Geographica 1
Onward Migration

The Transnational Trajectories of Iranians Leaving Sweden

Melissa Kelly
Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Universitetshuset Room IV, Biskopsgatan 3, Uppsala, Friday, May 17, 2013 at 10:00 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English.

Abstract

Onward migration is an understudied process whereby people leave their country of origin, settle in a second country for a period of time, and then migrate on to a third country. This dissertation explores the transnational trajectories of one specific group of onward migrants. These are highly educated people who moved from Iran to Sweden as refugees following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Then, after settling in Sweden for a period of time they subsequently moved on to London, England.

Melissa Kelly explores how people live their lives across places. Using life history interviews conducted with individual onward migrants, Kelly draws out and contextualizes the individual and shared experiences of these migrants in specific space-time contexts, and highlights the meaning of both settlement and mobility in their lives. In doing so, she explores the circumstances that underlie the onward migration phenomenon, drawing attention to different geographical levels of scale, and linking social, economic and cultural perspectives.

The main argument of the dissertation is that while place continues to be of significance, a broader understanding of migrant integration processes is required. Onward migration disrupts the categories usually used to comprehend the integration of migrants in narrowly defined nation state contexts, and encourages a more nuanced understanding of how we conceptualize both migration and settlement.

Keywords: Onward migration; Transnationalism; Iranian Diaspora; Mobility and Settlement; European Welfare State; Sweden; London; Highly Educated Migrants; EU mobility; Cosmopolitanism; Class and Culture; Life Course Research; Narrative Research.

Melissa Kelly, Uppsala University, Department of Social and Economic Geography, Box 513, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden.

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ISSN 0431-2023

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-198099
(http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-198099)

Printed in Sweden by Elanders Sverige AB, 2013
Acknowledgements

Pursuing this project was an extremely enjoyable journey, but not one that I could have completed alone. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to say thank you to just some of the people who have helped me along the way.

To begin with, I would like to thank the study participants, who generously volunteered their life stories. Although I will not state their names here, I would like to acknowledge that without them this research would not have been possible and I am truly grateful for all the time these people so willingly put aside to help me complete the project. Thanks are also due to the multiple Iranian-focused associations who took part in this study. All have made a valuable contribution, and I am most grateful for all the hospitality I received! There were also several individuals who assisted me in finding participants, or provided otherwise interesting information for this research, and I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.

My supervisors, Roger Andersson and Aida Aragao-Lagergren, have played a very important role in my life for the last four years, and I would like to thank them both for the support, guidance and feedback. Both made sure that I had everything I needed to complete this project, and encouraged me to pursue my work with confidence.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Irene Molina, Aina Tollefsen and John Östh, for reading the first complete draft of the dissertation, and for providing very helpful feedback. The comments and suggestions I received played an essential part in getting this project to the finish line.

More generally, I am deeply grateful to the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Uppsala University, for giving me the chance to pursue my studies in Sweden, and also for providing me with such an outstanding work environment! It was truly a privilege to be a student here! Special thanks to Kerstin Edlund and Karin Beckman for providing outstanding administrative support, and to all my colleagues for making Uppsala a great place to be.

I am also grateful to the Institute for Urban and Housing Research (IBF), for giving me the possibility to collaborate with an outstanding
group of migration researchers over the years, and especially during the final months of my stay in Sweden.

In 2007-2008 I was a grad student at the Geography Department at York University in Toronto. Intellectually, this was an important learning period for me. I am therefore grateful to Valerie Preston, for getting me on the right track, for providing ongoing support and for being a wonderful role model. I would also like to thank Bryn Greer-Wootten, my mentor extraordinaire, for numerous thoughtful conversations and encouraging comments! Finally, I would like to acknowledge Phillip Kelly and Tricia Wood for inspiring the direction of this project in a number of important ways.

In 2010-2011, I spent a period of time at University College London, where Claire Dwyer provided expert guidance and support that I could not have done without. The time spent at UCL was extremely special, and it would not have been possible without Claire!

My fieldwork was funded by the Rektors resebidrag från Wallenbergstiftelsen and the Anna Maria Lundins Resestipendier. I am grateful to both Uppsala University and Smålands Nation for making it possible for me to carry out international fieldwork and attend several conferences. I would also like to extend my warmest gratitude to the Graduate School in Population Dynamics and Public Policy at Umeå University, for providing additional resources and for enriching my academic experience in general.

During my time as a PhD student, I have benefited immensely from collaborating with Jill Ahrens, Ilse van Liempt, and Hassan Hosseini-Kaladjahi. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to work with these wonderful researchers. Over the years we have shared many ideas, all of which have helped me to write this dissertation!

I would like to acknowledge the generous support I received from Lina Hedman who provided me with statistical data, Will Strum who used his GIS skills to help me on short notice, and Chiara Valli who designed the dissertation cover. I am extremely grateful for these contributions and the dissertation would not be the same without them.

The PhD students at the Department of Social and Economic Geography have offered ongoing support and friendship over the years. My former office partner Ann Rodenstedt brightened up some of the more challenging days at work, and Erika Sigvardsdotter guided me through the entire PhD program from start to finish! Special thanks also to Sara Lång and Pepijn Olders, who provided valuable feedback on two of my texts.
I would also like to thank my friends outside of the department, for being so patient with me throughout this whole process, and for reminding me that there is more to life than work! Writing can be an isolating process, and I am therefore especially grateful to Enrico, for following me on this adventure from beginning to end, and for checking on me on a daily basis. I don’t know what I would have done without you!

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me in every possible way. They have both been very involved in this project, listening to my ideas, providing suggestions for my cover design, giving feedback on my title and even proofreading my texts. Thanks, mom and dad, for your patience, love and encouragement.
Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v

Chapter 1 Locating the Study of Onward Migration ........................................... 13
  Research Goals and Objectives ............................................................................... 15
  The Onward Migration of Iranians from Sweden: Trends and Characteristics .................. 16
  Previous Research on Onward Migration .................................................................. 24
  Onward Migration in Broader Perspective ......................................................... 27
    Onward Migrants as Skilled and/or Highly Educated Migrants .......................... 27
    Onward Migration in Relation to the Study of Emigration or Return .................. 30
    Onward Migrants as EU Movers ........................................................................ 32
  Approaching the Study of Migration ...................................................................... 34
    A Transnational Social Field Approach ....................................................... 36
    Migration and Everyday Life ............................................................................. 37
  Outline of the Dissertation .................................................................................. 39

Chapter 2 Situating Onward Migrants in Social Space ...................................... 42
  Transnational Social Fields ................................................................................ 45
    Assimilation, Integration, and Migrant Transnationalism ............................... 45
    Defining Transnational Social Fields ................................................................. 49
    Diasporic Transnational Social Fields ............................................................... 51
    Problematizing Diaspora as an Analytical Tool ............................................. 54
  Social Reproduction in Transnational Social Fields ........................................ 57
    Class and Social Reproduction ......................................................................... 58
    Maintaining Class Privilege over Space ......................................................... 63
    Structure, Agency and Conceptualizations of the Individual ............................ 66
  Transnational Social Fields and Power: An Intersectional Approach .................. 69
    Intersectionality, Space and Time ..................................................................... 70
    Intersectional Approaches to Migration ......................................................... 71
  A Life Course Perspective .................................................................................. 72
    The Relationship between Individuals and Society ....................................... 74
    Situating Migrants in Time and Space ........................................................... 75
Chapter 6 Settling in Europe: The Iranian Diaspora in Sweden and Britain .............................................................. 168
  The Settlement Experience in Sweden ........................................... 169
    Finding their Place: Positionality and the Representation of Iranian Migrants ............................................ 173
    Internal Relations ........................................................................... 180
    Formal Organizations ................................................................. 180
    Politics and Relations with Iran .................................................. 182
    Sweden as Home? ......................................................................... 183
  The Settlement Experience in Britain ............................................. 183
    Relations to the British Majority ................................................ 184
    Internal Relations .......................................................................... 188
  The Circumstances Leading to Onward Migration from Sweden to London ................................................................. 191

Chapter 7 Mobile Families .............................................................. 196
  The Centrality of Family Life ........................................................... 197
  Changing Family Structures .............................................................. 200
    Intersectional Approaches to Understanding Social Change 202
  Raising Families across Borders ....................................................... 204
    Making the Most of Ethnic Capital ........................................... 209
  Familial Status and Attachment to Place ........................................ 218
  Individual Trajectories and Family Scripts ..................................... 222
  Transnational Predicaments and Enduring Ties ........................... 228

Chapter 8 In Search of Success ............................................................. 230
  A Successful Diaspora ....................................................................... 231
  The Pursuit of Success in Transnational Spaces ........................... 235
    Seizing Opportunities ................................................................... 237
    Making Success Happen: The Geographical Specificity of Capital Exchange ............................................. 239
    The Habitus at Work: Getting Ahead in Specific Career Fields ........................................................................ 242
  Narratives of Success ........................................................................ 251
    Moving to London as Planned Happenstance ......................... 252
    Structure, Agency, and Migration Decision Making ............... 255
    Exploring Gendered Definitions of Success ............................ 256
    Broadening the Definition of Success ....................................... 259
    Individual Trajectories ..................................................................... 261
  Linking Economic, Cultural and Place Perspectives ..................... 266
Chapter 1
Locating the Study of Onward Migration

Azita was born in Iran and, like many other middle class Iranians, pursued her education in Western Europe. After the Iranian revolution, however, she moved with her parents to Sweden. She was fortunate enough to have her credentials recognized in Sweden and secured a good job. Despite this, she eventually decided she needed a change, and spontaneously moved to London. This was not the last stop for Azita, however, who continued to move between several countries before returning to Britain where she now intends to stay. For Azita, Iran is a place that no longer exists as she once knew it, but it remains a constant point of reference. Sweden is the country of her European citizenship. A small town on the outskirts of London, however, is the place where she feels she can practice her preferred lifestyle.

This is a study about people like Azita who have lived lives that span many countries and many different locales. It is a study about how lives are lived across borders, and how people develop their families, careers, and lifestyles across both space and time. The people at the center of the research are those who originated in Iran, became refugees in Sweden after the Iranian revolution in 1979, and for a variety of reasons, eventually migrated onward to London, England. In this dissertation, I explore the multiple migrations made by these migrants, by situating them in specific space-time contexts. In doing so, the focus is on drawing out the complex relationship between mobility and settlement and exploring it in the context of everyday life.

Refugees originating from outside of the European Union who have acquired citizenship in one EU country before moving on to another, represent a group of migrants who have received very little attention in research. There has nevertheless been a growing interest in the topic of onward migration, and a growing acknowledgement of onward migration trends. Lindley and Van Hear's (2007) exploratory working paper, “New Europeans on the move: A Preliminary review of the onward migration of refugees within the European Union” highlights many of the possible reasons for onward migration, and poses future questions for research. From my point of view, one of the most interesting and pressing of the questions they raise is the extent to which onward migration may represent a new form of inte-
igration for the group under study. As migrants move between places they operate between opportunity and constraint; different places may meet their needs in different ways. The dissertation is therefore particularly concerned with exploring the structural dimensions of onward migration, and how people may exercise their limited capacity for agency by moving on to places that best meet their social, economic and cultural needs.

Questions concerning the opportunities available to migrants in Europe are perhaps particularly salient in a context where refugees are typically depicted as undesirable. While mobility within the EU is encouraged, those originating outside of the union (so-called third country nationals) are finding it increasingly difficult to enter. Furthermore, growing anti-migrant sentiments in many EU countries, rising levels of Islamaphobia, and talk of the “failure” of “multiculturalism” in public rhetoric have all raised questions about what opportunities exist for third country nationals to work, study and cultivate a sense of belonging in the European context. To date, most research on refugees in particular has conceptualized these migrants as people gaining the permission to enter one country where national governments expect them to assimilate and stay. While not wishing to undermine the ongoing importance of the nation state, the present study aims to go beyond this national framework, by looking at how migrants may use various places at different levels of scale, to achieve their own self-defined integration goals.

In exploring the complex circumstances influencing the onward moves of individuals, this research explores the trajectories, diasporic entanglements, and ambitions of a specific group of onward migrants. Despite being highly educated, the group under study does not fit the usual frameworks and categories used to describe highly skilled migrants. Instead, they were members of the middle class who left Iran when conditions changed after the Iranian revolution in 1979. Most left as refugees and therefore did not have a great deal of choice in deciding where to move. Despite moving to Sweden initially, some eventually found that for them, Sweden was not the best country to live and work in. While the time these migrants spent in Sweden played an important part in shaping their lives, and indeed offered them many opportunities, these migrants nevertheless found onward migration necessary in order to achieve their long-term socio-cultural, economic and political ambitions.
Research Goals and Objectives

The study offers an in-depth overview of the onward migration process, by focusing on the life trajectories of a specific group of Iranians over space and time. Tracing their experience from Iran to Sweden to London, it aims to take account of both the structural factors these people have acted upon, as well as the individual circumstances explaining migration decisions. While the study uses register data as a background, it aims to go deeper into the experiences of onward migrants. Although exploring the onward migration of Iranians from Sweden, in general, the research is particularly focused on those migrants with high levels of education and/or skill. Linking education to a middle class positioning, it aims to target a group of people who are moving between opportunity and constraint. The central research question is three pronged, and could be broadly stated as follows:

1) How do highly educated onward migrants live their lives across places?

Firstly, I do not view migration as an isolated event, but rather as embedded in the broader life course trajectories of onward migrants whose biographies span three or more countries and multiple local and transnational contexts. I therefore explore the role that diasporas and other types of transnational social fields, nation states, cities and localities play in peoples' lives. My work therefore bridges the study of settlement and the study of mobility, two topics that are unfortunately often treated separately by migration researchers.

2) What are the relevant circumstances behind the migrants’ decision making?

Secondly, rather than treating causality in a positivistic way, I am interested in exploring how decisions to onward migrate come up in peoples’ lives, and how these decisions relate to broader developments in the life course. My research therefore aims to contribute to the theorization of onward migration, but also to the conceptualization of the relationship between migrants, mobility and places more generally. In doing so, I contextualize onward moves in both space and time.

3) What are the expectations of onward migrants in the new context?
A third and final aim of the thesis is to consider the expectations that onward migrants have of specific migration destinations. I explore places and the opportunities they make or do not make available to migrants. My primary focus, however, is on understanding how migrants, in accordance with their own experiences, attach meaning to different places, and how they make sense of their lives across both space and time.

The Onward Migration of Iranians from Sweden: Trends and Characteristics

Before elaborating further on the specific research approach, I would like to situate the study with reference to previous research and statistics, and provide some background context important for understanding the onward migration of Iranians from Sweden.

Sweden is a democratic welfare state that prides itself in treating refugees generously. In the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, it was a comparatively open country with a liberal reception policy. Furthermore, those receiving asylum were given the opportunity to have free education, financial security, universal healthcare and even quick and easy naturalization. At the same time however, Sweden is also a country that has been undergoing significant changes to its migration policy over the last decades. Sweden made a shift from a labour-oriented policy to a refugee-based policy thirty years ago, and is now increasingly interested in attracting highly skilled migrants. As a welfare state in the process of transition and reform, Sweden has a vested interest in both maintaining certain features of its universal welfare model, while simultaneously opening itself to the global economy. This has raised a number of questions concerning how to retain human capital in Sweden and, more specifically, determining which migrants are inclined to stay in Sweden, and which are inclined to move on.

The issue of onward migration has been given some media attention in recent years. An article on DN.se titled “Flytt ger invandrare en ny chans” (“Migration gives immigrants a new chance”) by Ann Persson in 2011 highlights how the onward migration of Somalis, Iraqis and other migrant groups from Sweden may represent a new trend. The limited findings of a small number of studies on onward migration have confirmed these trends. Nekby’s (2006) study shows that from 1964 on, well over half of those leaving Sweden are in fact foreign citizens. While much of this emigration used to be return
migration, she notes that onward migration appears to be increasingly important to several migrant groups. According to Nekby’s (2006) findings, the total percentage of emigrant moves to a third country has gone from 12% in 1991, to 32% in 2000 (Nekby 2006:200). Nekby compares the relative percentage of those moving on and those returning to their country of origin. As her findings illustrate, the percentage of return versus onward movers varies considerably between different migrant categories.

Figure 1. Percentage of return versus onward moves by country of origin (working age emigrants 26–64 years old)

![Graph showing percentage of return versus onward moves by country of origin](source: Nekby (2006:205))

Iranians are one of the largest migrant categories (defined by country of birth) in Sweden. Swedish statistics suggest that of the more than 50,000 people who moved from Iran to Sweden before 2006, about 20% have subsequently left the country. While some of these emigrants returned to Iran, more than half moved on to a third country (Statistics Sweden 2006). Although Iranians have been less inclined to move on than, for example, migrants from several African countries (Nekby 2006), as the chart below suggests, the number of emigrating Iranians appears to be steady and in fact shows an upward trend.
Furthermore, while according to Nekby’s findings, migrants from Europe and the Americas tend to return to their home countries rather than onward migrate, the proportion of onward migrants versus return migrants appears to be much higher among Iranians. If we look at the total number and the percentage of people who were born in Iran, migrating to a third country in three different years: 1995, 2000 and 2005, the relative importance of onward migration is very clear. This may reflect the problematic relationship that many diasporic Iranians continue to have with Iran, and the limited incentives they have for return migration (Adibi 2003).

Of those that moved on, some eventually returned to Sweden, others stayed abroad in the destination of their choice, while yet another group have led highly transnational lives, moving back and forth between three or more countries. Swedish register data suggests that for those Iranians leaving Sweden for an onward destination, the UK is the most popular destination. Before 1998, the United States was the most popular onward destination (Statistics Sweden 2006).
Figure 3. Return versus onward migration of Iranians leaving Sweden (absolute numbers)

Source: GeoSweden, Institute for Housing and Urban Research (2008)
During the last decade, however, mobility within the EU has been facilitated by changing legislation which promotes the rights of EU citizens moving within the Schengen zone. It is perhaps for this reason that the UK has become an increasingly popular alternative (Kelly 2012). Swedish statistics show which country onward migrants move to, but they are of course unable to show where, on a city level, onward migrants are moving. Information collected through interviews with Iranians in both Sweden and in Britain, however, suggests that London is the most popular destination for onward migrants (Kelly 2012). London is appealing for a number of reasons. Since the relaxation of Europe’s borders, people from all over Europe have been attracted to London’s cosmopolitan environment to work in a variety of employment sectors. Furthermore, the fact that English is the city’s official language makes it easy for many migrants to quickly find work and to establish themselves (Kelly 2012).

In terms of the specific characteristics of onward migrants, it is possible to see that males outnumbered females in 1995 and 2000, but in 2005, the number of female and male migrants nearly achieved equilibrium. This likely reflects the fact that more men migrated from Iran to Sweden until the mid-1990s, when the number of women and men almost achieved equilibrium.

Figure 4. Percentage of Male and Female Onward Migrants

![Percentage of Male and Female Onward Migrants](image)

Source: GeoSweden, Institute for Housing and Urban Research (2008)

Most onward migrants appear to be adults between the ages of 30 and 64, although the percentage of young people (aged 18-29) has gone up between 1995 and 2005.
Table 1: Age of Onward Migrants in Selected Years (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-17</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-64</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GeoSweden, Institute for Housing and Urban Research (2008)

In fact even those born to Iranian parents in Sweden show a higher tendency than the average Swede to leave the country for destinations further afield, especially English speaking countries like the UK, the USA, and Canada (Statistics Sweden 2006).

As a diasporic group, Iranians in Sweden have been successful in many respects. They tend to be highly educated. In fact their level of education surpasses that of Swedes (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012a). Secondly, they are less geographically segregated than most other migrant groups (Kelly 2011). That said, while some have achieved high level positions, the majority have faced difficulties in securing meaningful employment. This will be discussed further in chapter 6, when the Iranian diaspora in Sweden will be introduced in more detail. For the purpose of this chapter, it is simply important to note that, according to the statistics, onward migrants tend to be those showing low levels of employment and income prior to their onward migration, but also high levels of education. Although the employment rate for Iranians is generally very low, it is even lower for onward migrants than return migrants. The same can be said for income levels, with onward migrants in this case outperforming return migrants, but performing well below the level of stayers.

Table 2: Employment rates by migration status in selected years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayers</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return Migrants</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onward Migrants</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GeoSweden, Institute for Housing and Urban Research (2008)
Furthermore, while the media tends to depict migrants as moving to places where they can secure benefits, this does not appear to reflect the group of migrants under study. Despite living in Sweden where benefits are generous, and facing low employment rates, statistics show that the onward migrants who left Sweden in 1995, 2000 and 2005 were actually less likely to receive state benefits in the year prior to their emigration than Iranians that never left Sweden, or those who moved back to Iran. As the chart shows, there has been a drop in the amount of benefits received by Iranians in general over time, but onward migrants have, in all three time periods under study, received the least amount of benefits.

Source: GeoSweden, Institute for Housing and Urban Research (2008)
Finally, compared to stayers, onward migrants show high levels of education. As Nekby (2006:199) notes, in the Swedish context those migrants who emigrate generally have “below-average employment and income levels in Sweden” but also “relatively high education levels”. It appears that Iranian emigrants reflect this trend.
As the statistics presented here illustrate, onward migrants from Iran are a highly selective group. While showing low levels of employment and income relative to Iranians more generally, they are nevertheless often highly educated and have not been recipients of social benefits prior to their emigration. Indeed, most of the literature on migrants in Sweden focuses on those who are considered underprivileged and in many cases dependent on the welfare state. By focusing on emigrant Iranians, however, something can be learned about the experiences of a group who appear to have a more complex integration experience.

Previous Research on Onward Migration

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion on onward migration, it is perhaps necessary to discuss what it is, and how it is defined. In the context of this study, onward migration refers to migration from one country to another in a two-step, or multi-step process. The concept of onward migration bears resemblance to earlier conceptualizations of “transit” or “step migration”. Perhaps most significant to mention here is Ravenstein’s (1885) work which postulated that mi-
migration occurs in steps or phases, and often in the direction of urban centers. While Ravenstein’s focus was on people making multiple migrations within one country (commonly referred to in the internal migration literature as secondary migration), his initial ideas can also be extended to an international context.

Indeed, many scholars have used the terms secondary or transit migration to refer to international moves. Usually these studies consider the movement of refugees through one country before receiving asylum in another (Papadopoulou 2004). Other studies have adopted the concept of step migration to explore the international trajectories of labour migrants. Paul (2011), for example, specifically tries to bring together both Ravenstein’s concept of step-migration with the concept of “transit” migration to discuss how labour migrants may move between hierarchically ranked countries before achieving their desired destination. While the term “onward migration” is far from being formalized, it may be considered distinct from transit, secondary, or step migration in a number of ways. Lindley and van Hear (2007) define onward migration as specifically referring to the voluntary movement of people through formal channels. Furthermore, the limited literature in this field largely captures migratory movements that (unlike transit migration) are not necessarily consciously planned in advance, and (unlike stepped labour migrations) often occur between countries in the North.

Among the limited studies addressing onward migration are several based on quantitative data sources (Nekby 2006; Takenaka 2007; Rezaei and Goli 2011). These studies are primarily concerned with identifying onward migration trends, and the characteristics associated with onward migrants. Typically, these studies show which national groups are most inclined to move on, and emphasize human capital variables as key to their analysis and findings. Takenaka’s work from the US, for example, finds that migrants who speak English well, have graduate level education, and high levels of income are overrepresented among those who make multiple international moves (Takenaka 2007). Rezaei and Goli (2011) similarly use registry and survey data to explore which migrants are most and least likely to leave Denmark. Their findings suggest that migrants with above average and below average levels of socio-economic integration, labour market participation and education are overrepresented among onward migrants (Rezaei and Goli 2011). Finally Nekby (2006) shows a strong relationship between high levels of education and onward migration in the context of Sweden. These studies shed light on who moves, and propose a number of possible (primarily economic) ex-
planations for why migrants may move on. In this sense, they have highlighted the selectivity of onward migrants, and have shown policy makers some of the challenges of retaining migrants with high levels of education and skills. They do not address migrant subjectivity, however, and therefore are inconclusive in their findings. While Rezaei and Goli (2011) make several references to the experience of migrants in Denmark’s welfare state, their study is not based on in-depth qualitative material and therefore can only speculate as to why migrants may not be fully satisfied with their Danish experience.

A second body of relevant work looks more at how migrants justify their decisions to move on. Interestingly, many of these studies have dealt with Somali migration within and beyond the EU (Bang Nielsen 2004; Kleist 2009; van Liempt 2011a; van Liempt 2011b). These qualitative studies are generally situated in specific space-time contexts, and therefore evaluate both what led migrants to leave a specific place, and what attracted them to another place. Van Liempt (2011a; 2011b) for example, personally carried out an interview-based study on the emigration of Dutch-Somalis to Leicester and London in the UK. She found that both disappointment with the Netherlands, as well as the presence of better opportunities and larger social networks in the UK, encouraged the emigration of Somalis from the Netherlands to these cities. Bang Nielsen’s (2004) work showed similar findings for Danish Somalis moving to the UK. By highlighting the perspectives of migrants themselves, such studies offer more contextualized explanations for onward migration than their quantitative counterparts. They also provide valuable insights on the importance of place in shaping the onward moves of migrants. They are, however, unlike their statistical counterparts, limited in scope and do not provide a sound analysis of onward migration trends.

There are a few general reasons that perhaps help to explain the lack of discussion on onward migration in the literature, and so far, the reluctance of scholars to address the lacunas in existing research. Because of the tendency to depict migrants as new (permanent) members of nation states, most of the work being conducted in migration studies looks at issues that migrants have faced in their countries of destination: their integration into local labour markets, housing markets, and political processes. While these issues are very important, they are narrow in their geographical perspective, focusing mostly on single nation state contexts. A second problem inhibiting the study of onward migration concerns the way we categorize migrants. The tendency to make clear distinctions between, for example, labour and refugee migration, limits our understanding of who, for
example, counts as “skilled” and consequently who might be inclined to move on. While many governments and other actors have become increasingly concerned with attracting and retaining skilled migrants, they have frequently expressed these concerns through studies about labour migrants only. The potential motivations of categories like refugees are, in this conceptualization overlooked. With the exception of studies on transit migrants, the existing literature does not pay sufficient attention to how refugees may use a variety of migration channels and programs over space and time to achieve their goals. A final reason that few studies exist on onward migration relates to statistical data shortages. Few countries have the ability to keep track of its emigrating citizens, let alone distinguish them by county of birth. It has therefore been difficult to address onward migration, or even to recognize its existence. Naturally, going beyond the level of the nation state to discuss the phenomenon at other levels of scale is even more difficult. This is unfortunate considering the importance that various levels of scale play in the onward migration phenomenon.

Onward Migration in Broader Perspective

It could be argued that, given the lack of theorization around onward migration, we cannot study it simply on its own terms. We can therefore begin to conceptualize onward migration by situating its study within other subsets of the migration studies literature. By looking at onward migration in relation to the literature on highly skilled migration, return migration, and intra-EU mobility, we can identify which aspects of onward migration are most in need of further investigation, and how onward migration may relate to and differ from, other migration trends.

Onward Migrants as Skilled and/or Highly Educated Migrants

Clearly not all onward migrants fit the same educational and occupational profile. As has already been emphasized by the findings in the quantitative studies mentioned earlier, however, there are some patterns that suggest that education in particular is an important variable in determining the selectivity of onward migrants. Onward migrants tend to be more educated than stayers (Morrison and DaVanzo 1986; Nekby 2006). Therefore developments in the literature on skilled
migration and human capital flows must be considered when investigating onward migration trends.

The way of looking at skilled migration has changed dramatically in recent years. In the 1960s it was mostly thought of in terms of “brain drain” (Iredale 2001) as people with skills moved, in accordance with systems theory, from peripheral to core countries. Some scholars (Stark 2004; Rizvi 2005; Tung 2008) have argued, however, that the current situation appears to be much more complex. Globalization, the rise of economic opportunities in a number of so-called developing countries, and the expansion of diasporic networks, have created new opportunities for people with skills to move between different places (Rizvi 2005; Tung 2008), and there has therefore been a new emphasis on the importance of skills circulation. Despite this emerging framework for understanding the mobility of skills, many national governments, corporations and other interested parties, are still very interested in defining who is highly skilled, and how to attract them.

