

Identifying Barriers to Iranian-Canadian Community Engagement and Capacity Building

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Negin Khaleghi

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Approval

Name: Negin Khaleghi
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of Thesis: Identifying barriers to Iranian-Canadian community engagement and capacity building

Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. John Harriss
Professor of International Studies

Dr. Michael Howard
Senior Supervisor
Professor of International Studies

Dr. Alvaro Pereira
Supervisor
Professor of International Studies

Date Approved: April 29, 2011



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Abstract

This thesis examines the barriers Iranians face, after immigrating to Canada, to integrate and engage in the Canadian society, focusing on the Iranian community in Vancouver. The roots of these barriers at times go back to the country's history and culture, and the way they shaped the people's identity and at times to the host country's immigration policies and social, political and cultural environment. These barriers affect the diaspora on both individual and collective levels and prevent them from realizing their potential as a highly educated community that could contribute to the host country. Identifying, acknowledging and addressing these issues are the first step, toward building a more cohesive and functional Iranian community. This study tries to provide a building block for future projects.

Keywords: immigration; Iranian diaspora; Vancouver; community engagement; integration barriers

In the loving memory of my father
& to my mother,
For all the sacrifices she has made for me.

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Glossary

Civic Responsibility	The responsibilities of a citizen; the social force that binds you to the courses of action demanded by that force.
Cohesion	(i) the act or state of sticking together tightly. (ii) union between similar plant parts or organs.
Community Center	A building or group of buildings for a community's educational and recreational activities.
Credential Recognition	The process of verifying and assessing an individual's skills, competencies and credentials in a fair, consistent, transparent and rigorous manner.
Diaspora	A group of people who live outside the area in which they had lived for a long time or in which their ancestors lived.
Integration	To form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole.
Physical Proximity	Being physically near in place, time, order, occurrence, or relation.
Social Convergence	The act of converging and especially moving toward union or uniformity within members of a society.
Tolerance	Sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own.
Transnational	Extending or going beyond national boundaries

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Introduction

It is commonly known that members of the Iranian community suffer from a deep sense of mistrust of politics and the political process, lack of social cohesion, trust, and a sense of civic responsibility. These issues may be preventing the community from effectively organizing itself to understand and communicate its collective concerns as a diaspora. The virtual nonexistence of cohesion may affect the members of the community on both an individual and a collective level. The status quo impedes the community's potential to contribute effectively to Canadian socio-political development on grass roots, local, or national level.

The importance of studying diasporas in Canada rises from the fact that Canada is one of the most hospitable countries to immigrants. With every new wave, immigrants are faced with new questions of identity and recognition, and in their effort to adapt to the new environment; some may even redefine their values and individuality in their transition. According to Slavin's article "Iranian Diaspora Struggles to Find Unified Voice", one will observe similar trends in community interaction, levels of cohesion, and general civic activities of the Iranian Diaspora community across the major cities of Canada and the United States. Where Iranian socio-cultural or socio-political organizations do exist, they commonly lack strong governance structures, democratic processes or cultures of tolerance.

As it is not common or practical for an entire diaspora to be involved in transnational and local politics, I am not hereby suggesting that the lack of participation from the entire Iranian diaspora makes it any different from other diasporas within Canada; rather I am looking for ways to utilize the renewed sense of affinity in the

community that appear to have emerged after the events following the 2009 presidential election of Iran. I have used research and projects done by Iranian-Canadians with the vision of increasing cohesion and visibility and claiming to represent larger constituencies.

While it is not unusual to see the decline of social and political participation of immigrants once they have left their homeland, most communities have established a community center. These community centers offer the choice of participating and engaging in the new environment through a familiar channel. The Iranian population in Vancouver has not established such a center. Nor has the Iranians in Vancouver succeeded in electing anyone to political office, unlike some of the other ethnic groups. Attempts have been made in the past to penetrate the local political arena, but the community has not been successful at electing an Iranian city counselor, member of the provincial Legislative Assembly (MLA), or member of the federal parliament to address the Iranian communities concerns and interests at these government levels, even where ridings were dominated with decisive numbers of Iranians (Slavin).

The existence of informal networks takes priority over any well-established body within the Iranian community. The suspicion towards organizations and associations makes forming networks extremely difficult and therefore, a stage on which individuals can openly communicate their concerns has yet to be built. Without open communication, Iranian-Canadians will not find their common voice that is required for social mobilization and the subsequent achievement of their personal goals. The author acknowledges that it would be a realistic possibility that a governed body may only serve to reverse the level of integration achieved so far. (Bill 144)

Methodology

The present research project relies on a variety of written, secondary sources as well as interviews conducted in relation to a case study. The written sources examined include material presented by other researchers, which at times proved to be inconsistent. Much of the research done on the Iranian diaspora and Iranian immigrants is highly subjective and done to achieve specific, pre-determined results. One of the challenges faced in the present study was to seek a more objective understanding of the situation based on such subjective material.

Gathering statistical data also proved challenging, especially because of the absence of reliable official Iranian statistics. I have avoided including such unreliable statistics and information in this paper and had to rely on information provided by Western sources such as the CIA Fact Book and Statistics Canada and international bodies like the World Bank.

I have also used a single case study to explore issues faced by the Iranian community. As John Gerring notes “[s]ometimes in depth knowledge of an individual example is more helpful than fleeting knowledge about a larger number of examples. We gain better understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part.” (Gerring, 1) Silent Scream, a rare instance of the community’s engagement, is presented as a case study. My research on Silent Scream included an in-depth interview with one of the co-founders of the movement.

Outline

I will start by presenting a history of Iran's immigration and Canada's demography and the implications of these patterns. The characteristics and cultural identities of Iranians people as presented in available literature is then addressed and to draw a more comprehensive picture of the Iranian community outside Iran, I will compare the Iranian diaspora in Canada with those in United Kingdom and Sweden. I will then try to assess the roots of the identified barriers and present an example of a recent community activity in Vancouver, Silent Scream, that despite having a very strong initial organization and framework, failed to progress and establish a permanent status. I will end with the expert interview I conducted with one of the cofounders of the organization and try to identify the previously addressed barriers within the context of Silent Scream.

Canada: Pre & Post Iranians

History of Iran's Immigration Pattern

Since most social phenomena are driven by political, sociological, psychological, and economic factors, exploring the Iranian diaspora in Canada is important in order for the transitions of Iranians who have settled in Canada to be understood. This section relays the historical elements surrounding the Iranian diaspora in Canada.

Under the monarchy of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979) western ideologies made their way into urban Iranian popular culture and political affairs in an unprecedented manner. Iranians who were more conservative perceived the influence of these ideologies as acts of betrayal. In addition to seeming like the West's "puppet", the Shah instilled many oppressive and violent mandates and foolishly spent the country's oil profits, which created great dissent among the population (Bailey, 21-23).

During the Shah's regime, a small number of Iranians made their way to the west for the purposes of personal safety after opposing Shah's regime and for financial prosperity. Increased abuse of finances by the Shah during this period persuaded more to leave for more secure lands and economies, but the number remained relatively low compared to the amount of dissent experienced within Iran. Only 620 Iranians made their way to Canada as immigrants between 1961 and 1970, a period commonly referred to as the first wave, since the number of immigrants before this period was considerably lower and insignificant in comparison (Garousi, 9; Nouhi, 19; and Hakimzadeh). In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile after unification, and demonstrations of enraged masses paved the way for both the re-strengthening of traditional Islam in Iran. This re-

strengthening symbolically and literally served to rid Iran of the “pollution” of westernization and western ideologies, and the empowerment of Ayatollah Khomeini (Bailey, 26).

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in the absence of strong political opposition from other non-religious parties. Initially most of those involved were pleased; the oppressor and abuser were gone, as was the presence of a culture that threatened to destroy the values, traditions, and morals of the nation. The rural population who felt the most displeased under the Shah and who tended to be the most conservative citizens in Iran saw this change in the country's future as a positive one.

Shortly after this transition in power, groups and organizations that were major players in the empowerment of Khomeini and rejoiced in the ousting of the Shah were targeted by the new regime. Those who may have benefited from the Shah's rule or were thought to still be supporters of the monarchy were sought out, tortured, and usually executed. This group included military personnel and officials at all levels of government (Bailey, 27; Nouhi, 20-21).

Women faced severe restrictions; with loose-fitting garments imposed according to Islamic-inspired principles, laws, and dress codes that forced women to cover their entire bodies with the exception of their hands and face (Shirpak et al, 114). They were discouraged from working or attending university, and in some cases, it was claimed a national duty for a woman to place priority in her maternal duty since family is considered one of the most important aspects of Islam. Advances in women's rights that had been established by the Shah and enjoyed by many urban women, mainly in the areas of education and politics, were dissolved in the new Islamic Republic of 1979.

Meanwhile, women from rural, less economically sound families experienced a greater access to education and work opportunities. Those favoring the new Islamic laws argued that the restrictions imposed on women do not indicate that they are lesser citizens than men are, rather that western ideologies no longer have a place in Iran (Bailey, 27-29).

Women who chose to engage in activities not related to their family were frowned upon. Gender segregation laws were applied to both males and females, as they were discouraged from gathering in public spaces at the same time and were obligated to carry documentation proving familial relation (being related by blood or marriage) if they were to be seen in public together (Bailey, 29; Shirpak, et.al, 114; and Nouhi, 20). These ordinances aimed to preserve the honor of women and the sanctity of family and marriage among the Iranian community. These traditional ideologies seem to be so deeply rooted in individuals, that they are later manifested in the diaspora community's behavior. More secular sects of Iranian society found that that religious freedom was non-existent under the Islamic regime. Despite asserting that Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and others, with the exception of Baha'is, could practice their faith and participate freely in society and politics, they were afforded minimal political representation and anyone seeking to convert away from Islam faced execution on charges of apostasy (Bailey, 32; Nouhi, 20). Iranians in academia were also restricted. Their access to information was limited since part of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic-based reforms required that universities be closed for over two years in order for the government to alter both the curriculum and the materials used to teach to reflect a more Islamic influence rather than a westernized or modern one. They also hired new faculty and staff members for universities, which was later referred to as "Islamization of the teachers and faculty members" (Nouhi, 21;

Bailey, 31). Canada saw a jump in the level of Iranian immigrants during this period, which is commonly referred to as the ‘Second Wave’. The number of Iranians who migrated to Canada between 1971 and 1980 jumped to 3,455 (Hakimzadeh). During this period, the most common reasons for leaving Iran were the oppression of women’s rights, the Islamization of education, including the closing of schools, and the persecution -- mainly the beating, torturing, and execution -- faced by anyone not completely aligned with the Islamic regime (Nouhi, 21; Bailey, 31). Families with female children as well as professionals and those seeking to pursue high levels of education were motivated to leave. This movement of educated members of a society onto new lands is popularly referred to as “brain drain” (Hakimzadeh; Nouhi, 22-23). This results in Iranian diaspora being one of the most highly educated immigrant societies.

