California resident relatives and she wonders who she really is and what homeland is like. Throughout the memoir (which I will discuss in details) Azadeh's identity fluctuates between Iranian, Persian, American, Iranian-American, and Californian Persian; so does her experience, as she moves from one location to another. As I noted in the critical framework chapter, identities are value-laden with history, social location, and positionality⁴⁴⁷ and they go through a constant process of interpretation and re-interpretation in one's life time. There are times and she feels certain about being 'Persian' which is followed by her resentment of 'Persian identity' expressed through a satirical language. For Azadeh, a second-generation girl born from Iranian parents, and growing up at a historical point of Iran going through massive political and social changes, as well as being marked as a hostage taking terror in the West,⁴⁴⁸ it is easier to call herself Persian:

Growing up, I had no doubt that I was Persian. Persian like a fluffy cat, a silky carpet— a vaguely Oriental notion belonging to history, untraceable on a map. It was the term we insisted on using at the time, embarrassed by any association with Iran, the modern country, the hostage-taking Death Star. Living a myth, a fantasy, made it easier to be Iranian in America.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁵ Moaveni, Azadeh. *Lipstick Jihad: a memoir of growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), vii.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁴⁷ Moya, cited in Alcoff and Mohanty, *Reconsidering identity politics*, 6.

⁴⁴⁸ Hostage crisis in Iran lasted from 4 Nov. 1979 until 20 Jan. 1981.

⁴⁴⁹ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, vii.

Since the 1979 revolution in Iran and the hostage crisis, which was identified as a key turning point in Iranian foreign relations history, people who came from Iran and lived in the West divided into the two groups of Persians and Iranians. Their identity was associated with multiple discourses such as terror, islamophobia, occidentophobia, and occidentophilia. Moaveni starts from her own experience of being an Iranian in the US and explains how Iranians identified themselves.

Being associated with fluffy cats, silky carpets, and the other oriental stereotypes that most Americans had in mind about Iran, it was much easier for Iranians to deal with rather than being associated with the occidentophobe, hostage taking, and fundamentalist Islamic republic of Iran. Her Iranian identity becomes a problem even at school where people could not pronounce her name. Her mother advises her to choose an English name⁴⁵⁰ for herself instead of Azadeh, which means “one who is free,”⁴⁵¹ ironically contrasting her position as a child with a strict mother and coming from a country which according to her relatives, is not free.

Azadeh’s voice became very important in the diaspora literature about Iranian identity. As a transnational writer and journalist, she moves with a privileged mobility to go and see things for herself. Therefore, she has an epistemic privilege in the US compared to the white majority due to her lived experience as a woman of colour who has assimilated in the Western culture and has even changed her name for people to be able to pronounce it. However, having an intersectional perspective, one should bear in mind that her account of Iranian diasporic cannot be applicable to all Iranians who moved to the US after the revolution. Coming from an upper-class secular family, Moaveni’s experience of both Iran and the US is different from someone who had to migrate to the US as a lower-class political refugee. I will discuss this further in my analysis of Dina Nayeri’s *Refuge*. Once she begins to develop a sense of diasporic identity, she starts to feel uncomfortable in her skin. She remembers that, as a child, she only felt less Iranian when her mother dragged her to an ashram:

The hours I spent cross-legged in these candle-lit, incense-infused rooms were among the only I felt comfortable in my own skin. Everyone was too dippy and preoccupied with vegan curry and their chakras to care that we were Iranian; in fact, they thought it was sort of neat, and we were embraced with the squishy affection of people fond of the exotic.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ As Tehranian notes in his book, Middle Eastern backgrounds in the US are considered white legally, but socially, only when they are successful migrants and have met all assimilation criteria. He calls this process “selective racialization”
Tehranian, John. *Whitewashed: America's invisible middle eastern minority*, (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 6

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵² Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 10.

Azadeh is too young to understand “cultural appropriation”⁴⁵³ and exoticism as a condition of “othering.”⁴⁵⁴ She feels welcomed when people show a lot of affection for Persian culture, poetry and food and she perceives of these people as those who have welcomed minorities and their culture, keen to practice them. Although older Azadeh can see “whiteness”⁴⁵⁵ and the privileges coming along with it, her young voice has not yet developed a multiplicitous self which can question the moments she feels the discomfort coming from outside her community. As an adult, she remembers how her family refer to themselves as émigré in order to escape the connotations that came with the word “immigrant.” Denying their permanence in America, Azadeh’s family and many other Iranians like them referred to themselves as émigré and believed that immigrants were those who came to the US by boats.⁴⁵⁶ Azadeh observes that part of this misconception comes from American identity politics, colour hierarchy and the Iranians’ denial of brownness:

There was no space for Iranians within the multicultural dialogue everyone seemed so bent on having. We were too new, and didn’t have a place yet. And then there was the question of race, in the American sense. Was I brown? All the Iranians I knew seemed to consider themselves Europeans with a tan. Was I an immigrant? My family had always insisted we weren’t really immigrants as such, but rather a special tribe who had been temporarily displaced. Iranian women like Khaleh Farzi lived in daily fear of being mistaken for a Mexican—a pedestrian immigrant rather than a tragic émigré.⁴⁵⁷

The dominant narrative of the time surrounding migration, multiculturalism and new identities in the West allowed Iranians from upper-class background to be exiles, those who had fled the revolution and a bloody war, had lost class status and were trying hard to be good immigrants in the US. They were seen to have tragic identities and thus, victimized into exotic, cultured exilic identities who lived every second of their lives with the hopes of return. On the other hand, Iranians did not want to surrender to the category of brown people because that would be a denial of their Aryan identity and the fascist mentality of white supremacy.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵³ Alcoff discusses cultural appropriation as something that exists at “the core of white privilege” and is defined as “the ability to consume anything, anyone, anywhere... a colonizing desire of appropriation, even to the trapping of social identity.”

Linda Martin Alcoff, “What should white people do?” *Hyppatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 19

⁴⁵⁴ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, (London: Sage, 1997).

⁴⁵⁵ Neda Maghbouleh highlights the ways in which Iranians complicated the idea of race and whiteness. She mentions religion as a contributing factor serving to whiten a group of people in the eyes of the law. Iranians migrate to the West with the internalized feelings of whiteness and the Aryan ideology and that is why they fall into, what she calls racial loopholes, meaning “everyday contradictions and conflicts” that appear when “a group’s legal racial categorization is inconsistent with its on-the-ground experience of racialization or deracialization.” The whiteness imaginary of Iranians feeds from “ethnic bigotry, religious intolerance, or anti-immigrant nativism,”

Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2017), 5, 170.

Also see the book review: Mokhtari, M. *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race*. Vol. 42. (Edmonton: Univ Alberta, 2017)

⁴⁵⁶ Movane, *Lipstick*, 28.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁵⁸ According to Abbas Amanat, “Historically Iranians became conscious of themselves in the face of the mythical Turanids and later the historic people they came into contact with: the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and others.” However, as Reza Bigdeloo notes, in 1936, the Nazi Germans announced a fraternity between the Nordic races and Persians under the name of Aryan race. However, even before this fraternity and the birth of Aryan race as a propaganda, the nationalist Reza Shah of Iran had publicly announced his belief in the Aryan supremacy and then he chose the name of “Iran” for the country.

See Abbas Amanat, “Introduction.” In *Iran Facing Others*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-33.

Reza Bigdeloo, *Archaism in the Contemporary History of Iran*, (Tehran: Markaz Publishing house, 2001), 266-267.

The question of Iranian identity only gets much more complex when Azadeh goes back to Iran in the spring of 2000. For her, and people like her who had left Iran before the revolution, at the time of war or had never seen Iran as they had been born across the borders, Iran of the late 90s and early 2000s was unimaginable.⁴⁵⁹ The Iran of first and second hand memories and that represented by Western media was different to the real Iran Azadeh and her family experienced upon arrival:

Now that I had met actually existing Iran, the Iran of the Islamic Republic, the question of Iranian identity had become infinitely more complex. That Khaleh Zahra could not cope with life in the Islamic Republic did not mean she could not have coped with a different Iran, a place more tolerant of privacy, and private life. Amidst all this haze, one thing was apparent.

All of us, Khaleh Zahra, Kimia, and I, had arrived in Tehran as Iranians of the imagination. We had Iranian identities, but they were formed by our memories and the Farsi-speaking parts of our soul—the part that responded, with years of accumulated references, when someone said “love” to us in Farsi, our first language of affection. But we could not navigate the Tehran of today, or share in the collective consciousness of the Iranians who never left.⁴⁶⁰

The experience of border crossing changes Azadeh’s imagination of Iran, although we will see later that her implicit bias gets in the way of seeing things. Azadeh is aware that her knowledge of Iran is situated in her family history, her diasporic condition and her social location as an upper-class woman, however, she feels unable to communicate her feeling of dissociation from “Modern”⁴⁶¹ Iran’s conditions of life. Later on in her narrative, she mentions that she believes as long as she has an American passport, people would interpret her anger over “livability of Iran” either as implying that Iranians do not deserve any better, or “commiserating” and confirming a bleak future for the country.⁴⁶² Having an intersectional and decolonial approach in mind, it is clear that although Azadeh’s experience is situated in her transnational identity and her privilege of holding an American passport, the same privilege inhibits her from seeing that her interaction with Iranians is limited to a certain class with intellectual and cultural capital is unbeknownst to the masses. Azadeh’s view of Iran is a country in a mess (and this view comes back throughout the work) because she has not actually seen the Iran of eight years of war and the massive post-revolutionary political disputes. Azadeh is unable to see the slow

⁴⁵⁹ Anderson’s “Imagined Communities” is relevant to this discussion.

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. (New York: Verso Books, 2006).

⁴⁶⁰ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 86.

⁴⁶¹ I am a bit reluctant to use the term “modern,” although Azadeh uses it in her narrative. To me, using modern Iran when discussing the 2000s, implies a binary of ancient and modern and I insist on the concept of alternative modernity when discussing the global south and the influence of colonialism on shaping the concept of modernity. As examples of this binary making, Moaveni mentions “Since low-grade depression was a national epidemic, most Iranians who were not opium addicts or alcoholics had some expertise in spiritual restoratives. A generation ago, people turned to religious gatherings and prayer rituals for serenity, but in modern-day Iran, it had become commonplace to keep Islam at arm’s length.”⁽⁹⁵⁾ In this passage, there is an implication that religion is a non-modern sedative tool that Iranians used to practice in previous times and these days, the modern spirituality has replaced that. Moaveni continues, “Eastern spirituality, with its internally directed, pacifist sensibility, was the ideal antidote to the militant, invasive brand of Shiite Islam imposed by the regime.” See Moaveni, *Lipstick jihad*, 95-96.

Edward W Said, *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 2012.

Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and power in a time of terror*. London: Routledge, 2017.

⁴⁶² Moaveni, *Lipstick jihad*, 174.

reform of Iran across the 2000s which has been the product of a lot of civil society activism.⁴⁶³ Having been away, coming back with political and social privileges and criticizing where people have not just “called” but “made” home, and ignoring the socio-political outcomes of years of sanctions, imperialism, and the coloniality of power, Azadeh is practicing the denial of coevalness.⁴⁶⁴ Azadeh says that she “felt crushed by the magnitude of Iran’s national decline” and wonders how Iranians had been reduced to this?⁴⁶⁵ She feels she sounds like an apologist in maintaining that Iran is in a complicated situation and that situation has also been impacted under the careless hands of US Middle East policies.⁴⁶⁶ Her discomfort after border crossing and living in in-betweenness, is an example of Anzaldúa’s “intimate terrorism,” which is “the violence and fear of the life of in-betweenness.”⁴⁶⁷ Her experience of being in and seeing multiple worlds is not easy, and the more she experiences life in Iran, the more reflexive she becomes about her identity and privileges. Although some scholars⁴⁶⁸ believe that *Lipstick Jihad* is a neo-orientalist and reductionist memoir with some political agenda, it is still an interesting example of self-discovery and story-telling of transnational identities full of contradictions, an identity of multiplicitous selves occupying multiple worlds.

As a second-generation migrant, Azadeh holds the epistemic responsibility of inhabiting both worlds of the West and the East while also occupying a unique space for so-called “citizen of the world” space. She mentions:

⁴⁶³ Asef Bayat refers to Iran’s post 1979 reform movement as a “youth nonmovement.” He argues that “[the post 1979] draconian social control gave rise to a unique youth identity and collective defiance... The assertion of youthful aspirations, the defense of their habitus, lay at the heart of their conflict with moral and political authority. With the state being the target of their struggles, Iranian youths engendered one of the most remarkable youth nonmovements in the Muslim world.” This is what Azadeh has missed, not having grown up in Post-revolutionary Iran. Tara Povey also renders a thorough analysis of reformist social movements in post-revolutionary Iran in her book. She argues that “increased levels of authoritarianism” as a result of “neoliberal reforms” led to the “adoption of more radical strategies for transformative social change... [challenging] the authority of the state itself.” See Asef Bayat, *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 111-112. See Tara Povey, *Social movements in Egypt and Iran*, (New York: Palgrave, 2016), 177.

⁴⁶⁴ Denial of coevalness is a term coined by Johannes Fabian which is defined as “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.” Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 31. The denial of the denial of coevalness has been defined by Walter Mignolo as “intellectual decolonization.” See Walter Mignolo, *The darker side of the Renaissance: Literacy, territoriality, and colonization*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), ix. Mignolo in his foreword to Dabashi’s *Can non-Europeans think?* also elaborates on the epistemic racism that exists around the concept of logic and thinking as a white, Christian European-only ability. See Walter Mignolo, “Foreword: Yes, we can,” in *Can non-Europeans think?*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (Chicago: Zed Books, 2015). Dabashi also refers to the ways in which Western anthropology and ethnography fetishize any practice happening in the region as Arab, Muslim, Middle Eastern culture and attach meanings to that. His Al-Jazeera article “The Arabs and their Flying shoes” does a good critique of Western anthropology in a humorous and succinct way. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/02/201322691640324311.html>. Hamid Dabashi, *Can non-Europeans think?* (Chicago: Zed Books, 2015).

⁴⁶⁵ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 175.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁶⁷ Ortega, *In-between*, 58.

⁴⁶⁸ Critics such as Dabashi, Mottahedeh and Keshavarz use their own personal histories and stories of border crossing in their scholarly work to respond to the memoir boom, especially to Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Teheran*. Amy Motlagh warns them against the “lures of diaspora” which they cannot transcend or avoid, being part of the Iranian diaspora, with certain personal histories and experience.

See Amy Motlagh, “Autobiography and Authority in the Writings of the Iranian Diaspora.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 411-424.

Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks*, 38-64.

Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Jasmine and stars: reading more than Lolita in Teheran*. North Carolina: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Negar Mottahedeh, “Off the grid: reading Iranian memoirs in our time of total war.” *Middle East Research and Information Project* 9 (2004).

This was supposed to be the inheritance of our generation, the privilege of shedding history. We were supposed to be citizens of the world, comfortable everywhere, released from the concerns of political conflict. Our lives were supposed to make up for our parents' lives.⁴⁶⁹

Azadeh and her generation had to constantly bear the burden of *mennat* (a Persian word for indebtedness) for the border crossing their parents had done for them. Although feeling comfortable in the heart of California, she does not feel like that anymore after coming to Iran and experiencing the Iran of her parents. The first challenge is the space where she used to call home and the history she heard over and over again from friends, family and media.

All our lives were formed against the backdrop of this history, fated to be at home nowhere—not completely in America, not completely in Iran. For us, home was not determined by latitudes and longitudes. It was spatial. This, this was the modern Iranian experience, that bound the diaspora to Iran. We were all displaced, whether internally, on the streets of Tehran, captives in living rooms, strangers in our own country, or externally, in exile, sitting in this New York bar, foreigners in a foreign country, at home together. At least for now, there would be no revolution that returned Iran to us, and we would remain adrift. But the bridge between Iran and the past, Iran and the future, between exile and homeland, existed at these tables—in kitchens, in bars, in Tehran or Manhattan—where we forgot about the world outside. Iran had been disfigured, and we carried its scraps in our pockets, and when we assembled, we laid them out, and were home.⁴⁷⁰

Azadeh projects her feelings of alienation and anger at displacement from the homeland of Iran and believes these feelings are not diaspora-specific feelings, but for everyone. She overgeneralizes her anti-revolutionism to the community and calls Iran a “disfigured” country, whereas this feeling of discomfort comes from intimate terrorism and not-being-at-ease on the borders. “Disfigured” is a much stronger metaphor than ‘fragmented’ and it invokes a butchered image, wounded and unidentifiable. This is not Iran that is disfigured, but her imagination of Iran which is based on what she had heard. Iran only looks like a disfigured mess because it has gone through changes, and her version of modernity is different to the American modernity and Eurocentric ideals of democracy.

Azadeh is not fragmented; she does not hold a disconnected identity. Throughout her memoir, she navigates a multiplicity of locations and selves that are context-based, trying to adapt to different spaces and networks. The reason she sounds contradictory at some points does not just result from being exposed to multiple discourses and grand-narratives, but from her lived experience which swirls from an American to an Iranian and vice versa, sometimes settling somewhere in between. Despite all the pain of adaptability and reflexivity, Azadeh still survives the border. Yet, it seems Azadeh travels the world without much world-travelling. She crosses borders to see what her ancestral homeland is like, only to interact with people of the same privilege and social status. She resides in Northern Tehran and frequents places very similar to those back in the US. She finds a network of people like herself, enjoying the same social privileges and they form a

⁴⁶⁹ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 236.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

solidarity network to support the feelings of homesickness and foreignness.⁴⁷¹ Azadeh never goes to working class areas of the town, nor does she interview working class women to see if feminism is practiced by them as well. She overgeneralizes Iranian women into passive creatures who do not know about feminism and women rights, characterizing them as “Iranian housewives, unadventurous by nature.”⁴⁷² She finds refuge in fashion shows of northern Tehran and chooses gyms that only *Khavaas* (the specials) go to. For Azadeh, part of the uninhabitability of Tehran comes from the fact that she still needs to be special there, as she has always been back in the US and among her family. Unlike Azadeh, Niloo—the protagonist of *Refuge*—finds coping with her multiplicitous selves and in-betweenness much more difficult. I discuss Niloo’s transnational Identity in the next section.

As mentioned earlier, border crossing, despite having hardships and pains, is an act that can for those crossing borders, actually be epistemically privileging. In the following, I discuss the significance of the types of border crossing; the denotations and connotations of migrant identity labels – namely, émigré, refugee, exilic or transnational—I argue how these terms are epistemically, politically and socially loaded and that we must hold them in-between different spaces, times, and persons. I will argue this in-betweenness is crucial to understanding border crossing. I will approach these labels and terminologies from an intersectional lense and a decolonial spectacle. As we will see in each of these narratives throughout this research, the migrant status is perceived to be very politically loaded and, therefore, there exists a kind of compulsive anxiety about how to be identified as a migrant by other identities and how to build up a group identity.

I discuss *Lipstick Jihad* to show how migrant identity labels are epistemically and politically important.⁴⁷³ I debate the question if these labels are just an in-group anxiety or there is a pragmatic aspect involved to the consumption and usage of labels.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷¹ This is just like certain Iranian communities in Sydney for example, who only do Persian barbeques together, listen to Los Angeles pop music and only choose those Sydney suburbs for residence which are similar to *Lavasan* or *Shemiran* in Tehran.

⁴⁷² Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 96

⁴⁷³ From a realist post-positivist approach, these social categories and labels are not just descriptive terms, but they are explanatory claims, “about a system of social relations, and about the world in which the relations among groups are shaped and defined.” Identity categories and labels are theory-laden. As Satya Mohanty explains, calling someone a person of color is not just descriptive of that person’s skin color, but it is “to draw on a fairly complex social theory, a theory that explains systemic features of a social world that divides and shapes individuals according to accidental and morally irrelevant features, such as skin color, cultural background and ancestry.” The same way that identities, social locations and categories are explanatory, they are locations of knowledge as well. We cannot just dismiss the epistemic privilege of marginalized identities on the basis of the fact that their knowledge is a product of distorted discourses and narratives. As Mohanty maintains, “knowledge is not simply the product of disinterested contemplation; moulded as it is by historical and social forces, knowledge is often the product of activism, of social engagement and deliberately partisan inquiry.”

See Satya Mohanty, “Social Justice and Culture: On identity, Intersectionality, and Epistemic Privilege,” in *Handbook on Global Social Justice*, ed. Gary Graig, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. In Press)

⁴⁷⁴ I should also argue why I prefer an intersectional feminist approach to a transnational feminist one. As Eliza Noah debates: “A certain postmodernist trend in academic feminist discourse called ‘transnational feminism’ seems so quickly to have replaced the critiques by women of color, which argue for an intellectual and political incorporation of racial-gender diversity and its significance in shaping our respective communities. In other words, I learned that even as the labour and subjectivities of women of color continue to cross national boundaries, our experiences of racism, coloniality, and culture require us to prioritize ‘feminist nationalist movements—that is, work that addresses issues of sex and gender.’”

From the very beginning of the memoir, Azadeh's family express an obsession with status and migrant labels. Khaleh Farzi hates being mistaken for a Mexican, because she thinks of them as less than white people, while also considering herself to be white. The issue of whiteness is very central in the discussion of migrant labels among Iranian diasporic community. So many Iranians who migrate share Khaleh Farzi's feeling about their identity. As Neda Maghbouleh observes in her analysis of Iranians' relation to Whiteness,⁴⁷⁵ [Iranian Americans], "Caught in the chasm between formal ethno-racial invisibility and informal hypervisibility, work, love, and live through a core social paradox: Their everyday experiences of racialization coexist with their legal, and in some cases, internal "whitewashing."⁴⁷⁶ Thus, it is not only Iranians themselves whitewashing their identities into something that they are not, but also their adoption of American politics of whiteness,⁴⁷⁷ which plays upon hierarchies of color and status, occurring in the binary of superior/inferior so much so, that the migrants themselves start using its terms and labels. In this regard, Azadeh's mother is an interesting example:

When it served her purposes, Maman embraced America and lovingly recited all the qualities that made it superior to our backward-looking Iranian culture. That Americans were honest, never made promises they didn't intend to keep, were open to therapy, believed a divorced woman was still a whole person worthy of respect and a place in society—all this earned them vast respect in Maman's book. It seemed never to occur to her that values do not exist in a cultural vacuum but are knit into a society's fabric; they earn their place, derived from other related beliefs.⁴⁷⁸

Her mother's experience of border crossing is very much like Lili's; living in the US validates her experience more as a divorced woman than living in Iran. But she expands that experience to a discourse of backwardness; a very traditional orientalist technique to dehumanize Middle Eastern cultures. Said defines nineteenth century Orientalism as a "body of ideas, beliefs, clichés" which developed "the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of

As cited in May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl, eds. *Growing up transnational: Identity and kinship in a global era*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 235

⁴⁷⁵ Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness*, 170

⁴⁷⁶ Tehranian in his book *Whitewashed* discusses the invisible Iranian whites in the US, a social construct that he has witnessed and experienced. He discusses the politics of race from his own experience, when applying for a job at a law school and gets rejected on the basis of his race having been identified as "White." He problematizes the ontology of Middle Eastern racial condition in the US, stating that Middle Eastern background Americans are denied of white privilege, while being legally categorized as White. Anita Famili also contests this very issue saying that "Middle Eastern Americans remain an invisible group. They are both interpolated into the category of Caucasian while simultaneously racialized as an "other." . . . Middle Eastern Americans do not appropriately fit into the prevailing categories of race. Rather, their ethnic/racial identity is constantly contested." Even if Iranians, more specifically in this study, identify as white, as Tehranian highlights, the role of the legal system in the US should not be neglected.

See Tehranian, *Whitewashed*, 3

Anita Famili, *What About Middle Eastern American Ethnic Studies?* Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs symposium, May 17, 1997, available online at http://www.urop.uci.edu/symposium/past_symposia/1997/ablist3.html.

⁴⁷⁷ Tehranian argues that law played a big role in "constructing the notion of race," and also "a strict assimilationist directive," which confused Middle Eastern immigrants who already had issues with "the white/ nonwhite divide." Tehranian stresses that "courts determined whiteness through performance. The potential for immigrants to assimilate within mainstream Anglo-American culture was put on trial. Successful litigants demonstrated evidence of whiteness in their character, religious practices and beliefs, class orientation, language, ability to intermarry, and a host of other traits that had nothing to do with intrinsic racial grouping." This was how "a dramaturgy of whiteness emerged" as the courts determined naturalization based on performance and whoever that could perform whiteness better, they would have been considered more fit. Tehranian continues that "[t]he courts thereby sent a clear message to immigrants: the rights enjoyed by white males could be obtained only through assimilatory behavior. White privilege became a quid pro quo for white performance, especially for Middle Eastern immigrants, who faced the greatest debate over their racial classification." See Tehranian, *Whitewashed*, 5

⁴⁷⁸ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 20.

inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and un-challenged coherence.”⁴⁷⁹ Interestingly, Azadeh’s mother is very strategic in her use of stereotypes. For her, America is a great place when it is respectful of her experience as a divorced woman, an independent woman, and a single mom, but when it comes to her cultural issues, she is very critical of whiteness and the Americanization of culture. It is not clear to Azadeh if this is a tactic of strategic-ness her mother exploits to raise her as an Iranian in the US, or if it is her hatred of imperialism, coming from a leftist socialist background, or merely her feelings of exilic resistance to the cultural norms of the new home. As she witnesses:

In Maman’s view, America was responsible for most that had gone wrong in the world. *Een gavhab*, these cows, was her synonym for Americans. She’d established her criticisms early on, and repeated them so often that to this day they are seared on my brain: “Americans have no social skills. . . . They prefer their pets to people. . . . Shopping and sex, sex and shopping; that’s all Americans think about. . . . They’ve figured out how corrupt they are, and rather than fix themselves, they want to force their sick culture on the rest of the world.” Since she mostly wheeled out these attitudes to justify why I couldn’t be friends with Adam-the-long-haired-guitarist or why I couldn’t go to the movies twice in one week, or why I couldn’t wear short skirts, I wondered whether they were sincere, or tactical.⁴⁸⁰

Unlike her mother, Azadeh’s father experiences border crossing and identity differently. In order to suffer the exile less, he develops several reasons for hating where he comes from:

My father was an atheist (Marx said God was dead) who called the Prophet Mohammad a pedophile for marrying a nine-year-old girl. He thought the defining characteristics of Iranian culture—fatalism, political paranoia, social obligations, and enthusiasm for guilt—were responsible for the failures of modern Iran. He wouldn’t even condescend to use the term “Iranian culture,” preferring to refer, to this day, to “that stinking culture”; he refused to return to Iran, even for his mother’s funeral, and wouldn’t help me with my Persian homework, a language, he pronounced direly “you will *never* use.” When I announced my decision to move to Iran, his greatest fear, I think, was that something sufficiently awful would happen to me that it would require *his* going back.⁴⁸¹

His version of secularity is Islamophobic, a feature that is shared by many nationalists; he denies his sense of nationalism by hating the language and culture too. The idea of going back to where he came from is an absolute impossibility (orientalist perspective of Iran as an sterile land, unable to change and non-modern), and using all those excuses about the banality of life in Iran, cultural paranoia and corruption makes it easier to deal with exile, and the conditions of life in the US. Azadeh’s parents are not political refugees; they left Iran before getting involved in any of the uprising of the 1980s. What scares them of going back and seeing change that scares them. The imposed exile, especially for her father, saves them from the feeling of in-betweenness. In order to justify their fear and hatred of the Iranian background community and, of course, to stick to their

⁴⁷⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 205

⁴⁸⁰ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 21.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

previous social status, which is “*adam besabi* (good families),”⁴⁸² they assign labels to people—such as “Mr. Savaki” or “Mrs. Bazaarī”—to separate themselves from the community of the *nouveau riche*.

Azadeh’s own experience of border crossing is different to other life writers, as she is the only one among them who upon going back to her homeland, experiences border crossing in reverse. Azadeh, as she also claims, is considered more American than she is Iranian. As much as she had to try in her early years of school to come to terms with her Iranian-American identity, and, as she puts it, “[to find power] in her otherness” and to discover a “self anchored in history,”⁴⁸³ she has to come to terms with her American identity once she goes back to Iran. At some point during her stay there, she gets frustrated with people reminding her that she is an outsider, an American. On one occasion, she loses her self-control while sitting at a lunch table with her auntie:

At what point, I asked her, will I stop being considered an outsider? I live here, I breathe the pollution, I suffer the bureaucracy, I carry the passport, both my parents are Iranian, and I know more about Shiism and Iranian poetry than half the girls my age. Khaleh Farzi tried to console me. “Do you suppose people mean to hurt you, by saying such things? Look at it from their perspective. They think all the exceptional people have left. Can you see it’s almost a compliment?”

But I refused to understand. If I felt alienated in America—considered to be from an imagined land of veils, harems, suicide bombers, and wrathful ayatollahs—the only fair compensation was that somewhere else I would be ordinary, just like everyone else.⁴⁸⁴

Azadeh is unable to see her difference in the new social location. Her epistemic blindness regarding Iranian-ness, which would have been an epistemic privilege if she were still in California, or New York, hinders her from seeing people’s point about her being an outsider. She is asking to be included whilst not really mingling with the general public. She has come to know Iran based on what she has “heard” from people, from specific people that she keeps around as company. The limited vision resulting from epistemic blindness is destructive, as some of the representations she renders of Iran and Iranians can easily turn into stereotypes. For instance, Azadeh describes gyms in northern Tehran in a way as if they are harems or hammams as represented in orientalist texts. She insists that the young women using those gyms are all mistresses of the men in power in the governmental system of Iran in early 2000s. On the point of her feelings of in-betweenness is Khaleh Farzi’s comment, by which she tries to make Azadeh feel as if she is special for leaving Iran, like whoever else has done so. Khaleh Farzi is speaking from the slogan: “all the good ones have left”, which has been prevalent in Iran since the revolution. However, when she talks about her frustration to one of her friends, he explains to her why she cannot claim such an insider identity and, therefore, epistemic credibility:

⁴⁸² Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 18.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

Don't demand what's not yours, he told me peevishly. You weren't here during the war, when Iraqi warplanes were flying over Tehran. You didn't have to run into bomb shelters, or duck when windows shattered, or call around to see if your relatives and friends were alive, the mornings after. You don't know what we *endured*. So don't show up here and start calling yourself Iranian.⁴⁸⁵

Iranian-ness, in this context, is not just a nationality, but it is a positionality of knowledge; it is “epistemic credibility.”⁴⁸⁶ It is claiming that you belong, therefore you can produce knowledge, and thus, you can have power. This is not only Azadeh's case, but so many other in-between identities and minorities. The condition that they do not belong fully somewhere is not just an airy-fairy feeling, but it is to feel powerless, to feel marginalized, pushed away from the center and sent to borders. It is a feeling of constant discomfort which is hard to resolve through even adaptability. Once Azadeh finds herself back in the US for the coverage of “Dialogue among Civilizations,” where she must be around Iranian politicians, feelings of discomfort return:

On this Manhattan Street, wearing a veil was the equivalent of going bare-headed in Tehran. Suddenly, I wasn't invisible anymore. People's eyes actually skimmed over me, instead of sliding past blindly, as they're supposed to do on a crowded urban sidewalk. I had been so busy contemplating “to veil or not to veil” that it hadn't occurred to me anyone else would notice. It was like wearing a neon sign, blinking “Muslim! Muslim!”⁴⁸⁷

Azadeh becomes hyper-visible, something she had not experienced before as in her childhood, she used to be invisible among other second-generation migrants. Every time she crosses the borders, her experience of visibility changes, and, therefore, the knowledge she produces is affected by that change of social location. Azadeh is a secular American in Iran, whereas she is Muslim Iranian in the US. What is common between both situations is that she feels the pains of in-betweenness and hypervisibility.

Azadeh's account of Iranians and Persians in the US gives us some insight into the way they classify themselves and interact with each other, their version of in-betweenness, their strategies of adaptation and their obsession with status, class and wealth and finally, their construction of whiteness and assimilation. Although so much of the literature⁴⁸⁸ on the genre of Iranian-American life writing has been very critical of this type of representations by the Iranian community, I believe we can still withdraw from life writing a nuanced diversity of voices despite the contradictions, misrepresentations, racializations and self-whitening of such texts. In-betweenness is not just a social location, but it is also an existential abstract feeling which is hard to come to terms with.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.,108.

⁴⁸⁶ See: Alcoff, "On judging epistemic credibility," 53-80.

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

⁴⁸⁷ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 171

⁴⁸⁸ Literature by Farzaneh Milani, Amy Motlagh as I broadly discussed in literature review in chapter one.

3.2.2 Trinkets, passports and backpacks: Epistemologies of refugee perimeters

Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* was published in July 2017, making it the most recently published narrative I analyse in this study. In an email correspondence with Dina, she mentioned to me that this work is a life writing narrative, categorized as auto-fiction and based on her own experience of border crossing. I insist on having a refugee narrative among my migrant narratives in order to highlight the diversity of voices and experiences among border crossing narratives and to challenge Muslim woman misery narrative as a genre.

Refuge is an eloquent, poetic and beautiful but painstakingly written narrative of border crossing. My own reading of *Refuge* came after I read Nayeri's autobiographical article in *The Guardian*, titled "The Ungrateful Refugee: We have no debt to pay."⁴⁸⁹ Narrating an Asylum Seeker woman's life, not only does she challenge the discourses surrounding the concept of gratitude, but she also renders a heavily critical and decolonial approach to migration and its consequences. *Refuge's Niloo* is in fact Dina herself and this book is not only about her own life and experience of border crossing, but also her family's and her husband's, as well as her interactions with both the homeland that has been left behind and the new homes that she occupied as a transnational woman. Life writing narratives, such as *Refuge*, do not centre upon a plot, a climax, or a moment of epiphany. They hold a diversity of voices, experiences, and events; the more polyphonic and dialogic they are, the more objectively they can historicize experiences of everyday life. In the post-positivist realist sense, objectivity does not equal neutrality but can be achieved if we acknowledge that our experience is a source of "both real knowledge and social mystification."⁴⁹⁰

For Dina, Iran and Iranian identity are more complicated than what they are for Azadeh. She narrates her story using another voice for herself called Niloo, the protagonist of the narrative, giving the reader more critical distance. Using an autofictional mode, Nayeri separates Dina's omniscient voice from Niloo's shedding light on the multiplicity of selves and voices that the autobiographer holds in narrating life story. The distance the reader feels from the testimony claimant or autobiographer gives them a chance to relate to the experience in a less biased way. This stylistic technique distinguishes Nayeri's work from the post-9/11 Iranian memoir-boom. As an omniscient narrator, she owns her experience, and the ones of other voices like Niloo's. *Refuge* is formed as a parallel narrative of a daughter in Netherlands and her father in Iran, during the 2009 uprisings. What connects the two storylines is not only their blood relations, but also the experience of border crossing. Niloo left Iran with her mom and brother almost thirty years before the current setting of the narrative. In 2009, the father, who had never joined them, decides to cross the borders as an asylum seeker and reside in the West.

⁴⁸⁹ Dina Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee: We Have No Debt to Repay." *The Guardian* 4 (2017).

⁴⁹⁰ Satya Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," 54.

Niloo is very epistemically aware of the spirit of exile, border crossing and pains that come with it. As she notes:

The mystic Al-Ghazali said the inhabitants of heaven remain forever thirty-three. It reminds me of Iran, stuck in 1979 in the imagination of every exile. Iranians often say that when they visit Tehran or Shiraz or Isfahan, they find even the smallest changes confusing and painful—a beloved corner shop gone to dust, the smell of bread that once filled a street, a rose garden neglected. In their memories, they always change it back. Iran is like an aging parent, they say.... My Baba at thirty-three was Iran from a time. And now...his decline and Iran's are the same for me.⁴⁹¹

Niloo distinguishes between Iran as a country and Iran as a parent. If for the exiled migrants, Iran is like an aging parent, for her, her father is like an aging country. Here, there is not only a metonymical relation between homeland and parent, but also a special synaesthesia which mixes up the spatial to the interpersonal. Like Azadeh's "scraps" of "disfigured Iran"⁴⁹² Niloo's Baba and his opium addiction becomes the metonymy of a homeland that she had to leave as a child. Niloo's experience is different to the exilic community. In the second chapter of the book, she goes through her experience, starting from her perimeter, which I feel compelled to call her transnational space.

Niloo's perimeter is a kind of place in which to locate her multiplicitous selves. It is where she stores all her ID cards, multi-national passports, and all the important things that she needs for those urgent moments when she needs to flee. She is reminded of her transnational privilege in the beginning of the narrative when Gui, her husband, has an important guest and starts bragging about his transferring of his French nationality to Niloo.

"Niloo has a third passport now," says Gui, a hint of pride in his voice. "I finally added her to my *livret de famille*." "Congratulations dear," says Dr. Holding. "What a worldly woman you are. And where is your father? Back home?" Briefly she is confused with the word *home*. "Yes, he's in Isfahan. A dentist."⁴⁹³

Three points come up in this quotation: first, a third passport, then, the concept of a worldly woman, and lastly, the idea of *home*. Niloo has already had Iranian and American passports, so having a French passport which she has gained through marriage adds to her privilege of being a multi/trans-national woman. However, the question is, does transnational identity have anything to do with physical passports? Does Niloo feel grateful for this transnational privilege? Does having multiple passports make a human being "worldly"? It is from this point that we realize Niloo has deep connections to her experience of refugeeness and the process of asylum seeking. The metonymy of home confuses her. She wonders whether Dr. Holding is asking her about Iran, or her father. Additionally, Passports metonymically represent 'nationhood.' Like a 'metonym' (as a literary trope)

⁴⁹¹ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 27.

⁴⁹² Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 246.

⁴⁹³ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 32.

that grants us access to something much larger, passports grant Niloo access to borders and her memories of border crossing. Asylum seeking, of course troubles access to those memories for Niloo. What has made Niloo a worldly woman is not holding multiple passports, speaking multiple languages and being married to a French man. For her, she is worldly because of the pain she has gone through, growing up as a refugee, without a father and trying hard to wipe out her difference. She remembers the time when as a child, kids at school humiliated her for the way she looked and spoke, and how teachers victimized her as a refugee and asylum seeker. As Dina remembers in her autobiographical article:

At first, the children were welcoming, teaching me English words using toys and pictures, but within days the atmosphere around me had changed. Years later, I figured that this must have been how long it took them to tell their parents about the Iranian kid. After that, a group of boys met me in the yard each morning and, pretending to play, pummelled me in the stomach. They followed me in the playground and shouted gibberish, laughing at my dumbfounded looks. A few weeks later, two older boys pushed my hand into a doorjamb and slammed it shut on my little finger, severing it at the first segment. I was rushed to the hospital, carrying a piece of my finger in a paper napkin. The segment was successfully reattached.⁴⁹⁴

This is Dina's first experience of school. As long as her classmates had not been fed racism, they could play with her, acknowledge her presence, and have fun. As soon as they are taught about the anti-Iran spirit of the time in the US, they not only stop playing with her, but proceed to treat her violently. "Intimate terrorism"⁴⁹⁵ for Dina does not just come from within her multiplicitous self and difficulty adapting, but also from the outside world and its residents.

Like Dina's, Niloo's voice also narrates the pains of adaptability and intimate terrorism:

She's handled things since her first days in Oklahoma, when she was no longer Niloo, but "that Middle Eastern kid," and her teachers noticed a tic in her neck. When she heard them discussing trauma, and therapy and special classes, she rid herself of the tic through sheer will—she vowed to sit still and suffer and not move her neck, not even once, not as long as the American teachers watched. After three months of discipline, the tic was gone.⁴⁹⁶

The victimization of her experience is more painful than the trauma per se. She learns she needs to wipe out any signs of difference, including the trauma-caused tics. She can be a less miserable 'Middle Eastern kid' or a happier American one, without her tics. Here we need to problematize the concept of transnational identity. Are refugees and asylum seekers considered as transnational identities? Do intimate terrorism and the fears of border crossing give these identities multiplicitous selves or do they turn into disconnected, schizophrenic identities because they have not been able to cope with the terror and the pain, and so adapt too much to reflexivity?

⁴⁹⁴ Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee," 2017.

⁴⁹⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa's intimate terrorism is a result of life in "borderlands." As she mentions, the woman of color border-crosser does not feel safe back in her "culture," and within the dominant "white culture" and therefore within her "inner life" or "self." This unease is called intimate terrorism. Anzaldúa, *Borderland*, 20.

⁴⁹⁶ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 47.

Reading through Niloo's narrative, and despite the fact that she acknowledges her confusion about her identity at some points in the memoir, Niloo still holds a strongly reflexive identity.⁴⁹⁷ Niloo/Dina is fully aware of the way her story should be narrated; both the temporality and spatiality of the narrative corresponds to Niloo's mind and the ways in which she remembers, which is very non-linear without being fragmented. None of that non-linearity is a result of her disconnectedness but is actually a result of her self-reflexivity and the way she connects her present self to crucial events in her life. Those crucial events are not necessarily big turning points in life, but through their triviality we come to realize how layered and complicated her "facultad"⁴⁹⁸ is and how complicated experiences, fears of border crossing, and pains of adaptability have turned her into a multiplicitous self. A multiplicitous self allows for less confusion and more reflexivity about 'tics,' both real and metonymical ones.

Niloo begins working on this self-reflexivity when she meets some other Iranian refugees and they start sharing stories. I will discuss Niloo's story-telling in a future section. One of the life changing events in her memoir is the dry cleaning story which she narrates in a place called Zakhmeh, "a Persian squat and arts space"⁴⁹⁹ and a name, derived from the word Zakhm, which means wound in Persian. It is the first story that she decides to share:

A few months ago, the dry cleaner, a Chinese man around fifty, rips my favourite jacket." Mr. Sun had ripped her jacket and Niloo had flipped out. She had owned that jacket for six years, the only clothing she kept in her corner with her treasures, the only purely aesthetic, non-functional item to earn a spot in the Perimeter. How was a person to feel safe if a thing that important could just be thrown around and torn up by a professional hired specifically to protect it? What kind of order was that? If Mr. Sun could tear her jacket, then the embassy could confiscate her passport, and the bank manager could leave her credit card number on a scrap of paper on his desk, and what's to keep the whole world from falling into chaos?... And so she yelled. He yelled back. She accused him of shoddy work. He accused her of lying about the rip. They kept upping the ante, until Mr. Sun muttered something about a spoiled American not knowing anything about his life, his children's lives. An inexplicable ball formed in her throat and she ran out with her torn coat.⁵⁰⁰

Niloo's outburst, as she can very reflexively put into words, is not just about a jacket that has been torn by another migrant. Her frustration mainly comes from the insecurity she feels in a country that she has chosen as her new home and the juxtaposition of a torn coat and Zakhmeh (reminding us of Persian word Zakhm) again is metonymical of Niloo's long-held rage and disappointment. The jacket has definitely been important because Niloo confesses that this item, even though completely used for aesthetic purposes and not functional ones, she still used to keep in her perimeter. 'Perimeter' is one of the key terms in Niloo's narrative and in her

⁴⁹⁷ Even Niloo's coming over the tics as forms of reflex represents her reflexive identity.

⁴⁹⁸ *La facultad*, according to Anzaldúa is "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world." See Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 38.

⁴⁹⁹ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 73.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

life in general. She defines it for those listening at Zakhmeh as: “The square meter of space I take with me from country to country.”⁵⁰¹ Niloo’s ‘square meter’ is like Azadeh’s pocket in which she carries scraps of her homeland. The fact that Niloo kept the jacket in her perimeter makes the jacket a metonym of border crossing memory. The jacket is in the perimeter together with Niloo’s passports, ID cards, and escape backpack. It is interesting that when she talks about the perimeter, none of the refugees who share the border crossing experience with her are surprised to hear about a movable square meter. They nod at her expression and smile as if it were a very normal thing to possess in life, a square meter with an escape bag. What hurts Niloo more in the dry-cleaning story is being called a spoiled American who knows nothing about migrant lives. It is not being called an American that bothers her but being called someone who has not experienced the pains of border crossing and being a foreigner in a country like the Netherlands. Niloo has survived a difficult border crossing, and although she is a privileged migrant with three passports, she still intends to hold on to her Refugee *umwelt*, because it is the kind of experience that has given her epistemic privilege. The type of knowledge that Niloo, and people like her carry in their memories is very quintessentially theirs, like the perimeter as a space for her multiplicitous self. Niloo goes back to the Chinese dry-cleaning man and apologizes with a pack of baghavas for him.⁵⁰² Mr. Sun very gently responds “your clothes are my clothes.”⁵⁰³ And that sentence is the closure point of the story. However, when she retells the story for her French husband, he does not get the point of her anger at the torn jacket and Mr. Sun’s reaction, so he ruins the moment for her by sending a large tip to the Chinese migrant, shaming him for his poverty and again playing the role of white saviour. Niloo’s understanding of Mr. Sun’s social location and experience is not comparable to Gui’s. Not that Gui has bad intentions to shame the man, but through his epistemic ignorance, he undoes Niloo’s endeavour for bringing back a sense of solidarity between them. Niloo endeavours to make the store a perimeter in her own right, like what she later on does with Zakhmeh.

I would like to discuss the significance of perimeter from different angles. As I explained above, Niloo’s perimeter does not only have a spatial significance, but there is a multiplicity of meaning attached to it. Basically, this one-meter square space is Niloo’s life history, her migration, border crossing experience, the new privileges she has gained in the West, her past memories of homeland and childhood, and a history of all her relationships, interpersonal, geographical and temporal ones. To put it simply, the perimeter is the metonym of Niloo’s world-travelling.

Niloo’s perimeter has a direct influence on her relationship with her husband throughout the narrative. Gui’s first exposure to the perimeter happens the very first night that they move in together, when she has

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 81.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 81.

arranged a neat rectangle of objects in the corner of the room, with two umbrellas functioning as walls or borders around her backpack. She has placed her “mother of pearl jewellery box”, passport, naturalization paper, diplomas, her sentimental books, her dad’s photos and some “rocks and trinkets from Iran.”⁵⁰⁴ These items are the same as the “scraps” Azadeh mentions in *Lipstik Jihad*. Gui, not having noticed the pile of objects, takes off his shirt and throws it at the corner. She stiffens, feels violated, and asks him to remove the shirt. That is when Gui acknowledges what the objects mean: “Oh, chicken, did you make yourself a little perimeter with the umbrellas?”⁵⁰⁵ Since then, Gui acknowledges and respects the corner as, in his words, Niloo’s ‘perimeter.’ But the ignorance does not go away although Gui, according to Niloo, has a sense of understanding despite the limitation of his experience:

After that, he spoke of the Perimeter with a kind of everyday reverence, acknowledging it, respecting it, like a home medical device or a moveable temple that lived in a corner of their every home, every hotel room, even his parents’ guest room in Provence. “I’ll put the suitcases here,” he would say casually. “Let’s do the Perimeter with the side table and that chair.” He spoke of it as if it were *their* thing, not only hers, and the constancy of this effort made her want to give him what he wanted most: to be included. Once or twice she didn’t speak when he left his keys or wallet inside the perimeter, but they both felt her discomfort and he removed the items without further discussion.⁵⁰⁶

There is no doubt about Gui’s good intention and willingness to be part of Niloo’s life, and experience; however, she does not want to share her experience, because her version of world-travelling is not comparable to Gui’s. Bearing the experience of in-betweenness, Niloo is never a pure Iranian, or American, or French although she carries all three passports. As much as she is sometimes jealous of Gui’s privilege, she does not want to share her experience and her epistemic privilege with him. Niloo lives in her in-betweenness in the perimeter and that is why, when Gui brings the perimeter up again in one of their fights, she gets defensive: “[Gui:] Is this a perimeter thing? [Niloo]: “It’s a personal space thing. Can’t any person need that?”⁵⁰⁷ As much as she wants her in-betweenness and multiplicitous self to be acknowledged, she hates being reminded of her difference and her “Niloo-strangeness.” Niloo tries to include Gui in her in-between identity, but there is an insurmountable epistemic border between the two of them that disconnects their experience from one another. Niloo recalls:

On the day she got her French passport, Guillaume watched her place it inside the perimeter—a space forbidden to him. He pretended to be too busy to notice, his gaze focused elsewhere as he loosened his necktie. But he couldn’t veil the pride in his eyes as he watched that little red booklet disappear into a file folder she had marked *Important*.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 36.

There are certain things that she agrees to share with Gui, but when it comes to Zakhmeh and her story-telling group, Niloo is ashamed of Gui and his privileges, and is therefore, embarrassed to take him along with her. The way Gui dresses up,⁵⁰⁹ talks, or is disconnected from the shared experience of the crowd, reminds Niloo of her difference, her “Refugee saga” as Gui calls it, and the pains of border crossing that she and the people of her Zakhmeh have gone through. The painful knowledge she holds in her heart makes this gap between the two of them, and contradictorily, the gap she lives in, wider and wider.

Although Gui and Niloo come from two different backgrounds and social locations, there is one thing they share: America and everything American they can talk about. However, even within that hybrid world and all their shared American knowledge, some things separate their American worlds. They both shared the experience of having lunch meats that their mothers used to put in their lunchboxes, but Gui’s was out of cultural novelty, whereas Niloo’s was as a result of financial necessity, and being refugees in the US⁵¹⁰. These differences become highlighted when Niloo and Gui (who represents the privileged white European migrant) correspond regarding one of their fights:

[Gui’s letter to Niloo]: Wanna show you love me? Waste some time. Meet some low-key people... How about that poetry groups in the Jordaan? Have some pointless fun with all that crazy energy. (73)

Niloo’s response in her head: My world domination isn’t sweet or little. Also, Iranian poetry doesn’t attract “low-key people.”... *Waste time?* Why does he expect her to behave as if she too grew up grinning drowsily through the sedative fog of her own privilege? Then, conceding that she didn’t, as if she should drop every hardwired habit and fixation by virtue of being connected to him now?⁵¹¹

This is a very clear explanation of why Gui and Niloo cannot share some experiences, and why Niloo’s multiplicitous self and her world-travelling experience could cause her pain in different moments of her relationship with Gui. It is not just that Gui has grown up privileged and Niloo has been a marginal migrant in the US trying to catch up, that makes her angry at Gui’s comment. It is more Gui equalizing his experience to hers through a “loving, knowing ignorance.” According to Mariana Ortega “Loving, knowing ignorance” is a type of ignorance that could be more dangerous than willful ignorance or arrogant perception or the arrogance of those who have no intention of including the notion of “difference” in their thought and world view.⁵¹²

As Ortega states: “Loving, knowing ignorance is not loving at all; it is not a way of practicing loving perception.... It is a mode of arrogant perception whose alleged aim is not simply to coerce or dominate or turn someone into what we want them to be, but to make knowledge claims that are supposed to further

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 34-35.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 73.

⁵¹² Mariana Ortega, “Being lovingly, knowingly ignorant: White feminism and women of color.” *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 57

understanding of the object of perception, of women of color.”⁵¹³ I believe Niloo’s experience with Gui and whiteness in general very well theorizes the loving, knowing ignorance, which is more destructive than ignorance in general, and we will see that this leads to their separation in further sections. This also contributes to Adrienne Rich’s concept of “White solipsism”, which is a tunnel vision blind to non-white experience.⁵¹⁴ Niloo can still more tolerantly deal with Iranians in the West or her father teasing her for “losing her fine accent”⁵¹⁵ or having an American accent over her Persian, as if she is a “defective blender.”⁵¹⁶

Niloo maintains her multiplicitous selves through scraps of cultures and languages, memories and histories that she carries with her and in her perimeter. She is aware of the fact that people like her father want her to be part of a “larger organism,”⁵¹⁷ to be proud of who she is, a true Persian, with a knowledge of the poetry and culture. But Niloo is still hanging onto the refugee story; this is something that she cannot let go, something that keeps her cells together, “attach and grow.”⁵¹⁸

These feelings reach a climax when Niloo observes the situation of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands and critiques the immigration politics, while being reminded of her own past:

She comes to think of herself as an Iranian immigrant again, a child refugee, not an American expat—the difference having to do with options, purpose, and personal control. Like many Middle Eastern immigrants, she watches the growing influence of Wilders with awe and trepidation. She reads up on his political career, his rants against Islam (“Take a walk down the street... before you know it, there will be more mosques than churches”), his casual racism (“Netherarabia will just be a matter of time!”), his proposals to tax women in hijab and place moratoria on “non-Western” immigrants, and worst of all, the way he appeals to poorly educated rural farmers with his openly hostile attitude to Holland’s large Middle Eastern and North African populations.⁵¹⁹

Niloo only became an Iranian refugee because her mother had converted from Islam to Christianity, and, as a practicing GP, she felt she had no security to stay in Iran with her two kids. Meanwhile, Niloo’s father, Dr. Hamidi, a dentist, was addicted to Opium and living in his own world of delirium. Niloo, having been raised by a Christian convert mother and a traditionalist, atheist father, and being agnostic while having been raised a Christian, she sees how Islamophobia and racism affect her and people like her in the Netherlands. Nayeri has a very decolonial and critical feminist attitude towards immigration and the immigration laws practiced in the Netherlands. The fact that she mentions Wilders and his racist, sexist, and Islamophobic policies, while her work is published in the West, is very interesting. She shares refugee experiences and her critical perspective of

⁵¹³ Ibid., 61.