As Koser and Salt (1997) note, the definition of who is highly skilled stems “from the interplay of three broad conceptual bases, centered on the migrant, the state and the employer.” (Koser and Salt 1997:287) In much of the literature, “highly skilled” workers are usually defined as those that possess a university degree. In some cases the term can also be extended to include those with significant work experience (Iredale 2001). Of course there are many different ways that “skills” and “talent” can be assessed. Some scholars (van Ham, Mulder, and Hooimeijer 2001) distinguish between human capital (which refers to education and credentials) sector-specific capital (relevant experience in a specific field) and enterprise-specific capital (relevant experience in a specific business). Other researchers (Csedo 2008) distinguish between education and occupation, and take into account assets such as language knowledge, and even personal characteristics. The category “Highly skilled” is not a generic category, therefore, but refers to a very heterogeneous group within which some persons may have more opportunities than others to transfer their skills to new working environments. Furthermore, people have different possibilities to transfer their skills, for example via national programs, through employer driven programs, or transnational corporations (Koser and Salt 1997).

Not all skilled migrants move in the same way, and to the same extent. Iredale (2001) points out that when it comes to labour mobility, there is a great deal of differentiation according to profession; Mahroum (2000) has similarly argued that type of work may play a
role. In general, cross-border labour migrants might be classified as corporate transferees, technical/visiting ‘fireman’, professionals (i.e. health, NGOs), project specialists (engineers), consultant specialists, private career development and training, clergy and missionaries, entertainers, sportspersons and artists, independently wealthy, academics, and military personnel, among others (Salt 1997). As Kofman (2000) notes, however, “The differing conditions applicable to each category mean that we need to be careful about how we analyse this heterogeneous group.” (Kofman 2000:47) There is therefore a growing amount of literature that addresses the specific migration patterns of certain occupational groups such as doctors (Miller et al. 1998), nurses (Money and Falstrom 2006), IT workers (Millar and Salt 2007; Sahoo, Sangha and Kelly 2010), bankers (Beaverstock 1994; Beaverstock and Smith 1996) among others.

While it is important to highlight the role that individual occupations have played in influencing migration flows, it is also important to go beyond studying only the occupational profiles of onward migrants. Although many onward migrants are classified as highly skilled, or highly educated, they cross-cut different occupational classifications and this is something that must be taken into consideration. While some move as professionals, others move as students, others as transferees, and others as business owners. It is therefore important to address their human capital in a more general sense, studying not only professional skills, but also the transfer of more embodied types of capital (Bourdieu 1984), tacit knowledge and other types of capital that may also be significant in encouraging onward moves. Onward migrants for example seem to show high levels of education in many different geographical contexts, and may or may not necessarily belong to specific occupations and move through specified migration channels related to their jobs. Related to this is the issue of how skilled migration may overlap with other types of mobility.

As Koser and Salt (1997) note, in geographical scholarship, there has traditionally been a divide between economic and socio-cultural approaches to the study of skilled migration, with the former receiving much more attention. Because even much of the geographical literature on skilled migration has emphasized the role of elites moving through corporations, or perhaps on the movements of specific professional categories (Findlay et al. 1996; Beaverstock 2002) one of the major shortcomings in the migration literature is that other types of skill and education transfers have been overlooked. Certain categories of migrants, including refugees, women, or others who may move
outside the channels typically open to skilled migrants, may nevertheless bring high levels of human capital with them wherever they go (Kofman 2000). Growing literature on middling transnationalism tries to address the human capital aspect of these seemingly more mundane everyday kinds of mobility (Smith and Favell 2006). There is, therefore, a growing acknowledgement of the need to address human capital in a broader way that takes into account different types of education and skills, and looks at how they are transferred or not between migration sending and receiving societies. Furthermore, the economic factors typically promoted by economic migration theories, should also be viewed in light of other (perhaps social and cultural) reasons for making the decision to move (Laoire 2000).

Onward Migration in Relation to the Study of Emigration or Return

Return migration, or the movement of migrants back to the country from which they originated, has become quite a common field of study (Cassarino 2004). This literature is frequently approached from a development point of view, insofar as return migrants are often seen as returning to their original country with new sources of income, education, or simply new ideas, thereby transferring the capital they had acquired while abroad back to their country of origin (Balaz and Williams 2004; Waters 2006). A second interest in the return migration literature concerns the repatriation of refugees. Refugees are generally expected to either remain in the country of asylum, or to return to the country from where they came (Klinthäll 2007) with the latter alternative frequently being seen as the most desirable option for both host countries and refugees themselves.

Given these considerations, a great deal of literature has developed to address which type of migrant is most likely to return to their country of origin. Several studies are quantitative and are primarily concerned with the economic position of return migrants (Morrison and DaVanzo 1986; Dustmann et al. 1996; Jensen and Pedersen 2007; Klinthäll 2007). Frequently such studies also address onward migrants, by grouping all emigrants together, or in other cases, separating onward migrants from return migrants, but studying them using the same framework. Consistent with findings in the literature on internal migration (Andersson 2012), one of the most common findings across these studies is that the longer a migrant stays in a given place, the less likely they are to leave. Secondly, as in the case of onward migration, human capital often plays a role in influencing
who returns and who stays, but so do structural circumstances. High levels of education may in some cases encourage return, but unem-
ployment in the destination country may also encourage migrants to return to their home country (Jensen and Pedersen 2007; Dustmann and Weiss 2007). In this sense, it would appear that migrants are highly selective, not only in the case of initial migration, but also in subsequent migrations.

Although in the past it was assumed that migrants would, at most, move once to a place and then return to where they came from, a growing amount of literature on international migration addresses the increasing significance of emigration, circulation and/or multi-
directional flows (Tollefsen and Lindgren 2006; Vertovec 2007; King and Newbold 2008; Jeffery and Murison 2011). The growing com-
plexity of migration in general, and the growing tendency for mi-
grians to engage in temporary, return, or onward migration, has raised a number of questions concerning how we conceptualize mi-
gration of all different types. This has even led some scholars to pro-
pose that a new “mobilities paradigm” be used to integrate our un-
derstanding of all different types of movement, outside the confines of usual definitions of migration and settlement (Urry 2000; Sheller and Urry 2006).

In light of this growing interest in multiple migrations, some of which are carefully planned in the framework of a temporal perspec-
tive, several more qualitatively-oriented studies have gone beyond analyzing what variables influence return, and have instead consid-
ered the circumstances behind return, and the way in which people live their lives across multiple places. In particular, several geogra-
phers (Tollefsen 2000; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Christou 2006; Laoire 2008) have explored return and circular migration by situating migrants in multiple (but specific) space-time contexts. Rigid concep-
tions of migration, and even return migration, are therefore being challenged by new conceptualizations of migrants as highly mobile and not just fixed in one place or another. These researchers have shown how migrants find some destinations more desirable than others and, in some cases, how they prefer to live in different places at different points in the life course. Furthermore, as King and New-
bold (2008) point out, today migration is not necessarily just one-way. For those that have social, economic or political linkages in various places, it can be quite natural to move between places. This may be especially true for those belonging to diasporic networks that connect them to different places.
Although the numerous studies on circular and return migration can provide a useful starting point for studying onward migration, it is useful to distinguish onward migration from return and other types of migration (Schroll 2009). Assuming migrants have a choice over where to go, there may be very different reasons for a return move, versus an onward move. Onward migrants may treat their migration decisions the same way they did when making an initial move to migrate. As Nekby (2006), points out, for example, refugees may be limited in their choice when selecting a country in which to seek asylum, and onward migration may reflect their desire to improve their prospects (Nekby 2006). That said, many refugees often face limited opportunities for return, and in this sense, onward migration and return may occur for similar reasons. Those disappointed with the country of destination, or those facing structural difficulties such as unemployment, for example, may choose to return (Bhatt and Roberts 2012). In this sense, the reasons for return may be similar to the reasons for onward migration, but the choice of destination will depend on the circumstances in migrants’ place of origin and the destination options available to them.

Onward Migrants as EU Movers

The movement of naturalized third country nationals within the context of the EU cannot be discussed without considering it in relation to wider trends associated with intra-EU mobility. Onward migration may be considered one type of mobility within the EU, alongside (and cross-cutting) other types of mobility such as labour and student migration.

The Treaty of Rome in 1957 gave European laborers the right to move freely across European borders, thereby complimenting the flow of goods and capital. This was mostly to accommodate guest workers, moving from Southern Europe to fill labor shortages in Northern Europe. After this, several different pieces of legislation were introduced that increased the rights of European migrants. Finally, in 2004, ten of these different laws were combined to allow for the freedom of movement of all EU citizens, and the right for migrants to take their family members with them (Boswell and Geddes 2011). It was felt that the labor flexibility facilitated by the policy would help to compensate for ageing populations in many European countries (Mahroum 2001; Fertig and Schmidt 2002). Inspired in part by widespread mobility within the United States, the rationale was to
encourage the flow of labour across borders, and at the same time to encourage a sense of European citizenship.

Despite the increasing ease with which Europeans may move across borders, there has been little academic attention to internal EU migration patterns, and how some groups may use intra-European mobility to meet their changing needs and interests. This may at least be partly due to data shortages, and the difficulty of studying these migrants who, unlike third country nationals, tend to cross borders without much monitoring or restriction. There is some development in this direction, however. Favell’s (2008) work, *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe*, is perhaps the best example. Favell’s book is based on interviews with sixty Europeans who have moved internally in Europe. His research focuses on migration flows to Amsterdam, Brussels and London and his interviewees represent a variety of employment sectors. Favell’s book mostly focuses on the positive aspects of intra-EU mobility, and the growing opportunities available to Europeans in a united Europe. There have also been several studies that are more ambivalent about intra-EU mobility, however, especially concerning the disproportionate number of migrants moving from Eastern to Western European countries and the often difficult conditions that they face. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that EU mobility has allowed Western countries to exploit a highly educated Eastern European labour force (Boswell and Geddes 2011). Many Eastern migrants, while highly educated, end up working in the unskilled sectors of Western European economies. Exactly what intra-EU mobility has to offer (and to whom) is therefore still an open question.

Despite the hype around freedom of movement in Europe, mobility within the Union has remained extremely low. In 2002, Jileva noted that less than “2 per cent of the working-age population in the EU consists of people from one member state working another” (Jileva 2002:696). According to Eurostat (2011), this number is on the rise due to the financial crises in Southern Europe, but mobility still remains below what was anticipated. As Favell (2008) notes, unlike movement within the United States, movement in Europe still requires moving across a national border which is more difficult than making an internal move (Favell 2008). Deterrents to mobility include linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as practical matters associated with finding work, housing etc. (Peixoto 2001; Fertig and Schmidt 2002; Findlay et al. 2006). In many EU countries, migration to and from third countries is of greater significance (Boswell and Geddes 2011). This is especially true when considering refugee flows.
As a number of researchers have emphasized, however, there is a clear distinction between EU mobility and migration coming in from third countries. While EU citizens are free to move, the management of inflows coming from outside of the EU remains an issue managed at the level of the individual nation state (van Riemsdijk 2012). In the process of opening EU borders, some scholars have also argued that Europe as a whole has become more closed to migration from outside, and that there has been a growing sense of “othering” associated with non-European migrants (Ballard 1996; Tesfahuney 1998). Many European countries have become increasingly restrictive when it comes to allowing family or asylum migration, while skilled migration programs are given priority. This raises a number of questions, therefore, concerning how non-European citizens may use certain opportunities for entry into the EU, as well as subsequent strategies to acquire residence in the countries they actually wish to live in.

Approaching the Study of Migration

As the above literature review has demonstrated, there are many different ways to conceptualize migration, and this poses a number of challenges for researchers interested in charting emerging migratory trends.

The first is the issue of scale (Cadge et al. 2010). Whether international migration should be studied at the level of the nation state or rather at the level of the region (Rogers 2004), or the locality (Brickwell and Datta 2011) of course depends on the topic of interest, but increasingly scholars have argued for an acknowledgement of the connectedness of places, and how migrants may be considered “scale makers”, who actively connect different places thereby situating themselves not only in specific “contexts” but also in places impacted by different power relations and global flows (Caglar and Glick Schiller 2011). A growing body of literature therefore notes the ties that migrants maintain to multiple scalar contexts such as cities and regions, and the ways in which their integration into one place may be facilitated by their connections to another (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2011; van Bochove 2013). Defining the relationship between migrants and places therefore requires careful attention.

The second issue concerns how to go about conceptualizing and analyzing migratory movements. Accounting for both structure and agency in the migration process is a matter of ongoing debate. Furthermore, approaches to the study of migration are often compart-
mentalized according to the specific approach they adopt. Perhaps most fundamental is the distinction between macro and micro approaches. According to Castles and Miller (2009), macro approaches take account of “large-scale institutional factors”. These may include features of the political economy, specific national policies and so on. Micro approaches in contrast consider “the networks, practices and beliefs” of migrants themselves.” (Castles and Miller 2009:28) A meso level approach, according to Castles and Miller connects macro and micro approaches with, for example, a study of the specific individuals and organizations acting as intermediaries between large scale structural programs and individual migrants. In fact all three: macro, micro and meso level approaches are often connected and intertwined, but this is not always acknowledged or explored in the migration studies literature.

The third issue concerns the specific theoretical approach adopted by researchers. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. Economic approaches, which have traditionally dominated the field, illustrate the link between economic opportunities and migrant flows. In recent years there has nevertheless been a growing interest in exploring other types of socially or culturally motivated migration. Structural approaches consider the structures that influence or deter migrant flows. Institutional approaches look at the role that institutions play in facilitating these flows. Finally, a network-based approach considers the role that migrant familial and social ties play in influencing migration patterns. The lack of dialogue between these approaches, however, has led to fragmented findings within the field of migration studies. This is difficult to overcome given the differing theoretical and methodological perspectives of migration researchers. It is perhaps the interdisciplinary nature of geographic research, however, that has led geographers to consider these shortcomings in the migration literature, and to express an interest in overcoming them. This leads to the fourth and final concern, which is that of disciplinary approach.

King’s (2011) article “Geography and migration studies: Retrospect and prospect” highlights some of the contributions that geographers have made to the interdisciplinary field of migration studies. Notably, he highlights how following the cultural turn in the discipline of geography, a number of new approaches to the study of migration have been introduced. While previously population movements were solely the domain of demographers, King notes that in the last twenty years there have been a growing number of studies that address population movements from a diverse range of new
perspectives (King 2011). In particular, since the 1990s, there has been a push to move beyond the dominance of economic approaches and to integrate them with social and cultural developments in the field (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; White and Jackson 1995; Laoire 2000). Despite these developments, however, there is still more that needs to be done to overcome the micro-macro divide, and also, as King (2011) points out, to link the study of settlement with the study of migration patterns and flows.

Since onward migration is a relatively new field of study, I have proceeded with these different considerations in mind, and have tried, as far as possible, to draw on different theoretical perspectives in order to address these deficiencies in the way geographers, and more generally migration researchers, approach the study of migration. My research therefore aspires to bridge traditional population geography studies, concerned with measuring and documenting migrant flows, with a predominantly qualitative approach that prioritizes subjectivity, and the meanings that people attach to their actions, including their decision to move from one place to another. In doing so, I adopt a transnational social field approach to the study of onward migrant flows in a way that aims to link migrants to different levels of geographical scale. This is combined with a perspective that incorporates economic, structural and cultural perspectives on migration. By addressing both micro and macro factors, and drawing on different theoretical ideas, I hope that I can contribute to the conceptualization of onward migration, and in particular its relationship to both settlement and mobility.

A Transnational Social Field Approach

Until recently, most research on migrants focused on settlement experiences, and the way that migrants reestablished themselves in their place of destination (O’Reilly 2012). Today, however, there is a growing focus on the ways that people live their lives between or across different places in broadly defined “transnational spaces” (Faist 2013). As Faist, notes, today the various ways in which places are connected via migrants are more complex than older approaches to migration studies can account for, thereby challenging classic theories of assimilation. Globalization and increased space-time compression have led to much more complex linkages between places (Faist 2000b). Unlike earlier migrants who moved to one place and established themselves there permanently, many of today’s migrants are able to move back and forth between origin and destination sites, and
to maintain networks of colleagues, fellow alumni and relatives in different places (Meyer 2001). Furthermore, they may retain closer ties to their place of origin than was possible in the past, using, for example, telecommunications that allow for simultaneity in different places (Vertovec 2009).

While most of the literature addresses the ties that migrants maintain to their place of origin and a single destination country, increasingly, transnational fields have also come to include third countries. As Faist notes:

Country of origin, country of destination and migrants (plus their significant others who are relatively immobile) thus create a triangular social structure, which can be expanded through the inclusion of countries of onward migration. (Faist 2010:14)

Naturally, since there is communication within these fields, there is also physical movement. Migrants may use their social networks or other types of ties to move between the places to which they are connected. The present study will therefore take these social spaces as a starting point for exploring how onward migrants position themselves within the complex ties they maintain to different places.

While a transnational social field approach is very useful for understanding the spatial relations of migrants, theoretically, the approach tends to emphasize the active role of migrants as agents. In order to understand onward migration in all of its complexity, therefore, it is also necessary to understand the role of structural factors in influencing onward migration. These power relations may be instigated by race, class and gender hierarchies, which intersect in specific ways in specific places, thereby creating differentiated opportunities for migrants to live, work and belong across social space. As Grillo (2007) argues, it is important to include a critical perspective when understanding transmigrants’ opportunities for moving within space and time. It is for this reason that I have decided to combine a transnational social field approach, with one that relates migration to everyday life.

**Migration and Everyday Life**

Current literature highlights the extent and pace of mobility in a seemingly frictionless world that encourages migration flows (Urry 2000). It would seem that the world’s *cosmopolitans*, people who may be conceptualized as on the move and simultaneously free of parochial attachments, are often seen in opposition to *locals*, who are in-
stead conceptualized as fixed in place (Ley 2004). This tension is articulated in a number of different ways including how we conceptualize home and mobility (Ralph and Staeheli 2011) and more generally, the global and the local (Harvey 2000). From my point of view, one of the major weaknesses of migration research, however, is that it often fetishizes movement, depicting it as something separate to everyday life. This is perhaps especially true of the economic literature on skilled migration which tends to focus on the flow of capital and labour across borders rather than on the nuanced life experiences of migrants. Based on the findings of this research, migration is generally only a part of life for most migrants, who are concerned with everything most other non-migrants are concerned with: finding work, meeting their daily needs, cultivating relationships, educating their children and so on. These activities may take place in a migration context, but they are nevertheless rooted in peoples’ daily lives and broader life trajectories. In adopting an approach that aims to highlight the link between mobility and emplacement, and how people live their lives across borders, this dissertation builds on a growing body of geographical literature that emphasizes migration and the everyday (Ley 2004; Conradson and Latham 2005b; Ho and Hatfield 2011; Staeheli et al. 2012). This literature emphasizes the link between the global and the local, and the various ways that mobility and emplacement are intertwined.

When studied as practice, or as a dynamic process of meaning making, culture can tell us much about why migrants do what they do, and how they bring meaning to their lives. Bottomley (1992) argues that culture is a concept that is often misunderstood and overlooked in migration studies, despite its potential contribution to understanding migration processes. The avoidance of the culture concept perhaps relates to its popular misuse in recent years. As Andersson and Molina (2003) point out, in the Swedish context, culture is often “considered in a narrow sense, as the values that immigrants bring in the form of baggage from the country of origin.” Similarly, in the British context, migrant “communities” are said to be defined by their unique (and supposedly closed) “cultures” (Baumann 1996). This is unfortunate, considering that if defined properly, much can be gained from combining both the study of structure and culture, in order to capture both the macro and micro contexts that affect peoples’ lives and experiences (McDowell 2008).

Drawing on the work of scholars such as Bourdieu (1984) Skeggs (2004), Savage et al. (2005), and a number of feminist geographers, this dissertation explores how cultural meanings are also tied up with
classed and gendered understandings of social practices within and across social space. To bring out these different aspects of the phenomenon and the relationship between them, a biographical approach is employed to capture peoples’ wider life experiences, and in particular how structure and culture have played out in individual lives lived across space and time.

Following in the footsteps of several geographers (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; Laoire 2000; Lawson 2000; Tollefsen 2000), therefore, this study takes up a biographical approach to understanding migrant flows. Adopting such an approach has several benefits. Firstly, it can help us to situate specific moves within the broader life course of the migrant. In other words, it can facilitate the understanding of onward migration as an embedded process that takes shape within a temporal and a spatial context. This is in contrast to approaches that view migration as a rationalistic, individual decision making process. This may help to develop an understanding of the relationship between individuals and the structural contexts that they encounter. Secondly, adopting such an approach can contribute to an understanding of migrant subjectivity. A biographical approach links migrants to the contexts to which they are attached by assuming “a complex interaction between the way the individual understands his or her world and that world itself.” (Anthias 2002b) A focus on subjectivity makes space for understanding the meaning that people attach to the migrations that they have made.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation has three parts. The first part, chapters 1, 2, and 3 outlines the approach to the study of onward migration. Chapter 2 offers an in-depth overview of the theoretical framework. It is argued that much of the literature addressing human capital issues in population research is limited by a narrow understanding of highly skilled migration flows, and that much can be gained by drawing on broader theoretical concepts from critical and feminist theory. In particular, I propose that by drawing on critical diaspora and transnationalism studies, theories of social reproduction, the feminist concept of intersectionality, and a life course approach, we can better situate migrants in both time and space and at different levels of scale. Rather than viewing onward migration as a unique event, therefore, the goal is to situate it in the everyday geographies of peoples’ lives.
In Chapter 3 the methodological approach is elaborated. It is argued that while much can be gained by using statistics as a starting point, these quantitative data sources should ideally be combined with interviews with Iranian-focused organizations as well as individual life history interviews with onward migrants. Such an approach aims to capture the macro, meso, and micro level of the phenomenon under study.

In chapters 4-6 the study is contextualized. Chapter 4 provides an overview of modern Iranian history and the formation of an Iranian diaspora. Attention is given, in this chapter, to the specific social and economic history of middle class Iranians in Iran, and their selectivity as they left the country to form a globally dispersed, highly differentiated (but also highly connected) diaspora. The focus is mostly on how race, class and gender have affected emigrants’ decisions to leave Iran, and to pursue life in other places.

Chapter 5 focuses on the national welfare states that are of central concern to the onward migrants in the study: Sweden and Britain. The chapter provides a comparison of the different approaches these two countries have taken to admitting and integrating migrants.

Chapter 6 considers the settlement experiences of Iranians in Sweden and London. The empirical findings for this chapter are based on interviews with Iranian organizations in Sweden and Britain, statistics, and secondary sources. The goal in this chapter is to paint a general picture of the challenges and opportunities Iranians have faced in Sweden, thereby exploring what might have led some Iranians to move on to London, and how they may have experienced the latter context.

The third part, comprising chapters 7, 8 and 9 focuses more on the experiences of individual onward migrants. These chapters are based on biographical, life history data, collected from multiple interviews conducted with 15 highly educated onward migrants in London. Each chapter aims to unravel some of the dominant narratives presented by individual migrants, as they discuss how they have lived their lives across difference places. The chapters are organized thematically. Chapter 7 looks at how transnational social fields based on familial networks and ties have influenced migration flows, as well as the experience of Iranians in the diaspora. In particular, shifting conceptions of gender and family, and their impact on social reproduction, are explored.

Chapter 8 considers how onward migrants see moving on as a way to achieve social mobility. In this chapter the economic motives for onward migration are combined with an approach that emphasizes
the link between economy, culture and place. I argue that onward migrants are, in a sense, aiming to reproduce their pre-revolutionary class position in Iran, by moving on to London which they see as a more suitable place than Sweden for fulfilling their goals. The way that individual participants position themselves in relation to dominant understandings of what constitutes success is also explored.

Chapter 9 considers the relationship between settlement and mobility, and its implications for place belonging. While not having a clear sense of place belonging, onward migrants, it is argued, have used migration as a strategy to find their place in the world.

The dissertation finishes with Chapter 10, with a brief discussion on the main findings of the research, as well as a presentation of the study’s key contributions.
Chapter 2
Situating Onward Migrants in Social Space

Like most critical geographers, I am inspired by Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of social space. I view space as constructed, contingent and where power relations are played out (Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Silvey and Lawson 1999; Massey 2005). As Tollefsen (2000:11) notes, social relations “cannot be seen as separate or independent from their spatial contexts.” Migrants, in their turn, are situated in social space, but also constitute these social spaces (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2011). Identifying who is a migrant, and how to go about studying their movements, is therefore not as simple as it may first seem. While the migration studies literature frequently reduces migrants either to objects or subjects (Silvey and Lawson 1999), as several researchers (Bertaux-Wiame 1979; Laoire 2000) have argued, migration is a process, and is much more complex than it is usually perceived to be. Although migration may be a straightforward demographic event, the context in which it occurs and the mechanisms underlying it nevertheless require careful theoretical consideration.

The decision to use the term *migrant* in this study, rather than *immigrant*, *emigrant* or *exile* was a conscious one, and was based on the desire to conceptualize migrants as people whose lives crosscut different places. The terms *immigrant* and *emigrant* tend to refer to migrants who enter a country that is not their own, while the term *exile* tends to refer to people who are permanently displaced. While both of these terms may accurately reflect the experiences of some of the onward migrants studied here, I prefer to challenge dominant assumptions that place migrants in specific, pre-conceived social-spatial relations, often with political implications. Furthermore, I believe the fact that migrants are frequently studied in this way, poses limitations to capturing the full complexity of their experience and also their migration decision making.

To begin with, traditional approaches to the study of migration tend to divide migrants into two categories: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary migrants are seen as exercising rational choices in their locational preferences, while involuntary migrants are seen as
being forced to move from one place to another due to extenuating circumstances such as war, famine, and environmental disaster. This, however, is an overly clear binary that should be problematized (Richmond 1988). People are encouraged to move (or not) for a number of reasons. Furthermore, such classification systems are frequently guilty of imbuing certain categories of migrants with attributes that give them agency (i.e. skilled migrants) and others migrants (i.e. refugees) with problems that lead to structural dependency. Such dichotomies limit our understanding of the complexity of migration decision making, and indeed the way we understand migrant lives.

A second limitation of traditional approaches to migration is the way that they frequently reduce migration to a rational decision. This was true of early push-pull migration theories, and the same could be said for the economic approaches that still tend to dominate migration research. According to macro-economic theories, people are expected to flow, like capital, according to the dictates of the global economy. Such conceptualizations of migrants and migration tend to overlook the structural factors inherent in encouraging or restricting migrant flows. Even in cases in which no forced migration occurs who moves where may be influenced not only by economic demand, but by immigration policies which target certain education, occupation and skill categories while simultaneously deterring so-called “undesirable” immigrants.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that migrants, on an individual level, always act in an inherently rational way, moving to the job that provides the best possible return. Micro economic theories, in their turn, therefore fail to consider “informal training or the role of institutional factors, discrimination and other factors that lead to imperfections in the labour market” (Iredale 2001:8). As scholars such as Halfacree (2004) point out, economic considerations are important and they may very well play a central role, but we cannot assume that economic criteria are the most important or act isolated from other factors. Migrants may move for a complex mix of economic, personal, social and cultural reasons that are seldom taken into consideration in their entire complexity (Halfacree and Boyle 1993:334).

The study of migration is therefore an aspect of population geography that is in particular need of new and innovative approaches that address the issue of migration decision making from a more multifaceted perspective than has been done in the past. In particular, more must be done to bring the macro and the micro perspective together under a single theoretical framework. Bridging the gap between structure and agency, or micro and macro approaches to mi-
gration remains an important challenge for geographers who want to understand migration processes in a more holistic and nuanced way.

As noted in the previous chapter, this study aims to understand onward migration by contextualizing moves within the broader historical, cultural and social structures that affect peoples’ lives at different levels of scale and at both the macro and micro level. While I do not wish to reify or treat these different levels of scale separately in the dissertation, I do try to draw connections between them. Figure 8 shows the aspects considered in both the formulation of the research questions and the design of the life history interview study.

Figure 8. Conceptualization of Transnational Migration

In adopting a social constructionist approach (Berger and Luckmann 1966), my study is not concerned with highlighting the existence of a concrete objective reality, but rather, aims to understand why migrants (on their own terms) may choose to leave Sweden and how this is related to their positioning in social space. I therefore start this research with the belief that society creates social structures that individuals must then effectively maneuver around.