Most of those who immigrated during the Revolution of 1979 were not satisfied with where the Revolution seemed to be heading. “The middle and upper classes living in Tehran were those who benefited most from the years under the Shah and had a good deal to lose in the change to a theocratic state. Iran is a nation of great variety, both ethnically and religiously. The policies of the Shah, Reza Pahlavi, particularly the land reform initiatives in the 1970s, ensured that this diversity also manifested itself in socioeconomic terms” (McAuliffe, 63). The level of engagement the Shah’s regime had with the West, had a direct impact on the growth of a secularized and consumption-oriented society. This created a class at odds with the rest of society, mostly based in the capital, Tehran, with different expectations from the government as well as different ideologies. One of the key factors of disaffection with the Shah that led to the Revolution was this class tension. This classicism has survived in subtle ways and still

exists in the society with common assumptions that those supporting the monarchy are the richer and those opposing it are the working class. (Dabashi 19-23, McAuliffe, 75).

A new reason for immigrating for the people of Iran came during the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988. Feelings of nationalism and patriotism were evoked to engage people in the war that lasted for eight years and was later called “The Holy Defense” (Hiro, 44). Both men and women left Iran during this time for their own safety; some men sought to escape the draft, and some women sought to protect the physical well-being of themselves and their daughters (Nouhi, 21). Some also left because they opposed the war and its impact on the population in general -- Educational opportunities dwindled during these times, as enrollment into university proved outrageously difficult, especially for women, with all the “assigned duties” and new rules and regulations for their presence in a public place (Bailey, 29; Nouhi, 22). The quality of life declined drastically during this period and so immigration to Canada as one of the popular destinations increased.

The influx of Iranians in Canada continued to steadily rise throughout the 1980s as a side effect of the Iran-Iraq war. By 1990, over twenty thousand Iranians had immigrated to Canada. The Iranian immigration boom in Canada continued to increase through the 1990s, and by 2001, Iranians arriving in this decade comprised 36.2 percent of the entire Iranian-Canadian population. This 36.2 percent represents the entry of over 40,000 Iranians between 1990 and 2000, the years of the third migration wave. By the time of the 2001 census, 44 percent of Iranian-Canadians had settled in Toronto, 22 percent in Vancouver, 5 percent in Ottawa, and 19 percent in undisclosed cities (Garousi, 9). Those seeking to reconnect with friends and family also left because of the existing

political climate as joining family and friends was one of the most important reason given by the newcomers for settling in Toronto, Vancouver or Ottawa. In the case of Vancouver, another important reason was simply the climate while Toronto and Ottawa seemed appealing because of the better possibility of a finding a job (Statistics Canada).

Table 1. Immigration Waves of Iranians to Canada

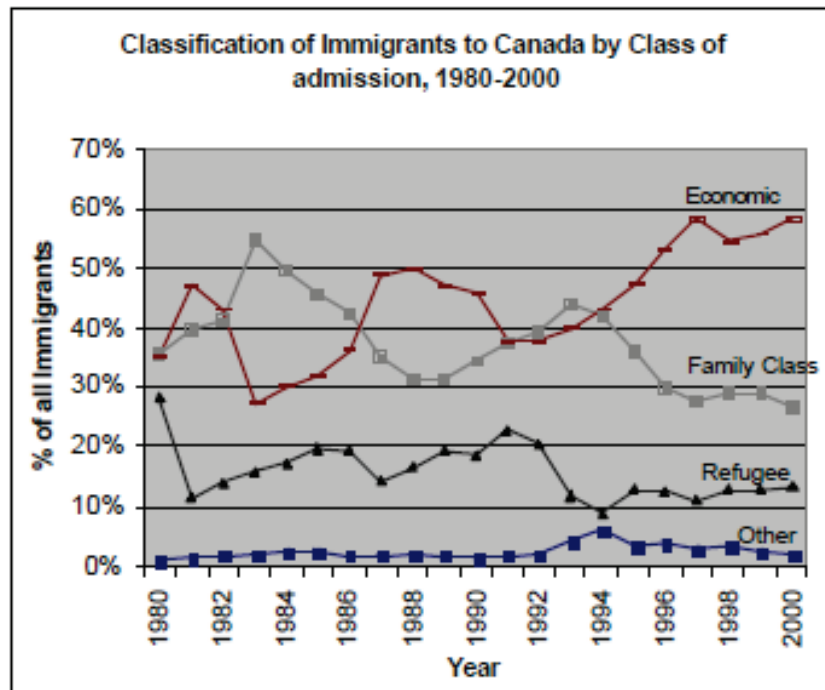
Name of the Wave	Time	Number of people moving to Canada	Reasons for immigration
First Wave	1961-1970	620	Personal safety and financial security
Second Wave	1980-1988	3,455	Oppression, Islamization, personal safety
Third Wave	1980-1988	40,000	Iran-Iraq war

Although the political climate of Iran was a major reason for the shift in Iranian immigration to Canada, other reasons contributed to this shift as well. Canada's immigration policy reforms played a major role, specifically the implementation of the Points System in 1967 and its alteration in 1976 (Garousi, 7). The point system classified the conditions of immigration into one of three categories: the Family Class, which is given to immigrant relatives of Canadian citizens who were sponsored by their Canadian relatives to arrive in Canada; the Independent Class or the Economic Class, which is comprised of immigrants with economic means to invest, self-employ or self-sustain; the Refugee Class, a status granted to those who prove they have been persecuted and have had their human rights violated; and the Skilled Workers Class for immigrants with relevant work experience and education which could be beneficial to the host country. This Points System was based on the level of education, skills such as languages, and the

amount of “adaptability” one possessed. Another factor that played an important role in the decision many Iranians made to move to Canada was the fact that Canada’s immigration system did not discriminate based on the country of origin (Garousi, 7). Both Iranian political situation and Canadian immigration policy helped facilitate emigration from Iran.

In comparing the waves of immigration as classified by Canadian officials, and the sociopolitical climate of Iran in each respective period, a visible trend emerges. Figure 5 of Garousi's *Iranians in Canada: A Statistical Approach* summarizes one aspect of his research findings:

Figure 1. Classification of Immigrants to Canada



The percentage of Iranians entering Canada under the family class during what is considered the second wave made up over 50 percent of all Iranians entering Canada in

the early 1980s; the amount of Iranians fitting into the family class towards the start of the new millennium comprised less than 30 percent (Garousi, 8). This statistical data is consistent with Iranian history. In the very wake of the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, many women fled Iran, some to join their husbands or male relatives who had migrated to Canada as part of the first wave. The conditions of their move normally indicated they would have been granted family class status however; Iranian men and women who left Iran during the third wave left as highly educated professionals with the intention to secure careers in Canada. These individuals, based on the Canadian point system, would have been granted Economic or Independent Class status. Also reflective of this argument is the fact that after 1994, according to Garousi's data, most Iranians entering Canada were considered Economic or Independent immigrants. Since the re-Islamization of Iran continued through the 1980s and 1990s, it is clear that the percentage of Iranians considered 'refugees' would remain relatively stable compared with the other classifications, as many who left during these periods would claim restriction of information was oppressive (Nouhi, 22).

The synchronicity between Iranian migratory data in Canada, the changes in immigration laws, and the political upheaval in Iran attest to the fact that politics contribute to social upheavals and emigration. By addressing the social concerns within a community's surroundings, one can better understand the issues on which a community places priorities, and how those priorities shape their actions and behaviors, both on an individual level and as a group.

History of Canada's Demography and the Implications

Social conditions are the building blocks of a community's concerns because they shape public opinion, and because these concerns point to issues that may be mobilized into causes for change. This section provides a history of Canada's demography, an analysis of the implications of demographics, and assesses the malignancy of the cultural principles on which the implications are based.

Social convergence and integration into the host country can take different forms and can be revealed through different indicators. Marriage, for example, is not just an aspect of demographics; it could be a symbol of unity and convergence of morals, values, and traditions. In this respect, marriage is a key indicator of the level of integration of a given community into its host community (Shirpak, et.al, 122). In the case of Iranian-Canadians, marriage to a member of the host community, as an indicator of the improvements in social condition by integration, speaks of how acculturated they had become at the time of the 2001 Canadian census, and may provide clues to concerns that cause social divisions and divergence.

The small number of Iranian-Canadians from the first wave had migrated to Canada in order to pursue personal safety and business endeavors (Nouhi, 19). As a result of political instability and social oppressions, this small number continued to grow over the next two decades. Demographic data presented by Garousi suggests that more Iranians had mixed marriages with other cultures in the early years of Iranian migration, which may reflect the necessity of companionship or of attraction to the exotic and foreign, but as the number of Iranian immigrants to Canada increased, less Iranians had mixed marriages (Garousi, 12). Before 1961, 57 percent of Iranians had mixed marriages

while only 8 percent of Iranians had mixed marriages between 1991 and 2001. Only 17 percent of Iranian-Canadians claim to be of more than one ethnic origin, which may speak for the progeny of the mixed couples of the past (Garousi, 14). Of interest would be the data presenting the progeny of the second and third wave of Iranian immigrants. It was shortly after the second wave that mixed marriages saw a dramatic decline and thus one should expect that the percentage of responses would probably be significantly less than 17 percent.

Another aspect of demography that indicates the level of integration into a society is the rate of unemployment (Nouhi, 20). Canadian census data suggest that of the 89,000 Iranian-Canadians believed to be living in Canada at the time of the 2001 Canadian census, 34 percent claimed to be unemployed compared with only 12 percent Canadians (Garousi, 9, 18). This finding is in stark contrast to expectations, since over 30 percent of Iranian-Canadians hold university degrees compared with less than 15 percent of Canadians in general. Moreover, at least 59 percent of Iranian-Canadians knew English, 16 percent knew English and French, and 9 percent only knew French. Only 6 percent of the entire documented Iranian-Canadian community did not know either language (Nouhi, 23; Garousi, 16). Hafezi reports “Science and Engineering undergraduate Iranian-born student enrollment in Canadian universities increased by 70 percent from 1985 to 1998 and reached a total number of 825. In the same period, the graduate enrollment surged by 240 percent making the total number of enrollees 673. From 1992 to 2003, the number of degrees granted to Iranian students in Canada increased from 40 to 140 (350 percent), Total number of Iranian Students enrolled in Canadian universities in 2003-2004 was 1,050” (Hafezi, 2). These statistics are significant in presenting a

disconnection between education and employment in the Iranian community, which could raise question about their level of integration or prejudice involved in the process.

One would not expect, based on these statistical findings, that Iranian-Canadians would have much difficulty finding employment. Assessing the barriers to employment, as perceived by the struggling community, will provide insight into the general social response of the Iranian-Canadian community, and an idea of the values and ideals on which these responses are based. Understanding employment issues can provide hints as to what components of the immigration system should be improved, and how to implement those changes so that the Iranian-Canadian community can better integrate into Canadian society.