⁵¹⁴ Adrienne Rich, *Disloyal to civilization: feminism, racism, gynophobia*, (New York: WW Norton, 1979).

⁵¹⁵ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 74.

⁵¹⁶ Even the term, defective blender that Niloo uses to refer to herself is an interesting word choice. Niloo is a blender, blending all cultures and languages, mixing them up and producing a smooth shake which kind of tastes like all those cultures and languages but none of them individually. See Nayeri, *Refuge*, 102.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 259.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 259.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 207.

European refugee politics with a white European, and more broadly, a transnational audience who only hear about those lives in the media.

Part of Niloo's multiplicitous self comes from her Iranian identity and being from a Shia Muslim majority country. Like other Iranians in Zakhmeh and the poetry house, she cannot escape that identity marker. She is fully aware of the rise of populism and the way it affects the conditions of refugees and migrants. An act of solidarity or just out of personal experience, she avoids identifying as an expat and instead identifies as a child refugee, an immigrant, because she acknowledges that "options, purposes, and personal control" make all the difference in border crossing and developing a multiplicitous self. Niloo's intimate terrorism is different to what Azadeh experienced as the pains of border crossing.

Niloo's understanding of refugee life brings her closer to the community of post 9/11 Muslim refugees in the Netherlands. Unlike Azadeh, her place of refuge is not uptown parties and upper-class intellectual get-togethers, but the dungeon-like Zakhmeh, where people get together, eat canned peas, and talk about their miseries as migrants in Europe. This type of community is similar to AA group therapy get-togethers where people share and, through sharing, feel relieved. Niloo does not only feel morally responsible to care, but also epistemically responsible to produce, and share her experiential knowledge. Out of the many microhistory narratives that I read while coming up with my corpus of study, *Refuge* was one of the best examples of decolonial narratives among them, in which the writer is not just after self-discovery, but also dismantling whiteness and representing multiplicitous refugee identities. While acknowledging despite her traumatic childhood experiences, that she is still a privileged migrant in Europe, she is contrasting herself to her friends: Karim, Mam'mad, and Siamak. The polyphony in *Refuge* makes Niloo's story more epistemically credible; She does not try to give voice to the voiceless, a phrase that I find problematic due to the politics of 'speaking for others', but by incorporating the real lives of refugees in her own story, she makes an archive of everyday life histories, knowledges, and experiences that are very frequently marginalized and forgotten by grand narratives of history. By sharing her perimeter story, Nayeri invokes similar common experiences among migrants of all types, letting us know that passports, trinkets and backpacks matter in border crossing lives and they are carriers of memory and knowledge.

Compared to the identities Azadeh portrays and discusses in *Lipstick Jihad*, Dina Nayeri highlights the diversity of Iranian migrants. She invests more into portraying migrants and refugees of different types of social status and background. Her descriptions go as follows:

Group One: Money Persians. These took their money out before the fall of the shah. They settled mostly in California, mostly in real estate. They built Tehrangeles and seem unashamed of that, as they are unashamed of their blue velvet furniture and hefty indoor columns. Draped in gold and bathed in perfume, they do cleanses and flash about in packs, spilling out of their red Mercedeses, designer labels blazing off their bodies two or three

at a time, When Money Persians have Western guests, they serve beluga caviar or honey pastries, fresh pistachios, champagne.⁵²⁰

Group two: Academic Persians. Scattered in small colleges and university towns, they read fat dusty books. If they didn't get out before the revolution, they don't have much money and seem fine with that. Money Persians embarrass them. They've fled Westward because they value their freedom to think and create, to study what they like. They shiver with political fury and listen to music from chic sixties Tehran and read *The Blind Owl* and pressure their children to attend Harvard. Every young Persian thinks his parents fall in group two, even if their house has Corinthian columns or smells like fried cilantro. To America guests, they serve baked lays with Cucumber yogurt dip.⁵²¹

Group three: Fresh-off-the-boat Persians. They may have been here for twenty years but the musk of the village follows them. They read the Koran. Their houses smell like Ghorme Sabzi, or at least fried cilantro. Often their teeth need work—this isn't an issue of class, but of habit. Even rich villagers are villagers. They hang ghilim rugs bearing Nastaliq script on the walls. If they come into unexpected money, they sink it into fake watches or visit the Grand Canyon. They hope their children will try for good universities, but secretly wish them to stay close to them. They know what Harvard is, but not Yale. They don't burn with need for it, as do groups one and two. They pickle and store things (garlic, shallots, onions) in big jars in the garage next to the derelict car and try to serve it to Western guests wearing tight smiles, who sample one item.⁵²²

Group four: Artists and Activist Persians. Fiery, wandering, no ambitions beyond tipping the world off its axis. They drink a lot, smoke a lot, rant against religion, have imaginative sex with strangers. Sometimes, they wander to California or New York and play the Arab character on a cheap daytime soap or telenovela while they finish their book of stories or their album. They write letters to poets currently in residence at Evin prison. They grow old in white ponytails and floral skirts that hint at Northern Iran but are actually purchased from farmers' markets in Fort Greene or Camden Town or the Jordaan. They read the news and can really dance. To guests, they serve beers, mixed nuts, and whatever hasn't gone off in the fridge, as local natives would.⁵²³

As much as the descriptions sound funny and stereotypical, Niloo is drawing from her anthropological knowledge of categories that people have either developed for themselves or they have been made to fit into. The Money Persians that Niloo describes are the common San Francisco/California Iranians described by Azadeh and Jasmine. They are financially well-off, obsessed with money and culturally cheap, according to these descriptions. They always try to impress the Western people with their ancient culture, Caviar and jewellery. For them, money is status, Their Tehrangeles is Tehran back in the 1960s and 1970s, and they never bother to go back to Iran to face the change. The second group of Iranians are academic Persians who are obsessed with degrees, the university brands and they are mostly disciplinarian. Their version of exile is more artistic, they read literature, listen to music and do not care if they do not have money or they have been living in a small town all their lives. They distance themselves from money Persians, because, for them, status is based not on financial capital, but on cultural capital. Although they are obsessed with knowledge acquisition, they can also be stuck in the past and dissociate themselves from current Iran.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 84-5.

⁵²² Ibid., 85.

⁵²³ Ibid., 86.

Fresh off the boat Persians are usually those who have entered the US on a lottery visa. They have moved out of Iran but they still create Iranian spaces in the US. Their border crossing does not equal world travelling, because they still stick to norms and values out of context, they do not even try any other type of food. Artist and activist Persians also comprise a category that shares a lot of exilic feelings with the rest of the groups. These artists do not care about money or university degrees in the West. They are still obsessed with the social and political changes happening in Iran, but in a pessimistic and depressive way. They believe nothing will change in Iran making activism from overseas necessary. Their version of activism is writing letters to prisoners and promoting secularity.

After describing the four categories above, Dina, voiced by Niloo represents different categories of refugees, a form of representation that I had not come across in the Literature of Iranian diaspora. Niloo's feelings of in-betweenness is entangled with her type of refugeeness and border crossing, as I explained in the previous section. However, she is not stuck in her own category of refugee, as the second-generation political religious refugees. She has her eyes open to see other refugee's lives, political consciousness, and new social locations in the new land. Seeing the fresh off the boat refugees suffer, Niloo is very resistant against the idea of her father seeking asylum in the West, after having been put under house arrest in the 2009 uprisings. Niloo developed a consciousness for the epistemologies of exile over time and cannot see a possibility of adaptability and world-travelling for her dad. As she states:

She moves the message out of sight. Because if tonight has taught her one lesson, it is this: Baba's matchless spirit wouldn't survive the refugee life, and she doesn't want to tempt or confuse him by relenting to another visit. Would she send an innocent like Gui (however arrogant) into the bowels of Green Movement Tehran to be singled out and arrested? In the same way, Baba doesn't belong here, his bare feet, cradled for decades by warm grasses, soft Ardestooni riverbanks, and silky rugs, landing suddenly on this chilly, inhospitable soil. In exile, Baba's feral laugh would die in his throat. His sour cherry pockets would dry up. He would forget the boyish clapping of his heart, as Mam'mad and Karim have done. As Niloo did, long ago.⁵²⁴

For Niloo, world-travelling has taken place, but adaptability is still a challenge. She has worked hard, has been highly educated, has seen around the world, holds three passports, is married to a French man, but still she feels the exile and otherness throughout all her existence. Her lack of a sense of belonging, her struggles with adaptability, and her constant search for a home is also felt by her partner who reminds her:

"You're not Karim or Mam'mad." He says, "Why are you still so scared of losing your spot?" That name sends a hot ache through her belly. Gui stares into his glass. "For ages I thought we were making a home, but you're still waiting with your backpack all packed and ready to go."⁵²⁵

The climactic moment of the relationship occurs when Gui reminds Niloo that her backpack has been the wall between them, anchoring her off from any home-making practices and developing any sense of

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 163.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 249.

belonging somewhere. For Niloo, Ma'mmad, Karim, and Sy – the refugee friends she has made in Zakhmeh – adaptability is a political act; so is in-betweenness. They do not identify as émigré, or expats, because they do not share that version of border crossing experience. Ma'mmad and Karim do not identify as transnational because transnationalism is the privilege of being able to cross the borders according to someone's freedom and agency, to be able to gain social security, citizenship rights, and the chance of re-rooting. Sy has had the privilege of growing up in the West and being educated there, but he like Niloo still identifies as a refugee. There is shared knowledge in the backpacks that these people carry to and from Zakhmeh, in the chats they have while sitting by the canal and over the peasant food and drinks they share at Zakhmeh. Through sharing lived experience, they document their histories and their type of mobility. The epistemic privilege, political consciousness, and activism that comes from refugee status makes them transcultural epistemic bodies navigating differences and diversity. It is through the discrimination that M'ammad and Karim, for instance, have to tolerate, that they develop an understanding of human rights violations, racism, and racial profiling. This knowledge or understanding is an outcome of lived experience, and an existence which is non-linear, non-temporal, non-spatial but interpersonal. Despite the fact that they are living in in-between spaces and times, their existence is dependent on one another. This is why Zakhmeh turns into a place of refuge for Niloo, or Sy, where they can fill in the gaps of histories of migrants and migration. As much as Sy's political activism and knowledge sounds radical and sometimes idealistic, his scattered memories of home juxtaposed to his memories of life in the West, is a good representative of his multiplicitous self:

Sy might be praising his dinner and he'll turn it political: *I'm loving this so much right now; I wonder if Ahmadinejad knows there's an Iranian out there left unfucked for a few minutes.* And he considers everything about the Western world dull and lifeless: *Don't you see how gray everything is compared to Iran? Have you forgotten the lemons like candy and the grasses that whistle and lamb kebabs and salty corn on the roadside on the way to the Caspian Sea? Have you forgotten the music? Oh, Niloo joon, the music...*

Often he speaks in many directions: his childhood in New York, Mousavi's moderate policies but lack of charisma, the world Cup, the shady way Iranian elections are run. At the microphone on story nights, he talks about falling in love in troubled times, from a jail cell, across class and religion. "Glorious," he says. He calls everything *glorious*, cheapening the word.⁵²⁶

Sy's ongoing enthusiasm about change in systems is too idealistic for people like Karim and Ma'mmad. He can still entertain concepts such as "democracy", love across class and religion, charisma and so many other pompous, boisterous terms, while Karim and Ma'mmad are still standing in queues of the immigration office to gain an update on their status. They are scared of any political participation, in case it might worsen their refugee cases and they get rejected after years and years of waiting. As Karim testifies:

"Do you really believe anything will change?" Karim says, almost moaning. "Every time I go to a protest, I think, what if a newspaper snaps my picture and I never see my wife again? And then when a long time passes and nothing happens, or another asylum petition gets rejected, I think, I'll be roaming these streets without her

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 216.

forever. I've been here for ten years, agha. Not like your friend Mala's ten years. Most of that time I've been illegal. Room to room, or on the streets. I have children I barely know."⁵²⁷

Karim's in-betweenness is not like that of a diaspora or transnational. He has been waiting for asylum for ten years, meanwhile his wife and kids have been living in Iran waiting for him to take them to Europe to get the family back together. This long-lasting process, and his illegal existence in Europe has beaten him down. Karim has not even been given a chance to start the world-travelling and adaptability phase, because he has been kept in the dangling phase of immigration. Niloo observes that "Karim seems always ashamed, like a beaten person, exhausted in mind and body, as if at any moment he might throw his hands up and announce he's finished, then immediately disintegrate into ashes."⁵²⁸ She considers the extremity of Karim's condition demonstrates that "no Westerner has ever wanted to be involved in Karim's life."⁵²⁹

Another example of suspended refugee identity is Ma'mmad, whose in-between condition is a silent heartbreak. Ma'mmad, a scholar and an academic, has come to Holland with the prospect in mind that "I should be a knowledge worker, not a refugee". Ma'mmad is very conscious of the refugee category of "scholars at risk": "Scholars come here, they languish, they never find work. They are sent home."⁵³⁰

For Niloo, the experience of border crossing is more of an interpersonal nature and loss of people and relationships. She does not expect Gui to understand what refugeeness and border crossing mean to her. He calls Niloo's experience a "fantastic refugee saga"⁵³¹ and she enjoys it when he "mocks her outright"⁵³² instead of looking all sad and pitiful, a face that, for Niloo, "[conjures] images of fathers knocking at border gates for the benefit of some stranger."⁵³³ Niloo sticks to her refugee identity because it makes her feel stronger than what she is expected to be. Niloo's relationship with her father and her husband portray her identity before and after crossing the borders and settling as a successful migrant. For her, every time, seeing her father in a remote corner of the world, is also a loss. The older her father gets, the more she feels affected by her in-betweenness and remoteness from people with whom she shares self-knowledge. As she voices her feelings:

How sad it is when someone who has left your orbit, whose memory has receded, holds such intimate knowledge. Meeting them again feels like renewed loss, and it's full of tremors and watery eyes and involuntary responses much like a bout of opium withdrawal, not only because every familiar detail—their blue eyes or their yellowing laugh or a charming turn of their hand—is like a coil of skin peeled from the heart, but because they took away

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 215.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 159.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 150.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 35.

⁵³² Ibid., 35.

⁵³³ Ibid., 35.

that knowledge of you with them, that snapshot of you, out into the world. And as they changed, everything that they knew changed too. And so you are unwittingly altered.⁵³⁴

This excerpt particularly highlights the significance of knowledge based on lived experience. As Niloo discovers, our self-knowledge does not just come from what we experience but also from what other people experience with, about us and our presence in their lives. Niloo's relationality to the world around her involves a lot of knowledge sharing and she believes, once people walk out of one's life, they take with them that very particular epistemic body they have built about you, which also takes away one's self knowledge, which is based on that epistemic body. Thus, border crossing is not just interpersonal, or locational, but also epistemological and epistemological challenge should not be undermined. A considerable amount of the feelings of in-betweenness are due to the loss of self-knowledge the border crosser feels and although knowledge is very anchored in space, it is not merely spatial. The border-crosser misses the knowledge people back home used to have of them; for instance, Niloo with her father back in Iran is someone very different to Niloo in Turkey with her father, or Niloo in the Netherlands with her husband. I am not suggesting that a border-crosser or an in-between identity loses integrity in terms of self-knowledge once they cross the borders, but I am saying that there exists a trade-off of self-knowledge once people change location and lose touch with people of their orbit. The knowledge that people of a homeland, especially family members, have about someone, is unique. It is through people's knowledge of us that we realize we are sensitive, smart, strong, cautious, etc., and we internalize those adjectives in our selves.

Story-telling is another form of knowledge-sharing between border crossers, as a way to compensate for the self-knowledge that is lost through border crossing and losing touch with people who had contributed to those epistemic bodies. In order to retain the knowledge of home and community, Niloo seeks asylum in Zakhmeh and starts sharing stories with refugees and migrants who share the same dislocation and tell stories of their lived experience for public audience, with no sense of shame or reservation. When Niloo is asked to tell a story, surprisingly of her, she "feels bold and craves to participate."⁵³⁵

She wonders what story they would like. Should she tell them about Maman at Food for less? About trying to learn sixth-grade slang? About the tic in her neck? No, she decided, she should describe the day at the dry cleaners two months ago. On that day, as after the incident at Marqt, she didn't try to explain herself to a baffled Guillaume. She didn't know how. But here no storyteller is doing any explaining; it seems unnecessary. The stories unfold detail by detail, and the heads in the crowd nod and bow, their understanding palpable in their expressions, in the quiet way they bring their cigarettes to their lips, the way they rest their chins on their knees and let their soup congeal beside their bare feet.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 202.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 80.

This excerpt is a good representative example of how, through story-telling and oral history, marginalized communities can gain epistemic privilege, adaptability, and dwell in their in-betweenness. Things that are shared in Zakhmeh, by Niloo or by any other participant, are real life stories. As much as those stories do not make any sense to the majority White community in the Netherlands, or if they do, they are digested through victimhood assumptions, pity and remorse, they do make a lot of sense to people who share that experience. Niloo's nervous breakdown over a dry-cleaned jacket and her fits of anger over so-called small things are such common stories and experiences among those people that even embodiment of the act of listening, (which is smoking in this scene), is quite similar from one person to another. Niloo is confident to talk to people of Zakhmeh because she expects them to understand, however, she is incapable of any type of story-sharing with her husband. As she grows older, she feels the in-betweenness and challenges of adaptability more than before, and this is why she becomes very defensive of all her belongings, including a spice jar which she had inherited from her grandmother. A fight, over a jar of spice because Gui has just thrown it out, thinking that it is trash, turns into a huge disappointment for Niloo.

"You threw out my jar"...

"Did I?" he says. "I'll buy you another one." "He turns back to his printouts."

"This is why I don't want your hands in my stuff. Couldn't you let it just be mine?"

"...You were at the guitar-pick place and I had some free time, so I cleaned the pantry. I only threw away a few expired, garbary things. Or, I thought they were... I'm sorry."

"It's called Zakhmeh," she snaps, "Zakh-MEH. It's not hard to learn. And you didn't have to get revenge just because I had one thing of my own."

She knows the accusation is unfair—Gui isn't vengeful. ... This is Guillaume's approach to life, to possessions. Unless a thing looks pricy, it's worthless.

.... "Sometimes I wonder," she says, "if I put on my shittiest T-shirt for long enough, would you throw me away?"⁵³⁷

Niloo knows her anger at Gui is not just over a spice jar, but it is more about not sharing a background, lived experience, and not finding a possibility of connection through experience. Niloo gets angry at Gui's approach to life, the fact that he throws things out as soon as they look worthless to him, and she cannot even have one thing as a personal belonging. She gets insecure about her presence in his life, whether he will get rid of her when she is messy looking. Niloo knows Gui will not treat her like that; however, by accusing him, she gets revenge on whiteness, European privilege and every privilege she has received through border crossing which she is expected to be grateful for. When she snaps at him about Zakhmeh and tells Gui off about not

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 247.

being able to pronounce the name “Zakhmeh,” she is expressing her frustration over an unrequited adaptability going on in a “multicultural” social space. Seemingly, the jar is not only a spice jar, but a metonym of bits and pieces of Niloo’s identity, the selves she has brought from Iran and she is struggling to still conserve in her spice jar in the Netherlands. Niloo is tired of negotiating her previous identity, and as long as this negotiation goes on, she does not feel like she belongs or she has a home.

3.2.3 Of daughters and mothers and stories untold

In this section, I discuss Jasmine Darznic’s *The Good Daughter*. Unlike *Refuge*, Darznic’s narrative is more concerned about a historiographical representation of Iran, more than of the West. *Refuge*, is a father-daughter narrative in so many aspects, and Niloo’s attachments to homeland is represented through her relationship with her father who metonymically epitomizes homeland for her. However, *The Good Daughter* is the narrative of a mother-daughter relationship and the attachments to homeland are more of a feminine nature.⁵³⁸ Jasmine narrates the lives of four generations of women, her great grandmother, grandmother, mom and herself, and this feminist historical overview of these lives gives the reader a much better understanding of her mother’s experience of border crossing, and of hers, as a second generation, biracial migrant. Only in the final third of the book do we get to the migration experience of Lili, Jasmine’s mother, and herself. The different experiences of the mother and daughter portray two very different types of world-travelling and multiplicitous selves.

Jasmine narrates Lili’s life, based on what she has heard from her. However, her version of testimony based on heard knowledge is different from Azadeh’s. Lili has documented all her memories, her life history and experience on a number of tapes that she mails to Jasmine. Lili, born in Tehran, from an unfortunate marriage between her domesticated mother and her well-off, successful, and absent father, happens to marry a man, years older than herself through an arrangement organized by the women of the house, namely, her grandmother, aunts, and her mother, when she is only twelve years of age. The marriage takes place at the time when Reza Khan, the first Pahlavi Shah of Iran, began his modernization project and, as a result, for instance, ordered all women to take off any type of veiling.⁵³⁹ Lili has to give up her education, because at the time married girls were not allowed to attend schools. In her marriage, she suffers through being raped, beaten and impregnated by her husband. After giving birth to her first daughter, she asks her absent father, who is preoccupied with his mistress and job, to free her from marriage. He only agrees to help her get a divorce (because, divorce was a very stigmatized act and divorcees were essentially considered as bad women or sluts,

⁵³⁸ Jasmine has an Iranian mother who represents homeland for her.

⁵³⁹ The project of unveiling women, according to some Iranian and transnational feminists such as Mino Moallem, was a patriarchal practice, which was advised by white imperialist feminism, in order to present a gesture of modernity through a liberation and emancipation of women’s bodies. This project was a failure according to many feminists, as it was still another way of policing women’s bodies, and instead of being liberatory, it was limiting for so many women who practiced veil out of faith, especially in the context of the time and space which is Iran of 1930s. See Moallem, *Between warrior brother and veiled sister*, 29.

according to Lili's testimony),⁵⁴⁰ based on the condition that she goes back to school and becomes something.

As the memoir notes:

If he could not restore her to the status of a respectable woman, then Sohrab would make her into something else entirely, something hitherto unknown in their entire extended family, an educated woman, a professional woman.⁵⁴¹

In order to be an educated woman, and to be restored to the position of a respectable woman, Lili is sent to a founding hospital run by Catholic nuns in Germany, which would be a preparation for her medical school education to become a doctor. While so many ups and downs happen in her life, her father dies, she has to go back to Iran and then spend all her savings to come back to Germany and become a midwife. Lili manages to get her degree, meet a young German called Johann, get married, and start practicing midwifery in Tehran. Lili gains respect and recognition in Iran, not only for being called a *Kbanoom doctor* (Ms. Doctor) but also for having married a *Damad Farangi* (a foreign bride groom) who is a European engineer. Lili's happiness does not last very long, as the pre-revolutionary uprisings start to happen in Tehran, and Lili, who has just settled in, has to pack up her life and family and leave for the US.

Lili's experience of border crossing is remarkable in this study, especially because she leaves her homeland at a time when it is not very common for women to travel on their own, especially for educational purposes. Although the stories narrated in her memoir share so many dramatic turning points with pop memoirs about the success of victims, what is called "pornography,"⁵⁴² *The Good Daughter* is not a misery narrative. Lili is a real woman, constrained by her conditions of time and space, her knowledge and social myths, and she is resilient enough to change some things about her life, even if miseries and turning points in her life sound very much like misery-narrative tropes. Throughout the memoir, Lili's hardships, challenges and at times, sufferings are not overgeneralized to all women in Iran or are not interpreted as outcomes of cultural and religious practices; rather, they are associated with universal patriarchal oppressions. This makes her memoir a great example for critiquing the critiques of memoir as a misery narrative.

⁵⁴⁰ As Ziba Mir Hosseini states in her *Marriage on Trial*, divorce in Iran has gone through many legal changes. While divorce laws enjoyed a radical reform in pre-revolutionary Iran under the Family Protection Law of 1967 (giving women equal rights to divorce and assigning divorce decisions to court rather than the man who previously could divorce his wife any time), the reforms were denounced by Ayatollah Khomeini after the revolution, making divorce harder for women and easier for men. These days, men and women go to court for divorce decrees, and they both need to provide grounds for the request, however, it is legally easier for men to provide grounds considered 'logical' by the judge. Divorce rights and the reception of a divorced woman, as Mir-hosseini also maintains, vary based on class and education level. See Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on trial: A study of Islamic family law*, (London: IB Tauris, 2000), 56.

⁵⁴¹ Jasmin Darznik, *The Good Daughter: My Mother's Hidden Life*, (New York: Random House, 2012), 118.

⁵⁴² Guy Mark Foster, "Do I Look like Someone You Can Come Home to from Where You May Be Going?" Re-Mapping Interracial Anxiety in Octavia Butler's "Kindred." *African American Review* 41, no. 1 (2007): 143-164.

Marcus Wood, *Slavery, empathy and pornography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Carolyn J Dean, "Empathy, pornography, and suffering." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2003): 88-124.

Lili's version of world-travelling and developing a multiplicitous self is different to Azadeh, Niloo, or any other woman.⁵⁴³ Her difference lies in the kind of flexibility that she practices in her border crossing, along with her resilience to achieve something, to be someone, or to make something out of herself. Lili is among the first generation of migrants who have a temporary experience of living in Europe and then choose to reside in the US after the revolution. In both border crossing experiences, she bears awareness of her situation as a divorced Iranian woman, a mother, and someone who needs to strategize her life, even if she experiences racial and sexist discrimination. She needs to show flexibility to gain what is good for "her" and "her family." When Lili goes to Europe for the first time, walking in the streets of the town in Germany, she and her brother joke about how Germans might be perceiving them: "they joked that the locals must take them for a pair of wealthy exotics passing through on their honeymoon."⁵⁴⁴ This does not mean that Lili did not take exoticization as racialization, but her understanding of that experience comes with more flexibility, because being in Germany, getting a job, and becoming a doctor is what she has signed up for and will save her life. As she archives her memories for Jasmine:

There were few jobs for a foreign girl like her, but at Sohrab's word Nader had made inquiries and secured a spot for her as an orderly at a foundling hospital run by Catholic nuns. If she did well there, Nader promised her, she could eventually earn a place in medical school. She'd be a doctor! The prospect thrilled her, and so Lili wasted no time in joining the ranks of skinny, dark-skinned immigrant girls—Turks, Greeks, Yugoslavians—who'd come to Germany after world war II to be thrown together with no common language, and jobs that left them little time to wonder about one another's circumstances or even to give much thought to their own.⁵⁴⁵

Lili enters Europe at a time when "dark-skinned immigrant girls" are hired for low rank jobs, "thrown together," and exploited so much that they do not get to have any time to question their social location. This short description manifests well why Lili has to be flexible, playful and strategic and why survival matters to her so much.⁵⁴⁶ By playful here I am referring to Maria Lugones' concept of "playfulness", defined as "an openness to being a fool, [...] not being self-important, [...] not taking norms as sacred, [...] openness to surprise, [...] openness to self-construction or reconstruction of the "worlds" we inhabit

⁵⁴³ The diversity of multiplicitous selves has been addressed by Marianna Ortega in her *Hypatia* article titled "New Mestizas," "World-Travelers," and "Dasein." Ortega and other Latina phenomenologist feminists such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, Aurora Morales, Rosario Morales and Ofelia Schutte question the traditionalist philosophical preference for a unified, primarily epistemic and autonomous subject" and instead theorize the new mestiza, or the world-traveling subject with a multiplicitous self "caught in between norms and practices of different cultures, classes, races, or "worlds." The same as the intimate terrorism that Ortega suggests, Anzaldúa believes that the multiplicitous self is constantly suffering "an inner war," "a cultural collision," or "a psychic restlessness," and the difficulty is "juggling" cultures, norms, practices, beliefs and ideas that could be different or contradictory.

Anzaldúa believes that responses to world-travelling are not the same for every New Mestiza. As she states: "Only by remaining flexible is she (the new mestiza) able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tend to use rationality to move toward a single goal (A Western mode), to divergent thinking characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes." See Anzaldúa, *Borderland*, 79

See Mariana Ortega, "'New Mestizas,'" "World Travelers," and "Dasein": Phenomenology and the Multi-Voiced, Multi-Cultural Self." *Hypatia* 16, no. 3 (2001): 4-5

⁵⁴⁴ Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 137.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 141-2.

⁵⁴⁶ This setting informs the reader about the waves of discrimination and construction of colour hierarchies throughout the last sixty years. Intersectionally speaking, the type of oppression Lili has to survive is dependent on her gender, ethnicity, class, marital status, level of education, etc. However, the extent of islamophobia that, for instance, Niloo experiences in Europe in 2003 onwards, is different to what Lili experiences in 1960s. Post 9/11 Europe is obsessed with Muslims and their migration, which is understood as invasion and terror.

playfully.”⁵⁴⁷ Playfulness as a shift from being one person to another, moving in-between different worlds and around different people, and to “travel” into people’s worlds is an important aspect of border crossing. Lili’s understanding of her social location and her “self” partly comes from her relation to others, as we are all social beings who exist in relation to others, and that relation, together with our own experience of the self, defines who we are. Through her relation with German doctors she feels her ethnicity as a one thousand and one night Persian:

For Lili, the doctors in their impeccable White smocks were easily the most appealing men in Germany, not least of all because they made her feel she was a character plucked from the pages of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Several of them were wont to pull her aside the hallways to discuss the love poems of Hafez and the architectural wonders of Persepolis. They were in many cases more learned about her country’s history and literary traditions than she herself, and she listened eagerly to their speeches and secretly spun fantasies of her own.⁵⁴⁸

Lili is questioned about her culture. This is a recurrent experience for many Iranians in the West, where white people ask them questions about a few minute things that they have learnt about Iranian culture, while reading for escape at their leisure time. Iranians are supposed to have read Hafiz, Rumi, one thousand and one nights; they are expected to have seen Persepolis, and the rest of the architecture wonders of Persia. Yet, the reality of their life demands something different. Women like Lili have given birth to children while they were children themselves, they do not know much Hafiz because while forced into marriage, they were banned from going to school. Thus, the hardships of life have never given them a chance to be educated about their own cultures. For an Iranian woman at that historical period having cultural knowledge is a privilege that is based on ethnicity/gender/class.

Lili is coming over so many barriers to be educated and to shift class. By documenting her own life history, she is contributing to the resistance of epistemic bodies, and sharing a kind of experience that can help other women of colour to become more aware of their multiplicitous selves, to see their own contradictions and, instead of questioning themselves, understand that this is what every new Mestiza goes through. Lili, the Yugoslavian girls, Turks, Greeks and other dark-skinned women at that period of time and in that social space, are travelling worlds, or, as Ortega puts it, “[they] find themselves balancing beliefs, norms, and practices from different cultures or societies or from their own heterogeneous groups—beliefs, norms, and practices which cannot always be balanced or aligned neatly.”⁵⁴⁹ Therefore, these women travel into other worlds, but not as tourists traveling, relaxing, eroticizing, consuming or appropriating cultures.⁵⁵⁰ They travel to learn from other

⁵⁴⁷ Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, "world"-travelling, and loving perception." *Hyppatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 17.

⁵⁴⁸ Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 184-5.

⁵⁴⁹ Ortega, "New Mestizas, world-travellers," 19.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

worlds, to contribute to other worlds, and although they expose themselves to risks such as racial injustice, exploitation, abuse and harassment, they still resist injustices and seek to produce knowledge.⁵⁵¹

Even Jasmine does not know anything about her mother's experience of world travelling until she hears them on tape. Only then does she start sympathising with her and realizing why they had such a tumultuous relationship when she was growing up. Lili leaves one daughter behind to protect another. She moves to the US because she wants an easier life for Jasmine. She puts up with her alcoholic husband and does not get a divorce for the second time because she cannot be an unrespectable mother in the US; especially within the Iranian community in San Francisco, who consider divorced women as social lepers, according to Lili. The only thing Jasmine remembers of her mother's border crossing, is a family that only consisted of women who lived together, decided together, and wrote each other's destinies together, while men were either drunk, or absent.

Until Lily told the story in the tapes twenty years later, I'd forget almost everything about that last night in Iran. The two suitcases, the pretty lady in the golden carriage on television, all the cries, prayers, and promises, Kobra as she held the Koran over our heads, and Zaynab burying her face in Lili's chest and then wrestling herself free and walking away so as there was no choice for us but to go. One by one my memories of that last night in Iran fell away until finally I remembered nothing but the snow.⁵⁵²

While Lili and Jasmine leave, Kobra (Lili's mother) and Zaynab (Lili's aunt) stay. One of the pains of world travelling for Iranian women is leaving their families behind. As much as it might seem natural and part of the immigration process, for women like Lili and so many like her, it is the most difficult part of the journey. Those who leave have to deal with the pains of border crossing and developing multiplicitous selves, to be able to negotiate their social locations and identities. Those who stay, need to develop the skill of understanding the world travelling process of those who have left. In the case of Lili and Jasmine, Kobra, a single mom who had raised not only Lili, but also Sara (Lili's eldest daughter), and Jasmine, is the one who is left alone and needs to understand Lili's choice to leave home and reside in the US.

Jasmine's experience of border crossing is different to her mother's. Since she is biracial, she had already experienced difference in Iran; however, that sense of difference is more of a privileged status of whiteness as superior; whereas in the US, her brownness is much bolder and, therefore, she is in a less privileged social location, compared to other kids at school. As she states:

⁵⁵¹ This is why Lourde Torres emphasizes that autobiographical accounts of Latina women are important, because they are "seizing the podium" through writing their life histories, and highlighting a self that is not "monolithic" and does not fit into the homogenous category of Latina women writers. I am applying the same argument in approaching Iranian and Iraqi women's life writing. See Lourdes Torres, "The construction of the self in US Latina autobiographies." *Women, knowledge, and reality: Explorations in feminist philosophy* (1996): 127-143.

⁵⁵² Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 269.

I was doh-rageh, a two-veined child. Not “half” or “mixed,” as they say in America and many other countries besides, but double. Two. For Iranians, such legacies are carried in the body, intimate as blood and unopposable as destiny.⁵⁵³

Jasmine’s perception of her status as a child born out of an interracial marriage opens an apt discussion about the politics of race and biraciality as a social construct, which is interpreted differently from one culture to another. Jasmine knows that being ‘doh-rageh’ in Iran is a privilege,⁵⁵⁴ since the biracial identity is not considered as having two halves of two full identities but having them both. Thus, a biracial identity is an amalgamation of two cultures, two histories, two languages and any other social construct that could bring privileges to that identity. Jasmine refers to the untranslatability of the term doh-rageh. The legacies she refers to could be interpreted as knowledges, cultures, identities, and multiplicitous selves that not only do we construct, but also inherit from previous generations.⁵⁵⁵

As I will discuss in later sections, there is a sense of togetherness in the multiplicity of selves that women like Lili embrace in their experience of border crossing.⁵⁵⁶ Although they seem to bear so many contradictory elements, they are not contradictory beings. It is their juggling of norms, beliefs, or worlds that makes them sound confused or contradictory. They are not fragmented identities; there is definitely a sense of wholeness in their worlds and selves that defines their agency and makes them epistemic bodies.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁵⁵ Mention should be made that the term ‘doh-rageh’ in Persian has positive connotation. As defined by Dehkhoda dictionary of Farsi, the original term used to refer to horses that were a mix of two breeds. Doh-rageh is commonly used as a positive term for a mix of races such as Caucasian and African and it is appreciated the most when there is a racial mix of white European and Persian. Religiously speaking, Muslims have been encouraged by the prophet to travel in the world, mix with other races and reproduce, as their next generations would become intellectually and physically stronger. However, the term is barely used when referring to a child born out of an Iranian-Afghan mix. Like in the West, as Jasmine experiences, the Afghan side of the identity would be highlighted in a derogatory approach, due to the racist attitude of Iranians towards Afghans and the history of exploitation and supremacy they hold over Afghans.

For the Hadith, see Yamal al-Din Muhammad Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-arab*. Vol 1, (Al Dar al-Misriyya Li-l-ta’lif wa-l-tarhim, 1975), 639.

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, et al., "Marriage and family formation of the second-generation Afghans in Iran: insights from a qualitative study." *International Migration Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 828-860.

⁵⁵⁶ As Ortega concludes in her discussions of world-traveling subjects, there is a sense of togetherness in the multiplicitousness of the world-traveller’s self, which benefits from ontological elements, one of which Heidegger calls “mineness.” These ontological elements give the traveller the opportunity to be reflexive and see the ways in which they are faring in the worlds. See “New Mestizas, world-travellers,” 17.

Chapter Four:

Dreams of Orange Trees and Chimeras of Home: Iraqi Women's Narratives of War, Loss and Homesickness

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look at three Iraqi life writing narratives, including *Orange Trees of Baghdad* (2014) by Leilah Nadir,⁵⁵⁷ *City of Widows* (2011)⁵⁵⁸ and *Dreaming of Baghdad* (2009)⁵⁵⁹ by Haifa Zangana. I trace the concepts of multiplicitous selves, world travelling and border crossing identities in these memoirs, comparing them to the Iranian ones that I analysed in the previous chapter. The common theme among and the historical turning point in these Iraqi narratives is the American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Narrating through personal lenses and family histories, these writers document counter-hegemonic microhistories and produce decolonial feminist epistemologies of war, invasion and occupation. I start this chapter with *Orange Trees of Baghdad*, a second-generation narrative and proceed to Haifa Zangana's *City of widows* and *Dreaming of Baghdad*.

4.2 “Intimate terrorism” and terrorist intimacies: scent of orange trees and bullets in Baghdad

Orange Trees of Baghdad begins with a big turning point in the history of Iraq, that is, the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, this event is not the only historical event revisited in this memoir. The writer, Leilah Nadir (second generation, half Iraqi half English) digs into layers of history such as British mandate, the Iran-Iraq War, Gulf War, and the American invasion and occupation retold by multiple real-life characters from different generations living in and out of Iraq. This memoir is a pastiche of exilic, diasporic and transnational experiences of Iraqi men and women at different times which the author collected through oral history. She uses people's testimony and experience through an ethnographical approach to present another perspective about the contemporary history of Iraq and at the same time resist Western epistemicide about what is actually taking place in the Middle East and more specifically, in Iraq. Leila's experience as someone who is “world-travelling” through witnessing other migrants' world-travelling is an interesting.

The narrator opens the narrative with the image of a family tree of generations and a picture of an orange tree in a Baghdad garden in the beginning of narrative. Being the symbol of life, the tree presents a good start to a narrative about the celebration of life through resistance and resilience. The introduction proclaims:

⁵⁵⁷ Leilah Nadir, *The Orange Trees of Baghdad* (BC: Barbarian Press, 2014).

⁵⁵⁸ Haifa Zangana, *City of widows: an Iraqi woman's account of war and resistance* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011)

⁵⁵⁹ Haifa Zangana, *Dreaming of Baghdad* (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009)

“I remember our garden in Baghdad”⁵⁶⁰ and a description of the garden and the trees and later on followed by the voice of Leilah, mentioning that this is her father’s recollection, “[a] picture that is hidden in my father’s memory. Like all our mythical origins, his beginnings are in a garden.”⁵⁶¹ She claims that she has never been to Iraq but she can feel it in her bones: “I sense the garden only through my family’s stories, words and pictures about its smells, the searing heat, the light, the butterflies, the storks, eating the Baghdadi delicacy of buffalo cream there.”⁵⁶² The descriptions awaken the reader’s olfactory, gustatory, tactile and visual senses in the very beginning and interestingly, this provocation is maintained throughout the story. Apart from the sensual aspect of the description, the way second hand memory and experience are embodied and can be felt by the Leilah is remarkable. Leilah experiences her Iraqi Identity differently to her father or any other first-generation migrant. Also, her version of intimate terrorism is different, on account of being born and raised in Canada. She does not have to juggle the Iraqi norms and practices with the Canadian ones, as much as a first generation would, to reach a compromising adaptability. Nevertheless, her pains of identification and adaptability should not be undermined. In my observations, and the interviews that I conducted with many people of second generation Middle Eastern background or people of colour in general, I noticed a common complaint among them; most mentioned to me that their pain of separation from a homeland that they have never directly experienced is always undermined by their parents or others in the community of the previous generation.

This extends to a sense of “pure” identity, or a simple sense of taste, smell or touch of something that awakens a sense of belonging. Part of the reason is that the pain of adaptability, intimate terrorism, and border crossing is generally associated with the first generation of migrants, therefore, there is the general assumption that the second-generation benefits from the privilege of already having crossed borders and settled in a new home. However, another pain exists due to the lack of accessibility to the roots of memory and imagining a homeland through the mythologized representation of homeland received from first generations. Those second-generation migrants who do not have access to an ancestral homeland invest a lot of energy, imagining how it is to be Iranian or Iraqi, for instance. Those who do have access to the land, feel the loss each time they go back and imagine what it would have been like having been born in homeland and identifying as Iranian-Iranian or Iraqi-Iraqi. This gets even more complex for biracial identities, such as Jasmine in the previous section and Leilah in this section, when their brown and white selves have to juggle norms and cultures to reach a compromise of identification. In the case of Leila, very intricate elements shape her world-travelling experience and process of identification, which I will explain as we go further on in the analysis.

⁵⁶⁰ Nadir, *The Orange Trees*, 15.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 16.

Leilah's world travelling and the development of a multiplicitous self start with the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁵⁶³ Most of the story is set in 2003, and this event seems to have ignited Leilah to start writing a family history to fill in the gaps of Iraq's social and political history. Writing or story-telling was also a way of world-travelling and self-discovery. Born to an Iraqi father and an English mother and having had contact with both extended families, she is quite familiar with the complexities of her own identity. She grew up in the West while wars were happening in Iraq. However, the 2003 invasion is different for her and she begins expressing her consciousness when the invasion takes place. As she mentions:

With the war raging, I wasn't sleeping, and I found it difficult to go through the rituals of my daily life. I realized that my mother's culture was terrorizing my father's. The present was invading the past. This had already happened in my lifetime during the 1991 Gulf war, but then the international agreement to go to war and the complicit silence of the Western media had shielded us from the reality of the devastation wrought on Iraqi society. This time I was thirty two, twelve years older, and I knew that there was something deeply wrong with what was happening.⁵⁶⁴

The American invasion is not just another war like any other. It's the war of histories, empires, and cultures, and, as we will see later in the work, it is the best representative of epistemicide, that is, killing the knowledge which is Iraq's history and culture and shielding the audience from the realities of the injustice of the war taking place in Iraq. Leilah feels like "both the aggressor and the victim [...] both the enemy and the ally"⁵⁶⁵ and this feeling awakens her hybrid identity. As she says, the invasion of Iraq is between two cultures both of whose blood flows in her.⁵⁶⁶ The war of cultures is a very common term when we look at the history of wars in the Middle East and this, of course has been the justification for colonialism all throughout history. The fact that whiteness always needs to be the saviour of the ancient cultures is not a new phenomenon. Leilah articulates that very well when she refers to herself as both the aggressor and the victim, and this very feeling makes the navigation of borders, and worlds much harder for her. The shared feeling of guilt that so many white people feel over the political actions of their countries is mixed with the feelings of misery of people of color who feel powerless in the face of injustice.

Despite not being treated as an "other" by the extended family members, Leilah frequently expresses her confusion about her Iraqi identity at both ontological and epistemological levels. As a Canadian of biracial descent, she feels Iraqi when watching on television as the homeland is attacked and falling apart. However,

⁵⁶³ Leilah mentions that her curiosity with Iraq had started with her name, its meaning and the reactions she used to get from any Arab or Iranian who knew the story behind the name; however, upon asking her mom about the reason why she has been called Leilah, she was told that she had been named after Leilah Khaled, the Palestinian refugee who hijacked the plane from Rome to Athens to protest against the largest American airline flying to Israel. Her mom claims that she has been fascinated by this brave woman's act against injustice. Although Leila is shocked by the story, she mentions that this would be a very rare act from an English mother these days. Leilah is the only child in the family who is given an Arabic name. See Nadir, *The Orange Trees*, 19-20.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 34.

she questions her own Iraqiness with her lack of knowledge about the language and culture of a nation that is under attack, just the way Azadeh did in *Lipstick Jihad*. Leilah describes her confusion as follows:

How could I feel even a little bit Iraqi when I didn't know the language or the culture and had never lived there, never even been there? Yet I'd always had this mysterious magnetic pull, a curiosity to know more and more, to get closer and closer. I felt frustrated because while I was aware that many Iraqis had left the country and never returned, I knew there were some who took the risks and went back periodically to visit their families.⁵⁶⁷

As a second generation British-Iraqi, she feels that she is epistemically responsible to know more about Iraq, as part of her identity is formed through a homeland that she has never visited. She also feels responsible about sharing her knowledge with a Western world that is being wilfully ignorant about the atrocities happening in Iraq. Identifying as a woman of color does not feel epistemically privileged. That is why she initiates her journey and goes through different sources and people to learn more about home. In fact, Leilah's world-travelling and border crossing shapes through her investigation of other people's memories and home epistemes. Thus, Leilah's world-travelling has more of a mental and psychological nature, rather than embodied act of travelling. Of many sources she uses, the album of photos collected by her grandfather is significant. The collection of pictures has been captioned in English and Nadir believed Khalil, the grandfather has "painstakingly" and "purposely" used English to transfer the family knowledge to the next generations. He knew that "all the family history would [have been] lost in a generation if he [hadn't made] the albums⁵⁶⁸" and had not provided English captions for the next generations who could not speak the language. Iraq, for Nadir, begins with the scent of Jasmine and orange trees that she has never 'smelled' but, as she claims, she 'feels' home "in her bones":

I feel Iraq in my bones, though I have never been there. I have never lazed in the shade of the date palm on a stifflingly hot day or underneath the grape leaves hanging on the vine in the evening. I haven't smelled jasmine or orange blossom scenting a Baghdad night. I've never tasted mango pickle with masgoud—the specialty fish dish of Baghdad—at an open-air restaurant on the banks of the Tigris.⁵⁶⁹

These feelings of home are essential for identity development. Leilah's baggage of experience and her hermeneutic horizons are based on an imaginary of homeland, a homeland that is now a myth and does not anymore exist. Even if Leilah had travelled to Baghdad at the time of writing her memoir, to see the Tigris, smell the night air and feel what it means to be an Iraqi from Baghdad, she would be shocked to see that so much of the locations, smells, tastes, and Iraqiness in general that she had pictured in her mind from second hand memories were non-existent. However, this is through navigation of the same imaginaries and memories with which she builds up her multiplicitous self. Leilah is not only a biracial Iraqi, English, or Canadian. She is

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

developing a reflexive self through all her identities and besides that, she is critiquing them all as well. Her understanding of Iraq is not fragmented, even if it is based on memories of others and the documented history that she has read.⁵⁷⁰ Leilah has been able to develop a multiplicitous self by seeing beyond what she has seen and heard and watched on TV. She is able to question and address the aggression that white power is imposing on her father land.

4.3 The multiplicitous body in the mirror

City of Widows and *Dreaming of Baghdad* are two autobiographical narratives written by Haifa Zangana, the worldly-known Iraqi writer. I had the privilege of meeting Haifa in London, in June 2017 when I undertook a short fieldwork trip to the UK. My initial plan was to interview her with a number of questions about memoir writing and the politics of publication. Although she was very open and responsive in her emails about a meeting, I was a bit stressed about the interview, mainly because I knew she had lived through so much oppression in Iraq and I did not know where to begin to ask and how to pose my questions. To be honest, I was afraid of performing the curious researcher whose best attempt in research also leads to epistemicide and an ignorant representation of someone's lived experience. Despite my worries, the semi-structured interview turned out to be a very friendly conversation. Haifa told me about transnational activism, NGO problematics and how it is like to speak about Iraq from across the borders. Before talking about the identity and border crossing, she reminded me how important it was for her to present herself in her work, as a victim or as a hero. She mentioned that sometimes it takes her hours to write a sentence, because it is significant to think through each word and how it would be received by both Iraqis inside Iraq and Iraqis across the borders and also the Western audience. This resonated a lot for me with what Linda Alcoff mentions in her article, "The Problem of Speaking for Others" and how important it is to predict the consequences of speaking for others, not just the who, where from and to whom, but also what words do to other people.

When I asked Haifa how she would identify herself after living in London for many years, she responded: "I am Iraqi; maybe I'm something else without realizing it." This was very interesting for me to hear, especially because I was fascinated by reading her memoir and seeing her Iraqiness expressed even in

⁵⁷⁰ As Alcoff argues, any speaker's social identity, or social location has an "epistemically significant impact" on their claims, observations and narratives, and furthermore, it should be noted that some privileged locations might take a dangerous positionality by speaking for the less privileged social identities. Nonetheless, Alcoff raises the question if social identities should only speak for themselves, and not for those who are less privileged than them and if that would be fulfilling of moral and political responsibility. Although the speaker's location has epistemic salience, it is noteworthy that all kinds of speaking for others are "representations." See Alcoff, "The problem of speaking for others," See Alcoff, "The problem of speaking for others," 7-8. As mentioned in discussions of realist theory of identity, a neutral position is impossible, albeit, objectivity can be achieved. Alcoff agrees with Spivack's critique of Foucault and Deleuze who both reject speaking for others and she maintains that if speaking for others is problematic and entangled within power imbalance, perhaps speaking with/ to the oppressed groups or less privileged identities would help and this is definitely better than not speaking at all. As Alcoff states, "Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says. To whom one is accountable is a political/epistemological choice contestable, contingent, a Donna Haraway says, constructed through the process of discursive action." All that said, it is not only the location of the speaker and their privileges that should be accounted for, but also where the speech is going and who is listening to it and what it does to them. The resolution perhaps is asking whether speaking for others would empower or disempower them, and then decide to do the talking. See Alcoff, "The problem of speaking for others," 25-26

those chapters that were titled to be London memories. Haifa positioned herself as a transnational writer, when I asked her about feminist activism, one who cares about transnational justice. As an example of her projects of act against injustice, she referred to Party for Thaera; Palestinian women writing life and mentioned how having a distance from their social location and not having shared misery with them helped her see things better and render a better representation of their experience.

By contrast, Haifa's narrative about Iraqi women and life in Iraq under torture and imprisonment definitely does not involve such authorial distance, which would allow her to write memories without personal involvement. The autobiographical voice of the author, the depth of pain in memories, and a loose sense of linearity and temporality give a surreal/postmodern style to the narrative. Instead, the order of the events and memories flows based on what layer of the repertoire memories are stored. As Haifa states in the epilogue to her memoir:

Writing about memories is an elusive process, it often begins with a good intention: to convey the truth. What happens in reality is that we only write down what passes through the censors' eyes. The censors here are the ambient time and space, social and political conditions, and the psychological changes in the writer herself. What one writes now is certainly not what actually happened. It is but a vague indicator of what might have happened, a mixture of illusive and constructed images, a dream, or an act conditioned by either a denial or a desire to see past events shaped by what is yearned for in the present.⁵⁷¹

Dreaming of Baghdad is a very emotionally difficult read. As much as the language is reader friendly, the memories and the emotions are hard to digest. Although Haifa is portraying a tortured self, having suffered different forms of dehumanization, and this is her own story and life history, she still expresses doubts about the truthfulness of her memories. Haifa is fully aware of the situatedness of her memories and the historical, political and social baggage that conditions memories. She mentions that what is written is not what has happened, but this is the representation through memory filtrations that is written on paper. The memories of torture are so painful that her mind might have repressed them for years and when they come up after so long, they are not just narratives of torture, but also of years and years of repression of those moments. Haifa's memoir is not just a prison narrative, it is an act of courage, of breaking the silence and narrating a history that had always been gendered and assigned to men. There have been life writing narratives published about the torture of men in Abu Ghraib, but few works have been published about women's prison narratives.

Despite all the pain and disconnectedness from reality that memories of torture make Haifa feel, her voice is not fragmented at all. I would like to challenge the postmodern claim of identity 'fragmentation' here,⁵⁷²

⁵⁷¹ Zangana, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, 153.

⁵⁷² Lacan's reference to "fragmentation" and Derrida's "decentered subject" are examples of postmodern claims of fragmented identity. Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Ecrits: The first complete edition in English*, (WW Norton & Company, 2006). Jacques Derrida, *Writing and difference*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

especially because *Dreaming of Baghdad* has a postmodern style, whereas the voice of the author is not schizophrenic and fragmented, and instead is a very good representation of her multiplicitous self.

Haifa's multiplicitous self arises not only from crossing the borders of Iraq and transnational, but also from her world-travelling and navigation of different realms of painful experience. Each of the prisons inside which Haifa lived, was tortured, and suffered loneliness, is a distinct world. When I asked Haifa if she feels at home in London, she told me that London has been the world that has given her a sense of detachment, and only there could she write about the memories of the past.