The theoretical foundation for this dissertation is based on four cross-cutting theoretical concepts which I will outline in some detail in this chapter. The first and overarching concept is that of transnational social fields, and especially diasporic transnational fields. After discussing how I define these fields, and how I intend to use them in
the study, I go on to discuss some of the other concepts that I wish to explore in relation to transnational fields. Drawing on the concepts of everyday life and particularly social reproduction, I explore how lives are lived within these transnational social fields. This is followed by a discussion on how transnational social fields may be structured hierarchically by gender, race and class relations. For this I adopt an intersectional perspective. Finally, I consider what adopting a life course approach may add to an understanding of transnational social fields. In what follows, I will discuss each of these theoretical ideas in detail, drawing attention to the implications they have for both the social and geographical positioning of onward migrants. I hope that this particular combination of theoretical approaches used in this dissertation will be a contribution to the field of migration research, which seems to be in need of new ways of approaching the study of transnational migration. As some researchers have noted, when studying migration it is important to emphasize the actual people involved in the process, rather than simply reducing migrants to flows and figures (Davies 1994; Tollefsen 2000).

Transnational Social Fields

The concept of transnational social fields serves as the theoretical basis for the study. In this section I will therefore devote several pages to discussing the concept, and how it can be used to facilitate our understanding of the link between migrants and places, mobility and settlement. To begin with, however, I would like to discuss how the concept has emerged as a critique to other ways of conceptualizing migrants and the processes by which they adapt to places of destination.

Assimilation, Integration, and Migrant Transnationalism

Migrants, especially those coming from distant locations, disrupt the usual ways of understanding the relationship between identity and place. Migrants are people who often do not share the same cultural backgrounds and experiences as the native born. Moreover, they may challenge the way that citizenship is conceptualized (as for example, something defined by birth or blood). This has raised a number of questions concerning what belonging means, how migrants should (or should not) be permitted to belong to specific places, and what opportunities are available to migrants in this regard. While different
national governments have conceptualized and addressed these issues in a variety of ways, a few key theoretical concepts have been drawn on to debate the issue of migration and belonging in several Western countries.

Assimilation has been defined as “the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it.” (Alba and Nee 1997) Assimilation theory was originally based on the early experiences of (mostly European migrants) moving to the United States. In the past, it was generally assumed that migrants would indeed assimilate with time; in other words, they would eventually join the mainstream in terms of both economic profile and cultural affiliation. With rising levels of migration, however, came a growing awareness that not all migrants in fact do assimilate. In the United States, this led in the 1970s, to a growing acceptance of ethnic or cultural pluralism. Many migrant groups, it was decided, may retain aspects of their cultural and ethnic identity and avoid assimilating into the mainstream (Faist et al. 2013). This was followed in the 1990s, however, by a more nuanced discussion around the different pathways migrants may take when finding their place in a new society. While some migrants may follow the classical pathway laid out by assimilation theory, others may not (Vertovec 2009; Portes et al. 2009). Furthermore, these emerging discussions have helped to deconstruct the assumed relationship between assimilation and social mobility, and have contributed to a growing awareness that assimilation is not open to everyone in every context. In order to assimilate, migrants must be welcomed to do so by non-migrants (Gans 2007).

It should be noted that despite its ongoing relevance to academic literature, the concept of assimilation is contested. Integration is usually seen as a better term to describe the gradual incorporation of migrants. Rather than assuming that migrants will gradually adopt the same culture as non-migrants, integration tends to focus on “markers” like housing, employment and education (Ager and Strang 2004), which are used to measure the structural position of migrants in destination countries.

Despite the distinction often made between assimilation and integration, however, some of the underlying issues raised by early conceptions of assimilation are nevertheless still present in the integration discourse. The issue of structure and agency is far from resolved with some viewing integration as a choice that migrants make (or even a responsibility that they should have) to join the mainstream, rather than a process by which both migrants and non-migrants work
together to build a new society (Phillimore and Goodson 2008). Related to this, the cultural aspects of integration are poorly defined. The extent to which migrants are expected to join the “mainstream culture” is unclear. The pressure that migrants often feel to “integrate” even in the cultural domain has led some to argue that integration and assimilation are in fact very similar concepts. It has even been argued that there has been a move away from the ethnic pluralism model, and a return to assimilation, albeit using new terms and concepts, through policies which emphasize “civic integration” rather than multicultural belonging in many Western countries (Brubaker 2001).

At the heart of all of these discussions is the issue of how to deal with difference. There have been many different theoretical approaches to addressing the topic. In particular, postcolonial theorists (Said 1978; Gilroy 1993; Peake and Kobayashi 2002; Khader 2013) have done much to challenge assimilation discourses by raising attention to the challenges migrants face in forging a sense of belonging. Critical race theorists such as Stuart Hall have theorized the positionality of racialized minorities in Western societies by arguing that, even in a time of multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism, a new form of discrimination called “cultural racism” which emphasizes a “politics of difference” has emerged (Hall 1996:601). This new cultural racism, according to Hall, is based on a belief in the immutability of cultural categories, communities and divisions, even over time, and has led to the ongoing inferiorization of migrants, and the inability of migrants to forge a strong sense of belonging regardless of their intentions to integrate or assimilate.

One of the more interesting developments in the migration studies literature in the last two decades has been a growing awareness that migrants may not simply integrate into the country of destination, but rather, may engage in transnational practices which challenge the way that concepts like assimilation and integration are understood (Kivisto 2001; Caglar and Glick Schiller 2011). Since the 1990s, the focus has shifted therefore, from a nationally framed concept of integration to a transnational one. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) note:

Migrant incorporation into a new land and transnational connections to a homeland or to dispersed networks of family, compatriots, or persons who share a religious or ethnic identity can occur at the same time and reinforce one another. (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1003)

The important point here, is that migrants may be incorporated into both their place of origin and their place of destination and that the
two are not necessarily incongruent (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002). In fact people may live their lives between places, in broadly defined “transnational spaces”.

While an acknowledgement of migrants’ ongoing ties and connections to their places of origin is not new, the possibility of viewing adaptation and transnationalism simultaneously has emerged in response to growing discussions around globalization and space-time compression. Such arguments emphasize the growing possibilities for migrants to travel between different locales, maintain contact with family members in different places, and to access a diverse range of linguistic and cultural media resources. While this does not necessarily suggest that assimilation at country of destination does not occur, it does pose a challenge to the way that integration is conceptualized. In his study of the transnationalism and mobility of business migrants between Hong Kong and Canada, Ley notes that:

The reality of migrant mobility in a globalising world brings the need for new adjustments, or at least new expectations, from a nation-state whose policies and institutions have been predicated on permanent settlement not circular migration. (Ley 2013:2)

The opportunities for living in a transnational way of course differ between different spatial contexts, however, and individual migrants may also make different choices when it comes to what kind of transnational ties they maintain. As Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002) have noted, there are different motivations for engaging transnationally and different possibilities to do so. This is perhaps especially relevant when considering the second generation.

As Vertovec (2009) points out, some researchers have argued that transnationalism is not common among the second generation. Those emphasizing more classical models of migrant incorporation continue to focus on first generation transnationalism, and view the second generation as either successfully or poorly integrated into the place of destination (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Other scholars (Kivisto 2001; Levitt 2009), however, have postulated that transnationalism may easily be adopted by these young people, for whom “the lines between the home and the host country and between the first and the second generation blur, making them one interconnected social experience” (Levitt 2009:1226). In other words second generation migrants may function well in destination countries while also remaining connected to their ancestral country of origin through a variety of ties that may be similar or different to the ties their parents retain (Lee 2011; Haikkola 2011).
Transnational practices may include participating in family visits, telephone conversations, email, or the sending of remittances, which keep them connected to people either “back home” or in other parts of the diaspora. They may also be of a more symbolic nature, in which youth, while living in one specific country, may identify with an additional country or place, or perhaps several, on account of their family history, language, religion and customs. Furthermore, as some scholars have pointed out, transnational connections and ties to the parents’ place of origin may play an important role in the lives of second generation youth even if they have never been to their ancestral homeland. As Levitt and Jaworsky (2007:131) note, multiple generations may be caught up in transnational social fields in a variety of ways. It therefore does not make sense to distinguish clearly between immigrants and non-immigrants from the point of view of socialization. “Instead, socialization and social reproduction often occur across borders, in response to at least two social and cultural contexts…” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:134)

Furthermore, as suggested by earlier critiques of assimilation theory, for both first and second generation migrants, transnationalism cannot be understood solely as a choice. Some migrants may be inclined to engage in what Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002) have termed “reactive transnationalism” in response to not being able to assimilate in countries of destination due to discrimination or other structural constraints (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002). As Ley (2013) points out, while integration measures usually take account of economic or educational outcomes, the social and cultural aspects of migrant incorporation are more commonly overlooked. These aspects of the migrant experience should also therefore be given consideration when understanding why some migrants may choose to live transnationally.

Defining Transnational Social Fields

Perhaps it is important from the outset to establish exactly what I mean by transnational social field. While the concept does not necessarily allude to Bourdieu’s conceptualization of “social fields” (for example in her 2010 work Glick Schiller explicitly states that this is not how she intends to use the concept), I am working with the definition established by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) which is influenced by Bourdieu. As Levitt and Schiller define it:

The notion of social field exists in social science literature in several different forms. We draw here on those proposed by Bourdieu and by the Manchester school of anthropology. Bourdieu used the concept of social field to call at-
tension to the ways in which social relationships are structured by power. The boundaries of a field are fluid and the field itself is created by the participants who are joined in struggle for social position. (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1008)

As they point out, while Bourdieu did not discuss transnational social fields, he also did not discuss why his concepts should not be used beyond the context of individual nation states. Instead, they use Bourdieu’s conceptualization as a way of focusing on the multidimensional nature of social networks, which may facilitate the exchange of ideas, practices and resources.

In adopting such an approach, as they point out, researchers should avoid clearly distinguishing between levels of scale and instead look at how migrants’ experience of specific places may be influenced by multiple scalar levels. This may include laws and institutions operating at different levels of scale, but it may also include, for example, the specific influence of diasporic networks operating in that place. As Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) put it, theoretically, “A major research task, then, is to specify the types and dimensions of different kinds of social fields and their effects on migration trajectories” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:144). This may involve the study of the transnational practices of individuals, but also the role of organizations and institutions (Amelina and Faist 2012:1708).

As already noted, many transnational practices do not involve mobility between places, and people may retain ties to their country of origin in a variety of ways. But as Ley suggests, it is perhaps those with the most transnational engagement, those who travel between places, and especially those who are engaged economically and/or politically in more than one place that can provide the most insight into the relationship between integration and transnationalism (Ley 2013).

As noted in the previous chapter, however when it comes to migration between places, developing a focus on transnational social fields in general may prove insufficient for understanding the specific ways in which migrants use them to move across borders. The concept of transnationalism, as Amelina and Faist (2012) point out:

does not define multi-directional geographic mobility as significant by itself, but as relevant in respect to the formation of cross-border social entities such as transnational professional networks, transnational kinship groups, transnational organizations and diasporas. (Amelina and Faist 2012:1707-1708)
When studying how they influence mobility, thus, these different types of “transnational social fields” should therefore be distinguished and studied both separately as well as in relation to one another.

Diasporic Transnational Social Fields

For migration scholars employing the transnational field concept, perhaps one of the most important distinctions to make is between “diasporic transnational fields” and migrant transnational fields more generally. Diasporic fields refer to the transnational social formations of a specific group living outside of their country of origin. Studying diasporic formations often involves studying specific migrant groups who have been forced to move from one context to another. The focus on diaspora tends to be on connectivity, and in particular, examining the connections migrants retain to their place of origin. The concept of transnational fields, in contrast, is “used both more narrowly—to refer to migrants’ durable ties across countries—and, more widely” including “not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations.” (Faist 2010:9) While diasporic fields are more often employed by humanistic scholars concerned with history and culture, transnational fields are taken up by social scientists who are interested in patterns and processes.

One of the benefits of using the concept of both “diasporic” and “transnational” fields is that together they allow for a broader understanding of migration; such an approach takes into account migrant experiences in the place of origin or country of birth, as well as the way migrants may relate to their new home country, and even other parts of the globally dispersed diaspora to which they belong. Although the term diaspora refers to a scattered population, there has, through the process of settlement in different countries, also been a reconfiguring of diasporic space, with mobility eventually becoming settlement, albeit in new and creative ways that reflects the tension involved in belonging and longing for multiple geographically distant places.

There have been considerable efforts made to define the term “diaspora” and evaluate the extent to which migrant communities constitute diasporas (Safran 1991). The term “diaspora” comes from Greek and refers to the scattering of a population. The term, however, was first used to describe the Jewish experience of scattering, which was forceful rather than voluntary and was in many ways syn-
onymous with the concept of exile (Baumann 2010:19). As a result, the traditional definition of diaspora came to signify “a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile.” (Cohen 1997b: ix). Despite its traditional usage, the term “diaspora” has since taken on a looser meaning and in recent years it has been used to describe many large migrant communities that have moved for a variety of voluntary and involuntary reasons. Cohen, for example, in his attempt to redefine the diaspora concept, distinguishes between victim diasporas (Africans and Armenians), labour diasporas (Indians and British), trade diasporas (Chinese and Lebanese), cultural diasporas (Caribbeans), as well as those that have been in search of a homeland (Sikhs and Zionists) (Cohen 1997b). More recent literature has followed Cohen’s approach, and explored various migrant communities through a diasporic lens. It could be said, therefore, that the concept of diaspora has come to denote a social condition rather than a specific definition of migratory movement (Laoire 2003:276). By defining diasporas in a more open way, the focus has shifted to the transnational spatial dimension of the diasporic experience (Wahlbeck 2002). In other words, to be diasporic is to be between two or more places.

As an analytical tool, diasporas are seen to offer an understanding of “multiple allegiances and belongings, recognition of hybridity, and the potential for creativity” (Laoire 2003:277). The diaspora concept acknowledges the histories that migrants bring to wherever they move, and help to bring out the unique features of their migratory experience. Those belonging to a diasporic community are typically viewed as having a double-consciousness based on their situatedness as both members of the society from which they have come as well as members of the society to which they have moved. This diasporic consciousness may, as Clifford puts it, be “constituted both negatively and positively” (Clifford 1994:311). Migrants experiencing marginalization in their new place of residence may view suffering, alienation and exile as central to their diasporic experience; at the same time, community formation, the cultivation of a sense of attachment to multiple places, and the resistance to oppression may be viewed as something positive.

Diasporas are historically constituted, and as such, must be considered as individual and unique. Even individual diasporas are constantly undergoing development and change. As Clifford writes:

As counterdiscourses of modernity, diaspora cultures cannot claim an oppositional or primary purity. Fundamentally ambivalent, they grapple with the
entanglement of subversion and the law, of invention and constraint—the complicity of distopia and utopia. (Clifford 1994:319)

This dynamic and ever-evolving quality is something that should be kept central when investigating individual diasporas. Diasporas are, like other social formations, constantly undergoing change, as they strive to adapt to broader social changes and developments, and in this sense their final destination is never certain (Chambers 1994; Davies 1994; Patterson and Kelley 2000). This process has frequently been viewed as offering a creative tension. As Avtar Brah writes, diasporas “are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure.” (Brah 1996) Those belonging to diasporic communities should not be seen as bearers of a previous place and time, but rather as agents who have the potential to create and recreate their identities anew within the dynamism afforded by the diasporic context.

The diasporic concept is useful, thus, insofar as it deepens our understanding of migrants’ positionalities and identities in a space that transcends the nation. Unlike research that studies migrants only based on their status as immigrants living as minorities inside a foreign state, for example, diasporic conceptualizations are less ethnocentric. As Clifford (1994: 307) points out, “(D)iasporic populations do not come from elsewhere in the same way that ‘immigrants’ do.” In this sense, diasporas provide resistance to assimilation to the nation state, and help to create an alternative to assimilation frameworks, at least in social or symbolic space. When analyzed as a theoretical tool, furthermore, diasporas highlight the perspectives of those that have moved, rather than those of the host society. In this sense, as Clifford points out, “old and new diasporas offer resources for emergent ‘post colonialisms’.” (Clifford 1994:302)

Furthermore, using the concept of diaspora can bring out a more nuanced understanding of how migrant communities are formed, and how their members relate to one another. As Blunt (2007:6) states, “The cultural geographies of diaspora encompass the material and imaginative connections between people and a ‘territorial identity’, often over transnational space and via transnational networks.” When relations across space are analyzed within a diasporic framework, the focus tends to be on multi-locality, rather than on specific national or even local contexts. In fact, it could be argued that the concept of diaspora is all about interconnectivity: relations between place of origin and place of destination, and frequently also between diasporic communities that have been dispersed around the world.
Problematizing Diaspora as an Analytical Tool

Despite the potential of the diaspora concept, it has been criticized by a number of scholars. Clifford, for example, argues that the concept sometimes over emphasizes “notions of the multiply-positioned subject” rather than rooting empirical findings in a more concrete way (Clifford 1994:319). This reflects larger debates around how the growing experience of migrancy has led place to take on new meaning, and the extent to which people are still grounded in specific spatial contexts. In order to make diaspora studies useful, therefore, it is necessary to ground one’s findings in specific contexts. Place does matter, even as traditional scalar approaches are challenged (Pries 2001). In my view, diasporas should be historically situated and contextualized. This must be balanced, however, with an open approach that embraces the dynamic nature of diasporas as dispersed social networks that challenge traditional conceptions of space, and especially nation. As Brah writes:

> What enables us to mobilise the word diaspora as a conceptual category in analysing these composite formations, as opposed to using it simply as a description of different migrations, is that the concept of diaspora specifies a matrix of economic, political and cultural inter-relationships which construct the commonality between the various components of a dispersed group. (Brah 1996:196)

In this sense, diasporas should be studied, therefore, in their spatial specificity, but also by way of an approach that acknowledges the dynamic processes that serve to bring communities together or divide them across space.

A second and related critique is that, in our efforts to situate diasporas in historical context, there is a risk of essentializing diasporic identities (Mitchell 1997). Academics have been guilty of depicting specific diasporas (and consequently also specific ethnic categories) in an objectified way that looks at specific groups and defines them as unified without first considering whether concepts like “community” accurately describe the migrants being studied. Research projects are frequently delineated around categories like “the Gujaratis in Britain”, for example, without problematizing national and ethnic labels and the ways governments and other actors classify migrants. Some migrant categories have themselves used essentialism to promote their own interests (Alexander 2010). In order to fight marginalization, it has not been uncommon for migrant groups to engage in identity politics, thereby essentializing what might otherwise be seen as fluid boundaries between ethnic groups. Some scholars, rather than criti-
cally analyzing these political strategies, have instead taken these polit-
icized definitions of diasporas at face value and used them in their
own work.

Equally problematic, is the tendency to overlook diversity and,
more importantly, power relations within diasporic frameworks (Brah
1996; Bailey 2001). Even when diasporic communities can be identi-
fied on the basis of a shared (migration) history, their members have
a diverse range of experiences. Furthermore, the tendency to draw on
spatial metaphors when discussing migrancy has, as Kaplan (1996)
notes, led scholars to overlook its less progressive dimensions. The
diasporic experience is not the same for men and women, for exam-
ple, or across different class groups (Clifford 1994). Many studies
overlook power differences within diasporas, thereby further essen-
tializing migrant communities and giving power to their most vocal
members. People who see themselves as belonging to diasporic
communities on account of, for example, their race or ethnicity, may
benefit more or less from this membership depending on their posi-
tion in other social hierarchies. Furthermore, scholars such as Levitt
(2009) and van Hear (2006), have alluded, for example, to the im-
portant role of class in directing the development of transnational ties
and practices, while Faist (2000) notes the inequalities that exist in
diasporic networks. Without the contextualization of these processes,
these inequalities may go unnoticed. Evidence that these inequalities
are frequently overlooked may be seen in policies that address mi-
grant communities as unified entities, as well as academic work that
does not take internal differences into account. While not frequently
discussed in transnational studies at this point, the potential to intro-
duce a stronger power perspective is there.

Despite the many challenges of using the diaspora concept, if em-
ployed cautiously as an analytical tool, it can provide access to aspects
of transnational life that other theories do not. In my view, it is pos-
sible to employ an approach to diaspora that both highlights the
unique experiences of certain migrant groups, but also analyzes the
inequalities within these groups. As Laoire (2003) argues:

understanding diaspora practices and identities requires understanding their
location in geographical, historical and material processes. This means that
the complexity, specificity and contested nature of diasporic experiences is
not lost (Laoire 2003: 279).

This is best done, in my view, by adopting a historical approach that
is also sensitive to the ever evolving, constantly changing diasporic
context, and also takes into account larger processes related to, for
example, the political economy within and between the nation states in which they are situated.

Since one of my aims is to consider onward migration in the context of diasporic formations, I hope that by taking up the topic of diaspora, I may be able to contribute to the burgeoning literature on critical diaspora studies. According to Alexander, such an approach “suggests a space where the historical and lived experiences of diasporas intersect with an anti-racist and materialist politics of engagement with the contemporary local, national and global context” (Alexander 2010:116-117).

When it comes to the relationship between diasporas and their place of origin, however, there have been more specific reasons for sustaining ties across space. These are rooted in these larger structural changes, but are nevertheless important to point out as distinct points unto themselves. Cohen identifies four specific factors that have changed the nature of diaspora-homeland relations. These include faster, cheaper, and more accessible communication and transportation technologies; the development of less permanent migration patterns (e.g., temporary work contracts and more open borders); transnational social movements (which have reduced the strength of the state); and the emergence of new “hybridized” cultures that have gained recognition through global media and tourism. (Cohen 1997:135) To these we can add three more processes that, according to Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, have increased the importance of transnational ties:

1. a global restructuring of capital based on changing forms of capital accumulation has lead to deteriorating social and economic conditions in both labor sending and labor receiving countries with no location a secure terrain of settlement;
2. racism in both the U.S. and Europe contributes to the economic and political insecurity of the newcomers and their descendants;
3. the nation building projects of both home and host society build political loyalties among immigrants to each nation-state in which they maintain social ties. (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995:50)

Such processes, have made it not only possible but also desirable for diasporic communities to reshape their points of reference, maintain contact with their counterparts in both the country of origin and other parts of the diaspora, and re-create their identities not just in accordance to host-land assimilation processes but in relation to wider changes in the extended diaspora community (Olwig 2003:787).

Together these economic, social and political processes have led migrants to be both open to exploring opportunities in different places, and also to identify with places in new ways. In other words, in the
current context, migrants can no longer be expected to simply move to a new place, assimilate, and stay there for the rest of their lives. In fact, in an increasingly global economy, they may not even see this as the ideal approach (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995). Instead, their lives are shaped by the flow of ideas, culture and other types of representations and symbols, across space.

While the literature on diaspora and transnationalism has done much to shape our understanding of the relationships migrants may have to their home countries, and to other places, in my view, there are theories that can do more to help us understand, in a more explicit way, the existing power relations within diasporic communities, and how this may influence onward migration.

Social Reproduction in Transnational Social Fields

Like non-migrants, migrants may still want to find a job they enjoy, feel appreciated by their local communities, meet certain goals in their lives, and raise their children in a way that they see fit. International migration, of course, disrupts these processes, and migrants must adapt to the changing circumstances that arise in the experience of settlement in different places. Finding continuity by way of social reproduction in daily life, and also across generations, therefore, cannot happen simply within the realm of a single town or even a single nation state. On the contrary, it must take place across not only time, but also space. In this process, migrants may sustain attachments not only to the place where they are from and the place where they are currently living, but rather, their lives may be embedded in many places at once. “These arenas are multi-layered and multi-sited, including not just the home and host countries but other sites around the world that connect migrants to their conationalists and coreligionists.” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:131) From a geographical point of view, the focus here is on “simultaneity” and how migrants’ retain relationships to multiple places simultaneously (Yeoh 2005).

As was already illustrated in the previous chapter, economic factors, and especially those addressing the selectivity of migrants with human capital, are prioritized in the few studies that exist on onward migration. It is said that onward migrants are generally those with above average levels of education (Nekby 2006). When we look at this trend from the lens of social reproduction and daily life, however, it takes on a more nuanced and more socially imbued meaning, and a number of new questions come to the fore. Rather than looking at
the issue of human capital from an economistic perspective that tends to focus only on the transactions between an employee and an employer, we can use the concept of social reproduction to look at the more subjective experiences of migrants trying to transfer their assets to a new context, and as I will explore more later on, reproduce their lifestyle and class position across space and time. Status and class are not synonymous, and they do not necessarily remain the same across time and space. The so-called human capital of migrants in the form of educational degrees and skills, may therefore not be reflected in migrant economic performance if they cannot use them where they are. Class practices and social reproduction, however, may continue across generations even without its economic base.

Class and Social Reproduction

While some scholars have avoided working explicitly with the concept of class because doing so may lead to overlooking other facets of inequality such as race and gender, I nevertheless agree with scholars such as Savage (2000) and Skeggs (2004) that much can be gained by directly acknowledging class divisions and trying to understand and conceptualize them. Given that the world has changed a great deal since the Marxist concept of class was coined, it is perhaps necessary to adjust our understanding of these social relations in new and emerging social contexts, and at transnational as well as national levels of scale (Breen and Rottman 1998).

The way that class is defined and studied is contested. Some attempts to clarify its primary elements, however, have been made. As Hanagan, drawing on Katznelson puts it, the “four elements of class are economic structure, social organization lived by people (lived experience), disposition (consciousness), and collective action” (Hanagan 1994:78). The reason why class is so important is that it affects a person’s life chances and, given the durability of social positions, the condition of having or not having opportunities and material well-being tends to be passed down between generations. This is what makes class a durable concept, and what makes it reproducible. The concepts of class and social reproduction, therefore, are closely linked.

According to Hanagan, class reproduction is “the persistence over time of positions in a structure of production. A self-reproducing social class is a subcategory of class reproduction and is composed of a single career or variety of careers, all sharing similar positions in a structure of production, and which are transmitted over generations.”
This, of course, is not a neutral process, and it involves a struggle for material benefits as well as status and other forms of recognition in the labour market and other spheres of social life. As Katz puts it, social reproduction “hinges upon the biological reproduction of the labor force, both generationally and on a daily basis” through “the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing, and health care” (Katz 2001: 711). But this labour force is, she goes on to say, a product of class struggle. In order for a class (broadly defined) to reproduce itself, strategies are needed to maintain class position. These strategies may be conscious or unconscious, and may vary depending on the context.

While some continue to view class in the Marxist tradition by focusing on the relationship between capital and labour, more recently, some scholars from the post-structuralist field have adopted a more integrated approach that incorporates the non-economic aspects of class and social reproduction (Savage 2000; Skeggs 2004). Typically this work builds on the ideas of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) who was perhaps one of the first significant scholars to develop a nuanced concept of class that takes into account the cultural as well as the economic aspects of class divisions. This may be more useful in a migration context where class boundaries (besides race and gender structures of power) shift, and culture comes under more scrutiny.

**The Cultural Dimensions of the Economy**

According to Bourdieu, the assigning of class position was mostly about having not only economic resources, but also cultural and social ones. Economic capital refers to the financial resources and assets one has access to. Cultural capital refers to the possession of knowledge one has acquired through formal education, upbringing or leisure time and can be institutionalized by, for example, a university degree, or objectified through the attainment of cultural objects. Finally, social capital refers to the social resources one has access to in the way of useful networks or contacts. Bourdieu’s (1984:124) argument is that each group or “class” has different combinations of capital which together constitute the groups’ lifestyle. These types of capital are typically acquired and accumulated through one’s life, and may be exchanged for other types of capital. As might be expected, however, not everybody has access to the same quantities or types of capital and these combinations are not exchanged and given value equally. In fact, the differential way in which capital is rewarded, is related to cultural processes, rather than economic ones. Bourdieu’s
theory helps us to understand how some people gain access to privilege while others cannot (Lamont and Lareau 1988).

Beverly Skeggs, building on Bourdieu’s work highlights how the arenas within which people exchange capital is not neutral. On the contrary, we must focus on understanding “whose perspectives makes something valuable, hence exchangeable” (Skeggs 2004:11). While some peoples’ capital is deemed useful to all (i.e. to employers or to society), others’ are seen as having capital that is only useful to themselves. In the process of inscribing people with value, moral categorizations play a role, thereby classifying people not only according to their economic utility but also according to whether or not they are good or bad, worthy or not (Skeggs 2004:14). It is in this way that class becomes naturalized, rather than being seen as a problematic, unequal social relation. Migrants, however, who have moved from one context to another, may have certain understandings of their class position that are not given validation in the new context. Social positioning is therefore something that has to be negotiated.