Canadian Society, Iranian Identity

In Nouhi's study, 203 Iranian-Canadians in Vancouver were asked about their barriers to employment. Of those who had never worked in Canada, 31.6 percent of her subjects considered "lack of work experience in Canada" to be the biggest barrier. Second and third to this opinion were "lack of networks" and "lack of credential recognition." Amongst those who were employed, "lack of networks" was the most popular answer followed by "lack of credential recognition" and "lack of work experience in Canada" (Nouhi, 43-44). These answers suggest that amongst immigrants, having established networks or being able to network are powerful tools.

As the cultural norms and traditions are transferred from the homeland, the dependency on networks and the significance of creating a system of communication through which one can be a part of the community of Iranian-Canadians, hold a special

place amongst the new immigrants. James A. Bill in *The Plasticity of Informal Politics: The Case of Iran* states that in Iran in the time of the Shah, power was not necessarily the guarantee of a political title. Instead, physical proximity to forces of power and ability to influence them through informal networks were more valuable. He explains the cultural significance of this concept as follows: “Personal ties and connections are of critical importance in this system for they mean access to power. Proximity in the sense of physical nearness also acquires special relevance for if you can be physically close to someone you have an unusual opportunity to influence him” (Bill 137). This gives a background to the importance of networking for Iranians in or outside the country. He continues to describe the extent to which locals went in order to be in physical proximity to their leader when he visited an area. He also derives from this notion that many powerful political players obtained their power by being in physical and social proximity to the Shah (Bill 136). The ever-present dependence on networks of present day Iranian-Canadians confirms both the validity of Bill's argument and also that Iranian ideals and traditions are imported to some extent, however unconsciously.

A book written in colloquial Farsi by Naraghi a prominent sociologist in Iran in 2001 provides an intimate view of Iranian society. His book is a form of self-criticism that addresses serious issues in a sarcastic, yet simple language. He states that his book is not trying to place blame and for this reason, he talks about his personal research and experiences using numerous anecdotes and calls the issues he comes across “our” problems. He refers to what Bill calls the “importance of networking” for Iranians as “social climbing”: “Iranians try to go out of their way to relate themselves to people of status. Our zeal to assign only successful or famous people to Iran is motivated by a

proud quest for validation” (Naraghi, 61). This shows how Iranians try to gain stature amongst their peers through their connections and networks.

Bill also discusses the importance of informal gatherings on political influence. He describes how “The exercise of power in Iran is played out primarily within networks of informal groups. Factions, cliques, coteries and ad hoc collectivities of all sorts are the kinds of group formations that count in Iran” (Bill 133). This theoretically effective mentality requires a collective goal that is non-existent among the members of the Iranian diaspora in Canada. Another problem with Iranian-Canadian reliance on networking is that in networking, all parties involved must benefit in some form. Since Iranian-Canadians have not yet established themselves as powerful resources, society will not seek them out for networking because the benefits are not yet apparent. In fact, Nouhi believes that common sentiment among Canadians is that they have already contributed too much to the Iranian diaspora through tax dollars, and are reluctant to provide further assistance (Nouhi, 54-55).

Nouhi compares the perceived barriers to employment and the documented barriers, mainly the absence of a nationalized credential assessing body in Canada, red tape involved with assessment and recognition of foreign credentials and the costs imposed on immigrants to have their credentials assessed, in Vancouver. She then proposes suggestions to improve the system (Nouhi, 12). The most cost-effective ways for the Canadian system to help Iranian-Canadians secure employment, according to Nouhi's research, is to improve the availability of information as it relates to ensuring foreign credentials are recognized and to the possibility of securing employment; this includes the procedures necessary to gain the proper licensure or certification for any

given profession.

When her participants were asked how and why they decided on Vancouver as the stage of economic endeavors, many said their friends and family in Vancouver expressed the absence of struggle in establishing themselves. Some found information on their own, and still others, despite maybe being told about difficulties in the Canadian labor market, assumed they would find employment in their studied professions based on the approval of their application as economic class immigrants by the Canadian government (Nouhi, 37-38). Another concern when assessing the Iranian-Canadian method of seeking information based on the presence of networks is the inaccuracy of the information they receive. The optimism expressed to the yet-immigrated Iranian could be based on inaccurate information or the illusion of prospects for success.

Class and social standing is an essential part of Iranian behavior in general. Nicole Bailey in her thesis about the Iranian diaspora from a feminist perspective mentions the importance of class, status, education, and profession among Iranians in general. Besides exploring the motivations behind the migration of her subjects, she also explores the significance on which these aspects are attached and says:

In response to the claim that Iranians must 'maintain a facade of success' for fear that exhibiting vulnerabilities will be exploited and their status...subverted...the social position an individual occupied in Iran...can no longer be taken for granted and must be more proactively cultivated due to the uncertainty and changes that have resulted from migration (Bailey, 100). Bailey also shares the following account from one of the women she interviewed:

[W]hen they come here...suddenly they start showing off, like everything they have, their money...and the power and the status and the parents who are a doctor and the parents who are the lawyer, like it has to be

mentioned...And some of the kids I know are like, their parents are very strict of who they hang out with? They have to hang out with other kids whose parents are surgeons as well (Bailey, 100).

These types of accounts emphasize the importance of class, status, and success in Iranian culture. For example most Iranian-Canadians tell their friends and family of success and happiness when they may actually be struggling to get by. It is possible that by misleading newcomers, Iranian-Canadians are hindering the entire community from realizing its potential. This tendency to value status and impression is a divisive element in this particular diaspora society. James Bill's observes the interlacing of networks of the Shah's time and the Iranian tendency to value the collective over the individual observed by other researchers -- Iranians in general have a natural, albeit culturally driven, disposition to form collective agencies aimed at benefiting the whole (Shirpak, et.al, 118). Yet this has not been accomplished in Iranian-Canadian communities. Further dissection of the social conditions affecting members of the Iranian diaspora in Canada in comparison to Iranian diaspora elsewhere may expose barriers affecting social integration in Canada particularly. This could lead to clues into the inter-community dynamics, which may be inhibiting social cohesion among the Iranian diaspora community in Canada. In some cases, there is also a traditional reliance on government to solve problems, Iranian immigrants carry the same sort of expectations from the Canadian government and in some cases are less willing to take initiative and instead expect the government to carry their burden (Naraghi, 83). The reasons for this lack of motivation to take initiative instead of waiting for others to take the first step need to be addressed in order for the community to realize its potentials.

Several researchers found a tendency in Iranians to present oneself, one's family, and one's community in the best possible light, to the point of concealing or lying about one's true thoughts or actions. Higgins for instance, notes that for some respondents the interview ameliorated loneliness and isolation (Higgins, 699). Naraghi dedicates two chapters of his book to this phenomenon. He suggests that it is not that lying is necessary, but that it is easier to ignore the issue:

It's like a collective decision to ignore the ugly truth. More than a decade ago in 1999 one of Iran's dominant newspapers published an issue featuring an article about 2700 murders, 3000 suicides and 2 and a half million known mental patients in that year and that was the last time that any statistics regarding these issues were published. People chose to forget and never question it again (Naraghi, 41).

Iranian community needs to identify and acknowledge such shortcomings as the first step towards solving these deeply rooted issues. This may take years but I believe the motivation and reasoning after the 2009 election, has made the current time the most crucial and suitable time for the intellectuals within the community to take initiative and realize and utilize this momentum.

Comparing Diasporas in Canada and Elsewhere

Comparison of Iranian diaspora in Canada to Iranian diaspora elsewhere, serves to highlight different characteristics of two or more groups that may be the cause of successes or weaknesses that a particular group may have. This section will compare the demographic information of Iranian diaspora communities of Sweden and United Kingdom with those of the Iranian diaspora community in Canada, in order to compare the level of integration experienced by Iranian communities. Demographic information of other diaspora communities within Canada will be compared to Iranian demographics in order to establish an argument about the lack of social integration of Iranians in Canada. Finally, this section will discuss linguistic tendencies and behaviors as a complementary tool to demographics. This discussion is not intended to compare all elements of Iranian diaspora communities elsewhere, nor does it intend to delve into the social conditions of other diaspora communities in Canada, as these elements do not serve to provide answers to the barriers Iranian-Canadians face in regards to social integration and cohesion.

Sweden and the United Kingdom have been popular destinations for Iranian immigrants seeking to flee the changes in Iran after 1979. According to Asadulah Naghdi, from whom most of the Iranian-Swedish community's information is derived, disunity between Sweden and its neighboring nations based on cultural values proved beneficial for Iranian immigrants of the second emigration wave (Naghdi, 200). Sweden enforced immigration laws for its neighbors and by the 1970s, work was available for incoming immigrants. Many Iranians stated they chose Sweden because the "...reputation [of Sweden] in humanitarian affairs, low population and its growing economy that inclined it

to absorb labor” (Naghdi, 200). These are the some of the factors that Iranians lack within their own country and thus make the country a desirable destination for immigration.

Sweden's demographic trends during Iranians' immigration are similar to Canada's. A significant percentage of Iranians at the time of data collection spoke Swedish well, which is comparable to Iranian-Canadian language abilities. In Sweden, more than half of Iranians speak Swedish and 42 percent of the third wave to enter Sweden had post-secondary education as compared with about half of the Iranian population in Canada speaking at least one of Canada's official languages and having a relatively high education rate (Garousi, 10; Naghdi, 200).

A difference between Canada and Sweden is the rate of unemployment. In Canada, according to Garousi's research, 34 percent of Iranians were unemployed, whereas in Sweden, 55 percent were unemployed. Another difference between Canada and Sweden is that divorce rates are amongst the highest of all immigrants in Sweden (Naghdi, 200; Garousi, 9). Most Iranians (over 73 percent) feel integrated into Swedish society, with Iranian-Swedish women stating they feel more “acculturated.” To an Iranian with a skewed view of non-Iranian communities, the popularity of divorce among Iranian-Swedish communities and the stated level of comfort in Swedish society may reiterate the negative impact that social integration into a less traditional society has on Iranian values and traditions, as is suggested by respondents in Shirpak, et al.

In 2006, there were approximately 61,000 Iranians living in the United Kingdom, 22,000 fewer than in Canada. The unemployment rate recorded for Iranian-born immigrants does not exceed 10 percent in Britain, which is insignificant in comparison to Canada. Of Iranians who immigrated to the United Kingdom prior to 1990, 66 percent

had post-secondary education while only 12 percent did before then. Finally, a significant amount of Iranian-British citizens felt ultimately successful, but professionally speaking, felt they were targets of discrimination more often than not (*The Iranian Muslim Community in England*, 29-30). There is no data on the rates of divorce and mixed marriages for the Iranian population in the United Kingdom because Iranians are classified under “other ethnic groups” (Jeffries, 13). It is unclear whether the ability to obtain employment is the origin of the assumption that Iranians in Britain are well adjusted to British society. There is no data available on the employers of Iranians in Britain either, but percentage of Iranian-British that are unemployed compared with unemployed Iranian-Canadians could be an indicator of a greater level of integration into British society, if one assumes that Iranians haven’t been entirely employed within their own ethnic group. Without the complementary presence of marital statistics and the percentage of Iranians who claim more than one origin, only speculation about the level of integration can be made.