Writing about the past is a game the writer plays by feints with memory. She chases them but they slip away and hide in the enigma of time and place, in the labyrinth of the present and the unconsciousness of dreams. Memories are too elusive to grasp as the truth. Some construct them, while others erase them. "I" sometimes becomes all, and everyone else is erased. Truth hides behind layers of coloured clouds that filter it and allow only glimpses. The Truth is covered, events camouflaged. The writer sees the past, like looking at an old photograph. The photographer is the only one who can freeze memory in an instant. And the photograph belongs to that instant alone. It cannot go beyond that one moment; it shows nothing else. The photograph itself is without memory. At most, it can turn into a symbol or a sign at a junction. Who knows, one of those roads may lead to a secret memory covered in time. Memory is multilayered; its architecture varies according to the intentions of the carrier. It is the unwritten record of the past. Its only partner is forgetting.⁵⁷³

The above excerpt is one of the best examples demonstrating how important it is to read testimony as theory. Although there is so much reference to memory and truth, I can see how the writer's multiplicitous self is slowly constructed through navigating the memorial layers and architecture of pain. Haifa suffered through intimate terrorism all these years she has been changing locations and repressing memories, unconsciously wandering a labyrinth, and all the while developing an epistemic privilege that provides her with knowledge of pain, and witnessing others in pain:

Gazing at my body, I see not limbs and torso, but a panel with coloured buttons. I press the green button on the right each morning to go to work. I use the red button on the left to show courtesy. I use it to agree with other people, to repeat the word "yes." There is also a yellow button in the middle that I press each night before sinking into a comatose sleep. Over the years, I have managed to reduce my hours of waking. I take sleeping pills at six p.m. each day, the minute I get home from work. The dream I recall on awakening is always the same: it's about the past.⁵⁷⁴

Haifa is reflexive. She knows the nature of her pain, and the pain of all those who have been tortured, imprisoned, and forced into exile along with her.⁵⁷⁵ Her version of adaptability changes as she changes spaces: taking sleeping pills, sleeping more than before, and implementing the robot-like feelings to make life easier to

⁵⁷³ Zangana, *Dreaming*, 156.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁷⁵ One of Haifa's reactions to extreme suffering and pain has been forgetting. She mentions in her epilogue to the work that forgetting Haidar, a young man part of her leftist community and remembering that forgetting breaks her heart. She says: "Why had I not written about Haidar? Had I really forgotten about him in the fog of recalling others? Or had I been in denial, trying to rid myself of the memory of his short tragic life, the last chapter of which I had witnessed? Was it my fear of acknowledging what had happened to him that caused such a lapse in memory? Or was it my belief that there would have been no point in opening up such old wounds?" Zangana, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, 152-3.

tolerate. Here in this very excerpt, the self-gaze becomes very important, as it is not just gazing at the body, but at the plural selves that Haifa has grown all these years. The body here is the embodiment of the experience of pain, and, at the same time, of knowledge. Each organ is a mnemonic and reminds her of a particular moment, with a particular experience, and a particular way of adapting to it. These memories are about different Haifas in different historical, social, and political moments. The present Haifa looking into the mirror is different to each of those images, because she has turned into a Haifa embodying all Haifas, their pains and their experiences. Mirror, a typical means for self-referencing and reflexivity reveals Haifa on the verge of some deep ontology. Mirror is the reflexive organ that allows her to see a self that encompasses the others and it opens the physical labyrinthine architecture of her embodied memory. Memories and multiplicitous selves entangle and the reflection in the mirror represents a panelled-up self that encompasses all other worlds' travelling selves and memories.

The development of multiplicitous selves does not just lead to a positive epistemic privilege. When multiplicitous selves arise from adaptability to too much pain, such as torture, they can be swayed towards the torturer's identity. As Haifa mentions:

While fighting the oppressive regime, we, without realizing the gradual change, were putting on, one piece at a time, the garments of an executioner. But we always avoided looking in the mirror. We were exhausted from constant fleeing, changes in hiding places, arguments, fear, doubts, guilt, and worries about our families.⁵⁷⁶

The distrust for each other, sense of guilt, doubts and constant anxiety is a result of continuous fighting, being constantly tortured, pressured into giving each other away to the investigators, hiding their true selves, and performing in the garments of executioners. These feelings can altogether produce a sense of alienation, however, that does not mean that the person under such circumstances has an alienated identity. Haifa's feelings as a result of crossing the borders of pain are very close to Niloo's feelings resulting from her refugeeness experience and her own navigation of the physical and mental borders. Both cases, as we can see, still uphold to a core identity, with epistemic privilege. Instead of labelling transnational and exilic identities as fragmented, we should see the power and resilience that is an outcome of world-travelling and experience as the core features of identities. The assumed contradiction here, namely, being both alienated and epistemically privileged need not be resolved. The integrity of an identity does not come from full adaptability to all situations and pure satisfaction of everything. Once identities are epistemically loaded and with experience, they cannot even be close to that ideal model of monolithic identity. What I am suggesting here is that even each individual identity cannot be monolithic, let alone group identities, like Iraqi women, Iranian women, Middle Eastern women.

⁵⁷⁶ Zangana, *Dreaming*, 155

There exists multiplicitous selves among these world travelling identities and a multiplicity of worlds, which makes the diversity even more vibrant.

Apart from knowledge through personal experience, knowledge through shared history contributes to the development of a multiplicitous self and world-travelling identities. The epistemic resilience that results from certain histories, political moments, and social movements results in knowledge production. I assume, for instance, Haifa's microhistory writing as epistemic resilience, in which not only she shares her personal history of imprisonment and torture, but also the history of a nation, a people's, in war, under invasion, occupation, and sanction. In countries such as Iran and Iraq (we can even say in Middle East, very often) historical turning points are used as points of reference, to make sense of not only the past, but also the present and the future, and begin to grasp the reasons why people are suffering as a consequence of history. As Haifa mentions:

Writing this book has demanded that I make sense of my forty years of personal involvement in Iraqi political and intellectual life both inside Iraq and as an exile.⁵⁷⁷

Most Iraqis, young and old, refer to historical events that took place a thousand years ago as if they happened only yesterday. This cultural tendency to take refuge in the distant past gains urgency at times of national crisis, under threat of foreign cultural domination and colonial rule.⁵⁷⁸

As Haifa states, writing has been liberating for her in a sense that she has been able to make sense of herself, her own experience and identity as an Iraqi in exile. What is very interesting here is that Haifa refers to herself as an exilic identity, whereas her perception of her own individual social identity and the group identity that she shares with Iraqis back in the country is dissimilar to so many other exilic identities that I have read, interviewed, and seen. Despite watching Iraq from across the borders, Haifa is fully aware of what is happening in the country, she can see all the changes, and for her Iraq is not just a miserable location on the map. When I asked her about her thoughts on the invasion of Iraq and all the sectarian conflicts since then, she responded with a calmness that is quintessentially hers, gained from epistemic privilege and experience, that "Iraq is not unique." She mentioned Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Yemen, and Syria, and that if they are not worse, at the very least they are going through a lot of troubles. She mentioned that the conflict in Iraq is historical, and we need to take responsibility for what we have done, and what we should have done. When I compare her argument to those coming from the exilic Iranians writing about contemporary Iran, I can see a huge difference, of intersectional self-reflexivity. The kind of moral responsibility Haifa refers to is an outcome of epistemic responsibility. Instead of navigating nationalist, populist, or Islamist discourses – which are very commonly used by exilic subjects – Haifa engages history very critically. The valour of her writing is her inclusion of women, women's voices and the social movements they have lead all throughout Iraq's contemporary history.

⁵⁷⁷ Zangana, *City of widows*, 23.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

She writes about Iraq's modern identity from a gender inclusive perspective, saying that "the emergence of the Iraqi women's movement was an integral part of the construction of Iraq's modern identity, which began to take shape while the country was still under Ottoman rule and which continued while it was fighting British colonialism."⁵⁷⁹ In this very excerpt, not only does she address the women's role in construction of modern Iraqi identity, but she also highlights the history of coloniality and colonization in Iraq, the two of which are not separable. Haifa's world-travelling and navigation of every other border except her own country's has given her feelings of both exile and knowledge. Through the decolonization of history, she gains reflexivity and adaptability to her current social location, which she can use to produce knowledge for inviting in Western readers for more epistemic responsibility, less epistemic violence and less wilful ignorance. She courageously states:

This is a story written in exile, in the hopes that readers in the West will gain insight into a country they have impacted so fully and terribly. Writing this book is also a personal history that includes my story of growing up in Baghdad: living through wars and periods of peace and prosperity; joining movement for social change and participating in armed struggle; and working for equality as a woman, an Iraqi, and as a citizen of the world. [...] This is also an attempt to clarify how Arab and Muslim women, particularly in Iraq, continue to shape our modern history in response to the devastating situation they find themselves in due to external and homegrown challenges. It is a story of tremendous suffering and sacrifice, of courage and triumph, and also of hope and humanity.⁵⁸⁰

I take this excerpt from Haifa's *City of Widows* as one of the best representative examples, to refute and critique the reduction of the genre of Muslim women memoir to misery narratives for the sake of self-presenting and publication. I argue that life writing accounts such as Haifa's need to be included in the historical and literary canons to fill in the gaps of representation, not only because they are written by women, but since these accounts are epistemic bodies of resistance and resilience to coloniality, imperialism, racism, sexism, ethnicism, classism etc. In other words, they are counter-narratives, not just representing the multiplicitous selves of the New Mestiza identities, but also critiques of the West regarding their interventions in the Middle East.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 40.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸¹ It is ironic, that for instance, Azar Nafisi is apparently the only Iranian and maybe, Middle Eastern background life-writer whose work has been canonized in the Western canon of literature, whereas Haifa Zangana's *Dreaming of Baghdad*, despite being one of the most avant garde styles of writing and courageous accounts, is not mentioned in that canon. As an academic, trained in literature by discipline, I come back to the question of canon, and if women of color writers should build up their own canon and make it a counter canon to white Western canon, or they should keep on their resistance and demand inclusion in the same canon. Is a solidarity going to be possible? How do we make a dialogue happen despite the anger and wilful ignorance? After theorizing multiplicitous identities, women of color identities and their epistemic privilege, how do we make a constructive practice of collaboration and conversation happen? I also believe this is a great step that Western publishers have begun to publish voices that stand against the "common-sense" understanding of the Middle Eastern literature and life-writing more specifically.

PART II

Chapter Five:

Epistemologies of “Home” and Politics of Assimilation and “Hometactics”

Home is the safe place. The place where the me of me mattered. bell hooks

“What is home? The place I was born? Where I grew up? Where my parents live? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community, my people? Who are my ‘people?’” Chandra Mohanty

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. Maya Angelou

There are “worlds” we enter at our own risk, “worlds” that have agon, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are “worlds” that we enter out of necessity and which would be foolish to enter playfully in either the agonistic sense or in my sense. In such “worlds” *we* are not playful. But there are “worlds” that we can travel to lovingly and travelling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that travelling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their “world” we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have travelled to each other’s “worlds” are we fully subjects to each other Knowing other women’s “worlds” is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them.” Maria Lugones, Playfulness

5.1 Introduction

“Scraps”, “perimeters”, “spice jars” and “orange trees” are recurrent metonyms of home that touch upon a sense of belonging, triggering new meanings of home. In this chapter, I discuss the epistemologies of home, belonging, assimilation, and integration from a realist perspective. I argue that we need an intersectional and decolonial perspective to social location when discussing “home” as a concept. According to Ortega, the concepts of home, belonging, location and adaptability are interrelated.⁵⁸² She introduces the notion of “hometactics, practices that allow for a sense of familiarity with and a particular sense of “belonging” to a place, space, group, or world while avoiding the restrictive, exclusive elements that a notion of belonging might carry with it.”⁵⁸³ I analyse the intersection of “belonging”, as a phenomenon, with social location, gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion and faith, and demonstrate how hometactics works in the context of migration, transnationality, refugeeness, and whether that can facilitate assimilation and integration. I also debate the binary of “good/bad migrant”, and the notion of “gratitude complex” in relation to belonging and home.

Border crossing identities are in a constant state of unease, travelling multiple worlds and negotiating different selves as a form of adaptability. The nature of their unease and the pain of developing a sense of belonging is very different for them, compared to people who have an authentic belonging to some location. As Ortega argues:

All of us are multiplicitous selves, but there is a crucial difference between those who are comfortable and at ease in various worlds and those whose experience is marginalized, oppressed, or alienated in some way and who have to world-travel constantly. So, it is key to remember that multiplicity is more at issue for some selves than others,

⁵⁸² Ortega, *In-between*, 194.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 194.

depending on the different ways in which their positionalities are perceived or negotiated given specific social, economic, and cultural contexts as well as power relations.⁵⁸⁴

Ortega draws on Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "intimate terrorism,"⁵⁸⁵ the feeling of not being at ease, especially for the woman of color, whose experience is marginalized not only in homeland, but also in the new home in which she is trying to settle. The "in-between" identity needs to travel into other people's worlds, learn them, practice the rules, integrate, but at the same time, keep her homeland identity, teach her mother tongue to her children, and cook with her grandmother's spice jars and recipes. To appease all these worlds and their rules is not easy, nor is it to find a place called "home."

According to Barvosa,⁵⁸⁶ self-integration is highly affected by the experience of contradiction, ambiguity, and ambivalence.⁵⁸⁷ She perceives identity contradictions as "the manifestation of political conflicts at a personal level."⁵⁸⁸ She argues that border crossers, with identity contradictions despite their "wealth of selves," have to engage in a form of "selfcraft" as a "means of political participation" to be able to integrate. These participations and "processes of critical discernment" provide these identities with a chance to mend their "inner fragmentations" and achieve an integration of their multiple selves.⁵⁸⁹ Ortega, on the other hand, reads these processes of selfcraft through her "coalitional politics," as a "practice mindful of both location and relation." She does not suggest "that we should give up all attempts at projects of self-integration, as in Barvosa's account,"⁵⁹⁰ but she also argues that not all border crossing identities desire to have a "self-integrating life project"; in fact, many in-between identities are willing to maintain their "ontological pluralism" and live with their ambivalences and contradictions.⁵⁹¹ She argues:

[...] There is room and necessity for larger political projects of co-belonging as well as moments when it might be necessary to integrate certain aspects of our multiplicitous selves. Yet I would like to add another layer to our attempt to understanding home, location, and belonging, a layer that is many times overlooked as we emphasize the grander project of forging a politics capable of generating resistance to oppression or projects that emphasize unity or integration. This layer is that of the lived experience of multiplicitous selves that are being-between-worlds and being-in-worlds and that find themselves constantly negotiating their multiple identities in light of both ambiguities and contradictions but also in light of what I have referred to here as a will to belong. Thus my

⁵⁸⁴ Ortega, *In-between*, 196.

⁵⁸⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 20.

⁵⁸⁶ Barvosa, *Wealth of Selves*, 176.

⁵⁸⁷ She also maintains that not all selves can achieve integration. On the other hand, Ortega believes that not all selves desire integration and they might just willingly resist that. According to Ortega: "Given the complexity of the selves as well as the complexity of spaces of belonging (in terms of their members as well as criteria for membership), there is no sense in which one can be said to *fully* belong. There are only different senses of belonging depending on which markers of identity are chosen. Full membership and belonging—the safe, comfortable home—is indeed an imaginary space in need of demystification." See Ortega, *In-Between*, 200.

⁵⁸⁸ Barvosa, *Wealth of Selves*, 207.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 226-229.

⁵⁹⁰ Ortega, *In-Between*, 201.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

introduction of the notion of hometactics is an uncovering of what multiplicitous selves are already practicing in their everydayness, a disclosure of that which is *already* happening in our lived experience.⁵⁹²

Home is constructed; it is interpreted differently by each person, as everyone reads through it based on their baggage of live-experience and hermeneutic horizons. For instance, my only experience of home was Iran, before coming to Australia, and due to so many reasons, namely, political situation, economy, personal issues, not always did I feel at ease at home; I identified Iran as home because I had my people there, not because I was comfortable or assimilated; yet, it was still home. I came to Australia and this place was definitely *not* home, because I did not feel welcome and I did not have any people around me. I went back to Iran for a visit, and then, even when I was trying to reconstruct that mythic image of home for myself, go to places that were sites of memory for me, or interact with people that I knew, loved and related to, I realized there was so much that had changed in me, and in them, and in the space that made home as a comfort zone still a myth. In the last three years, I have tried to make my place closer to home. Every time I go back, I bring some rugs, table mats, pictures, spices, herbs and nuts to feel at home when I am home after work. I have more friends now and can relate to some of the experiences people share with me. Most of my friends are people of color, southern Europeans and Muslims, whereas back in Iran, I only had apolitical, secular friends who did not care as much about politics as I did. What I share here with people around me, is the mythic home that I am making, while also resisting feelings of in-betweenness.

5.2 Bearing “untold” stories of home: Scent of jasmine, orange blossoms and taste of mulberry

Where is home for a multiplicitous self? How do migrant identities perceive of home? How is having a sense of home related to identities being “transnational”? How does border crossing affect the experience of home? Does return affect the view of home? These are the questions that I had in mind before reading the autobiographies of my corpus of study. In this section, I demonstrate how the concept of home is experienced by these writers. I draw from their lived experience narratives to show home is experienced differently from one to another, as their hometactics are deployed at a personal and relational level. As much as we try to assign group identities to people based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, etc., there still remains an expansive territory that is governed by lived experience, not just at a current social location and point of time, but as a baggage of experience people carry with them and which has been gained at different social locations and historical moments.

⁵⁹² Ortega, *In-Between*, 202

5.2.1 Homesickness for a lipsticked-up sick home

Azadeh's experience of home as a second generation individual born in the US might be shared with some other second generation Iranian-Americans. However, there are experiences that are quintessentially hers. In the very beginning of the book, Azadeh remembers the Iran of her childhood as a place of Mulberry trees⁵⁹³, playing around freely in the garden, climbing trees and picking plump berries. For her, the taste of mulberry is reminiscent of the ancestral home, although she has only tasted them dried at Persian grocery stores in San Jose.⁵⁹⁴ Her first passage to a homeland, in which she was neither born, nor lives, is made through nostalgic taste of mulberry. Mulberry picking is not just a simple fruit picking practice in Iran. Fruit and blossom picking from the trees, for instance mulberry or orange tree blossoms, is considered a feminine practice. During spring, women of families get together and go to the orchards for mulberry or blossom-picking and the orchard turns into a bonding space for them, where they feel comfortable about the most intimate things. Like Hammams or hairdresser salons, orchards have been spaces of female bonding and intimacies which could turn into feminist spaces where women acquire and share liberatory practices. The subjective experience of the space makes it either as a feminist space or a feminine bonding space. Azadeh is too young when she experiences mulberry picking and hence, she cannot perceive of this experience as a feminist practice. Instead, she experiences it through the lens of exile, with which has been raised. As she confesses: "As a girl, raised on the distorting myths of exile, I imagined myself a Persian princess, estranged from my homeland—a place of light, poetry, and nightingales—by a dark, evil force called the Revolution."⁵⁹⁵ Therefore, home for Azadeh means she has been socialized as being part of an exilic family. The way she perceives of Iran, the revolution, liberation, democracy, etc., is all mediated through the "expat view"⁵⁹⁶ as she calls it. Once "in the safety of a walled family compound" in Iran she feels liberated at the orchard, even if it is only one year after revolution.⁵⁹⁷

As the demonstrations breathed life into my conception of Iran, I saw that the expatriate view—Iran as a static, failed state in unchanging decline—had little to do with the country itself, and everything to do with the psychology of exile. It was an emotional trick to ease the pain of absence, the guilt of being the ones who left, or chose to stay outside. It was a delusion that deferred a mournful truth: that we would never regain the Iran of before 1979, that we would never go back. That if we wanted to deal with Iran as patriots, it would have to be the Iran that existed now, wounded and ugly with its pimples and scars.⁵⁹⁸

Azadeh gains certain level of consciousness about the construction of "home" as an exilic and expatriate Myth. The spirit of exile she talks about is a certain practice of hometactics by border-crossers going into exile to survive the distance from home and feelings of homesickness. One thing the exilic community

⁵⁹³ Movaneï, *Lipstick Jihad*, 3

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

refuses to see, especially the Iranian exiles in this context, is the possibility and feasibility of change and dynamism of life back in homeland. Part of adaptability happens for them through growing a sense of hatred for where they come from, its political climate, as well as buying into the idea which emphasizes on the “backwardness” of the homeland. In *Lipstick Jihad*, Azadeh’s father is a great example of exilic mentality. He defines Iranian culture with characteristics such as “fatalism, political paranoia, social obligations, an enthusiasm for guilt” which have all been responsible for “the failures of modern Iran.” Azadeh states that her father never used the term “Iranian culture,” instead referring to that as “that stinking culture”; “he refused to return to Iran, even for his mother’s funeral, and wouldn’t help [Azadeh] with [her] Persian homework, a language, he pronounced direly “[Azadeh] will *never* use.”⁵⁹⁹ Home culture and often times religion, have to be negotiated as they are assumed to conflict with Western modernity. The exilic community is usually unable to read power and power relations between homeland and the new home. It is unable to read whiteness, white supremacy, and the ways in which they have been made to believe in racialization as a norm and as a right. The Iranian exilic community is often heard to comment on Iran as “*kharab-shodeh*,”⁶⁰⁰ or making political comments implying that the people of Middle East are in trouble because they cannot properly practice politics. The epistemic salience of social location should always be highlighted when a critic is analyzing knowledge coming from group identities, and here, in this context, it is crucial to remember that the loss of status for the “Persian community” has been so detrimental that they associate the homeland they have left as a static social space. Azadeh makes America home, like so many other second-generation migrants, and it only becomes possible for her to better see America when she watches it from afar, being from inside of Iran (despite limited vision) when she arrives due to her work as a journalist:

Life in America came with its own set of frontiers, but they were familiar, and from the vantage point of Tehran, seemed more subtle, more bearable. As for a Middle Eastern person, there were symbolic barriers placed between you and your culture, in the Islam-bashing and prejudice that seeped into everyday life, ephemeral barriers between you and your peace of mind, as you had to work to disregard the slights and political slander and ignorance that presented themselves so routinely, in so many guises.⁶⁰¹

One of the attributes that Azadeh offers for a definition of home is “familiarity.” Racism, Islamophobia, marginalization, and willful ignorance become part of the norm of everyday life in the US, practices that she considers troubling while in the US and more bearable when across borders. The degree to which she finds those practices troubling, firstly results from her social location and the epistemic importance of her status, and secondly, due to the comparison she makes with the social, economic, and political situation of Iran in the 2000s. It is definitely not a fair comparison because Iran of early 2000s was a country that had survived a revolution, eight years of war, and post-war trauma and now it was going through social and political

⁵⁹⁹ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 22.

⁶⁰⁰ It could be translated to “That ruined land.” It appears in *Lipstick Jihad* and *Refuge*. See: Moaveni, 24.

⁶⁰¹ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 55- 56.

reforms. Furthermore, so much of this change would probably not have happened if the country had not experienced the 1953 coup, operated by the US.

In her descriptions of the Iranian homeland, Azadeh uses the metaphor of “sickness” as a frequent figure of speech. There is a chapter in her memoir called “My country is sick” and in it, not only does she question the politics of the country but also critiques its people, their culture, habits, and norms of life.

As the gravity of the Islamic Republic’s hypocrisy revealed itself, I came to the slow, shocking realization that Iranian society was sick. Not in a facetious, sloganny way, exaggerating the extent of culture wars and social tensions, but truly sick. The Iran I had found was spiritually and psychologically wrecked, and it was appalling....

By winter, when Ramadan, the month of fasting, rolled around, I had no idea what to expect from this nation of ambivalent Muslims.⁶⁰²

Homeland, being identified with metaphors such as “hypocrisy,” “sick,” “spiritually and psychologically wrecked,” “ambivalent,” and “appalling” only in one paragraph, would be a representative of Azadeh’s problematic representation of the country. While Azadeh portrays herself as knowledgeable about Iran, and as an insider, her capacity to understand and to communicate is limited by the language barrier, to which she refers throughout the memoir. Azadeh might have benefited from “intercultural polyglossia”⁶⁰³ growing up in the US and working there as a journalist, but when she comes to Iran, she cannot maintain that complex communication, because neither could she make herself understood, nor understand the different native idioms. In her communications with close Iranian girlfriends and when trying to bond with them through sharing intimate stories, Azadeh finds herself unable to transfer the message:

Those times I wanted nothing more than to be direct and talk about how humiliating it was to be molested during a security pat-down (by a chadori woman, no less), how I couldn’t bear the thought of another session with Mr. X, or how weak I felt, letting it all get to me. I knew precisely how I felt and was bursting to tell her, eager to ease the hurt with mockery, and unravel it all over and over again, from a hundred different vantage points—the sort of deep, swirling conversation one has with one’s girlfriends. But Farsi denied me the nuance I needed. Without those shades of gray, my descriptions and ideas came out as partial, crude sketches. In the course of these halting monologues, I realized that some of my most integral parts resisted translation. It was only in not being able to transport them into another language that I saw how much they mattered.⁶⁰⁴

Azadeh tries to talk about her experience of humiliation by a morality police woman but she finds it difficult to discuss because Farsi denies her the eloquence she needs. However, this limited view of home and its problems does not only come from her language barrier, but so much of it is caused by her limitations of

⁶⁰² Ibid., 101.

⁶⁰³ A term coined by Lugones in her discussions of complex communication. It is considered as the ways in which the oppressed can be engaged in communication with intercultural resisters. Ortega also refers to this term when she introduces her concept of coalitional politics. To her, “Complex communication and critical world-traveling, what I previously described as the resistant practice through which we reflect on our practices of world-traveling and engage world-traveling in a restructuring, reconfiguring of worlds, allow for the possibility of *becoming-with*.” See María Lugones, “On complex communication.” *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 83. Also see Ortega, *In-Between*, 168.

⁶⁰⁴ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 68.

experience as an upper-class American citizen who is well-assimilated into the American culture as well. What Azadeh is describing as one of the attributes of a hypocritical homeland is the reality of so many migrant men and women's lives at the airports in the US. The fact that she highlights the agent of the act as "a *chadori* woman, no less" unravels the social location she is speaking from. She might have never experienced it at the airports when she is travelling as a journalist. She also might have never experienced that before even in Iran, because the practice of body-frisking only happens at certain spaces, and if it were related to morality police and their modesty policies in the public sphere, it would be limited to only certain areas of the city of Tehran, at least not in the uptown Tehran where Azadeh temporarily resided.

After a few times travelling back and forth, Azadeh makes home in-between Iran and the US. She does not seem to have a desire to develop the "selfcraft" for which Barvosa argues; rather, she practices Ortega's "Hometactics" by not forcing herself into mingling the two worlds and choosing the in-between space as home. She writes that "[she] was getting better at existing between Iran and America. Most days one helped [her] understand the other better, rather than the two squishing [her] like elephants. But geographically at least, [she] still preferred them apart."⁶⁰⁵ She feels reassured by the "vast ocean and great land mass as separator" and "some European airport duty free" in-between, where she can get ready for the "transition." Thinking of "mullahs" coming to "Manhattan" makes her uncomfortable as she interprets it as an invasion of her space. Azadeh considers New York as her "sanctuary," where she can "loungue half-naked in dimly lit bars, sip cocktails with friends, and forget about those same mullahs."⁶⁰⁶ Turbaned mullahs are metonyms of Iran that cannot be mingled with "Manhattan skyline," as a metonym of modernity in Azadeh's head. Thinking of mullahs (President Khatami in this case) in New York, who were going there for the UN General assembly, the first thing crossing Azadeh's mind is the question of what to wear.⁶⁰⁷ Here, the Orientalist binary of the West and the rest is dominant, whereby Iran as a homeland is remembered through mullahs and their violation of women's freedom and the West is remembered by architecture, skyline, and cocktails. For Azadeh to be able to consume the civilizational aspects of the West and the exotic cultural aspects of Iran, she needs to exist in-between the two, as two separate spaces. Her hometactics does not approve of the coexistence of her Iranian-ness and Americanness; they need to be separate for her to feel at ease as a border crossing identity.

To conclude, so much of Azadeh's knowledge of homeland has been constructed based on what she has heard not only in the US from people of the community, also from people around her in Iran. In the final chapter of her memoir, "Not Without My Mimosa" Azadeh decides she cannot stay in Iran anymore and misses her accented New York life. For her, the US is more of a homeland than Iran, and she feels more American

⁶⁰⁵ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 169.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 169

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 168-9.

than Iranian. Language plays an important role in her conception of home as a place of belonging. Azadeh sees things in English, thinks things in English, and can express herself better if she speaks in English. Another factor determining her sense of belonging and defining of homeland is social relationality. Azadeh does not make Iran home and goes back to the US because her authentic belonging to the land is questioned by people. The memoir ends with Azadeh and her friends getting together in New York, speaking Farsi with “different accents,” choosing “neutral-visa territories” for their weddings and carrying bits and pieces of their parents’ “melancholy nostalgia” of Iran.⁶⁰⁸

5.2.2 “To be or not to be [grateful]”: Atonement for new roots and green shoots

The protagonist of Dina Nayeri’s auto-fiction, *Refuge*, Niloo, has a more complex understanding of home than Azadeh of *Lipstick Jihad* due to her different experience of both homeland and the new homes she has made across the world. Niloo does not conceive of home merely as a spatial concept where she feels she belongs, but also as an interpersonal existence which she carries with herself wherever she goes. Niloo’s perimeter, for instance, is a significant space constructing the idea of home, a space where she stores all bits and pieces of her cultures, ID cards, and whatever else that makes her feel she has some sort of attachment. But, more important than the perimeter, is Niloo’s father who is the epitome of her homeland:

The mystic Al-Ghazali said the inhabitants of heaven remain forever thirty three. It reminds me of Iran, stuck in 1979 in the imagination of every exile. Iranians often say that when they visit Tehran or Shiraz or Isfahan, they find even the smallest changes confusing and painful—a beloved corner shop gone to dust, the smell of bread that once filled a street, a rose garden neglected. In their memories, they always change it back. Iran is like an aging parent, they say... My Baba at thirty-three was Iran from a time. And now...his decline and Iran’s are the same for me.⁶⁰⁹

In the previous chapter, I interpreted this passage in relation to multiplicitous selves, but it also has meaning for the idea of home. Niloo is conscious about the exilic imaginary of homeland: the mythic homeland that never changes and the mentality that life used to always be better in the past. She uses the common metaphor of the aging parent for home and refers to her father who has been Iran for her from a long time. Niloo left Iran at a time when she was very young and has forgotten much about homeland. But since leaving Iran was equal to leaving her father, the political and the personal intersect in her experience of homeland. Niloo’s social location as an ex-refugee and a successful migrant not only bears epistemic salience but political salience too. Niloo has made homes of multiple spaces; from the refugee camps in the US upon their arrival, to the dormitories of the universities in which she has studied. However, the dormitory room is where she first felt she had a real home; it was where she felt emotional human connection. It has become a mnemonic of memorable times:

⁶⁰⁸ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 245-6.

⁶⁰⁹ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 27.

I wanted to turn back and run all the way to Connecticut and get into my senior year dormitory bed, where Gui's arms had cradled my head for so many nights that it had started to become home.⁶¹⁰

Reminiscing the memories of the dormitory room and imagining that it would have been a home space for Niloo is not just an outcome of the growing nostalgia for the past, but also a consequence of knowledge developed through years of adaptability. If people have not experienced the self-contradictions and the complexities of world-travelling and adaptability, it is easier for them to settle down, imagine a land as a new home and make a home of their own. Once assimilation takes place, that place can be called home. Whereas, for Niloo, self-contradictions, world-travelling, and the complexities of adaptability have resulted in a highly self-conscious and critical mind that is constantly looking for home as an ontological entity. She narrates:

"I'm going home," she says. Is it her home, this place she's headed? For decades she's tried to make homes for herself, but she is always a foreigner, always a guest—that forever refugee feeling, that constant need for a meter of space, the perimeter she carries on her back. Over the years, she has learned to adapt, to start over in each new place and live as if she belongs there. It feels like lying, even more so now.⁶¹¹

"I'm going home" is the statement that Niloo utters after witnessing the climax moment of Ma'mmad's life. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, Mam'mad was a university professor who entered Holland on a "scholars at risk" visa and considered himself a "knowledge worker"; however, he was called an illegal migrant by the authorities, who after going through long processes of visa applications, rejected him a number of times. The story of Mam'mad ends tragically when he self-immolates in Dam square. Niloo remembers how complicated his view of the idea of home and identity was when Niloo told him about her theory of four categories of Iranians in the West. His response was: "people are more complicated than that."⁶¹² Niloo's response to the sickening truth, that refugees like Karim and Mam'mad reached such drastic levels of desperation due to the lack of help from the system, is to go home. The home she has in mind is some place of refuge that she has been building up all these years. However, the tragic death of Mam'mad reminds her that for a refugee, "home" is unachievable. Intersectionally speaking, Niloo is not a working-class woman; she has never been, neither in Iran nor in the West. She is highly educated and has enjoyed some level of comfort all her life. But the status of refugeeness has always been with her, like the perimeter she has been carrying around the world. Niloo identifies with the rest of the refugees, such as Mam'mad who to voice his misery, and the misery of people like himself, finally commits suicide as a political statement. Mam'mad's burnt body, which is "a ruin of soot and blood and charred flesh," becomes another embodiment of a long-lost "home" for Niloo, Sy, and other refugees. This is why she feels the urge to go home while thinking of her spice jar and turmeric:

Adding tumeric makes a thing Persian. That ripped-up root that bleeds when crushed, staining kitchen counters, oven mitts, even the soil, a dark yellow. The soft, papery fingers of grandmothers back home, jaundiced to the

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 222.

⁶¹² Nayeri, *Refuge*, 220.

last—did Mam'mad once have an aziz joon with henna hair and yellow thumbs?... the warped stem gets in the blood, leaking up from the loam [...]“I am here!” Mam'mad cried out in his final act. We are all here. Still waiting, addicts clustered together in a squat, broken from the earth like turmeric root, staining everything. (223)

The surreal images of turmeric bleeding and staining everything in the kitchen parallel Mam'mad and the rest of the addict refugees clustered together like a pile of rotten fruit or crushed turmeric. It is representative of the fate of the 'ripped-up' refugees who have crossed the borders “illegally” according to the officials. As long as these hyper-marginalized⁶¹³ identities are considered social lepers, they cannot make any homes for themselves. For Niloo, home is embodied in the spice jar she has inherited from her grandmother and turmeric, a strong spice that can leave traces of itself everywhere, like bits and pieces of identity to which refugees feel they are still entitled, and when they self-immolate: it is to assert agency and power over their only property: their existence.

Amid the constant feeling of homelessness, the search for home makes Niloo very resistant to the idea of her father's asylum seeking, despite the fact that he is being politically prosecuted. Niloo's relationship to her father has always been full of insecurities. Love has always been present between them, while trust has not. Niloo remembers the number of times she has been disappointed by her father and his terrible addiction to opium. Nevertheless, she still does not want him to lose his home, as then he would be lost, like she is, and for Niloo, her sense of home would be lost along with him. She contemplates:

I decided that I had been foolish to be ashamed of Baba, to let my need for security conquer every other instinct. I had spent years nursing the wrong fears. Baba's Iranianness, his village ways, weren't the problem. Just the opposite: If Baba were to uproot, every special thing about him—the Ardestoon he carried in his easy gait and his yellow fingers and his lion cane—all of that would be lost. Home would be lost. Living in America or Europe would end him, his lofty, infectious personality, his wonderful sense of himself. Deep down, Baba must have known this.⁶¹⁴

In epistemologies of home, rooting, uprooting and re-rooting are key elements. Niloo knows that her father would not survive uprooting; a loss of home for him would be a loss of identity. She remembers, he did not even move out of Iran with them in the first place because a loss of home was so threatening. As her father says in his broken English: “Is not easy to build village.”⁶¹⁵ Building a village means rooting in some land, where you can have access to the basic needs of life, where you can build relations with other people, and feel a sense of belonging. Uprooting and re-rooting are complicated processes that require a lot of world travelling and strategicness. As Dr. Hamidi, Niloo's dad says: “I think a better way to observe the world isn't by how far from our natural state we've travelled. I think it's by whether we can go back and forth. That is a better evolution.”⁶¹⁶

⁶¹³ I use the term hyper-marginalized because I intend to highlight that the marginality and dehumanization that refugee identities go through is not just mere marginalization. Marginality for these identities could cost their lives.

⁶¹⁴ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 284-286.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

Niloo interprets his statement as adaptability, however, he continues that “the world, it travels too.” This is an important fact of world travelling although Dr. Hamidi has not lived across the borders for a long time. Dr. Hamidi promotes a new definition of home when he proffers an axiological observation of the world. For him, how much we have traveled is not a value, but having a possibility of moving back and forth, having mobility, being transnational, and occupying borderland spaces, is a value and something that should be taken into consideration. Borderlands become home once people realize that “the world travels too.” Despite being an addict and not taken seriously by his family and friends, Dr. Hamidi is the most philosophical character of the story. He practices adaptability and strategicness when Niloo finds herself incapable of calling any place home. Dr. Hamidi’s village can travel to the Netherlands and become a new home. Home is not just a matter of being then, but also of becoming. It can be a process, rather than a static entity:

Maybe so, and yet, of that old Dr. Hamidi’s dispersed lot, here sat three, far from all they had known, around a familiar Sofreh, as if drawn together by a magnets in their shoes. They might one day lose one another again. Over the years, their numbers had dwindled and swollen and dwindled again so who could predict? But now they were three. He trembled with gratitude, with the urge to kneel and kiss the ground. They were three and three was enough. They were a village.⁶¹⁷

As we can see in the excerpt above, the interpersonal aspect of home is much stronger for Niloo and her dad than the geographical, locational, or, simply, physical aspect of home. People can build homes where they feel loved. Identities experience home through a loving relationship to both land and people. *Sofreh* as a concept becomes very important in relation to community, and therefore, belonging. *Sofreh* in Persian is something similar to tablecloth, but not a tablecloth that people spread on a table. It is a piece of cloth usually consisting of different colors, different floral patterns to be spread on the floor, usually on a carpet to dine on. Traditionally, in Iran and most Arab countries, people sit on the floor around that cloth for three main meals of the day. But *Sofreh* is frequently referred to in idioms, proverbs and sayings denoting a value that keeps the community close together. Even if the numbers dwindle as Dr. Hamidi has witnessed all his life, three is still a good enough number to make a small community who can stick together lovingly and make home somewhere. For Niloo, this is a happy ending for a process of homemaking which took a very long time to happen.

When Niloo realizes that her relationship with Gui is over, it is in part because their idea of home has diverged. They cannot make a home together anymore (even if they are literally building an apartment together); she moves out and moves in the half-built apartment full of dirt and dust. She starts whispering a children’s song to herself in Farsi, which feels to be “the correct language for her refuge.”⁶¹⁸ The song themes upon the rhyme “*A caged bird is heartsick of walls,*” which sets a proper atmosphere for Niloo’s ontological anxiety;

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 320.

⁶¹⁸ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 290.

She [Niloo] sits for a while, and when the floor grows icy against her haunches, she gets into bed in her clothes. Lying in this wreck, something important feels finished. It is as if in her fingers and toes she knows that the life she has built is done and that the passing decades will find her gone from here, inside a different future. For several hours, she sleeps the sleep of the sated women she used to watch in Tehran and Oklahoma, the ones who never worried because their homes never changed.⁶¹⁹

It is ironic that only in the wreck of an unfinished house does Niloo finally feel that her anguish over home and love is over. This is the moment of epiphany when she can sleep the sleep of the sated women. The pains and exhaustion of world-travelling, adaptability, changing spaces, homes, and social locations suddenly feels done when she makes her decision not to try to build a home with Gui any longer. She does not need to compromise the concept of home with anyone. She can live in a half-built house, which looks like the squat Zakhmeh at which refugees get together, sit on the floor, eat plain soup and bread, but at the same time enjoy each other's company.

He wanted to tell her, you don't need all the things the world has pushed you to want. He recalled London, her tired, desperate voice: No one hands you anything and they expect you so much. But no one needs a PhD or publications or titles. You don't need a big city. You don't need hundreds of friends, or adventures, or any substance to fill your bones with life. You need some good lamb stew with kidney beans and fenugreek, basmati rice, romance sometimes, community always. You need a deep well of kindness for old lovers. The atmosphere of the heart matters; you draw your border around that and keep it clean. If you dispose of a love too brutally, you scorch the surrounding heart flesh where they lived, and then that atmosphere is ashen. Having walked away from his home, his photos, souvenirs of his children, Bahman knew that you don't need much –most everything we claim to want is the empty shell of something more essential; we're afraid to face the hard road to obtaining the thing itself. So we build a fortress of objects we crave to keep near.⁶²⁰

Bahman's perspective of life is an ironic combination of mystic and hedonistic. He has purified his life ideals of any materialistic, capitalist values through his Sufist beliefs and his rural life-style. He is an educated dentist, but his lifestyle is of a simple villager who takes pleasure in very small things. Despite having privileges attached to his social location as a doctor in Iran, he is still able to see the simple joys in life. Good food and romance are some factors that he believes to make life easier and home a desirable place to live. However, community is what he insists on, no matter where one lives. Bahman is the only character of the story who carries his home in his heart and he still strives for building up a community wherever he goes. "The atmosphere of the heart" he refers to is crucial to the concept of roots. The atmosphere is community, our relationships and loving. Any practice of uprooting, be it for spaces or people, needs to be performed smoothly lest you scorch flesh of the heart. Border crossing and migration is just another practice of wounding the atmosphere of the heart; this is why love becomes the central value in Bahman's life and why he advocates that for Niloo as well. He has realized what Niloo is missing is not jobs, a physical home, or relationship, but comfort, love, and community. Home, village, and community merge into the same concept, and instead of being geographical, spatial, or locational, home becomes an interpersonal, communal concept. It turns into a feeling,

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 291.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 312.

an affect which has more to do with loving and becoming than it does with static being.⁶²¹ In other words, the human aspect of home is embodied in the world-travelling processes of multiple selves within the border crossing multiplicitous self (who is constantly negotiating through adaptability processes) and also in negotiations that multiplicitous selves need to make with other multiplicitous selves, either with those who are border-crossers, or those who are the dominant majority.⁶²² As Ahmed et al put it:

Homing' entails processes of home-building (Hage 1997), whether 'at home' or in migration. Making home is about the (re)creation of what Eva Hoffman would call 'soils of significance' (1989: 278), in which the affective qualities of home, and the work of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materialities of rooms, objects, rituals, borders and forms of transport that are bound up in so many processes of uprooting and regrounding. Homing, then, depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted – in migration, displacement or colonization. Inherent to the project of home-building here and now, is the gathering of 'intimations' of home, 'fragments which are imagined to be traces of an equally imagined homely whole, the imagined past "home" of another time and another space' (Hage 1997: 106; emphasis added). In this respect, being at home and the work of home-building is intimately bound up with the idea of home: the idea of a place (or places) in the past, and of this place in the future. Making home is about creating both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present.⁶²³

Having now discussed the concepts of home, we must now discuss the lived experiences of assimilation.⁶²⁴ The aim of this section is not to argue if assimilation is a good or a bad thing; the aim is to critique the concept of assimilation as a practice that is required by relations of power in white dominant societies. I will relate assimilation and integration to the gratitude complex and to identity negotiation. I argue that there is a difference between identity negotiation and 'loving playful strategicness'⁶²⁵ as an assimilatory practice. To see this, I must demonstrate how differently assimilation takes place for identities and how their baggage of lived experience of border crossing, from before, during, and after affects the ways in which they choose to make homes, assimilate, and become new citizens. I also critique the concepts of "transnational' and "citizen of the world" identity in the context of assimilation and show how politicized assimilation is only expected of non-white identities.

⁶²¹ Sara Ahmed et al in *Uprootings/Regroundings* suggest a framework based on the concepts of uprootings/regroundings which is proposed to "rethink home and migration in ways that open out the discussion beyond oppositions such as stasis versus transformation, or presence versus absence. Uprootings/regroundings make it possible to consider home and migration in terms of a plurality of experiences, histories and constituencies and of the workings of institutional structures." They critique much of the research on migration and placement as they believe it destabilizes identities and communities by detaching them from place. They maintain that "While recognizing that the transnational movements of bodies, objects and images have transformed concepts and experiences of home and belonging (defined as locality and community as well as nation), we question the presumptions that rootless mobility is the defining feature of contemporary experience and that it stands against any form of 'rooted belonging'." Sara Ahmed et al, *Uprootings/ Regroundings: Questions of home and migration*, (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 1-3.

⁶²² Ahmed et al acknowledge Postcolonial feminist theorists who "have led the way in theorizing 'border- zones' and *mestizo* identities in relation to the work of migration and inhabitation (Anzaldúa 1987; Ifekwunigwe 1999; Kaplan et al. 1999; Lorde 1982; Moraga 1983). They have made us aware that the greatest movements often occur within the self, within the home or within the family, while the phantasm of limitless mobility often rests on the power of border controls and policing of who does and does not belong. And they have shown us that long-standing categories of difference addressed in feminist work become important in new ways when addressed in relation to uprootings/regroundings." See *Ibid.*, 5

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶²⁴ Also see Ghassan Hage, "At home in the entrails of the West: multiculturalism, ethnic food and migrant home-building," *Home/world: Space, community and marginality in Sydney's West* (1997): 99-153.

⁶²⁵ I am borrowing these terms from Maria Lugones and have already discussed them in previous chapters. Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness," 3-19.

In *Refuge*, Dina Nayeri portrays how assimilation works differently from one person to another, even if those people are members of the same family and share so much as a group identity. She differentiates between exile, asylum seeking, and transnationalism, and emphasizing the extent of the difference the time and place setting of immigration make on the situation of migrants. In her article “The Ungrateful Refugee” and her autofiction *Refuge*, she poses the microhistory of refugees like herself and her friends as a counter narrative to the grand narrative of the history of migration and exile.

Niloo’s border crossing as an eight-year-old girl had not been easy, neither had her transition from a refugee to a migrant. She remembers graphic images from her childhood when she was trying hard to assimilate into American culture and be less of an “other” to the rest of the kids at school. In her article in *The Guardian*, Nayeri very aptly critiques the conditions of migrants in terms of integration and assimilation:⁶²⁶

But there were unspoken conditions to our acceptance, and that was the secret we were meant to glean on our own: we had to be grateful. The hate wasn’t about being darker, or from elsewhere. It was about being those things and daring to be unaware of it. As refugees, we owed them our previous identity. We had to lay it at their door like an offering, and gleefully deny it to earn our place in this new country. There would be no straddling. No third culture here. That was the key to being embraced by the population of our town, a community that openly took credit for the fact that we were still alive, but wanted to know nothing of our past. Month after month, my mother was asked to give her testimony in churches and women’s groups, at schools and even at dinners. I remember sensing the moment when all conversation would stop and she would be asked to repeat our escape story. The problem, of course, was that they wanted our salvation story as a talisman, no more. No one ever asked what our house in Iran looked like, what fruits we grew in our yard, what books we read, what music we loved and what it felt like now not to understand any of the songs on the radio. No one asked if we missed our cousins or grandparents or best friends. No one asked what we did in summers or if we had any photos of the Caspian Sea. “Men treat women horribly there, don’t they?” The women would ask. Somehow it didn’t feel OK to tell them about my funny dad with his pockets full of sour cherries, or my grandpa who removed his false teeth when he told ghost stories.

Dina is very clear on her point. The unspoken conditions of their acceptance as refugees or newcomers makes the assimilation process quicker for them, as it is the only alternative for survival in a new land. Identity negotiation happens because migrant identities are expected to do so under hegemonic policies, security, white supremacy, and white savior discourses. As long as the asylum-seeking identities tell their stories properly, tell the right salvation sagas, and share those sides of the story which the white saviours and policy makers prefer to hear, they will be accepted as victims needing help. However, there is a limit to the level of acceptance, even if the refugees have the most exciting misery stories of border crossing. In the above excerpt, Dina presents a decolonial approach to misery pornography. She argues it is important to see refugees not as victims, but as social identities who have left behind so many people and valuable things. It is the West’s moral responsibility to give them refuge and accept them for who they are. Yet, her personal experience and what she witnessed in her family, was very much in line with the assimilatory discourses:

⁶²⁶ Nayeri, “Ungrateful Refugee”

From then on, we sensed the ongoing expectation that we would shed our old skin, give up our former identities – every quirk and desire that made us us – and that we would imply at every opportunity that America was better, that we were so lucky, so humbled to be here. My mother continued giving testimonials in churches. She wore her cross with as much spirit as she had done in Islamic Iran. She baked American cakes and replaced the rosewater in her pastries with vanilla. I did much worse: over years, I let myself believe it. I lost my accent. I lost my hobbies and memories. I forgot my childhood songs.⁶²⁷

Niloo is bothered by the ongoing expectation that requires her to forget who she was before coming to the US. She can witness the gratitude complex in her mother, the way her cross gets bigger and bigger; she changes her indigenous Iranian cuisine into American-style. She grows a sense of self-hatred because she loses her childhood memories, things that remind her of her family's village back in Isfahan, her Persian accent, which is funny to so many Westerners because of the strong v's and long vowels. Hometactics and assimilation techniques require her to repress memories of home and build up new ones in their stead. Unlike the exilic community who live in the past—their hometactics in favor of remembering and re-remembering their past memories and highlighting their previous identity while resisting assimilation. Niloo's mother strategically assimilates into the Western culture. However, Niloo has fluctuating feelings about assimilation and integration. Whilst she grows up into an American girl, gains two more citizenships, and becomes a successful university graduate and prolific individual, she more observantly starts to see her social location and identity. Through her epistemic privilege, which is the result of her multiplicitous selves' world-travellings, she distinguishes between the young assimilated Niloo and the thirty-three-year-old Niloo who lives with constant ontological anxiety and does not feel at home anywhere. As Dina narrates Niloo:

People change. Everyone. And all love ends. She knows this now. Only hardened exiles refuse to change; they dig their feet in and try to root everywhere they land. Even if the soil poisons them. They hang on and on, afraid to move forward. They don't let go of dead things. They don't toss the lime juice. They hoard trinkets in ragged suitcases. They pile up photographs of long-ago days; begging their children for doubles. They build a fortress in the corner of a closet. Maybe Gui was right. You're still waiting, he said- it's true. She's so terrified of losing her every small advantage that now her own baba poses a threat. If she had accepted Gui as her home, would she shield herself so zealously?⁶²⁸

It is not only people in exile who have been building up fortresses in their closets and holding on to their past, but also Niloo who has always been waiting for something bad to take away her life. Niloo was not born with the privileges she has, as an American citizen, of any other non-migrant American, but she has worked very hard. She has always been grateful and at the same time fearful of what might take away her life. It is not just the trauma of refugeeness and homelessness but the post-traumatic stress of having already once lost her previous life and status and the constant anxiety of losing it once again. Nayeri uses the apt metaphor of purse and ID cards to draw the readers' attention to the privileges that are usually taken for granted as universal:

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 251.

Would she be a secure kind of woman with a dozen purses strewn everywhere, each containing an old ID or a dozen documents she once thought important—none of it vital enough to save, because her entitlement to her life isn't granted by these things, but intrinsic? No one can snatch it away. Maybe that's the difference between refugees and expats. The difference isn't Yale or naturalization papers, a fat bank account or invitations to native homes. In that way, she is the same as Mam'mad and Karim. When you learn to release that first grateful windfall after the long migration, when you trust that you'll still be you in a year or a decade, even without the treasures you have picked up along the way, always capable of more—when you stop carrying it all on your back—maybe that's when the refugee years end.⁶²⁹

The key insecurity in the lives of refugees, according to Niloo, is a sort of entitlement to life that cannot be snatched away. Refugees are forced to go through so many bureaucratic procedures that they find it difficult to believe their new social location, after having been granted citizenship. The process of naturalization in itself is a highly problematic issue, in which refugees have to prove their honesty, their misery and their usefulness as new citizens. Therefore, from early stages of asylum seeking to the end, they are reified and treated as numbers and statistics. No matter if they are well assimilated and hold graduate degrees from Yale, as long as they still have physical and mental perimeter corners and a ready-to-go backpack in that very perimeter, they are still carrying all the pains of border crossing, assimilation, and adaptability on their shoulders and, therefore, suffering highly from gratitude complex. Niloo portrays how a gratitude complex can make social identities dysfunctional, despite the epistemic salience their social location bears. The refugee life ends only if the insecurity ends, when people start to develop a trust for life and believe that life has more to offer and is not going to take things away from them. Developing trust for life is not easy for people who are running from conflict zones, those who have been politically persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, having always led lives of unexpected events. Nayeri reminds the reader, especially the Western reader, that not all people enjoy the privilege of having stable lives. She represents the difference between being an expat and a refugee, while highlighting the persecution aspect of refugeehood; as she mentions about Bahman: "Now the world has grown weary of Iranians and he wore his secret plans like a soiled undershirt; he was sure they could smell him coming."⁶³⁰ The synesthesia she ironically uses here feels like a response to cartoons of refugees embodied in form of animals, mostly rats, as a threat to the health and security of a system.⁶³¹ In order to fight this persecution, Bahman's strategy is to dress like a British colonial agent:⁶³² "I want to look like British men in Topkapi and mosques," he said to the salesman. "The good ones, not the riffraff. [...] I'm about to become a

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 251-2.

⁶³⁰ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 265.