The Habitus
According to Bourdieu, even though opportunities for class advancement are limited, people nevertheless rationalize their lifestyles by internalizing the norms of their class position and viewing them in a positive way. Although there may be little choice, for example, in where individuals live or the kind of work they do based on the combinations of capital they possess in a given society, they share circumstances and experiences with others and through this commonality, create a class with a distinct lifestyle or in Bourdieu’s words, a shared “habitus” or “system of schemes of perception and thought” (Bourdieu 1977:18). While the habitus cannot be a reified concept that applies to carefully defined class groups, it is something that is shared and recognized by many people. As Friedmann points out, the term dispositions “is critical to the definition of habitus”. According to his interpretation of Bourdieu “the habitus serves as a kind of template which generates strong, normative propensities of actual social practices that are considered normal, acceptable conduct within a given field” (Friedmann 2002:300). Children are born into a certain habitus and are inculcated into the lifestyle of their parents with little questioning. This leads to social reproduction and makes durable “the schemes of perception, thought and action...” of the group (Bourdieu 1977:90).

In Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984), Bourdieu argues that group members, in order to justify their lifestyles and to protect their class position in the social hierarchy, distinguish
themselves from others based on the lifestyle “choices” they have made. For Bourdieu, a group’s preferences in food, music, decorating and fashion are particularly indicative of its class position and what it deems, though perhaps not consciously through its own choosing, as valuable and important. Seeing other peoples’ lifestyle choices as inferior or even vulgar aids a group’s ability to preserve its own practices thereby making them durable over time. In this sense, it is possible to argue as Skeggs does, drawing on her research with white working class women, that certain groups or categories may make their own “systems of value” that allow them to be “both positioned by” but also contest “the symbolic systems of historical inscription to generate alternative systems of value.” This gives people their own “sense of subjectivity and self-worth.” (Skeggs 2004:2) In this sense, “the rules of the game” to which Bourdieu refers, might be seen as not only externally defined by the dominant group, but also internally defined by specific class groups themselves. While one may be disadvantaged, thus, when competing with more powerful groups, they at least have the capacity to develop a sense of belonging and acceptance within their own community. This is particularly important for migrants who, given their often contradictory position in their places of settlement, may choose to play different games, or at least play with different rules than the dominant groups who hold more power.

For those wishing to succeed in the mainstream game, however, the rules are clearly not fair. While some people simply have what they need to succeed (e.g. a university education from a recognized institution, an understanding of the cultural norms that guide the working environment), others must work to acquire these, and to show they that understand what is expected of them (Skeggs 2004:19). Katz similarly argues that belonging to a certain habitus will lead some to have certain values, knowledge and practices quite naturally, while others will not have these assets; they will not belong to the social groups that would give them these assets (Katz 2001:714). In this sense, social reproduction goes far beyond securing “the means of existence” but is also imbued with cultural forms and meanings (Katz 2001:711). As Skeggs notes, “Defining class through culture dislocates it from the economic and firmly locates it within the moral…” (Skeggs 2004:40) Culture, in this sense, is of particular value, as the upper classes mobilize resources that are not easily acquired by the lower classes (ways of speaking, ways of being) that appear to be outside of the realm of economic relations but are nevertheless fundamental to them. This naturalizes class relations and makes
things like academic success seem as though they were awarded on the basis of merit, rather than through processes which privilege middle and upper-class children (Lamont and Lareau 1988:155; Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997).

**Intra- and Inter-generational Social Reproduction**

Bourdieu argues that from generation to generation, the circumstances of the wider field change, making certain types of capital more or less valuable. Sustaining or attempting to improve the group’s position in the social hierarchy, then, may require new strategies which may lead to lifestyle changes. Since the terms of “the game” and a group’s propensity to succeed at it in a given field change over time, each group has a historical trajectory in which it mobilizes different types of capital to achieve its goals or simply to maintain its position. Bourdieu would argue that it is actually very difficult for a group to dramatically change its place in a given social hierarchy, since for the most part, all groups are trying to achieve the same things and their class trajectories therefore move simultaneously at the same pace towards similar goals (Bourdieu 1984).

Those at the top of the hierarchy do what they can to sustain their privileged position by ensuring that the rules of the game remain in their favour. Although, for example, higher education is now much more accessible to the economically disadvantaged classes than was the case in the past, the elite classes maintain their position by ensuring that a new value is put on knowledge only attainable through, for example, extra-curricular activities still not widely accessible by the rest of society.

As has been noted by Kaufman, however, in his study of middle class social reproduction, having a privileged starting point is not necessarily enough to reproduce class, and collective action is also needed. As he puts it, “we need to recognize that social reproduction does not come about naturally but must be gained actively through clearly defined social action.” (Kaufman 2005:247) While some groups may start in an advantageous position, this does not secure their dominance forever; they must take action to maintain their position. The strategies that different families or class groups develop may involve “longer term considerations than those exhibited in lived experience” and may be “based on an estimation of opportunities extending over years, not on routine events viewed as endlessly repeating themselves.” (Hanagan 1994:84) According to Hanagan:

Issues of consumption also figure in strategies that, along with questions of education, choice of marriage partners, and job training, pertain to the calcu-
lations that family members [may use] to advance their individual and collective goals. (Hanagan 1994:84)

Another point to make is that while there is significant evidence that would point to the durability of class positions over both time and generations (Savage 2000), we cannot take this as a given. While people may actively engage in trying to maintain their class position, naturally this is a dynamic process and both groups and individuals may experience either class mobility or degradation. Since everybody is trying to get ahead, they must use different resources at their disposal in order to sustain their place in the hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984).

Maintaining Class Privilege over Space
From a geographical perspective, the spatial contexts in which we study class matter. Recently, given the plethora of studies on globalization and transnationalism as touched on earlier, there has been a movement away from using the nation state as a unit of class analysis. Scholars such as Breen and Rottman (1998), for example, have suggested that class should be studied at different levels of scale since it could be argued that it is manifested not only at the national level, but also at the regional level and the local level. Furthermore, these scholars draw on global systems theory to suggest that the way that class is understood in national contexts may also be understood in an international context, where some nations have particular relationships to the means of global production, while others do not, and that class stratification within nation states may also be related to this global distribution of power when it comes to production. This is related in part to Katz’s argument that “The varying role of the state across history and geography also affects the balance between the various constituencies in how social reproduction gets carried out.” (Katz 2001:713) In short, researchers cannot assume that class is something that can be studied as a reified concept transferable to all states equally, and nor should they overestimate the significance of the state in class processes. In order to understand how class works, researchers must study how it is produced and reproduced in specific contexts.

It is important to point out, however, that, as Skeggs emphasizes, all “capitals are context specific” (Skeggs 2004:17). Where the capital is being used, and in what time period, will play an important role. For Bourdieu, whose work was situated in the specific national context of twentieth century France, context was more a matter of the different facets of society in which people intended to participate. Bourdieu distinguished between different fields, arguing that each
field constituted its own game, with specific rules that should be followed. By applying his work to more recent time periods and different spatial contexts, however, researchers must be aware that these fields are not the same, and there may be different social hierarchies in different places that are affected by different geographical levels of scale. As geographers such as Massey (1994, 2005) have pointed out, places (no matter how defined) are connected to other places, and as such are always constituted by a number of different scalar levels.

Migration raises many further questions regarding the exchange of capital. The first and perhaps most obvious issue concerning migrants is that the combinations of capital that they carry may be met with different levels of appreciation and validation in different space-time contexts. Perhaps most relevant here is the concept of cultural capital. Economic capital is fairly flexible (albeit at different exchange rates), social capital may or may not transcend different nation states, but as has been increasingly discussed in the academic literature on skilled migration, cultural capital is validated differently according to hierarchies in different places (Bauder 2001; Nohl et al. 2006).

Furthermore, in considering the extent to which migrants’ credentials are validated, there are more factors at work than simply formal recognition issues. The wider power relations within a society may play an important role in validating or de-validating the capital that migrants bring. Beverly Skeggs highlights how the metaphorical space of the nation in particular may play an important role in validating capital. As she points out, subjective mechanisms may be used to validate what counts as legitimate capital. As she puts it, “only some people could belong to the nation, only some were rendered as having the ‘right’ experience and could therefore produce themselves as individuals with a self” (Skeggs 2004:22). In this sense, Skeggs brings new meaning to the “cultural” dimensions of class. In a migration context, it is not only about hierarchies based on alleged cultural differences within nation states, but also between them. People coming from what are perceived to be as overly “different” cultural backgrounds may, in this sense, also not have the right combination of resources for success, no matter where they sit in the social hierarchy in their place of origin.

A number of geographers have explored how international migration and the (de)valuation of capital may play out. In particular, Bauder (2001, 2003) uses Bourdieu to take a critical perspective on foreign credential recognition in Canada. He notes that by not accepting academic credentials earned in non-western countries, employers are in fact requesting that their employees be of a certain ethnic back-
ground. He therefore argues that the institutional capital some migrants have to draw on, therefore, is not as valuable as an equivalent amount of institutional capital possessed by those born in Canada. In doing so, he articulates the structural limitations faced by some migrant groups by way of using Bourdieu’s nuanced conceptualizations of class in a migration context.

A Transnational Habitus

Friedmann (2002), while seeing much utility in Bourdieu’s work, finds that more needs to be done to spatialize some of his concepts. Furthermore, he argues that in today’s global world, the habitus may be less durable than Bourdieu initially proposed. For Bourdieu, change happened slowly over time, but as Friedmann points out, in today’s world people are exposed to many different experiences and ideas, and may therefore have more opportunities of changing their practices and ways of life. Furthermore, migration may be seen as disrupting the habitus, (Friedmann 2002:302-303). This does not mean that we should not use the concept of habitus in migration research. On the contrary, Vertovec (2009) argues that much can be gained from doing so. As he argues:

By conceptualizing transnational experience through the idea of habitus, social scientists might better appreciate how dual orientations arise and are acted upon. The notion also shines light upon the ways in which transnational life experiences may give rise not only to dual orientations but also to a personal repertoire comprising varied values and potential action-sets drawn from diverse cultural configurations. (Vertovec 2009:69)

While studies like those conducted by Bauder focus mostly on integration, and the way in which capital is validated or not in specific contexts, other scholars have tried to combine Bourdieu’s idea of the habitus, with a more transnational perspective that bridges the life worlds of migrants, to encompass both their places of departure and destination. Sayad’s (2004) work on Algerian migration to and from France perhaps provides one of the earliest examples of this. More recent work speaks directly to the literature on transnationalism that has emerged in recent years. Phillip Kelly and Tom Lusis (2006), for example, try to connect the concept of social fields with that of the habitus. They argue that while social fields offer an empirical point of departure for understanding transnationalism, the habitus can be of theoretical value. In their work, they argue that Filipinos in Canada, for example, are simultaneously influenced by both the Philippines and Canada at the same time. Their way of viewing their situation in
Canada, thus, may be connected to the lifeworld they left behind in the Philippines. Another scholar (Fernandez-Kelly 2008) has instead looked at what value class histories have for the present. She illustrates how having a privileged past may, if nothing else, give migrant youth a sense of self-worth that they otherwise would lack in a context of downward mobility following their family’s migration. The value of cultural practices, in this sense, could be seen as still having meaning in a migration context, although perhaps in new and less obvious ways that require further exploration.

In fact, few scholars have attributed the concept of *habitus* to specific communities of migrants. Kelly and Lusis’ (2006) work is one example, although they themselves acknowledge the difficulty inherent in such an approach, noting that internal diversity within the Canadian Filipino community is missed in this approach. Indeed, Umut Erel (2010) later critiques them for this, and instead argues that internal divisions within migrant communities may be of significance, and may in fact lead to different strategies to assert privilege and distinction. By viewing the habitus of migrant groups in transnational perspective, it is possible to trace where ideas around class, status and recognition originated in the first place, and how privilege has been maintained (or not) over space and time.

Structure, Agency and Conceptualizations of the Individual

Although some scholars have viewed Bourdieu’s theory as successfully incorporating structure and agency, groups and individuals, others have criticized him for being too deterministic (Jenkins 1992). According to Bourdieu, while people make subjective lifestyle choices to improve their position they are nevertheless constrained by structural factors that are not possible to transcend. For him, although most of our practices are outside of the conscious realm, even when we are aware of them, our habitus is so deeply engrained that it is difficult for us to transcend. In this sense it could be argued that his theory privileges structure over agency. Action is taken, but clearly within the dispositions and fields in which the actors are situated. Furthermore, although capital can be mobilized, converted, and otherwise used strategically to improve class position in the field, some groups will have a better ability to maximize their capital depending on the circumstances of the field and the specific types of capital they possess at a given time. Inequality, in this sense, is reproduced despite the conscious or unconscious strategizing of actors.
Bourdieu’s attention to persisting inequality maintained through, among other things, cultural practices, is very much in opposition to the individualization hypothesis, for example, which argues that in today’s modern society we have seen a decline in the importance of class and a rise in the importance of individual choices and acts (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The rational economic individual is expected to engage in self-management, to discipline themselves and to offer their assets to the labour market where they will be best rewarded. In a sense this involves converting one’s personal assets into property which, it is assumed, should help the individual to overcome the traditional restrictions imposed by their habitus. From the perspective of scholars like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, restrictions related to the family, tradition and gender have been lifted and people today have more opportunities than ever to develop themselves as unrestrained individuals. Some have used the individualization hypotheses to challenge the seemingly more structuralist work of Bourdieu.

While I would agree that some of Bourdieu’s conceptualizations of agency are limited, I would nevertheless argue for two points: the first is that the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim is not adequately situated in structural context. As feminist scholars such as McNay point out, the focus here is mostly on the symbolic and it ignores the more deeply entrenched aspects of identity that are much harder to discard (McNay 2000:22). Skeggs similarly argues that the more she “investigated different forms of class production” the more she became “aware that different forms of personhood and individuality were integral to how class interests become inscribed onto different bodies in the name of ‘the self’.” (Skeggs 2004:6) Skeggs challenges the individualizing theories proposed by scholars like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim by arguing that they assume that people have the equal ability not only to take action on their own behalf, but also to make sense of their experiences biographically. As Skeggs points out, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim rely “completely on everybody having equal access to the resources by which the self can be known, assessed and narrated” (Skeggs 2004:53). This, she argues, is not possible, and individuality itself may be considered a resource to which people do not have equal access. (Skeggs 2004:55)

Based on these critiques of Beck, Beck-Gernsheim and others working with individualization, I think it is fruitful to turn to McNay’s notion of creativity. People are restrained by structures, but as they look for space to overcome these structural constraints, new creative solutions may ensue. I would agree with Hanagan (1994) that
the “discussion of social reproduction has suffered from inadequate attention to agency” in some respects, and that in general, work on social reproduction has, as he argues:

suffered from a failure to carry out comparative analyses of the varying paths of class reproduction as well as of cases of failed reproduction. The question of who reproduces specific social classes, how they do it, and what happens when they fail remains largely unexplored. (Hanagan 1994:80)

Perhaps by focusing on the more creative dimensions of agency we can help to overcome this shortcoming. Of course, such a conceptualization of agency should be “placed in the context of structural, institutional or intersubjective constraints.” (McNay 2000:23) In particular, what is needed here is a more thought through way of looking at the links between symbolic and material aspects of power (McNay 2000:26).

Furthermore, despite all its strengths, it could be argued that the work of Bourdieu in particular overlooks the role of gender in structuring social fields (Adkins 2004). For Bourdieu, class difference was the ultimate social organizing principle, and he was reluctant to adequately theorize other social divisions in society. Gender in particular is overlooked in much of his work. Women, for example, are incorporated into his model as a form of capital for exchange. While he outlines his theory of gender in great detail in *Masculine Domination*, his work by-passes all opportunities to more thoroughly examine women’s subjectivity, which may be different from what he assumes it to be. In general, Bourdieu has been criticized for not considering anything that falls outside of his model which does, after all, largely have an economic base.

But as McNay (2000) has noted, Bourdieu’s concepts of the field and the habitus pave the way for a more nuanced understanding of agency and difference, and many of his concepts have already been taken up by feminist researchers for this purpose (Skeggs 1997). Like these scholars, my intention has been to draw on and build on this work. While I use many of Bourdieu’s concepts (as well as those of other social reproduction theorists that have drawn on his work) I have used them in combination with other theories that, more directly situated in the feminist literature, take other aspects of difference, and other ways of conceptualizing agency and context into account. So far, I have focused mostly on how class may influence transnational social fields. I would now like to go beyond a class analysis alone, however, to look at how class, race and gender intersect. Perhaps the best way to discuss and analyze power issues within transna-
Transnational Social Fields and Power: An Intersectional Approach

In the West, critiques of Marxist approaches which focused solely on class paved the way for more nuanced discussions on how race and gender may intersect with class to influence individual positionalities. Geographers have drawn on both postcolonial and feminist theory to explore these intersecting relationships in spatial context (Kobayashi and Peake 1994; McDowell 1999). These studies have proven particularly valuable for discussing racial and gender hierarchy, and in particular, how men and women from non-Western contexts may be relegated (although often differentially depending on their gender) to an inferior status in their place of destination.

The anti-racist and feminist movements have different origins. While early anti-racist movements were dominated by black men, the early feminist movement was largely viewed as a project addressing the oppression of white women (McCall 2005). With time, however, and a growing realization on the part of black women that their interests were being ignored by the existing anti-oppression framework, intersectionality emerged. This led to a “pluralizing of feminism” (Valentine 2007:12) and a “growing recognition that it is not possible to separate out the categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality, nor to explain inequalities through a single framework” (Valentine 2007:12).

In her groundbreaking work, Black Feminist Thought, Hill Collins, defines the concept of intersectionality as follows:

Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression. (Hill Collins 2000:21)

From the beginning, intersectionality was largely concerned with issues of inequality. Categories or social divisions, while not inherently negative, tend to create hierarchies. The basic premise is that cate-
categories may be socially constructed, but nevertheless point to differences in social outcomes and should therefore be investigated, understood, and in some cases challenged.

Intersectionality is useful for the present study insofar as it helps to build an understanding not only of how these various types of difference play a role in migration processes, but also, and very importantly, how they coalesce in the life trajectories of migrants. While acknowledging that hierarchies based on race, class and gender have their own historical foundations, I nevertheless think it is important to consider how they may work together or separately in different spatial contexts.

Intersectionality, Space and Time

Some of the major theorists using intersectionality have raised a number of issues worthy of consideration. Some of these include differentiating between identity and positionality (Yuval-Davis 2006), as well as the relative importance of positions depending on the circumstances faced by individuals or categories of people (Staunes 2003). One important aspect of these theorizations is the emphasis on context, and consequently place. Anthias, for example, argues that the focus “on location and translocation recognises the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales” (Anthias 2002a:276). Like Yuval-Davis, Anthias argues that identities and positionalities are not simply given, but rather, are shaped by context, and evolve in accordance with them. Furthermore, as already noted, the very way that these intersectional locations are constituted may relate to power structures taking shape at different levels of scale.

Despite the importance of context, intersectionality’s focus on cross-cutting social divisions: especially race, class and gender, has led it to be viewed as a sociological concept rather than a geographical one, and until recently, geographers have turned to other means to analyze the relationship between power and place. There has, nevertheless been a growing acknowledgement of the spatial dimensions of intersectionality (Valentine 2007) and increasingly feminist geographers have drawn on the concept to explore the relationship between power and space at a number of different scalar levels (McDowell 1993; Ruddick 1996; Pratt 1999; McDowell 2008).
Intersectional Approaches to Migration

I will now turn to a discussion of the possible role intersectional analysis has played, and may continue to play, in building an understanding of migration. The migrant, as a person that actively moves from one context to another, can provide great insights into the ways in which opportunities are structured differentially and intersectionally across space.

The first group of relevant studies that is often explored from an intersectional perspective concerns migration regimes. Who has the ability to move where and with what rights? While some countries actively recruit skilled migrants, others only accept refugees. From an intersectional point of view, some studies have looked at, for example, the gendered nature of immigration policies, which may favour men’s role as male breadwinner (Walton-Roberts 2004), as well as those that give women from certain ethno-national backgrounds easy entry into a given state so that they may perform certain jobs such as domestic labour work (Pratt 1999). One of the major factors affecting migrant mobility is work opportunities, and increasingly such opportunities are being viewed in an intersectional way. As geographers Silvey and Lawson (1999) argue:

Specifically, recent work is examining how specific power relationships constructed around differences of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and nation intersect with mobility processes and migrant subjectivities and identities” (Silvey and Lawson 1999:127).

There has been a proliferation of studies dealing with the feminization of migration (Boyce 2002; Mahler and Pessar 2006), and this often relates to opportunities in the labour market for women of certain class or ethno-racial backgrounds (Kofman and Raghuram 2006). Studies on domestic labourers (Lutz 2008), for example, often take an intersectional approach to understanding how women of certain ethno-cultural and class backgrounds from certain countries are in high demand in middle class households in wealthier parts of the world.

But migration regimes are not only about how people can enter a country, they are also about how they are treated once they come. Constructions of race, class and gender affect the way migrants are perceived in different spatial contexts. Other studies have therefore looked at the impact of welfare regimes on migrant populations by taking an intersectional perspective (Mulinari 2007; Fink and Lundqvist 2010). In these studies, welfare policy, and the opportunities migrants have or do not have to benefit from welfare systems are at the fore-
Welfare regimes may regulate migrants’ access to education, employment, and other social benefits, and may influence what migrants can or cannot expect to achieve in terms of income and social standing. As Valentine, argues, “in particular spaces there are dominant spatial orderings that produce moments of exclusion for particular social groups” (Valentine 2007:19). This has obvious implications for migrants who, operating between opportunity and constraint, may choose one place over another based on where they think they will be most included or least excluded. How such migrants perceive their preferences for certain places in accordance with their gender, ethno-racial or class background, however, has been underexplored in the migration decision making literature. Considering these more subjective aspects of migration decision making would, I believe, do much to develop our understanding of the nexus between places and identities/positionalities.

Despite its many strengths, the concept of internationality is, in my view, best used in combination with other approaches. In order to understand how individual subjectivity and objective circumstances interact, it is helpful to have a more dynamic approach that looks at the relationship between structure and agency over not only space, but also time.

A Life Course Perspective

The study of migration involves the relationship between time and space. Lives, as Pratt and Hanson note, “are lived through time; they are also lived in place and through space.” (Pratt and Hanson 1993:30) A life course approach does this by, among other things, situating individuals and groups within not only spatial, but also temporal, contexts. In order to study life courses, then, one must take account of historical, individual and institutional time. As Heinz and Krüger put it, “In all three approaches the life course is understood as a sequence of stages or status-configurations and transitions in life which are culturally and institutionally framed from birth to death.” (Heinz and Krüger 2001:33) Although this chapter has frequently alluded to the temporal aspects inherent in many social theories I think much can be gained from working directly with the concept of time in a more explicit way.

Like intersectionality, a life course approach provides a somewhat loose framework within which to work, and consequently it combines well with other approaches (Wingens et al. 2011). Rather than starting
with a fixed theoretical perspective then, a life course approach begins with a theoretical orientation. According to Elder et al. (2003) a life course approach focuses on the following:

age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history. This view is grounded in a contextualist perspective and emphasizes the implications of social pathways in historical time and place for human development and aging. (Elder et al. 2003:4)

While in the past, lives were often studied according to fixed models of what were considered so-called typical lives by way of a life cycle approach, recent developments in society as well as social research have changed to accommodate more variety and variability in life trajectories. As Katz and Monk view it,

Research that now emphasizes the diversity of experiences within an age group and the lack of clear associations between chronological age, perceptions and behaviour, has instead adopted the terms ‘life course’ and ‘life span. (Katz and Monk 1993:19)

A loose understanding of the patterned way in which people live their lives has therefore replaced older more fixed conceptions (Geist and McManus 2008).

In general, the goal of life course research is to explore the relationship between individuals and society. It assumes that people act within certain opportunities and constraints. As Heinz and Krüger put it, “the contemporary life-course approach examines the interaction between structural constraints, institutional rules and regulations and subjective meanings as well as decisions over time.” (Heinz and Krüger 2001:33) A life course approach is thus consequently often cited as a way of overcoming the micro-macro divide in social research (Wingens et al. 2011).

In order to do this, current approaches to studying the life course draw on a number of interrelated concepts. These include social pathways and trajectories. According to Elder et al. (2003), social pathways are

the trajectories of education and work, family and residences that are followed by individuals and groups through society. These pathways are shaped by historical forces and are often structured by social institutions. Individuals generally work out their own life course and trajectories in relation to institutionalized pathways and normative patterns. They are subject to change, both from the impact of the broader contexts in which they are embedded and from the impact of the aggregation of lives that follow these pathways. (Elder et al. 2003:8)
In other words, individuals may make choices that affect their life course, but these choices are always made within certain constraints.

Another important feature of the life course approach is its emphasis on linked-lives, and the way that people (i.e. couples, parents and children, extended families and friends) take decisions and act together rather than separately (Geist and McManus 2008). People do not live in isolation, but rather, their lives are shaped by their relations to others: family members, friends, and larger communities and social formations that may also greatly affect their sense of structure and agency and, consequently, the way their lives unfold (Heinz and Krüger 2001:34).

The Relationship between Individuals and Society

As I already referred to in my discussion on class and social reproduction, recently there has been a tendency to see life trajectories as more individual and based more on the choices an individual has made than the social forces (especially class constraints) that they have been subject to (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The growing popularity of the individualization hypotheses has been eagerly taken up by some life course researchers. As Heinz and Krüger point out, “As modernization continues, not only in North America, but also in Europe, life-course arrangements are becoming more dynamic, less standardized and more self-directed.” (Heinz and Krüger 2001:29) and this, naturally, has been something of interest to life course researchers.

Critics contend, however, that structural factors can still greatly influence the life course (e.g. economic, political and cultural systems, markets, welfare-state regimes, ethnicity, religion, etc.) (Wingens et al. 2011:7), albeit possibly in new ways. Furthermore, Wingrens et al. (2011) suggest that cultivating an individualized biography may in fact be a way for people to make up for the traditional structural role that family, class etc. once played in their lives. As they note, it is possible that the temporal dimension has perhaps become more important in shaping peoples’ lives than was previously the case in the past (Wingens et al. 2011:7). These authors similarly argue that some groups, however, have less opportunities to develop coherent and desirable long term life trajectories, the tools needed to “master” the life course (Wingens et al. 2011:10). Migrants may be one such group. As these authors note:
as a person’s life course and biographical continuity, hitherto provided and guaranteed by the social structures and institutions of the origin country, becomes fragile or even disintegrated by migration she has to ‘re-frame’ her life and biography as an agentic, self-monitored actor yet under conditions of fundamental uncertainty due to the unknown societal structures and institutional regime of the destination country. (Wingens et al. 2011:6)

The focus here is on how individuals relate to structural constraints, and how this impacts their subjectivity. While this is inherent in many theories, the advantage of the life course approach is its temporal dimension, which helps illuminate how individual subjectivities evolve over time. This kind of approach has strong ties to the concept of narrativity, which relates to the way individuals make (or fail to make) sense of their experience by way of the formation of dynamic identity processes, and the notion of a coherent sense of self (Ricoeur 1985). This issue will be taken up again and discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Situating Migrants in Time and Space

As has already been suggested in several places in this chapter, both space and time play an important role in structuring the everyday processes that affect the lives of migrants. In this sense a life course approach can be applied to the other theories with which I am working. By taking up not only a transnational concept, but one that considers the role of diasporas, I hope that I can link individual migrants to the historical contexts that they have experienced. After all, as Pred notes, “individuals are determining as well as determined, the producers as well as the products of history.” (Pred 1981:7)

Despite geography’s commitment to the study of space-time, there are not that many geographers who have worked explicitly with a life course approach. Within migration studies, however, there is great potential for this. Migrants, as they move between places, experience changing contexts. My work therefore builds on the work of a small number of geographers exploring these issues (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Kobayashi and Preston 2007; Ley 2010). In these studies on Hong Kong migrants to Canada, the scholars found that family members moved back and forth between Hong Kong and Canada depending on their stage in the life course. While Canada was seen as a desirable place for both education and retirement, for example, Hong Kong was associated with better career opportunities. Looking at migrants’ experiences over time and place is, as these researchers
convincingly argue, highly valuable and may lead to more nuanced understandings of migration-related processes.