According to Statistics Canada, between 2005 and 2007, of the top ten countries of origins for immigrants in Canada, eight of those were Asian. They included: China, India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Iran, South Korea and Sri Lanka. The highest number of immigrants came from China, India, and the Philippines and the most popular destination points among immigrants were British Columbia and Quebec (Statistics Canada). Garousi’s data, which account for trends in migrations up until 2001, suggests that of all Middle Eastern populations to have entered Canada by 2001, Iranians made up the greatest portion (Garousi, 12). A comparison of the percentages of interracial marriages between immigrants from Middle Eastern countries shows that Iranians had the least

amount of interracial marriages (17%) while Azerbaijanis (67%), Turks (40%), Iraqis (27%), and Pakistanis (26%) had considerably more (Garousi, 14) up to 2001. As stated above, marriage is a good indicator of level of integration; the fact that so many other Middle Eastern communities have such higher levels of interracial marriages suggests that Iranian-Canadians have yet to come to a common ground with the greater Canadian population.

Demographic data alone is not enough to convey the extent to which Iranian-Canadians have not integrated into Canadian society. In a study on code switching behavior, which is a linguistics term denoting the concurrent use of more than one language in conversation, Rezaeian discovered that Iranian-Canadians in Vancouver, do not alternate between languages when they speak to each other as much as other immigrant cultures did in other studies. He suggests that cultural differences between Iranians and Canadians have not been transcended. Rezaeian proposes that the general Canadian mentality about culture merging is part of the reason why Iranian-Canadians have yet to merge with Canada: “In juxtaposition to the label 'melting pot' which many use to characterize the immigrant experience in the US, Canadians use the label 'salad bowl' in order to describe the process on integration into their society” (Rezaeian, 41). In the salad bowl concept, there is no merging; there is only togetherness. In the salad bowl, all different elements complement each other. While this on the surface seems to be an explanation as to why Iranians have not developed the tendency to merge their languages and subsequently their cultures, it does not explain why other communities have a higher tendency to code switch than Iranians do.

Finding the Roots

Collective Action Barriers, Diversity and Social Distrust

Collective action is dependent on the commonality of goals in a society or community. To have a common goal means to have common values, ideals, and priorities. From sociological studies available, one would expect that the Iranian-Canadian inability to socially integrate would strengthen the community's ability to establish common goals among its members as it suggests a rejection of non-Iranian values. However, this seems not to be the case. In fact, the opposite is true. The intention of this section is to examine the traditions and values among the Iranian-Canadian community that act as collective action barriers.

Rezaeian's data implies a sense of togetherness in Iranian-Canadian culture that is evident in Iranian-Canadian tendency to swerve between languages (Rezaeian, 40). The fact that all ages and genders kept using one language, which was usually Persian, when they spoke may lead one to conclude the absence of dividing aspects in Iranian-Canadian communities. Disparity exists within the Iranian-Canadian community however, that is not evident in its use of language. An assessment of social issues, such as importation of cultural values is necessary here.

As confirmed in Bailey's observations of Iranian women and by Carment and Bercuson's discussion of the Iranian diaspora in Canada, a number of relevant aspects of Iranian culture have been imported to Canada (Carment and Bercuson, 115). Other researchers like Shirpak, et al, also support this point.

Religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity is an inherent component of the Iranian society (Groot, 159). Naficy argues that diasporic consciousness could bind internal ethno-linguistic differences among Iranians because the sense of loss experienced in diaspora outweighs all other differences in the struggle of adapting and surviving in the new environment.

"It is a relationship that is not so much based on shared originary facts (birth, nationality, color, race, gender) than on an adherence to a common imaginary construction. Discourse thus replaces biology" (Naficy, 169).

It would seem that this diasporic identity would result in a sense of community among Iranians. Mostofi believes that as immigrants, Iranian Muslims, Jews, Christians, Turks, Armenians, and Assyrians could construct and collectively adhere to an identity composed of neutral cultural—mostly historic Iranian celebrations such as Norouz (New Year), Chahr-shanbeh-soori (the last Wednesday of the year), Seezdah beh dar (thirteenth day of spring), ta'arof and roodar-vasi (forms of etiquette), and dowreh (gathering)—but that they have failed to do so: “Although Iranians can relate to these traditions as Iranian cultural universals, they may not be enough of a stimulus for all Iranians to create a community” (Mostofi, 685).

Ansari notes that Iranian immigrants are not a homogeneous group, their experiences of immigration are different, and a sense of Iranian “community” is absent in the diaspora. Commenting on this lack of a collective identity based on the diasporic experience of living in the United States, and having to adapt to the new society does, Ansari points out,

“It is a normal mode of behavior for an Iranian to escape from other Iranians, or to ignore him wherever he meets one. Iranians suffer from

mutual distrust and lack of social commitment. The immigrants' state of mind is one of skepticism and distrust. The lack of alumni and other associational activities among Iranians shows this lack of cohesiveness, which is necessary to the creation of a community" (Ansari, 80).

This distinction between the sense of community and the diaspora has roots in the Iranian language, writing, and interpretation of space (Eickelman, 222). Mostofi describes the "architecture" of Iranian verbal interaction as indicating a pervasive distinction between the "external" (*zاهر*), public aspects of social action and speech and an "inner" (*باطن*) core of integrity and piety revealed only to one's family and trusted intimates. This external world is marked by insecurity and uncertainty, where the cultural ideal is the "clever dissimulator" (*زهرنگی*), the shrewd and cynical manipulator capable of maintaining a "proper public face" and holding "true" feelings in check to trusted family and intimates (Mostofi, 696). Such distinctions makes doing research and interviews more difficult as you can never be certain of the accuracy of the answers.

The linguistic diversity among the Iranian diaspora, including Turkic languages such as Azeri, as well as ethno-religious languages such as Armenian, and regional dialects gives a great variety to the community. Some scholars believe that these varieties cause such great gaps in the community, that there is no comprehensive Iranian diaspora, rather there are different experiences of Iranian community amongst different groups from an Iranian background, defined along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. McAuliffe distinguishes between the contexts where the term diaspora can be used for Iranians:

"These experiences are diasporic in form, but may be differentially experienced by different groups. I use the term Iranian diaspora/s to reflect

this diverse experience of diaspora, which is divergent within Iranian migrant groups, but nonetheless may also come together at times to express a nationally unified diasporic migrant experience. Elsewhere I use the term ‘Iranian diaspora’ to represent a constructed national migrant communal affiliation that needs to be critically unsettled” (McAuliffe, 68).

This internal mistrust and lack of cohesion impedes their integration to the host nation as well. Tom Smith and Glenn Dempsey speak of the tendency of individuals to create divides based on differences in values. (Smith and Dempsey, 584) According to Carment and Bercuson’s studies of the perceptions of sexuality in Canadian culture, Iranian-Canadians separate themselves from the Canadian society on the more personal level. These researchers found that more often than not, Iranian men and women alike of all ages had more traditional views about relationships between males and females and families compared with those held by Canadian society as a whole. About the casual interactions between men and women, one of the study participants said, “We cannot let other men flirt with our wives just because it is acceptable in Canadian society” (Shirpak, et al, 119), indicating that Iranian-Canadians are not in agreement with greater Canadian views of gender relations.

Participants were asked questions regarding their perception of Canadian marital and parent-child relationships, sexual education in Canadian schools, and platonic gender relations in Canadian society. In each case, men and women expressed common concerns about the over-sexuality of girls and women and the sanctity with which Canadians view their marriage (Shirpak, et al, 119). One participant stated: “...Canadians' relationships are incomparable to Iranians. Canadian couples have no commitment and no emotion about each other. They are with somebody today and with somebody else the next day [...]

Iranians try to keep their marital relationship in any condition...” (Shirpak, et al, 120). Such perceptions may be stifling the integration.

In response to questions about parent-child relationships, Iranians were at a consensus in thinking that the allowance of independence of Canadian teenagers by their parents was an indicator of how much parents loved and cared about their children: “...They don't care if their 16-year-old daughter doesn't come back home at night. It is important for us as Iranians!” (Shirpak, et al, 120). There are many misconceptions such as the one mentioned when it comes to cultural differences.

Zancouver study participants, which were all women, were asked what they felt were the dividing factors in their community. One typical response among participants was the rift in values and morals that was exhibited by their behavior. One participant told of her interactions with another Iranian-Canadian woman when she revealed she was living with her Canadian boyfriend: “Some...people [Iranians]...I can't deal with them...You know, they think different. Because I [was] dating a Canadian guy...Last year, when I went to school, some [Iranian] lady, you know older lady, middle aged lady. Forty or something [...] 'He's, he's Canadian.' 'He's not Muslim?'...[I]t's so stupid...I can't talk to them about my private life and they always...judge you and tell you what to do...I think that...mostly it's...cultural” (Bailey, 93-94). Other participants criticized Iranian women in their community for the way they dressed. Clothing perceived to be revealing and inappropriate behavior made these women unwilling to form relationships with other Iranian-Canadian women (Bailey, 95); this assertion suggests that the opposition of values among Canadians and Iranians is a cause for divide.

It was not expressed how many of the women interviewed lived in rural areas of

Iran prior to immigrating to Canada. This makes it difficult to assess whether or not their tendency to be more conservative than Iranian women originating in urban areas of Iran is based on general Iranian sentiments about acceptable women's behavior and dress, or on different levels of preferred conservatism. This lack of clarity also makes it difficult to assess the tendencies to acculturate based on the setting of origin. However, responses in other studies such as Shirpak, et al, about perceptions of sexuality, suggest that conservatism in general is embedded in Iranian values.

In any case, it is clear that a large dividing factor is the ability and willingness of each Iranian-Canadian person to merge cultures. Individuals that are considered hybrids, generally women who are adapting to their increased level of social freedoms, are as treated the same as an “outsider.” The account from a woman torn between the two identities, describes her feeling of rejection after having given a presentation in her homeland about films depicting Iranian struggles: “I had become an outsider now, without the right to speak. I was authorized to speak about Iranian cinema abroad—something the person who introduced me lauded—but I could apparently not do so inside [...] I was neither an authentic native nor a born-and-bred true foreigner, neither self nor other, neither here nor there, but an amphibolic person straddling both cultures who had produced partiality and hybrid positionality, not wholeness and stable positions” (Naficy, 167).