⁶³¹ The controversial Daily Mail cartoon, depicting refugees as rats, running amongst Muslims who are also represented as terrorists is one example. This cartoon is said to have been inspired by the anti-semitic Nazi cartoon representing Jews as rats in 1939. For cartoon images, please see the links below:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3321431/MAC-Europe-s-open-borders.html>

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/daily-mail-nazi-refugee-rat-cartoon_us_564b526ec4b06037734ae115

⁶³² Like V.S. Naipaul's mimic men. See Naipaul, Vidiadhar Surajprasad. *The mimic men*, (New York: Pan Macmillan, 2002).

trespasser in a place that wants me to turn around and go home,” Bahman sighed. “Shouldn’t I fix myself up a little?”⁶³³

Bahman is a playful character. Despite his linguistic barrier, he can still make jokes in a language he has not mastered and be politically ironic. He calls himself a trespasser before the border security officers call him and he strategizes his looks in a way that would be acceptable to whiteness. When he goes to the embassy, he knows he would be rejected if he dresses like an *Ardestooni* villager. He assimilates before he is asked to adhere to any forms of naturalization, or to prove that he is not a threat, a terrorist, or a Muslim man with rigid biases against any non-Muslims. This is his way of crossing the border to get to his daughter. He peels himself off of any Iranian looks or smells, a strategy from previous experience. Every time Niloo, used to meet with her mother and with Bahman, she could see the difference between each parent’s way of dealing with life in the West, one as a citizen of the world, and the other as a temporary border crosser.

It struck me that she and Baba were no longer in the same cultural category—maman wasn’t displaced each time she left her home. She seemed so much younger than Baba. She didn’t struggle and suffer and hunt for *lavash* bread. She didn’t look for an Iranian host or a welcoming *sofreh*. She ate Spanish food. She learned Spanish greetings.⁶³⁴

Elsewhere in the memoir, Niloo describes maman:

Unlike Mam’mad, Maman knows how to approach the neighbours here like a confident American: she offers sweets not to beg for a welcome but with entitlement: I need your vacuum. She reaches into the pores of the space, peeling off layers of dirt that Niloo’s hands haven’t even touched.⁶³⁵

Both examples above show how, through hometactics, Niloo’s mother has managed to adapt. This adaptability does not necessarily mean a full sense of belonging. In fact, it is a development of ontological plurality, homemaking, and fighting invisibility—the latter of which is a subversive act by nature for minorities in a so-called multicultural society. Maman is presenting herself there through her confidence in interacting with whiteness. This practice is very similar to what Kris Sealey identifies as a practice of bad faith for making home out of no home.⁶³⁶ When Niloo’s mother learns how to approach neighbours in a foreign country and

⁶³³ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 265.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁶³⁶ Sealey uses Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, Ortega’ hometactics, and Lugones’ plurality and playfulness, to theorize the Sartrian concept of bad faith as a subversive anticolonial practice. As she argues: “For bodies made invisible, “at the edges” of community, a demand for grounding is both legitimate and, quite frankly, subversive. [Her] claim is that we find this demand prioritized in a project of bad faith through which [she] claim presence for [her]self, and, against all odds, stake a place under [her] own sun.” For Sealey, it takes freedom and strategicness to practice a little bad faith in line with hometactics to achieve a more stable position and build homes. Freedom for Sealey is not “magical.” It rather is “the freedom to encounter the fact of [her] body (race, gender, nationality, its formation for others) with meaning that fits into [her] fundamental project.” She finally concludes that racialized others must navigate the political space, especially when that space is shaped by the practice of colonial violence and the racialized bodies experience fetishism through fear and desire of the colonial agents. For Sealey, it is only through subversively daring to make a home in an unhomey space that bad faith becomes a constructive practice. In the context of my study, ‘self-orientalizing’ is a ‘liberatory practice’ through “bad faith” which can function as a survival strategy. For more information see Kris Sealey, “Resisting the Logic of Ambivalence: Bad Faith as Subversive, Anticolonial Practice.” *Hypatia*, 175

ask them for a favour while offering her own delicacies first, she demonstrates that she has learned strategic adaptability. No matter if she is considered a wog⁶³⁷ or a refugee, she has learnt how to make people respect her and how to make herself feel at home. She does not live with the nostalgia of hot Iranian flat bread and does not linger on her asylum-seeking years like Niloo does. As an assimilated Christian woman, she has gained her social space among Westerners. After her divorce from Bahman, she dated a Christian white American man and although it did not end well, Pari did manage to keep herself away from the exilic feelings that most Iranians were experiencing in the US at the time. Pari's transition from a middle-class practicing doctor in Iran to a political asylum seeker in the US and her assimilation and integration has been remarkably affected by her faith. Despite the fact that her conversion to Christianity was the main axis of oppression for her in her home country, her Christian faith served as her saviour in the West accommodating her with a privilege that Muslim Iranians could not afford. Like Leilah in *Orange Trees*, Pari's religion as an identity marker surprises the white majority. How can she look Middle Eastern and not be an Arab or a Muslim? Intersectionally speaking, although Pari might have experienced casual racism, she has gone through less institutional racism because on paper, and politically speaking, she is a Christian.⁶³⁸

5.2.3 Another unibrow from “Eye-ran”: Did you come before or after?

The concept of “home” in *The Good Daughter* is narrated from the view-point of the biracial Jasmine, born from German and Iranian parents and growing up in the US. As I mentioned before, most of the story is a biography of Lili, Jasmine's mom, and Kobra, her grandmother, but the final chapters specifically refer to Jasmine's experience of growing up in the US, which is attached to her mother's experience crossing borders as an Iranian woman. Once the 1979 revolution sparks in Iran, Lili and her German husband sell all their assets in Iran and go to the US. Despite being educated and skilled migrants, the only way they can begin a new life in the US is by starting a business, which for them is buying a run-down motel, in the north of San Francisco. Lili and her husband take turns running the motel until her husband's alcoholism becomes a real issue, resulting in his constant disappearance. Building up home in a country like America is not easy for Lili and her German husband, although he is white, and Lili has already had the experience of living in Germany. Jasmine remembers the first time she is made aware of her presence in the US by her mom asking her to ‘look at America’:

From time to time, her eyes would seize on some detail of the landscape and she'd point out the window and tell me to “look at America.” I was five years old and “America” meant nothing more to me than the plush maroon

⁶³⁷ A derogatory/pejorative term used to refer to a non-white migrant, especially from southern Europe as defined by oxford dictionary. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wog>

⁶³⁸ Mention should be made that the asylum seeking for Christian converts turned out to be the easiest category of refugeeness and in the recent years, there was a wave of migration from Iran fitting that category. The asylum seekers should show genuine practice of the religion and after landing in the US, they should engage in a lot of community practice and promoting of Christianity to other communities. So many YouTube videos exist of these promoting and disseminating practices of religion by Iranian asylum seekers.

seats and gleaming hood of that Buik. Persian was just the sound of my mother's voice and German was my father's.⁶³⁹

For Jasmine, the concept of homeland is mixed with her own biracial identity, the difference she feels in the new land and the language. When Jasmine is told to “look out the window at America,”⁶⁴⁰ she does not understand what exactly she is supposed to look at. Is it the land? The scenery? The new language? The people? Or whatever else she had left in Iran, including a sister that she never got to meet?

It does not take a long while for her to get to know about categories of Iranians and Persians in the US. Jasmine demonstrates how the temporal dimension of migration affects these labels, and therefore, the social location that Iranian migrants assign to themselves and others.

“And when,” they asked her after preliminary pleasantries had been exchanged, “did you come, khanoom? Before or after?”

This was the question no two Iranians failed to ask each other when meeting in America back then. It was a nearly discreet way of discerning who hailed from the “best” families in Iran. The “best” Iranians were almost always the ones who'd left months or years before the revolution; everyone else was presumed to have escaped the country in various states of economic and legal hardship. It might not seem that such things could matter here, so far from Iran, but they did—mostly because in America Iranians were suddenly thrown altogether in ways that wouldn't have been possible in Iran.

“Before,” Lili answered quickly. “We came before.”

They passed her a fresh cup of tea and sent me off to play with their daughters. “Tell us, khanoom,” they entreated her. “Tell us your story.”⁶⁴¹

Iran, both before the revolution and after, has been a very class-conscious society. Poverty used to be considered as a sort of social shame and the image of the best families in town was always shaped by the level of well-to-do-ness. Due to the huge gap between upper-middle class and working class in Iran, Iranians, especially before the revolution, were socialized to be very classist. As traditional Iranian families insisted, and as some still do, social status was not only determined by class, but also by “bones” or the family name. However, the revolution made the concept of status much more complicated than what it used to be. Being pro-revolutionary or anti-revolutionary, which is still a Western obsession surrounding the categorization of Iranians, served as an identity marker, even for Iranians themselves. On top of that, the temporal aspect of migration also turned into an identity marker. “When did you come” was not just a question asking for a date, but also a question asking what type of Iranian you are, what is your social status, and what class do you belong to. As Dina Nayeri also satirically mentions the Iranian categories in her *Refuge*, if Iranians had come before the revolution, it meant they were upper-class well-to-do Europeans with a tan who were in the US to start

⁶³⁹ Darziq, *Good Daughter*, 269.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 298.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 276.

businesses and contribute to American society. If they had run away after the revolution it did not matter if they were Marxist-Leninist, Shah supporters, or to which wing their politics was more lenient. All that mattered was that they were in the US as refugees, fresh-off-the-boat newcomers, who were considered a threat to the public image of the community of Iranians in the US.

To make America home, not only do Lili and her family have to negotiate their identity with White America and its values, but also with the expat/émigré community of Iranians, who are not very welcoming of the new Iranian migrants. Maintaining their previous status was so important for Iranians in the US that so many of the migrants could not survive a loss of status and were unable to make a home in America. As Jasmine witnesses among her mother's friends:

[My mother's friends] came between countries, marriages, and lives. Among them were wives whose husbands had found their reduced circumstances and diminished prestige in America unbearable. When their husbands left for Iran to take young wives and start new families, these women opened beauty parlours or turned their living rooms into day-care centers.⁶⁴²

Once the men did not survive loss of status, women started their feminine work spaces, namely, beauty parlours and day-care centers.⁶⁴³ It was not that the loss of home and the spirit of exile had not engaged them; of course they were affected by the border crossing experience, however, they developed these beauty parlours and day-care centers as strategies to adapt to the new land and to develop homes outside of what they used to identify as home. These women, like Niloo's mother, Pari, in *Refuge*, practice strategic bad faith and hometactics, which might include identity negotiation to some extent, but also crucially, a chance for survival. A very thin gap stands between strategicness and selling out, between breaking the invisibility and presenting a whitewashed visibility. These differences have been misunderstood by a number of postcolonial scholars when they discuss memoir and life writing narratives in general.⁶⁴⁴

Strategicness as a practice of hometactics is not negative; it is a result of world travelling, negotiating identities and a result of "intimate terrorism." This process is much more difficult for those women's children who went to school and were either invisible, or hypervisible, among other children. As Jasmine remembers her school experience, while Iranians were a new community in the US, and even in California,⁶⁴⁵ not so many

⁶⁴² Ibid., 295.

⁶⁴³ The status of new migrant Iranian moms can be compared to American moms at PTA meetings as Jasmine describes: "In just ten years these Marin moms would survey their ranks for the few Chinese American, South Asian, and eventually, even Iranian families, all of whom they'd suddenly embrace according to a new ethic of "cultural diversity." But not yet. This was 1981, Ronald Reagan was president, and "immigrants," when these women thought of them at all, were the brown-skinned "Mexicans" who loitered in the canal down in San Rafael. Iran was "Eye-ran" and hospitality, where Lili found it in Tuburon, extended no further than a thin-lipped half smile." See Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 283-4.

⁶⁴⁴ Dabashi refers to Iranian American life writers as "self-sexualizing" and more specifically, in his critique of the empire, he refers to writers like Azar Nafisi as "native informer."

⁶⁴⁵ Jasmine's observation of how Iranians chose California as their new home is related to the status question and how "Persians" have always preferred the posh areas of the towns because they can maintain some class-based status. As she describes: "When Lili first narrowed her eyes at San Francisco Bay, turned to my father, and said, "Here," she could not guess that many other Iranians had already staked the same claim. But by the late seventies, there were already hundreds of Iranians in the area. Many had arrived several years before the revolution with substantial fortunes in several countries.

Iranian children were around at school. Even among those Iranians, the politics of old migrants against new migrants was an inhibiting factor in their communication and solidarity building.

At the large public high school, the Iranian girls formed cliques of their own, but at my small private school there were just three other Iranian girls and we kept to ourselves and did our best not to call attention to the Iranian parts of our lives. We did our best to pass as American. I, in any case, did my best to pass.⁶⁴⁶

The politics of identity-making and home-making at that time span required the little girls at school to make attempts to pass as American and not to call attention to themselves. This is when fading accents start, dying hair blonde, and the emotional and physical distancing from parents begins to develop. Jasmine remembers the huge difference at school between the days after the hostage crisis and the days before. She remembers the day when the teacher, Miss Stevens, introduced a new Iranian girl who had just started school there. Jasmine remembers how threatened she feels by the new girl's presence in class, especially because Ziba's English was poor. She felt enraged by the teacher's attitude when she announced in class that "Ziba is from Iran" and she pronounced Iran as "Eye-ran." That announcement leads everyone in class to notice Ziba and Jasmine; all of a sudden, they both became hypervisible to the extent that paper planes started flying over their heads:

Ziba's English was awful. She couldn't even say "the" properly, she was always mixing up her pronouns, and her penmanship was worse than a kindergartener's...Miss Stevens discovered that Ziba was very good at math. She was in fact a math genius...

She writes of Ziba's accent:

Somehow this high-pitched "I tink" became Ziba's trademark. The class seemed charmed by it. All day long kids begged her to say it. Ziba always obliged and laughed along with them.

Then one day they forced her to say it over and over until her eyes welled up with tears. "hey, listen to unibrow!" someone called out, and everyone burst out laughing.

Within a few weeks kids stopped calling her unibrow. Instead they called her a sand nigger. Nazi. Smelly A-rab.⁶⁴⁷

Once the hypervisibility started taking its hyper-racialized form, Jasmine dissociated herself from Ziba. She hated it when the teacher sat them next to each other and tells Jasmine that "It'll be nice for her [Ziba] to have a friend from her own country." The act of grouping kids coming from the same country was not acceptable to Jasmine even before racialization starts, not to mention, after Ziba is called a "sand nigger," "a Nazi" or a "smelly Arab." As children of Iranian nationality, they are accounted responsible for the hostage

Some claimed close ties to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran. They filled the walls of their homes with photographs of fathers, uncles, and grandfathers in heavily decorated military costume, receiving medals of honor from the king's own hands. Others traced their lineage to the Qajars, the previous – and they would have said true – dynasty of Iran. Their green-eyed wives and daughters had been known for centuries as the most beautiful of Iranian women, and they could be identified easily even in exile." See Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 274

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 305.

⁶⁴⁷ Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 279

crisis, no matter if they are just primary school kids. As a clear category for them in terms of group identities (more specifically color categories) was non-existent, they are associated with other identity groups receiving the most negative racist remarks. These types of reactions led to the self- appropriated exclusion of both Ziba and Jasmine during lunch time breaks and their self-exiling to a bench outside the classroom where Jasmine could sip on her Capri Sun and Ziba could chew her garbanzo beans.⁶⁴⁸ The friendship between Jasmine and Ziba does not work out as one still feels Iranian and the other tries hard to fade away anything Iranian about her in order to become an American kid. Finally, after Jasmine ditched Ziba for a tall beautiful American girl, Ziba managed to find Iranian friends from other classes. The complicated relationship among second generation Iranian Americans or the adolescent new migrants is to a great extent affected by the politics of space, homemaking, and assimilation, not only practiced by their parents but also promoted by hegemonic whiteness.⁶⁴⁹

Jasmine's experience of America with the practice of homemaking is very interrelated. Despite leaving Iran at a young age, she can still feel the loss of status related because of her privilege of biraciality. However, that is not the only reason for feeling lost in the new home of America. Her second generation's practice of homemaking and assimilation conflicts in many ways with her parent's generation of hometactics. As much as parents try to make Iranian homes in the heart of California, be it by planting the indigenous Iranian plants, or by performing Persian culture, cuisine, and language, their children look for more American spaces in which to make homes. As Jasmine explains:

When I was a child, shame was my first, true, and native instinct. Nothing about me was right in America; nothing about me "fit" here. In Iran I'd been coddled and fussed over as a "two-veined child," but here my "gold" hair and "honey-colored eyes" were just plain old "brown." Worse, in America my mother's ways were strange and shaming. Day after day she sent me off to school in party frocks and two-piece in miniature. She filled my lunch box with cucumbers and sliced quince fruit. I'd peel off my jacket, hitch up my skirt, and toss her offerings into the trash before school even started. Shy and sullen among the swarm of the blond ponytails in the schoolyard, I took to hiding out in the library at recess and lunchtime. If I could not be ordinary (and already I knew I could not), then I would be invisible.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Snacks Iranian moms would pack for their kids to take to school. Niloo, Azadeh, and Jasmine all testify, they all felt embarrassed to have Iranian snacks because during lunch breaks the other kids would make fun of them and they would become hypervisible.

⁶⁴⁹ Another form of resistance comes from the upper-class Iranian community in the US who, as Dina Nayeri and Azadeh Moaveni also refer to, identify as *émigré* and not immigrants, based on the same logic that immigrants are boat people. A practice of bad faith or selling out, this can be considered a strategy towards homemaking and assimilation. As much as it can be considered as self-exoticizing, it could also be seen as strategic playfulness, as long as the ethics of community stay in place. As Jasmine portrays: "These were the "good" Iranian families, the ones whose names were firmly planted in the roster of the Iranian elite. They did not think of themselves as immigrants, but as *émigré*, and they called themselves Persians, not Iranians. The wives of such families could be found every day at Nordstrom, immaculately dressed in pencil skirts and twinsets, pearls at their necks and Chanel sunglasses perched on their heads. Their husbands didn't often work in America, as it was understood that here there were no positions commensurate with their pedigree." Jasmine's family does not belong to that group of *émigré*, even if they had immigrated to the US before the revolution via plane. But, as she testifies: "We were not that kind of Iranian family, but with American money and certain guile, we would soon take on many of their airs. It was a performance in which we were hardly alone; it was a way, common to so many Iranians back then, of imagining new lives in this country." As she mentions, this "*émigré*" role-playing for so many Persians was a strategic performance of imagining the US as a new home. If this type of self-representation is the only way to get some visibility in the White America of the seventies and eighties, then it could be considered as an effective strategy of bad faith as Kris Sealey discusses in her article. See Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 274-75.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

The word “fit” is very important to discuss here. How a migrant would “fit” in a social space in a new home has a direct relation to politics of assimilation and integration. Does fitting into a culture mean people need to abandon their previous identity and everything else attached to it? Of course a teenage girl would have a different attitude to the concept of home and assimilation. While Jasmine’s mother tries to preserve Jasmine’s half-Iranian-ness by sending her to school with Iranian-mom-snacks and later on, stressing over her relationships with men and panicking over her loss of virginity, Jasmine “peels off” her Iranian-ness every morning before going to school and prefers invisibility over any degree of visibility. Invisibility is a privilege and one of the key factors bringing about a sense of fitting in and belonging. “Ordinariness” becomes desirable as a guarantee of a sense of home and belonging. Thus, Jasmine’s identity negotiation and peeling-off strategy are practices of homemaking against unsettling feelings about Iran as homeland.

Jasmine openly talks about the resistance and willful forgetting of Iran while she was growing up in a post-hostage crisis America. The version of exile Lili and Jasmine experienced was different to the nostalgic version most of the Persians in the US were suffering. Lili could still go back to Iran and, politically speaking, do so without border crossing problems. However, she would find Iran culturally restraining, having been divorced once and now married to an alcoholic foreigner. Lili’s homemaking and assimilation is a strong act for survival of a woman who has endured a long history of abusive relationships, child marriage, and divorce, but still keeps strategizing for a better future. Jasmine remembers Iran differently to what her mother remembers. Jasmine remembers with an active willful forgetting of “home” for an easier process of assimilation, Americanization, and integration:

I’d forgotten home, I’d forgotten Iran, but just as some memories linger in spite of our longing to forget them, there are some loves that will take in just about my soil. When my mother Lili lined my bathtub with pomegranates, she was giving me an appetite for an unearthly fruit and the stories and secrets encased in its many-chambered heart, and this, she knew, was a pleasure from which not even a small girl could be exiled.⁶⁵¹

Pomegranate, like orange blossoms and mulberries, symbolizes a place, a land attached to all gustatory memories that people carry with them from childhood. Jasmine feels stuck between a willful forgetting of homeland and an active remembering of it, between two generations of women, her grandmother and her mother Lili, the former reminding her to make sense of Iran as homeland and the latter encouraging her to forget Iran as homeland to have an easier assimilation process:

Nearly, as unsettling was my grandmother’s notion that Iran was “my country,” a place I could still call home. In all these years of living in America, I’d never really thought about going back to the place where I was born. “There’s nothing left to see,” my mother often told me when I was growing up, and I’d always believed her.

For years, my Iran had been a place in California, a place made up of women and their stories. When I thought of my family’s first years in America, it was mostly the sadness of these women that I remembered, the sadness

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 293.

that clung to them and then trailed their daughters as they made their own way in this country. That was Iran to me, and I wanted no part of that Iran.

But even if I did not want to think of it, there was always another Iran, an Iran as far away as the shrouded angry figures on our American TV screen and as close as the sounds of my grandmother's and mother's voices waking me late at night.⁶⁵²

Iran for Jasmine is not a country marked with so much political stigma, but a "place made of women" and their stories. Here is when home metamorphoses from a strictly spatial entity into an interpersonal abstraction, a different form of space in which can take place women's solidarity and bonding, strong-telling, knowledge building, history writing, or simply surviving day to day struggles. For Jasmine, the sadness of all those stories is what makes the act of remembering home very difficult. Travelling these ontological worlds and living in-between on these mental borderlands is an act of emotional labour. What is left of Iran is another woman for Jasmine, Sara, a sister she never properly met because Lili hid them from each other, as she was hiding her previous marriage and life from everyone. Iran becomes the good daughter that Lili always used to threaten Jasmine with whenever she was not acting Iranian enough. The more Jasmine tries to forget Iran, the further Iran turns into a feminine space, with mothers, sisters, and women who have been fighting patriarchy in their own ways and within their own limitations, even if their fight is not considered feminist in the Western world.

But I never returned to Iran. I never sought Sara out. I told myself I was too busy with my studies and then, later, with work. I told myself I'd go just as soon as the political tensions between America and Iran eased. Really, though, I was afraid. Besides, Sara had always known about me and yet she had never tried to contact me. If I tried to find her now, I'd only be intruding on the life she had made for herself. It was childish of me to think I could feel at home with her in Iran after all this time. Still, I couldn't quite give up the possibility of returning to Iran and meeting her. Next year, I'd promise myself, next year I will go back.⁶⁵³

To Jasmine and many other exilic identities, the desire to return to Iran stays forever but the desire is constantly repressed through procrastination. Like in Azadeh's family and in Jasmine and Lili, the fear of going back and finding things, places and people not similar to what they had sustained in their imaginary is what restrains the exilic identities from returning. For Jasmine, a return is difficult because all she knows about home is gained through "post-memory."⁶⁵⁴ Jasmine, having left Iran at a very young age cannot remember Sara, Iran as a homeland and the family relations that existed there. However, she keeps hoping for a day that she goes back home, even if it never happens.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 317.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 320.

⁶⁵⁴ A term coined by Marianne Hirsch. See Marianne Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)

5.2.4 *A Republic of Imagination or an imaginary republic?*

The concept of home in Azar Nafisi's *Republic of Imagination* stands apart to how it is defined for Niloo (Dina), Jasmine, and Azadeh. Nafisi, who is well-known in the West for her *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has received a lot of critique for the way she has portrayed Iran and the US in her memoir writings.⁶⁵⁵ What is particularly interesting about her life writing narratives is the way she uses the American literary canon as a lens to see the world, her own experience, and how other identities' experience border crossing and home-making. Some critics have questioned her act of using American literature as a colonial/imperial project⁶⁵⁶ in which she has been involved since her migration to the West. Nafisi's controversial reception is paradigmatic of the contestation surrounding the knowledge produced by transnational women's voices. The kind of knowledge that transnational voices, like Nafisi's produce are scrutinized as they sometimes bears claims of truth. As Lara Kang reminds us:

Especially because those subjects who produce knowledge along the specific axes of their own social difference ... are seen to derive their institutional and epistemic authority from merely being who they are, there needs to be a sustained critique of the many redeployments of knowledges that emerge in the name of women.⁶⁵⁷

As much as some critics believe that voices like Nafisi's are important because they turn into the voice of dissent, and because the contradictions in the epistemic bodies and the clashes with other epistemic bodies produced by other writers result in theories of identity and knowledge, we need to bear in mind that cooptation of indigenous voices is also a risk to women of color feminisms. As Jodi Melamed⁶⁵⁸ articulates in her critique of "neoliberal multiculturalism":

The reducing of women of color feminism's theory of embodied knowledge to a notion of knowledge in bodies, which allows a mode of analysis to be mistaken for a method of identity consolidation. Ironically, this misreading leads to the frequent mischaracterization of women of color feminism as "identity politics" when, as Roderick Ferguson demonstrates, the main thrust of women of color analysis is not only to repudiate identitarianisms but also to repudiate the very concept of a fixed identity.

Melamed centers her discussion of white supremacy derived from official anti-racisms in the US on literary productions and the ways in which neoliberal multiculturalism co-opts women's voices in the name of

⁶⁵⁵ I have referenced the studies critiquing Nafisi's work in my literature review.

⁶⁵⁶ Marandi refers to Nafisi as "colonial surrogate" and "orientalist." See Seyed Mohammed Marandi, "Reading Azar Nafisi in Tehran." *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 6, no. 2 (2008): 180,188
Also see Seyed Mohammad Marandi, and Hossein Pirnajmuddin. "Constructing an Axis of Evil: Iranian Memoirs in the "Land of the Free."" *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2009): 23-47.
Roksana Bahramitash, "The war on terror, feminist orientalism and orientalist feminism: Case studies of two North American bestsellers." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 221-235.

⁶⁵⁷ Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002),19

⁶⁵⁸ Jodi Melamed, "Reading Tehran in Lolita: Seizing Literary Value for Neoliberal Multiculturalism." (2011), 2-3

women of color feminism and “further obscure[s] and (mis)appropriate[s] the intellectual space carved out by women of color feminism.”⁶⁵⁹

Contrary to the valorization of American identity portrayed in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Republic of Imagination* is more concerned with America as a space and as a home which fails Nafisi’s ‘Americanophilia’. As she did in Iran in *Reading Lolita*, she seeks refuge in the world of American literature again and builds up a “Republic of Imagination,” which she is able to navigate freely. In *The Republic*, Nafisi talks about the reasons why she wrote *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. She connects her passion for books and literature to her responsibility as a citizen, a writer, and a teacher⁶⁶⁰ to let Americans know what Iranians think of them, and what they know of them. As she states, telling Americans the story of an Iranian Muslim girl who has read Virginia Woolf and can write poetry in three languages is a better introduction on Iranians’ conception of America than holding a “particular position on the “West” and the “rest.””⁶⁶¹ Nafisi says that she had thought of calling *The Republic of Imagination* “*Becoming an American*” as she wanted to put emphasis on the idea of moral freedom these fictional characters were propagating, not only for non-politically free Iranians, but also for Americans themselves.⁶⁶² America as a new home and American citizenship as a new identity resonates for her in the realm of American literature, as she confesses:

Six years ago, I swore a public oath in a bland government office building, but I became an American citizen long before that, when I first began to trace my imaginary map of America, beginning with Dorothy’s Kansas and the dessicated farmland of the Ingalls sisters. That America is a country of immigrants is a truism, and even now it remains the case—it is populated by people from many parts of the globe who have brought with them the restless ghosts of their original homeland, making homelessness an integral part of American identity. More than any other country, America has become the symbol of exile and displacement, of choosing a home, as opposed to becoming born in it.⁶⁶³

This is an interesting way of looking at citizenship; however, one can question its feasibility, especially in the context of the United States. Arguably, home can mean something different to every person, but politics of homemaking and hometactics is entrenched within intersectional racial, ethnic, sexual and gendered power asymmetries. America is a land of immigrants, but America has never been equally home to all immigrants. Some immigrants have lived exilic lives in the US, whilst some others have always felt at home and this does not just arise from an inner feeling but from the the degrees to which identities have attachments to power. Nafisi can feel like an immigrant because her hometactics have dictated a preference for remembering moral freedom as an American value and lack of freedom as an ideological issue which she only experienced in Iran.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁶⁰ Nafisi, *The Republic of Imagination*, 25

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 31.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 34.

Apparently, she is willfully unable to read the power struggles Muslim identities have in America when she apologetically refers to an Iranian Muslim student of hers who had mastered American literature to resist the oppressive system. This should be put in perspective comparatively to a long history of literature of resistance written in Persian, in all genres including fiction, which propagated political and ideological resistance against any kind of oppressive system, be it Monarchy or Islamic revolution. This is where aggrandizing America as an egalitarian land of opportunity while it is still the land of the homeless sounds like a Trump tweet: “making America great again.” On top of that, America has not been “the choice” for so many immigrants, including African Americans whose ancestors were brought to the US as slaves.

Nafisi’s world-travelling has taken place across the world of American fiction. Her experience of border crossing is nothing close to Niloo’s, for instance, who has never been able to feel equal to the other immigrants in the US or in the Netherlands, despite all her prosperities by the age thirty seven. For Nafisi, home is made through a constant comparison between the American fiction and life in the Islamic Republic of Iran. She writes:

As the reality of the Islamic Republic insinuated itself into our lives and Tehran lost its colours and sounds, America was transformed in my imagination into a lush, green, teasingly colourful and desirable land. The more alien and menacing Tehran became, the more we had to withdraw from its public spaces, the more vibrant America’s fictional landscape appeared in my imagination. Yet it was obvious to me even then that the America I yearned for was more an invention of life in the Islamic Republic than the country I had known as a student. So I clung to that fictional other country, whose vagrant and at times unhappy citizens were the ones who helped me keep things in perspective when daily life began to feel more and more like a very bad dream.⁶⁶⁴

Home for her is neither Iran nor America; it is an imagination of a land that is free of any menace and impurities; a republic of fantasy. She seeks refuge in the world of fiction, like Jasmine in her college years, or Niloo when she studied at Yale to get a degree in literature. However, Nafisi does so differently. Compared to the America she portrays in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, she has a more critical view of America and the American dream. She states that she finds Tehran more menacing and alien due to the conflicting ideologies she shares with anything Islamic-republic-like. However, this is not only about the imposed Islamic ideologies that she struggles with both in the public sphere and in her work space. It is more about loss of status. As an upper middle-class academic woman who has been educated in the West, Nafisi finds it very difficult to lose her job and her social status and rebuild everything from scratch in the US. Nafisi crosses the borders and chooses to reside in the US, but she does not really experience world-travelling whilst crossing the borders from the Middle East to the Americas. She physically moves, but she does not move worlds. As she also mentions, she moves from one fictional landscape of America she developed in her fantasies back in Iran, to another, both of which she calls America. Thus, America, as the new home, is always an imaginary construct, not the real world, and Iran is the home that has disappointed her; thus, the portrayals are always much darker than what they could

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 72.

be in real life. Nafisi's practice of hometactics involves incumbent readings of American literature, which make up the main plot of both *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *The Republic of Imagination*. The fictionality of the world that Nafisi creates can be compared to the one in *Refuge*, and the auto-fictional mode in which the author opts to narrate her life story. In *The Republic*, the fictional and imaginary American landscapes are juxtaposed to an Ayatollah-ruling Tehran. The Author portrays Tehran as a city fixated in the 1980s, whereas America is idolized and fictionalized as in *Huckleberry Finn*, or *Babbitt*. Fictionality per se, however, is not the problem. It is the juxtaposition of the fictional and the real and the ultra-contextual comparisons that are problematic. In *Refuge*, Niloo's Amsterdam and Bahman's Isfahan as settings of the story both have real and fictional dimensions to them. Yet, none of the two are idolized and both are approached from a critical and 'border-aware perspective. What makes reading *The Republic* as a memoir problematic is the representational mode difference between an idolized fictional America and a real downgraded Tehran.

Assimilation for Nafisi is not even close to what Niloo has to struggle with. Assimilation in America happens naturally due to the country's Vagrant nature:

I have always been drawn to America's vagrant nature, so well portrayed and celebrated in its best works of fiction. I believe that many of those who, like my family and me, migrated to America from all over the world can feel at home in it because it allows us both to belong and to be outsiders. It somehow encourages our vagabond self—befitting a nation that started its life by deliberately choosing to become an orphan.⁶⁶⁵

Nafisi believes many migrants like her and her family have been able to "fit in" or "feel at home" due to the vagrant nature of the US and because immigrants have chosen to be orphans. This argument is problematic due to a number of reasons: first, because, intersectionally speaking, not all migrants benefit from the same social location neither before nor after migration. The second reason is that any type of border crossing involves many layers of politics that determine the politics of assimilation of those migrants upon arrival. Third, because America is not originally the land of immigrants. It is deeply unfortunate, even shocking, that throughout the memoir Nafisi should remain incredulous to the indigenous owners of the land, whom she fails to even mention in favor of Western liberal democracy and political and moral freedom.

Nafisi's ideal fictional world is free of any "confining categories" of race, color, gender, class and ethnicity as she states:

That literature is in essence an investigation of the "other," a term used in such a stale and rigid manner, it has lost its original meaning and is no longer about actual difference so much as identifying subcultures and ethnicities and placing people within increasingly confining categories... while it is fine and good to discover our differences and accept them—and at times celebrate them—the real surprise comes from the discovery of how alike we are,

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.

how much we all have in common. No great work of art and literature would survive the test of time if it were not in some deep sense universal.⁶⁶⁶

I find it amazing that concepts like race, class, gender, once so incendiary, have now been reduced to these empty but menacing words that explain nothing, whose main function is censorship, justified like all acts of censorship by the self-righteous pretense of combatting oppression.⁶⁶⁷

In her Epilogue, which is a reading of James Baldwin, Nafisi relates the idea of America as home to the concepts of gender, race, and class and the ways in which they have complicated an understanding of literature as a place of refuge for mankind. Nafisi suggests that Baldwin should be read as “a writer, not a Negro writer” because becoming a “writer” is what Baldwin was “struggle[ing]” to achieve.⁶⁶⁸ By separating blackness from Baldwin, Nafisi is trying to critique identity politics and the “boxes” in which people are put, because of their race. She encourages tracing a universality of identities in all works of literature which is free of any confining identity categories. Whilst in an ideal world this would have been a great idea for us to only focus on our similarities and consider equality as a possibility, I would like to quote James Baldwin’s two very precious sentences that have been my inspiration for writing as a person of color:

To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.⁶⁶⁹

American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.⁶⁷⁰

What is ignored about Baldwin’s blackness in Nafisi’s critique of identity politics is the epistemic privilege resulting from his colored social location. Baldwin writes as a man of color, living in a country where his ancestors have been slaves to the white European migrants. He writes as a black man whose ancestors have been brought to America by force, and in chains. A universal identity is irrelevant here because blackness as what George Yancy argues, is defined by “the white gaze” and the ways in which it functions to “objectify the Black body as an entity that is to be feared, disciplined, and relegated to those marginalized, imprisoned, and segregated spaces that restrict Black bodies from “disturbing” the tranquillity of white life, white comfort, white embodiment, and white being.”⁶⁷¹ Having this quotation in mind, how can we separate Baldwin from his blackness and insist on imposing a universal identity on him as a writer? The same thing works for Muslimness; even by wearing the most “moderate masks,”⁶⁷² Muslim identities cannot escape the terror they present to whiteness. Writing as a transnational writer is like homemaking. As much as self-craft and assimilation are parts

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 301.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 320.

⁶⁶⁸ Nafisi, *The Republic*, 311.

⁶⁶⁹ James Baldwin, Emile Capouya, Lorraine Hansberry, Nat Hentoff, Langston Hughes, and Alfred Kazin. "The Negro in American Culture." *CrossCurrents* 11, no. 3 (1961): 205.

⁶⁷⁰ James Baldwin, "A talk to teachers." *Saturday Review* 46, no. 42.44 (1963), 19.

⁶⁷¹ George Yancy, *Black bodies, white gazes: The continuing significance of race in America*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), xxx.

⁶⁷² Borrowed from Yassir Morsi’s *Radical skin, Moderate Mask*

of the process, so are the ethnic and racial identity. Nafisi presents herself as a writer with a universal identity, like what she perceives Baldwin to be. Her hometactics as a writer and in the world of writing adheres to universality which could be detrimental to the identities she represents in her work, given the presence of hegemonic discourses that co-opt voices of the minorities.

Living in in-betweenness and constantly struggling in a process of homemaking, as some identities do, makes the definition of home more than what American fiction has defined for immigrants. Home is defined differently from one person to another, as people always carry their baggage of experience with them. It could bring them insight, or it could complicate their view because of the biases, both implicit and explicit, that we all bear. The intimate terrorism that the transnational woman of color experiences throughout border crossing provides her with such knowledge of home that could be called “theory in the flesh,” as Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa name it.⁶⁷³ Differences are important, and they need to be acknowledged when evaluating the knowledges produced by women of color. As mentioned earlier, we should bear in mind that there is a difference between embodied knowledge and knowledge in the bodies, and homes as sites of embodied knowledge.

⁶⁷³ Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 23.

Chapter Six:

Resistant Assimilation and Hometactics as Decolonial Practices: The Stories of Leilah, Ibrahim and Haifa

"I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am also, much more than that. So are we all." James A. Baldwin

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences." Audre Lorde

I will plant my hands in the flowerbed
I will sprout, I know, I know, I know
And the sparrows will lay eggs
In the hollows of my inky fingers..."
— from "Another Birth" by Forough Farukhzad

6.1 Introduction

Border crossing experienced by the Iraqi writers of my corpus of study does also have political and social reasons, however, the narratives are woven very differently to the ones by the Iranian corpus. The concept of home, the practice of hometactics⁶⁷⁴ and the definition of belonging is approached very differently in the Iraqi life writing narratives compared to the ones by Iranians. In this chapter, I analyse three life writing narratives: *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, and *City of Widows* to shed light on the ways in which "home" has been defined, assimilation and belonging have been achieved through a practice of hometactics, and decolonial resistance has been practiced. As a note before starting the discussion, the writers of these memoirs come from three different generations and they have left Iraq (or have never seen Iraq as they were born somewhere else) during the Baath regime's governance of Iraq (1958-2003); however, the narratives have been written after the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq and therefore, the narratives are an amalgamation of experiences of before and after the war. What was intriguing for me about some of these memoirs was the polyphonic narrative which not only does highlight the lived experience of the author but also brings into perspective both the commonality and diversity of experiences of oppression arising from both the Baath regime and the Western intervention in Iraq. The relation of "belonging" to social location and its intersectional nature is one of the main concerns of this chapter. Another important question to raise in this chapter is whether a feminist practice of hometactics would lead to the construction of feminist homes. I would also like

⁶⁷⁴ Transnational identities' practice of homemaking has been the object of inquiry for many scholars. As Sandu points out, it is important to see the link between belonging as a feeling and homemaking as a practice and the ways in which the process of uprooting and re-rooting takes place. According to Sandu, "roots are linked to belonging, fixity, positioning a person to a place, while routes allow for a mobile, continuously evolving nature of belonging, reflecting fluid transnational connections and networks. Yet, this mobility does not eliminate constructions of homes based on previous experiences, imagined and desired homes, or as Brah (1996) calls it, a 'homing desire'. Moreover, for many transnational migrants, conceptualisations of home are both multiple and ambiguous, often reflecting attachments to more than one place. 'Home' is thus shaped by memories as well as everyday life, experiences and practices (Blunt and Dowling 2006). It is the latter aspect that is however less explored, particularly showing how these homemaking practices link migrants to their place of residence."

See Adriana Sandu, "Transnational homemaking practices: Identity, belonging and informal learning." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 21, no. 4 (2013): 498

to mention here that the political value of these three memoirs might be contradictory compared to one another, but I have purposefully chosen to juxtapose and analyse them in this chapter, as I plan to demonstrate that despite the contradictions and very different politics of the works, lived experience narratives are theory-laden and intersectional feminist theory can be drawn from those contradicting accounts of border crossing and hometactics.

6.2 Assimilating “willingly” and “easily”? : From Baghdad to Vancouver

In *Orange Trees of Baghdad*, the concepts of home, assimilation and belonging are conspicuously different to the other life-writing narratives of the corpus of study. Leilah, the protagonist, writes about her own experience of home, both Canada and Iraq, at the time of the American invasion of Iraq. But she does not uncover much detail about her own understanding of home; instead, she writes about her father’s experience of border crossing and homemaking in the West and the ways in which he assimilated and re-rooted somewhere else. Leilah’s narration of the second-hand memories of Ibrahim’s (her father) border crossing and homemaking play a great role in clarifying the significance of some of the symbols and cultural references she uses for the reader. Furthermore, her social location, as a second generation, biracial British-Iraqi, Canadian by citizen and Christian by birth, affect her vision of home, what it means for her and what it means for Ibrahim and the rest of the Iraqi identities in her extended family. Using the genre of memoir has enabled Leilah to offer a more complex view of identity by incorporating multiple voices and perspectives, without having to reduce them into a monolithic one. If polyphony is maintained throughout lived experience narratives, especially narratives of the marginalized voices, literary forms and genres such as the genre of memoir, can function as a means to decolonize epistemologies. Leilah’s narrative includes voices of men and women who have lived their lives under the oppressive system before 2003, and after the invasion and occupation, and their critical perspective stands as a counter hegemonic discourse. Memoir as a literary genre can provide the ground for these voices to decolonize the power of hegemonic discourses and the grand narratives of history which have documented stories from above as ‘facts’ and ‘common sense’.

Leilah starts the story of her father with reference to how little she knows about Ibrahim’s relationship to Iraq,⁶⁷⁵ as he had kept so much of his stories away from them. The background to Ibrahim’s story of homemaking in Canada⁶⁷⁶ is that he went to England on an Iraqi government scholarship to pursue his education there as an engineer, and, since he fell in love with a British woman, he decided to stay. As a result, Leilah’s grandfather had to pay the scholarship off. Ibrahim never returned to Iraq, although he was supposed to, based on his scholarship conditions. The Baathist regime was ruthless, and he could not make sure that

⁶⁷⁵ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 34.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

visiting Iraq again would not be equal to punishment. Ibrahim's exile and assimilation story is followed by a description of his personality:

A successful engineer and businessman, he has a scientific, rational approach to life. He is very reliable, loves math and famously, as his colleagues sometimes tease, "never makes mistakes." He [my father] isn't superstitious, a conspiracy theorist or a reactive thinker; he loves games of strategy like bridge and chess and laughs off mysticism and miracles. Perhaps because he married an Englishwoman, he didn't socialize much with other Iraqis or live out an Arabic life in Canada. He assimilated willingly and easily, and was happy in the West.⁶⁷⁷

In this quote, Ibrahim's willful assimilation has been juxtaposed to his rational approach to life. He is described as "not superstitious or a conspiracy theorist or reactive thinker" which recalls stereotypes with which most Arabs, and Middle Eastern identities in general, are identified. Ibrahim is described as a good example of an assimilated migrant who chooses to live outside Iraq, marry an English woman and move to Canada with her to start a family. Compared to Iranian exilic identities, Ibrahim is never described as homesick for Iraq or for his family. He is said to laugh off mysticism and miracles, which are remarkable cultural references when discussing Middle Eastern religions and cultures. Leilah is not sure if this assimilation is a result of Ibrahim's marriage, or if it stems from his rational mind. Considering the notions of logic and rationality in this context, I would argue against a Eurocentric ground of comparison, which sees rationality and superstition as a binary opposition. This also reminds us of the binary of Modern/non-modern societies. I am not saying that Leilah has a Eurocentric view of logic and rationality here; I am trying to demonstrate how juxtaposition of words in this context could produce knowledges that might include epistemic violence. Taking an intersectional perspective, I argue that most of Ibrahim's assimilation in the West is a result of his social location as a middle-class, educated Christian Iraqi who migrates to the UK at that specific era (Baathist regime in power in Iraq).

Like so many of the exilic identities (including Iranians) he isolates himself from the Arabic speaking community in the UK, and later in Canada, as a practice of hometactics. He does not wish to be identified as an Arab Iraqi, not because he does not want to be considered as a "conspiracy theorist,"⁶⁷⁸ but because the racial hierarchy that already existed in the West upon his arrival would still other him into that category, even if he were not one. Leilah claims that her father has never experienced racism.⁶⁷⁹ This claim partly arises from the fact that Leilah's biracial identity holds privileges that make her unable to see different forms of racism. Racism is not only the blatant disrespecting of someone into their faces due to their skin colour or language; a more harmful form of racism is the institutional systemic racism, which denies migrants opportunities, forces them into unwillful practices of assimilation, identity negotiations, and forgetting of their past homes. This is why a phenomenological approach to the notion of race and racism is necessary when discussing practices of

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁷⁸ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 35.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 35.

hometactics and assimilation. The extent to which assimilation takes place is affected by the system and its receptivity to migrants. Ibrahim has been so well-assimilated that Leila could not see her father's difference to other Canadian citizens; as she mentions: "All [her] life [she]'d never perceived [her] father as an immigrant and so whenever there was a war in Iraq, [she] was startled to be reminded that he came from an enemy land."⁶⁸⁰

The fact that Leilah never perceived her father as an immigrant all her life is a very important point here. Ibrahim's hometactics and practice of assimilation has been so successful that even his own daughter has not seen the pains of adaptability he has gone through. One reason why is that he has never expressed any discomfort while adapting to the new culture, except for a few culture shocks that Leilah has recorded. As Leilah claims, Ibrahim has never experienced discrimination; she writes:

Some of the Iraqis complained about discrimination, but Ibrahim never experienced it.

"I had high self-esteem, so I didn't care if people were rude. Maybe they were reacting to my being Arabic, but I just thought they were being unpleasant. It didn't occur to me that people were discriminating against me because of my race. I thought it was their problem. I never thought it was because of the colour of my skin," he said, shrugging.⁶⁸¹

According to the excerpt above, Ibrahim has experienced discrimination; however, his adaptability has been more based on denial than confrontation or acceptance. I argue that this is another form of hometactics: to develop a level of self-esteem and to acknowledge one's own rights of presence and existence in a space. Not all forms of adaptability include confrontation, aggression, victimization, or fantasization and recreation of past homes. Instead of taking those strategies, Ibrahim develops a high level of agency for his presence. To make discrimination less of a central issue in his migrant life, he avoids terms such as racism and discrimination and replaces them with 'rudeness' and 'unpleasantness' of behaviour. Using 'rudeness' instead of racism does not take any weight out of the heaviness of racism as an experience which most migrants experience; however, as a practice of homemaking, it has made life easier for a migrant like Ibrahim. Ibrahim is married to an English woman and he has settled down in the West. If he sees every unpleasant act as racist, he would be drained of life. This does not mean that he is racially blind, or like so many nationalist Iranians, he would bring up the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire or reign of Babylon as a response to racism (framed into the binary of culture/civilization). His act is a practice of hometactics which keeps his productivity and mental health in place. Holding on to one's agency is an act of resistance and a strategic response to others' willful ignorance and this is what Ibrahim has been performing in order to keep his family together.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁸² There's a term Linda Alcoff uses when referring to the idea that we need to keep about from negativity as an act of resisting coloniality and racism. One thing is to critique, and another is to engage in negative "pessimism" which disturbs our productivity. See Linda Martin Alcoff, "Towards a phenomenology of racial embodiment." *Radical Philosophy* 95 (1999): 15-26.

Leilah comes to perceive her father as a migrant when the war breaks out and his Iraqiness becomes hyper-visible to her. That is the point when all practices of hometactics, adaptability, resistance and home-making in the West are outweighed by the outrage of an imposed war. This is the first time Ibrahim starts talking about his Iraqiness, his homeland, and his view of something that led to him border crossing and exile, which is the Baathist regime:

“No one hates Saddam Hussein as much as I do, no one would be happier than me to see him gone,” he’d [father] replied angrily. “But this war is illegal, immoral! it would be unjustified, it is a pre-emptive war. It would be seen in the Middle East as an unprovoked invasion by the West, against international law, confirming everyone’s worst fears about Western imperialism. It would not be acceptable. You can’t just decide that you don’t like your neighbour and go into his house and murder him. You can’t take the law into your own hands. Innocent people will die and then how can the world ever turn to a country ruled by a despot and tell them that such actions are unacceptable? It would be hypocrisy.”⁶⁸³

Home, for a transnational subject who has been in exile from home for more than thirty years, is a complex concept. Ibrahim, as I discussed before, has had a successful practice of hometactics and performance of adaptability due to his epistemic privilege. He has followed the politics of home from afar and has tried his best not to engage in “illogical” conspiracy theories. But when the invasion of Iraq takes place, and Saddam Hussein is executed with no trial, he breaks his silence and his adaptability takes a different form of resistance, which, this time, has more of a confrontational nature. He problematizes the invasion of home as a counterproductive act, as an intervention which not only does not reduce despotism in that region but adds to it and produces more violation of human rights. For so many transnationals like Ibrahim, home is an abstract concept. The homeland in which they have been born and raised fades away as home when they leave and make home in other spaces. But they will always see it as home again when homeland is troubled. Home is not just a spatial concept; as much as it hurts to see the historical heritage in ruin, it does hurt even more to see the lives of people turn into ashes, lives of those people that speak the same language to oneself and know what it means to have the smell of orange tree blossoms everywhere in the city. It is a space, embodied in people and their relations with one another that makes that very space home.

To put it differently, the concept of home involves bodily memory. One’s experience is part of their hermeneutic horizon which they take with themselves and use it to interpret their new experiences. Part of that experience is related to their group identity, part of it is gender and race-based identity that might not be foregrounded in all contexts but are definitely foregrounded in specific contexts and situations. The hermeneutics of horizons⁶⁸⁴ allow us to see that our group identities are part of us; however, hermeneutics cannot be used as the only tool because it does not take the body into account. We need to have a phenomenological approach on the side to bring the body and its analysis back into the debate. The degree of

⁶⁸³ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 35.

⁶⁸⁴ See Alcoff’s *Visible Identities*

visibility is dependent on one's physical manifestation too, therefore, it is important to take the sphere of the visible into account. To see how the concept of home has both spatial and interpersonal qualities, we need to consider embodiment as an integral part of our hermeneutic horizons.

Ibrahim's early years in England as a sixteen-year-old boy attending school in Yorkshire were full of homesickness. As Leilah narrates his story, "instead of going 'wild,' he [Ibrahim] went domestic."⁶⁸⁵ He could not survive living with an English family as he missed Iraqi food which, to him, was the taste of home. His first practice of homemaking was when he started asking his mother and aunties to send him food recipes and he started making his own Iraqi food. Food is one of the most frequent embodiments of home in a transnational life. It is not just the taste of food, but the process of making it which evokes the idea of home. Food could be the nostalgic embodiment of homeland and home culture for an exilic identity, or it could be a practice of hometactics for a transnational identity who is developing a level of adaptability to the new space and intends to make life easier in the new potential home. As Ibrahim implies, cooking Iraqi food, playing chess with his friends like what people did back in home,⁶⁸⁶ or writing long letters to his parents were the only strategies he could consume to relieve the anxiety of border crossing. As he explains to his daughter, "people didn't think like that in those days... you just got on with life. There weren't any other options. How would I get home? Plane tickets were very expensive in those days."⁶⁸⁷ Therefore, homemaking and adaptability become a survival strategy as having a transnational life and crossing the borders back home is not always a viable option at specific times. Ibrahim starts going to pubs with his friends, because according to Leilah's document, "all social activities revolved around a pint or two [of beer]." This practice of hometactics is feasible for Ibrahim who is Christian by religion, however, we need to remember how difficult socialization would have been and still is for a practicing Muslim who is trying to assimilate.

It would be even harder for a practicing Muslim woman, as the practice of drinking not only has religious and ethnic connotations, but it is also a gendered practice. A practicing Muslim woman walking to a pub for socialization is hypervisible. Her Hijab functioning as a politicized flag of her faith makes her presence not function towards assimilation, but towards more being othered. Thus, hometactics practices cannot be monolithically applied by all group identities, even if they belong to the same ethnic subgroups (Arab/Persian/Iranian for instance). They can only be creatively developed in intersections with one's particular social location through the different privileges to which they can hold onto. Furthermore, developing a fully assimilated life after border crossing could go beyond the development of a multiplicitous self and instead aim for a unified self which has resolved the conflicts of cultural, social, religious values and is now ready for a full

⁶⁸⁵ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 66.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

integration into the new home space. The anxiety of border crossing, or what Anzaldúa calls intimate terrorism,⁶⁸⁸ results from the anxiety of assimilation. The anxiety of moving worlds (border crossing) and living in-between worlds (adaptability) does not just arise from moving spaces. As we can see in Ibrahim's case, it is mostly about moving from one set of relations to another, and the new world might not have any space for those sets of relations that one brings from the previous world. Adapting to a new set of relations is not always a volitional act, it could be motivated by anxieties. Assimilation is a process of receptivity and adaptiveness; however, it is volitional when it takes place through critical thinking as well as strategicness. But, even practicing critical thinking while assimilating is a privilege that is dependent on one's social location and does not only come from wilfulness. Not all border-crossers have been able to develop that critical consciousness. This is why, as Karen Barad⁶⁸⁹ and Paula Moya explain,⁶⁹⁰ transnational identities need to be explained in relation to "onto-epistem-ology," which is the practices of knowing in being. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world, we know things because "we" are part of the world and the set of relations dominant in that very world.