Central to adopting an intersectional life course approach is the idea that migration decision making, for example, may involve a range of considerations and the decision to move should be viewed in long-term perspective. While some studies only consider what triggers migration decision making (i.e. what happens directly before the move), the decision to move may take place much earlier in the migrants’ life course. As Halfacree and Boyle (1993:337) put it, “Of primary importance is a need to stop regarding migration as a discrete contemplative act but to see it as an “action in time”.”

My specific approach to the life course will be addressed more in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that I think it can be valuable to look at all of the above discussed concepts not only in spatial, but also temporal context. This can be done by looking at the space-time trajectories of migrant groups, but also of individuals who have moved within specific transnational social fields.

A Theoretical Framework for the Research

This chapter has introduced a number of theoretical concepts that work together to create a framework for investigating onward migration in an in-depth way which captures the complexity of migration, as well as the embeddedness of migration in other processes. In some places a micro approach was adopted, in other places a meso approach, and in other places a macro approach.

By using the concept of transnational social fields as the overarching theoretical concept, the present study aims to capture the experiences of a group of people whose lives and careers transcend multiple nation states. Indeed the participants at the center of this study are truly transnational insofar as their lives bridge three or more countries: Iran, Sweden and the UK, and many have also experienced several local contexts within these three countries.

As I have suggested, however, a stronger theoretical perspective is needed in order to have a more critical understanding of diasporas, and the transnational processes migrants engage in. As a result, the study also draws on theories of social reproduction and, more specifically, new ways of looking at class, that allow for an exploration of how hierarchy and social privilege may be preserved across not only time, but also space. These theories provide insights into who has the possibility to take action, including mobility decisions, in their lives,
and how this affects conceptions of agency and selfhood. Such theories are useful, in the case of this study, given the important role of class in the Iranian diaspora. This is something that will become more apparent in later parts of the dissertation.

Although the study puts a priority on studying class in a nuanced way, other markers of difference also affect the migration experience, and also alter understandings of class itself. I have therefore adopted an intersectional approach to understanding how other social divisions based on class, race and gender intersect in the lives of migrants as both individuals and as members of larger groups. The relationship between positionalities and identities is also something that can be explored by way of an intersectional approach.

Finally, it was argued that adopting a life course approach can contribute to and further develop all of the other theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter. A life course approach draws more specific attention to understanding the temporal dimensions of transnationalism, social reproduction, and intersectionality. By looking at how individuals and cohorts relate to the historically specific situations in which they find themselves, we can further our understanding of many of the theoretical issues raised here, including the question of structure and agency.

My goal has been to create a framework for exploration that allows for the exploration of the phenomenon under study that takes into account both the more “objective” or structural positions shaping the migrant’s life trajectory, while also taking into account the situated subjectivity the migrant has as a result of their lived experiences (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Together, these theoretical perspectives have helped to situate Iranian onward migrants in social space, which I see as central to developing an understanding of how and why some may choose to move from Sweden to London and beyond.

The specific approach of the research will be developed further in the next chapter, where I provide a more detailed overview of the methodology and the ways in which I have tried to capture these different elements in the empirical work.
Chapter 3
Researching People on the Move

Azadeh was born in Iran. She moved from one city to another in Iran, before moving to Sweden when she was still a child. After finishing high school, Azadeh moved from a small city in the middle of Sweden to London. A few years later she moved back to Sweden (this time to another city) and stayed for a while, and then returned to London.

Studying onward migration is not as straightforward as studying some other types of international migration, where people simply move from one place to another at a single point in time. Instead, onward migration involves (at the very least) moving, and then moving again, and in the case of people like Azadeh, even more subsequent migrations. From a methodological perspective, therefore, the challenge for geographers is to identify the importance of specific places in people’s lives, while at the same time capturing the ongoing dynamics of individual migrants’ evolving social and geographical trajectories as people “on the move”.

The primary aim of the dissertation is, as noted in the introduction, to study how people live their lives across places. For the purposes of this research project, therefore, it was necessary to study both the contexts to which onward migrants have moved, as well as the subjective perspectives of onward migrants themselves. I therefore used multiple methods to try to capture both these elements. This involved drawing on statistical information to identify dominant migration trends, semi-structured interviews with Iranian-focused organizations in specific parts of Sweden and London, and finally, narrative life history interviews with individual onward migrants.

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of how I went about studying the movement of people from Iran to Sweden to London. I begin by connecting my methodological approach to my broader theoretical framework. I then go on to outline my research design. Next, I discuss the specific methods I have used to address my research questions. Finally, I conclude by addressing reflexivity and in particular, how my own positionality and social location has influ-
enced my findings and the way I have chosen to represent my participants.

Transnationalism and Methodological Challenges

Transnationalism is appealing in part because of its transcendent nature and its ability to challenge the dominance of the nation state (Mitchell 1997). As Vertovec puts it:

The global flows and cross-border networks represented by transnational migrant communities critically test prior assumptions that the nation-state functions as a kind of container of social, economic and political processes. (Vertovec 2001:575)

While many researchers are attracted to transnationalism in theory, in practice adopting a transnational approach poses a number of methodological challenges. For this reason, much of the research on migratory movements is still based on nationally defined territories, even where studies aim to transcend these national frameworks. Several scholars (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Weiss 2005), have argued that “methodological nationalism”, the ongoing tendency of scholars to situate research within nationally defined jurisdictions, has been holding research back from its full potential.

Mitchell (1997) encourages researchers to ground their work on transnationalism in empirical studies that look at what is actually happening on the ground rather than resorting to theoretical arguments that often leave migrants left in unclearly defined spaces in which it is not possible to investigate their positions in actual existing power hierarchies (Mitchell 1997:109). As she writes:

By ‘bringing geography back in’ on several different scales, and by forcing the contextualization of understandings of hybridity and the margins, it may be possible to harness the double potential of transnationalism, and to realize its progressive elements in a fuller sense. (Mitchell 1997:102)

While Mitchell’s argument was put forward in the 1990s, it has been echoed in more recent scholarship (Conradson and Latham 2005b; Favell et al. 2006, Glick Schiller and Caglar 2011). Such studies emphasize the necessity of approaching migration studies, and particularly the study of transnational migration, in ways that situate migrants in specific contexts at different (but often interconnected) scalar levels. Such studies should, these scholars argue, pay attention to how people live their lives in more than one place, but in places
nonetheless. It was with inspiration from these studies that I embarked on my research.

Defining the Focus of Research

As noted in chapter 1, there is little known about the tendency for third country nationals to move within the European Union (Lindley and van Hear 2007). This may be reason enough to pursue research on onward migration. The specific approach that I have taken when conducting research on the topic, however, may be related to other factors, including both a theoretical interest in transnationalism and structural inequality as well as personal experience with transnationalism and multiple moves.

The experience of transnationalism is becoming increasingly common for many people who have found themselves with family connections, cultural ties, and employment and educational opportunities spread out between different places. Transnationalism has certainly become an important part of my own life; I have spent extended periods in Asia and Europe, all the time staying connected with and often returning “back home” to Canada and my family (which, by the way, is spread out between multiple provinces and different locales). In this sense, the concept of “moving” and “moving again” is one that I can identify with closely in many respects. In my attempt to secure meaningful work, maintain my personal life, and remain connected to what I know and love, I have indeed moved multiple times, crossing time and space in order to achieve my multifaceted goals. But I have not defied geography; on the contrary I have succumbed to it insofar as I have realized that social and economic opportunities are differentiated across space, and indeed in order to have it all (as much as anyone can) I cannot stay in one place.

My specific interest in studying the transnational practices of diasporic Iranians emerged when I moved to Lund, Sweden as a student in 2002. Prior to the move, I had spent a great deal of time with Vancouver’s Iranian diaspora, attending Iranian-focused events and Persian dance classes, and spending time in the company of Iranian friends. After moving to Sweden, I observed that Iranians in Canada seemed to have a much higher status and more positive reputation than Iranians in Sweden. This led me to question the differences in opportunity between Sweden and Canada, and why this may be the case. When I later learned that statistics suggest that Iranians show a tendency to move on from Sweden to English speaking countries, I
began to explore the link between transnationalism, onward migration, and structural relations.

In this study several different geographical levels of scale proved to be significant and worthy of exploration including the nation state (Iran, Sweden and Britain), an international region (the EU) as well as many specific urban contexts. The context of London in particular was important to the research, but so were several smaller cities within both Britain and Sweden. However, since I began the research by way of nationally defined Statistics, the study did indeed begin with the nation state in mind. Statistical data available on migrant categories in Sweden is organized according to country of birth and country of citizenship. Using such data therefore requires, at least when conducting statistical analysis, to work with these existing categories. So despite my interest in unsettling the traditional approach to understanding transnationalism as described at the beginning of this chapter, I was nevertheless limited to studying the movement of people born in one nation state (Iran), who had subsequently moved from a second nation state (Sweden) to a third nation state (Britain). I am nevertheless aware of the limitations this approach, and have tried to use this country of birth data in a critical way, and to move beyond it, especially in the more qualitative aspects of my work. Furthermore, when conceptualizing these specific places, I aimed to keep their connectivity in focus. As Massey (1994) reminds us, places can be understood not simply as historicized contexts, but also as spaces where power relations are played out. Rather than viewing the places in the study as carefully defined and closed off from the rest of the world, therefore, I deliberately viewed them as shaped by their relationships to other places, at a number of different scalar levels.

National categories and “ethnic” categories are always constructed, and as such sometimes oversimplify social reality (Anthias 2002a). Iranians are a heterogeneous group, and it could be argued that focusing on “Iranians” downplays this internal diversity. Furthermore, if one views structural factors as more important than, for example, historical or “cultural” factors in influencing migration, it may not make sense to focus on only one migrant category. Taking this into consideration at the beginning of the research process, I considered studying onward migrants in general, and including migrants from several different backgrounds among my interview participants. I later decided, however, that it was valuable to focus on a specific migrant category to draw out the unique aspects of that particular group’s trajectory and immigration experience. This is an ontological choice that is based on the belief that, if studied in depth and not
superficially, much can be revealed through the study of migrant “groups” or “categories”. As Andersson (2012) points out, to properly understand the impact of ethnicity on migration decision making, we need more in-depth qualitative studies of an ethnographic nature that address both cultural factors and population movements. As already noted in chapter 1, however, this does not necessitate viewing “culture” in a deterministic way. My interest is, rather in the long-term historical trajectories of specific migrant categories, and in particular how specific structural experiences have shaped their perspectives and expectations as they traversed from Iran to Sweden to London.

As already mentioned, until recently, little attention was paid to the mobility of middle class migrants (Favell et al. 2006). Most migration research has instead focused on elites and to a much larger extent, those migrants facing significant disadvantage. I have therefore chosen to focus on middle class migration by choosing a group of migrants who fit this profile. Although I cannot place all of the research participants in a specific class category, I have used education as a way of approximating peoples’ class position. By focusing on highly educated people, the study focuses on those operating between opportunity and constraint. For the most part, the participants in this study came from middle class backgrounds and occupied a fairly privileged position in the occupational and social hierarchy prior to emigrating from Iran. While privileged in terms of their education, however, the group under study may in fact be considered disadvantaged in other ways (i.e. by their refugee status in Sweden and their racialized position in European society). More specifically, the fact that Iranians in Sweden tend to have high levels of education but low levels of employment is of particular interest in the context of onward migration. Finally, since I am interested not only in migrant groups based on ethnicity, but also class and other markers of social status, I anticipated that by studying “highly educated” Iranians only, it might be possible to better understand some of the power relations within the category “Iranian” and to include this in my analysis. Interestingly, it was not initially planned to focus on middle class or highly educated migrants. As the research topic evolved and I began recruiting participants however, I decided that this was an important point of focus for the study.
Designing the Research and Identifying the Field

This research is situated within the constructionist tradition, and therefore does not aim to generalize, but rather to interpret and contextualize the experiences of the people concerned (Creswell and Miller 2000). For this reason, the research design is based on the objective of bringing out the complexity of the phenomenon under study, and contextualizing it in order to increase the possibility for explanation. As Mason notes, “situated and contextual understandings are at the centre of qualitative explanation and argument” (Mason 2006:17). I therefore began my study by considering the various ways that I could contextualize the onward migration of highly skilled Iranians from Sweden to London.

I finally began to conduct the research according to a loosely defined sequential design. I planned to start with macro data (descriptive statistics), move to the meso level (interviews with organizations) and finally, the micro level (interviews with individual onward migrants). While this has served as the basis for my work, in practice it was much less orderly than it is presented here. In reality, I was not sure if my research design would work as I initially planned it. Would the statistics provide useful information? Would I be able to secure interviews with organizations? Would I even be able to find onward migrants? As a result, I adopted an open approach from the beginning of the research process, always rethinking the design, and watching the study unfold, roughly but not always perfectly as planned.

Many of the descriptive statistics, for example, actually came into the research process quite late, after I had acquired the necessary data, or after I realized what questions I wanted to (or was able to) address with numbers. Furthermore, while the initial plan was to only employ the three methods mentioned above, in practice I conducted additional semi-structured interviews with people who could provide me with information about the phenomenon along the way. These “informal” interviews proved to be an important source of information that was not anticipated when drafting my initial research design. In short, I was constantly defining and redefining points of interest, as well as rethinking how to go about obtaining the information I needed for the research. For the purposes of this methodological discussion, however, I will nevertheless discuss how the basic research design came into place and, in a general sense, how I went about collecting the information for the thesis.

Although statistics were used at the beginning of the study, they did not contribute very much to the initial findings since they did not directly address the research questions. They simply provided a useful
background, and the knowledge that there were Swedish Iranians in the UK. This gave me the confidence to continue with the research. Before interviewing individuals, however, I decided it was important to contextualize the research in the contexts of Sweden and London in particular. I therefore began by visiting different cities in Sweden, and conducting interviews with the leaders of several Iranian-focused organizations in various regions of the country including Stockholm, Uppsala, Göteborg, Umeå and Malmö. In doing so, I had the opportunity to learn about these different contexts, and how Iranians have experienced and made use of opportunities in these specific parts of the country. I then went to London where I did a similar thing, interviewing Iranian-focused organization in different parts of the city. I also studied the labour markets, migration histories and welfare systems in both Sweden and the UK (and where applicable, also London).

Because the goal was to eventually focus on individual onward migrants, defining the field was difficult. Studying people who are both physically mobile and who maintain connections to many different places requires researchers to break free from the traditional ways of conducting research. In particular, we need methods that allow us to situate our research in more than one place (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 2006). Because I was not conducting a comparative study, but rather a multi-sited one focused on people whose lives had traversed many different contexts, it was not enough to contextualize Sweden and Britain/London only as separate places. On the contrary, I needed a way to study the role that these different places had played in the life trajectories of individual onward migrants. This involved studying individual people’s lives in certain spatial contexts, but also across them (over time).

Rather than simply visiting carefully defined field sites, thus, I instead followed the individual participants to the specific neighbourhoods in which they worked, lived and socialized in London. In some cases the research also took me to towns outside London, since some of the participants had moved to neighbouring towns. In this sense, while I started my study with a focus on “Sweden” and “London”, the specific places that came into focus in the study were defined by the participants and the specific places they occupied in their daily lives. As Kristmundsdottir (2006) has argued, when studying individuals, it is important to understand the cultural contexts in which their lives are situated. After understanding these contexts, however, it is possible to go beyond them, and let participants’ lives define the field of study (Kristmundsdottir 2006:165). As she argues:
The field as a geographical place is very much there in biographical research in the sense that a life is always lived in certain places that need to be investigated in the course of the research. As a subject may have lived in a number of different places, the field may in fact be geographically diverse. Yet these geographical localities are by no means the actual field of biographical research. In such research the life of the subject becomes the field constituted by the events of the life, what happened at different times and in different places… (Kristmundsdottir 2006:168).

I applied Kristmundsdottir’s approach, traversing both the specific spatial and temporal contexts of importance to the participants in the study. Furthermore, in conducting life history interviews with the participants, the aim was to understand the role that many different places played in their lives, sometimes simultaneously.

Detailed Overview of Method Selection

Limb and Dwyer (2001) argue that qualitative methods play a special role in social research. As they state it, qualitative methods:

explore the feelings, understandings and knowledges of others [and can be used to] explore some of the complexities of everyday life in order to gain a deeper insight into the processes shaping our social worlds. (Dwyer and Limb 2001:1)

Most qualitative research aims not to prove or disprove a concrete “reality” that can be known, but rather to bring out the complexity of that which it studies. In my case, since I was not aiming to explain the factors influencing why migrants move on in a quantitative way, but rather to access the meaning that onward migrants attach to their subsequent moves, adopting a qualitative approach to addressing the research question was a natural choice.

Although this dissertation is located clearly in the qualitative paradigm, I was nevertheless inspired by Mason’s (2006) article encouraging qualitative researchers to be open to other types of (quantitative) data if it can be used to further qualitative explanation. Drawing on quantitative data for contextualization, she argued, may be helpful, especially if the researcher’s goal is to bridge the micro and the macro levels of analysis. Since the latter was one of my primary goals, I began my project open to a variety of methods and approaches. Although Mason’s article caught my attention because it targeted qualitative researchers in particular, a number of other scholars have similarly advocated using a mixed or multiple method approach (Graham
Like Mason, these scholars argue that researchers should be more open to using a variety of methods if they can offer us access to a broader range of information and help to link our research more solidly to the theoretical questions we take up in our work. Such approaches are needed in migration studies where most research draws on either large scale data sets or on in-depth qualitative studies to understand why people move, and how they make the decision to do so (Andersson 2012).

Since, in the case of this study, contextualization was very important, I have found it useful to draw on multiple methods. As already noted, these include descriptive statistics, semi-structured interviews with Iranian-focused organizations and life history interviews with individual onward migrants. I use these methods in a complimentary way. Rather than trying to integrate the different types of information to answer the research question, I have instead focused on “linking” them together (Mason 2006). While the statistics and semi-structured interviews with organizations are central to addressing the research questions, they serve mostly as a source of background information. The most time consuming and in-depth part of my research has undoubtedly been the collection of life history data from interview participants, and it is for this reason that the next sections of this paper devote a disproportionate amount of space to the latter method. I will nevertheless take the time to touch on all three of the three data sources used. I will outline why I have used them, and how they connect to the wider aims of my research project.

Descriptive Statistics

I have found myself very privileged to be working in Sweden. Population registers in Sweden are among the most detailed in the world. The specific database on which this research is based is called GeoSweden. The database allows authorized researchers to find an array of (anonymous) information on anybody who has lived in Sweden for any period of time between 1990 and 2008, and to follow their residential patterns and socio-economic position longitudinally. This has been a very important resource for me, and indeed, has provided a strong background for my research. Using the GeoSweden database (2008) it was possible to see that a large number of people classified as “Iranian born” are leaving Sweden every year. Based on this, a further analysis on the characteristics of these migrants was possible. I considered their gender, age, employment, education, and last place
of residence. I also identified the countries to which they have officially moved. The project therefore uses statistics as a starting point to identify the characteristics of onward migrants, and to identify onward migration trends. Many of these findings have already been presented in chapter 1.

Beyond its ability to provide information on onward migrants, the database has proven highly valuable in terms of identifying the position of Iranians in Swedish society more generally. It has been possible to identify the age, gender, marital status and geographic distribution of people born in Iran (and their children). The statistics have also made it possible to research the income level of all Iranians in Sweden, their representation in different employment sectors, their education level, and the extent to which they receive social benefits. In this way, using statistical data has allowed me to better contextualize and situate the more qualitative parts of my research. This information has helped me to identify the more structural factors affecting the lives of Iranians in Sweden, and in turn, to speculate on the kind of situation Iranians may be leaving when they decide to leave the country.

Interviews and Participant Observation with Organizations

Since the focus of the study has been only on Iranians, I thought it was important to investigate this diasporic community in more detail, not only from a statistical point of view, but also by using organizational ethnography. Studying migrant-focused institutions is a way for researchers to broaden their understanding of the politics and internal workings of migrant groups, to get a better sense of the issues and challenges facing certain migrants, and also to better understand the discourses ethnic groups have about themselves and the places to which they have (or have not) moved.

In my case, Iranian-focused institutions served as a valuable link to the wider Iranian community. Cunliffe (2010:227-228) notes that:

"Ethnography is not a quick dip into a research site using surveys and interviews, but an extended period tie in which the ethnographer immerses herself in the community she is studying: interacting with community members, observing, building relationships, and participating in community life."

Spending time with Iranian-focused organizations over the period of the 4 years that I spent in Sweden significantly broadened my understanding of the Iranian diaspora there. Although I often began my interaction with these organizations through formal interviews with
organization leaders, often I was later invited to join Iranian social events of both a formal and informal nature. Some of the people that I met at these events then became guides, inviting me to more events, and introducing me to relevant individuals in both Sweden and in some cases also in London. I therefore used the ethnographic approach of participant observation to get an overall sense of my study topic, and to further situate the remaining stages of my research.

The Iranian-focused organizations I interviewed in Sweden included the headquarters as well as several regional branches of the National Iranian Federation, an Iranian student society that is now (unofficially) a social club, a transnational NGO assisting children’s education initiatives in Iran, No One is Illegal, a Women’s organization, a Farsi-speaking radio program and a Persian restaurant. As noted earlier, through speaking with and observing these institutions, I got a better sense of the composition, history, and identity of the Iranian community in Sweden, as well as a more nuanced understanding of the situation of Iranians in several locations across the country.

Interviews were also conducted with Iranian-focused organizations in London. The purpose of doing so was to understand the differences between the Iranian communities in Sweden and the United Kingdom, and to get a sense of the sort of opportunities and challenges leaders felt there were for Iranians in London in particular. In London, formal interviews were conducted with the Iranian Community Center, the Iranian Society, Rustam (Farsi) School, two Iranian-focused student societies, a Baha’i organization, and the British Iranian Business Association. I also observed and participated in events at the Iranian Church, the Iranian Medical Society, and the Iranian Studies Center at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Although my time in London was relatively short, I tried to spend as much time as possible in the Iranian-dominated parts of the city such as Kensington, and Barnet, observing shopping centers, restaurants and tea houses that catered to an Iranian clientele. While these observations cannot be considered fieldwork in the true anthropological sense, they nevertheless helped me to understand the individual participants’ life experiences and to situate them in a spatial context.

Life History Narrative Interviews
Conducting interviews is commonly noted as the “standard” method in qualitative inquiry, and probably for good reason. There are many
reasons why interviewing and qualitative research work together so well. Valentine (2005) notes that:

Unlike a questionnaire, the aim of an interview is not to be representative (a common but mistaken criticism of this technique) but to understand how individual people experience and make sense of their own lives. The emphasis is on considering the meanings people attribute to their lives and the processes which operate in particular social contexts. (Valentine 2005:111)

While I developed a sense of some of the reasons people might choose to move from Iran to Sweden and then to London from statistics, secondary sources and interviews with organizations, it was necessary to interview these highly mobile individuals to understand the more complex motivations underlying their moves, and the meaning people attach to their actions. An important goal was to find an approach that balanced both the study of the structural determinants of migration, while still leaving room for the more subjective processes of migrants, thereby giving space to their agency (Laoire 2000: 230-231). If we view migration as Findlay and Li (1999) do, as an individual and a social event, we must study it as both. In the case of this study, life history narrative interviews were a good method to address these objectives.

To start this segment of the research, I went to London to do a pilot interview with my first participant. Burck (2005) has noted the value of conducting pilot interviews in order for researchers to test their particular approach to interviewing. It was certainly useful for me. I invited the participant to answer a list of prepared semi-structured interview questions. I was thinking that in this way I would quickly come to understand why he had chosen to lead a mobile life. I was greatly disappointed with the result and later discarded this pilot interview from my study. The participant’s answers were short and very clear cut, and lacked the kind of context and elaboration that I had been hoping for given my research question. Furthermore, I felt that, through the framing of my interview questions, I had perhaps unintentionally pushed him to answer in a certain way, based more on my way of thinking than his own. In order to overcome this, I decided that it would be more effective to ask people to tell their life stories and to see how, and at what point, the onward migration decision came up.

Life story interviews help researchers to get at the more subjective thought processes of interviewees. Through telling their life stories, interviewees often rationalize their behavior, thereby revealing much about their values, their preferences, and their way of seeing the
world. Some scholars (McAdams 1993) have argued that it is through a process of “myth making” that we make our lives meaningful. Indeed, underlying the biographical approach is a belief that people live “storied lives” and that by telling stories, people attempt to make sense of themselves (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Several scholars have promoted biographical interview approaches as a particularly good way to capture subjectivity, and to bridge subjectivity with broader structural processes (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; Laoire 2000; Lawson 2000). As Roberts (2002:13) puts it, through studying peoples’ lives we can “gain an understanding of individuals’ life experiences within their socio-historical context.” Such an approach, particularly in combination with more quantitative sources of data on migrants’ pre-migration positionality and/or migration trends, can do much to link individual migrants to wider structural processes.

As Somers and Gibson (1994:39) point out, many sociologists have been trying to develop “a social theory that allows for human action which is nonetheless bounded and constrained by structural restraints.” Typically structure and agency have been studied by looking at peoples’ observable behaviour, rather than “by exploring expressions of social being and identity.” (Somers and Gibson: 40) The structuralist tradition of the 1960s and 1970s greatly discouraged subjectivity and instead led researchers to study observable trends, but in more recent years, biographical approaches have been proposed as an alternative way of understanding human action, by acknowledging peoples’ subjective worlds. The scientific method has a tendency to take the human elements out of our understanding of causality, while a biographical approach offers a scientific alternative: a way to put the human back in (Roberts 2002:4) and in the case of migration studies, to view migrants not only as economic actors, but also as people motivated by society and culture (Laoire 2000:232).

Bourdieu, whose critique of life histories as research data is particularly well known, argued that when asked to tell their personal stories, people simply tell folktales, and lack a broader sociological basis for situating their lives. This prevents the researcher from conducting a sound sociological analysis of the structures affecting individuals’ trajectories (Denzin 1989:63). In recent years, however, a new way of looking at life stories has emerged that challenges Bourdieu’s critique. Even Bourdieu himself began to engage with biographical research towards the end of his career (Bourdieu 1999). Some scholars (Sommers and Gibson 1994:38) have argued that there has been a shift from “representational” to “ontological” narrativity, which means that, since Bourdieu’s initial critique was made, scholars have
begun to develop a new way of viewing and analyzing life stories. As Somers and Gibson (1994) put it, Bourdieu and his followers failed to see that “social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life.” Recent research, according to them:

is showing us that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emploted stories; that ‘experience’ is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these… (Somers and Gibson 1994:38-39)

This argument has been echoed in the work of Järvinen (2000), who argues that the ability (or even the inability) of research participants to relay a solid story or understanding of their lives is interesting unto itself, and need not impinge on sociological investigation.

As migrants recount their reasons for doing what they have done, they reflect on them from their own unique perspectives which are of course always evolving. Chamberlain and Leydesdorff (2004:233) argue that “The experience of migrating does not, of course, end at the point of disembarkation” rather, it “continues throughout the migrant’s life, demanding constant adjustment and appraisal across cultures, generations and often continents.” This makes the biographical approach particularly interesting for the study of migrants, as they work to connect the old with the new, and to make sense of the role that different places have played in their lives. Life histories are inherently concerned with place. They link migrants to the contexts they are attached to by assuming “a complex interaction between the way the individual understands his or her world and ‘that world itself’” (Anthias 2002b). Although places may be understood in their own terms, by getting the individual migrant perspective we can better understand the meaning that people attach to them. In going beyond pure context and seeing the continuity in peoples’ lives within and across places, we may also better understand the meaning that people attach to places, and how they have shaped their lives.

Conducting Biographical Fieldwork

The line between fieldwork and daily life has not been entirely clear in my case. Since I am not from Sweden but have been living in Sweden for 4 years for the purpose of completing my PhD, I have in a sense been constantly “in the field”, exploring new things and new places,
and trying to understand Swedish society, especially with respect to how it receives migrants. During my time in Sweden, I have lived in Lund, Stockholm and Uppsala, and have made frequent visits to other Swedish cities in both the North and South for a variety of academic and personal related reasons. The London part of my fieldwork was much more structured and my time in the UK much more limited. I spent six months in London between August 2010 and February 2011, and also made several short visits between 2010 and 2012. Since the focus of the methodology has been on conducting biographical narrative interviews in London, I would like to elaborate on how I carried out this part of the fieldwork in particular.

