

APPENDIX I: SOMAYEH BAHRAMI'S PRESENTATION

Iranian Women in Vancouver: Gender, Race, Class, and Post-Revolution Migration

Iranian politics have undergone dramatic changes in the last 45 years or so, and so has the nature of Iranian migration to Canada. Before the Revolution, there was barely a trickle of Iranian migration to Canada. The creation of the Islamic Republic—a fundamentalist Islamic revolt against the Shah of Iran—initiated major displacements as members of the political elite and affluent classes fled Iran in fear of persecution. It is important to note that although the Islamic Revolution succeeded in 1979, many had already felt threatened and left the country around 1975.

Indeed, most migrants from Iran during this turmoil were political refugees. While there is a body of literature on the Iranian post-revolution diaspora, my dissertation focuses on the immigration of Iranian elite and affluent women who left Iran for Vancouver between 1975 and 1985. I will stop at 1985 because the patterns and reasons for migration changed around this time. By placing gender, family, work, class, and race at the centre of the story of Iranian immigration to Canada, I want to make an original contribution to historical understandings of the impact of revolution on migration patterns of elite and upper class Iranians. This will shed light on the complex social and political factors shaping immigration from Iran to Canada.

Background Information

In 1953, Operation Ajax, a covert operation orchestrated by the CIA, overthrew the freely elected government of Iran which had threatened to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Set in the context of Cold War geopolitics, this intervention led to the reinstatement of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the recently deposed monarch, as head of state, and drew Iran into the sphere of American political influence. Over the next 25 years, temporary migration became an essential component of modernity in Iran as members of the political and economic elite travelled to Western Europe and North America to attend university. The experiences of these earlier journeys became central to diasporic politics after the Islamic revolution of 1979. In fact, the legacy of Iranian immigration to Canada is intimately tied to the highly uncertain socio-economic and political climate of Iran before and after the revolution (Afary, 2009; Afary & Anderson, 2005; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2006; Hakimzadeh, 2006).

I will employ a number of methods, utilizing oral histories of Iranian women combined with textual analysis of historical documents in both English and Persian. In particular, I will interview elite and upper-middle class Iranian women over the age of 60 who immigrated to Vancouver between 1975 and 1985. Following the work of historians Alexander Freund (2014, 2010, 1994), Franca Iacovetta (2016, 2011, 1992), Nadia Jones (2013), Noula Mina (2013), Susana Miranda (2003), and Joan Sangster (2016, 2010), this

project structures the story of Iranian immigration centered around the collected oral histories of women and explores the extent to which Iranian women's experiences of immigration were shaped by their gender, race, class, and familial and sexual identities. I build on the rich historical and theoretical literature on the intersection of immigration, class, and work to study the material and emotional responses of Iranian women to the process of immigration, their settlement in a racially marked country, and the resulting loss of their class status (Arat-koc, 1997; Avery, 1995; Dossa, 2004; Dua, 2007; Sangster, 2010; Schulze et al., 2008). How do migration experiences influence marital and parental relationships over time? How did women and their families decide to immigrate to Vancouver? What were their employment experiences in the new society, and how did their work and education experience in Iran shape their education and employment in Canada?

Oral histories present historians with a unique opportunity to engage in history with the living (High, 2014). Oral history traces not just what women did, but what they remembered, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did (Portelli, 1991). Drawing on this tradition, I will capture stories of these women's journey by recording and highlighting the changes that took place in their lives. As they tell their stories, I will listen for how they discuss the roles of power, privilege, and oppression in their migration experiences. Current scholarship in oral history upholds the tradition of shared and collective storytelling and examines the relationship of immigration, violence, and memory. I will examine the emotional and traumatic experiences of loss and separation as Iranian immigrant women respond to the loss of homeland, wealth, employment, prestige, and social and political networks (Freund, 2014, 2011; Frisch, 1990; High, 2014; Little, High, & Duong, 2014).

I will also add to the critical literature on the historical processes of Canadianization to examine how race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality shaped what Iranian women were expected to do to become 'Canadian' women. Iranian women came to Canada under a post-1967 immigration system which removed discrimination on the basis of national origin in favour of a point-system based on such criteria as language, skill, and education; yet as many scholars have argued, such a system did not remove or eliminate racial, gender, and sexual discrimination (Arat-koc, 1997; Dua, 2007; Flynn, 2011; Hellwig & Thobani, 2006; Iacovetta, 2006; Joy, 2015; Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010; Thobani, 2007). How did Iranian women identify themselves in terms of racial, religious, and national identities? How did these complex identities translate into Canadian terms, and how were they understood and represented by Canadian society? How did these representations change over time? Oral history methodology will be enriched through photo and video elicitation techniques involving reflection on family photographs or videos, archives, newspapers, and film and television resources. This technique expands the possibilities of research and produces a different kind of information rooted in the evocation of feelings, gestures, and memories that may differ from the traditional verbal interview (Little, High, & Duong, 2014; McAllister, 2010). Finally, I will analyze historical textual materials including mainstream newspapers and community papers in English and Persian, such as *Iran*, *Salam*, *Tehran Times*, and *Zan*. My fluency in both Persian and English allows me to critically analyze how Persian-language newspapers in Iran portrayed and commented on

the women who left Iran for Canada while simultaneously analyzing how Canadian media sources understood the revolution and the migration associated with it. All of these newspapers are accessible online or are housed in Canadian or Iranian archives such as the Iranian-Canadian Centre for Art and Culture and the National Library of Iran.

I am now pursuing a Doctoral Degree in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. I have completed all course requirements and am currently completing comprehensive exams. SFU is the best university at which to undertake this project. The university has an oral lab and scholars in the field who can provide practical support and critical engagement. My research benefits from the senior supervision of Dr. Lara Campbell, who is an expert in women's and gender history and post-war Canada. Dr. Campbell also taught me the important role university research plays in listening to what communities can tell us about the diversity of the Canadian experience. Since Canada has historically been and continues to be an immigrant-receiving state, my dissertation will add to a vital and growing body of scholarship on the critical study of immigration and settlement in Canada. My supervisory committee includes Dr. Özlem Sensoy, who specializes in Middle-East studies, post-colonial feminism, and critical race feminist theory. Dr. Habiba Zaman, the third member of my committee, has expertise in transnational labour and immigration. My first language is Persian, and I have personal and professional contacts within the Persian community in Vancouver. I am therefore extremely well-positioned to undertake this complex and nuanced project.

Acknowledgments: I am grateful to Dr. Habiba Zaman and Dr. Sandiza Habib for providing me with the opportunity to participate in the International Workshop on Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion. I also extend my gratitude to the workshop participants and attendees for the fruitful discussions. I recognize and acknowledge that SFU is on the ancestral, unceded, and rightful lands of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Musqueam, Squamish, Kwikwetlem, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwantlen, and Qayqayt Nations.