Another practice of hometactics towards adaptability that has been portrayed in *The Orange Trees* is about Ibrahim's learning about English culture from his father before moving to Britain.

Ibrahim already knew all about British culture from his father the basics of how to dress, how to introduce yourself and make small talk. But there were many terrified students from small Iraqi villages, who were very clever but had never lived in a city before and had no idea how they were going to manage in England... Couples kissed in the streets which felt almost pornographic to a young Iraqi who wasn't allowed to have a girlfriend or to be alone with a young woman who wasn't a relative. Here, people flaunted their affairs in public.⁶⁹¹

This is another example of moving worlds and noticing a whole new set of relations at work in a new space which is supposed to be the new home.⁶⁹² The relations are of social, cultural and interpersonal nature and intrinsic to one's existence in the world[s]. When Ibrahim has his first encounters in London, he experiences a huge difference in social and cultural practices between Baghdad and London. Adaptability to such a new atmosphere requires a great extent of receptivity. Practices such as public expression of emotion or having relationships out of wedlock would be shocking to a newcomer like Ibrahim and his friends; this might be interpreted as "backward" through an end of the twentieth- century Western lens. However, there is another side to this story too; some practices that would be completely normal and a common sense for a young Iraqi man would be shocking to a British one. For instance, Ibrahim recalls watching a young student smoking half

⁶⁸⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 20.

⁶⁸⁹ Karen Barad, "Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 829

⁶⁹⁰ Moya, *The social imperative*, 30

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁹² Leilah mentions that "for Ibrahim, raised on romantic notions of Britain and the West, it [London] felt like the most horrible place in the world." It is important to see how Ibrahim's imaginary of London was actually different to what he could see in reality. See Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 65.

of his cigarette and putting the rest of it back in the box for the next break and this comes as an absolute shock to him coming from where people have one single puff of a cigarette and throw that away.⁶⁹³ These are very simple examples chosen from the memoir to demonstrate the complexities of homemaking, hometactics practices and adaptability for different social identities in different social locations and contexts.

Ibrahim barely talks about Iraq. Even Leilah's mom, Mary, agrees that Ibrahim did not share much about Iraq and his family history and going back to Iraq after they got married was never a question at the table, perhaps because Ibrahim had not done his compulsory military service and it would have been dangerous to go back and be forced to serve.⁶⁹⁴ Leilah mentions that when she once tried to press him about why he knew so little about his family history, and mainly his grandfather who was a translator for the British, Ibrahim responds, "Life was hard then, you know. People had to struggle, people didn't have the luxury to talk about family history or stories about the past, even the middle classes like us. You just got on with life, with surviving."⁶⁹⁵ Ibrahim uses the phrase "get on with life" a few times in his stories. The practice of getting on with life portrays a multilayered complex social position where as a Middle-class Iraqi man, he does have a life, a position to hold on to, but he is not still privileged enough to choose some things, even if he has a free will. Choosing a place of living, a country of residence and to make a home there is an act of survival for Ibrahim. He remembers the anxiety of awaiting a visa admission to Canada when his visa for staying in the UK had expired and, as an Iraqi married to a British woman, he did not want to go back to Iraq and serve in the military. All the choices he had to make (which were mostly driving him farther from the homeland) made him emotionally remote from home too. When Leilah asks her mom if she and Ibrahim ever considered going to Iraq and living there, she also responds: "I suppose we didn't think it through to that final conclusion, [...] probably we always thought, hoped, that things in the country would improve, that things would change there, that it would be possible to visit."⁶⁹⁶

The desire for improvement of homeland is a common volition amongst many transnational and exilic identities. Even the term diaspora suggests an idea of a homeland: Diaspora means "the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland."⁶⁹⁷ Therefore, there is a home from which people have been dispersed and a possibility of return is implied as a binary opposite to dispersion. For Mary, as a young British woman, Baghdad does not have the same home feeling as it does for Ibrahim or so many other Iraqis. She only bonds with Baghdad because that is the city where her husband has been born and raised. When Leilah asks

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁹⁴ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 71.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁹⁷ According to Oxford dictionary: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/diaspora>

Mary about Ibrahim's accent when they started dating (because according to Leilah, he did not have an Arabic accent anymore, which is another sign of assimilation), Mary responds:

“Oh yes he did, a lovely one, [...] and, he was very exotic. The film Lawrence of Arabia came out around that time, I can't remember when, and we were all very taken with notions of the 'east.' I remember seeing Omar Sharif in the movie and thinking of your father! The east was very remote, very 'other', and we romanticized and idealized it, the way you do as a teenager. Baghdad was this exotic city. When I thought about Baghdad then, it was a place bathed in a golden light connected to the Ottoman Empire. A city with skyline of minarets and domes like Istanbul, but with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flowing through it and palm trees everywhere. It was something out of a fairy tale.”⁶⁹⁸

Mary's description of Baghdad is rich in Orientalist perspectives of Baghdad and the Middle East in general. Of course, Mary as a teenager has gained that perspective via the media of the time, the movies and pictures representing “The Middle East.” Baghdad is represented as a romanticized idealized land full of gold, domes and rivers running in-between. This is clearly a very Aladdin-like description of a city where Ibrahim has been born and which he does not want to go back to due to the tumultuous situation, a great part of which has been caused by British coloniality. Ibrahim looking like an “exotic” Omar Sharif in the West has had to (willingly or unwillingly) erase his Arabic accent and westernize it so that he fits in his new home. Even if all these assimilation practices are willful and come from one's full free will and agency, the power of the white-supremacist discourses of integration and assimilation at the time should not be underestimated. Ibrahim and Mary's first experience of migration to Canada is narrated by Leilah. They move to a very small town near Calgary where people are shocked to see a mixed couple like them:

Still, the small town was a shock to Londoners, and they were a shock to the town. The Canadians had known an “A-rab” had been hired and were expecting a traditionally robed Gulf Arab with a red head scarf and his exotically submissive wife. Instead, a green Chevrolet pulled into town and the townspeople watched the new engineer, Ibrahim, with his shaggy black hair, trendy tight T-shirt and jeans, helping out his new bride, Mary, with her long brown hair parted in the middle and flowing down her back, wearing a brightly coloured miniskirt, loud prints on her shirt and platform shoes. This was not the belly-dancing wife that some had expected.⁶⁹⁹

Ibrahim does not fit in the stereotypes that already exist about Arabs and Middle Eastern men in general. His “modern” look is not a result of assimilation though. Ibrahim comes from the secular modernized Iraq where Middle-class men and women are highly educated and are not robed or headscarfed. However, the Western imaginary is still obsessed with the stereotypical *One Thousand and One Nights* men and women. If Mary were not a British woman and she were Iraqi by any chance, she would have been expected to be the same submissive woman, fully covered outdoors and belly dancing within the walls of the harem. Through his marriage to a British woman, Ibrahim has achieved some privileges that non-mixed couples might not have had at the time. His conjugal affiliation to whiteness makes him more of a ‘one-of-us’ rather than ‘one-of-them’ in

⁶⁹⁸ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 69-70

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

the Western imaginary. Through this marriage, he has already been filtered as a non-threat and as a liberated Arab Iraqi man. Furthermore, his marriage to an Anglo woman makes his assimilation and achieving a sense of belonging an easier task.

Leilah's biracial identity is also significant. Throughout the memoir, there is more emphasis on her being second generation compared to Ibrahim, and the nature of their nostalgia for Iraq is different. Yet, one big difference with Ibrahim (also Haifa, Azadeh and Niloo) is that she also has access to the cultural and identitarian capital of her mother, which is her white Anglo privilege and her "Britishness. Apart from one quote regarding the invasion of Iraq, whereby Leilah considers herself as both the "conquerer and the conquered," the rest of book de-emphasizes Leilah's own "Anglo-ness." This could result from two situations: first that it is because whiteness is blind and once one is born white, in a system that is designed for white people, they do not need to acknowledge their white capital. Second that it could be a practice of hometactics and adaptability, in a condition where whiteness is invasive to her Iraqiness. *Orange Trees of Baghdad* is a second-generation memoir about Iraq, but it is also a biracial memoir which detaches itself from British sides of the invasion and emphasizes on the American side more. I am more inclined towards the adaptability hypothesis in this context, because Leilah's nostalgia of a lost Iraq can only be soothed if her invasive British side is forgotten for a while.

As a second generation biracial, Leilah does not share that kind of experience with Ibrahim. For her, Iraq is her father's home, something she feels in her bones through second hand memory and her imaginary is constructed through "what she has heard," like Azadeh in *Lipstick Jihad*. However, Leilah's nostalgic imaginary of home is not only based on hearsay but also on research and a polyphonic story sharing among family members and the photo albums she has inherited. The pictures of home are extremely vivid as she describes them:

My father's childhood house still stands. The orange trees are still there. I sense the garden only through my family's stories; words and pictures about its smells, the searing heat, the light, the butterflies, the storks, eating the Baghdad delicacy of buffalo cream there. [...] I imagine Iraq spreading and rippling out in circles with the house and garden in the halo at the centre.⁷⁰⁰

As a second generation, Leilah keeps picturing the family house which she has never seen, lived in or smelled. Second generation memory is very complex. The nostalgia of home has not necessarily been passed on from the first generation to them, because, of course depending on the type of border crossing, many first generations practice the strongest forms of assimilation, even sometimes, they do not pass on the mother-tongue language to their children, as they try to fully raise the kids in the new culture and within the new home cultural values. On the other hand, some first-generation migrants make a lot of effort to preserve the homeland

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

culture. They only speak their first language at home, teach their children old songs, folkloric dance and music and pass on their food recipes. In my ethnographical observation of the second generation diaspora in Sydney and London, I came across a number of second generation Iranians and Iraqis, highly educated, socio-economically middle class (not upper middle class though), and mostly involved in cultural and educational activities who mostly identified with the first group of second generations. They were all very passionate about a homeland in which they had not been born, or even lived. Some of them told me that they really wanted to visit their “homeland” (this is the term they used for the country of their background) but they had been stopped by their parents who considered going back a waste of time. They unanimously talked about a confusion that they felt about the concept of home, along of this nostalgia of a homeland they had never visited. Highly hyperconscious of their accented Persian or Arabic, they still tried to maintain conversations in mother tongue telling me how they pictured homeland. Like Leilah, one of them told me that she feels she has inherited the border crossing anxiety from her parents. While her parents do not talk about their experience of border crossing, assimilation process and the difficulties of making homes at borderlands, she felt the anxiety of homemaking and border crossing in her bones, as if she had experienced it herself. Second generation diaspora bears the anxiety of displacement and belonging, however, even the very fact that they can question the nature of their anxiety and “care” about a homeland they have never directly experienced places them in a privileged social location. The second generation, like Leilah, Azadeh and Jasmine, does not have to learn a new language in their adult age, or make homes from scratch, because the first generation has already done that for them. However, their “belonging” anxiety, cultural in-betweenness and second-hand trauma is what turns into an identity challenge and something in life with which they have to “get on.”

As I mentioned earlier, so much of Leilah’s understanding of home comes from a photo album which has been collected by her Iraqi grandfather. Interestingly, the photo captions are all in English, which confirms Khalil’s (Leilah’s grandfather) futuristic concerns about the next generations and family heritage. Leilah writes:

As I look at these pictures, I realize almost of the painstakingly written captions are written in English and there are only a few names in Arabic script. Khalil had even marked small X’s directly on the photographs with the names printed out in the margin so that people could be identified. It’s as if he had purposely written this for us, his grandchildren, knowing that we didn’t know Arabic. He didn’t make the albums so much for his own children, who knew most of the people and events they contained, but for us, the grandchildren he couldn’t know. He knew that all the family history would be lost in a generation if he didn’t make the albums. I believe this wasn’t an accident—it was his direct intention.⁷⁰¹

Khalil has written and documented the family microhistory in both visual and verbal modes. The fact that he has used English as an archiving language is avant garde. Khalil has foreseen a future transnational family, a family on the move, as he has lived the hardest historical moments in Iraq, namely, colonization, dictatorship, Iran-Iraq war, Gulf war and sanctions. One would keep a backup of all family heritage and

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 104

memories, once they live in constant fear of bombardment and destruction. As Leila contemplates, Khalil “didn’t want us to forget Iraq, our roots. Did he suspect that one day it would be impossible to go back and see the house he built for the family, to collect our possessions, the family heirlooms?”⁷⁰² She knows for sure, that at the time of her grandfather’s death, “Iraq had been cut off from the world for almost a decade. Maybe he knew what that meant, and how easy it would be for that to happen again.”⁷⁰³ Through these photos and captions as epistemic bodies, Leilah achieves postmemory knowledge. Postmemory, according to Marianne Hirsch has been defined as “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.”⁷⁰⁴ She sees postmemory as “a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove.”⁷⁰⁵ She continues: “postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation.”⁷⁰⁶ Jennifer Bowering Delisle calls Leilah’s postmemory “genealogical nostalgia,”⁷⁰⁷ which is “the affective drive to uncover, preserve and record our family history and homeland—this notion of feeling a place “in our bones,” despite never having seen it.”⁷⁰⁸ She distinguishes between postmemory and genealogical nostalgia for Leila; while postmemory is “the inheritance of trauma,” genealogical nostalgia is “a yearning to know and understand that trauma;” genealogical nostalgia is “a nostalgia derived not out of direct experience, but out of the very gaps between personal experience and a dominant ancestral past.”⁷⁰⁹

Leila’s understanding of Saddam Hussein, and the brutal regime of the time when her father left Iraq comes through postmemory. It is not a trauma she has lived through, but it is a trauma of which she has heard different narratives. It seems to her, that her father’s choice of never going back to Iraq was mostly influenced by this very historical character. When on December 29, 2006, Saddam Hussein is executed, Leila asks her father how he feels about his death and as a response he says “nothing.”⁷¹⁰ Leilah expects more hatred and disgust from her father towards the execution of someone who had killed thousands of people. However, Ibrahim has always known that this day would come, as the fate of dictators is just another repetitive historical

⁷⁰² Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 105.

⁷⁰³ Ibid 105

⁷⁰⁴ Marianne Hirsch, "The generation of postmemory." *Poetics today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103

⁷⁰⁵ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 106.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁰⁷ Jennifer Bowering Delisle, "" Iraq in My Bones": Second-Generation Memory in the Age of Global Media." *Biography* 36, no. 2 (2013): 384

⁷⁰⁸ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 384.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 384.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 310

story.⁷¹¹ Whilst Ibrahim has been advised by another Iraqi friend (Canadian resident) to “just forget Iraq” and “never ever go back,”⁷¹² Leilah has a desire to return and see the trauma of Saddam removed from the lives of people. This is the trauma she has not lived but which she still carries with her through postmemory. She can see her father’s discomfort in Canada’s cold winters, and she remembers that he has not gotten used to the temperature yet, and that he might never. This is how she has inherited the nostalgia of a homeland that exists on the other side of the world, but which is still unliveable for so many Iraqis like her father. The fear of going back and seeing the homeland in ruin is what has stopped Ibrahim and so many other Iraqis (even Iranians) to go back. Instead, Leilah imagines going to homeland:

For now, all I can do is imagine, in ten or twenty years, with my children perhaps, opening up the old [family house in Baghdad] and going inside. Perhaps the photographs will still be framed on the mantelpiece, my aunts’ clothes in the closets, my father’s newspaper in a drawer. I walk up on to the roof. I look everywhere, but the house is empty. I go back downstairs and out onto the terrace facing the neglected garden, shriveled and wild. There I am greeted by the ghosts of my grandparents, my great-aunt, my great uncles, all saying at once, “Welcome, welcome. You’ve come to visit us. Sit down, sit down, we’ll drink tea. We knew you’d come one day. We knew you’d be back.”⁷¹³

This nostalgic description situates homeland in past, present and future. Leilah’s connection to homeland is not just an Arab-Iraqi house with orange trees and mantelpieces, it is the people about whom she has read, heard and learned to love without having ever met them. Homeland for Leilah is not just a spatial entity, but a set of relations with people she has never met but whom she knows she would have been loved by; people like Khalil, who had prepared family albums with captions in English for the future generations that he also knew he would never meet, but he would love. Therefore, the genealogical nostalgia is not just about homeland as a space, but it is for people and affective relations that make people feel like they belong to a space.

The reality of homeland both as space and as a set of interpersonal relations hits Leilah when she sees a photograph of Al-Rasheed Street in 2011. She describes the photo as a “shock,”⁷¹⁴ as “everything the eye lights on is broken down, blackened by explosions.”⁷¹⁵ The photos of their family house in Baghdad, which portray home in a state of decay, are the painful reality of homeland and the family house:

Because of the devastating contrast between these images and my aunts’ memories, the photographs are the catalyst for severing the final connection and selling the family home. My aunts looked into the pictures and knew they could never live in the house again, on that street, in that neighbourhood, that they were never going back to Iraq, that the idea was pure fantasy. In ten years, they had lost all their relatives and friends, either to death or emigration. They had once known most of their neighbours, but now only one family remained on the

⁷¹¹ Ibid., 311.

⁷¹² Ibid., 311.

⁷¹³ Ibid., 312.

⁷¹⁴ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 326.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., 326.

street, everyone else had fled. There was no one to take care of the house and the country was too terrifying to return to. Why would they ever go back?⁷¹⁶

The photographs catalyse fantasy into reality without changing in substance. They portray a present, as shocking as they are, representing a nation's struggles and the impossibility of going back for those who left home years ago. Selling the family house is not just a sort of property management, but it is to repress memories of a home that used to bring people together. Stranded houses are very common in Iran and Iraq, especially in middle class areas of the town. People, having once made homes there, have had to leave and the houses are still there after forty years in poor shape, only because the owners always thought there will come a time when they can return to those houses. Most never return. The old houses, layered with generational memories are either sold through local lawyers and end up being gentrified, or they are taken over by local government since the inheritors never claim their property. Most people never return because there is no one to return to; as Leilah explains, there is no point in going back home when one has lost all relatives and friends at home, either through death or emigration. What remains of home, or even homes that are sold, are suitcases of documents, albums, birth and death certificates, property documents and heirlooms. Leilah vividly narrates the sad story of her family's last suitcase:

The suitcase full of documents that my father had asked Karim to bring when he fled is now housed with distant family members living in Baghdad. One suitcase is all that is left in Iraq of a family whose roots in that landscape, culture and language go back thousands of years, an ancient connection that likely reaches back to the earliest Christians, perhaps earlier. A suitcase bereft of even a person to carry it to the next homeland.⁷¹⁷

The suitcase becomes a metonymy of homeland. Like Niloo's backpack in the perimeter which is all that is left of her Iran, Leilah's suitcase is all that is left of a homeland she has never directly experienced. The only difference is that Niloo could carry the bits and pieces of the memories of home with her and finally place them in her perimeter, whereas Leilah's and her family's only remnants of home cannot even cross the borders. They simply have to stay in Iraq because Iraq has been constantly struggling with war, invasions, civil conflicts, terrorism, etc., all these years after Ibrahim's emigration. No one has been able to stay in Iraq. Emigration has not been a desirable option for Leilah's aunts and relatives but has been the only way to survive.

Amal explains: "we want to find out if there is any way she can apply for the family to come to England. They have to get out of Iraq. But she doesn't want to move here and become a refugee. She just wants to stay in Baghdad and for everything to get better." ...Reeta leaves the room, taking a few plates with her, but I see she's holding back her own tears. Reeta misses Baghdad already; the idea of leaving forever is tormenting her. [...] Even though Iraq is in such anarchy, the British government and many other Western countries regard the country as "free" since it has held democratic elections. It is more difficult now to apply as a refugee than it was during the years of Saddam's dictatorship.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 327.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 328.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., 268- 269.

The hometactics that people like Reeta have to practice is very different to the one Ibrahim had applied for making a home in Canada years before. This excerpt is a conspicuous example depicting why I insist on having a decolonial methodology for reading these lived experience narratives. Many Iraqi women like Reeta have lost their shelter, family members, men of their lives and children to war, sanction and unwillful emigration. Reeta is Leilah's second cousin. The first time Leilah meets her Iraqi family members, they all meet in London, half way from Iraq and half way to Canada. When they meet, Leilah is wearing her "gold Iraqi-map necklace" which Maha, her blood cousin has sent her. When Maha sees that for the first time on Leilah's neck, she says "yes, everyone who has lost their country has to wear one of these necklaces. Wear their country around their neck."⁷¹⁹ The necklace, as a metaphor for a homeland that could be carried around reminds them of homelessness. They talk about the Palestinians in Toronto wearing Palestine necklaces. It is as if identities with no homelands carry parts and parcels of their home with them, like Niloo's perimeter trinkets. The challenge of homemaking in a new place like London or Vancouver is not just homesickness, adaptability to new relations, language barrier and culture shocks for young Iraqis like Reeta. The main struggle is how to seek asylum. Leilah narrates the stories of women who were once used as an excuse for liberation and emancipation by the Western imperialist patriarchy; women who lost their family members, homes, and the best years of their lives under war, sanction and civil conflict, and now, when they have no other alternative but to emigrate and seek asylum in Britain, the British government and many other Western countries, according to Leilah, consider their cases of asylum invalid, because presumably, Iraq has been liberated from its "sole" oppressor Saddam Hussein. Through narrating the lived experience of these women, Leilah is building up a microhistory of the coloniality of power and its lethal effects on men and women's lives. The politics of hometactics has to change when coloniality of power is involved. Before assimilation and integration happens, the reasons why border crossing is *necessary* need to be problematized. The fact that these women have been displaced due to imperial and colonial forces, and now they are being denied of shelter, needs to be addressed. I will discuss the problematics of Western liberal democracy as a modernizing strategy (which was practiced in Iraq through invasion and occupation) in the next chapter.

6.3 Dreaming of the *City of Widows*: Going beyond nostalgia

"Writing lends a voice to the displaced." Haifa Zangana

Haifa Zangana is not only prominent in the world as a Middle Eastern Iraqi writer, but also as a transnational artist and political activist. There is a wide generational gap between her and the other writers of my corpus of study, however, her voice is significant to the main argument of this research. Writing about Haifa Zangana's works is difficult. Almost all her narratives, books or journalistic articles are woven with her lived

⁷¹⁹Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 260.

experience and autobiographical accounts. When looking at her works, the concept of home cannot be separated from politics and political activism. Haifa Zangana's oeuvre is one of the best examples of decolonial feminist epistemologies documented in literary life writing narratives. As polyphonic as her narratives are, she prioritises the perspective of women in her books. In the introduction to her *City of Widows*, she mentions three reasons why she highlights women's voices. The first reason is that "human rights for women" in traditional patriarchal societies should be addressed to create an active civil society to "delineate and protect their rights."⁷²⁰ The second reason is "gender-related violence," the conditions of which has been exacerbated after the invasion and occupation.⁷²¹ The final reason is because women are life-givers, mothers and therefore, are in more vulnerable situation during war times, and it is important to shed light on the ways in which the society treats "its more vulnerable citizens."⁷²²

Haifa Zangana's definition of home is very different to the rest of the works I have discussed thus far. Her narratives are all about Iraq as home, and there is little about London as the new home. It is hard to trace common (compared to other transnational writers) hometactics, strategic homemaking tactics and assimilatory acts amongst the incessant political resistance and resilience portrayed in both *Dreaming of Baghdad* and *City of Widows*. Iraq as home becomes a site of memories entangled with politics of different eras. When asked in an interview if she thinks of crossing the border back to Iraq, she says:

"We would like to go back if there is some kind of light at the end of the tunnel," she sighs. "After 2003 my husband and I went immediately to Baghdad. He had a heart attack there so we came back. I visited again alone three years ago and stayed more than a month. I just decided this is where I belong and again things got out of hand and I had to leave. I chose the worst time and targeting of people was an almost daily event. Because I write and I am well-known, it is dangerous on a personal level. It is getting more difficult to go back and settle."⁷²³

Haifa Zangana's works are significant epistemic bodies filling out the gaps of historiographical accounts of the contemporary Iraq. More than being personal narratives, Zangana's works shed light on the history of everyday life in Iraq post invasion and occupation, functioning as counter narratives to hegemonic discourses. The above excerpt describes the extent of her mobility as an author and public intellectual. Living in London for decades, when I asked her how she identifies her self, she responded that she feels "Iraqi"⁷²⁴ and no matter where she lives, she still feels Iraqi. Going back to Iraq and making home in homeland is a desire for her and so many other exiled public intellectuals, but the possibility of settling back in homeland is not very strong, as most regimes fundamentally have no tolerance for public intellectuals and critics. Thus, the intellectual is always in exile, no matter where they live. They are in exile in homeland and across the borders of homeland, as they

⁷²⁰ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 33

⁷²¹ Haifa quotes an Iraqi parliament member source, testifying that 1,053 cases of rape have been documented, which have been perpetrated by occupying troops and Iraqi forces from 2003-2007. See Ibid., 33.

⁷²² Ibid., 34.

⁷²³ Ibid., 34.

⁷²⁴ Interview with Haifa Zangana done by myself in July 2017.

see things too clearly, question things too much, and problematize social and political practices and norms. Most academic intellectuals choose to live in an ivory tower, which turns into a comfort zone. They lose touch with society and the real everyday lives of people while they simultaneously sophisticatedly theorize the same people's lived experience, and those theories sound like myths in the minds of people who have any tangible experience of intersectional oppressions. Haifa Zangana, though, has carried her Iraq with her wherever she has gone, and she has kept in touch with Iraq as a spatial entity and a set of inter-personal relations. Home as a concept is situated in a site of political care and activism for her, and writing is the way she reconciles with memories of the past home in the new home. When asked about her book, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, which took her eight years to complete, she says in the prologue: "I wrote this book ... when I had persistent nightmares about my past," "I wrote it at a time when I didn't want or wasn't able to deal with memories of what had happened to me in prison. I wrote it while I was living in exile, missing my family terribly, believing I would never return to live in Baghdad again."⁷²⁵ Thus, rewriting turbulent memories is not only an act of resistance but a therapeutic act of reconstructing and decolonizing home for her. In *City of Widows*, Haifa makes a strong argument:

I argue that contrary to the neoliberal view of our nation, Iraq is not an invented country, but has existed from time immemorial. Prior to the occupation and especially in its aftermath, there have been attempts by Western media and in academia to rewrite Iraqi history, in support of dismantling the Iraqi state. A common rationalization is that Iraq is an artificial entity concocted by British colonization, whose constituents are at war with each other and need to be reconstituted. This is simply not true.⁷²⁶

Home for Haifa is writing and her hometactics applies writing as a tool to make adaptability possible. One of the strategies that she holds to adapt to the state of 'in-betweenness' is rewriting history of Iraq as a resistance to testimonial smothering.⁷²⁷ Although she is writing in English and for a transnational audience, who as Dotson points out, demonstrate testimonial incompetence, and on some occasions, pernicious ignorance (white privilege is one reason for this type of pernicious epistemic ignorance), she still holds on to her decolonial perspective and questions not only Western media, but also academia as knowledge factories which serve the neoliberal system's ways of knowing and seeing the world. She continues, referring to some geopolitical facts about Iraq whilst presenting her own story in the middle of Iraq's story. Haifa and Iraq become one when she hinges on the liberatory movements having been going on for decades both before the Baathist regime and after. She uses historical evidence to support her argument surrounding securitarianism having roots in intervention. She mentions that the occupiers "have destroyed Iraqi society's modes of coming with such

⁷²⁵ Yaqob, T. "The Iraqi author Haifa Zangana: Writing lends a voice to the displaced." In *The National*. 2011. Accessed <https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/the-iraqi-author-haifa-zangana-writing-lends-a-voice-to-the-displaced-1.422748>

⁷²⁶ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 25

⁷²⁷ Testimonial smothering as a form of epistemic violence is a term coined by Kristie Dotson, feminist philosopher. Testimonial smothering as a form of testimonial oppression occurs because, according to Dotson, the speaker perceives one's immediate audience as unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony." She identifies three circumstances in which this form of testimonial violence takes place: first "the content of the testimony must be unsafe and risky;" Second, "the audience must demonstrate testimonial incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony to the speaker;" and third, "testimonial incompetence must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance." Dotson, Kristie. "Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing." *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 244

problems [secratiar tensions] themselves. The occupation has deliberately dismantled the state, army and key structures of civil society so that people have been forced further back to the defenses of their smaller communities.”⁷²⁸ Small communities, as Haifa mentions, helped people’s survival under sanctions and during the time that the overarching state was still in place; however, after the invasion and during the occupation, due to the shortage of resources, survival through community became problematic. Sectarian conflicts occurred, men, previously appointed to be the heads of the families and communities and guardians of women, lost their lives in conflicts and war and this is how women have had to deal with multifaceted oppression, protect the family and survive by themselves.

Haifa’s view of homeland is not nostalgic, as one would expect from an exilic writer, but is strongly critical. Even the language she uses is a strong, documentary form language which gives the content a factual tone.⁷²⁹ She refers to herself as a third person in most of her works, which is a way of sharing her experience with so many other Iraqis who are living that experience every day, no matter at which point in history. Haifa comments on the second-generation transnational Iraqi’s ideas of Iraq as home and their romantic nostalgic view of a land that is being violated. As she says: "It seems they have a different perspective of what is happening but they still feel attached, even if they have never visited."⁷³⁰ The second generation Iraqi’s perspective of home does not come from first hand experience, like what I discussed with Leilah’s postmemory and genealogical nostalgia in *Orange Trees*, but rather from different media platforms that link them to a homeland their parents have been forced to leave. Haifa believes that this kind of identity making is still valid and important: "These links are important, whether they are through Facebook or Twitter. My daughter was born in London but says she is an Iraqi. They can contribute in a way when you seek international support. You don't have to be an Iraqi or a Palestinian to feel the injustice."⁷³¹ Thus, homeland politics is what links generations of Iraqis to home. This is an experience also shared by second generation Iranians, like Azadeh in *Lipstick Jihad*, or Sy in *Refuge* whose conception of homeland is very political, even if there exists an epistemic limitation in their perspective. Most of this epistemic limitation comes from the lack of access to homeland. The epistemic value of eye-witness testimonies is different to the cropped videos and pictures we see on social media; however, this does not mean that these sources are empty of epistemic value. They can still function as

⁷²⁸ Zangana, *City of widows*, 30

⁷²⁹ One of the examples of this language is witnessed in this very excerpt from Haifa: "Poverty, hunger, and intellectual stagnation forced many people to flee the country, among them writers, artists, poets, and academics. The irony is that the mass exodus in the 1990s, with the exception of the people who were involved in the southern uprising, came about for economic reasons and at a time when the regime’s oppressive grip was weakening. Economic deprivation and corruption resulted in deterioration in education, health, and public services." See *City of widows*, 91

The language signifies a reportage voice, and it has a strong effect on the reader. Yet, reportage is not the only strong rhetorical here; Dina Nayeri’s literary language is also very persuasive to the reader.

⁷³⁰ Yaqob, *The Iraqi author*, 2011

⁷³¹ Ibid.

microhistory accounts, histories from below that people share in their everyday lives in an act of resistance and resilience.

Haifa's new home, London, barely appears in her writing. There is only one chapter of her *Dreaming of Baghdad* that is named after London, and it is still reminiscent of her memories of Baghdad. She says:

I have a small flat and a good job. The window of my sitting room looks out over the city. The city's doors are open wide. And yet, after ten years, I am still hesitant to enter. I miss the past. I feel unfulfilled by my body, with wounds deeper than scars can reveal. At night, I wake in fear, surrounded by blood and my friends' faces. I long for solitude, but I fear it, too. I long to look calmly into myself without interference from others.⁷³²

As she eloquently writes, the city's doors are open but she hesitates to enter. Haifa hesitates being in London, living in London and feeling like a Londoner, because the traumatic memories of the prison years, brutal murder and torture of her friends and solitude come back to her, every time she sleeps. London turns into a prison despite its open doors for someone who has spent the best years of her life in prison, and therefore, it cannot be called home, even if she has a flat and a job there. Home, to so many transnational identities, is not just a spatial entity, as I mentioned in previous sections, it is also a set of relations with people, feelings, and memories that people can carry with themselves or leave them behind. Home is a concept, an affect, the lack of which signifies its existence. People look for home when they feel homeless, displaced, alienated, and once these feelings do not subside they go back home to see things for themselves, like what Haifa does, and they realize home has changed so much even though they had been following all events from afar. Haifa writes:

On visiting Baghdad with my husband nine months after the occupation began, we found ourselves wondering: Why aren't most people fighting the occupation the way our grandfathers did during the 1920 Revolution? The answer, we came to realize, was "Nreed njur nifesna awwel," which literally translates: "We want first to draw breath." Most middle-class Baghdadis whom we met in January 2004 wished for breathing space, to recover some physical strength, and not to try to understand the situation with an open mind.⁷³³

The breathing space Haifa refers to is a very important notion here. For the transnational identity who has left and, despite the homesickness and traumatic memories of the past, has still continued fighting from across the borders, it is not understandable why people have stopped fighting the occupation. Is it a bad sign? Is it a sign showing that people have surrendered to neocoloniality? Does it convey that people have submitted to oppression and Western intervention? The answer, as people testify, is that they need to take a breath. People are simply fatigued by years and years of fighting, living under sanctions (and I keep repeating this term, because it has significant effects on lives in Iran and Iraq), and civil conflict and wars. I have witnessed the same experience expressed by Iranians living in diaspora who complain about local Iranians not doing anything to save the homeland from the oppressors in power. All sentences start with "in the past, people used to [...]";

⁷³² Zangana, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, 34-5.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 139.

the nostalgia of a past homeland and a people who were resistant against any oppression turns into a myth when the context and multifaceted forms of oppression, and more important than that, history, is left aside and people are expected to still resist. Haifa knows why Iraqis need to take a breath, even if she, herself, has been intellectually fighting from afar. As an Iraqi, with an epistemic privilege gained through lived experience, she knows things about Iraq and Iraqis that the occupiers fail to see. As she mentions:

What the occupiers have failed to see is that Iraqis who have committed acts of resistance are not terrorists. We are a people willing to risk our lives defending our homes, families, ways of life, history, culture, identity, and resources. We do not hate Americans, though we do loathe their government's greed and brutality, and are willing to defend ourselves against it. We simply believe that Iraq belongs to Iraqis.⁷³⁴

Haifa resists white ignorance and islamophobia when she powerfully compares resistance and terrorism. By reducing resistance to terrorism, the occupiers cannot justify their presence in Iraq. Even if the Western world chooses silence about the so-called mistakes they have made in Iraq, she writes to remind the world that this willful mistake was fatal to Iraqi lives, especially women, who were used as an excuse for the white saviour to invade their homeland.

Haifa says she cannot go back to Baghdad as long as her life is at risk, but she keeps fighting through writing back to the empire, reminding Americans that Iraq belongs to Iraqis and shaming them for the atrocities they have perpetrated there and which they have wilfully ignored as simple mistakes. In one of her powerful articles published on the Guardian, she describes in detail an atrocious scene, released by Wikileaks, which is proved not to have been a mistake:

In their Apache helicopter, with their sophisticated killing machinery, US soldiers seem superhuman. The Iraqis, on the ground, appear only as nameless bastards, Hajjis, sandniggers. They seem subhuman – and stripping them of their humanity makes killing them easy.

As I watch, I feel the anger calcify in my heart alongside the rage I still feel over other Anglo-American massacres: Haditha (which has been compared to the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam war); Ishaqi (where 11 Iraqi civilians were killed in June 2006); Falluja; the rape and killing of A'beer al-Janaby and her family; the British Camp Breadbasket scandal.

We often hear of the traumas US soldiers suffer when they lose one of their ranks, and their eagerness to even the score. We seldom hear from people like the Iraqi widow whose husband was shot, who looked me in the eye last summer, and said: "But we didn't invade their country." Unlike this video, the injustice she feels will not fade with time. It is engraved in the collective memory of people, and will be until justice is done.⁷³⁵

Haifa speaks truth to power by reminding the Imperialist white saviour that they have done more harm than help. By shaming them for the God-like supremacy they felt while they called the dead civilian Iraqis

⁷³⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁷³⁵ Haifa Zangana, "As I Watch the Footage, Anger Calcifies in my Heart," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2010. Accessed: <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/apr/10/wikileaks-collateral-murder-iraq-video>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rXPrfnU3G0>

sandnigger and told the shooter on the helicopter “Light 'em all up,” she documents these human rights violations and atrocities. No matter how many American soldier memoirs are published or how many NGOs are set up in the US by Condoleeza Rice to save Iraqi women from the religious and patriarchal oppressions of the community, narratives of lived experience like Haifa Zangana’s challenge the dominant saviour discourses as well as willful ignorance and historical amnesia. Hometactics for resistant transnationals like Haifa is practicing political resistance and setting up a challenge to Western whitewashed narratives of heroism in the Middle East.

PART III

in an interpretation of Islam that is in harmony with democracy, equality, religious freedom and freedom of speech would reach a wider audience, particularly in the West.⁷³⁶

Later on in her article, she expresses her surprise and anger at the regulations in the United States which made it impossible for her as an Iranian writer to publish her memoir in the U.S. due to restrictions on the free flow of information, as part of the American trade embargoes, assigned by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. Therefore, any import of books from Iran, Cuba, and some other countries would be illegal under this law, and "materials not fully created and in existence" cannot be published, edited, or translated in the US, unless they are self-funded by the author.⁷³⁷ Ebadi filed a lawsuit against the Treasury Department, arguing that "if even people like [her] – those who advocate peace and dialogue – are denied the right to publish their books in the United States with the assistance of Americans, then people will seriously question the view of the United States as a country that advocates democracy and freedom everywhere. What is the difference between the censorship in Iran and this censorship in the United States?"⁷³⁸

Ebadi poses a good question here. This question implies other questions for me as a reader and a critic; what is the difference between democracy in Iran and the US? Is there really a universal form of democracy? Why do systems of power in different parts of the world have to follow a certain model of democracy? If they do, what does this tell us about alternative forms of democracy and alternative epistemologies? One of the prominent travelling concepts in all the life writing narratives I have discussed so far is 'democracy', both as a concept and practice. In this chapter, I draw from narratives of lived experience written by transnational Iranian women writers as women of color border-crossers, and therefore, minorities, to discuss the concept of democracy. Democracy is not addressed just as a political form of governance in this thesis, but as 'an excuse' which has been used to justify wars on terror, wars and sanctions in the Middle East, more specifically in the second half of the twentieth century. Democracy, in the context of this research, is not the Western liberal ideal but the 'civilizational package' exported through missiles, rockets, and bombs to the Middle East. Ebadi is right in the way she asserts that censorship is not only limited to Iran but it also exists in America; however, her disappointment at the world not seeing the alternative democracy practices in Iran after she is awarded the Nobel peace prize warrants further discussion. Ebadi is not alone in this disappointment. So many other

⁷³⁶ Ebadi, Shirin. "Bound but Gagged," *The New York Times* 16 (2004): accessed: <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/16/opinion/bound-but-gagged.html>

⁷³⁷ Taleghani describes the targeting of the literary works as follows: "In September 2003, in an intellectual preemptive strike, and by activating long-dormant regulations, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) announced a publication ban on any text written by an Iranian living in Iran.³ At first, articles by Iranian scientists were targeted, but the new policies also affected literary works, and violations of the regulations could result in imprisonment and fines up to one million dollars. Under such regulations, as pointed out by Nahid Mozaafari, the editing and translating of literary texts by Iranian authors would also "constitute aiding and abetting the enemy." (282)
See Sharea Taleghani, "Axising Iran: The Politics of Domestication and Cultural Translation," in *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The cultural politics of diaspora*, eds. Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsaltany, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

⁷³⁸ Ebadi, "Bound but Gagged," 2004

intellectuals who practiced intense resistance against the oppressions of the system inside Iran and Iraq have experienced severe disappointment after moving to the West and seeing the same power dynamics there. So did I, as a junior academic scholar. The epiphany comes through the experience of in-betweenness and border crossing and world-travelling, as I discussed in the previous chapters. The War on Terror is not a result of Muslims in the Middle East not being democratic, or being religiously bigoted, or culturally backward, because it does not really matter what kind of Muslims we are. Secular, practicing Muslim, culturally Muslim, Shiite, Sunni, Sufi, Ismaili, or whatever else, Islamophobia as a form of racism and racialization is not as faith-oriented as we think, but power-oriented. It is not concerned with one's type of faith, whether they interpret the text, or stick to the same rules practiced 1400 years ago, as Ebadi mentions, for that does not really matter. It is "the imaginary" of those in power, and the myth of the West as the cradle of civilization that matters, and for that to exist, the rest, the Orient, particularly rich-with-oil Middle East needs to be culturally backward, bigoted, in a constant state of turmoil, and above all, quintessentially undemocratic. As Yassir Morsi maintains, "[t]he racializing eye of the War on Terror rarely looks beyond the portraits of Muslims to see its own violence. A concealment occurs through today's endless debates about Islam as a compatible culture to democracy. The portraits of good or bad Muslims simply hide the landscape beyond the frame of such discussions."⁷³⁹

The debate surrounding democratic Muslim is considered problematic by scholars like Morsi, because first of all, the "therapeutic tone of a good Muslim" insisting that Islam is compatible with democracy is only there to ease "white anxiety" whilst denying the "harmfully patriarchal" turmoil that exists in the Muslim world next to all the beauty.⁷⁴⁰ One should bear in mind that, as Morsi eloquently puts, "[t]he victories of democracy and liberalism have not become universal and humanist truths and speech from thin air. They have come not only from a logic, a clarity of reason, or from noble self-reflection alone, but also from blood and slavery."⁷⁴¹ Lived experience narratives, microhistories, and testimonies, such as Ebadi's, Zangana's and Nayeri's, to name a few, critique the abstract language of liberalism and democracy and take us back to the history of colonialism and imperialism, to challenge the contradictions of democratic missions in non-Western world.

Before getting into the memoirs and the alternative epistemologies of democracy drawn from those accounts, I bring forward a few definitions of democracy as a concept. According to Elizabeth Anderson,⁷⁴² democracy as a mode of government is "government by people, carried out by discussion among equals. As a culture, democracy consists in the free, cooperative interaction of citizens from all walks of life on terms of equality in civil society." Anderson refers to the ideals of democracy as a basis to address and evaluate racial integration in societies and for that, she refers to democracy as "a way of life that can be understood on three

⁷³⁹ Morsi, *Radical Skin, Moderate Masks*, 141.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴² Elizabeth Anderson, *The imperative of integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 89.

levels: as a membership organization, a mode of government and a culture."⁷⁴³ In her characterization of democracy, Anderson refers to "diversity and disagreement" as central features of democracy⁷⁴⁴ and she highlights the epistemic value of dissent and its crucial contribution to self-correction.

Democracy makes sense when social equality exists in a society. However, as Anderson points out,⁷⁴⁵ freedom and equality are conflicting concepts, because "equality is defined in terms of equal distributions of property, and freedom in terms of individual rights to use and dispose of property in unregulated markets" and therefore, a conflict of interest arises here. Anderson argues that from a relational point of view, "social inequality and lack of freedom are one and the same."⁷⁴⁶ To achieve equality, freedom of the individuals has to be restricted and that restriction of freedom is governed by power dynamics that dictate who should be restricted more and who should enjoy more freedom. Considered in this perspective, democracy as a value is a utopian myth, an ideal, and no matter where individuals are located, democracy in the Western liberal sense is unachievable. Given the condition of inequality in Western societies like the U.S., and the historical oppressions that indigenous communities and people of color have gone through and are still experiencing,⁷⁴⁷ the export of democratic values to countries such as Iran and Iraq sounds unreasonable, impossible, and conflicting.

Transnationalism, the privilege of having seen the two sides of the border and developing an extent of knowledge about both sides, give the viewer the will to care. By caring here specifically, I mean caring for home, engaging in home politics and making attempts to bring change to systems of power. In all the memoirs of my corpus, what I traced as a common trend was political consciousness and the authors' political care enacted in relation to their particular social locations. There is of course a broad diversity in the forms of politics these women practice, ranging from refugee rights activism to feminist activism, nationalism, Western liberalism, etc.; however, what is a common point among all types of political consciousness is care for freedom and agency. What is remarkable in these narratives is that political activism among these women is not only limited to feminist issues such as women's rights and gender equality, but it involves a greater scope of human rights, minority rights, and global injustice.

These women writers navigate the world through their gender and racial identities, which as Alcoff argues,⁷⁴⁸ provide interpretive horizons for them to make sense of their embodied experience of the world, and

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁴⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, "The epistemology of democracy." *Episteme* 3, no. 1-2 (2006): 15

⁷⁴⁵ Anderson, *The imperative of integration*, 103

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁴⁷ Take the example of Australia for instance, and the shameful history of the settler colonial treatment of the aboriginal communities, the genocide and the stolen generation scandal. It is noteworthy that Australians are critical of the American model of democracy and their electoral system. Despite calling the current era post-colonial, coloniality is still in place, aboriginal communities still have the highest rate of incarceration in Australian legal system and poverty is a substantial social problem in their communities.

⁷⁴⁸ Alcoff, *Visible identities*, 88.

the experience of others. Their experience of the world is not just limited to their gender; as border-crossers, homemakers, and women of color an assemblage of axes shape the ways in which they experience the world. They become caretakers of their families and other people and, at the same time, political activists, because global politics does shape their everyday lives. One should be in a privileged social location, ticking all empowering boxes to be able to ignore being a ‘political carer.’ It is not that Middle Eastern background identities are born with the passion for politics. It is their social location, the social, and economic upheavals influenced by everyday regional and global politics that forces them into caring, following the news and turning into political activists. One has to have experienced and witnessed war, mass murder, destruction, sanction, homelessness, refugeeness, and prosecution both in homeland and the new home to be able to make sense of the severity of the effects of world politics on one’s life. This is the point where political care translates into a form of transnational or border resistance. The border-crosser writers develop “border epistemology” which Jose David Saldívar calls border thinking:

[E]nvisaged, border thinking is the name for a new geopolitically located thinking or epistemology from both the internal and external borders of the modern (colonial) world-system. Border thinking is a necessary tool for thinking what the Peruvian historical social scientist Anibal Quijano calls the “coloniality of power” and identity at the intersections (los intersticios) of our local histories and global designs.⁷⁴⁹

Thus, recording the epistemologies of the border involves both homeland politics and the new home politics, local histories and global/transnational histories, and a navigation of coloniality of power. Saldívar uses Quijano’s concept of coloniality of power as a “structuring process of racial identity, experience, and racial knowledge production articulating geostrategic locations and subaltern (minor) inscriptions.”⁷⁵⁰ Addressing the coloniality of power is part of the political activism and care that some of these women writers have incorporated in their narratives of border crossing; however, some have only focused on local histories and politics of home and critique the lack of the universal liberal democratic values in the region where they originally come from. In this chapter, I go through these life-writing narratives one by one, demonstrating that not only are they epistemic bodies, but they also bear political values in forms of care and critique which can be conflicting at times.

7.2 For whom the bells of democracy toll? Azadeh’s *domesticated* story of contemporary Iranian politics

Azadeh Moaveni’s *Lipstick Jihad* is one of the life writing narratives covered in this thesis that has the most conflicting political implications in the form of both care and critique.⁷⁵¹ Going to Iran as a transnational

⁷⁴⁹ José David Saldívar, "Border thinking, minoritized studies, and realist interpellations: The coloniality of power from Gloria Anzaldúa to Arundhati Roy." In *Identity politics reconsidered*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 152.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁵¹ Taleghani argues that in *Lipstick Jihad*, “American(ized) voice,” as opposed to a number of Iranian voices, carries greater weight for commercial

journalist in early 2000s, in the middle of the reform period, Moaveni covers a great deal of regional and transnational politics in her memoir, which have been received as an objective truthful narrative in the West. She presents herself as possessing an insider's voice which would hold a great deal of epistemic credibility. In saying this, I do not argue that she has fabricated the stories she has narrated in the memoir, as I argued in previous chapters as well; rather I am saying that due to her particular social location (American, upper-middle class, ethnic Persian) and the particular fields she chooses for her anthropological study of Iran (Iranians and regional politics), there exists a limitation to her perspective and this very perspective cannot be presented as an omniscient point of view. On the other hand, narratives like Moaveni's are important in the sense that there still exists an epistemic salience to the contradictory conflicting perspectives of the inside and the voices from the community which she presents in the work.

There are a number of main political concerns that I will draw on from Azadeh's memoir to demonstrate the ways in which these concerns have been represented by her voice as someone claiming to be a contemporary historiographer: political reform, civic engagement, democracy, Islamophobia, moral responsibility after 9/11, and coloniality of power.

As aforementioned, Azadeh travels to Iran at the time when Khatami's reformist government is in power and is valiantly struggling through impediments created by the conservative opposition party and revolutionary guards. Of the major events of that era, several could be named, such as serial murders of the political dissidents and intellectuals, assassination of Khatami's allies, impeachment of his ministers, imprisonment of many political dissidents, and, most importantly, the infamous student uprisings which led to the murder, arrest, imprisonment, and disappearance of so many students of the University of Tehran in July 1999. However, Azadeh does not narrate these events through an eye-witness account but through hearsay. I will draw from some of those excerpts to argue that although there is a limitation in perspective, and epistemic violence in some aspects of the work, there still exists knowledge in the contradictory accounts that she narrates of her own and other people narrating their history.

Azadeh considers the political system of Iran a dysfunctional system which has no originality. She is very critical of the Islamic policies in Iran and believes they are conflictual to democratic governance. The version of democracy that she has in mind is based on Western ideals of liberal democracy, and a religious democracy sounds infeasible to her. She argues:

success in the United States suggests a privileging of the perspective of the "individual," the "I," that narrates a memoir or provides an intimate narrative that metonymically stands for a collective. Reviews of the text confirm the expectation that an "American voice," via its fluency in U.S. popular cultural references, frequently evoked and at times ironically altered in the text, will offer a more appealing, more accessible, more *domesticated* rendering of Iran." See Taleghani, "Axising Iran," 289.

Most societies that have flirted with Islamic politics, where religious parties win votes in elections, have not had the chance to watch their Islamist crush play itself out. A full and lasting conversion to secularism could only be reached after clerics were permitted to rise to power—as in Iran and Afghanistan—and make a gigantic mess of things. History had shown that this, ultimately, was the only way to test and discard the religious model.⁷⁵²

Azadeh only talks about one model of democracy and one form of secularism. Alternative secularisms and democracies do not make any sense to her, and that is why she considers the amalgamation of religion and secularism “a gigantic mess of things.” However, Religious Secularity is a model of governance during the reform period in Iran that political scientists have explored as coming into unexpected results. For instance, the Iranian-Australian scholar Naser Ghobadzadeh, considers it as a functional form of governance:

Religious secularity, part of a broader enterprise of religious reformation in Iran, challenges the legitimacy of the Islamic state and draws attention to the detrimental impact upon both religion and state in their unification. Religious secularity discourse objects to both the politicization of Islam and authoritarian secularism, a political paradigm that has characterized the histories of Iran and the postcolonial Muslim world. While the main thrust of secularism is the emancipation of state and economy from religion, that of religious secularity is rooted in religious concerns—in particular, the liberation of religion from the state. Today in Iran, it is religious scholars, rather than politicians or political theorists, who are the leading proponents of religious secularity... Demonstrating the inconsistency between the religious claims of the state and Islamic principles, religious secularity aims to safeguard the religious establishment from state intervention.

In light of Ghobadzadeh’s compelling paradigm, even the language that Azadeh uses when she refers to “testing and discarding” religious models appears as a problematic way of approaching models of governance. The process of the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran is complex and it cannot be reduced to a clergy’s imposition from above. It was shaped through people’s yes vote right after the revolution, and people always engaged with politics. At the point when the reform movement in Iran started in the late 1990s and early 2000s, people noticed that atrocities were enacted under the name of religion. This complex process cannot be reduced to the assumption that people have simply lost their faith in religion, as Azadeh suggests, after having only been mingling with the upper-class northern Tehrani people. This was a misconception, which was also repeated in 2009 leading to the second round of Ahmadinejad’s populist regime’s election. Furthermore, one should remember that Iranian contemporary political history did not start in 1979. History shows that the adoption of a religious inspired form of governance is not the only reason for the political mayhem in Iran. Western interventions and the overthrowing of democratic and secular government of Mosadegh in 1953 were significant contributing factors.⁷⁵³ This is the other side of the story that Azadeh chooses to stay silent about and erase in her memoir. The unequal weight of silence regarding some aspects of Iran’s history and over-coverage of some other historical events such as the revolution and hostage crisis does contribute to shaping the Western reader’s conception of Iran as a modern state in a way that is coherent with the mainstream orientalist narrative. Silence in this regard is nothing but epistemic violence. The ways in which,

⁷⁵² Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 97.