It seems logical to assume that even as a “hybrid” one would yield better treatment from Iranians than someone of non-Iranian descent, that assumption would be a mistake. Bailey describes a similar rejection when she first began approaching her subjects about her intended research. She describes her attendance at Iranian cultural

events and the looks of suspicion and lack of hospitality she endured from a people whose struggle she was interested in understanding and helping (Bailey, 11). Several researchers report lack of respect for social science research and suspicion of strangers asking questions to be particularly strong among Iranians. Higgins argues that only someone with strong ties to the community can be successful in research with this population (Higgins, 702).

In *Zancouver*, respondents confirm that the differences between traditional and westernized ideas are one of the major reasons why Iranian-Canadians drift away rather than towards each other. Differences between new comers and established members of the community are described in terms of distrust for newcomers, whose traditional views may be associated with political ties in Iran (Bailey, 108). One respondent described her experience of distrust amongst other Iranians for deciding to wear the veil or the Hijab: “I’m planning to wear [the hijab] in the Fall, it’s just so hard here. Like people really have a very different take on it... You get really dirty looks[...]It’s very intimidating... By everyone, not to say like you know, [only] Canadians, a lot of Persians are actually worse about it. They’re very defensive, ‘cause they think you have immediate political ties...” (Bailey, 108). These judgmental reactions create gaps among the members of community.

The huge disparities between political ideologies among Iranian-Canadians as they are expressed by another one of Bailey’s interviewees suggest another barrier to social cohesion -- the diverging perspective with which men and women view their new environment. In the eyes of some Iranian men, women in westernized countries experience a level of freedom they never had in Iran, and are threatening the very core of Iranian. This sentiment is expressed across many studies in terms of divorce. While both

parties may be fearful of divorce in Canada, the reasons given by each gender group were different. For example, in *Iranian Immigrants Perspective on Sexuality*, women viewed divorce as a freedom. Women respondents explained that divorce was a way of controlling their own lives; women were no longer forced to stay in situations if they did not want to. Men, on the other hand, felt divorce is a selfish act that represents divergence from traditional Iranian mentality, which places family before anything else (Shirpak, et al, 119-120). Bailey proposes that this perception, and the different perceptions of gender roles between men and women, results from the lack of adjustment and importation of cultural ideals. She states: "...men, as well as new Iranian-Canadian women and women of older generations living in Canada, have a harder time letting go of the traditional impositions that Islamic rule has left ingrained on cultural values" (Bailey 99). This tendency of men to be more traditional may be a response to lack of success in a new environment, as humans tend to feel melancholy when there is no perceived success. To return to traditional ways of life would give the illusion of at least one secure aspect in the lives of men. (Shirpak, et al, 124)

The divides that emerge between Iranian-Canadians by their differences in values is undeniable. These divides are the fundamental factors that make Iranian-Canadian integration difficult. No common goal can be established among a community whose values and ideas are so varied. If things continue to follow this trajectory, neither community will flourish into what it could be. Change in attitudes will only occur if both Canadians and Iranians are open to change. This openness and willingness to change is currently inhibiting the Iranian-Canadian community from moving forward with integration.

Another point of separation between the Iranian diaspora, according to McAuliffe is the difference between newer arrivals and the established 'higher class' Iranians is mediated through the conspicuous consumption of upper class goods, from cars and houses, down to shoes and trousers.

“Newer Iranian migrants were frequently called a derivative of the phrase ‘fresh off the boat’ (e.g. ‘FOBs’ or ‘fobes’) by informants. This blanket phrase, not used exclusively by Iranians but across migrant groups in all three cities [Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal], had a particular resonance with the Iranian case. They were simultaneously accorded difference along religious, economic and linguistic lines. They were described as less wealthy, more religious and ‘speaking in a funny accent’” (McAuliffe, 69).

McAuliffe reports some of his informants believed that new migrants were seen as ‘low class’ and fighting among youth at Iranian events was often attributed to them, since they “didn’t know how to behave’ in their new society”. Class separation remains an important influence that serves to cause separation within the fabrics of the Iranian community creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ (McAuliffe, 70).

Silent Scream

Background and History of the Movement

One of the rare instances of the successful community activity in Vancouver among Iranians happened after the 2009 Iranian presidential election with Silent Scream. In this section, I will go to roots of the barriers Iranians face when trying to form a community event with an interview with one of the core members of Silent Scream. The interviewee's full name has been excluded to protect his privacy.

After a heated campaign between reformist candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi and incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iranians turned out in record numbers to vote in the presidential election on June 12, 2009. Not long after the polls closed, the Interior Minister announced that President Ahmadinejad had been reelected by a 62 percent margin. The announcement was followed by allegations of vote rigging and election fraud and prompted supporters of leading reformist candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi and others to hold public demonstrations in several major cities of a size and intensity unprecedented since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Government has banned unauthorized public gatherings but protests reportedly have continued since the election. Supreme Leader Khamenei, along with the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij, appear determined to impose the election outcome by force (Addis, 2).

Silent Scream was an independent grassroots movement that claimed not to be affiliated with any political organizations or factions. On their official website they state that the reasons for their formation were to demand an end to the violence against protesters in Iran, to release all associated prisoners and to resume all means of

communication (Media coverage-silentscreamforiran.com). When one observes the barriers to the cohesion and integration of the Iranian community, events such as Silent Scream gain additional significance since the organizers managed to keep the crowd motivated, interested and engaged longer than any other Iranian entertainment event in Canada. It was one of the first community movements in Vancouver that did not have an entertainment purpose and yet it attracted the support of the community.

Interview with M.R. One of the Cofounders of Silent Scream (Appendix 1)

M.R. is an adjunct professor at the University of British Columbia and holds a Master of Science degree in Environmental Technology and a postgraduate level certificate in Environmental Science. He is the founder and president of Strategic Carbon Management and has over twelve years of multidisciplinary international experience in management, research, consulting, and as a United Nations project officer. He is a seasoned project manager with Intercultural sensitivity, having lived and worked in three continents. He managed, budgeted, planned, implemented, and monitored UNICEF's US \$6,000,000 water and environmental sanitation project in the earthquake stricken city of Bam. In the last 5 years, he has been involved in various initiatives in metro Vancouver's Iranian and Canadian community.

In the interview with M.R. who is also one of the cofounders of Silent Scream, he described Silent Scream as “a movement that generated just from a few concerned Iranian citizens, in reaction to the events occurring after the 2009 election in Iran.” In answer to the question how Silent Scream events were different from other community events he said:

We started it very suddenly, it was a phone call, a couple of friends got together and the next night we had the first Silent Scream event organized. The way it differed was that we didn't really have any ...at the beginning at least, any personal agendas. It was mostly just to help the Iranian community in Vancouver react to what was happening in Iran, give them a venue. It didn't have a pre-defined framework.

M.R. talked about other Iranian-Canadian community activities prior to Silent Scream.

Most of the significant events are limited to entertainment and maybe historical, cultural events such as "Norouz" and "Charshanbe Soori". "Charshanbe Soori" is one of the biggest gatherings of Iranian-Canadians in Vancouver. The organizers claim that they have about 3500 Iranians attending that event, but I find that hard to believe. But there is no 'activism' involved in that. People just show up to have fun, jump over the fire and eat food and dance to the music, this probably wasn't the first, but in terms of turn out I think it was unprecedented in Vancouver to see such a turn out. Some days we had about 4000 people coming. A different group of Iranians, some of them were also in Silent Scream, organized some events prior to the [2009] election to encourage people to vote. That was to sort of to tell them where they can vote and encourage them to participate and have a say in what was happening in Iran.

The cultural events he mentioned are ancient Persian celebrations that are celebrated at the end of winter and beginning of spring.

He refused to call the event 'anti-government' and stated that the diversity of the ideologies and political views in the group was one of the reasons it succeeded in attracting the attention of the community the way it did.

Actually we had a lot of different views inside the group which were

organizing Silent Scream; what we were all concerned about was what was happening to the people on the streets. The sort of crack down on the people was what our biggest concern was...one of the principals of the Silent Scream was that we are not here to chant slogans or send a message, what we want to do is to be silent if you may, to let the voice of the people on the streets of Iran be heard. [...] We had all different sorts of groups [political and ethnic]. Initially some of them conflicting but at the end we had leftists maybe some monarchists, a lot of ordinary (non-partisan) citizens, there were actually some Hezbollahi people [pro-government] who would support the government but were not happy with what was happening on the streets. They would just show up because we, in the context of Silent Scream would avoid chanting slogans and if there was anything like that, it would happen after our event, but there wasn't a lot of support for that. I think one of the things that brought people together in Silent Scream was that we didn't want to take sides for any of the political groups. What we wanted, what we were saying was that we just want to support the people on the streets and want their voices to be heard.

Many lessons can be learned from this. The ethnic, religious, cultural, as well as political diversity of Iranian-Canadians must be taken into consideration if one is to succeed in engaging the community in non-entertainment events.

When asked if the Canadian government and society played any effective role in the success of the events, M.R. expressed his surprise at the amount of support they received from different levels of government of Canada as well as the media.

We even had some federal newspapers publishing articles about the Silent Scream event. We had TV interviews and radio shows talk about us, we had a lot of newspaper articles [...] With just the numbers of people we had, and

just because people showed up in the thousands in the silent vigil in the Vancouver art gallery in the core of downtown Vancouver, that was an event that almost no one could ignore...and 10 nights in a row...every one who I talked to afterwards had at least seen one night. And as it progressed we had more and more Canadian audiences, who would come to support our cause.

He talked about the importance of this support stating that

I think we are lacking a sense of belonging. We aren't happy with being Iranians right now. We try to show that we are proud of it but we really are not! One of the things that a lot of people identified with was that in Silent Scream for the first time we saw high ranking non-Iranian officials coming and addressing us as 'Iranians', because we are Iranians, and that I had never seen in my life time. I've seen Iranians being recognized for their scientific achievements and inventions for their financial success but that was the first time I saw Iranians being recognized as just Iranians and because of being Iranians and being respected as Iranians. We haven't had that a lot.

He believes that this recognition gives a sense of closeness and affinity to Iranians that they need in order to build a successful community.

M.R. believes that in order for any group to evolve and grow, there needs to be different voices and ideologies in the group, and he said that Silent Scream had that diversity and managed to keep a democratic system inside but in the end, those who did not want to conform to the neutrality of the group created gaps in the foundation of the group that ended in a decision to dismantle the group.

The fracturing started when we saw that some people wouldn't abide to what was agreed in the group. We had people at some point taking the microphone and make statements on behalf of the Silent Scream that were

not discussed or agreed upon prior to the event. The main reason I believe was that we thought that we lack a unity to continue and people started feeling uncomfortable with the way things were going forward. We just had to spend a lot of time trying to manage the diversions from the democratic decision and that was very frustrating.

M.R. believes that Silent Scream did not fail and that it was

the most successful Iranian community engagement event. I have been in Vancouver for six and half years. But from what I've heard from people who have been here for 30 years that they have never seen something like that and Iranians from different levels of diaspora to get together and support the cause and there were reasons for that. [...] It wasn't only that it formed during the time of crisis because there were a lot of other events going on as well during that time but none of them were able to attract this much support. I wouldn't call it a failure then, because it succeeded more than we had imagined.