Participant Selection

I searched for interviewees using several different means. I began by finding two participants through Iranian-focused organizations. I also contacted Swedish-focused organizations where I obtained two further participants. I also used email lists directed to the Iranian community in both places, to advertise my study and solicit participation. Personal contacts in Sweden as well as in London, however, led me to the majority of the participants. Once I had email addresses or phone numbers of potential participants, I emailed or called them and told them about my project, and promised anonymity should they decide to participate.

Because I was not sure what turn the project would take from the beginning, I was open to a wide range of participants. The only criteria I had was that people had an Iranian background (i.e. were born in Iran or their parents were born in Iran) and that they (or their parents) had moved to Sweden between 1980 and 1995 (the period in which most Swedish Iranians left Iran). These dates were chosen because I was interested in studying a similar cohort of Iranian migrants that left Iran for Sweden at that time for similar reasons. Participants were also required to have lived in Sweden for at least 5 years prior to moving on. I felt that five years was an adequate period of time because it meant that most participants would have had the time to secure Swedish citizenship, learn the Swedish language and experience different aspects of life in Sweden. I also wanted them, for reasons outlined earlier, to hold a tertiary level education.

Even with a relatively open framework for recruiting participants, it was very difficult to find volunteers for the study. According to the participants and other Iranians I spoke to, there were a number of reasons why people might avoid participating in my research. Many
people had allegedly moved to the UK from Sweden without proper documents and/or authorization to do so (i.e. before receiving permanent residence status in Sweden) and were afraid of revealing their identity. Others had moved legally, but because they were avoiding the repayment of their Swedish student loans, preferred not to speak with me. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the fact that many Iranians maintain a troubled relationship to the Iranian state, and any request to speak based on their “Iranian” identity may be considered with suspicion.

In the end I found eighteen participants who met my criteria. Because 3 participants did not wish to be recorded or could not meet me for a second interview, they were removed from the study. Due to the highly detailed nature of my analysis procedures which I will discuss later in this chapter, I decided to remove them from the project. After all, my goal with using a life history approach was not to be able to generalize about the onward migration phenomenon so much as to explore, in-depth, the life trajectories and subjectivities of a small number of participants. I therefore prioritized methodological consistency over simply gathering information, and decided to focus my in-depth analysis on the fifteen participants that could meet the requirements for full participation. That said, the extra interviews that I conducted were not useless. On the contrary, the information they provided has led to more general insights into the process of onward migration and enabled me to understand the 15 selected participants in a more nuanced way. It should also be noted that 2 of the participants had already returned to Sweden by the time I was concluding my research, and therefore I met with them in Stockholm and Malmö rather than in London.

I realize that the participant sample is highly affected by participant selectivity. I found it easiest to find participants that were my age, probably because these people felt more comfortable speaking with me, and often identified with my position as a student. The gender balance was fairly equal, but more men refused to be recorded and were thus later removed from the project. Almost all of the participants were first generation Iranians, with two exceptions: one was born in a refugee camp on the way to Sweden and one was born in Sweden just months after her parents moved to Sweden. The latter was the only participant to have one non-Iranian parent and one Iranian parent, although even in this case both parents were Farsi speaking and had lived together in Iran for many years prior to moving to Sweden. Although I hoped to find diversity in my sample, I did not intentionally create it since I did not know which sub-groups
were more inclined to move on than others; this is beyond the scope of what Statistics Sweden can offer. By chance, I was happy to find that the Kurdish, Baha’i, and Armenian minorities were all represented in the study. I saw this as positive because I felt that they may have different perspectives to offer. Valentine (2005:112) notes that qualitative samples may be based not on issues of representativity but rather on theoretical concerns. This was very much the case for my study, insofar as I had demanded that my participants be highly educated for theoretical purposes, but welcomed their diversity of experiences and backgrounds in all other respects.

Collecting Stories

The Biographical Narrative Method (BNIM) has been created and promoted by Tom Wengraf (2001), however it is highly influenced by the ideas of (among others) Gabriele Rosenthal (1993). Like Wengraf, Rosenthal promotes a thematic focus in which the themes raised by interviewees in unstructured interview situations are of central consideration. It is thought that interviewees select certain memories to relay to the interviewer, and in doing so, they create a pattern and a structure to the story they provide. In addition to the content of the interview, therefore, the researcher can also later analyze these themes and the order in which they were brought up, in order to better understand the meaning the interviewee attaches to their life experiences and the specific stories they are telling.

While some biographical approaches may resemble more traditional interviewing techniques with the interviewer asking semi-structured questions such as “Where did you work during your youth?” the BNIM narrative approach instead tries to encourage story telling. The method encourages limited interviewer intervention. The interviewer simply asks the interviewee a starting question. The interviewee is then not interrupted until he or she finishes relaying an initial narration (Wengraf 2001:113).

As the interviewer, I adopted the BNIM approach and simply asked my interviewees to tell me “the story of their lives including, but not limited to, how they went from Iran to Sweden to London”. I did not interrupt them until they were finished their initial narration (this took from as little as 15 minutes to as much as 3 hours). I then tried to ask them questions using only their words, only on topics that they had raised, and in the same order as they had raised them. This usually led the interview to go on for another 1-3 hours. The method assumes that when asked to deliver a life story, most people will be
inclined to give a complete narrative account, with a beginning, middle and end. As most narrative approaches contend, people are motivated to create some form of internal coherence when speaking about their life trajectory (Roberts 2002). By not interfering during the initial narration, it is therefore possible to capture these narrative elements.

Although BNIM is based primarily on the initial narration and the follow up questions following immediately after this narration, the method encourages a second meeting with interviewees if needed (Wengraf 2001:119). In my case, one interview was, in most cases, enough to capture the “coherent” life story of the interviewee as they presented it. Many participants felt that they had told me everything in the first meeting, but I nevertheless decided to meet with everybody for a second time, during which I was able to ask direct questions related to my research agenda, clarify unclear points, and collect more biographical data on each participant. Many of the participants were surprised by how much more they could say during the second meeting, and the second interview was often just as long, if not longer, than the first. For every participant, I did as much analysis as possible on the first interview, prior to meeting for the second. I believe this was a true strength of my approach insofar as it helped me to make the most of my time with each participant and to ask what I deemed were unanswered yet highly relevant questions. According to Dunn, one of the advantages of interviewing is that “your own opinions and tentative conclusions can be checked, verified, and scrutinized.” (Dunn 2010:103) I would argue that by using two interviews instead of one, this advantage of the interviewing method can be realized even more.

Beyond this, I found that meeting for a second time had other advantages. It allowed me, in the first meeting, to simply focus on the participants’ story. I could resist the urge to interfere and ask questions related to my research agenda, because I knew that there would be a second chance to meet with participants where I could ask these questions in a way that would not hinder their story telling. Secondly, meeting for a second time helped to clarify some ethical concerns. During the first meeting the participant had very little guidance while telling their story, so in the second meeting I was able to be more upfront about my own research agenda, and to address any concerns they might have about how their story would be used. Finally, the second meeting gave me the opportunity to hear how the interviewee felt about the first interview experience. This later impacted how I interpreted and analyzed the collected life story.
These last points raise the issue of co-construction. Because I was in charge of how the interview(s) were structured, the material that I obtained was in part a product of my own influence as the researcher. The narrative elements shared in the first interview were produced because I spurred the participant to tell an uninterrupted story, while the questions answered in the second interview were largely reflective of my own specific interest in onward migration and my own understanding of how it may relate to other themes (such as belonging and identity). It is possible that these issues were only discussed because I as the interviewer and the researcher raised them. This means that, despite taking up the unsolicited narrative approach in the first interview, my findings nevertheless reflect my own frame of reference. I have tried to be reflexive about this, and indeed comparing the first and second interviews (the interviewee-led and the interviewer-led interviews respectively) have sometimes yielded interesting insights. Sometimes the two interviews were very different. I noted occasions, for example, where some participants failed to mention topics in the first interview, but when prompted spoke extensively about them. In some other cases, participants instead tried to make use of the second interview to reinforce the same points they had made during the first interview. I cannot say, therefore, that the two-part interviews worked the same way methodologically in every case, but they did always give me a second opportunity to engage with the participant and to solicit new information.

While it is perhaps not ideal to ask participants to undergo an interview of this kind in a second or third language, all of my participants appeared to be highly fluent in the English language and were comfortable doing the interview in English. This was helpful given the central importance of language and text in the analysis of life history narrative interviews. Given that I am not fluent in either Farsi or Swedish, I preferred to conduct the interviews and analyze them in English. While I considered conducting the interview in Farsi by way of a translator, I felt that this may change the dynamic of the interview setting (Miles and Crush 1993:88). All interviews were recorded. I took notes during the interview and afterwards wrote down my reflections and impressions into a fieldwork journal. This later helped me to recall the interview experience and assisted with my analysis of the interview material later on. I always gave my participants full control when deciding when and where to meet. Most interviews were conducted in participants’ homes, private offices, or in public restaurants and cafes.
Analyzing Onward Migration Trajectories

Without analyzing interview materials, the information collected is only information; it must be interpreted to make it research (Haverkamp and Young 2007). As Mansvelt and Berg (2010) put it, “In the end, we are trying to understand the meaning of particular aspects of social and spatial life, and meaning is always a matter of interpretation.” (Mansvelt and Berg 2010:348) Within the constructionist paradigm and within qualitative research more generally, there is usually an acknowledgement that these meanings are always partial, and there is no such thing as a “correct” interpretation (Winchester and Rofe 2010:8). The quality of analysis, thus, is typically evaluated by what the researcher is able to do with his or her material, and the extent to which he or she can draw out the meanings that his/her participants convey (Cresswell and Miller 2000). While there is no single meaning to identify, the way that researchers choose not only to collect material, but also to analyze it, will greatly affect the findings and quality of their study.

There are multiple ways to analyze biographies, depending on what kind of information the researcher is interested in. In my case, I was focused on an event (onward migration) and was therefore interested in capturing the significance of this event within the broader life course of the participant. Since I also had an interest in structural relations, however, I interpreted my participants’ lives by looking at how social categories such as race, class and gender influenced the life of the individual in specific space-time contexts (Erel 2007). While some researchers go about this by looking at certain thematic threads (i.e. career, family life etc.), I began by looking at the whole life of the participant, and only later defined certain themes that could be drawn out and highlighted when sharing the empirical findings. My goal has been to identify how the different intersecting aspects of an individual’s positionality have been affected over space and time (Kynsilehto 2011). This particular perspective views life stories as “not merely unique individual experiences” but, rather, as “systematically shaped by social relations of gender, class, ethnicity” and sometimes also such things as “migrant status” (Lawson 2000:174). Such an approach, which focuses on the positionality of research participants, views people as “caught up in webs of social relations” and aims at “uncovering the structures of these webs” (Bertaux-Wiame 1979:26). Researchers drawing on this structural approach use life stories to better understand social relations, and make these social relations visible to whoever reads the final results of the research.
While carefully analyzing and contextualizing the contents of the interview material was important, and I was interested in the biographical details and structural contexts relevant to the participants’ lives, I was also interested in studying how the participants’ presented these details, that is the way that stories were told. The central place of culture and meaning making in the study required that I go beyond purely analyzing the contents of the participants’ biographical accounts. This latter point raised a number of challenges and questions concerning how to best conduct the analysis.

Much research within the social constructionist tradition focuses on language and in particular the role of discourse, to access subjectivity (Burr 1995). While I have chosen not to use traditional discourse analysis for this study, my approach was similarly based on using language to get at the deeper structures inherent in my participants’ subjectivity. Unlike discourse analysis, however, using a narrative approach helped me to “examine issues of self-presentation in an overall way” and at a different level (Burck 2005:256). As already noted, one assumption underlying the narrative approach is that people live storied lives. In order to make sense of themselves, and to give the interviewer a clear understanding of how they went from point A to point B, narrators generally work to produce cohesive stories. This is what Schutze (2007) and Inowlocki and Lutz (2000) have referred to as ‘biographical work’. Turning points and critical incidents in the individual biography lead people to reflect on their lives. As Kazmierska (2003) puts it, “The deeper the change, the more elaborated the biographical work that has to be done in order to integrate one’s experiences into more or less coherent wholeness.” Of course, not everybody has the ability to narrate the self in the same way or to the same extent (Skeggs 2002). Being able to objectify the self depends on many things, including one’s access to selfhood, as well as other factors such as language ability and education. These were things that I kept in mind as I approached the interpretation of the narratives I collected.

Another thing that I kept in mind was that as people tell their stories, they have a different perspective on past events than they had when the event actually occurred (Järvinen 2000:385). As such, the interviewer may get information about the past, but through learning about the meaning participants attribute to their pasts, they also learn to understand the present subjectivity of the participant. As Bertaux-Wiame (1979:29) argues, interviewees give “meaning to the past in order to give meaning to the present, to the present life of the person.” (Bertaux-Wiame 1979:29) Järvinen similarly notes that the “narrator
confers a meaning on events that, when they actually occurred, no doubt had several meanings, or perhaps none.” As she notes, therefore the lived life “can never be recapitulated; it can only be assumed based on the structures given to it by the present.” (Järvinen 2000:385)

It is very difficult, thus, to access the past subjectivity of the participant as they speak of themselves, in an objectified and distanced way, from the perspective of the present. Despite the difficulty of accessing past subjectivity, some researchers have proposed that adopting a narrative approach, which demands that interviewees climb, as much as possible, into their past experiences and relay them in as much detail as possible, is one way of doing it. As interviewees relive their experiences, they may better recollect how they felt at the time. However, their reason for choosing to highlight some incidents and not others will be largely a reflection of their current values and way of seeing the world (Wengraf 2001). It was therefore from this perspective that I studied the narratives delivered by the participants.

Keeping in mind these challenges, at the beginning of the analysis phase, I again turned to the BNIM method for guidance. I began the analysis phase of the research by producing detailed transcriptions of all of the first (part 1) interviews, and almost all of the second (part 2) interviews. This was a very time consuming task that resulted in hundreds of pages of material which had been transcribed with as much attention to detail as possible (utterances, pauses etc.). Then, in accordance with the BNIM approach, I made a distinction between the “lived” stories of the participant, that is the chronology of their lives (as can be extrapolated from the interviews and other external sources), and the “told” story, that is the way the events are relayed in the interviews (Wengraf 2001). The former requires that the researcher identify the events, life phases, and turning points significant in the life of the interviewee, and then try to contextualize them. How might a person in situation x experience situation y? The telling of the told story, in contrast, requires a much more in-depth analysis in which the structure, sequencing and other aspects of the story are systematically unraveled.

Following the BNIM approach to analysis was extremely revealing, as it helped me to distinguish what people do from how they talk about it. It also helped me to see which themes were most relevant to the interviewees (rather than to me as a researcher). Finally, since I carefully analyzed how my participants responded to what I said in the interview situation, it helped me to be very critical of my own impact on the findings.
According to the BNIM method, while the analytical focus is on the first interview, the story told by the participant, the researcher draws on the second interview for further biographical information. The researcher should, when considering how the story is told, compare the first with the second interview to see if there are discrepancies between the two, and see what kind of information is left out of the initial telling of the story and was only provided later through a more semi-structured interview situation. After creating both the lived life chronology of the participant, as well as the analysis of the told story, the researcher should look for the relationship between them (Wengraf 2001:299). I found this a useful way to systematically and thoroughly analyze the interview materials. The entire process of analysis was extraordinarily time consuming, however, and as a result I could not apply it to all of the cases in my study. So while 8 cases were subject to this detailed analysis, the other 7 were handled in a less rigorous way. While I still tried to distinguish between “lived lives” and “told stories” I was less systematic in my approach. By this point I had also gained confidence in my ability to analyze the interviews without going through the whole procedure encouraged by the BNIM approach.

From Individual to Group Stories

The final stage of analysis involved identifying the similarities and differences between different research participants. As has been emphasized, life history research emphasizes the role of the individual in society. In this way, even a study of one person takes into account many others. Bertaux-Wiame (1979:31), for example, argues that in order to see the general, one must first be able to see the particular. Miles and Crush (1993:90) similarly argue that “The collection of in-depth portions of life-stories rather than a superficial overview of an entire life is therefore perfectly acceptable, and even desirable” when it comes to understanding social trends. While there has been a growing appreciation of particularistic approaches, linking the general and the particular, the group and the individual, remains a very difficult challenge for researchers using the method.

According to Sommers and Gibson (1994), group narratives are “attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” and “range from the narratives of one’s family, to those of the workplace (organizational myths), church, government, and nation.” (Sommers and Gibson 1994:62) Elliot similarly notes how the form of narratives may tell us “something about the cultural
framework within which individuals make sense of their lives” and therefore that “the close analysis of narratives produced by a relatively small sample of individuals may produce evidence that is considered to provide an understanding of the intersubjective meanings shared by the whole of a community.” (Elliot 2005:28) This was a useful way for me to think about case comparison, since I have tried to identify the importance of both “individual” and “categorical” reasons for moving on.

Perhaps the most common group narratives are those of family stories. Families, according to Chamberlain and Leydesdorff “become sites of belonging” and identity (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004:227). In this sense, memories of past experiences may not be only individual, but also collective, as families share stories and perceptions of their history. As Chamberlain and Leydesdorff (2004:229) see it, the memories of others “become incorporated into our own”. I have taken this to heart in my research, and have in fact devoted chapter 7 simply to the discussion of family dynamics. While none of my participants were related to one another, I have nevertheless used their stories to capture this family perspective.

A second way of viewing group stories is to look more broadly at social categories. People practicing a particular occupation, belonging to a particular community, or sharing a similar experience at a given time may provide similar narratives which could be considered “group stories”. The latter refers to the scientific collection and analysis of intersubjectivity across research participants belonging to a similar social category. As Elliot puts it, “the close analysis of narratives produced by a relatively small sample of individuals may produce evidence that is considered to provide an understanding of the intersubjective meanings shared by a whole community.” (Elliot 2005:28) Like with individual stories, “group stories” can be interpreted in terms of the cultural meanings group members share (Denzin 1989; Järvinen 2000; Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004; Elliot 2005:28), or the shared structural circumstances a group of people face (Bertaux and Kohli 1984). This has also been an important approach in my research, insofar as I have tried to look at the ways in which my participants’ perspectives overlapped when it came to discussing issues around class, race and gender in particular.

While it may not be easy to generalize from individual participant stories, and doing so is seldom the goal of qualitative researchers, it is nevertheless valuable to see how stories overlap. Often this can be studied in relation to peoples’ membership in broader social categories. People with shared structural experiences may recount events in
similar ways. For this reason, as Erel points out, while it may be useful to distinguish between individual and group stories, she warns against keeping the two completely separate. Instead of “dichotomizing the notions of individuality and collectivity” she argues, “they should be seen as aspects worth exploring in every life story.” (Erel 2007) Everybody comes from both partial individual and collective standpoints; people are both individuals and members of groups, and as such, should be viewed as both.

Reflexivity and Representation

If we agree that stories are constructed differently in different times and places by different people, we must also accept that the interview situation itself may play an important role in how the interview unfolds. What we interpret, therefore, “is a story about people, events, and experiences which might equally well have been told in other ways.” (Miles and Crush 1993:91) The life story cannot be seen as an objective box containing what happened, but rather a construction, created through the interview situation. Restrictions in terms of what was asked (i.e. generally people are not asked to relay their entire life story), time constraints, and emotions evoked by the interview setting affect how the narrative is produced by the interviewee. As Miles and Crush (1993:91) put it, “The life-history, almost by definition, imposes the constraints of the narrative form on researcher and narrator.” The impact that the researcher has on the researched, should therefore be taken into careful consideration during the analysis phase (Roberts 2002:87). The interview should be “seen, and interpreted, as an ‘interactive text’ which reflects in important ways the very protocols of the interviewing process itself” (Miles and Crush 1993:84). The interviewer is present during the interview and also during its interpretation, and therefore cannot be left out of the analysis process.

It was not really until the 1970s when researchers began to think about the impact of the researcher on the researched. According to Erel (2007), even now it is still a relatively underdeveloped topic in social research, and one that needs to be considered more carefully. Yow’s (1997) article encourages researchers to think about why they are doing their project, and how they are reacting to their participants at all times (Yow 1997:56) She argues that:

liking or not liking, feeling repelled by difference in ideology or attracted by a shared world-view, sensing difference in gender or age or social class or eth-
nicity, all influence the ways we ask questions and respond to narrators and interpret and evaluate what they say. (Yow 1997:78)

Robinson (1994) similarly notes how less obvious factors such as “disciplinary location, physical location during research, political persuasion, personality, and so forth” can affect our research in the same way that race, class and gender might (Robinson 1994:217). As Rose (1997) notes, researchers are not unified coherent selves that can be known in an unproblematic way, which can make reflexivity difficult. Despite this, it is nevertheless important to make an effort to reflect on how we relate to our interviewees throughout the research process. As feminist geographers in particular have been apt to remind us, knowledge is always partial and is always situated (Valentine 2002).

Until recently the distinction between “insider” and “outsider” was frequently employed in qualitative research. I agree with scholars (Dwyer and Limb 2001; Valentine 2002), however, that this distinction is overly binary and is based too much on rigid categorical divisions. In migration research in particular, it often assumes that there are discrete “cultures” that people can or cannot fit into. Instead, it is perhaps important to consider the researchers relationship to their participants more specifically, noting that there may be ambiguities and that not all participants will view the researcher in the same way (Mohammad 2001). Furthermore, in terms of positionality and experience, one may share some things with his or her participants, but not other things. In my case, for example, unlike my participants, I was not born and/or raised in Iran and did not experience the Iranian Revolution or the Iran-Iraq war. On the other hand, I am not from Sweden originally, and am not regarded as “Swedish.” On the contrary, like many other migrants, I attend Swedish language classes, renew my resident permit on a regular basis, and keep in close touch with people around the world. More importantly perhaps, I am well educated, travel frequently, and was of a similar age to many of my participants.

The things I shared in common with many of my participants helped me to bond with them. Where time permitted (usually after the interview had taken place), I had many informal conversations with the participants about traveling, studying and living in Sweden. Several of the participants were curious to hear about my experiences of living and studying abroad. While some feminist researchers have argued that the sharing of stories can be a useful approach to research (McKay 2002), I deliberately tried to avoid sharing too many of my thoughts and opinions until after the first interview. This was not
because I wanted to keep the interview situation “objective”, but rather that I thought it was important for me to first listen to my interviewees before bringing up my own thoughts and opinions. In doing so, I wished to acknowledge the differences in our experience, and to open the way for the participants to tell me their own stories, from their own points of view.

My specific location in relation to the research has no doubt influenced the findings. I am sure that I have missed some of the nuances that would have been obvious to many Iranian researchers who could have conducted this research in Farsi. On the other hand, in terms of being able to meet people and hear them speak openly and honestly, it seems that the fact that I am not from Iran was useful. It has been noted by Zahra Kamalkhani (1988), an Iranian woman who conducted a study of Iranians in Norway, that there is a great deal of suspicion within Iranian diasporic communities which makes it difficult for researchers to access participants. This was a frustration echoed by other Iranian researchers I met during the course of my study, who said that they had difficulties securing research participants and having them speak openly. While I had some difficulties accessing participants, I do not believe that I was subject to the same degree of suspicion. Furthermore, unlike those who study “their own group” very few things were taken for granted when I spoke with my participants. They explained everything they felt was important for me to understand them in great detail, and this, I believe, has contributed to the breadth of the material I collected.

The similarity that I shared with many of the participants in terms of lifestyle and outlook has of course also played an important role that is both potentially useful and potentially limiting. As Yow (1997) argues, intersubjectivity shared between researcher and researched can be useful insofar as it can help us to better understand what we are studying. By drawing on my own experiences, I believe I could relate to many of the things that the participants shared with me. I am also aware however, that intersubjectivity can result in researchers paying attention to certain things about our participants while ignoring other things. I therefore tried to be conscious of the relationship between researcher and researched at all levels of the research process: from the planning of the study, to the data collection phase, to the conducting of my analysis, and even during the final writing phase. The purpose of this was not to limit my role in the research process, but rather to be aware of my own claims to understanding and to critically interrogate them before coming to any conclusions.
Perhaps more important than all of this discussed above, however, is the issue of power. In terms of income and occupation, the majority of the participants were positioned favorably and I often had to secure the time and interest of people in high positions. I recall calling one person on the telephone and having him tell me how much his time was worth per hour. After I paused and became anxious, he told me he was kidding. The class difference between researcher and researched affected the process of collecting life stories insofar as I was always conscious of the amount of time I spent with each participant. For the most part, however, this was not a practical problem and the participants were very generous with their time despite their busy schedules. More problematic was the subtle pressure I sometimes felt to represent these participants in a certain way. I have nevertheless chosen to use this to my advantage, by including it in the analysis of participants’ self-presentations.

As a white person of European descent who has never been classified as a “refugee” or somebody coming from “The Third World”, I was very aware that I was in a much more privileged category than many of the participants. In fact, in both Britain and in Sweden, I was generally assumed to be a local, while the participants (much more Swedish and British than myself) were still regarded as migrants. This became particularly apparent to me when, on one occasion I was meeting a participant in a café in Stockholm. Our waitress overheard us speaking English rather than Swedish. Although we had been speaking English solely for my benefit, the waitress nevertheless insisted on speaking Swedish to me and English to my participant. She had assumed that he was the foreigner, and I the local!

Thus, while choosing to go ahead with my decision to study one specific migrant group, I was nevertheless sensitive to postcolonial critiques (Mohanty 1988) about research that reifies (in this case largely racialized) categories of people. While it was impossible for me to change the power balance between myself and the participants, I nevertheless hope that by choosing the methodology that I did, I have approached this research in a way that was as sensitive to this power imbalance as possible. Part of this involved not coming to interviewees with fixed questions and themes in mind, but rather, letting the participant set the agenda of our first interview. While I do not claim to give the participants “voice” as some feminist accounts do, I nevertheless feel that by letting the participants speak on their own terms, I have improved my chances of representing them in a fair way. This is also the reason why I have relayed several quotes, biographies and personal narratives in chapters 7, 8 and 9. I have also
tried to indicate my level of influence on the information provided by participants with a notation system. Since I conducted the interviews in three parts with three different levels of interviewer interference, it is possible to distinguish my role in obtaining the information given by the participant. A quote marked with (1) is taken from the first segment of the first interview (an uninterrupted narrative inspired by a single question). A quote marked with (2) is taken from the follow up-questions (which were based only on themes raised by the participant). Finally, a quote marked with (3) is information taken from the second interview that I conducted with the participant which mostly involved casual conversation and direct questions. Naturally, while this allows participants to speak in their own terms, and readers to interpret according to theirs, my approach to representation also raises questions around ethics.

Since I found several possible research candidates who refused to take part in my study, I began the interviewing process very aware of the risks interviewees were taking to speak with me. Telling one’s life story to a stranger is not something that everybody wants to do. That said, my participants were people who came forward and (in most cases) very willingly shared significant amounts of personal information about themselves. In return, I tried to be a good listener, and to make them as comfortable as possible. Given the nature of life history interviewing, I believe that most of the participants wanted me to understand their perspectives, and indeed in almost all interviews, I wound up feeling a lot of compassion to whomever I was speaking to; the participants had, in this sense, become co-researchers. After leaving the interview situation, however, I had the power to interpret the participant’s words, and present them as I saw appropriate. This raised a number of questions regarding what was acceptable information to share, and what was not (Blaufuss 2007). In some cases interviewees were very explicit about what could and could not be shared. While some interviewees gave me full permission to use all of the information that was shared for my research, other participants later expressed concerns about what they had shared and asked me not to reveal it in the dissertation. While this was a good guide, it did not fully answer my concerns around the more subtle micro-politics of interview interpretation and participant representation (Alinia 2004). The interpretations of my findings are, after all, solely my own, and are no doubt coloured by my own experiences and positionality as a researcher and a human being. As researchers we ourselves may be considered a location, something that affects the scope and the field of our research. Although we may take
many aspects of ourselves for granted, it is essential that we look into ourselves, and reflexively consider how our own interpretations have coloured our work, especially when dealing with something as personal as individual biographies (Kristmundsdottir 2006). As Ley and Mountz (2001) note, “We are all caught up in a web of contexts—class, age, gender, nationality, intellectual tradition and others—that shape our capacity to tell the story of others.” (Ley and Mountz 2001: 235)

Introducing Onward Migrants

Before going on to discuss some of the circumstances underlying onward migration, and the narratives these reasons prompted from the participants, I would like to briefly introduce the participants individually. Without going into the details of their migration decision making process or their reasons for migration from Sweden to London, I will introduce their educational background and their occupational type. As already emphasized, the stories of these participants serve as the primary material for the dissertation. They will therefore be discussed in more detail as the dissertation proceeds, but especially in chapters 7-9.