⁷⁵³ One well-known example is the overthrow of Mosadegh’s government in 1953 through a coup d’état, orchestrated by the United Kingdom and the United States. .

and the reasons why, the 1979 revolution in Iran took place are not separable from the circumstances in which the 1953 coup was brought forth in Iran. A decolonial view is necessary here to shed light on the historical turning points that affect the current situation and political system in place in Iran. The coloniality of power in the Middle East, of course, needs to be studied at the intersections of orientalism and Islamophobia as dominant discourses in shaping the representations of the region.

In some parts of Moaveni's memoir, the descriptions are very much in line with orientalist discourse. She writes about mysterious political figures and centers as if she is describing the Andaruni of the harem. The stereotypes she brings forth about the clerics in Iran are all juxtaposed to her reading of the Iranian model of democracy and religiosity, and this juxtaposition conveys to the reader a strong interrelatedness between the clerics and dysfunctionality of the state. This could be partly true; however, this stereotypical description is very silencing of the agency and freedom of a people that have been resistant and fighting against oppression inside and outside, both before and after the revolution. Terms and phrases such as "gluttony and sloth" of the clergy, "the ruins of a family dispersed and dispossessed by a clerical revolution," reference to Qom as "Mullah factory," mixing up Qom with "gham" which means gloom or calling the city the "epicenter of clerical evil" and "Death Star"⁷⁵⁴ are all orientalist stereotypical examples that are prevalent in *Lipstick Jihad*. In one of her trips to the Andaruni of Qom with Scott, the Time magazine correspondent, Azadeh documents the knowledge gained through eye-witness account:

We visited one of the city's computer centers, elaborate places designed by the clerics to prove that Islam's seventh-century ideology can coexist with modernity. The government loved to promote the centers, and every foreign journalist who visited Qom was dragged through one of the fluorescent-lit rooms where turbaned clerics stared at screens and listlessly clicked away at mice. Scott wanted to know if Qom's clerics were trying to export Shia revolution by CD-ROM. The immense cleric who was showing us his archive of hadith was puzzled by the question and asked me to repeat it.

"So, are you trying to export revolution by doing this?" For a minute he just looked at me, squinting through the fleshy folds of his sleepy eyes. He was clearly not used to sitting up straight. His work, as he might say, taxed the mind, not the body. My father always said clerics were the laziest species on earth. But this one in particular, oozing out of his chair like Jabba the Hut, one slipper hanging off his toe, seemed to prove him right. The thought of exporting anything at all, let alone revolution, seemed to tire him.⁷⁵⁵

Apart from the fact that Azadeh is representing Qom as the center of Iranian government and reducing the system of governance to a purely religious one, there are several other descriptions which read as condescending, reminding the reader of a white, Eurocentric perspective (which considers "that part of the world" as backward and incapable of any reform.) Referring to Islam's seventh-century ideology when also at the same time she calls the city of Qom as center of government "epicentre of clerical evil" and "Death Star"

⁷⁵⁴ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 97-98.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

is a “denial of coevalness”⁷⁵⁶ which in itself is epistemic injustice resulting from the coloniality of power. This form of representation needs a radical epistemological critique because through the denial of coevalness, it is conveyed that Muslims in Iran are still living with the living standards of the seventh century and the clerics in power are ruling them like back in the 7th century, as if they had no agency. The condescending tone is transparent when asking the clergy if they were “exporting the revolution by CD-ROM” to the other countries or insisting that the centers were designed to reconcile seventh century Islamic ideology with modernity. This surprised tone suggests that Modernity and Islamism cannot co-exist because one negates the other and there is only one form of modernity, the one Azadeh has been taught back in the US. The clergy’s response to the “exporting the revolution” question is simply that the CD-ROMs are there “for the Muslims to study with.” But this still sounds unbelievable to Scott who keeps asking how they are exporting the revolution to the other countries. Another problematic description is where Azadeh refers to the cleric as “Jabba the Hut oozing out of his chair.” Although this description follows the comment regarding the clergy in Iran being lazy, this does not really have anything to do with laziness, but with demonization. Jabba the Hut is the fictional slug-like alien character of Star Wars who has an insatiable appetite, owns enslaved girls, and is associated with criminals, assassins, and smugglers. Comparing the cleric in an Islamic research center to an alien with such characteristics and then following this description up by quoting her father calling them lazy, “lecherous,” and assigning sloth to the clerics’ as their “worst sin”⁷⁵⁷ has Islamophobic implications. It is problematic because this description would be taken as the truth about all the Shiite clergy in Iran, as she verbalizes it.⁷⁵⁸

Azadeh interprets the reform movement towards democracy as a foolish idea. Her Western lens is what inhibits her from seeing indigenous forms of governance in Iran and the difference between the social context in Iran to the one in the US. If, as a journalist, she cannot see the fact that historical, social, and cultural contexts make a difference in the ways in which governments are formed and function, one would not expect an average American citizen to understand alternative democracies and modernities as real. She critiques the reform movement without seeing the challenges and multifaceted obstacles that are on their way:

This was the Achilles heel of their movement, this foolish idea that they could take a Western concept, like democracy, alter it with Islamic attitudes toward women, and expect it to function properly. [...] They borrow

⁷⁵⁶ As mentioned before, Johannes Fabian and Walter Dignolo both use the term denial of coevalness as forms of epistemic injustice. See Dignolo’s *The darker side of the Renaissance* and Fabian’s *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*.

⁷⁵⁷ See All the quotes in Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 100

⁷⁵⁸ In another quote, she acknowledges that the clergy in Iran have been respected by people and have actually made some changes to the conditions of people’s lives throughout the worst historical periods. As she writes “Resistance to injustice is the central theme of Shiite Islam, and during times of political unrest or oppression, clerics traditionally raised their voices against the imperial or local oppressor of the moment. In times of chaos, when emotions flared and events spiraled, few could calm or incite masses of Iranians like the mullahs, who spoke in the familiar tones of, and on behalf of, ordinary people.” See in Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 96

One of the examples of the decolonial acts of the clergy in Iran is the historical Persian Tobacco movement, which was against the Tobacco concession to the Great Britain. A Fatwa was issued by Grand Ayatollah Mirza Hassan Shirazi and people followed his religious order and stopped using Tobacco, as a result of which, the concession and the Talbot monopoly was cancelled. Nazem al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-e Bidari Iranian (History of Iranian Awakening)*, (Tehran: Entesharat Bonyad Farhang Iran, Agah and Lowh, 1979)

Western concepts like democracy, stick in Iranian parts, and can't figure out why they've lost the juice.⁷⁵⁹

As mentioned before, Azadeh keeps referring to democracy as the one and only model that is practiced in the West. When she argues that Western concepts like democracy cannot be mingled with Islamic attitudes towards women, she is implying that Islamic rules toward women are undemocratic. Of course, this critique is not to deny the oppressions that the Islamic regime forced upon women in Iran in terms of policing their bodies and forceful imposition of gendered roles. However, there were certain forms of freedom that women gained after the revolution, including more open participation in the labour force and access to higher education at universities.⁷⁶⁰ The reform movement made it much easier for women to enter the public sphere and to navigate new realms. Azadeh is apparently comparing the condition of women in Iran to the middle-class white American women in the US, and this is why she cannot see the reform and its benefits for women. No one could appreciate the benefits of reform if they have not seen the pre-reform eras in Iran in the eighties and nineties. Even the pastiche-like bits and pieces of feminism that the reform movement used to gain more publicity was beneficial to Iranian women at the time. In one of her interviews with a reformist, Azadeh is taken aback to see that the man displays "an advanced awareness of gender relations and their intersections with politics in an oppressive system,"⁷⁶¹ but she quickly negates that as a progressive attitude because she decides these thoughts are only his "private reflections" and the reformists come from an "ultra-traditional class"⁷⁶² anyway. In her imaginary, which is a very Western/American one, Muslims, no matter if they are conservative or reformist, cannot be progressive because the assumption is that a practicing Muslim comes from Ultra traditional social locations. This is Azadeh's imaginary seeing and interpreting events and conditions in Iran, not really her vision, and such an interpretation can immensely feed Islamophobia.

Although Azadeh addresses her confusion over different political streams fighting for power in Iran, she also acknowledges that she had to generalize so much about different political parties under the reform

⁷⁵⁹ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 77.

⁷⁶⁰ Homa Hoodfar does a thorough historical analysis of Iranian women's participation in the public sphere in her book. Prominent feminist scholars such as Mino Moallem, Roksana Bahramitash, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Parvin Paidar, Elaheh Rostami-Povey and Tara Povey have all done nuanced analysis of women's rights in current Iran and the complex ways in which Iranian women have been navigating Islamist patriarchal discourses and participating in hie social and political sphere as well as labour force.

Homa Hoodfar, *The women's movement in Iran: women at the crossroads of secularization and Islamization* (Grebels, France: Women living under muslim laws, 1999).

For more sources, see: Roksana Bahramitash, "Revolution, Islamization, and Women's Employment in Iran." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2003): 229-241.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative–Reformist Conflict Over Women's Rights in Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (2002): 37-53.

Mino Moallem, *Between warrior brother and veiled sister: Islamic fundamentalism and the politics of patriarchy in Iran*. Univ of California Press, 2005.

Elaheh Rostami Povey, "Feminist contestations of institutional domains in Iran." *Feminist Review* 69, no. 1 (2001): 44-72.

Tara Povey, *Social movements in Egypt and Iran*. Springer, 2016.

⁷⁶¹ Movanei, *Lipstick*, 77

⁷⁶² Ibid., 77.

movement umbrella, because writing as a journalist does not give one a chance to cover histories and contexts of the different streams and therefore, generalization is inevitable. As she mentions:

In my files, generalizations like “reformist, liberal, progressive, moderate” appeared over and over again. My conscience bristled at this language, especially since news stories rarely had room for the historical context required to explain the nuances of these misleading labels.

Writing about Iran as an American journalist, in language that did not get one banned from the country, meant effacing history from the story. It was, to read most written accounts of the political schism, as though real liberals—secular intellectuals, technocrats, and activists with no ties to the clergy—either did not exist or were too irrelevant to be counted as political realities. A conservative politician whom I frequently visited in Tehran had the same complaint, though from a slightly different standpoint. “You journalists, you’re painting this story as a fight between good and evil,” he said. “You’re absolutely right,” I told him, though I finished the sentence silently this way: “It’s actually a fight between evil and slightly less evil.”⁷⁶³

Despite the fact that Azadeh sees this form of generalization as “effacing history from the story,” she does not really see that this generalization is dangerous and problematic. The system of governance in Iran is one of the most complicated ones in the world, and just because there are so many different layers and hierarchies of power that are non-existent in Western democracies, that does not mean that a generalization about the political system, and simply calling it an Islamic regime in power is not problematic. The complexities of post-revolutionary Iran resulted from the “collapse of dichotomies” and Iran’s transition into a “postmodern world,” in Moallem’s terms. As she maintains, “the revolutionary conditions soon circumvented or surpassed the framing of Iranian modernity, and Iran entered a postmodern world characterized by the collapse of boundaries between modern and traditional, secular and religious, West and East, elite and popular, [...] national and transnational, leading to new forms of subject formation.”⁷⁶⁴ It was the overthrow of all these “dichotomies” that “created space for all kinds of transgressions and various forms of resistance.”⁷⁶⁵ The secular intellectuals contributed to the revolution and the reform movement, but their presence has most often been silenced because of the ways in which journalism works. Azadeh mocks the conservative politician who addresses this problematic way of representing Iranian politics (as a fight between good and evil) because to her, this binary is even darker: it is just a fight between the evil and less evil, as if in any part of the world there exists any “good” and honest political streams.

Azadeh’s tone does not really change when she writes about the more left wing/reformist politicians as well. She meets up with Ibrahim Asgharzadeh who was one of the student followers of Imam’s line, and then a political activist and politician. Asgharzadeh is known for his tendencies for improved relations with the United States. Azadeh describes him as follows:

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 39-40.

⁷⁶⁴ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother*, 4.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

Like many reformists, he was ready to embrace democracy as long as it ensured that men like him would be at its helm. Democracy as it furthered his political future, not democracy as it benefited the country... Asgharzadeh's Westernized style—beige tweed blazer, frameless glasses— would appeal to young people who instinctively distrusted men in turbans, and his militant credentials would help him maneuver within the system. As he droned on, I daydreamed about quitting journalism and becoming his press aide, writing speeches for his trips abroad. I could be the female George Stephanopolous, and he could devise a Clinton-like “third way” for Iran, assembling a team of clever, savvy young Iranians who would work exhaustive hours, trying to rehabilitate Iran's image in the world. My American side would stop being a mark of difference, but an asset to the nation.⁷⁶⁶

Azadeh sees Asgharzadeh as “a fusion of Bill Clinton and the Ayatollah Khomeini,” as if one represents modernity and the other is the epitome of conservatism. Even the Islamic reform movement is conceptualised for her in terms of a Western style movement. This has been an ongoing trend in criticisms of the Islamic reform of Iran by Western journalists; they assume this reform should be completely in line with Western democratic ideals and once they see it's not, it is constructed as a failure to them. Or, they keep highlighting the Western aspects of the reform (even if they are just some universal rules and not only Eurocentric), which usually ends in reform movements in Iran, receiving severe backlash from the conservative system in power. Azadeh dreams of being a George Stephanopolous, as if he should be a role model for any successful advisor. Another problem with this comparison, aside from the systematic choice of American models, is the entitlement she feels to an advisory job, even in her dreams. Azadeh does not master the language, she has never lived in the county before, she does not know the hidden layers of history because her knowledge of Iran comes from hearsay, American media, and her close circle of people who come from a certain social location, like herself. How would she be able to advise a politician like Asgharzadeh about anything political? Her white saviour attitude shows up again in this excerpt where she considers her “American side” as “an asset” to the nation, because she can save the face of Iranians in the West. What she is oblivious to is that first of all, Iranians have not committed any crime except for being exploited by their own system and the West over years of war, sanction, and indirect and direct intervention. Therefore, they have nothing to apologize for to the world, or no face to save. If it were not for Western media painting such a problematic and victimizing picture of Iran and Iranians, there would not be any image that needed rehabilitating. Azadeh is not aware that the West ‘demands’ this rehabilitation and saving face and she is validating that logic in her discourse. The second problem with this statement is that as an American-Iranian with substantial social privilege, she lacks the epistemic privilege that would have helped her break through the ignorance surrounding power hegemony. Even if Iranians publicly apologized to the world for any harm any Muslim anywhere in the world has ever done, even if they had the most successful carriers and the most substantial contributions to global science, arts and humanities, they would still be represented as what Azadeh can see as a portrayal. Because it is not about what they do, how they live, how they fare the world, how hard or easy they work inside or outside the country; for the West to be the cradle of civilization and for Westerners to be the civilized, cultured and successful

⁷⁶⁶ Movaneï, *Lipstick*, 105.

citizens of the world, Iranians still need to be “hostage takers,” fundamentalist Shiites, conservative and traditional, oriental, spiritual, exotic and sometimes camel-riding backwards.⁷⁶⁷

Azadeh finally sees the challenges on the ways of reform in Iran and she sounds more empathetic to the reformists and their politics:

When I saw exactly how these reformists suffered in the process of a movement so many of us mocked as ineffective, I felt terrible. Iranians of all walks of life called them so many names—collaborators (for working with the mullahs), cowards, incompetents. But they were doing what no one else was willing to do. They were exposing themselves, making their families vulnerable, for the sake of making Iran a tiny bit more open. Yes, many of them were Islamists. Yes, many of them had supported, or still supported, the revolution. But were they not asking for the right things? For the right to free expression, fair trials, and free elections? It was so easy to sit at home and be pristinely secular over cocktails in the garden in north Tehran, or Switzerland, or Washington.⁷⁶⁸

Azadeh reaches this realization when she becomes closer to Reza, a reformist supporter friend of hers who very casually talks about picking up his friends from Evin prison or dropping them off there as they have been called to prison. Azadeh can partly see that the version of democracy the reformists advertise faces backlash and prosecution from hardliners in the judiciary and anything that smells a bit Western becomes a criminal act. She finally acknowledges her privileged social location and agrees that it is easy to be secular and democratic while one is sipping their cocktail in northern Tehran or in Switzerland or Washington. The reform movement in Iran is particularly challenging because Iran is a big country, populated by a multiplicity of ethnicities, religions, traditions, cultures and classes. Even within the same Shiite Islam sect, there are many different forms of practice and, since the country is being run by political Islamists, the scale of conservatism is directly related to the version of political Islam in power. Before noticing all these nuances, Azadeh expected people to fight against the political Islam forced upon them, whereas later, she can see why political decisions are so complicated in Iran.⁷⁶⁹ Despite her efforts, she still has fixed expectations of reformists and conservatives, still dividing them up into groups and does not see the differences within these political groups. Azadeh desires reformists to be secular, as if secularity as a Western value is the only resolution for fixing the problems of a country which has not yet survived years of monarchy, plunder, Western intervention, war, and sanctions.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁷ In that very interview with Asgharzadeh, Azadeh experiences sexist silencing by Asgharzadeh, who calls her a foreigner. The response to Asgharzade's foreigner comment is immediately “Mr. Hostage Taker,” with capital letters. Asgharzade is held accountable by Azadeh for ruining “Iran's international reputation.” She calls him a thief too, which is a strong demonizing term. Asgharzadeh is not wrong about Iran's slow progress into democracy at the time when he was interviewed, and it is hard for Azadeh to understand that because she does not share the history, context and struggles with him. The problem is that the male privilege and the patronizing attitude of the Muslim community men like Asgharzadeh kill the possibility of a conversation which could have produced knowledge. Despite all this, Azadeh later on comes to see the struggles of reformist more clearly.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁶⁹ Later on in the memoir, she confesses that although the reformists had fatal flaws, they has “created an atmosphere hospitable to all that change from below”; or she maintains that she felt terrible about criticizing the reformists, after seeing that “they were doing what no one else was willing to do,” and that “they were exposing themselves, making their families vulnerable, for the sake of making Iran a tiny bit more open.” See Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 62, 114.

⁷⁷⁰ The only reformist she considers broad minded to an acceptable extent is Reza who works for the ministry of culture, meanwhile that he is working towards a doctorate degree at Tehran University. Azadeh believes that “[w]ithin the reformist clique, the one-time revolutionaries who had undergone a change of heart and decided they liked freedom, Reza was particularly broad-minded. Many reformists didn't really care about Western thought, they just learned the theorists (John Stuart Mill for dummies) so they could say the fashionable things and be invited to conferences in Europe.” See *ibid.*, 107

Iran of the 2000s simply could not be fully secularized because religiosity and politics were still inseparable in most people's minds. For Azadeh, reform is a "movement that didn't move."⁷⁷¹ She considers the reformists' "intellectual inquiry [and] their appreciation for notions such as the rights of the individual" as "utilitarian," and just a façade. Except for Reza who she believes to be a broad-minded man, she considers the rest of the reformists only used magnetic Western concepts in order to present themselves better in the international arena. Otherwise, conservatives and reformists are both the same to her in terms of liberal democratic values. Even when Azadeh is sympathetic to the reformists and their challenges, she still uses a West versus the rest discourse that implies Western superiority in terms of progress as opposed to the stagnant, unreformable, and unchangeable situation in Iran.

Another example of Azadeh's Westocentric attitude to democracy is when the election results come out and Khatami becomes the president of the country for the second time. Her observation is as follows:

The results were released Saturday evening. Khatami won by 78 percent, and a remarkable 66 percent of eligible voters had turned out to vote. It was nothing approaching pure democracy, but at least people were engaged and believed their vote made some sort of difference. Relative to the rest of the region, this was somewhat significant. In Egypt (an American ally), the sitting president had been re-elected for two decades by a farcical 99 percent margin, and no self-respecting Egyptian would ever conceive of going to the polls. Saudi Arabia (an American ally), a country named after a family, didn't even bother with elections.⁷⁷²

Elections in the Western world are considered as a sign of democracy, but Azadeh believes the elections in Iran are nothing even close to democracy. She acknowledges that Iran has a better political performance compared to Egypt or Saudi Arabia, however, the tone is still condescending, implying that people are just stupidly keeping themselves busy with a façade of democracy. As hopeless as the political situation in Iran might be, people's agency in making decisions in a complicated double governance system should be respected. The coloniality of power has drawn borders between the Middle East and the rest of the world and, whilst the Middle Eastern countries' oil is being looted and weapons are instead sold to them for fighting the same neo-colonial wars, the whole region gets criticised for a lack of capacity to conform to universal democratic values. This reminds me of the speeches of Donald Trump or Benjamin Netanyahu when they address people of Iran as an oppressed nation who are suffering inside the country and all of sudden flourish once they cross the borders and reside in the West. The coloniality of power is fed by the coloniality of knowledge. Once knowledge about some parts of the world and some nations dictates that those locations and people are incapable of solving their problems and need saving, the colonial power finds its way in those regions and exploits them even more.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, 107.

⁷⁷² Movane, *Lipstick*, 146

Coloniality of power and Islamophobia work hand in hand. Azadeh's attempts to convince the reader that secularity is the solution to the political mess in Iran can be interpreted into the religious Islam being the source of the problem.⁷⁷³ Azadeh does not distinguish between religion as a heartfelt faith for so many Muslims in Iran and politicized religion as an apparatus. She is angry at both; after feeling hyper-visible with the veil on in New York, she comes back to her hotel room and as she mentions, she "peel[s] off the outfit of shame," "pour[s] [her]self a glass of wine from the minibar" and "[l]ies] naked on the fluffy white comforter," contemplating, "in between sips," where the most "unIslamic Republic" place is in New York for her to go with her cousins. She thinks of Tapas or Nobu and just as the thought passes through her mind, she feels like "the hundreds of small kinks in [her] shoulders had begun to ease."⁷⁷⁴

The pressures of political Islam in Iran, especially on women, leads to frustration with a religion that is used as a justification for an unjust oppression. Azadeh's experience of hypervisibility (which might be a daily experience for a veiled practicing Muslim in New York, and of course she is expected to get used to it if she does not want to "assimilate") leads to reactionary thoughts on her side: lying naked on the bed, she sips wine, doing something very "unIslamic Republic" to take revenge on some practice that she does not personally adhere to. This is an experience shared by so many other Iranian women inside Iran as well, who are forced into compulsory hijab and have to navigate segregated social spaces, especially in the legal and political sphere. However, writing about such experiences is hard for some Iranian women especially those whose priority is to practice resistance while navigating local and transnational political spheres. As a personal note, it makes me very uncomfortable to write about compulsory hijab, not because I do not consider that a violation of women's freedom, but because of the multitude of discourses surrounding Muslim women and veiling, Iranian women and compulsory Hijab and Middle Eastern women as oppressed by their religion and culture. I wilfully practice censorship and epistemic smothering on myself, because talking about compulsory hijab in Iran silences the experiences of so many women from different walks of life: women practicing hijab out of faith, and women practicing resistance despite such oppressions for a greater "common good," namely context-based gender equity. Women like me, and so many other Iranian women, do not consider hijab as a symbol of our identity and the only axis of oppression. We do not necessarily practice it where we are not legally required to (although we acknowledge that the legal sector is a site of women rights violation in Iran), but if that practice is the only option for us to navigate public sphere, we practice hijab as a political decision. For us, campaigns such as "White Wednesdays"⁷⁷⁵ bear intersectional violence for local less-privileged women who can get beaten up by

⁷⁷³ When Azadeh goes to New York to cover Iran's news at the conference, she observes the massive change in the degree of her visibility with the veil on. As she states: "On this Manhattan street, wearing a veil was the equivalent of going bare-headed in Tehran. Suddenly, I wasn't invisible anymore. People's eyes actually skimmed over me, instead of sliding past blindly, as they're supposed to do on a crowded urban sidewalk. I had been so busy contemplating "to veil or not to veil" that it hadn't occurred to me anyone else would notice. It was like wearing a neon sign, blinking "Muslim! Muslim!" See Movaneï, 171

⁷⁷⁴ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 172

⁷⁷⁵ This movement refers to so-called feminist campaigns which started by Masih Alinejad, an Iranian exilic journalist transnationally famous for her Facebook page, "my stealthy freedom."

the police forces in public. There is not a day that Muslim feminists like me do not live in fear of causing more violence to women of our local communities, while we have the privilege of practicing transnational feminism in our safe spaces. Categorizing women (in this context Muslim women) and their experiences, their resistance, and their social and cultural practices denies them of the complexities they bear as epistemic bodies; therefore, categorization functions as epistemic violence. Regarding Muslim women, the double-edged sword of whiteness and community patronizing patriarchy is very silencing to us, and we consider the dangers of whiteness far more destructive to local communities, because they can turn into actual wars. Back to the memoir, Azadeh's feminist practice does not involve much "listening" to local women but so much "observing" of them especially in specific locations, and this is what makes feminism seem more inclined to white liberal feminism than intersectional inclusive feminism.

Unlike Azadeh, her mother has a different approach to local political activism and the US politics in the region. Azadeh here is trying to paint a picture of Iranians as Americaphiles. In a way, this is as problematic as the Americaphobic picture that already exists in the West, as it still conveys the same black and white binary, does violence to all the grey areas of representation, and falls into the trap of "Iranian people love Americans, they apologize for the past, and they have forgotten about American interventions so let's all be friends again." However, her mother reminds her of how problematic it is to wipe out history from the story of Iran-U.S. relations:

The stories about pro-U.S. sentiment in Iran, she [Azadeh's mom] insisted, were concocted by the American media (and its journalist-propagandists, like me) to pave the way for American cultural/political/military/culinary domination of the region. The U.S. wanted to keep Iran either weak and isolated, or weak and dependent. That's why the CIA overthrew the country's democratically elected government in 1953. The United States cared only about securing its own interests, along with Israel's, in the region. Given this, Iranians had a duty to be anti-American. I had a duty to be quiet, and not criticize the Islamic Republic, because in the short term I would be making things easier for a neo-imperial America bent on undermining the country...If I have to function that way, I told her, I'd rather not be a journalist. The whole reason I do this is to document reality, not cover it up. Besides, why isn't it possible to criticize both? Do America's abhorrent Middle East policies somehow oblige us to defend the Islamic Republic?⁷⁷⁶

Azadeh's response to her mom's critique of the neoliberal coloniality of the U.S. in the region is reactionary. She considers her job as a journalist as an objective documentation of reality and therefore, covering up any stories would be against her work ethics. However, she does not see the fact that she is already covering up the other side of the story, which is years of American intervention in the region. Even her reading of Iranians' Americanophilia is too simplistic. The hegemony of America as a land of opportunity and liberty has had a long-lasting presence in Iran, since before the revolution. The more America exported its American dream discourse through cultural productions to the region, the harder the system fought what they called "cultural invasion" and the more the fascination of an imaginary dream land grew among Iranians. Although Azadeh

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 211.

interprets her mom's reading of the situation as a conspiracy theory, the conversation and the disagreement between the two is a site of knowledge for the reader. Two different generations, one having experienced life in Iran before the revolution as a pro-revolutionary (but anti-Islamic revolutionary) leftist and a second generation born and raised in the US and with a partial view of life in Iran and only visiting Iran after the revolution, have very conflicting views. Therefore, generation does matter as a point of difference in an intersectional analysis. In diaspora memoir studies, it is important to take the generation of the authorship into account, since we deal with memory in the first-generation accounts, whereas we are concerned with "post-memory" and second-hand memory in a second or third generation's acquisition and production of knowledge. Generation determines the difference between "seeing" and "hearing," although of course, "seeing" like "experience" could also be contested as a pure epistemological source due to the limitation of our vision and our partiality of perspective.

Another different voice to Azadeh's, questioning American politics in the region, is Reza's, the intellectual friend I mentioned earlier. I go back to Reza here because his voice and views on 9/11 are the most conflicting to Azadeh's. Azadeh is traumatised by the twin tower attacks as an American who has many friends and relatives in New York. Therefore, she becomes even more hyper-vigilant towards Iranians' reaction to this event and Iranian media's coverage of the event, which is a common reaction by many Middle Easterners when any heartbreaking events happen in the Middle East and there is absolutely no coverage in the Western media.⁷⁷⁷ Azadeh writes:

One evening, a youth group organized a candlelight vigil for the victims of the attack on the Twin Towers at a square in north Tehran. A decent and varied number of people turned out, the Basij attacked, and I, of course, hyperventilated. But the vigil, with its undercurrent of sympathy and openness to America, was just one strand of the Iranian reaction. It was only in the astounding indifference around me that the depth of accumulated resentment of American foreign policy in this region became apparent to me. The fraught, emotionally charged conversations I had in the days that followed left me stricken, but in their course I learned many things. The first was that the U.S. government was viewed as a greedy, heartless uber-power in pursuit of domination of the Middle East, indifferent to its civilians.⁷⁷⁸

Here and elsewhere Azadeh conflates the indifference coming from the system and media with the indifference coming from all people. What she sees as a vengeful indifference among people is just the way people in the Middle East cope with death. As I will discuss in the analysis of *Orange Trees of Baghdad* later, average people in countries like Iran and Iraq could be scared of dogs but not of war, death, and attacks, because they are just used to living in times of conflict. Azadeh's observation is not wrong though; many people do hate American policies in the region which has resulted in so much conflict and chaos in that part of the world, but

⁷⁷⁷ A recent example is the terrorist attacks in Lebanon and France. Whilst the entire world was covered with the France flag, Lebanon was barely mentioned in the media. I have taken notes of such events while reading all these memoirs. There is another terrorist attack which happened in Baghdad almost two years ago and more than 180 Shiites were killed. The number of lives taken in Syria and Palestine is just out of hand and only growing every day.

⁷⁷⁸ Moaveni, *Lipstick*, 223.

people do distinguish between systems of power and civilian nations, as they expect the West to do so. Whilst Azadeh fights Reza accusingly over 9/11 events, asking him to say he is sorry and posing rhetorical questions to him such as “Don’t you care that thousands of people died?” or “Are you so dehumanized that you can’t even feel sympathy for dead office workers?,” Reza loses his temper and reminds her of the political reasons why dehumanization is a term of dramatic irony in this context:

“Why did no one talk about dehumanization when America armed both Saddam Hussein and the mullahs, and allowed us to bloody each other during eight years of war,” he replied, his arms tightly folded across his chest.

“But these were civilians—” I interjected.

“Civilians!” he snorted. “What about our civilians? Do our lives count for less? There’s no outrage in the West when we die, no one talks about civilian deaths, because by now our loss of life is ordinary. What about the Iraqi civilians dying because of sanctions? What about Palestinian kids who get shot in the street running out for candy?”

In all the instances he named, the injury inflicted on civilians was considered to be encouraged or abetted by America, the instigator of sanctions, the ally of Israel. Surely those deaths, the thinking went, could not have been silently facilitated by the United States unless it considered us, people of this region, animals, whose slaughter was less regrettable than that of Americans. It was from this sense of having already been dehumanized, counted for less, that the attitudes around me seemed to come. Understanding the origin of these views depressed me profoundly, because I saw they did not arise from cultural rage, jealousy, powerlessness, or religious hate, all the explanations that emerged to explain why anyone should feel anything other than absolute horror at what happened that day. The heartlessness was political, linked to specific events and places and ways in which America was seen as having behaved cruelly against the civilians of other nations. I saw only a reluctant satisfaction, as though a mirror was finally being held up—now *you* see what it feels like to die, you who have for years reserved death only for us.⁷⁷⁹

Reza talks about an ongoing dehumanization of Middle Eastern citizens going on for years as a result of the wars and sanctions imposed by the US and its Western allies. He points out the difference between American civilians and Middle Eastern civilians, the former being privileged enough to be considered as human and the latter so under-privileged that they are completely invisible even upon death. However, Azadeh again interprets that as a vengeful political hatred, even when she thinks she has reached an understanding of what Reza is trying to say. Reza is concerned with a moral and epistemic responsibility to assign humanity to people of all colors, genders, and social locations; however, Azadeh’s anger over deaths caused by terrorism in the US is hyperbolic compared to her anger about everyday casual death in Iraq or Palestine or Iran. Reza reminds Azadeh that terrorism is a result of the coloniality of power, regardless of where it happens and who its victims are. Azadeh still effaces history off the story and reduces Reza’s critique to political anger, even when she decides that Reza’s response does not arise from “cultural rage, jealousy, powerlessness, or religious hate.” For Azadeh to believe that everyone should feel absolute horror because of this event and no other feelings is

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 224.

reflective of her privileged social location, that she has not lived in Iran during the war and under sanctions to see what it is like to get used to horror and not be scared by it anymore.

Azadeh's life, like so many other Middle Eastern background people is historically affected by 9/11, even if they had nothing to do with the Twin Tower events, they did not identify as practicing Muslims or were not racially Arabs:

Like the hostage crisis, which forced every Iranian in the United States to walk around with a scarlet letter of association, September 11 and the "axis of evil" revitalized suspicion and hatred for the religion, however secularly, we belonged to, and the part of the world we did not live in, but were shaped by and whose citizens we looked like.⁷⁸⁰

Muslim identity becomes even more attached to any Middle Eastern looking person even if they identify as secular Persians. Azadeh and her friends witness a growing form of racism towards Muslims and Muslim-looking people in the U.S. and they have to listen to strange confessions coming from their white friends: "I was sitting next to this guy on the subway, saw him reading the Koran, and wondered whether I should call the police, since the terror alert was on yellow" or "He's cool, but Muslims these days, who knows what they're *really* thinking. I had an Iranian girlfriend, and I just had to get rid of her." Azadeh comes to highlight a person of colour identity more in her work after she also experiences hyper-visibility in the US and her definition of home becomes the "disfigured" entity the scraps of which people carry in their pockets.

Azadeh's political concerns and the extent to which she participates in Iranian political decisions are informed by her social location as a second generation, upper-middle class, educated Iranian-American woman who has also had the privilege of travelling not only between Iran and the US but also around the world. Although there is partiality to her view and experience, there is still knowledge in her lived experience account, when we follow her in her journey to Tehran and back to New York. *Lipstick Jihad* is not only about Azadeh's experience of homeland, but also about the discourses defining "homeland," "identity," "border," "modernity" and "democracy" as an ideal, and however contradictory some representations come out of the memoir, they are still theory-laden if read through a realist and intersectional perspective.

7.3 The portrait of refugee as a human: What would democracy think of a *knowledge-worker*?

Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* addresses a number of political and historical moments and processes, both transnational and local, including the so-called refugee crisis, the Greenmovement in 2009, the 9/11 attacks, the invasion of Iraq and the following execution of Saddam Hussein in 2006, and the rise of populism in

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 234.

Europe, especially in the Netherlands. In this section, I will refer to a few excerpts from the work and demonstrate how Niloo as the voice of the author, and her father Bahman, who I have discussed in previous chapters, practice political activism as a form of carework from different locations and perspectives.

Niloo's political activism is mainly concerned with a transnational care for refugees of different backgrounds and from different walks of life. This form of care is of course very complex and interrelated to different political issues, which put border-crossers into refugee categories. Lived experience plays a very important role in the ways in which characters like Niloo, Bahman, Sy, or Mam'mad practice political activism. The historical and political turning points in the memoir are beautifully intermingled, which give an impressive transnational complexity to lived experience shaped through politics and history. Mam'mad's death caused by his self-immolation turns into a metonym for the intersection of all the above-mentioned political and historical turning points. I start this section with the story of Mam'mad which is not only is important for the mentioned reason, but also because as a researcher, I am morally urged to highlight the stories based on lived experience that form epistemically salient microhistories. These microhistory narratives easily get wiped out by hegemonic discourses and it is upon us to shed light on their epistemic importance, even if they are disheartening or disturbing. Silence surrounding disturbing real-life stories and experiences of people is a form of epistemicide and too much of getting comfortable in our comfort zones.

Unfortunately, there is not much literature on self-immolation as a form of political activism in the field of humanities. It is considered as a "political sacrifice" but the limited literature on this issue is mostly in psychiatry and medical sciences more broadly. I approach the act of self-immolation here as an expression of a form of agency and free will and also as a political practice. In contrast to journalistic stories of self-immolation that frame this act in a victimizing language, I propose to read such stories as presenting their subjects as agents, defined as "a being with the capacity to act," therefore possessing agency, "the exercise or manifestation of this capacity."⁷⁸¹

The plot of *Refuge* is narrated by Niloo as follows:

In late fall, an Iranian illegal threatens to burn himself. They lose days trying to track his family, bringing him stews over basmati rice so he might feel at home, trying to find a trustworthy Psychologist who might speak to him. He never eats a bite and his family can't be reached. The psychologist starts coming to the squat, but they never call any Dutch agency. The Dutch, Mam'mad reminds them wearily, wouldn't try to understand the man; their solution would be cold and swift.⁷⁸²

Mam'mad, Sy, Niloo and Karim are the frequenters of the squat where they get together for discussing politics. Their political discussion starts from "the Green movement, Mousavi, Karoubi and Neda Agha-

⁷⁸¹ See in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy accessed: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency/>

⁷⁸² Nayeri, *Refuge*, 215.

Soltan⁷⁸³ and leads to the trial of Geert Wilders, Islamophobia, and the right-wing immigration policies in Holland.⁷⁸⁴ In one of their get-togethers they discuss an illegal refugee who had threatened to burn himself because he had not been granted a permit to stay in Holland after many years of being there as a political refugee. This, as a common fate for many of them like Mam'mad and Karim turns into a topic of discussion, and different approaches to the issue come up during the discussion. Through a solidarity network, other refugees try to help by making him feel at home through food and contact with family, and they do not even attempt notifying the Dutch agency because they have no expectations of help from them and, as Mam'mad reminds them, their solutions would be "cold and swift." Mam'mad is the only person who voluntarily talks to the man and convinces him to eat and break his hunger strike but others, including Niloo, never realize what was said between the two men. One night when they are all at the squat complaining about Wilder's racist politics and the fear of him becoming the prime minister, Mam'mad smokes a joint and starts his soliloquy about Wilders while he is high:

"He's a racist in charge of a major party. If he becomes prime minister, we have maybe two years of Erotic Republic and shitty music and waiting around for asylum. Then he'll kick most of us out. You wait and see. You find the smallest thing to love in purgatory and they take that too." Mam'mad meanders home, refusing company. He mutters, "It's hopeless," and disappears down the road in sweatpants and sandals, his head hung low.⁷⁸⁵

Mam'mad's disappointment does not come from hopelessness only, but also from too much political consciousness and knowledge, which is the outcome of his lived experience. As an academic who was politically prosecuted in Iran, Mam'mad knows how conservative politicians make life a purgatory for the powerless. His political views are very critical of the right-wing party, their racist policies, and their treatment of asylum seekers. Mam'mad had a decolonial approach to the coloniality of power. His life has been shaped by different political struggles inside and outside Iran. As an intellectual, he has been prosecuted in Iran for his political views and attachments to the Green movement, he has been promised a residency under the category of "scholars at risk" in Holland, and he gets denied a grant of visa. Then he turns into a political asylum seeker, an in-between man who can neither go back to Iran, nor stay in the Netherlands. His Muslimhood (even if he might not practice, he is categorized as a Muslim-background man), his colour, nationality, and type of border crossing turn into multiple axes of oppression for him, ironically where he is supposed to feel safe as an asylum seeker. 9/11 attacks and the consequently rampant Islamophobia affects the ways in which his asylum case is processed. The reality of the violence he expects to experience very soon hits him in the face and that is when he decides to sacrifice himself, probably for the rest of the refugees seeking asylum in order to show some level of efficiency, agency, and free will. Once placed in a position when nothing is under one's control, even as he says, "the smallest thing to love in purgatory" is also taken away, the only thing that remains and over which one has

⁷⁸³ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 217.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

partial control is his existence. People like Mam'mad, or Omid, the 23-year-old Iranian refugee in off-shore detention centres who also set himself on fire, express the highest form of agency through self-sacrifice. As disturbing and traumatizing this act is for their friends and family, it is a way to break the silence that white supremacy under the name of security has imposed on these voices. This silence-breaking does not last very long, because as I mentioned before, practices such as self-immolation are too disturbing for the privileged majority. This is why Dina Nayeri has done an unprecedented job of documenting such disturbing stories. The most graphic representation of this central event in the memoir is as follows:

Now she [Niloo] approaches and gives him the towel, which he places over his friend's disfigured forehead. Drawing closer, she lets out a guttural noise, like a mangled wail. She recoils from her friend, wiping the tears and mucus from her mouth. Mam'mad's face is a ruin of soot and blood and charred flesh, his eyebrows and eyelashes gone. She thinks of Siavash's burns, the violence of acquiring such scars, and she imagines that maybe Mam'mad too can survive. A tuft of scorched hair, still white, by his ear reminds her of the first night, when he gave her soup and called her khanoum Cosmonaut, when she told him her four categories of Iranians and he laughed, because people are more complicated than that [...] Though he is clearly gone, his face unrecognizable, she wants to shake him awake, to say: Mam'mad agha, this is all wrong. You're not a reckless young man. You're a professor. You deserve to be a knowledge worker.⁷⁸⁶

Not only does Niloo mourn Mam'mad's death, she also mourns injustice. Her reference to Sy's full name, Siavash, and his burn scars could be both a reference to the mythical Siavash of *Shahnamah* and an allusion to the story of Siavash, surviving a fire. What makes this intertextuality an apt literary trope here is the notion of justice which is shared by both stories. Refugees like Sy and Mam'mad have set or threatened to set themselves on fire as an act of protest against injustice. Siavash of *Shahnamah*⁷⁸⁷ is a young, desirable, and innocent man who is forced by the Shah to ride through a mountain of fire to prove his innocence for a rape sin for which he has been accused. Although he survives the fire and his innocence is proven, he is finally forced into exile and is finally murdered. This allusion pre-empts another sad fight against injustice for Niloo, implying that Sy might be the next sacrifice (as he apparently has scars from an unsuccessful attempt years back.)

After the event, Karim and Siavash keep texting in a group chat they share with Niloo,⁷⁸⁸ talking about Mam'mad, feeling guilty for letting the guy grow hopeless and losing all courage⁷⁸⁹ and trying to find a reason why he set himself on fire:

It was a sacrifice, he [Karim] says. Maybe it was for us, for the Green movement, for the younger generation. Maybe the old have passion too, instead of just expectations and sorrow. Niloo replies that it was a useless, empty loss and some Dutch bureaucrat should be fired and jailed. She's angry for missing every sign; for being

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 220.

⁷⁸⁷ Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian book of kings*, (London: Penguin, 2016)

⁷⁸⁸ Nayeri, *Refuge*, 298.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 298.

blindsided—when people at the squat spoke of suicide, she recalls, most often they were whispering about Karim.⁷⁹⁰

Karim calls the act of self-immolation a “sacrifice” which is a different reading of the story compared to Niloo’s, Sy’s and of course, of the media both in Iran and Netherlands. There is an epistemic value in the term sacrifice, especially in its Persian translation “fadakari” which implies an act of giving, contributing and caring. This form of expression of agency which is a great act of silence-breaking, despite the degree of trauma in the act itself, could highlight the agency of the refugees, political asylum seekers, and activists like Sy, who have been struggling for so long. However, the media representation is nothing but an epistemic violence. Niloo says:

Their usual story night moderator reads the news aloud from a laptop. The Dutch outlets sound so different from the Persian ones. He reads first from the BBC:

*“...According to reports in the Dutch media, the man had an argument with a group before setting himself alight. He soaked his clothes in a highly flammable liquid and is reported to have stood motionless and silent as bystanders and shopkeepers attempted to extinguish the flames using coats and buckets of water. Police said there was no immediate explanation for his act and that an investigation into the case was under way.”*⁷⁹¹

Payvand news:

*“An Iranian man who set himself on fire in Amsterdam has died of his injuries. The unidentified man was aflame for more than two minutes, and all efforts by passersby to douse the fire were unsuccessful. His reported motive for the self-immolation was the Dutch government’s denial of his plea for asylum. According to associated Press, the Dutch government has tightened restrictions on immigration over the past decade due to growth of anti-Muslim sentiments.”*⁷⁹²

Whilst BBC frames the story around an individual losing his senses and setting himself on fire, Payvand news describes the story through a political framing, hinging on issues of asylum seeking and Islamophobia and blames the issue on the Dutch government. Niloo and Sy engage in a conversation with the rest of the people in the squat who are listening to the night moderator read the news. Mam’mad’s position as an asylum seeker is publicly discussed, and people want to know if there were any signs of him being suicidal. As a paperless refugee, Mam’mad belonged nowhere, neither in Holland nor back in Iran. The fear of getting prosecuted and executed had stopped him from going back and with a “lapsed visa” at the age of sixty, he was not even able to get a dishwashing job to earn a living.⁷⁹³ In the middle of this conversation, the question of moral responsibility of the state comes up. Sy, as someone who has worked with refugees for a long time mentions that the government is free “to reject a request and deport an asylum seeker” but if the refugee is still in Holland

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 299.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 221.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 222.

and is “mentally finished” and “deteriorating,”⁷⁹⁴ then the government is morally responsible to care. They cannot simply show these people the door and tell them to go back where they come from. The knowledge that is produced by Sy here involves knowledge surrounding morality of the state, which is in conflict with its neoliberal attitude towards refugees. The sense of guilt that Sy struggles with is a result of his constant discussions and, at time, fights with Mam’mad over political issues:

[Mam’mad]: “What if we do win,” says Mam’mad, in a half-drunk mix of Farsi and English, “and Mousavi is made president and there are a few human rights improvements and a point made, et cetera? But our daughters are still under hijab. Our oil is still lubricating mullah pockets. Our sons are still addicted. Then won’t you wish the hard-liners had won and provoked some foreign power to oust them?” [...] “It’s been years,” says Mam’mad, eyes roaming as if to incite a rebellion. “Is enough being done? What’s the trouble that it’s become so complicated?” ... “I’m not a refugee. I should be a knowledge worker.”

“Knowledge worker?” Sy snaps at the older man. “Mam’mad agha, do you know what that takes? You need to find someone to hire you, a real organization. And not just hire you for a month, but pay you more than fifty thousand a year. Do you have that? Do you have enough Dutch or English even to hope for that? [...]

[M]: “fuck you and your informations,” says a scarlet Mam’mad in failing English. [...] “With your terrible American manners and your stupid phone. Have some respect for people who’ve earned it.”⁷⁹⁵

The political situation in Iran as the centre of their discussion is where disagreement starts. While Mam’mad argues that even the Green movement is nothing but a travesty and fundamental change is impossible in Iran, Sy argues for a solidarity with European citizens involved, starting demonstrations in Europe to empower Green movement transnationally. On the other hand, reform, which was one of the promises of the Green movement, might not bring a real change to the refugees’ lives, because they are already trying to settle down across the borders. Karim who has been a paperless refugee for ten years is scared of taking part in these protests in case his picture is taken and his wife whom he has not seen in ten years would be in trouble back in Iran.⁷⁹⁶ Sy knows the system in Holland well. He knows that to be a “knowledge worker” as Mam’mad claims to be, one needs to have mastery of the language and to be employed by an organization. This is the vicious circle of border crossing as a refugee of course. As a refugee, you are not granted a job and citizenship easily; job is a requirement for citizenship and citizenship is the requirement for a job. Despite all the struggles as paperless refugees, we can see that political activism as a form of care is a common practice among these refugee identities. Those who are in more vulnerable positions like Mam’mad and Karim sometimes question whether they should be strategic and uncritical, or whether they should just practice politics according to their sense of morality. Those in more stable and privileged positions, like Sy and Niloo, do practice politics as a form of carework for the local people of the country and for the sake of changing the transnational relations. Therefore, refugee identities are not, and cannot be apolitical. Whilst they are epistemically privileged to have political

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 160-161.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., 159.

consciousness and a sense of criticalness, refugees are vulnerable in terms of security reasons, as they are the real in-between identities, belonging nowhere, caring for justice and some stability in their lives. Despite this vulnerability, they practice politics as carework (something that might not benefit themselves, but maybe other people), critiquing both Western neoliberal ways of treating refugees and minorities and the oppressive regimes back home that has initiated their homelessness.

Niloo, on the other hand, experiences political care outside Iran and the politics of Iran and the West are inseparable for her. Unlike Azadeh, who constantly questions Iranian regime's politics and opts for silence against American politics, their history of intervention, immigration system and hegemonic white supremacy, Niloo incessantly juggles the two and critiques both:

Though Niloo has never stumbled into this scene before—the refugees, activists, artists— she has attended a Green movement⁷⁹⁷ protest or two, hovering in the periphery. She has watched the news from Iran, every day since June. She wonders if people like Gui and his colleagues are aware of what the Iranian exiles suffer here in Netherlands, without homes, always under threat of deportation, some living in squats, others on the streets. Often when news of Iran pounds too loudly in her head, she diverts her attention to Geert Wilders, the deeply racist (and anti-Islam, anti-immigration) conservative party leader who wants her people out of Holland. He is to be tried soon for hate speech against Muslims, having called the Koran a fascist book and Mohammad the devil. “Islam is the Trojan Horse in Europe,” he once said. Sometimes his rants sound like her Baba, except baba hates all religions, not just one. It baffles her that a country so progressive on health care, elder care, and education can allow this man anything but a clown's platform. And yet... his party for freedom (PVV) is growing, and he could become prime minister.⁷⁹⁸

As we can see in this excerpt, the immigration policies in Holland and the politics back in Iran (Green movement and reform) are not separable. Some politics back home uproot people and make them move, and some politics back in the new land prevents people from re-rooting. The rise of Populism in Iran is interpreted as a lack of democracy while in one of the most developed countries in the West, it is just a farcical game. The fact that Niloo diverts her attention from Iranian Green movement politics to Wilders and the politics of his ironically named ‘Party for Freedom’ is interesting. White supremacy and racism are bigger problems, and Niloo can identify with them more because she has experienced them all throughout her life in the West. Green movement and the fascination with some sort of pro-secularity reform still hold a degree of intellectual privilege. This is why most of the people Niloo describes as pro Green movement in Amsterdam are “artsy Persians.” Niloo does not know much about the politics in Iran, and due to the limitation of knowledge, she does not feel entitled to comment on that as much. However, her social location as a refugee has granted her the epistemic privilege to see white ignorance. She wonders if Gui, her partner, and his Dutch friends have any sense of how difficult life is for Iranian refugees, especially at politically tumultuous times like in 2009. Niloo is concerned

⁷⁹⁷ Niloo documents Green movement and the consequences of 2009 elections: “weeks ago, in August, Ahmadinejad was inaugurated for a second term as President of Iran and again, protests sprang up everywhere. “Death to the dictator,” the people chanted, and demonstrations in and out of Iran continued. Since the election in June, the newly stoked fire among the Persians of the West has grown into a full roaring flame, maybe accomplishing nothing more than the sense of closeness it creates to their native country and its history.” See in *Ibid.*, 208

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

with the Dutch immigration policies as she knows racially discriminating and Islamophobic policies will definitely affect those who are currently being oppressed by the regime in Iran due to their political views and will finally have to move out of the country. Despite being individually privileged, Niloo has care and empathy for people who are not as privileged as she is. She and Sy are the ones who can afford to critique governments more openly and publicly because of their privileges.

People like the “Ahmadinejad of the Dutch,” as Sy calls Wilders, are more dangerous than Ahmadinejads of the Middle East; “the same cartoonish villainy, but worse, because he [Wilders] doesn’t have to resort to fraud. He has serious followers.”⁷⁹⁹ By fraud Sy is referring to the theory of 2009 election fraud which was strongly supported by the Green movement and was considered as the reason why Mousavi did not win the elections. If Ahmadinejad resorted to fraud, that would just be a cowardly act and sheer stupidity, whereas Wilders has real, Islamophobic anti-immigrant racist supporters who have granted him the power and audacity to use hate speech, and direct racist language whilst trying to be the prime Minister of a country too.

Niloo’s detachment from Iranian politics does not translate into a lack of care. *Refuge* is probably the only Iranian memoir that documents the brutal death of Neda Agha-Soltan who turned into the voice of a generation born in the 80s and never having taken a break from politics. The baby boomer generation of the 80s in Iran, identifying themselves as *dabe-ye shasti (60s)* are a generation that has survived eight years of war with Iraq, severe sanctions, and the reconstruction period after the war which left the majority of the population at the poverty threshold. Back in the 90s, this very generation had to fight each other for everything, from going to school to passing the entrance exam of the university and then in the 2000s, for finding a space in the job market. Once they raised their voice against the system’s inefficiencies, they got brutally repressed. This is the point where democracy and human rights stand hand in hand as reasons for public demonstrations.