He believes that had the movement continued, it could turn into “something that could address the short comings of us as a community and be a core for some sort of social cohesion to maybe address from there issues such as the mistrust that we have, the inherent mistrust we suffer from. In that sense yes we did fail. We could have continued and make this a more important platform for the community.”

M.R. addressed the issues Iranians have, which are “rooted deep in our identities as Iranians. I came out of this experience thinking that if anything is going to succeed in the Iranian Canadian community we need to address these barriers that prevent us from working together. What causes this distrust and the lack of social and civic commitment that we have in the group.” He suggests creating a strongly connected core team with

members that trust each other and have worked with each other. He insists that this does not necessarily mean that they should agree with each other, but rather have the ability to respect and accept their differences.

We had a very diverse group in Silent Scream which was helpful in some aspects but the it made decision making a very lengthy process because some people had never done something like this before, some weren't really on the same page with others in terms of objectives and we what we wanted to do and some people just couldn't work in a democratic context. [...] I think this was a great start; if the core group was more connected the Silent Scream would have been able to deal with issues from the inside and then easily tackle the out side problems.

What seemed to concern him was the fact that this absence of elected representative could translate into misrepresentation of the community in higher levels of Canadian government.

We were a couple of young people who got together and decided to do something. We were invited to very high level meetings that were talking about Canada's policy towards Iran ... but it's also sad. There were people there who are invited because they are organizing the "charshanbe soori" event.... So the host country could benefit from a more clear voice, talking about the concerns of the community if we have an elected member, someone more knowledgeable in the issue maybe. It was moving that such high ranking officials wanted to hear or opinion before forming policies towards the event in Iran.... We were just a couple of thousands of people gathering and it leads to us talking to the highest ranking officials. We had a meeting with the representative of the Prime Minister, so what we said there ... could have impact on Canada's foreign policy towards Iran.

This quote shows how much the community could benefit from an elective representative. He suggests that a program should be designed that doesn't have the kind of approach that says:

I know what needs to be done and I know what the problem is; rather one should go in the community, in the society and see what people think is the problem and what people think are the solutions and then take what you learn from that and engage experts and design a program based on the image that you get from the community. So a program that engages the community before it decides on the problems and the solutions.

This could be the very first step that needs to be taken before any visible changes can come around. Fundamental and sustainable improvements will only happen if people are engaged in the process, if they know the issues and if they are aware of the risks and benefits of such initiatives. This is a practical first step that is simple enough to be done without major funding or support needed.

Challenges and Sources of Error

Many of the sources and studies throughout this work were compiled through interviews with the Iranian population of Vancouver, BC Canada. While this method of research proves to have fewer limitations associated with understanding of community dynamics, it may have limitations related to bias and misinformation. For example, one limitation noted during research was the tendency of a researcher to have personal relationships with their subjects. It was unclear whether these personal relationships motivated the studies performed and whether certain seemingly irrelevant findings of their studies were omitted. Garousi's conclusions, for example, summarize the issues faced by and the strengths of the Iranian-Canadian community but omit any observation about weaknesses (Garousi, 24). It is certainly doubtful that Garousi meant to imply perfection in the social functioning of Iranian-Canadians, but by omitting the negative aspects, Garousi does imply that the factors impeding Iranian-Canadians from social integration are out of their control. Secondly, omission of the negative observations is unhelpful in establishing reasons for disparity within the Iranian-Canadian community. These observations were based on interactions with his friends (Garousi, 24), which suggests that some level of bias made its way into his research. Dependence on personal relationships, unfortunately, seems to be the only successful way to obtain information about personal beliefs, preferences and values.

Another research problem related to bias is the origin of the researcher. It became clear by the end of the research that the distrust in Iranian-Canadians of non-Iranians proved an impeding force to social integration. In some cases this proved problematic for

non-Iranian researchers whose information was used for this project (Bailey, 12; Higgins, 702). They report a similar sense of suspicion of strangers asking questions to be particularly strong among Iranians.

None of the authors of other sources used stated they had difficulty, if any, while trying to obtain information about the subjects and few of the authors stated their ethnic origin. It is no coincidence that most authors suggested changes to be implemented by either the Canadian population or the Canadian government. Due to the level of ethnocentrism exhibited by the Iranian-Canadian community as reflected by other researchers' findings, the ethnic origin of the researcher is important, since ethnicities and values associated with it may have some effect on interpretation of information and an effect on conclusions made.

Moving Forward and Future Research

The principle of freedom in Iranian values is very significant. It is important for Canadian society as well as the rest of the Western world to understand that conservatism does not equate with elimination of rights or the lack of desire for freedom. It is also important for Iranian-Canadians to understand that freedoms of the Western world are not meant to oppress their culture or traditional preferences as Canada is made not to be invasive of individual identity.

More than just assessments of weaknesses and strengths are necessary if one is to aid the social integration into Canadian society and social cohesion of the Iranian-Canadian community. The assessment of social concerns is only productive if one takes the information gained and uses it to design, suggest, and implement effective solutions.

Nouhi's research confirms the perceived importance of networks among the Iranian-Canadian community. Dependence on traditional networks will prove ineffective if it continues to be paired with discrimination towards anyone straying even slightly from traditional Iranian culture. The suggestion here is not to completely eliminate the dependence on social networks but to integrate more modern elements into the network system. The hybrid generation is the modern element required.

The success of Iranian-Canadian social cohesion and integration into greater Canadian society is not solely dependent on the tolerance of traditional Iranian-Canadians and Canadian nationals nor is it dependent solely on the willingness of each to understand the other's culture. The hybrid nation must also put forth lots of energy.

Efforts to minimize ethnocentrism must be made as well. The values, traditions,

and morals one has are a direct result, as has been proven throughout this discussion, of the political, social, and economic conditions of a location. Iranian and Canadian histories are polar opposites and so have instilled different values and ideals among both populations. That is not to say that there will never be convergence between the two groups. In depth research aimed at documenting only the specific reasons some Iranians chose Canada for relocation may prove more helpful than research that only stumbles upon the relevance of motivations. Realistic approaches to halting or at least minimizing ethnocentrism, one of the largest contributors to social disunity, may be revealed after analysis of these kinds of studies.

Conclusion

A common theme among the findings of those researching the Iranian diaspora in Canada is the conflict of identity between integrated Iranian-Canadians (what Naficy calls hybrids), Canadians, and non-integrated Iranian-Canadians. This hybrid identity, bearing the brunt of the pressure, is at present crumbling when it is in fact the bridge between cultures and perhaps the only chance traditional Iranian-Canadians have at achieving their goals. The existence of the hybrid should not signify a perversion of tradition and values by either community. Instead of being viewed as an impediment to the Iranian cause, it should be viewed as the missing extension to the network of which Iranian-Canadians wish to be a part. The hybrid with its ability to understand both worlds and therefore also merge them can take the best of both worlds and make positive changes in each using the strength of the other. The hybrid is not an anti force but a portal between both as demonstrated by its ability to transcend cultural barriers with the use of literature and arts.

Community centers offer the choice of participating and engaging in the new environment through a familiar channel and the Iranian population in Vancouver has not established such a center. The immigration pattern of the Iranians as well as Canada's demography gives a more logical and clear background as to the roots and causes of this absence of this sense of community. In this project I discussed the historic as well as psycho-sociological reasons by comparing the Iranian-Canadian community to the one in Sweden and UK.

The problem with forming legitimate organizations aimed at helping the Iranian-

Canadian community to integrate better is that Iranian-Canadians tend to be distrustful and therefore will not participate in these efforts based on their beliefs of effective communication webs that are dictated by Iranian culture; this lack of participation may be considered as reluctance on the part of Iranian-Canadians to help their own cause.

It is important to remember that in Iranian culture, the existence of informal networks take priority over any well-established body. The Iranian-Canadian community's suspicion towards organizations and associations makes forming networks extremely difficult and therefore, a stage on which individuals can openly communicate their concerns has yet to be built. Without open communication, Iranian-Canadians will not find their common voice that is required for social mobilization and the subsequent achievement of their personal goals.

James Bill concludes that due to the efficiency of networks and also the constant shifting of power in Iran, Iranians have an inherent ability to adapt to change and are dependent on social networks to do so (Bill 144-145) However, this ability to adapt requires instability, which is not present in Canada to the extent that it was present in Iran. Furthermore, it requires that effective networks are in place. It can be said that no effective networks are in place since present day networks may only exist between those who have very traditional Iranian cultural views and values.

The community has many barriers to overcome; the collective action barrier, social mistrust, ethno-cultural diversity are just some of the many issues that needs to be resolved and reconciled within the community and only then would they be able to truly utilize their potential as a highly educated, young community. Silent Scream was a testament to the possibility of a more cohesive community.

Appendix 1: Interview Transcript with M.R. about Silent Scream

March 26, 2011

-What was Silent Scream and how do you think it was different from other previous community activities? that is if there were any other activities that you are aware of?

-Well Silent Scream was a movement that generated just from a few concerned Iranian citizens, in reaction to the events occurring after the 2009 election in Iran; The way it was different was that it was...it just came out...we started it very suddenly, it was a phone call, a couple of friends got together and the next night we had the first Silent Scream event organized. The way it differed was that we didn't really have any ...at the beginning at least, any personal agendas. It was mostly just to help the Iranian community in Vancouver react to what was happening in Iran, give them a venue. It didn't have pre-defined framework.

-I was looking at your website and there's a part that says that "Iranian Canadian community has once again organized an event [...] in show of solidarity to defend the democratic rights of people of Iran..."

Did the community have other previous events such as this one?

-There are a lot of events going on in Vancouver. The Iranian-Canadian community in Vancouver, most of their significant events are limited to entertainment and maybe historical cultural events such as "Norouz" and "Charshanbe Soori"* especially the later, that's one of the biggest gatherings of Iranian Canadians in Vancouver. The organizers claim that they have about 3500 Iranians showing up for that event, but I seriously doubt that! But there is no activism involved in that, people just show up to have fun, jump over

the fire* and eat food and dance to the music, this probably wasn't the first, but in terms of turn out I think it was unprecedented in Vancouver to see such a turn out. Some days we had about 4000 people coming. The text on the website was not screened by everyone, this one person who was maintaining the website. What I imagine he was referring to was that, a different group of Iranians, some of them were also in Silent Scream, organized some events prior to the (2009) election to encourage people to vote. That was to sort of to tell them where they can vote and encourage them to participate and have a say in what was happening in Iran.

-So would you call this organization political, or maybe anti-government? In the way that it's supporting the democratic rights of Iranian people?