Dara moved to Sweden as a young man anxious to escape the growing tension in Iran following the revolution. He studied dentistry, and found himself unemployed. He moved to Britain where he has worked in two different towns. Furthermore, at some point in his career he returned to Scandinavia to upgrade his education before returning again to work in the London area.

Abbas, like Dara, moved to Sweden as a young man. As an Armenian, his family was discriminated against by the Iranian regime. In Sweden, Abbas studied dentistry, and because he knew he would be unemployed, moved immediately following his graduation.

Hamid like Dara and Abbas, moved as a free-moving professional to London following completion of his university education in Sweden. Hamid was only 9 years old when he first moved to Sweden, and had acquired most of his education there. He eventually found himself working in London’s corporate sector.

Kaveh like Hamid moved to Sweden as a youngster. He attended university in Sweden and got his first real job in Stockholm.
was transferred to London through his Swedish job and was later transferred back to Stockholm. After “trying London out” and building up a social and professional network there, he is hoping to return.

**Zeinab** moved to Sweden after being very politically active in Iran. She remained politically active in Sweden and after acquiring university level education and developing her activist network in Sweden, decided to establish a similar organization in London.

**Azita** moved to Sweden as a young adult after pursuing her university education in France. She initially began to study more in Sweden, but soon found herself becoming very involved in her husband’s business. Although Azita and her family have moved around from place to place, they feel that London is the best place for them to live and to manage their business.

**Neda** moved to Sweden as a young child and completed all of her primary education there. When she finished high school, however, her parents decided to move to the UK to pursue their careers. Neda joined them, and soon after started her university studies in London. She now holds a bachelor, master and PhD level education from British universities and is looking for an academic job.

**Farah** moved to Sweden as a young girl. She pursued her bachelor studies in the UK, and is now finishing her masters in London. She has also found work in her field in London.

**Bijan** moved to Sweden as a young child. He left Sweden to pursue his tertiary studies in the United States, returned to Sweden for further studies, and later found himself moving to London for work.

**Laleh**, who moved to Sweden as a young girl, similarly pursued her tertiary education in the United States, and later continued her studies up to the PhD level in the UK. She is now looking for work in London.

**Azadeh** moved to Sweden as a young child. Before starting university, she moved to London for the experience. After finding that she liked London, she decided to pursue her university education there. She is now working in London.
Shala, who moved to Sweden as a baby, independently left Sweden for a third country when she was only in high school. She later decided to pursue her university studies in London.

Pari was born in Sweden directly after her parents moved from Iran to Sweden. After finishing high school, she moved to London to work. She then decided to pursue her education in London and is now working there.

Milad moved to Sweden as a young adult, and pursued his tertiary education there. He later decided that he wanted to study English in the UK so he moved to London. After finding that he liked it in London, Hassan stayed on and found a job.

Hassan moved to London as a bachelor student but found it difficult to be away from his family. He returned to Sweden where he is still living.

Moving Forward

Despite the many challenges associated with transnational research, I have tried to adopt an approach that aims to capture different aspects of the phenomenon under study. By linking people both to, but also across places, I hope that I have been able to overcome some of the methodological challenges typically associated with transnational research, and perhaps migration research more generally.

Although this research departs from a constructionist starting point, I have aimed to be flexible in my approach, emphasizing the importance of contextualization when designing the research and selecting specific methods. I believe this has helped me to address a number of my theoretical interests, including the bridging of macro and micro level phenomena.

Now that I have established both the theoretical and methodological background of the project, I will begin with the next section of the dissertation: the contextualization of the findings. The chapter that follows begins this part of the dissertation by providing an overview of twentieth century Iranian history, and the creation of the global Iranian diaspora.
Chapter 4
Linking Lives with History: Modern Iran and the Making of an Iranian Diaspora

As Armenians, Abbas and his family managed quite well when the Shah was in power. This was to change, however, after the 1979 revolution. Discrimination towards minorities increased, and Abbas and his family suddenly felt like outcasts in their own town. Furthermore, Abbas’ father, who worked for an American company, lost his job when the business was shut down due to its association with “The West”. As a result, the family began to plot their escape from Iran.

Life stories are embedded in broader historical developments. All of the participants’ life stories begin in the context of revolutionary Iran. While some participants, like Abbas, left Iran because they suffered on account of their minority status or their involvement in politics, the majority were among those who simply had much to lose: financially, socially and politically, under the Islamic regime that was consolidated in 1979. They had benefited from the Shah’s reforms and programs, and described themselves as belonging to a new and growing middle class. The revolution aftermath hindered both their economic mobility, as well as their preferred lifestyles.

This chapter will provide a social background important for understanding the lives and experiences of the onward migrants at the center of this study. One of the aims of this dissertation is to contextualize the lives of Swedish-Iranian onward migrants by providing some perspective on the circumstances they faced in Iran, Sweden and Britain. In this chapter the focus is solely on Iran, and, in particular, the events that led to the eventual emigration of many Iranians from Iran to the West. I will begin by providing a brief overview of Iran’s relationship with the West prior to the revolution. I will then provide a historical overview of related events that led to the revolution in 1979. This is followed by an analysis of which Iranians left Iran and the destinations they moved to, as well as the transnational social fields they have created through the process of migration and settlement.
Iran and the West before the Revolution

Many of the events that led to the exodus of Iranians from Iran relate to Iran’s relations with the West, and the nationalist, religious and political movements that have emerged in response to Iran’s foreign affairs. Although Iran was not an official colony, it could be said that at the turn of the 20th century, it had a semi-colonial status as different powers vied to control its resources and gain access to its territory (Ansari 1992). While Britain was the Western power with the most influence on Iran between the 1920s and the 1979 revolution, historically Germany and Russia have also had interests in the region.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the country was under the control of the authoritarian Pahlavi regime. Reza Shah was famous for his pro-Western (and especially pro-British) stance. According to Mackey, Reza Shah looked to the West for ideas on how to build a strong state, and seized “aspects of the West as tools with which to build Iran into a modern, sovereign country” (Mackey 1998:172).

Part of the modernization process under the Shah involved a staunch secular and anti-traditionalist approach to society. He downplayed the role of Islam in Iranian daily life, banning the veil and reserving traditional dress for the clergy. His modernization efforts left room for new ways of conceptualizing gender roles. While some families continued to maintain “traditional” gender roles, in others women were free to adopt western dress, associate with men and attend university. It was during this period, therefore, that a gap began to divide the middle classes, with some being in favour of secularization and others being against it.

Among other things, Reza Shah established a standing army, modern judiciary, education system and university, a system of public healthcare, as well a railroad and improved communication networks (Amanat 1993). He also built prisons, squares, boulevards, and government offices. According to Abrahamian, the “military grew tenfold and the bureaucracy seventeenfold” under the Shah’s rule (Abrahamian 2008:66). In short, it could be said that Reza Shah’s mission was to build a strong modern, centralized state across the entire Persian territory.

In 1936, the Shah opened the country’s first university which was based on a western, secular model of education, and welcomed both male and female students (Shavarini 2005). He also sent many students to study abroad temporarily, with the intention of bringing them back to fill labour shortages in professional fields. Others were sent abroad to work in order to gain experience that was considered
valuable to Iran’s further development. For many individuals, Iran’s industrial development and growing public sector meant new opportunities for social mobility (Moaddel 1991).

The upper and middle classes in particular were greatly influenced by the West on account of both their educational experiences, as well as the flow of culture (music, fashion, cars) that came to Iran from Europe and North America during the Shah’s reign. Western ideals and material culture were promoted by the media, the educational system and through government rhetoric. At the same time, however, even among the highly educated, this high level of Westernization was critiqued. As Ansari aptly puts it:

What is perhaps striking is that the Iranians’ contact with the West since the early eighteenth century has had a paradoxical dual character: on the one hand, a high degree of assimilation of Western ideas and values; on the other hand, an ongoing resentment both open and silent (symbolic reaction), toward the West. (Ansari 1992:18)

Many of the politically active persons who would later fight against the Shah therefore were, ironically, themselves products (and one could argue in many respects beneficiaries) of the Shah’s program of westernization and reform. This irony is already brought out by a 1963 study on Iranian students studying abroad (Baldwin 1963). As Baldwin notes, with reference to the university-educated elite:

its members, in overwhelming numbers, are among the most persistent and bitter critics of the régime that rules Iran. In this the foreign-educated do not differ much from the domestic university students, particularly those at the University of Tehran. (Baldwin 1963:265)

There were indeed a number of reasons for people to be unhappy with the Shah. On the international level, his appeasement of the West made him very unpopular. Iran was giving away most of its oil revenues to the West, and the Shah did little to stop this, or to challenge Western interests in the region more generally. On a domestic level, his aggressive approach to secularization undermined religious sentiments and challenged peoples’ worldview. In fact, his pro-Western and very lavish lifestyle was offensive to many. Moreover, the Pahlavis were accused of corruption and, in particular, for using Iran’s resources to fund their own special interests. The Shah’s reign was considered overly authoritarian, and left no room for opposition (Abrahamian 2008). Furthermore, the Shah upset the rural masses by instigating agrarian reform, and supporting pro-urban development policies, which led to a growing rural-urban divide. (Khosrokhavar
While the Shah’s policies had benefited some, clearly they had not benefited others. Finally his lack of popularity led to his oust in 1941.

The Western powers (now including the USA) played an important role in determining the Shah’s future. With rising dissent in Iran, they wanted to get rid of the Shah, but maintain strict control over Iran’s oil supply (Abrahamian 2008). So while Reza Shah went into exile, his twenty-one year old son Muhammad Reza was, at the request of the allies, left in charge, although with very limited powers (Abrahamian 2008). Instead, this period saw the rise of nationalist and pro-constitutionalist leader Mossadeq, who nationalized oil and took a firm stance against foreign domination. His initiatives were cut short, however, when the Shah was reinstated through a CIA military coup in 1953. After losing control of Iranian oil, and fearing a rise in anti-colonial sentiments more generally, the British and the Americans had together decided to “intervene to change the course of events in Iran” (Matin-Asgari 1991:55). It has been argued that the coup was successful because the allies had the support of Iran’s armed forces, political groups who had taken issue with Mossadeq, as well as religious leaders who opposed the constitutional model (Matin-Asgari 1991). As a result, the Shah was returned to the throne.

Soon after he was reinstated, the Shah had to find ways to manage his people, including the many who did not welcome his return. Again with the help of the CIA, the government created SAVAK (the secret police) to monitor the opposition. Fearing leftist opposition in particular, he clamped down on opponents. Many were imprisoned or even killed. This further reduced the Shah’s popularity. According to Keddie (2003), the growing resentment towards the Pahalavi regime reached a tipping point when, in March 1977, the Carter government openly criticized the Shah’s human rights record. By this time newspapers in the West were discussing the way the Shah tortured his opponents and the Shah was starting to get a bad international reputation (Abrahamian 2008). The Shah responded by, among other things, allowing the International Red Cross and the International Commission of Jurists to inspect some of his prisons. He also eased up on the torture of criminals, and introduced a number of laws regarding military tribunals (Keddie 2003). The Iranian people, however, were anxious to push the Shah for greater freedoms, and labourers, students (both inside and outside of the country) the religious ulama as well as intellectuals played an important role in doing exactly that. Dissent was already starting in the autumn of 1977, when people began to publically criticize the Shah, through poetry, newslet-
ters, and other types of writing, which eventually culminated in street protests which led to arrests and, due to the regime’s fear of international reprimand, light punishments (Abrahamian 2008).

The Iranian Revolution

The period leading up to the revolution in 1979 was a highly intellectual one, in which a number of different ideas about nationalism, socialism, and religion were in circulation. Moallem (2005) draws attention to Iran’s postcolonial status during this period, arguing that the country was experiencing an identity crisis. The usual relationships and social categories used to organize society had been altered by an emerging modernity, not only because of the Shah’s specific policies and reforms, but also due to globalization processes more generally. Unlike ever before, Iran was a nation united by print media and radio. At the same time, the traditional sources of power that once held the country together were losing their base. As a result, several social movements emerged to fill the void: some of these movements were political, and others religious. The revolution may be seen as the moment in which these different social movements merged. United by little more than a desire to overthrow the Pahlavi dynasty, and reject western imperialism, revolutionaries came together under the banner of “Independence, Liberty, Islamic Republic” (Khosrokhavar 2004:71) and the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Khomeini promoted a version of law that was consistent with the holy Koran, and challenged imperialism; he was particularly against the USA government, and argued that foreign intervention denied Iranians of their true identity and heritage. He also highlighted the necessity of addressing the needs of the poor and the needy. In 1964 Khomeini had been arrested and exiled in Iraq, where he stayed for 13 years. It was during his time in exile that he developed his political views, and created a detailed text outlining his vision for an Islamic Republic. He also maintained strong ties to his followers in Iran. He sent tapes and writings that had a large appeal for many people. Under his influence, people rallied in the streets.

In January, 1978, an article that attacked and insulted Khomeini was released in an important daily newspaper, Ettela’at. The article had been written by the government’s information minister, Daryush Homayun. This greatly upset a number of Khomeini’s followers and dissent increased (Keddie 2003). Between this and the protests over human rights violations there was a new momentum for street pro-
tests. The masses had by now gotten caught up in a wave of revolutionary vigor. Strikes plagued the country and involved schools, bazaars, factories, banks, railways, government offices (Abrahamian 2008) and perhaps most significantly, even the oil industry thereby greatly reducing production (Keddie 2003). Iran as a country became dysfunctional. Khomeini had been moved to France after relations between Iran and Iraq turned sour, which made it even easier for him to communicate with people in Iran. He took a hardline stance, and encouraged his followers not to compromise until the Shah was overthrown.

Finally, on December 11th, during the Shiite festival of Ashura, as many as two million people took to the streets in favour of the Islamic Republic and the overthrow of the Shah. The Shah finally decided to leave Iran on January 15, 1979. He left Shapour Bakhtiar in charge and asked him to establish a new constitutional government (Keddie 2003:234). Bakhtiar did what he could to take control of the situation. Among other things, he immediately released prisoners, and closed SAVAK. But it was not enough. Instead, on February 1st, 1979 Bakhtiar gave in and allowed Khomeini to return to Iran. He was greeted by three million people. It did not take long for the military to lose control of the situation. (Abrahamian 2008) Less than two weeks later the overthrow of the Shah was complete.

In the nine months that followed the revolution, Khomeini tried to form a new government. Mehdi Bazargan was appointed the Prime Minister of the new regime’s provisional government (Keddie 2003). Since many different parties had backed the revolution, they all hoped to participate in deciding how the new government should be formed. Some politicized members of the clergy wanted a government based on Khomeini’s vision which was based on Sharia law, while the leftists preferred a secular approach. The latter had difficulty trying to form a united front, however. They were largely united with nationalists in terms of their anti-imperialist stance, but otherwise faced severe differences in opinion, even among themselves. While some leftist factions such as the Feda’iyan Majority and the Tudeh party backed Khomeini, others did not (Keddie 2003). According to Mirsepassi’s (2004) analysis, the left therefore had little to offer in terms of its own distinct agenda, and therefore found it difficult to seize control.

It is perhaps not only the fault of the left, however, that the Islamists emerged so dominant. Khomeini had given the impression that a secular government would be formed and that all of the various political factions that had taken part in the revolution would be partici-
pants in the new government; step by step, however, he quietly seized control. Khomeini’s government slowly took many of the country’s institutions one by one, until the opposition had little power. Eventually the government was called to vote on an Islamic Republic and because most members of the opposition boycotted the elections, a 98% pass was announced (Keddie 2003). The government’s next task was to set up a new constitution. To do so, an “assembly of experts” were consulted; they produced a very authoritarian constitution. Khomeini was eventually selected as the faqih, the supreme leader, and was given “divine authority to rule” for life. He was, according to the law, “only accountable to God” (Keddie 2003:247).

The next significant event to take place was the hostage crises. On November 4, 1979, a number of students invaded the American embassy in Tehran, taking a number of American diplomats hostage and stealing a number of secret documents. Khomeini supported the students’ actions, which both solidified his power and led Iran to become isolated internationally (Amanat 1993). When the leader of the provisional government, Bazargan, told the students to stop the occupation and they refused, the dominance of the religious groups was confirmed (Amanat 1993) and Khomeini emerged as the clear leader of the nation.

Khomeini’s leadership had a dramatic impact on many facets of Iranian life. The Shah’s efforts to secularize and modernize the nation were, on many counts, undone by the policies later implemented by the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, Khomeini’s attempts to consolidate his power by way of persecution and the promotion of war led to a great deal of social upheaval. In what follows I will attempt to highlight some of the outcomes of the revolution that later led many Iranians to flee their country and go into exile.

The Founding of the Islamic Republic and Subsequent Emigration

Prior to the Iranian revolution, there had been few large-scale out-migrations from Iran. There were some exceptions. The first migrants to leave Iran were Zoroastrians in the 8th century who sought refuge from the Islamic conquest by moving to India (Ansari 1992). Later, in the 19th century, some Iranians moved to Russia in search of work in trade or the oil fields. There was also an exodus of Jewish Iranians to Israel following the Second World War (Amanat 1993). Under the Shah’s leadership, many Iranians were able to study abroad
(Baldwin 1963; Hakimzadeh 2006), but in general, most Iranians did not consider leaving Iran before the political events of the 1970s.

The first wave of migrants to leave the country in response to the 1979 revolution were monarchists, people who supported the Shah and generally benefitted from the social and economic policies of the Pahlavi regime. These people included members of the government, the military and bankers. These migrants went to Switzerland, Austria, Britain and France, but the most popular destination was Los Angeles, California (Spellman 2004). Some went first as students and then decided to stay after the revolution, while others moved in response to the Pahlavi Dynasty’s decline.

After their defeat in the revolution, many of Khomeini’s political opponents fled the country, in some cases in fear of their lives. In 1981 the Nationalists and the Mujahedin left in great numbers. Some Leftists had aligned themselves with the new government with the ambition of turning it in a socialist direction. When this failed and the secretary general of the leftist Tudeh organization was arrested in February, 1983, several members of the party also left Iran (Nassehyan-Behnam 1991). Some moved to the Soviet Union in search of a political system that would accommodate their socialist views. Others went to Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America. These emigrants tried to maintain a low profile when leaving Iran (and in some cases even after establishing themselves in their country of destination), and it is therefore difficult to estimate their exact numbers.

Minorities were another group that faced challenges after the revolution. Some ethnic minorities like the Kurds had difficulties under the Shah as well as under Khomeini, since they were seen as a challenge to Iran’s nation building project (Khosrokhavar 2004). Religious minorities, however, tended to face increased problems after the revolution. As eluded to in Abbas’ story shared at the beginning of this chapter, for the most part, religious minorities enjoyed considerable freedom and respect under the Shah. Many minorities had benefited from their international ties to other places in a climate of growing internationalization. Furthermore, many became highly educated under the Shah’s policies which encouraged their social mobility (Amanat 1993). This meant that many minorities quickly became professionals as well as representatives in the Shah’s government. The Islamic government that followed, however, was not as tolerant as the Shah had been of religious and ethnic diversity, and many minorities suffered as a result.

Within the framework of Khomeini’s government, people of the book: Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews and Sabeans were protected by
the constitution, so long as they were born into the faith and not converted. These groups were often seen as having ties to other countries such as Israel, England and the USA, however, and were therefore considered suspicious (Spellman 2004). They also suffered from the stigma of being “impure”. *Najes* is a term used to describe non-Muslims as “ritually unclean, religiously dirty and polluting.” (Kelley 1993a:135) They were therefore often harassed and denied access to education and accommodation. Religious minorities outside of these four groups (such as Baha’is and Christian converts) had an even more difficult time. Some were imprisoned, and many were deprived of jobs and pensions (Spellman 2004). Many Baha’is were even sought out and killed in the years following the revolution, and continue to be persecuted today (Cameron and Danesh 2008). Both ethnic and religious minorities have therefore shown a tendency to leave Iran.

A number of studies have divided Iranian emigrants into two groups: 1) political emigrants or “exiles” and 2) socio-cultural emigrants or “immigrants” (Nassehy-Behnam 1991; Graham and Khosravi 1997). In this distinction, political activists and religious minorities may be considered people who were forcibly pushed from the regime, while other migrants may be considered “immigrants” of a more voluntary kind. But as I argued in chapter 2, it is hard to clearly distinguish between the motivations of migrants, and many Iranians left Iran for more than just one reason; furthermore, most left in response to a range of social, cultural, political and economic factors. Ansari (1992) notes that many Iranians:

> have chosen migration as an outlet for their general alienation from the socio-political system. Therefore, the Iranian migration as a voluntary action contains some essentially ‘involuntary’ factors. (Ansari 1992:31)

While two of the participants in this study were politically active, and three belonged to minority groups, most might just be considered privileged Iranians with the necessary resources and incentives to leave the country. In what follows I will therefore discuss the various reasons that so-called “ordinary middle class” Iranians have left Iran. For these migrants, state-centered attacks against religious and political freedom were the primary reasons for emigration.

**Islamicization**

At the time of the revolution, many secular, middle class Iranians had Muslim backgrounds and may have even followed aspects of Islam in their daily lives. As Kelley (1993a:81) notes, in the Iranian context it is
quite common to be secular, but still identify with Islam. So there were many Iranians who, despite identifying with some aspects of Islam, or even following Islamic morals and values, did not approve of Khomeini’s regime and the adoption of Sharia law. Some of these Iranians began to take a stronger secular stance only after their disappointment with the Islamic Republic (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, Der-Martirosian 1993). There were others, however, for whom the process of Islamicization was shocking from the outset, because despite being Muslims, they had come to view Iran as a modern, secular state (Moghissi and Rahnema 2001). As Nassehy-Behnam puts it:

the extreme psychological and social upheaval that Islamic rule imposed on an entire population came as a shock to educated, western oriented groups who, for half a century, had considered Islam a religion and personal faith rather than a social, political and economic system. (Nassehy-Behnam 1991: 102)

Although having considerable freedom only a few years before, the people living under the new regime were now faced with a number of limitations. People lived in fear of harassment, imprisonment or even death if they violated the newly imposed Sharia laws.

After coming to power, Khomeini had to consolidate his regime. This required a process of “Islamicization” in which all resistance to the regime would be eliminated, and replaced by institutions, programs and individual leaders who would uphold the regime’s objectives of creating a state based on clerical rule and Sharia law. In practice, this involved ridding the state of any influences that were deemed as foreign or anti-revolutionary. In the words of Moghadam,

Following the assumption of power by Ayatollah Khomeini and his clerical associates, steps were taken to abrogate modern, Western-inspired codes related to personal and family life and to institute precepts from the Sharia. (Moghadam 1991:1137)

The institutions and systems of governance that were implemented as a result were authoritarian and totalitarian in nature. The government exercised a great deal of power over its citizens through various conventional state institutions such as the police, army, courts, media and educational system, but one of the state’s most significant sources of power has been the implementation of traditional Shi’a structures (Moghissi and Rahnema 2001). People could no longer listen to pop music (Iranian or Western), consume alcohol, and there were very strict regulations in place about what films and television programs were acceptable (Keddie 2003). This was offensive for many Iranians
who were accustomed to Westernized lifestyles; these social changes and policies therefore encouraged the emigration of middle class Iranians in particular.

Many peoples’ jobs were also directly affected by the regime’s new policies. Foreign companies were shut down, causing many people to become unemployed. Those working for the state and particularly teachers, were under heavy monitoring, as they were expected to be good representatives for the rest of the population and promote the ideology of the regime. The “Cultural Revolution” of 1980-1983 made a particular effort to rid the state of those who were deemed too Westernized for their positions. This included many professors, teachers as well as cultural and scientific figures (Keddie 2003). This led to a great exodus of highly skilled persons from Iran.

The education system was also greatly transformed under the new regime. Girls and boys had to study separately, and all private schools (including those belonging to religious minorities) were shut down. New importance was placed on the study of Arabic, and a number of alterations had been made to text books to reinforce Islamic gender roles (Moghadam 1991). Furthermore, daily prayers were integrated into the school day, and Islamic dress was enforced (Shavarini 2005). Universities were reopened with new selection criteria: only students who were affirmed good Muslims could attend, and applicants’ piousness was often checked with their neighbors (Shavarini 2005). Furthermore, priority was given to the family members of martyrs and others that had served the regime. Many wished to leave Iran, thus, in order to secure education (either for themselves or their children) elsewhere.

The “Woman Question”

One aspect of Islamicization that deserves particular attention is the issue of women’s rights, commonly referred to in the literature as the “Woman Question”. Under the Shah, middle class women in particular became increasingly educated, and started to demand more in the way of work and opportunities. Despite this, any true challenges to Iran’s patriarchal system were not possible (Shahidian 1997). In fact, while some saw the increased freedoms granted to women under the Shah as positive, others believed this was not enough to fight women’s marginalization, or worse, that the widespread adoption of (among other things) Western dress had led to the increased objectification of women rather than their liberation. Tensions around gender issues therefore came to the fore during the revolutionary period, as people argued over what did and did not constitute as progress for
women. The debate came to a halt, however, when Khomeini took a firm stance on women’s place in society and aimed to restore “traditional” gender roles. Using religion to legitimize gender inequality, the government argued that men and women were fundamentally different and should therefore be compliant to adopt different roles in society. While men were to be the providers of their families, women should instead focus on homemaking and childrearing.

Early marriage was promoted, the policy of birth control dismissed, employment of young mothers discouraged, and the raising of children (to become ‘committed Muslims’) lauded. (Moghadam 1991:1137)

As Spellman notes, the new gender policies played an important role in marking “the boundaries of the Islamic community” (Spellman 2004:26).

These gendered policies were far more than symbolic however. On the contrary, they dramatically affected the security, lifestyles and status of women. Just one month after his return from France, and his subsequent rise to power, Khomeini announced that women in government offices would be obliged to wear hijab. On March 8, 1979 (International Women’s Day), thousands of women took to the streets, fighting against this policy of mandatory veiling. Not only did they not succeed to stop the policy from being implemented, but the law was later extended to all women appearing in public places. (Esfandiari 1997) Furthermore, now subject to Sharia law, women lost many rights when it came to divorce, and child custody.

Although work and education opportunities were reduced for many members of Iran’s middle class, middle class women’s seemed to suffer the most from Khomeini’s reforms. The economy and the modern, secular environment promoted by the Shah helped to create a number of job opportunities for women (Shahidian 1994; Khosrokhavar 2004). Women worked in a number of different occupations, including the professions, management, the arts, and private businesses (Esfandiari 1997). In the Islamic Republic, however, they lost the right to work in a number of positions. Among other things, women were prohibited from becoming judges and were not eligible for the role of supreme leader. There was therefore a strong class dimension, with middle and upper class women who had benefited from the Shah’s modernization campaign feeling a stronger sense of loss. As Moghadam points out, while Iranian women might have been united in some ways by their common cause as women, the inequality they experienced in relation to men was experienced differently depending on their social and economic situation.
The same could be said for education. Under Khomeini’s regime, schools were opened in rural areas, and in fact many girls who had not been able to attend school before (either because of distance or parents’ disapproval of mixed-gendered environments), were now able to do so. At the same time new restrictions were introduced that affected women at the upper end of the class strata, with high ambitions within the tertiary education system. Because women were supposed to fill a certain role in society, certain subjects were off limits to them (Mehran 2009). These fields included animal husbandry, natural resources, veterinary medicine, agrarian sciences, and geology (Shavarrini 2005). Although the restrictions were lifted by 1989, many Iranians had already left the country to pursue education in other places.

A final factor affecting women was their role in the revolution. The revolution had presented women (again, mostly those belonging to the middle class) with an opportunity to get out into the public sphere and fight for a better society. Many had gained newfound respect and independence in the process. There was therefore, “an omnipresent tension between people’s revolutionary aspirations and the projects of the newly established Islamic regime, which created new conditions of oppression.” (Shahidian 1997:12) As Shahidian points out, despite women’s involvement in the revolution, women’s issues were undermined by leftist struggle, and the anti-imperialist movement (Shahidian 1994). Among the many leftist parties that attracted female members, it was assumed that after a socialist revolution was achieved, women’s rights would be addressed. The failure of the revolution to address women’s issues came as a shock to women who did not believe that they could lose the progress that they had made under the Shah, or during the course of the revolution. This heightened feminist sentiments, and led many women to be even more disappointed with the regime than they might have been otherwise. Simply stated, the Islamic regime was perceived by many of these women very negatively and they left the country to protect their own rights as well as the rights of their daughters.