Bahman’s perspective, as Niloo’s Iran, documents the 2009 events in detail and in the form of histories from below, coming from eye-witnessed accounts. There are few works documenting 2009 protests because right after the 9th of Dey and Ayatollah Khamenei’s decree, any sign of protest was criminalized, and the history got wiped out by mainstream media in Iran. The only footage that people had access to was low quality mobile phone videos that individuals had recorded.⁸⁰⁰ Part of his description of the events is as follows:

There had been protests; he knew this already—friends and family were calling from everywhere to see if he was safe. Every night, people gathered on roofs and chanted Allah-o-akbar. Every day they flooded the streets, setting bonfires and overturning vehicles, bins, any standing thing, screaming, “Where is my vote?” In universities and

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 208

⁸⁰⁰ Sepideh Farsi in her famous film, *Red Rose* (2014) does a great job of using mobile records of the protests and using them as documented microhistory in line with her fictional account of a love story, born out of protests. She represents two generations of protesters, struggling in late 80s and late 2000s, one having lost hope in reform, another trying to keep passion and hope in place for a better future. One of the film’s main concerns is feminist sexual politics and its practice by younger generation of Iranian women.

other bustling places, green wristbands adorned every young, Westernized wrist—those educated, secular young people who wanted freedom from Islamic rule. Every news source was watching. Al Jazeera called it “the biggest unrest since the 1979 revolution.”

Bahman watches people venting their rage by setting things on fire and shouting “where is my vote” and “down with the dictator,” but he perceives these protestors as Westernized youngsters who have no real sense of revolution and who are not ready to die for freedom.⁸⁰¹ Bahman knows that all uprisings begin with hope; revolutions are a people’s movement until they are contaminated by religion, greed, and power. He confesses that the 1979 revolution was a good one, despite the purgatory that it turned into later. The Green movement, though, was “a roaring fire with a young kindling” to him, “much like a love affair that you now won’t last and so you burn through it all the more feverishly.”⁸⁰² To Bahman, who had seen a revolution where people sacrificed their lives and their families for a principle they called “Freedom,” a generation that “had their satellite dishes and nose jobs and fancy labels [...], access to ski resorts and Western music, ... education and some semblance of the internet” had nothing as a principle to die for.⁸⁰³ Bahman is aware of the fact that the poor were suffering the socioeconomic conditions in the county but, as he mentions, “it’s not the poor who make things happen. And the conscientious rich were only about their online-bazi.”⁸⁰⁴ It is the middle class educated intellectuals who are expected to make revolutions happen, according to Bahman. This is not a full view of the Green movement though. So many people died in the protests all over the country, people were arrested, tortured in prison, journalists were expelled, and they all did have a principle. The two different generations, those that were in their twenties back in 1979 and 2009 see revolutions differently because revolutions are not supposed to have the same form, given the fact that technology provides different platforms for the way people show their protest. These two generations have constantly been accusing each other for the revolutions and movements for which they have been responsible. Accusations usually hold dreams for freedom, liberty, and democracy while trusting powers in the East and West for support.

Another political/historical turning point in the region which appears in Nayeri’s memoir is the execution of Saddam Hussein. I mention this here because it would provide an interesting point of view in comparison to the Iraqi perspective. Niloo presents a trajectory of views on the execution of the tyrant, which is not only about Saddam Hussein, but very related to human rights issues in general:

After years spent apart, Kian and I sat beside our parents in a rented apartment in Plaza Major, watching footage of Saddam Hussein’s hanging. Just below our living room window, costumed Spaniards in colourful wigs were buying churros and beer and sparklers in the sunny square. First we watched the official video released by Iraqi television, then the shaky cell phone footage, the men shouting, taunting him. “Go to hell,” One said. Another begged, “Please the man is facing execution.” Then the dictator reciting some prayers and a sickening

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 133.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 133.

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 133.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., 133.

thump. Baba lit a cigarette and walked away, mumbling. “That wicked man is finally gone,” said Maman. “Praise Jesus.”⁸⁰⁵

The juxtaposition of the calm beautiful Plaza Major to the execution scene in the joint Iraqi-American military base Camp Justice is a defamiliarizing technique to attract the readers’ attention even more. Whilst in one part of the world, tourists are enjoying the sun and churros, in another part of the world, people are struggling regarding whether they should be happy about the death of the tyrant, or if they should be sympathetic and not wish him to go to hell. Pari, Niloo’s mom, reminds them of why the tyrant was hated by people so much:

If only they had killed him before he murdered and pillaged thousands of people, and bombed our best cities, and decimated our economy, and basically took a shit on the whole region for decades,” Maman said as she put on her coat... Baba looked at her his nose wrinkling. He shook his head. “why do you say such things? The man just died in the ugliest way. Why do you say this?”[...] “If you watched the news instead of memorizing old Sufi garbage a hundred different ways, you would know. The worst way to die is after torture, or amputation, or with mustard gas like those poor Kurds. The worst is a mass grave. That man died in an instant, called himself a martyr, and buried with his family.”⁸⁰⁶

The question is, even if the tyrant deserved death, was that retaliation based on an appropriate judgement? Was he executed after having been tried in the court with the right procedure? How is capital punishment justified in terms of morality? Pari remembers that Saddam Hussein has perpetrated the worst crimes against humanity, including torture, amputation, chemical bombings, mass grave burials etc. As an Iranian who shares the history of war with Iraq, Pari, and so many people like her believed Saddam Hussein deserved the execution. The ironic part of the story is that people tend to forget that Saddam Hussein was strongly backed by the Western powers in all of his crimes against humanity and that they only wiped him out when he turned against them. Excuses of weapons of mass destruction were used to invade the country, ruin the infrastructure, and execute a man, whilst he still claimed to be a martyr not a tyrant. In my observations, I have had interesting interactions with people in Sydney and London about this event. Whilst many Iraqis believe that he deserved worse than execution, some believe Saddam Hussein “at least” had a control over the country, different sects and religions, and managed their co-existence. However partially true this claim could be, it is interesting to see how historical amnesia works among people who experience constant suffering. It is not the case that Saddam Hussein kept the country together; rather, neo-coloniality, intervention, invasion, and occupation dissected the country to so many pieces that people wished for the return of the tyrant.

The final political and historical turning point in the memoir is the representation of 9/11 and it was perceived by Niloo, Bahman, and Kian, once the attacks took place. Niloo describes the event as follows:

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 227

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 229.

The next day, the planes hit the towers. Kian, baba, and I were having afternoon drinks in a pub near Hyde Park. We had grown accustomed to one another, and to our daily routines, and our pace had slowed—we spent a lot of time in pubs and cafes. Baba was distraught. He was on his feet as soon as the bartender turned on the news. A crowd gathered around barstools below the television but no one sat, and I mumbled translations in Baba's ear. "Ei vai," he whispered. "It is a madness." [...] "They'll bomb us," baba said like it was a finished thing. . . . "You think Hezbollah had no hand in this?" said baba, his eyes glassy and hollow. Despite our truncated relationship, I'd seen baba in the worst states, in drug-induced stupors, and in sadness and in loss. But I'd so rarely seen him scaped of hope. The man has hope stored up in his bones. "Well, think again. They're all helping each other over there. It's all the same religious insanity."⁸⁰⁷

As soon as Bahman sees the images on TV, he thinks of a war: "They'll bomb us." And he is right. As farcical as some of Bahman's points and his Finglish might sound (especially because he is high on Opium in most occasions throughout the work), he is the voice of reason. He can see beyond the surface of events even if some of his comments sound like conspiracy theory. Bahman is aware that Western hegemonic power is looking for excuses to bomb the Middle East. He is aware that it does not make much difference whether the attacks have been done by Hezbollah, or Al Qaida, or any other militant group, they would still be considered the same group of "Muslim Arabs." For Bahman, all religions are dangerous, whether it is Pari's Christianity and Jesus, or Islamic Republic of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. Politicized religion is greedy and to satiate that greed, it will not show mercy on anyone and anything. Bahman still prefers his own version of Carpe Diem life, which includes no politics, a lot of Rumi, Sufism, opium and wine; however, even he cannot evade having a political life, because at the end of the day, he has to submit to a refugee life, pack his suitcase and go to Turkey to seek asylum, once he is accused of having participated in the Green movement strikes and having housed protesters in his office.

For the protagonist of Nayeri's autofiction, Niloo, and for herself, political carework takes a transnational form. Although Niloo is not as radical as Sy, for instance, she is still a privileged refugee activist. To do political carework surrounding refugee rights, one needs to consider all stages of border crossing: the reason why these people are displaced, the ways in which they crossed the borders and their asylum-seeking cases are taken into consideration in the host country, and if asylum granted, the ways in which adaptability takes place in terms of assimilation and integration. Nayeri's political care comes through representation of the challenges that refugees and, most importantly, paperless refugees, have to face throughout their border crossing experience. Nayeri is unapologetic in saying that refugees do not have to be grateful all the time in order to satiate white virtue and benevolence. Although she highlights different historical processes and turning points, such as the Green movement in Iran, the 1979 revolution, the execution of Saddam Hussein and 9/11 attacks, her core political care lies in the influence of all these historical moments and processes on people's displacement, border crossing, and reception in the host countries. Reflecting on her own lived experience as a political refugee, Nayeri critiques Western liberal democratic practices and their duplicitous approach to

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., 182.

immigration and refugee rights. She shows that the white moralistic liberal systems contribute the most to the dehumanization of displaced subjects. Through story-telling, using a humanistic frame, and her unapologetic tone, Nayeri challenges the power of the hegemonic discourses that represent the righteous West as the saviour of the refugees and reminds the reader that refugees “have no debt to pay.”

7.4 When invisible women know politics

Jasmine Darznik’s *The Good Daughter* is one of the best examples of a decolonial feminist narrative. Jasmine’s political care presents itself in her critical perspective of the pre-revolutionary Iran, the Western intervention in Iranian politics, and feminist practice and care. Drawing on her mother’s experience, Jasmine portrays the feminist struggles of women in pre-revolutionary Iran, alternative feminisms, and feminist solidarities that have mostly been left out of the documented grand narratives of history. While Nayeri’s *Refuge* opts for a non-linear narrative, flash backs and flash forwards in contemporary history and focusing on post 9/11 time span, *The Good Daughter*’s setting is fashioned through temporal linearity, a wider time span as a historical concern and more investigation into historical roots of contemporary issues, a merit that *Lipstick Jihad* lacks.

Listening to Lili’s oral history records, Jasmine realizes that her grandmother’s household, despite the presence of her grandfather’s toxic masculinity and patriarchal attitudes towards women, is still run by women. Even during the worst historical times, such as the world war time, when people’s socioeconomic condition was below the poverty threshold, women had to manage the household in the most pragmatic way they could towards survival. As “oppressed,” “passive,” and “submissive” these women might seem to white Western liberal feminists, their act of carework and strategicness is contextually feminist to me. As caretakers of the family, they need to maintain their solidarity for a higher goal which is survival, even if they have disagreements with each other. With their lack of literacy, education, career, and economic capital, the way they have to strategize life is different and disputable at times. One of the examples of these strategic decisions is to marry girls of the family off to men older than them who can support those girls financially. In the current context, this kind of decision would be violence against women and an undermining of women’s human rights; however, in a context when there is no financial support for them in the family, no education, no basic welfare, marriage could have worked as a strategy of survival, despite all problematic aspects of it. *The Good Daughter* is a good example of a narrative that brings the grey areas of women’s rights and feminist practices into perspective. As disheartening as some events in the story are, neither does one feel like reading a narrative of victimhood, nor is the story a manifestation of ultimate resistance and successful resilience. The story simply portrays how historical moments and socio-economic conditions affect the ways in which individuals make decisions, how

women struggle towards survival, and how in all their contradictory feminist practices, they can achieve solidarity and practice carework.

There are a number of important historical and political turning points in history that this memoir hinges on and critically engages with. These events vary from the occupation of Iran during the Second World War to mandatory unveiling of women during the first Pahlavi period, to the 1979 revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war. Women are at the centre of all these events of course, struggling to maintain their presence in the society by achieving culture capital through education and labour force. To start, I refer to the Allied invasion of Iran and its decolonial feminist critique in the memoir:

In the years leading to the 1941 Allied invasion of Iran, when Soviet soldiers commandeered the northern provinces and British soldiers roamed the capital and controlled the oil fields to the south, the bread at Khanoom's house was often dotted with pebbles and splinters and the stews they ate were only rarely prepared with meat.⁸⁰⁸

The Allied invasion of Iran by the Soviets and the British is one of the examples of historical Western invasion and intervention in the region. Oil fields were controlled by the British forces since then until nationalization of oil industry by Mosadegh in 1951, which led to the coup in 1953 and therefore, the removal of the democratically elected prime minister and a series of more intense interventions afterwards. Whilst there was a noticeable drop in the quality of people's socioeconomic condition of life, due to what I insist on calling coloniality, women had to practice resistance and carework to save their families from starvation. Khanoom's household managed by women made the best of whatever they could find to feed everyone in the family. This is the context I was talking about earlier. When starvation is the main challenge in life, child marriage, despite sounding horrible, might be the only alternative. It is denial of coevalness if we judge those decisions based on the privileges that the general public enjoys at the current times. There is a context to the past decisions that shapes people's political decisions. Marriage could also be a political decision once it affects family as a society.

Jasmine critiques the mandatory unveiling of women as a "liberatory" movement in her memoir. Critiquing this liberatory movement is critiquing the Eurocentric idea of modernity, secularism as a value, and white imperial feminism's invasive decisions for Muslim women. Lili, Jasmine's mom, has documented her aunt's experience with unveiling, being attached to the royal family through Sohrab, Jasmine's father:

On the day the shah officially outlawed the veil in 1936 and ordered all the wives and daughters of his government ministers to appear before him unveiled, Zaynab accompanied Ismail Khan to the ceremony, wearing a two-piece skirt suit and a large feathered hat. Women were known to faint from terror in his majesty's presence and on the day that would be known as Women's Emancipation day many of the ladies in attendance sobbed in each

⁸⁰⁸ Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 17

other's' arms and covered behind walls. Zaynab, however, had drawn herself up to her full height, looked directly into Reza Shah's eyes and shaken his white-gloved hand with her own. ⁸⁰⁹

Unveiling was a decision that was made for women. Local Iranian women had no say in that. State feminists and Reza Shah decided together that women in Iran no longer needed to wear the headscarf and they had to dress in Western-style clothes to look modern.⁸¹⁰ Instead of fixing more fundamental issues caused by patriarchy, such as women's illiteracy and lack of presence in labour force, the first decision was to police their body.⁸¹¹ This issue, as it comes up in many microhistory narratives, like in Darznik's, inhibited many women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and more traditional and conservative social locations, to leave the household. If these women previously had the freedom of going for grocery shopping (and this would have probably been the only justifiable reason for getting a permission to leave the house), they would lose that bit of freedom too. Therefore, liberatory movements such as unveiling, are not liberatory for women of all social locations and walks of life. As Jasmine mentions, "Reza Shah would not be the last of Iran's rulers for whom engineering his country's future meant remaking its women, nor would he be the last to meet resistance on this front, but he'd done much to enflame the battle by outlawing the veil in 1936."⁸¹² Jasmine questions the fact that Western modernity, despite all claims of gender equity, engineers its agenda and pragmatism through women's bodies, as part of a colonialist power project, rather than benevolent care for underdeveloped nations.

Another example of decolonial feminist activism in this memoir is reference to the 1953 coup in Iran jointly operated by the U.S. and the U.K.:

[Lili] might have learned that while Iranians had lived on the ocean of oil for thousands of years, it was the British who first plunged a pipeline into it in the early 1900s. She might also have learned that for several decades Iranians had enjoyed scant revenue from their oil reserves but that two years earlier, in 1951, Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, had finally nationalized the country's oil. And, finally and most critically, she might have discovered that the chaos in the streets had been started as part of an effort to force the country's oil revenues Westward again.... In fact, though details of "operation Ajax" would remain sealed away for nearly fifty more years, the coup had been financed with American dollars and carried out by the CIA.⁸¹³

Documents about what was called Operation Ajax in the U.S and Operation Boot in the U.K. were released on the 60th anniversary of the coup⁸¹⁴ and the CIA admitted their role in the coup and the operation

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁸¹⁰ As Hamideh Sedghi mentions in her book, unveiling women by Reza Shah was an act towards "Emasculating the clergy through women's emancipation" (66) Reza shah's attempts in making a Westernized "strong state, thus, made women's autonomous activities obsolete as it exploited women's earlier efforts for its Westernization and centralization policies. This was manifested in a new, state-sponsored "feminism." It was through this 'imported' state feminism that new forms of policing of women's bodies took place during the first Pahlavi monarch. See in Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: Veiling, unveiling, and revealing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76

⁸¹¹ Educational reforms followed in the Westernization program later, yet, as Sedghi also highlights, "[they] did little to overcome discrimination against women. There is no evidence that women's entry into the educational sphere weakened the patriarchal structures of society." Furthermore, since wearing hijab was illegal at the time, a substantial number of women, mostly from lower middle class and working class backgrounds did not have the possibility of attending educational programs. See in Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran*, 72.

⁸¹² Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 43

⁸¹³ Ibid., 117.

⁸¹⁴ Documents can be retrieved from this link: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/>

which they called “the battle for Iran.” However, the role of the CIA in the Coup had always been public knowledge, at least in Iran. People knew it was not just conspiracy theory to believe that the US overthrew the democratically elected government of Mosadegh, despite the fact that they were already categorized as conspiracy theorists by the West. Iranians did not have much control over their politics, and once they resisted the Western intervention, they got repressed by the coup, and as a result, incarcerated and murdered. What is different about the representation of the coup in this memoir is the way Jasmine portrays it through Lili’s perspective, and traces the ways in which the coup affected Iranian women’s lives more specifically. Most historiographical macro-narratives represent this historical turning point from a male perspective, shedding light on how the coup affected the political and social conditions of the country but they do not much cover how everyday lives of women, especially the lives of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were influenced by these conditions. Political turmoil has a direct influence on the extent of violence against women, as it affects the degree of poverty, represses masculinity, and makes women more vulnerable against a variety of sources of oppression that already existed.

Another example representing Western intervention as a source of direct oppression against women in *The Good Daughter* is Sohrab’s death. Sohrab, Lili’s father, is killed in a hit and run accident perpetrated by an American residing in Iran. The event is described as follows:

No sooner had they dug a handful of soil from above Sohrab’s grave and passed it like kohl along their eyelids than they were called to appear at the American embassy. The man who’d struck Sohrab had been an attaché of the American government, one of dozens then living in Iran, and had likely been spirited out of the country within days of Sohrab’s death. Iranian law already granted foreigners immunity from government prosecution, but Lili and Nader had been summoned to Iran to sign a document waiving their individual rights to bring charges against the American attaché.⁸¹⁵

The juxtaposition of “a handful of soil,” “grave,” “the American government,” and “individual rights” in this passage evokes the relation between people’s individual rights over their life and their homeland in that historical era in Iran. The ritual of applying the grave soil along the eyelids is a ceremony for saying goodbye to dead person. In this context, it literally stands for a goodbye to Sohrab, but metaphorically represents saying goodbye to their individual rights over their life, death, and homeland under colonial rules. One of the colonial rules in place in Iran for many decades was Capitulation which, as Jasmine also describes, granted the foreigners in Iran immunity from prosecution once they committed a crime. A famous saying among Iranians was that Iranian citizens had a life less valuable than an American dog’s, even in their own country. What is documented in this memoir as a record of Sohrab’s death confirms the brutality of the capitulation as a colonial rule in Iran. After Sohrab’s death, a big family of women lose their breadwinner. It is not only Sohrab’s wife and his children, but also his mother, sisters, and his mistress Simin who lose the only man of their family. Whilst they are still

⁸¹⁵ Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 151.

mourning his death, Lili and her brother are summoned to the embassy to sign documents waiving their individual rights of bringing any charges against the American perpetrator. Therefore, the American attaché who has killed Sohrab is not only protected by the colonial rule of his country legally, but also informally through bullying the people who were related to the deceased man. There are not many everyday life stories of such forms of coloniality of power documented in history books. Jasmine's narration of such stories is her version of political activism and carework; by breaking the silence and representing Lili's broken silence surrounding her personal life, she shows how personal is political and how political is personal in this very context.

Jasmine's distance from politics in Iran is partly a result of her biracial identity and the way Lili introduced her to Iranian culture and history. There seems to be a wilful underrepresentation surrounding Lili's political affiliations. But in terms of her feminist activism, there are many references to the ways in which she and her colleague Maryam tried to change health conditions for many young women in low socioeconomic conditions whilst at that very time, paid labour for women had class-affiliated connotations:

While paid labour was still generally regarded as the fate of only the most unattractive or destitute of women, by the mid-sixties in some quarters of Tehran upper-class families had taken to boasting of their daughters' educational and professional achievements, shipping them off to university with parties as elaborate as weddings. Maryam had enjoyed no such support when embarking on her own career. As she was already handicapped by her own willfulness, or so her family judged her, they predicted that a professional life would seal her fate as a lifelong spinster.⁸¹⁶

As I discussed in the previous chapters, Lili was granted the chance to be educated because that was considered as the only way to save her from the stigma of being a divorcee. For Maryam, education was a way to enter the labour force and uplift her position in the socioeconomic hierarchy, given the fact that she also came from a working-class background. As part of the modernity project, education becomes popular among daughters of the upper-class families, which would also grant them a better marriage opportunity. Nonetheless, for women like Maryam that was not the case, because in her social location education would be considered as a qualification which would hold them from marriage and therefore, they would be considered as spinsters. Despite these attitudes, Maryam and Lili start their small clinic in the slum-dog areas of the city to help women, at a time when most doctors were male and women were only encouraged to gain education in certain "feminine" fields. Feminist activism could be deemed contradictory when certain lens is applied on the practices Lili or Maryam are involved in. Whilst Maryam is living with an addicted husband and she is the breadwinner of the family, and she has experienced different forms of violence in such an abusive relationship, she does not leave him, and instead she preoccupies herself more and more with the clinic to help women with pregnancy, family planning, contraception, and abortion if necessary. These contradictions arise from the reality of people's

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 222

lives and the contexts they are bound to inhabit. Lili practices the same form of feminist activism for other women from working class backgrounds, whilst she herself has been in an extremely abusive relationship, has suffered child marriage, rape, domestic violence, and even in her second marriage, she is suffering her husband's alcoholism. What Jasmine Darznik has done very well in this memoir is to represent the contradictions that many Iranian women had to face in their own lives and social practices, yet, not to surrender to the binary of victim/liberated woman. The type of resistance that is represented surrounding Lili's, Maryam's, Lili's Mom's and so many other women's lives in this memoir breaks the stereotypes the genre of pornography advertises for white shelves. This is the reason why I insist on using the realist theory; of all these contradictions, there arises some form of knowledge that forms the grey areas of cultural identities, the kind of knowledge that conflicts with mainstream knowledge of those identities, because it resists categorization. The narratives of daily lives of people are important, epistemically valid, and proving of the existence of alternative knowledges apart from those produced by discourses of hegemonic powers. Through these narratives, we understand women's resistance movement in Iran, which has been an ongoing process of politically personal whilst personally political indigenous practice.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁷ Jasmine makes a few references to political situation back in Iran; her account is not eye-witnessed but a result of what she sees on TV. Here are some examples: "When the news from Iran came on the television now, there was always a number that ran across the bottom of the screen. Ten days, forty-two days, a hundred days. The number rose and rose. The *shoolooqi* had a proper name by then—the Islamic Revolution—and the blindfolded men on the screen were called hostages." The image of Iran's Islamic revolution is entangled with the representations of hostage crisis. Even the term *shoolooqi* bears a degree of negative connotation in Persian; it means chaos, some mess that is not motivated by some purpose. See in Darznik, *Good Daughter*, 278. The other event she refers to is the Iran-Iraq war and she describes it through a humanistic frame: "Seven hundred and fifty thousand died that time, in that war. They died by bullets and rockets and grenades; by poisonous gases that seeped into their lungs and laid their bodies to waste; by mines that ripped flesh from bone as easily as it ripped soil from earth." See in Darznik, 288

Chapter Eight:

Liberation or Invasion? Democracy or Occupation?

Political Carework and Decolonial Transnational Activism in *Orange Trees of Baghdad*, and *City of Widows*

“Justice means making amends to the victims of the occupation and wars, taking responsibility for the damage to Iraq, from homes and schools, to roads and water plants. All the countries that participated in the war and in sanctions must take urgent action to help settle the millions of refugees and the displaced when they find their way home. “Prosecution of all those responsible for war crimes, human rights abuses, and the theft of Iraq’s resources must be carried out.” Haifa Zangana, *City of widows*

“I am used to the war, but I am afraid of dogs.” Qtd in Leila Nadir’s *Orange Trees of Baghdad*

“This war started out as a war on WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. When those were not found, and proof was flimsy at best, it turned suddenly into a “War against Terrorism.” When links couldn’t be made to Al-Qaeda or Osman Bin Laden... it turned into “Liberation.” Call it whatever you want—to me, it’s an occupation.” – (qtd from Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq*, 2005, 121)

“Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.” British Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, March 1917.

8.1 Introduction:

Transnational political activism among Iraqi writers is not only carework but a great deal of emotional labour. The political and historical turning points with which they engage from across the borders include both coloniality and authoritarianism. In this section, I look at transnational political activism arising from the life writing narratives of Leila Nadir and Haifa Zangana. I compare the ways in which these women engage with concepts of democracy, liberation, and occupation. Through comparison, I demonstrate the ways in which some Iraqi narratives of lived experience challenge colonial discourses, whilst some others justify coloniality under the buzz term of “liberation.” What I try to achieve in this section, and mainly in this research, is to show that contradictions within narratives and among them can build up a site of knowledge in itself; that is to say, for instance, when decolonial narratives are combined with colonial narratives, we as readers and critics can see the ways in which grand narratives justify oppression and micronarratives challenge them. Even the colonial micronarratives are telling of the hegemonic power of the grand narratives which justify imperialism, white hegemony, coloniality, and anything that results from that.

The main binary opposition that is addressed in the aforementioned narratives, and thus in this section, are invasion/occupation/ intervention/sanction as opposed to liberation/democracy. Writers like Haifa Zangana not only have a critical decolonial approach to Iraq’s contemporary history, but they also have a realist perspective which allows for compensation instead of revenge. In the epigraph mentioned above, Haifa re-defines the term justice for Iraqis: justice for Iraqis after years of oppression coming from local government and the international community means reconstruction of the country, settlement of the displaced refugees and

legal prosecution of those involved in war crimes, human rights abuses, and looting of Iraqi treasures. By calling for justice, not only does she critique the history of coloniality and the recent occupation of Iraq, but she also renders a realistic resolution to the international community to commit to some moral responsibility and make up for the chaos they have created in the region. In addition to that, Riverbend, the anonymous blogger whose blog got published under the title of *Baghdad Burning*, questions the 2003 invasion of Iraq which was justified under rhetoric such as ‘war on weapons of mass destruction’ or ‘war on terrorism’ and instead she names the war “occupation” which implies coloniality. Narratives of lived experience invite us to see the reality of war and its effects on people’s daily lives. Written by women, these narratives highlight the added violence against women, along with the human rights abuse that a war in the name of “the liberation of Iraqi women” brings to people’s lives. I begin this chapter by examining Leila Nadir’s *Orange Trees of Baghdad*, and then continue to Haifa Zangana’s *City of Widows*, both of which have their own concerns surrounding political activism and transnational carework.

8.2 Liberation through amputation: Pictorial testimonies of intervention in the city of orange trees

Leilah Nadir’s family memoir is a critical microhistory account of the contemporary political situation in Iraq. As I mentioned in previous chapters, the memoir starts, develops, and ends with the accounts of the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the American forces and their allies. Leila as an individual with a biracial Iraqi background feels morally and epistemically responsible to let the world know about the conditions in which Iraqis in Iraq are living under occupation. Although Leila never goes to Iraq, whilst yearning for a return to where she has understood through “post-memory”⁸¹⁸ to be home, she politically cares about Iraq. Being half Iraqi and British, she mentions that she feels like both “the aggressor and the victim,”⁸¹⁹ the conqueror and the conquered. Leilah, like Haifa, considers the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. as an illegal war, and their intervention as a colonial act. In this section, I show the ways in which Leila practices decolonial political activism as a form of carework for a fatherland that she has never visited.

One of the most recurrent themes in *Orange Trees* is the theme of war, intervention, invasion, and occupation. Leilah writes about aspects of the invasion and occupation that have not been represented by mainstream media and the macro-narratives of history. When the invasion breaks out, Leilah is in London with her father watching the war start under the name of liberation. The liberation, of course, leads to occupation, colonization, and looting of cultural and historical heritage of the country. Leilah writes:

My father and I are still in London for the “liberation” of Iraq. Horror follows horror; stories of destruction, killings and random violence seem to overflow the newspapers and television. In the anarchy that reigns after the invasion of Baghdad, the National Museum and the National Library and Archives are looted and burned. Centuries of precious literature, poetry, art and artifacts are wantonly destroyed within a matter of hours. We

⁸¹⁸ A term introduced by Hirsch, as introduced earlier. See Hirsch, “The generation of postmemory,” 103-128.

⁸¹⁹ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 34.

hear in bewildered disbelief the reports that the only government building the American soldiers were protected from looting was the Oil Ministry. This is the beginning of the occupation.⁸²⁰

The events that follow the invasion and occupation of Iraq, involving destruction and looting of archives, national museums and libraries and anything that is of a cultural nature, are a literal form of epistemicide, a murder of knowledge. Once the history of a nation is wiped out, new histories can be written for a people, like what Haifa Zangana mentions about the Western composition of the modern history of Iraq.⁸²¹ Unsurprisingly, the only government body that is saved and protected by the American soldiers is the Ministry of Oil, because oil is all that matters in the Middle East and all the reason why the wars break out in that region. During a conference in the Middle Eastern Studies in 2016 held in Australia, I heard a high-profile academic talking about the looting and destruction of cultural artifacts in Iraq by ISIS militants. While I had no doubts about the kind of violence he was referring to, I asked the first question during the Q&A: “what do you think about the looting and destruction that happened during the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the American forces and their allies?” The response I received was not convincing at all. They mentioned that the Americans tried to protect the cultural sites and the very little destruction that took place was done by mistake, whereas the destruction by ISIS militants is willful and for a specific purpose. Whilst this was claimed by an academic political scientist, I referred to the microhistory narratives (the conference was during my data collection) and found many references to the destruction of cultural sites, lootings, and anarchy that only took place during occupation. Not only was that the claim by people living inside Iraq, but they also mentioned the loss of civilian lives during occupation. One example is mentioned by Leilah:

My father couldn't understand why the Americans hadn't put a curfew in place to control the looting and protect the citizens. The message we took from this and from all the other acts of reckless violence was that if the invading soldiers were indifferent to priceless artefacts of human history, what value would they place on the lives of the Iraqis they were supposed to be liberating? Any twinges of joy we felt at the end of Saddam Hussein's appalling reign were stifled by the terrible fear that those who would replace him would not end in terror as they had claimed. The one impossible dream Iraqis had nurtured for decades, the end of Saddam's tyranny, was finally coming true. But instead of relief, it was bringing more and more pain in its wake.⁸²²

The presence of the American forces in Iraq ironically added to the violence and insecurity people were feeling. Leilah's aunts cannot even make a phone call from Baghdad to describe the situation. Phones, electricity, and water have been shut down and every minute of a telephone call costs people ten dollars. Aunt Lina, who is known to be the strongest woman in Ibrahim's family and, according to everyone in the family, had never cried at the face of destruction, two wars, and human loss, finally cries and finally admits to being terrified. Not having left the city while bombardments were going on, Lina is shocked to see the city in a new

⁸²⁰ Ibid., 111.

⁸²¹ See in Zangana, *City of Widows*

⁸²² Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 111-112.

state, and she says: “It’s not my city anymore.”⁸²³ This is how liberation is felt and lived by Iraqis who experienced the occupation and invasion, and, Leilah, by drawing on her family’s lived experience, shows another face of liberation to the Western world.

Leilah mentions that the destruction of Iraq’s cultural institutions “reverberated around the world as profoundly as the loss of the British Museum would.”⁸²⁴ Of course the loss of British Museum would be a huge loss, since all the historical colonial achievements of the British Empire are held there. Colonialism has always justified the looting of cultural artifacts from different parts of the world under the excuse of protecting historical treasures.⁸²⁵ Leilah believes that the grief that the international community felt over the loss of the cultural and archeological treasures in Iraq might have given them a sense of how Iraqis felt about “the loss of their country to foreign occupation.”⁸²⁶ I believe this is too optimistic, though. The international community knows that Iraq is the “cradle of civilization,”⁸²⁷ however, that does not imply that they have the knowledge and lived experience of the loss of home. They might be able to empathize, but they can never feel what Amal feels: “I feel like someone has come into my house, raped me, and stolen everything and burned down my house.”⁸²⁸

The other side of occupation that Leilah represents are the casualties resulting from the invasion, underrepresented by the international media. Leilah’s friend Farah, as a photographer and political activist, decides that she wants to represent the Iraqi victims, no matter how hard it would be:

Her [Farah’s] plan is to find Iraqi victims of war and photograph them. The occupation has not only taken over a country, but has also occupied Iraqis’ bodies, leaving bullets lodged in their flesh or confiscating their arms and legs forever. It has consumed their lives. She knows that there are thousands of Iraqi victims, yet the West doesn’t see them depicted in the newspapers because it is so dangerous for most journalists to get those photographs and also to get newspapers to publish them. Now the US media is filled with wounded US soldiers. Farah feels that the US audience is only “seeing” part of the story. No editors will help to fund her trip as they don’t believe she will be able to get the story of wounded Iraqis.⁸²⁹

Journalism and memoir writing in this context turn into weapons of resistance and fighting epistemicide. While the invading countries censor the news, only represent the side of the story in which they

⁸²³ Ibid., 112.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁸²⁵ During the occupation, Leilah comes across an article on new paper which is quite shocking for her. She describes the story as follows: “They [The Americans] are using ancient Babylon as a military base. Saddam Hussein was always criticized because he built a monstrous replica of the original on top of the remains. But this is worse; there is no recognition of the immense value to humanity of this place. Why would they choose it as a base? Ignorance or else something more vicious and deliberate?” See in Ibid., 183.

Leilah is not certain if establishing military base next to cultural heritage sites such as Ancient Babylon is just arising out of ignorance. Even if it is ignorance, it is willful; since the American forces could have easily sought advice from American archeologists, geologists, geographers, etc., about the feasibility of establishing military bases in those locations.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁸²⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 204.

are victorious, and deny the loss of civilian lives, Farah decides to take the risk, go Iraq, and take photos of the Iraqi victims of war and their lives. Chapter fourteen of *Orange Trees* titled “Portraits of the Wounded” is one of the most illuminating and heartbreaking chapters of the work. The chapter is polyphonic, narrating the stories of the wounded victims of invasion with photos illustrating their present condition. All men in the photos have one or two legs missing. One is a young boy whose car the Americans have blasted by gunfire on May 5, 2003.⁸³⁰ The other man in the photo is a father with one leg and one arm next to his daughter, whose car has been run over by an American military vehicle.⁸³¹ Another photo is of a young man in his mid-twenties who has lost an arm and both legs. He has been accidentally driving on the New Baghdad Bridge when a blast happens, intending to target the Iraqi police. They never find his hand. Seeing the guy is despairing, Farah takes him to the Green Zone so that he can be examined by the American military doctors. They give him hope that he can receive prosthetics for his lost limbs. However, the man never receives them.⁸³² These are only a few of the stories Farah narrates, and only a spec of dust in the world of stories out there regarding Iraqi lives under invasion and occupation. Farah Nosh’s most moving story is about a woman, which she narrates in a news article:

In 2009, I photographed a woman who, through an American airstrike, lost one of her legs, her sister and her unborn child, she was 9-months pregnant...I spent a lot of time with her, at her home. She had tried to commit suicide a few times. She just broke down crying out of pure depression and sadness. When I look at her photograph, it definitely stirs a lot of emotion for me. I really feel like her tragedy is Iraq’s tragedy.⁸³³

Of all the stories of war victims that I have read so far, the above-mentioned story is the most compelling. The way a civilian woman has been affected by the American airstrike, losing a leg, a sister, and her unborn baby is telling of the severity of war as an invasion and not as “liberation.” Like what Amal says, this invasion feels like rape for women like her, like the ones Farah Nosh documents. The wounded woman, whose name we do not know, symbolizes homeland. Farah Nosh metonymizes the wounded woman for the tragedy of Iraq. Now, she is not only an Arab woman who has lived a war, but also disabled, in an ableist world. Iraq’s tragedy is feminine, like a woman losing a child when she is nine-months pregnant.

Leilah Nadir skillfully weaves together stories, pictures, and memories from different people to represent the severity of invasion as violence and oppression and not “liberation.” The legs and arms lost in US military blasts and shootings cannot all have happened by mistake, despite the fact that the American government apologized every once in a while. Apology can only be accepted, as Haifa Zangana eloquently

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 219.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 220.

⁸³² Ibid., 224-225.

⁸³³ Nate Clark, “Farah Nosh, Canada’s War photographer,” in *Huffington Post*. Feb 06 2015, accessed: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nate-clark/farah-nosh-canadas-war-ph_b_7485872.html

mentions, when it is followed by justice. Leilah benefits from local voices that are able to update her about eye-witness accounts.⁸³⁴

According to local voices, suicide bombings and sectarian conflicts were results of the invasion and occupation. Karim tells Leilah that the situation in Iraq is complete anarchy. He expresses that since the occupation “more and more suicide bombers have been blowing themselves up in Iraq. The frequency is overwhelming....there were no suicide bombers in Iraq under Saddam.”⁸³⁵ Once havoc becomes the norm in the country anarchy follows, and death becomes an everyday fact. Suicide bombing is a very contentious issue, as it has been assigned as a Shiite religious belief and practice by many Western analysts. Don DeLillo, the American novelist, refers to Shiite Iranian men having keys to heaven hanging on their necks and going for suicide bombing attacks in one of his novels, *Falling Man* (2007).⁸³⁶ This is believed to be an Islamic practice, and much of the discourse surrounding terrorism being an Islamic practice arises from such fantasies. Such discourses have fed Islamophobia so well that even Muslims themselves are sometimes scared of seeing a brown man who looks like a practicing Muslim with a bag at a metro station or in crowded places. By contrast, Karim affirms that suicide bombing is not only a non-religious practice, but also very much a result of colonial anarchy, invasion, and occupation of Iraq. The situation is so dangerously hopeless that one of Karim’s neighbors says to him, “I wish the Americans would hurry up and put Saddam Hussein on trial, find him innocent and bring him back to sort out this chaos.”⁸³⁷ This might sound like a joke, however, the implicit meaning in this statement is that only dictatorship and despotism would be able to put a stop on such an anarchy. All that people have experienced for decades is oppression, either from inside the regime or outside; therefore, the local despot might render better solutions for such havoc in the country.⁸³⁸ The juxtaposition of “Saddam Hussein” as a metonym of despotism and “trial” as a metonym of justice, “innocen[ce],” and “chaos” demonstrates the complex relationship among different drives towards democracy and dictatorship, liberation and occupation, and nationalism and colonialism. The chaos caused by the imposition of pseudo-democracy and invasive liberation is so intense that, in the minds of some Iraqis, only despotism can put a stop to it. The irony in this statement is strong and truly cutting.

⁸³⁴ Karim, as I have mentioned him in the previous chapters is one of these voices. Karim has witnessed and heard about many random shootings that took place in Baghdad during the occupation. One of the stories is narrated as follows: “Suddenly, they saw an American tank up the road,” Karim continues, “and without warning, the tank began to shoot at the car with the huge tank machine gun. Instantly, the father and their three children were killed. My friend’s daughter survived and leaped out of the car, waving at the soldiers to stop.” The soldiers started shooting at her. “She ran through the shooting and found a house. It was a miracle she survived. She was taken back to her father’s home. Her clothes were soaked with blood. She was like someone who had lost her mind.” See in Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 124.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 140.

⁸³⁶ DeLillo, Don. *Falling man*. Simon and Schuster, 2007.

⁸³⁷ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 140

⁸³⁸ In the recent protests in Iran (2017-18), which I personally observed, one of the slogans people used and marched on the streets was to invoke Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi king, who is well-known for his version of despotism. People, especially working class protesters who are mainly protesting for grave socioeconomic reasons believe that only a despot could bring justice to this country and to send the current system on trial. As mythical as it might sound, historical amnesia comes into effect when people are experiencing critical socioeconomic downfall.

Sectarianism has also been used by imperialists as an excuse to “liberate” Iraq and take their flawed version of law, order, and democracy to countries like Iraq. However, Sectarianism, according to Karim, has exacerbated to a new level in Iraq since the invasion. Leilah tells Karim that North Americans want to know the reasons why there is a civil war in Iraq and why Shiites and Sunnis hate each other. Karim has alternative knowledge about the civil war in Iraq. As Leilah writes:

[Karim says]: “Oh yes, there is a civil war in Iraq, but it is very complicated.” He sighs. “It’s not just one part of the population against another, as it was in Lebanon, for example. Families are intermarried, Shia and Sunni, but then outsiders are coming and telling the Sunnies to move out of one neighbourhood and into another, and then telling the Shias the same. The people are becoming divided, but it is hard to divide families completely. It is so difficult because most people have some uncles that are Shia and some that are Sunni. Are they going to kill their own uncles? But there are death squads operating and people have to obey them because they are terrified for their lives. These differences were never as important in the past.”⁸³⁹

Thus, the civil conflict in Iraq is not a simple civil war, as the West might think. All the chaos in Iraq could only be reduced into civil conflict, if only epistemic ignorance and epistemic violence is operating in this context. As Karim claims (and we will see later in Haifa’s memoir as well), the conflict cannot be reduced into a Shiite/Sunni hate problem only, since these religious sects have been living with each other for centuries before, under different forms of despotism. There are so many contributing factors to this situation, including the division the American forces brought into the country via invasion and allocation of suburbs to different sects. Another factor according to Karim is “Iranian militias,” who, according to Karim’s local informants, “have killed over two hundred Iraqi pilots from the Iraqi army.”⁸⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Karim believes that “the Americans are only protecting themselves.”⁸⁴¹ He maintains:

There is no government in Iraq, only in name. Nobody can do anything without the American ambassador giving his approval. They have to take his advice. And they want what is best for them only, we know that now. We know they are building the biggest US embassy in the world here, it will be over a hundred acres. Why do they need this?⁸⁴²

Karim questions the legitimacy of the American presence in his country. He believes the Americans are going to stay in Iraq because “they are working for their interests” there. Karim cannot guess what the American policy is but he is certain that “it is a big plan for the whole Middle East, [and] it has just begun with Iraq.”⁸⁴³ The big plan, obviously is not just to liberate the people of Iraq and instate democracy in the region, however, as Leilah mentions, the US and UK government use “free election” and “democratic representative government” as a proof of the “correctness of the invasion.”⁸⁴⁴ As long as the everyday life stories of the

⁸³⁹ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 244.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

civilians and their lived experience accounts are not part of mainstream knowledge, democracy and elections as Western liberal values are used as excuses for intervention. This is the savior discourse that I have been tracing in my narratives and, as demonstrated above, in many microhistory accounts about contemporary Iran and Iraq, the white saviour attitude is critiqued, decolonized, and problematized as an axis of oppression.

Regarding the occupation of Iraq, Leilah mentions that “the US want[ed] to be seen by the world as invited guests of the Iraqis rather than occupiers. But they [were] barely bothering to cosmetically change the face of who is ruling Iraq.”⁸⁴⁵ If they can justify themselves based on an invitation and the free will of Iraqis demanding their presence, then occupation is liberation; it is a favor to local communities.⁸⁴⁶ Occupation and colonization have many trends in common. The occupier and colonizer most often justify their presence based on good will and moral responsibility. The grounds for moral responsibility in the context of the invasion of Iraq were interpreted through “invitation.” Since whiteness is associated with virtue and morality, the white savior can always use moral obligation as an inherently “good” reason to justify colonial intentions, such as the war in this context.

8.2.1 Is free election equal to democracy?

As mentioned at the end of the previous section, one of the most contentious justifications surrounding the invasion of Iraq is the pretext of democracy and free elections.⁸⁴⁷ Leilah goes to Beirut at the time of elections, planning to drive to Baghdad and see things for herself, like one of those trips her family used to have in the past. However, she is advised by everyone in and out of Baghdad not to go to there, firstly because it is not safe there yet, and secondly because, as a Westerner, she would put the locals in danger of being considered as collaborators.⁸⁴⁸ Leilah follows the elections in Baghdad from Beirut with a very critical perspective. Iraq’s first election in fifty years takes place under occupation and curfew to elect Iraqi National Assembly, meanwhile, people are not allowed to drive in Baghdad and that makes participation difficult. As Leilah analyses:

The occupation and curfew mean that many people can’t or don’t vote. And that most candidates running for office are too afraid to show their faces. Even the legality of elections under occupation is unclear, but the Western media is in full gear, reminding people of the historic occasion and that no election is perfect. The

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁸⁴⁶ For Iraq’s Governing Council, The Americans nominated signatories who were mostly Iraqi exiles and therefore, highly distrusted by local Iraqis. This is why people did not trust the government, according to Karim. He explains that once the climate of political distrust developed further, kidnapping of intellectuals, writers, doctors, businessmen and other privileged groups began in Iraq and because there was not a strong law and government in place and people did not know who the kidnappers were and whom they could trust with crime reports.

⁸⁴⁷ Leilah critiques the ignorance surrounding the initiation of war under the name of democracy very frequently throughout her memoir. She also makes a sarcastic comment about the version of democracy that the Americans chose for themselves: “On November 2, 2004, despite all the lies that the Bush administration had told regarding the war, despite the slow realization that there were no weapons of mass destruction, that the evidence to go to war had been fabricated, and that it was not helping to bring democracy to Iraqis, fifty million Americans voted to re-elect George W. Bush.” See in Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 150.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., 167.

television shows ecstatic Iraqis voting for the first time. So far there has only been one bombing at the polling station. I find out later that two hundred and fifty people died in violence that day.⁸⁴⁹

The analysis above demonstrates the ways in which forceful liberation can end in more violence. As far as Western forces are concerned, an election is the epitome of democracy and once held, the mission of liberation is accomplished. Meanwhile, the question is whether it is legal to hold elections in a country under occupation and if occupiers have the right to decide on instating curfews. Leilah problematizes the quality and security of polling stations and the shocking information here is the number of people killed in bombings on the election day. The documentation of these numbers of casualties and the reasons of their death is an epistemic responsibility for Leilah, as she knows Iraqi individuals are just a number when represented in Western media. The state of violence after the invasion is so critical that death has been normalized for Iraqis. These are the factors that lead Leilah to question her eligibility to vote as a moral responsibility:

For many Iraqis, it is the first time that they have ever voted freely. Even, I am eligible to vote, despite having never been to the country, because my father is Iraqi... But I have decided not to. I don't believe in these elections, don't see how I have a right to vote when I have never stepped foot in the place and when many Iraqis within the country live in areas that are too violent to allow them to get to the polling stations. Besides, to me, voting would mean supporting or giving legitimacy to a government that has been created out of violence and killing wrought by the invasion.⁸⁵⁰

Political participation in terms of voting and as a form of carework becomes disputable in Iraq's 2005 elections. Leilah expresses her concern surrounding the morality of her political participation. She does not see voting from overseas as a moral practice, because first, she has never been to Iraq, she has never lived there, and she has never suffered with people during all the tumultuous times, therefore, she does not feel like her vote should be given legitimacy. This differs from Azadeh, who thinks breathing the polluted air of Tehran with Tehranis legitimizes all her views about democracy and political participation in Iran, for instance. Leilah acknowledges her privilege as a Westerner who enjoys a social location distinct from local Iraqis'; she can see that she gets to have a better chance of voting than Iraqis inside Iraq because she enjoys the security of living outside the borders of Iraq and being in Beirut on the election day. The second reason why Leilah does not morally feel comfortable about voting is the fact that voting would legitimize a democracy that has been brought forth through violence and at the cost of Iraqi lives, culture, and heritage. Thus, for Leilah, questioning the legitimacy of this imposed democracy and not participating in it is an act of political care. On the other hand, as mentioned before, Leilah's social location as a Christian, half British half Iraqi, living in Vancouver, grants her the privilege of critiquing and choosing not to vote. But Iraqis in Iraq have to come up with a solution for the anarchy that has made their lives very unstable and at risk. Furthermore, the Western media has run the

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., 166.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 166-167

sensational propaganda of democracy so well that many Iraqis feel grateful about elections.⁸⁵¹ Leilah overhears some conversations back in Damascus about the elections, and she describes them as follows:

I listen to the gratitude the Iraqi feels to the international community, and I think that this is how a people would truly express being liberated from the tyranny of a ruthless dictator. And yet, the war has killed so many, destroyed so many lives and undermined the West in the eyes of so many Arabs. Damascus is full of Iraqis fleeing violence and terror. The idea of liberating a people and giving them freedom and democracy was so noble, and yet what was happening outside of the green zone in Baghdad bore no resemblance to the beautiful ideals being expressed at the next table. Iraqis deserved to live in freedom and democracy, and yet the very invasion that was done in their name was creating anarchy and fear in their society, every day moving it further away from the possibility of a peaceful future.⁸⁵²

Leilah describes the cycle of tyranny and chaos very well here. People are grateful because they have been “liberated” from the rule of the despot, but soon after, they realize despotism has never left their homeland, but also other forms of violence have been added to what they experienced before. War is ruthless, and Iraqis, of all people, know how brutal war is, having lived under wars and sanctions for decades. The freedom and democracy which Western liberalism propagates and exports to places like Iraq is instigated by violence; therefore, it is intrinsically wrong and contradictory. A freedom that is not asked for and is imposed on people refutes their “agency” and that in itself is a violation of human rights. The dire fact in this excerpt is the reference to Damascus as a place of refuge for Iraqis who have escaped the violence of the war and terror as a result of the anarchy. In less than a few years, Syrians who settled Iraqi refugees post 2003 onwards, turned into refugees themselves, crossing the borders in the most lamentable way.

Towards the end of the memoir, Leilah makes a note of another contradictory and lamentable outcome of the invasion:

What an irony that George W Bush a proclaimed Christian , has hastened the demise of Christianity in Iraq by his ill-conceived and illegal war. Now we watch as Syria has been enfolded in bloody conflict for two years, and the Iraqi refugees that fled Iraq for Syria are often in the surreal position of fleeing Syria for Iraq, hardly a haven.⁸⁵³

The violence of war does not only affect Muslims in Iraq, but also Christians. If the aim of invasion was to liberate people who were oppressed by their religion and culture (as the savior discourse claims), then Christians have ironically been oppressed by their religion under the name of liberation as well. The point here is that religion is just a political excuse when hegemonic powers are after domination. This is why having a reading of power is essential when one is looking at racial and

⁸⁵¹ This goes back to the gratitude complex that I discussed in the previous chapter. Despotism is also another contributing factor for people to be grateful to any system that replaces that, even if the new regime is even more despotic by nature.

⁸⁵² Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 184-185

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, 326

religious oppression. The anarchy of an illegal war and occupation led to a massive displacement of Christians, Assyrians, and so many other religious identities in Iraq.

The arrest and execution of Saddam Hussein was another liberatory practice which did not end in the liberation of Iraqi people, but rather their humiliation. Unlike the dominant representation of this historical turning point, *Leilah* documents the capture of Saddam Hussein in a more humanitarian perspective:

To see a figure so powerful who had tyrannized his people for so long, suddenly reduced to a bearded old man hiding in desperation in a hole the size and shape of his future grave, and then paraded on international television having his teeth examined like an animal, is distressing.... Saddam's humiliation symbolizes the humiliation of Iraq. Iraqis are no longer in control; the Americans are. It is a return to seventy years earlier when they were occupied by the British, before Iraqis had gained their true independence in 1958. Now they have lost it again. If someone as seemingly powerful and secure as Saddam could fall so far, no one was safe.⁸⁵⁴

As *Leilah* mentions, many Iraqis, of course, hated Saddam Hussein; however, they demanded a just trial for him run by Iraqis themselves. The dehumanization of Saddam Hussein and his reduction to an animal never ameliorated the pain people had felt under his tyranny. In fact, when oppressors are punished like this, a sense of sympathy arises among people.⁸⁵⁵ Saddam's humiliation represented the extent to which the agency and freedom of Iraqi people was undermined through invasion and occupation. It also represented the tyranny of more hegemonic powers, namely imperialism and coloniality, which would have no mercy on civilian lives.

8.2.2 Sanctions are breaking our back!

Leilah's concern about the sanctions and their effect on human rights reaches its climax in chapter twelve of the memoir, titled, "The Death of Lina." Aunt Lina, Ibrahim's aunt, is probably one of the few relatives that still lived in Baghdad and now she is dead due to an alleged "neurological disorder" that was never diagnosed.⁸⁵⁶ Lina, as the strongest woman in the family, according to *Leilah's* relatives, was the live contemporary Iraq, and therefore her death was caused by history:

Her life had spanned over seven decades and yet she was born under British occupation and died under the American occupation. Was the occupation responsible for her death? Were the sanctions responsible? Sanctions had caused the doctors to flee the country, hospitals to become dilapidated and antiquated, and the medicines to become scarce. The health system, which had been one of the best in the Middle East, was in tatters by the end of the Gulf war and sanctions. The US invasion and occupation had only exacerbated the situation. The reconstruction of hospitals still had not happened.⁸⁵⁷

This short personal narrative turns into a politically critical account of the intervention and sanctions. Lina's disease was never diagnosed because there was no adequate medical assistance in Baghdad after the

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., 137-8

⁸⁵⁵ Another view of Saddam's arrest was represented in *Refuge* with different responses from Bahman and Pari, which I analysed in the previous chapter.