-No, I wouldn't call it anti-government. Actually we had a lot of different views inside the group which were organizing Silent Scream; what we were all concerned about was what was happening to the people on the streets. The sort of crack down on the people was what our biggest concern was...one of the principals of the Silent Scream was that we are not here to chant slogans or send a message, what we want to do is to be silent if you may, to let the voice of the people on the streets of Iran be heard. So it was sort of bringing attention to what was happening in Iran for our other Canadian citizens and for the Iranian community it was a venue to come and do something, because a lot of people felt helpless and they didn't know what to do, and what we did was to organized a silent candle vigil, and people could just come and it didn't matter what their beliefs were, and in the people who came there we had all different sorts of groups (Political groups). Initially some of them conflicting but at the end we had leftists maybe some monarchists, a lot of ordinary (non-partisan) citizens. There were actually some Hezbollahi* people

who would support the government but were not happy with what was happening on the streets. They would just show up because we, in the context of Silent Scream would avoid chanting slogans and if there was anything like that, it would happen after our event, but there wasn't a lot of support for that. I think one of the things that brought people together in Silent Scream was that we didn't want to take sides for any of the political groups. What we wanted, what we were saying was that we just want to support the people on the streets and want their voices to be heard.

-You mentioned that you didn't have a certain framework, or a certain guideline that you were moving forward according to. Is that the way it was or did you have a certain set of rules when you started the Silent Scream?

-So the way that it started was that a couple of my friends called me...and they said, have you heard what's happening in Iran, I said yes, they said we need to do something! So we arranged a meeting in a coffee shop, Calhoun in Vancouver to be precise! Each of us brought a couple of our friends so there were a group of maybe 12 or 15 people at Calhoun and we got together and sat around the table, so there was no prior organization. This was just a group of people a lot of strangers. I knew maybe half of the people at that table. We sat down and said ok, what should we do? How should we do it? What should our principals be and like I mentioned one of them was that we are not here to say anything, we want the voice of the people from Iran to be heard. One of the things that we had experienced in previous events was that when we have a flag, that creates conflict. There are some groups that react very strongly to the current Iranian flag* and other who do not believe in any other flag than the one we have now. And we said we don't want to get into those kinds of arguments so what we said was that we don't want to

use any flags. We're not going to have a flag that would pose this conflict. So that was another principal that we had. So we're not going to allow people to come and chant their own slogans or whatever they want and whatever they are supporting; I mean we didn't want it to be uni-directional, supporting only sort of one sect. We want it to be a community event. Something that would connect with all the different beliefs and all different ...so we said we're going to try and keep it neutral. So that was another principal. And yes, most of it we just formed as we went along because it turned into a quite huge event, we never imagined it would get so much support from the community and yeah so as we went along we just learned...we probably made some mistakes...we definitely made some mistakes but as we advanced, so it was 10 nights in a row initially and every night we would learn something new and different.

-So initially did you have a specific audience in mind, the youth in Vancouver, Iranian youth for example? Or did you just do it as a community organization?

-Just as a community no specific audience.

-How did you advertise for it? How did you attract people's support?

-well initially the people's support was attracted through social media. Through Facebook and probably sending e-mails to friends and family and so each one of us just communicated through or contacts and network and we also put up signs at Iranian stores and anywhere we thought the Iranian audience may see it.

-So did the Canadian government or the Canadian media in any way help facilitate this communication or was this something purely Iranian?

-No actually we got unbelievable interest from the Canadian, different levels of government and the media. Even we had some federal newspapers have articles about the

Silent Scream event. We had TV interviews and radio shows talk about us, we had a lot of newspaper articles, from the top of my head as it was a long time ago, I think we had articles in the Vancouver Sun, Metro, 24...not just these though. There were people who were just specifically PR of this event and they would be the ones who would send our press releases. With just the numbers we had, and just because people showed up in the thousands in the silent vigil in the Vancouver art gallery in the core of downtown Vancouver, that was an event that almost no one could ignore...and 10 nights in a row...every one who I talked to afterwards had at least seen one night. And as it progressed we had more and more Canadian audiences who came, not from an Iranian origin, who would come to support our cause.

-Did you get any sort of financial support from any Canadian organization or was this solely supported from your own budget, you had any when you started out?

-No initially we didn't have any budget and we started with...we didn't need to pay for the rent. As a Canadian citizen we are allowed to organize rallies in public space. So we had a lot of cooperation from the city in terms of organizing the police to be there and giving up a permit for it and again there were people who were specifically in charge of this that would go and request a permit, so we had a lot of cooperation. For one or two nights later we did a fundraising. We had a little box that people could donate money and we had unbelievable amounts of funds raised. But then it was a lot of money and that was more than enough for what we were doing because for example for our printing there are a lot of Iranian shops who would do everything we needed for free.

So we didn't have a lot of expenses and we didn't want to collect a lot of money that was not our objective. So at one point we stopped accepting donations.

-Did you have any sort of opposition while you were trying to organize the events or even at the basic level when you were trying to form the idea- An individual or a group that may not want you to start or form these rallies?

-Definitely! At the very beginning there was a lot of scepticism. Some groups would call us government supporters or some would call anti-government! We didn't allow some groups to sort of raise their flags in our events and we forced this very strictly and that for some people was enough to accuse us of getting financial support from the government of Iran and some people question our motives. The majority of the population were supportive of what we were doing because they could easily see that it was just a group of young people like themselves who are just putting their effort onto organizing this and we didn't have any hidden motives. We didn't do many speeches. We did have some but they were not politically charged speeches or targeted towards a specific group, it was mostly from Canadian officials who would join us. We had Michael Ignatieff come and talk to us, we had the mayor we had various members of parliament both the provincial and federal. We had city councilors and a lot of support from the Canadian political system and that for a lot of Iranians was unprecedented to have such attention from Canadian high ranking officials for a purely Iranian cause.

-And did you think it facilitated in any way the progress of Silent Scream?

-Actually a part of the interest we had was from the cause, because a lot of people were supporting the cause so that the people of Iran would be heard, we tried to be very careful with our wording, not talking too much about if the election was fraudulent or not. That was not the issue we were addressing we wanted the people to have the right to demonstrate, to ask for what they wanted in Iran. We didn't see it as our place as Iranian

Canadians in Vancouver to make demands on behalf of Iranians in Iran. We also had groups of 4000 people showing up night after night and that's 4000 potential voters that no politician can ignore.

-You talked about different political sects that agreed or disagreed with your cause, but Iranians have different ethnicities and it's very diverse, did you have any conflict in that area? Was every one in it just because they were Iranian?

-Absolutely! In the Silent Scream events we didn't have any issues with ethnicity. The issues we had and a lot of these were only at the initial step. For example some people from the leftist parties...I didn't even know these people existed, because I'm not in these circles at all...these types of beliefs I encountered more closely through these events. At the beginning they were very sceptical and they were giving us a lot of trouble and we had excellent organization is our security team who would keep the crowd in order and also prevent people from chanting slogans for their own small groups or banners or flags that would give a direction to the event or try to sabotage this whole group. Because this happens a lot in Iranian events that once a group has an event that draws a lot of people, the other group that can't draw as many people would try and come and sabotage and take pictures and chant slogans and film it and then distribute the pictures as their own event. We were aware of that through the previous events that we had organized and we were prepared for it and I think that eventually through word of mouth we were able to gain the trust of the Iranian community and I think they really needed a venue to just come and let out their emotions, sorrow anger or whatever they were feeling. It was a silent vigil so just a big community gathered for a cause. .. it was very moving you can look up the clips on "youtube". A group of several thousands with candles all in

silence...we got a lot of praise from the police that they were saying that we never have seen such a large group so organized and so disciplined, calm and peaceful.

I think I sort of diverged from your question...

-Well my question was about ethnicities...

-So no we never had any issue ethnicity-wise at all, the example that I gave the leftist group...from the third or fourth day onward they just joined us and... there were some people also...I don't want to name...they were two political groups actually that were trying to sabotage the cause...but the people wouldn't allow it. So we asked them that if you want to come over and chant slogans do it after our event. And they would go up after our event and chant slogans and maybe five or six people out of a few thousands would answer their call. There were hurdles but definitely none were ethnic. A lot of other ones either joined with the group and believe in the cause because it was something they could support as well or they would just get separated and do their own event.

-So what happened? Why did you decide to dismantle it?

-Well it was a very diverse group and like I said it was just a group of people, half of which I knew...eventually the disagreements that were arising from the very beginning ...the different opinions we had from the beginning that we managed through organizing a system of voting and have a sort of democratic organizations with committees that had different responsibilities assigned to them...18 to 20 people...everything was delegated from this group and the smaller group, the PR community had the power to make decision to an extent that was decided. I think we were quite successful with this. After the 5th day it was very efficient. Some people were not very dedicated to the system.

-You talked about the differences inside the group. Were these differences

operational, or ideological?

-Both actually. We had a group inside this bigger group who were strong Green Movement supporters and they wanted to chant slogans and they were saying that we need to support that movement more directly and there were others who wanted to remain neutral and we wanted to stay neutral. This neutrality was one of the basic ideas of formation of this group and one of the reasons of its success. Then there were those of us who believed in long speeches and addressing different issues but some who didn't. I personally thought we don't need that and we can't go and lecture like that. The whole idea was to support the voice of Iranians within. But I always thought that these differences are going to help us grow. It was more not being able to sort of accept the majority's opinion. There were some in the group who wanted to push their idea at any cost. They would initially try to get the support of the group...and it was a very diverse group...every person had to really argue and talk about their ideas. We had long and interesting meetings every day. The fracturing started when we saw that some people wouldn't abide to what was agreed in the group. We had people at some point taking the microphone and make statements on behalf of the Silent Scream that were not discussed or agreed upon prior to the event. The main reason I believe was that we thought that we lack a unity to continue and people started feeling uncomfortable with the way things were going forward. We just had to spend a lot of time trying to manage the diversions from the democratic decision and that was very frustrating.

-This was almost 2 years ago after the 2009 election. Were there any follow ups? Any other groups that sprang out of Silent Scream that exist to this day?

-Some of the people in the group went out and formed Vancouver's Green Student

Movement. I thought it was very sad because 5 “green movement groups” came out of this and they couldn’t unify, and eventually the green student movements are either dismantled now or the core group has changed.

-So now that the whole Silent Scream movement has dismantled are there still any misconceptions about that group, what it stood for and what it was about?

-I’m sure there are. At one point we had one of the famous Iranian Newspaper and a TV station attack us for not doing what they thought was the right thing to do. I thought it was very unfair. Complications such as this along with what was going on inside the group they all lead to a decision to stop it. We know it succeeded in fulfilling its goals at the time and it was a good effort. I thought it could continue to become the core of Iranian community because it was one of the most successful programs that was able to bring people together for a non-entertainment objective, but I think a lot of that was also driven by the crisis at hand. Eventually the inherent issues we have as a community took over and both from outside and inside it lead to the dismantling.

-Would you say that Silent Scream failed in the end? Would you call it a failure?