⁸⁵⁶ Nadir, *Orange Trees*, 194.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 193

invasion. All those years under sanctions, medicine and surgical devices were not allowed into Iraq and Iraqis lived under critical shortage of medical assistance. Leilah was not able to see Lina before her death because of the consequential anarchy of the invasion and occupation. When she expresses her frustration at injustice in general and sanctions in particular, Ibrahim tells her: “don’t worry about the things you can’t do anything about... only worry about things that you have the power to change.” Leilah realizes that this is a luxury to be able to worry about injustice, get angry, and feel helpless, because you cannot sort things out.⁸⁵⁸ On the other hand, Ibrahim has always made decisions “based on external situations that were too large and beyond his control to worry about.” An immigrant can only focus on what they can control; dealing with injustice would be too ambitious since injustice is the reality of an immigrant’s life as “other.”

The extent of sanctions imposed on Iraq, according to Leilah, is nothing close to what is represented on media. Anti-sanction movements were transnationally active, protesting against the devastating effects of sanctions on Iraqi lives. Leilah is informed by her aunts that the scarcity of “cancer medicines” and “basic chemicals and foods,”⁸⁵⁹ has been devastating for an average Iraqi. Leilah is aware of the politics of representation:

Western newspapers hardly covered the story even though these were the most draconian sanctions ever imposed on a country and were responsible for the deaths of a million people and the total disintegration of Iraqi civil society. The sanctions were an attempt to prevent Saddam Hussein from developing his weapon arsenal; instead, the average Iraqi was impoverished while Saddam continued trying to prove his power by building palaces and monuments to himself with funds from illegal oil smuggling.⁸⁶⁰

Leilah’s view of sanctions is informed by family members’ testimony and Farah’s, who has been going back and forth to Iraq as a photo journalist to cover the effects of sanctions on civil society. Sanctions are supposed to pressure systems of governance to comply with international laws and human rights values; however, as Leilah mentions in the excerpt above, they were not effective on Saddam Hussein’s policies and international behavior, and they instead disintegrated Iraqi civil society and brought forth more and more violations of human rights. Lived experience narratives grant a human face to sanctions as human rights violation. Although sanctions are justified with the pretext that they pressure governments to treat their people in a more humane way, civil society believes that systems of power always find a way out to protect themselves. Even the issue of class here determines the extent to which civil society is affected by sanctions. A substantial percentage of Iraqis who could afford migration were forced to migrate due to the destructive effects of sanctions. Many of those who stayed were already situated in lower socioeconomic conditions and therefore, sanctions affected them even more substantially. The other ironic fact here is that the war, as mentioned earlier,

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 192.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 125.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 126.

was justified based on Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction; once the invasion took place, the Americans realized it was a mistake and WMD were non-existent. They then diverted the attention from war to the success of years of sanctions (the fact that Iraq did not have WMD was a proof that sanctions succeeded in putting a stop on any technological development).⁸⁶¹ Thus, none of these human rights violations were framed in a humanitarian perspective; instead they were all framed as acts following the greater goal of liberation of a people from the tyranny of a despot, and bringing forth universal peace and justice.

The infrastructure of the country had already been destroyed by years of sanctions, and war only exacerbated the situation for Iraqis. Karim, Leilah's cousin who has lived in Iraq all these years through sanctions and invasion, views the occupation as neo-colonization. He tells Leilah that "Americans came to Iraq for oil."⁸⁶² He is convinced that the Americans have taken over all of "Saddam's two hundred palaces that were filled with gold and money" and they have not paid for the oil Iraq has sold them. He mentions that "he can't believe that still the Americans have not restored anything: no power grids, no sewage or water treatment, no telephones. He says this is why there is resistance to the occupation; after the Gulf war, Iraqis had all of these things operational very quickly."⁸⁶³ Karim compares Iraq under sanctions with "liberated" Iraq which is under occupation and states that Iraq is thirty years behind the world due to the destruction of the war. He strongly believes that the sanctions were completely useless with regards to the system because meanwhile that Iraqis did not have access to university textbooks due to sanctions, the despotic system still managed to import luxury goods for Saddam's palaces.⁸⁶⁴ Karim's critique of the sanctions contributes to decolonial knowledges. When university textbooks are sanctioned, the access to universal contemporary knowledges is cut off, and indigenous knowledges cannot travel across borders. Iran and Iraq have been dealing with sanctions on knowledge for a long time,⁸⁶⁵ and once they have developed indigenous knowledge (for instance nuclear energy), it has been shut down by international institutions because it is always assumed that these knowledges are dangerous once they are in the hands of authoritarian regimes.

Another problem arising from sanctions is the division they bring within the political communities inside these countries, and the division between the nation and the government. People protest against the system when sanctions are breaking their backs and they get even more repressed by the regimes of power in the most violent ways (one example would be the green movement in Iran and the recent protests in small

861

862 133

863 (ibid, 133)

864 135

865 I'll add auto-ethnographical note on my own experience of doing my master's in English literature with no primary and secondary sources and how difficult it was to have access to journal articles and books. Yes, good idea, but maybe also add referencess to published sources giving more information on "sanctions on knowledge" and, if possible, statistical information on their impact?

towns of Iran in 2017-18). Therefore, as Karim also maintains, sanctions only affect civil society; they temporalize spaces and therefore lead to a denial of coevalness. Iraqis are living the life of thirty years back according to Karim because the space has been sterilized due to severe sanctions. Simply put, sanctions are human rights violation.

8.3 We don't need no liberation! The problematics of speaking about oppression

Haifa Zangana's *City of Widows* is one of the strongest critiques of coloniality, imperialism, and intervention. Drawing from Iraqi women's lived experience testimonies and her own, Haifa builds up a decolonial feminist microhistory narrative which challenges the dominant Western narrative of liberation. Compared to Leilah Nadir's *Orange Trees of Baghdad* which is mostly a family microhistory narrative, *City of Widows* is the history of Iraqi women's resistance movements before and after the invasion of Iraq, and the ways in which their oppression under the Baathist regime was coopted by imperial liberatory discourses. I start with Haifa's representation of NGOs and her critique of white imperial feminism in relation to Iraqi women's liberation and edification of democracy. In her introduction Haifa describes her intentions in writing this book:

The US-UK catastrophic adventure has been shrouded by the old colonial phrase "liberators not conquerors," and by the new imperial lie of "establishing democracy." Both require the rewriting of Iraqi modern history, a process in which Iraqi people, women in particular, are often invisible or portrayed as victims. I have written this book to challenge this neocolonial misrepresentation.... This is also an attempt to clarify how Arab and Muslim women, particularly in Iraq, continue to shape our modern history in response to the devastating situation they find themselves in due to external and homegrown challenges. It is a story of tremendous suffering and sacrifice, of courage and triumph, and also of hope and humanity.⁸⁶⁶

Haifa's intention in writing this book is clear. Not only does she challenge the neo-colonial and imperial interventions in the name of liberation, but she also highlights the role of Iraqi women and their resistance movements in shaping the modern history of Iraq. *City of Widows* is one of the most prominent examples of decolonial feminist epistemologies I have read so far. The relation between coloniality and gender politics in the Middle East has been emphasized by the writer to demonstrate how narratives of victimhood could be coopted into dangerous apparatus and be used as pretexts for wars and interventions. She also accentuates the significance of lived experience narratives in challenging the colonial co-optations of the struggles of Iraqi women. Haifa's political activism and carework comes through writing, and her weapon is her pen. Her vision is intersectional, taking into account Iraqi women's social location (which is formed at the intersection of their gender, ethnicity, religion, class, ability/disability, sexual orientation, generation, etc.) when looking at their resistance against homegrown and external colonial oppression.

⁸⁶⁶ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 21

Haifa stresses that the rhetoric of liberation of Iraqi women and reducing them to victims of oppression was a “colonial feminist”⁸⁶⁷ excuse which was far-fetched from the reality of Iraqi women’s struggle. As she maintains:

Iraqi women have been among the most liberated of their gender in the Middle East. They have a long history of political activism and social participation since the nineteenth century, having taken part in the struggle against colonial domination and in the fight for national unity, social justice and legal equality throughout the twentieth century.⁸⁶⁸

Iraqi women had started their struggle against patriarchy and colonization years before the invasion, and their struggle was of an intersectional nature, because it involved fighting the violence caused by both patriarchal practices of Iraqi men and the colonial interventions and domination of the British.

Iraqi women and their achievements throughout history have been “the beacon of hope for all women in the Middle East.”⁸⁶⁹ Once these histories of resistance as alternative epistemic bodies get erased from universal epistemologies, stereotypical imaginaries are replaced and, in this context, Iraqi women (also Iranian women in this context) are represented as disempowered passive victims of patriarchal, religious, cultural, and authoritarian oppressions.

Apart from Zangana’s strong testimony on the condition of women in Iraq after colonial invasion, many decolonial and anti-colonial feminist scholars have also mentioned the appropriation of the woman question by colonial projects. As Abu Lughod states, among other critics, prior to the occupation, Iraqi women had enjoyed “the highest levels of education, labour force participation, and even political involvement in the Arab world.”⁸⁷⁰ Abu Lughod argues that “the woman question” has been a common excuse in colonial politics. Tracking down the savior discourse in many intervention projects including in Iraq, she extensively portrays this gendered form of coloniality in relation to women in Afghanistan and raises the important question: “Do Muslim women need saving?”⁸⁷¹ Abu Lughod is not alone in this argument. Leilah Ahmed had raised the problem of “colonial feminism” in the context of the turn-of-the-century in Egypt in the 1990s.⁸⁷² Furthermore, Marnia Lazreg has shed light on “the colonial appropriation of women’s voices” in Algeria, which

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., 97. She also writes about colonial feminists in an article online. See Haifa Zangana, "Colonial feminists from Washington to Baghdad." *Al-Raida Journal* (2005): 30-40.

⁸⁶⁸ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 21

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁷⁰ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim women need saving?*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 7.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁷² Leila Ahmed, *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

was performed by French colonialists.⁸⁷³ Nadjé Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt broadly discuss the gendered violence done under the name of “liberation” in Iraq during the invasion and occupation.⁸⁷⁴

Co-optation of Iraqi women’s struggle by the savior discourse has a major role in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Haifa mentions the role of neocolonial NGOs and foundations that contributed to this oppression. Haifa names a few of the most prominent US-funded NGOs which started work in Iraq after invasion and analyses the problematics of their practice in Iraq. These NGOs include “Women for a Free Iraq,” “Women’s Alliance for a Democratic Iraq,” “The Iraq foundation,” and “The American Islamic Congress,” which were all funded by the US State Department, The International Republican Institute, The National Democratic Institute (Madleine Albright chairs this institute), and the Independent women’s Forum.⁸⁷⁵ Haifa challenges these NGOs’ motivations and their liberatory rhetoric:

[T]hese NGOs are an internal part of the US strategy in Iraq. They have been influential in rallying support for the invasion and occupation, a role designed for them in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Former secretary of state Colin Powell argued in his address to the NGOs in 2001 that “just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there serving and sacrificing on the frontlines of freedom. NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team.” Indeed they represent US colonial policy rather than the interests of Iraqi men and women.⁸⁷⁶

These feminist activists whom Haifa refers to as colonial feminists were supportive of occupation and therefore, they were considered “important voices which were missing from the debate—those of Iraqi women with personal experience of Saddam Hussein’s oppression.”⁸⁷⁷ On the one hand the lived experience of these women surrounding oppression, torture, and violence under Saddam Hussein’s regime needs to be acknowledged; on the other hand, these feminists’ alliance with the US government in the liberation project is in conflict with feminist solidarity promises, as it results in more oppression for local Iraqi women living under invasion and occupation. What feminists in the West might consider as liberation, agency, and women’s rights can be oppression and human rights violation in some other part of the world, more particularly, Iraq in this context. This is a simple argument: intersectionally speaking, womens’ needs towards the greater goal of gender equality and justice changes from one social location to another. In the context of Iraq, where women have lived thirteen years under severe UN sanctions and therefore, under more gendered violence, invasion and occupation cannot be liberating. It can only augment the severity of violence against which they have been resisting.

⁸⁷³ Marnia Lazreg, *The eloquence of silence: Algerian women in question*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 135.

⁸⁷⁴ Al-Ali, Nadjé and Nicola Pratt, *What kind of liberation?: women and the occupation of Iraq*, (Berkely: Univ of California Press, 2010). Also see Nadjé Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *Women and war in the Middle East*, (London: Zed Books, 2009).

⁸⁷⁵ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 94.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

As Al-Ali and Pratt argue in their book, *What Kind of Liberation?*, violence against Iraqi women cannot be polarized into only anti-war and pro-war discourses. While anti-war critics condemn British and American “imperialist ambitions, neo-colonial modes of thinking, and military aggression,”⁸⁷⁸ the advocates of military intervention reprimand “the threats and dangers posed by al-Qaeda, Islamist insurgents...and remnants of the previous Ba’th regime.”⁸⁷⁹ Of course, however, ‘armed resistance’ against invasion and occupation can only worsen women’s condition of life. Haifa mentions anguishing but acute examples to support this claim. Once the attacks occurred in Iraq in 2003, the fear of medical assistance shortage increased (since people had the experience of living under sanctions and wars, therefore, they were prepared for more excruciating conditions) and the struggle for ‘survival’ began once again. According to Haifa Zangana’s testimony, Iraqi women had to queue for rationed imperishable food, powdered milk for babies, and gas cylinders.⁸⁸⁰ Pregnant women had to queue to caesarian births before the due time, because they were uncertain about the future of medical assistance in Iraq. Women had to literally dig in wells in their backyards because no one could insure access to water during bombardments. The reality of women’s lives under bombardments has nothing to do with imperial feminist values of gender equality and sexual liberation. As Haifa argues:

The rhetoric of women’s empowerment, and the training of a handful of Iraqi women leaders on the principles and practices of democracy at conferences organized outside Iraq, have nothing to do with daily lives of women who live in dire poverty, have been displaced from their homes, or are living in tents, lacking basic sanitation and supplies.⁸⁸¹

The detachment of white feminism from the struggles of women of color has not only affected the achievement of a solidarity among feminists in the world, but it has also added a new axes of ‘white woman’ oppression to the oppressions and challenges women of color were already facing while fighting local and universal patriarchy. Savior discourse and liberation rhetoric are not only condescending and victimizing, but actually dangerous. As Haifa debates, colonial feminists and the NGOs that they were running under the name of Iraqi women were used by US Administration to justify their colonial policies and to cover up the chaos they had created by invasion as well as their failure in fighting against “terrorism and Islamist fundamentalism.”⁸⁸² One example out of a multitude regarding the rampant violence against women caused by war is the siege of Fallujah in which 600 civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, were killed. Another example is the 1053 cases of rape by occupying troops and Iraqi forces that has been documented in the time span of 2003-2007 (these are only the documented cases).

⁸⁷⁸ Al-Ali and Pratt. *What kind of liberation?*, 2.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁸⁰ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 99.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, 101.

The cooptation of Iraqi women's struggles under the Baathist regime was the strategy British allies also adopted. Haifa observes them in London:

Similar moves were made in London, following Washington's last minute realization that it could make use of the suffering of Iraqi women to build up public support for the war, Tony Blair had his own meeting with Iraqi women in Downing street. In November 2002, one month after "The Unheard Voices of Iraqi Women" in London, two of whom wept as they told him their stories. There is no doubt that many of the Iraqi women's stories were true, and that some of the women who spoke out at staged events in the prewar period hoped naively that their stories of life under Saddam would help in getting rid of Saddam's regime and build a better future for all Iraqis...Others, however, were not that naïve. They were, as their political affiliation indicates, highly aware of the significant role they were to play in mobilizing public and political support for the war on their country. While telling their "untold stories," they chose "to present the human rights case for intervention in Iraq," when the case for war was thin. Thus, they chose to be the female face of the invasion, and came to be seen by most Iraqis as colonial feminists.⁸⁸³

There is a significant point which Haifa makes here surrounding the epistemic validity of lived experience of Iraqi women who had gone through oppression under the Baathists. She distinguishes between those who naively bought into the Blairian liberation promises and those women who were not naïve to think of story-telling as liberatory but had important political agendas and presented a human rights case for intervention in Iraq. Whether the human rights case was based on personal motivations or the hegemonic liberatory discourses the coalition was pushing for, it was a case that suddenly made a "thin case" of war voluminous (although I believe even if women's testimonies were not coopted, they would have found some other excuse for invasion). Haifa calls these women the female face of invasion (which implies war and invasion is already perceived as a masculine patriarchal practice) and colonial feminists according to Iraqi people.

Presenting the liberation as a binary opposition to religious oppression has not really affected Iraqi women's conception of religion. First of all, this binary was based on the Western imaginary of the Middle East being a monolithic region with Islam as the only religion practiced; secondly, through such Western liberatory claims, Iraqi women, with a variety of faiths including Sunni and Shiite Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Yazidism, Zoroastrianism, and so many other minority religions were denied the agency and freedom of "not feeling" oppressed and silenced by religion and culture. Haifa eloquently portrays the epistemic violence that occurs through Western liberatory rhetoric:

Iraqi women know that the enemy is not Islam. There is a strong antipathy toward anyone trying to conscript women's issues to the racist "War on Terror" targeted against the Muslim world. Most Iraqi women do not regard traditional society, exemplified by the neighbourhood and extended family, however restrictive at times, as the enemy. In fact, it has in practice been the protector of women and children, of their physical safety and welfare, and this, despite loWest-common-denominator demands on dress and personal conduct. The enemy is the collapse of the state and civil society. And the culprit is the foreign military invasion and occupation.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 97.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 116.

Although Haifa is a transnational feminist and she has been living across the borders of Iraq for a long time, she has always been involved in the multifaceted struggles of Iraqi women and she is highly aware of the complexity of their struggle. The above quotation is a very strong critique of colonial feminism, since, to put it simply, that version of feminism does not work for Iraqi women. Haifa mentions that the cooptation of women's rights into 'War on Terror' is just the other face of Western colonial racist and Islamophobic politics. Haifa distinguishes between Sharia and tradition and whilst she acknowledges the restrictions imposed by traditional society, she argues that in the context of war, occupation, and civil conflict, the traditionalist values can also work in favor of women's rights. Haifa emphasize that feminist activism in Iraq needs to be framed in terms of citizenship rights for women, rather than women's rights only, because "it is impossible to deal with sharia in relation to women's rights alone"⁸⁸⁵ whilst the bitter reality of occupation and sectarian division is omnipresent. Haifa emphasizes the significance of Islam in shaping Iraqi cultural identity across the political, class, and ethnicity spectrum. Although Iraq has been known as a politically secular country, Islam as a component of cultural identity is inseparable from Iraqi culture.⁸⁸⁶ Haifa critiques the essentialist views of Islam and Quran as oppressive and patriarchal from a realist approach. She agrees with the Iraqi sociologist Sana Al-Khayyat who maintains that "Islam, in theory at least, is not a religion which can be considered to be anti-women, or which goes contrary to women's best interest in a whole variety of ways. It is the adulteration or corruption of Islam which so often militates against women's interest, so much so that religion has been a tool in the hands of those who have wished to control women."⁸⁸⁷ In other words, Haifa does acknowledge the patriarchal interpretations of the text and Sharia by jurisdiction which, of course, contributes to the gendered discrimination already existing in Iraq, however, she also unveils the oppression and silencing of Iraqi women that is caused by invasion and occupation.

Silencing of women and their struggles as a form of testimonial violence is at the center of Haifa Zangana's criticism of intervention and coloniality. Haifa's investigation through official records and testimonies of women documents horrendous cases of rape as war crime perpetrated by the American forces and the Iraqi police operating under American control. *City of widows* is not only a space for her to build up a feminist epistemology of rape and resistance, but also to critique the feminist activist officials who, apart from NGOs, made substantial contributions to the silencing of rape survivors and rape victims.⁸⁸⁸ One example that

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 116.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., 113-114.

⁸⁸⁷ Quoted in Zangana, *City of Widows*, 115

⁸⁸⁸ By rape survivor in the context of war zones, I mean those women who were raped but stayed alive, not necessarily that they are over the trauma of rape, and by rape victim, I mean those who were raped and then murdered or burnt to death in this context. However, I acknowledge that both terms could be phenomenologically problematic when assigned to raped women as the embodied individual experience of rape is different from one person to another. Linda Martin Alcoff also discusses the controversy over terms such as victim, survivor and consent in her book *Rape and Resistance*. As she argues, the extent to which terms such as "victim" or "survivor" are considered as "stable" or "fixed identity" can be phenomenologically problematic. As she maintains, "[b]eing a survivor is surely not an equally intense aspect of one's identity at every stage of one's life. Hence, resistance to the use of either term may come from a worry about a disconnect between such fixed terms and one's fluid sense of self. Others may feel discomfort with the word

Haifa mentions in her book is the gang rape and murder case of A'beer Qassim Hamza and the extreme epistemic violence that this case received from officials including Aida Ussayran, the former deputy human rights minister:⁸⁸⁹ Aida Ussayran did mention that rape was going on as a war crime but, as Haifa mentions, she “chose not to mention is the responsibility of the occupation authority in establishing a corrupt, sectarian government vested with militias. She also chose not to mention the gang rape of A'beer Qassim Hamza al-Janaby by US troops.”⁸⁹⁰ According to the neighbor's testimony, A'beer Qassim Hamza, a fourteen-year-old girl living in farm house in south of Baghdad had experienced advances from American soldiers and she had notified her mother. On March 12, 2006, the drunk American soldiers raid her house, gang rape the fourteen-year-old girl taking turns, shoot her, set her alight afterwards and then shoot her parents who are sleeping in another room.⁸⁹¹ This rape case, together with so many other harrowing cases is either rejected as epistemically unreliable⁸⁹² or reduced to incidental, rare cases. Conversely, Haifa renders a decolonial critique of the treatment of rape cases:

A'beer's rape and murder is neither incidental nor aberrant. (It was declared a symptom of one US soldier's “personality disorder.”) Rather, it is part of a pattern that includes the behavior at Abu Ghraib, as well as the Haditha, Ishaqi, and Qa'im massacres. This pattern serves a strategic function beyond indiscriminate revenge; it fosters the collective humiliation, intimidation, and terrorizing of Iraqi people, a classic colonial maneuver.⁸⁹³

Personality disorder is always the reason and motivation of any act of terrorism and violence when the perpetrator is non-Muslim, mostly, white. If the perpetrator is Muslim, their motivation is decontextualized and depoliticised, interpreted as religious, jihadist, and faith-based, and therefore a collective responsibility rather than an individual one. Rape is a systemic violence rather than an individual one. Tracing examples of violence in Abu Ghraib, Haditha, Ishaqi and Qa'im, Haifa argues that rape, torture,⁸⁹⁴ humiliation, and intimidation are all different faces of colonial systemic violence that are used to terrorize a people and take away their sovereignty over land. Video-recorded cases of violence such as a seventy-year-old woman ridden like a donkey by American troops,⁸⁹⁵ or a female detainee sodomized by a male American soldier⁸⁹⁶ and testimonial cases such

“victim” if they are still in the process of narrativizing their experience [...].Such reasons would constitute what I would call phenomenological grounds to decline or at least complicate the attribution of the word “victim.”” See Linda Martin Alcoff, *Rape and Resistance*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 141.

⁸⁸⁹ Zangana, *City of Widows*, 129.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., 130-131.

⁸⁹² One example is Zainab's gang rape by three Iraqi policemen at the police station; as Haifa writes she was called a liar and criminal by the prime minister of the time, Nouri al Maliki.

⁸⁹³ Zangana, *City of widows*, 131

⁸⁹⁴ In *Dreaming of Baghdad* Haifa discusses the effects of torture on Iraqi nation as follows:

Torture has left a deep scar on our collective memory, and death by torture was not an unusual fate for radical activists in Iraq. We wanted to put an end to this, but we failed. The war and occupation in 2003, apart from shuttering Iraq as a country and people, has brought about many more imprisonments, many more deaths. Abu Ghraib is only one of many symbols. In occupied Iraq, torture became an instrument of humiliation and a way to force a nation into submission. As we resist the occupation now, our message is clear: We did not struggle for decades to replace one torturer with another. See in Zangana, *Dreaming*, 5-6

⁸⁹⁵ Zangana, *City of widows*, 135

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 136.

as the twelve year old girl stripped naked and beaten by soldiers⁸⁹⁷ confirm Haifa's claim surrounding violence for the sake of intimidation and humiliation. Even when liberation of women is not a good enough reason for the coalition's presence in Iraq anymore (due to the confirmed sexual assault and murder cases), other excuses were used to kill Iraqi civilians. Haifa writes:

On the ground, the anxious US military often kills citizens going about their business, then plants evidence to cover up their mistakes, supposedly getting rid of "suspected al-Qaeda members." Facing mounting resistance across the country, the US military found the earlier labels of Sunni and Shiite invalid, and thus rebranded the resistance as al-Qaeda. It has become common for the US military to claim it has been battling Iranian-backed al-Qaeda as well as Iranian "special groups," a convenient buildup to a possible US attack on Iran.⁸⁹⁸

Iraqi civilians' citizenship rights have been violated by the Coalition troops since 2003. So much falsity has been produced to support an illegal presence and human rights violation in Iraq by these troops, including branding resistance movements in the country as al-Qaeda, or suspecting them to be Iranian special groups and therefore, justifying murders. If microhistory narratives such as Haifa's, and testimonial narratives such as the women and men she is documenting did not exist, no one would have known about the intensity and severity of human rights violations perpetrated by the so called "liberators." These narratives build up alternative epistemologies that challenge Western Eurocentric accounts of the wars and sanctions in the Middle East. They are epistemically value-laden and need to be referenced when contemporary histories of regions are written.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 10.

Chapter Nine:

Conclusions: “Theory in the Flesh”

“To Iranian President Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!”
President Donald Trump 1:24 PM - Jul 23, 2018 (Twitter)

“Our mission in Iraq is clear. We are hunting down the terrorists. We are helping Iraqis build a free nation that is an ally in the war on terror. We are advancing freedom in the broader Middle East. We are removing a source of violence and instability and laying the foundation of peace for our children and our grandchildren.”
President George W. Bush

“The person who is really the threat here is the home owner who has been so well socialized by the thinking of white supremacy, of capitalism, of patriarchy that he can no longer respond rationally.”
Bell hooks, *All about Love*

Writing on women’s lived experience, observing their lives, and taking a critical distance from their embodied experience was a difficult task and at the risk of performing the epistemic violence that I was critiquing throughout the process. I started this research with a postcolonial approach, which was concerned with the politics of publication, emphasizing the reasons there was a boom after 9/11 attacks in the publication and distribution of Muslim women’s memoirs. My primary research question was concerned with the label of “Middle Eastern women writers,” and a critique of this reductive label. Then, I began my investigation of the corpus of study and read many volumes of life writing by transnational Iranian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Egyptian, and Palestinian women. I could definitely see a common trend of representation in many of these narratives; however, I also witnessed the lack of sympathetic research on lived experience. My own experience of border crossing and that of other Muslim women of colour around me equipped me with the critical tools that I applied in my close reading of the texts, which included a realist and intersectional feminist approach. After narrowing down the corpus into Iranian and Iraqi narratives, I observed a common reason for these women’s displacement and border crossing apart from the political upheaval and socio-economic conditions in their countries, and that was the influence of the global coloniality of power. It was hard to prove this because coloniality is always obfuscated with colonization, and area studies scholars were convinced that Iran was never officially ‘colonized’ and they named Iraq’s contemporary invasion as an intervention.

It was through a close reading of the narratives that I came up with the theoretical framework for this research. The testimonies and lived experience narratives I read were theory-laden. They provided me with the proof I needed to address coloniality and employ a not purely intersectional, but also decolonial approach. It was the only way that I could have a sympathetic reading of the texts, analyse their content, and show awareness of the politics of publication. Iranian and Iraqi memoirs in this research are not narratives of victimhood. Despite all the contradictions that can be traced in some of them, for instance in *Lipstick Jihad* of which I was the most critical, they bear historical, social, and philosophical knowledge. Contradiction in representation does not negate the value of the knowledge surrounding those contradictions. They are only necessary in the process

of “world-travelling” and developing “multiplicitous selves.” The extent to which people can travel into other people’s worlds, literally and metaphorically, is affected by their social location, which is placed at the intersection of their gender, race, class, ethnicity, generation, faith, religion, ability/disability, and nationality. This social location is not separate from people’s personal and collective histories. In my study of border crossing identities, generation and the subject’s personal and collective history significantly affected the extent of the multiplicity in their selves, their hometactics strategies, their assimilation level, and their political agency. What these subjects share is multiplicitous selves and in-betweenness; however, this multiplicity and in-betweenness does not make them fragmented identities. They bear multiple selves in a bigger self, which they craft out of those bits and pieces of previous identity (prior to migration) and the new one (which is the result of world travelling and assimilation). This process is different in the first generation compared to second-generation identities. First generation’s first-hand memory and nostalgia of the homeland shows itself in the complex ways in which they assimilate and make homes. They show more political agency and critical care regarding the politics back home, and they have more gratitude towards the new host, which has ‘saved them’ from what made them cross the borders. Yet, the second generation, who were either born in the new home or migrated there at a young age with their parents in the context of my research, inherit the nostalgia of homeland from the first generation through post-memory. They are more involved in the politics of migration and expressions of democracy in the new home. The fact that they have been born or raised in the new home does not necessarily make them part of the community yet. Iranian and Iraqi second generations that I studied stated that they were racialized and marginalized for being “ethnic.” Whilst the first generation does not expect much inclusion, because of the strong ties they still hold with the previous home, the second generation feels more in-between. Biracial second-generations that I studied experience the same confusing sense of in-betweenness; however, their white privilege gives them more sense of inclusion compared to non-biracial second-generation ones.

Border crossing identities gain epistemic privilege through world travelling and intimate terrorism. The pain of border crossing, assimilation, and integration grants them cognizance about who they are, what they are capable of, and how they can negotiate and strategise between their multiple selves and feel centered as an individual. Niloo’s perimeter, Azadeh’s scraps of Iran, Haifa’s panel in the mirror, Jasmine’s tapes, and Leilah’s photo albums are all metonyms of home, and therefore, sites of memory. Border crossing identities, either first generation, or second, assimilate and integrate because adaptability is a part of homemaking; but they make a perimeter for themselves wherever they go to preserve those bits and pieces of previous home and previous identity, whether they exist through first-hand memory or genealogical nostalgia.

Border crossing narratives of lived experience in this thesis addressed whiteness, imperialism, Islamophobia, and coloniality in complex ways. Some, such as Nayeri’s *Refuge*, Nadir’s *Orange Trees*, and

Zangana's *City of Widows* were critical of these discourses. They address coloniality, war, and sanctions as a major reason for Iranian and Iraqi people's displacement, although the intensity and form of coloniality in Iraq is very different to the one in Iran. On the other hand, Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* and Nafisi's *The Republic of Imagination* are not critical of power and erase whiteness, imperialism, coloniality, and Islamophobia from their stories. Reading these contrasting narratives through a decolonial and intersectional approach exposed conflicting ideas, and those conflicts produced epistemic bodies.

I have lived the war and sanctions in Iran. Sanctions and the political and socioeconomic conditions in Iran were the reason why I decided to leave the country, like so many other migrants. But I hated receiving comments from people in the West about the oppressive regime in Iran being my only reason to be here. Like the writers I read and empathized with, I also believe there are multiple reasons for people's border crossing and whiteness and coloniality of power cannot be separated from those reasons. The West wants to believe that they save migrants and refugees from the Middle East and it is a favour to them to be hosted. The other side of the story, though, is that migrants and refugees would not have had to move if their home had not collapsed due to wars and sanctions.

At the cost of sounding idealistic, I argue that works like this research and many more on lived experience need to be considered seriously for their political value. Border narratives, marginalized testimonies, and lived experience of transnational minorities stand as counter-hegemonic narratives. The notion of Western civilization, economic prosperity in the West, and most importantly, peace in the Western world should not be studied unless hand in hand with the history of colonialism, imperialism, and proxy wars and sanctions in the Global South.

My relationship to this thesis was a love and hate one. Metaphorically speaking, it was a very feminine process to me, akin to delivering a baby. It was full of joy and agony. Often times, I was shocked by some accounts in the books. I identified with the writers and felt the challenge of putting their experience into words and of doing justice to their and the reader's feelings. Throughout the selection of memoirs, I came across many narratives of torture, rape, and murder. I learned a lot, but something died in me. I wrote this thesis for those who can see the injustice of war and sanctions. These days, the threat of invasion is felt every day in Iran, and Iraq is still struggling to rebuild the infrastructure that was destroyed by the invasion and years of occupation. Far right politicians complain about the flow of refugees and migrants and consider them a threat to their homeland security. The irony is, they do not imagine that they have caused the displacement.

This thesis hopes to engage in dialogues around 'the right to border crossing' and migration while considering the current political conditions around the world, especially in the Middle East. As a young Iranian woman scholar with racialized experience of border, I only hope for more justice and less violence. I also agree

with Dina Nayeri in saying that refugees have no debt to pay and they do not have to give up their previous identity. They cross the borders for reasons in which whiteness, imperialism, and coloniality are complicit, hence, there is a responsibility to house them, and allow them to make “homes.”

This is an accented thesis. My Persian translations and English mistakes are part of my transnational identity now and it is hard to separate them from my English-speaking self. Whilst I tried to make sense, I wilfully resisted erasing my accented English from this thesis.

I close this thesis with respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which this thesis was thought and written.

Bibliography

- Abbasi Shavazi, Mohammad Jalal, Rasoul Sadeghi, Hossein Mahmoudian, and Gholamreza Jamshidiha. "Marriage and Family Formation of the Second Generation Afghans in Iran: Insights from a Qualitative Study." *International Migration Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 828-860.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Al Maleh, Layla. "Anglophone Arab Literature: An Overview." In *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, edited by Layla Al Maleh, 1-64. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
- Al-Ali, Nadje, and Khalid Koser. *New Approaches to Migration: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Al-Ali, Nadje, and Nicola Pratt. *What Kind of Liberation?: Women and the Occupation of Iraq*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- . *Women and War in the Middle East*. London: Zed Books, 2009.
- Alcoff, Linda M. "Experience and Knowledge: The Case of Sexual Abuse Memories." In *Feminist Metaphysics: Explorations in the Ontology of Sex, Gender and the Self*, edited by Charllotte Witt, 209-223. Dordrecht: Springer, 2011.
- . "New Epistemologies: Post-Positivist Accounts of Identity." In *The SAGE Handbook of Identities*, edited by Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 144-162. London: SAGE, (2010).
- . "On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?." In *Engendering Rationalities*, edited by Nancy Tuana and Sandra Morgen, 53-80. New York: SUNY Press, (2001).
- . "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance." In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. 397-408. London: Routledge, (2017).
- . "Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment." *Radical Philosophy* 95 (1999): 15-26.
- . "Decolonizing Feminist Philosophy," In *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, edited by Margaret A. McLaren, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield International, (2017).
- . *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- . *Rape and Resistance*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.
- . "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991): 5-32.
- . "What should White People Do?." *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 6-26.
- Alcoff, Linda M. and Satya P. Mohanty. "Reconsidering Identity Politics: An Introduction". In *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, edited by Linda Martín Alcoff, Satya P. Mohanty, Michael Hames-García, Paula M. L. Moya, 1-9. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006).
- Alcoff, Linda, and Laura Gray. "Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 2 (1993): 260-290.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements". In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, xiii-xlii. London: Routledge, (2013).
- Amanat, Abbas. "Introduction." In *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, edited by Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani, 1-33. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2012).

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. New York: Verso Books, 2006.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. "The Epistemology of Democracy." *Episteme* 3, no. 1-2 (2006): 8-22.
- . *The Imperative of Integration*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Andrea, Bernadette. "Passage through the Harem: Historicizing a Western Obsession in Leila Ahmed's A Border Passage." In *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing*, edited by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, 3-15. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007.
- Anita Famili, *What about Middle Eastern American Ethnic Studies?* Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs symposium, May 17, 1997, <http://www.urop.uci.edu/symposium/pastsymposia/1997/ablist3.html>
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.
- Apostolidis, Paul. *Breaks in the Chain: What Immigrant Workers can Teach America about Democracy*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Arnold, David, and Stuart Blackburn, eds. *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Ashcroft, Bill. *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of a Colonial Culture*. London: A & C Black, 2001.
- Badran, Margot. "Expressing Feminism and Nationalism in Autobiography: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Educator." In *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson, 270-293. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, (1992).
- Bahramitash, Roksana. "Revolution, Islamization, and Women's Employment in Iran." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2003): 229-241.
- . "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism: Case Studies of Two North American Bestsellers." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 221-235.
- Baker, Russell, and William Knowlton Zinsser. *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.
- Baldwin, James, Emile Capouya, Lorraine Hansberry, Nat Hentoff, Langston Hughes, and Alfred Kazin. "The Negro in American Culture." *CrossCurrents* 11, no. 3 (1961): 205-224.
- . "A talk to teachers." *Saturday Review* 46, no. 42.44 (1963).
- Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831.
- Barvosa, Edwina. *Wealth of Selves: Multiple Identities, Mestiza Consciousness, and the Subject of Politics*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008.
- Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Bayeh, Jumana. *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora: Representations of Place and Transnational Identity*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2015.
- Behdad, Ali. *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Locations of Culture: Discussing Post-Colonial Culture*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Bigdeloo, Reza. *Archaism in the Contemporary History of Iran*. Tehran: Markaz Publishing House, 2001.
- Brah, Avtar. and Ann Phoenix. "Ain't IA woman? Revisiting Intersectionality." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 75-86.
- Brown, Wendy. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Chambers, Claire. "Countering the 'Oppressed, Kidnapped Genre' of Muslim Life Writing: Yasmin Hai's The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter and Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's Love in a Headscarf." *Life Writing* 10, no. 1 (2013): 77-96.

- Clark, Nate. "Farah Nosh, Canada's War photographer," in *Huffington Post*. Feb 06 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nate-clark/farah-nosh-canadas-war-ph_b_7485872.html
- Code, Lorraine. "Experience, Knowledge, and Responsibility". In *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*, edited by Morwenna Griffiths and Margarette Whitford, 187-204. London: Macmillan, (1988).
- . *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- . *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Collins, Patricia H. and Sirma Bilge. *Intersectionality*. Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2016.
- Cooke, Miriam, and Margot Badran, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6, 1991: 1241-1299.
- . "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, Issue 1: 139-167.
- Dabashi, Hamid, and Foaad Khosmood. "Lolita and Beyond." *ZNet: The Spirit of Resistance Lives* (2006).
- . *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New York: New Press, 2008.
- . *Brown Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 2011.
- . *Can non-Europeans Think?*. Chicago: Zed Books, 2015.
- . *Iran without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation*. New York: Verso Books, 2016.
- . *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror*. London: Transaction Publishers, 2009.
- . "The Arabs and Their Flying Shoes," *aljazeera*, last modified Feb. 27, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/02/201322691640324311.html>
- Darznik, Jasmin. *The Good Daughter: My Mother's Hidden Life*. New York: Random House, 2012.
- De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* (1979): 919-930.
- de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Dean, Carolyn J. "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2003): 88-124.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988.
- DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007.
- Delisle, Jennifer Bowering. "'Iraq in my Bones': Second-Generation Memory in the Age of Global Media." *Biography* 36, no. 2 (2013): 376-391.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Dotson, Kristie. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257.
- Dussel, Enrique. "Eurocentrism and modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)." *boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 65-76.
- Ebadi, Shirin. "Bound but Gagged," *The New York Times* 16 (2004): accessed: <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/16/opinion/bound-but-gagged.html>
- Elahi, Babak. "Translating the Self: Language and Identity in Iranian-American Women's Memoirs." *Iranian Studies* 39, no. 4 (2006): 461-480.
- Engel Rasmussen, Sune, and Ben Doherty, "Hard to watch?: Afghans react to \$6m Australian film aimed at asylum seekers," *The Guardian*, last modified March 28, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/28/hard-to-watch-afghans-react-to-6m-australian-film-aimed-at-asylum-seekers>.
- Fabian, Johannes. (2014). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Famili, Anita. *What About Middle Eastern American Ethnic Studies?* Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs symposium, last modified May 17, 1997, http://www.urop.uci.edu/symposium/past_symposia/1997/ablist3.html.
- Faqir, Fadia, and Shirley Eber, eds. *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*. Reading: Garnet Pub Limited, 1998.
- Fernandes, Sujatha. "Stories and Statecraft: Afghan Women's Narratives and the Construction of Western Freedoms." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 3 (2017): 643-667.
- Fortier, Anne-Marie, Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, and Mimi Sheller. *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. Oxford: Berg, 2003.
- Foster, Guy Mark. "Do I Look like Someone You Can Come Home to from Where You May Be Going?": Re-Mapping Interracial Anxiety in Octavia Butler's "Kindred." *African American Review* 41, no. 1 (2007): 143-164.
- Fotouhi, Sanaz. *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora: Meaning and Identity since the Islamic Revolution*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Friedman, May, and Silvia Schultermandl, eds. *Growing up Transnational: Identity and Kinship in a Global Era*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. (J. Weinsheimer & DG Marshall, trans.). New York: Continuum, 1989.
- Garry, Ann. "Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender." *Hypatia* 26, no. 4 (2011): 826-850.
- Ghahramani, Zarah, and Robert Hillman. *My Life as a Traitor: A Story of Courage and Survival in Tebran's Brutal Evin Prison*. London: A&C Black, 2012.
- Ghazoul, Ferial Jabouri, and Hasna Reda-Mekdashy. *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.
- Ghorashi, Halleh. "Giving Silence a Chance: The Importance of Life Stories for Research on Refugees." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 117-132.
- Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Golley, Nawar Al-Hassan, ed. *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007.
- . *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shabrazad Tells her Story*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
- Gorashi, Halleh. "Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Daring or Dogmatic? Debates on Multiculturalism and Emancipation in the Netherlands." In *Multiple Identifications and the Self*, edited by Toon van Meijl and Henk Driessen, Utrecht: Stichting Focaal, 2003, 163-172.
- Grace, Daphne M. "Arab Women Write the Trauma of Imprisonment and Exile." In *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing*, edited by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, 181-200. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007.
- Grewal, Kiran. "Reclaiming the Voice of the 'Third World Woman' but what do we Do when we don't Like what she has to Say? The Tricky Case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali." *Interventions* 14, no. 4 (2012): 569-590.
- Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney, 28-48. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Hage, Ghassan. "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-Building." In *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West*, edited by Helen Grace, 99-153. London: Pluto Press, (1997).
- . *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. London: Routledge, 2012.

- Harding, Sandra. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Hassan, Wail S. *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Heehs, Peter. *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. New York: SUNY press, 1996.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103-128.
- . *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Hoodfar, Homa. *The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization*. Grebels, France: Women Living under Muslim Laws, 1999.
- Hooks, Bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society". In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 111-125. Washington: Bay Press, (1983).
- . "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53-92.
- Kang, Hyun Yi. *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Karim, Persis M., and Nasrin Rahimieh. "Introduction: Writing Iranian Americans into the American Literature Canon." *MELUS* 33, no. 2 (2008): 7-16.
- Karim, Persis Maryam. *Fissured Nations and Exilic States: Displacement, Exile, and Diaspora in Twentieth-Century Writing by Women*. PhD Dissertation: The University of Texas at Austin, 1998.
- Keller, Pierre. *Husserl and Heidegger on Human Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Kermani, Nazem al-Islam. *Tarikh-e Bidari Iranian* (History of Iranian Awakening). Teheran: Entesharat Bonyad Farhang Iran, 1979.
- Keshavarz, Fatemeh. *Jasmine and Stars: Reading more than Lolita in Tebran*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Lacan, Jacques, and Bruce Fink. *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- LaCapra, Dominick. "Experience and Identity." In *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, edited by Linda Martín Alcoff, Satya P. Mohanty, Michael Hames-García, Paula M. L. Moya, 228-245. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006).
- Lazreg, Marnia. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Lejeune, Philippe, and Paul John Eakin. *On Autobiography*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Lugones, María. "On Complex Communication." *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 75-85.
- . "Playfulness, "world"-travelling, and loving perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 3-19.
- . *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989
- Maghbooleh, Neda. *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2017.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality." *Franz Foundation* (<http://franzfanonfoundation>), Accessed 27, 2017.
- Manisty, Dinah. "Negotiating the Space between Private and Public: Women's Autobiographical Writing in Egypt." In *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, edited by Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild, London: Al Saqi, 1998.

- Marandi, Seyed Mohammad and Hossein Pirnajmuddin. "Constructing an Axis of Evil: Iranian Memoirs in the 'Land of the Free'." *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2009): 23-47.
- Marandi, Seyed Mohammed. "Reading Azar Nafisi in Tehran." *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 6, no. 2 (2008): 179-189.
- Medina, José. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Melamed, Jodi. "Reading Tehran in Lolita: Seizing Literary Value for Neoliberal Multiculturalism." (2011). In *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, edited by Grace Kyungwon Hong, Roderick A. Ferguson, Judith Halberstam and Lisa Lowe, 76-112. Durham: Duke University Press, (2011).
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7-8 (2009): 159-181.
- . "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and de-Colonial Thinking." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 155-167.
- . *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Milani, Farzaneh. "Iranian Women's Life Narratives." *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 130-152.
- Million, Dian. "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History." *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 53-76.
- Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. "The Conservative–Reformist Conflict over Women's Rights in Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (2002): 37-53.
- . *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000.
- Misch, Georg. *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Moallem, Minoo. "The Unintended Consequences of Equality within Difference." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 22 (2015): 335-350.
- . *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Moaveni, Azadeh. *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2007.
- Modarressi, Taghi. "Writing with an Accent." *Chanteh* 1, (1992): 7–9.
- Moghissi, Haideh, and Halleh Ghorashi, eds. *Muslim Diaspora in the West: Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging*. London & New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Cartographies of Struggle." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 1-50. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (1991).
- . *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Mohanty, Satya P. "Can our Values be Objective? On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics." *New Literary History* 32, no. 4 (2001): 803-833.
- . "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On 'Beloved' and the Postcolonial Condition." *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 41-80.
- . *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997
- . "Social Justice and Culture: On Identity, Intersectionality, and Epistemic Privilege". In *Handbook on Global Social Justice*, edited by Gary Craig, 418-427. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, (2018).

- Mojab, Shahrzad. "Introduction: Gender and Empire." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 2 (2010): 220-223.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics, and Self-Representation*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.
- Morgan, Robin, ed. *Sisterhood Is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. City University of New York: Feminist Press, 1984.
- Morsi, Yassir. "The 'free speech' of the (un) free." *Continuum: Journal of Median and Cultural Studies* (2018): 1-13.
- . *Radical Skin, Moderate Masks: De-Radicalizing the Muslim and Racism in Post-Racial Societies*. New York: Roman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017.
- Motlagh, Amy. "Autobiography and Authority in the Writings of the Iranian Diaspora." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 411-424.
- . "Towards a Theory of Iranian American Life Writing." *Melus* 33, no. 2 (2008): 17-36.
- Mottahedeh, Negar. "Off the Grid: Reading Iranian Memoirs in our Time of Total War." *Middle East Research and Information Project* 9, (2004).
- Moya, Paula L. *The Social Imperative: Race, Close Reading, and Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- . *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Moya, Paula M. L. and Michael R. Hames-Garcia, eds. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Nadir, Leilah. *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*. Mission, BC: Barbarian Press, 2014.
- Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tebran: A Memoir in Books*. New York: Random House Incorporated, 2008.
- Naghibi, Nima. "Revolution, Trauma, and Nostalgia in Diasporic Iranian Women's Autobiographies." *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 105 (2009): 79-91.
- . *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- . *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Nanquette, Laetitia. *Orientalism versus Occidentalism: Literary and Cultural Imaging between France and Iran since the Islamic Revolution*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013.
- Narayan, Uma. *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Nash, Geoffrey. *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Nasrabadi, Manijeh. "In Search of Iran: Resistant Melancholia in Iranian American Memoirs of Return." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 487-497.
- Nayel, Amina Alrasheed. *Alternative Performativity of Muslimness: The Intersection of Race, Gender, Religion, and Migration*. Berlin: Springer, 2017.
- Nayeri, Dina. "The Ungrateful Refugee: 'We Have No Debt to Repay!'" *The Guardian* 4 (2017).
- . *Refuge: A Novel*. London: Penguin, 2017.
- Ortega, Mariana. "'New Mestizas,' 'World' Travelers,' and 'Dasein': Phenomenology and the Multi-Voiced, Multi-Cultural Self." *Hypatia* 16, no. 3 (2001): 1-29.
- . "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color." *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 56-74.
- . *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*. New York: SUNY Press, 2016.

- Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Panjabi, Kavita. "Probing "Morality" and State Violence: Feminist Values and Communicative Interaction in Prison Testimonies in India and Argentina". In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 151-169. London: Routledge, (1997).
- Povey, Elaheh Rostami. "Feminist Contestations of Institutional Domains in Iran." *Feminist Review* 69, no. 1 (2001): 44-72.
- Povey, Tara. *Social Movements in Egypt and Iran*. New York: Palgrave, 2015.
- Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.
- Rahimieh, Nasrin. "Border Crossing." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007): 225-232.
- Razack, Sherene. *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Roshanravan, Shireen. "Motivating Coalition: Women of Color and Epistemic Disobedience." *Hypatia* 29, no. 1 (2014): 41-58.
- Rudge, Chris John. "Psychotropes: Models of Authorship, Psychopathology, and Molecular Politics in Aldous Huxley and Philip K. Dick." PhD Thesis: University of Sydney, 2015.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- . *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012.
- . *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012.
- Salaita, Steven. *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- . *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011.
- Saldívar, José David. "Border Thinking, Minoritized Studies, and Realist Interpellations: The Coloniality of Power from Gloria Anzaldúa to Arundhati Roy." In *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, edited by Linda Martín Alcoff, Satya P. Mohanty, Michael Hames-García, Paula M. L. Moya, 152-170. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006).
- Sanchez, Rosaura. "On a Critical Realist Theory of Identity." In *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, edited by Linda Martín Alcoff, Satya P. Mohanty, Michael Hames-García, Paula M. L. Moya, 31-52. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006).
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Sandu, Adriana. "Transnational Homemaking Practices: Identity, Belonging and Informal Learning." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 21, no. 4 (2013): 496-512.
- Sayyid, Bobby S., and Salman Sayyid. *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books, 2003.
- Schutte, Ofelia. "Negotiating Latina Identities". In *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*, edited by Jorge J. E. Gracia and Pablo De Greiff, 61–75. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Sealey, Kris. "Resisting the Logic of Ambivalence: Bad Faith as Subversive, Anticolonial Practice." *Hypatia* 33, no. 2 (2018): 163-177.
- Sedghi, Hamideh. *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Shohat, Ella and Evelyn Alsultany, eds. *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.
- Shohat, Ella. *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001.

- Smith, Dorothy E. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- . *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Smith, Sidonie. *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Spengemann, William C., and William C. Spengemann. *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Stone-Mediatore, Shari. "Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of "Experience"". *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 116-133.
- . "Storytelling/Narrative." In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, edited by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth, 934-954. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Taber, Nancy, Shahrzad Mojab, Cathy VanderVliet, Shirin Haghgou, and Kate Paterson. "Learning Through Memoirs: Self, Society, and History." *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 29, no. 1 (2017): 19-36.
- Tehrani, John. *Whitewashed: America's Invisible Middle Eastern Minority*. New York: NYU Press, 2009.
- Torres, Lourdes. "The Construction of the Self in US Latina Autobiographies." In *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, 127-144. London: Routledge, (1996).
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society* 1, no. 1 (2012).
- Weir, Allison. "Identities and Freedom: Power, Love, and Other Dangers." *Philosophy Today* 61, no. 2 (2017): 423-438.
- Werbner, Pnina. "Introduction: The Materiality of Diaspora—Between Aesthetic and "Real" Politics." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 5-20.
- Whitlock, Gillian. *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- . *The Intimate Empire*. New York: A&C Black, 2000.
- Wood, Marcus. *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Xie, Chaoqun. "To Speak is Never Neutral." *Language* 79, no. 4 (2003): 806-807.
- Yaqob, T. "The Iraqi author Haifa Zangana: Writing lends a voice to the displaced." In *The National*. 2011. Accessed <https://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/the-iraqi-author-haifa-zangana-writing-lends-a-voice-to-the-displaced-1.422748>
- Yancy, George. *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- Zangana, Haifa. *City of Widows: An Iraqi Woman's Account of War and Resistance*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.
- . *Dreaming of Baghdad*. City University of New York: The Feminist Press, 2009.
- . "As I Watch the Footage, Anger Calcifies in my Heart", *The Guardian*, April 10, 2010. Accessed: <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/apr/10/wikileaks-collateral-murder-iraq-video>