-I wouldn’t say it failed; it succeeded more than we thought it would. We were just a bunch of friends getting together thinking what can we do? and we didn’t have any specific resources. It was mostly sitting around the table brainstorming and that’s how we started. And it turned out to be what in my opinion turned out to be the most successful Iranian community engagement event. I have been in Vancouver for 6 and half years. But from what I’ve heard from people who have been here for 30 years that they have never seen something like that and Iranians from different levels of diaspora to get together and support the cause and there were reasons for that.

It wasn't only that it formed during the time of crisis because there were a lot of other events going on as well but none of them were able to attract this much support. I wouldn't call it a failure then cause it succeeded more than we had imagined but at one point we were really hoping that this may be the start to something new in the Iranian community...something that could address the short comings of us as a community and be a core for some sort of social cohesion to maybe address from there issues such as the mistrust that we have, the inherent mistrust we suffer from. In that sense yes we did fail. We could have continued and make this a more important platform for the community.

-If you could do to again, what would you do differently?

-One thing I came to believe through my several community projects I have been involved in is that for a project to succeed in an Iranian community you need to have a very strongly connected core team. A team that trust each other, have worked with each other and not necessarily agree with each other, but have the ability to work with each other with trust. We had a very diverse group in Silent Scream which was helpful in some aspects but the it made decision making a very lengthy process because some people had never done something like this before, some weren't really on the same page with others in terms of objectives and we what we wanted to do and some people just couldn't work in a democratic context. They were more like "I know what needs to be done and everyone needs to do what I think should be done!" and that didn't work in what they organized later on but I think this was a great start and from the lessons that we learned if I had the opportunity again, if the core group was more connected the Silent Scream would have been able to deal with issues from the inside and then easily tackle the outside problems.

-So do you think this could be called a “collective action barrier”?

-Yes I think a lot of issues we had were rooted deep in our identities as Iranians. I came out of this experience thinking that if anything is going to succeed in the Iranian Canadian community we need to address these barriers that prevent us from working together. What causes this distrust and the lack of social and civic commitment that we have in the group.

-What concerns you most about these barriers?

-the worst outcome is that we are not acting as a community. We are not giving each other the support that a community gives its members and not receiving that support makes us not feel that sense of belonging and on the external points we are not achieving what we can as a community. We are a 40000 strong community in Vancouver. We can have a lot of say in the political processes; we can better develop our community if we have a more unified force. Even in the cities like North Vancouver which has the majority of Iranians concentrated there, we still don't have an elected Iranian official at the provincial level or I think even at the city level. It shows how deeply the problems manifest themselves.

-What other shortcomings other than having an elected member do you see?

-I want to say that it reflects on the level of happiness and satisfaction we have. And if we don't achieve that at the personal level, in our families, as a community we wouldn't have that satisfaction either. If we had more social cohesion, that satisfaction would manifest itself in the individual and eventually a collective level.

-Do you think movements such as this would be beneficial to the host country in any way?

-That's a very good point. We were a couple of young people who got together and decided to do something. I think from the 6th day onward, we were being addressed by the highest levels of government as representatives of the community. We were invited to very high level meetings that were talking about Canada's policy towards Iran; foreign policy and it was mind blowing but it's also sad. There were people there who are invited because they are organizing the "charshanbe soori" event. An entertainer who was politically representing the community because he has a event that people show up to party and have fun. Like a concert organizer. And he was part of the voice of the community. We were not elected by the community, neither were anyone else in those meetings and a lot of them had questionable motives. They had specific agendas and they would be pursuing those on behalf of the community and Canada is making decisions and this is the voice they hear from the community. So the host country could benefit from a more clear voice talking about the concerns of the community if we have an elected member, someone more knowledgeable in the issue maybe. It was moving that such high ranking officials wanted to hear or opinion before forming policies towards the event in Iran. That shows what wonderful country you live in and how much power you can have as an individual. We were just a couple of thousands of people gathering and it leads to us talking to the highest ranking officials. We had a meeting with the representative of the Prime Minister, so what we said there was going to be transferred to the Prime Minister and could have impact on Canada's foreign policy towards Iran.

-So this obviously addresses how this affects the home country as well, but could you be more specific about how this could affect Iran?

-Canada is made not to be invasive of individual identity. I think as Iranians we need to

see successful examples of community engagement and development and I've been looking for that and unfortunately haven't seen a good example of that. So to answer your question, I think if we do one day have successful example in Vancouver of the Iranian community, getting together and acting as a community setting aside differences, learning that we don't need to agree with each other, but design programs such as Silence Scream that wouldn't conflict with different people's beliefs, we can have an actual core that can bring us together and we could address the collective issues we are facing as a community and we could benefit from it. And I think if we have a successful example of that here maybe it can be replicated in other places and even back at home because I think a lot of these issues also start from Iran.

I think both home and host countries could benefit from diaspora activity. Canada can benefit from the immigrant society's success. If we can overcome barriers to integration, the mistrust we have within is also extended to the outside community and addressing these issues would help us be better citizens as well. The Iranian society can benefit from the solutions for the lack of social cohesion within and outside the country.

-Do you have any plans for future?

-I am not thinking about organizing events the way we did with Silent Scream, because those events were as a response to a crisis and like I said it was a well designed program that allowed people to safely participate but an important driver for people to join in was the crisis. I think the only successful events in the Iranian community are the entertainment ones: concerts and cultural celebrations that one could use to start an activity. But I think for a successful program we need to understand the blocks and barriers and start functioning as a healthy community at first and I actually have started a

program that hopefully if I get funding for it I will start to first get input from the community to see what they think of the barriers and issues.

-You mentioned that Silent Scream was a reaction to a crisis. What do you think would be other good points of union for the community? For example some argue that the point of union in the Islamic revolution of 1979 was religion, or maybe nationalistic reasons for union in the face of a war? Can you think of anything that would bring people together now?

-I don't think religion is the right tool to use for Iranians right now since a lot of people are disillusioned by that now, comparing with 3 decades ago... Nationalism maybe. ...I feel like what has happened now is that people are more attached to ethnicities. We have a very diverse ethnic background in Iran. I myself am an Azeri. Approximately 30% of Iranians are Azeri. I see in Azerbaijan how strong this sense of identity has become in comparison to being Iranian. For example the number of Azeri's in the 1979 revolution in comparison to current uprisings in Iran, is very insignificant. They have been having this gradual separation, maybe not widespread but it's getting stronger. The soccer team from Azerbaijan (Teraktor Sazi) has more than 30'000 supporters. They are supporting the ethnic identity more than they are supporting the sport itself. So nationalism as a tool to unite people wouldn't be as easy as it was when the Iraq Iran war happened at 1980.

-So unless it's another crisis, can we find an answer to this question of unity?

-I think we need a combination. We are very compassionate people; it should be appealing to the humanity of Iranians. Things that happened and united people in Silent Scream or the earth quake in the city of Bam in 2003 in Iran had to do with the compassionate side of Iranians...

-But that was another crisis as well!

-It was a crisis as well! Most of successful examples happened in time of Crisis. That's what history shows. I think we are lacking a sense of belonging. We aren't happy with being Iranians right now. We try to show that we are proud of it but we are not! One of the things that a lot of people identified with was that in Silent Scream for the first time we saw high ranking non-Iranian officials coming and addressing us as Iranians, because we are Iranians, and that I had never seen in my life time. I've seen Iranians being recognized for their scientific achievements and inventions for their financial success but that was the first time I saw Iranians being recognized as just Iranians and because of being Iranians and being respected as Iranians. We haven't had that a lot.

-I see what you mean here, but would that require an external party's recognition to unify and organize the community?

-Well it is self motivated to be recognized as a community and get that respect that we haven't had in the international community for a while now. All of us have suffered the judgments and pre-notions of being Iranian. If we are able to unite as community for me this is a very strong driver. I would love to see the Iranians community be respected and recognized as a community. We have a lot to be proud of, I don't have my statistics with me today but I read it recently in US Iranians are three times more educated than similar aged American youth. There are 6 times more PhD students in Iranian population than there are in the American, in the overall national average. We are a highly educated nation. We contribute a lot to the host countries that we move to but we are not recognized for that.

And this should be a good driver for us to change the status quo. I don't think it is

nationalism or religion; it's our identity as a community. As an Azeri, I still identify as an Iranian and I wouldn't call in nationalism because that sounds a little bit extreme and fanatic. I identify as much as being Canadian as I do with being Iranian and probably more with being Azeri but I love my community and I love the Iranian people and I would love for us to have the respect we deserve.

-Do you think these flaws that build these barriers are historic flaws rooted in our background or are a modern issue?

-We've had our historical issues and set backs. But I have seen these issues getting worse every time I go back to Iran. I notice the changes more significantly since I am outside. I see people becoming more self-centred and the circle of their attention becoming smaller and smaller, some times even excluding family members in relatives. The reason could be that we are being driven by wrong values, as if we are on a reverse course of social values and motives.

In every society there are selfish people who do not abide by the law but I haven't seen many societies where people would do this and then come and brag about it and other people praise them for it but you see that happening in our society now. In my personal opinion, as Iranians we have been historically looking at the rulers as the role models, whether royal families or the governments after those, we are not seeing a lot of integrity and social values being supported at the highest levels. We see people losing when they act based on integrity and when they don't act on selfish reasons. That also goes back to ourselves. It's a diminishing minority, people who hold strong social values. Another reason is that we don't see our civil responsibility and social obligation. Like the issue of taxes in Iran and thinking that if you find a way not to pay the taxes that's a smart move

because we don't see them being used for the benefit of the society. It's rooted in us that you lose if you don't think of your personal gain first.

These issues may go back to our history but some are rooted in the lack of role models in society. We are looking at our peers and we don't want to miss out while we are thinking that we are the only ones who are thinking about civic responsibility and helping others while our peers are enjoying the benefits of this selfishness. But in the end this doesn't matter.

The more important thing is how we can address it.

-And how can we address it?

-it comes to design a program that doesn't have the approach that I know what needs to be done and I know what the problem is, but to go in the community, in the society and see what people think is the problem and what people think are the solutions and then take what you learn from that and engage experts and design a program based on the image that you get from the community. So a program that engages the community before it decides on the problems and the solutions.

-Do you think Iranian community is unique in having these issues or do you think other diasporas have the same or similar problems?

-I think you don't find a community with this many members that don't have an elected representative. This signals that there's something not functioning. My focus is the Iranian community but from what I see, I don't think this lack of trust and cohesion that we have is not as immensely felt in other immigrant societies in Vancouver. The examples I talked about. We don't have an elected representative at any level. Not only political. But not even within the community. We don't have a successful community

center. You can find functioning community center for Scottish, Scandinavian, Serbian, Germans, Indian, Chinese communities. The Serbian community for example is a small community in comparison to the Iranian community yet they have a very well organized establishment. Then bigger ones such as Indian and Chinese have their own successful groups. For example “Success” is a very successful immigrant support non-profit system for Chinese.

-Thank you so much for your time.

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