**Economic Hardship and the Iran-Iraq War**

On September 22nd, 1980, Iraq decided to take advantage of Iran’s weakness, and especially its foreign isolation, by invading the country on the premise of a border dispute. Although Iraq expected that it would be easy to invade Iran and turn it into an even weaker state, the invasion had the reverse effect. In fact,
Iraq’s invasion did the opposite of what Iraq expected, uniting Iranians, combining Shi’a and nationalist fervor, reviving the armed forces, and strengthening the Pasdaran and Khomeinists. (Keddie 2003:251)

Khomeini used the war to further his goals of Islamicization and to consolidate his power. Young men were recruited to join the war effort through “ideological persuasion” as well as the “military draft” (Amanat 1993:25). Although there were many reasons to fear for their daughters’ futures, during the war, parents were even more concerned about their sons. The Iranian government was known for capturing young boys and taking them to the front lines to act as human shields. Finally, after 8 years of battle, in 1988, Iran agreed to sign a cease-fire. By then, many families and individuals had already escaped to avoid the fallout of the war, and in particular to protect themselves or their sons from the military draft.

Overall, Iran also suffered from serious economic problems during this period. The revolution had already caused major disruptions to Iran’s production facilities, and the war only made things worse. The country experienced rampant inflation, oil price declines, and money shortages (Keddie 2003). The latter, according to Esfandiari, affected the quality of living that Iranians were accustomed to “across the social and economic spectrum.” (Esfandiari 1997:44) The only ones to gain financially during this period were those close to Khomeini and his government who could access the country’s special foundations and funds. Corruption was therefore seen as a growing problem, and according to some scholars, a further reason why many people lost faith in the Islamic Republic (Moghissi and Rahnema: 2001). Many Iranians consequently emigrated in order to protect their financial security (Hassall 1989). The exodus of skilled persons such as engineers and technicians only furthered Iran’s economic problems, however (Khosrokhavar 2004:73), and as the situation got worse, more and more people decided to leave.

Iran in the 1980s was characterized by a rigid regime, which many Iranians considered to be a theocracy. As has already been discussed, this was very disappointing for the more secular Iranians who had given their youth to the revolution with the hope of securing a better future. After seeing the outcomes of the revolution, however, they “felt a painful sense of alienation and betrayal as they realized the breadth of the gap that separated them from the religious clergy.” (Amanat 1993:24) Seeking alternative lifestyles, the middle classes in particular looked to their contacts in the West in order to secure opportunities abroad (Amanat 1993).
Destinations: The Geography of the Iranian Diaspora

After the revolution, Iranians moved to a number of Western countries with the United States being by far the most popular, followed by Canada, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia and France respectively (Hakimzadeh 2006). In the paragraphs that follow, I will therefore outline each of these destinations in more detail. While the intention is to give an overall picture of the number of Iranians who left Iran and where they went, I will pay particular attention to the diaspora in the United States given its size, and the Swedish and British diasporas because of their central relevance to this research project.

North America and Australia

According to the Iranian Studies Group at MIT (Mostashari and Khodamhosseini 2004), in 2000 there were 338,000 people who reported their ancestry (first or second) as Iranian. But as these authors also point out, this is probably an underestimate given the tendency to underreport Iranian origins in the United States. Without a doubt, however, the USA was, by far, the country that received the most Iranian migrants following the revolution. Even prior to the revolution, the United States was an important destination for Iranians. Many came to the United States as students following the growth of the Iranian economy. Many families joined students abroad after the outbreak of the revolution, while others used whatever other channels were open to them at the time. Many religious and ethnic minorities were often accepted as refugees. The number of Iranians moving to the United States obviously dropped off significantly in 1980, however, after the American Embassy in Iran was closed (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, Der-Martirosian 1993).

New York, Washington and Los Angeles all have large Iranian communities (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, Der-Martirosian 1993). Los Angeles has, by far, the largest and most diverse Iranian population in the United States (Naficy 1993; Ghorashi 2002). As a result, one can find a significant number of Iranian-focused organizations and cultural services in the city, including television programs and newspapers in Farsi, as well as a number of businesses catering to an Iranian clientele. According to Ansari (1992), in the early 1990s, one could already find over 50 Iranian-owned stores and restaurants, causing people to refer to the area as “Irangeles” (Ansari 1992). The downtown areas were associated with Jewish Iranians and Glendale with
Armenian Iranian businesses (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, Der-Martirosian 1993).

Some may be surprised that the USA became the number one destination for Iranian migrants, especially considering the uneasy relations between Iran and the United States after the hostage crises in 1979. There are a number of reasons why Iranians chose to move to the United States. For one thing, many of the Iranians that moved to the United States during this time were, in fact, against the Islamic regime, and therefore experienced no conflict of interest in entering the United States. They tended to be persecuted by the regime, and were therefore often even received by the USA’s refugee policy. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that many Iranians, despite what happened between Iran and the United States, in fact had a strong interest in the USA both before and after the revolution. As Amanat has pointed out, “contrary to the image often portrayed in the American media, Iranians’ pro-American sentiments remained strong and their fascination with American culture continued” (Amanat 1993:16). It could be argued that this fascination began when Iranians started to visit the United States as students, and only strengthened as more and more Iranians moved to cities like Los Angeles. This does not mean, of course, that Iranians living in the United States have not experienced discrimination and difficulties following both the hostage crises and, more recently, the events of September 11th, 2001. (Daha 2011; Mobasher 2012)

Iranians in the United States come from a diverse range of political and religious backgrounds (Ansari 1992). One of the characteristics most commonly associated with Iranians in the United States, however, is wealth (Mobasher 2012). Many of the Iranians that moved to Los Angeles in particular were monarchists who had fared well under the Shah. Another group were international students who had the resources to study abroad before the revolution and to stay abroad after it happened (Ansari 1992). Finally, ethnic and religious minorities made up a disproportionate number of migrants to the United States, and as already noted, with the exception of the Kurds, they too, typically showed above-average levels of education, occupational status and wealth in pre-revolutionary Iran (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, Der-Martirosian 1993). According to some scholars, a large number of the exiles that came to the United States:

came from the professional and entrepreneurial classes of Iran. A combination of affluent and skilled exiles and former college students accounts for the unusually high socioeconomic status of Iranians in the United States. (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, Der-Martirosian 1993:69)
While the United States was perhaps the most significant destination for many Iranian migrants before, and directly following, the Iranian revolution, Canada has also emerged as a popular destination for Iranian migrants in recent years (Moghsissi et al. 2009). According to the 2006 census, there are more than 121,000 people born in Iran living in Canada, and more than half entered the country after 1996. According to the Canadian encyclopedia, 90% of these Iranians live in three provinces: Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec. The large Iranian communities in cities like Toronto and Vancouver have, like their counterparts in the United States, members with diverse backgrounds and personal histories.

According to the Australian Census (2006) there are 22,550 Iranian-born people living in Australia, and 12,000 of them live in Sydney. The rest are spread out between other major Australian cities. Migration from Iran to Australia peaked in the 1980s following the revolution, but like in the case of Canada, Australia has continued to be a popular destination for Iranians in recent years. Most Iranians have arrived through Australia’s “Humanitarian Stream” but family and skilled programmes have also been commonly used to enter the country.

Europe

Iran’s connection to Europe dates back several centuries. For this reason it is perhaps not surprising that many Iranians moved to France well before the revolution even took place. France was a popular destination for Iranian students. Reza Shah sent students on scholarships to study in French universities (Nassehy-Behman 1991). According to statistics, in 1978 there were 5,941 Iranians in France and most were students. This number grew dramatically, however, after the revolution. As the ruling classes left Iran in 1979, the number of Iranians grew to more than 9,000. In just one more year, in 1980, the number had grown again to 13,000, and by 1985 the number was 20,000 (Nassehy-Behman 1991). Many leaders of the opposition left Iran for France, and often their followers went with them.

There have also been several studies documenting the large presence of Iranians in Germany (Bafekr and Leman 1999) and the Netherlands (Koser 1997; Ghorashi 2002). As in the case of France, there were already a significant number of Iranian students in Germany prior to the revolution (Schirazi 2001), but the numbers continued to grow after the revolution in 1979. According to German statistics, by 1995 there were already around 107,000 Iranians resident in Germany but many Iranians have also continued to seek asylum in Germany.
over the last two decades. In the Netherlands most Iranians arrived after the revolution. Many were politically engaged, and therefore moved to the Netherlands as refugees (Ghorashi 2002). According to Dutch Statistics (2003), there are about 28,000 people of Iranian decent living in the Netherlands. The majority (more than half) live in Zuid Holland, Noord-Holland and Utrecht (28, 19 and 9 percent respectively). About 3,000 Iranians live in the Amsterdam area, but Rotterdam and the Hague also have significant numbers.

According to census data from 2011, there are currently around 75,500 people who identify themselves as being of Iranian origin in England and Wales. Approximately half of these people live in London. Iranians came to Britain as students even as early as the nineteenth century, but Iranian migration to Britain peaked after the revolution. Spellman (2004) divides these Iranians into two separate groups—those who came in the 1980s and those who came in the 1990s. Those Iranians, who arrived just before and just after the revolution, argues Spellman, were generally westernized elites who were connected to the Shah (Spellman 2004). These migrants were followed by a more diverse group who came after the establishment of the Islamic regime. The latter were Iranians coming from various socio-economic and political backgrounds, and many also represented different religious and ethnic minorities. The Iranian community was therefore diversified greatly during this period.

According to the leaders of the Iranian organizations I interviewed, there has been a limited but continuous flow of Iranian migrants to Britain. In recent years, many Iranians have sought asylum as a result of the Green Revolution, and many have chosen Britain as a destination. On the other hand, there are also a number of more privileged Iranians coming to Britain who have strong ties to the Islamic regime and its leadership. These Iranians use their wealth to study in British universities or simply enjoy the life in Britain. The result has been an increasingly diverse Iranian community that, while significant in numbers, remains internally divided.

Migration from Iran to Britain reflects Britain’s role in Iran’s colonial past. As Amanat has pointed out, for Iranians, Britain has been a country worthy of both “fear and fascination” (Amanat 2012:146). While many Iranians have disliked Britain for its imperial role in Iranian history, at the same time they have admired the country for, among other things, its education system. This has led to an interesting situation. While many Iranian students were studying in Britain, they nevertheless attended protests to overthrow the Shah and reduce the power of imperialism. In 1980 there were two major incidents of
this kind. In the first instance, students occupied the Iranian Embassy in London, and in the second instance, they protested outside the USA Embassy (Rundle 2002). Iranian-British relations have been strained by these events. They have also been strained by the two countries’ diverging views on Israel, and the Rushdie Affair. Despite this, Iran has continued to have an ongoing relationship with Britain, which is reflected by the constant flow of people between the two countries.

While the first outflow of Iranians went primarily to the United States, France and the UK, by the 1980s these countries had become increasingly closed to Iranian refugees, and especially to those without strong evidence of persecution. Sweden, then a country previously unknown to most Iranians, therefore emerged as one of the most desirable destinations for Iranians seeking a safe place to live. In 1976 there were only around 1,400 Iranians in Sweden. This group comprised students and a small number of businessmen. But this number changed dramatically following the revolution in 1979 and by 1990 there were approximately 32,000 Iranians in Sweden (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012).

Figure 9 shows the number of Iranians that arrived in Sweden in specific time periods between 1980 and 2006. As the figure indicates, the number of Iranian arrivals peaked within the ten year period, between 1985 and 1995.
The first Iranian migrants to Sweden were predominantly men. Since the 1990s, the balance between men and women has equaled out, and in fact for the last decade, female migrants outnumber male migrants, mostly as a result of family reunification (Hakimzadeh 2006).

Those that came to Sweden were either political exiles, who had been actively involved in politics in Iran, or emigrants, namely “young men who fled the military service and the Iran-Iraq war, ethnic minorities, and women and children who have joined kin abroad” (Graham and Khosravi 1997:118). While some Iranians came to Sweden simply because it was relatively easy to get permanent residence, and later citizenship there, there were others who had heard about Sweden’s political model and found it appealing. Many of the Iranians that moved to Sweden had been part of (or simply sympathetic to) the leftist opposition at the time of the revolution and saw Sweden as a socialist paradise that could accommodate their political views (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997). Some of the Iranians that came to Sweden at this time had been previously jailed and tortured by the authorities in Iran and had very strong reasons for applying for asylum. There were other Iranians, however, who were not particularly targeted by the regime, who sought asylum out of fear, the desire to preserve their pre-revolutionary lifestyles, or with the wish to protect their children (Eyrumlu 1997). Unlike some countries that had strict policies for admitting refugees, Sweden was open to all people seeking to escape negative political situations in their home country, and therefore welcomed these migrants. As a result the Iranians that moved to
Sweden are often viewed as “political activists” or as “ordinary non-activist middle-class Iranians” who had the resources to escape Iran and seek a life elsewhere (Hajighasemi 2012).

The Iranian community in Sweden is highly diverse and could not be said to be a single diasporic community. As in other parts of the Iranian diaspora such as London and Vancouver (McAuliffe 2008), the Iranian diaspora in Sweden is divided along political, class, and even religious lines (Kelly 2011). In terms of political background, in Sweden there are large numbers of Monarchists, Mujahedin Followers, as well as a range of leftist activists.

Furthermore, the presence of ethnic and religious minorities within the Swedish Iranian community should not be underestimated. Studies about Iranians in Sweden tend to focus on those with Muslim backgrounds who, according to most estimates, make up the majority of Iranians in Sweden (Kelly 2011). Such studies, however, overlook the presence of “cultural” “ethnic” and “religious” minorities. This problem is furthered by Swedish statistics, which measure migrant categories only by country of birth and do not take into consideration any other criteria. We cannot therefore accurately estimate the ethnic and religious composition of the Iranian community in Sweden, although my own fieldwork suggests that there is a large community of Kurds and Armenian Christians, as well as the presence of a small number of Bahai’s.

Transnational Diasporic Fields

Regardless of their backgrounds, most Iranians left for places where they could feel secure, and in some cases continue practicing their Westernized lifestyles. As I hope I have made clear even in this short introduction to the Iranian diaspora, the Iranians that left Iran faced certain opportunities and constraints. They were admitted to certain countries selectively, depending on which pathways were open to them, and which policies permitted their migration. The time period in which they sought to migrate, and their class backgrounds, played an important role in influencing where they found themselves in the West.

The lives of Iranians in these various destinations have no doubt been shaped by the social, cultural, and political structures of the destination countries and communities to which they have moved. Indeed, many Iranians have found themselves well settled in these destinations. I would nevertheless like to conclude this section with a brief discussion on the various ways in which Iranians scattered be-
between different places have remained connected within what could be considered cross-cutting transnational diasporic fields.

Without a doubt, social networks have played an important role in connecting an otherwise dispersed global community. Because many Iranians have family members in different parts of the world, they remain connected to many places simultaneously through their family members. Telephone calls, email contact, as well as international visits have been important to many Iranians. In some cases diasporic family members send remittances back to family members in Iran (Hakimzadeh 2006). A recent report noted how, given the sanctions imposed on Iran, family networks have even begun to play an important role in facilitating the influx of medications and other valuable goods from the West to Iran that would otherwise not be available (Nasaw 2013). Furthermore, while familial networks connect Iran with its diaspora, they also facilitate connections between Iranians in different diasporic locations. Iranians already living abroad may be inclined to visit their family members in many different parts of the world, or at least to remain connected to these places through family ties.

It is also important to point out, however, that the networks linking Iranians are not only based on family ties. Political and intellectual networks also link migrants in different national and regional locations. Such networks have helped to bring Iranians together both within and across national destinations. The interviews I conducted with Iranian-focused organizations in Sweden, for example, revealed a strong commitment to establishing links between Iranian cultural and political associations across Europe, and hopefully even someday across the whole world (Kelly 2011). Such organizations aim to meet the socio-cultural needs of Iranians in the diaspora, address issues around racism and discrimination faced by Iranians living in the West, and also politically mobilize Iranians to improve conditions in Iran. Academic and intellectual networks have led to the development of Iranian studies programs in many different parts of the diaspora. As a result of Iranian scholarship and related literary pursuits, several academic and semi-academic books have been produced, highlighting the shared diasporic experiences of Iranians who have settled in many different places (Karim 2006; Talebi 2008). Such works tend to include authors’ reflections on the Iranian revolution, but especially on their ongoing search for identity and belonging in the West.

Today, technology has been used to overcome space and time, and has helped to shape new imaginings of identity (Appadurai 1996). This is reflected by online Farsi-speaking communities, chat rooms
and websites, Farsi-language newspapers and publications, and Farsi-speaking television and radio programming (Graham and Khosravi 2002). According to Alinejad (2011), the Farsi language ranks fourth in the global world of online blogs, and as Graham and Khosravi (2002) point out, more generally the internet has become a primary way to organize political mobilization, to obtain products from abroad, and even cultivate a shared sense of identity (Graham and Khosravi 2002). Furthermore, despite staunch efforts to limit the influx of western media to Iran, satellite television continues to connect Iranians in Iran with diasporic Iranians around the world.

The production of Iranian culture in the diaspora, keeps many Iranians connected through music, art, and poetry. Naficy’s famous (1993) work, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*, highlights the important role that Iranian cultural production in Los Angeles in particular has played in encouraging connectivity among Iranians globally. As Hakimzadeh (2006) points out, Los Angeles is home to multiple television and radio stations that broadcast in Farsi to listeners across the United States, Western Europe, and even Iran. Furthermore, Iranian-focused cultural commodities (including many outlawed by the Iranian authorities) are distributed from Los Angeles to multiple parts of the diaspora, and are sometimes even smuggled into Iran (Hakimzadeh 2006).

Both the material and the imaginary transnational fields connecting Iranians in different places should be understood as both differentiated and hierarchical. Los Angeles, for example, may be seen as an important cultural hub or node for Iranians around the world, while other places in the diaspora may serve other functions. London, for example, while not at the forefront of cultural production like L.A., has nevertheless played an important role in the European context. As Sreberny (2000) notes, London is home to a number of famous newspapers. Among them is the famous Keyhan Weekly, one of the oldest and most famous diasporic newspapers catering to Iranian readers around the world (Graham and Khosravi 2002). During my fieldwork in London, I was informed by a Farsi language school, that many Farsi language teachers from Sweden are in fact trained in London where there are institutes devoted to the study of the Persian language. Sweden in its turn, however may be considered a strategic place for political activities and anti-regime movements. It is also home to the “The Exile Film Festival” which, according to Graham and Khosravi (2002) is very important to Iranian film makers living in diverse parts of the Iranian diaspora.
As the backdrop to all these transnational fields, Iran continues to be the main point of reference. It is perhaps somewhat expected that many first generation Iranians may wish to maintain ties to Iran. It is important to point however, that through these transnational diasporic fields, second generation Iranians have also been given the opportunity to remain connected to Iran. Some have made physical visits to Iran, while others have simply maintained close contact with their friends and relatives living in Iran as well as in other parts of the diaspora. Moreover, through involvement in Iranian-focused organizations, participation in online Farsi-language forms, and the consumption of transnational Iranian culture in the form of Persian music and media, many members of the second generation have been able to retain ties to Iran in new and innovative ways (Maghbouleh 2010). Of course the extent to which individuals wish to engage within diasporic fields depends on a variety of factors, and this is perhaps even more the case for members of the second generation. This is an issue that will be taken up again at later points in the dissertation.

Iran and its Diaspora

In the twentieth century, Iran went through a number of dramatic changes. It began the century decentralized with a strong ulema and a monarchy, and ended it with a modern state and a strict Islamic regime. In the process of change, issues around colonialism, nationalism, Marxism, and religion were discussed, debated, and experimented with. The outcome: a theocracy, overseen by one supreme leader, was disappointing for many. Those who belonged to Iran’s intellectual middle class, who had committed themselves to fighting for justice, and equality through the course of the revolution, did not see their vision materialize under the new regime. Instead, their freedoms were limited, and in some cases they were even persecuted for having different beliefs. This, combined with the social and economic difficulties Iran experienced during the Iran-Iraq war, led many Iranians to leave for the West.

As time has passed, Iranian emigrants have contributed to the formation of what is now a large and differentiated, but nevertheless highly connected diaspora. This does not mean, however, that they have cut their ties with Iran or with their counterparts living in various different parts of the world. On the contrary, many Iranians have simultaneously settled in the new places to which they have emigrated, while simultaneously retaining ties to other places where they have
social, economic, cultural or political connections. This will remain a central concern of the dissertation as I discuss the trajectories of those who moved from Iran to Sweden to Britain. Before discussing these individual experiences in more detail, however, I would first like to offer some more context, by comparing the Swedish and British welfare states.
Chapter 5
Comparing the Swedish and British Welfare States

Despite the growing significance of transnationalism in shaping many migrants’ lives, the nation state also continues to be very important for understanding migrant experiences, and I will therefore devote some time to discussing both the Swedish and British welfare states in this chapter. There are many similarities between Britain and Sweden. Both are constructed as “white” European nations with long histories. Both countries have been influential in their respective parts of Europe. Historically, however, the countries have had very different roles in global affairs, and related to this, different approaches to admitting and integrating migrants.

Many of the participants in this study told me that when they first left Iran they generally viewed the “West” as a homogenous entity, but later it became apparent to them that Europe was not an undifferentiated social space, and that nation states in Europe had different policies and practices for welcoming migrants. The differences between Sweden and Britain greatly affected the social and economic trajectories of these participants, as they moved from one political context to another.

This chapter begins with an overview of the migration histories of both countries. It then moves on to discuss how ethnic relations and multiculturalism are defined and addressed in the two contexts. Finally, the differing integration policies in the two countries are compared.

Two Migration Histories

Both Sweden and Britain experienced a large exodus of citizens in the first half of the twentieth century, and later became migrant receiving countries. In particular, labour shortages following the economic
boom after the Second World War spurred a new demand for migrant labour. The way the two countries went about admitting migrants differed significantly, however, leading to very different compositions of migrants in the two contexts. Moreover, the Swedish and British policies have continued to differ in a number of important ways since the 1960s, which is reflective of the differing political climates in the two welfare states.

**Sweden**

Until the 1930s, Sweden was predominantly an emigration country, with approximately 25% of its population moving to North America between 1860 and 1920 (Abiri 2000:12). After this large scale migration stopped, Sweden became a country of positive net-migration. From 1954 labour migrants could move freely across the Nordic region (Jonsson 2007:454). After the Second World War, migrants also came from other European countries to work as guest workers in Sweden’s industries which were, compared to other parts of Europe, relatively unaffected by the war (Runblom 1994:627). There were many economic opportunities for these migrants and those that came into the country were, like Swedes, fully employed. This slowly changed, however. Starting in 1967 workers coming from outside of the Nordic region had to apply for permits. Ultimately it was up to trade unions to decide who should be granted the right to work. Slowly the demand for foreign labour decreased, and in 1972 came to a complete stop after the Swedish trade unions passed a ban (Schierup 2006:199). As Ring notes, since then, “the recruitment of foreigners to the Swedish labour market has been of little significance.” (Ring 1995:162) Instead, Sweden’s migration policy came to focus solely on refugee migration.

The shift in labour policy greatly changed the way migrants were received. While the former policy had viewed migrants as workers, and workers as equal to citizens in most respects, the new policy did not include any expectations for migrants to work immediately upon their arrival to the country. The new policy was based on ideological principles, rather than on economic logic. This meant that no priority was given for example, to skilled migrants, and Sweden’s migration policy was very simplified and straightforward insofar as there were very few categories differentiating types of migrants. Almost all non-Nordic migrants entering the country were classified as refugees. Furthermore, applicants were handled on an individual basis, meaning that men and women were treated equally and, unlike in countries
such as Germany, for example, migrating spouses had the same access to employment and services as their partners (Sainsbury 2006).

The migrants that moved to Sweden in the 1980s were the beneficiaries of a generous refugee policy that was linked closely to Sweden’s wider welfare policies. In accordance with Sweden’s democratic welfare model, refugees (regardless of admission category) were generously received and, at least in terms of formal rights, were treated like the rest of the population (Sainsbury 2006: 238). Like Swedes they had access to healthcare, education and other benefits. Sweden’s approach toward foreign aid and refugee assistance was closely linked and refugee policy was, “based on humanitarian principles, comprehensiveness, generosity, internationalism and humanism…” (Abiri 2000:14) In the 1980s accepted applicants included those who were directly targeted by their own governments, as well as those who simply wished to escape the political realities of their country (de-facto refugees). This liberal approach to migration was not a problem for Sweden, however, given that the number of refugee applications in Sweden was, at this time, relatively low, and according to Abiri (2000), most applicants were successful until 1985. After 1985, however, the number of refugees was increasing significantly and there was growing discussion over how to deal with migration flows.

Finally, in the early 1990s, the Swedish government anticipated a migration “emergency”; there was a rising fear that Sweden would become overwhelmed with refugee applications following the fall of the Soviet Union. Indeed, with the break-up of Yugoslavia, “the number of asylum applicants rose from just over 27,000 in 1991 to 84,000 during 1992” (Abiri 2000: 19). While previously the government had granted asylum to most applicants who expressed the desire to leave their country for political reasons, it was at this point that the government toughened its policies and began to restrict entry to convention refugees or those with “strong protection needs” (Pred 1997; Abiri 2000). It also moved toward issuing temporary residence permits that would encourage repatriation, as opposed to offering all successful applicants permanent residence status irrespective of their intentions to return to their home country as it had done before.

Although Sweden continues to accept its share of refugees in accordance with EU quotas, it has shown a renewed interest in attracting labour migrants, and specifically skilled migrants to fill labour shortages in certain sectors. Because taxes in Sweden tend to be very high, some skilled migrants have even been enticed to the country by government endorsed tax discounts (Mahroum 2001). According to Swedish statistics, the country accepts approximately 100,000 new
migrants per year, including students and people exercising their right to freedom of movement within the EU.

Britain

During the early twentieth century many British people emigrated and became settlers abroad in North America, Australia and New Zealand. During the same period, many European migrants were also making their way to Britain. The first significant migrant groups to establish themselves in Britain were European. According to Panayi (2010:23), between 1800 and 1914, “about a million people crossed the Irish Sea to settle in Britain.” More Irish followed after the war, making the Irish one of the most significant migrant communities in Britain. European migration also included Jewish, Italian and French migrants, as well as (before the war) approximately 60,000 Germans (Panayi 2010).

After the Second World War, European migration to Britain continued, but new flows also started to come from Britain’s former colonies. Labour was needed to help facilitate Britain’s booming industries. Rather than implementing a formal labour scheme, however, the country drew on its commonwealth connections. There was a large influx of postcolonial migration, mostly from the Caribbean, South Asia, Hong Kong and Africa. Many of these migrants were anxious to work in the UK, but others moved as a result of the process of decolonization. Many former colonial subjects were displaced by the changing nature of postcolonial states. The break-up of India and Pakistan, for example, contributed to migrant flows, as did the expulsion of South Asians from several African nations. According to Panayi, by 2001, 8 percent of the population “identified themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic minority” (Panayi 2010:24). These migrants came at different time periods and for different reasons. When the USA stopped accepting migrants from Jamaica, for example, there was a huge influx of migrants from Jamaica to Britain in the early 1950s (Hickman 2005: 40). The largest groups to come to Britain, however, were South Asians. Hindu Gujaratis and Sikhs from India, Pakistani from Mipur and Bangladeshis from Sylhet and Chittagong were all well represented (Hickman 2005:41). These migrants were for the most part exercising their right to move to Britain. They held British citizenship, or were regarded as British subjects and “semi-refugees for whom Britain had taken responsibility in the international community as part of the arrangements of constitutional decolonization” (Goulbourne 1998:37).
Despite their connection to the British Empire, and their utility to the British labour market, like in Sweden the large numbers of immigrants entering the country during a short time period raised concern among the native born population. In the 1950s, anxiety over growing numbers of ethnic minorities in Britain led to the Notting Hill Riots and contributed to a Conservative win in government (Hickman 2005). Soon after, the government began to restrict the influx of migrants. In 1962 a Commonwealth Immigration Act was introduced, which aimed to reduce the immigration of commonwealth migrants in particular. Having the right to reside in Britain now required not only the possession of British citizenship, but also birth in Britain. People with the same citizenship were therefore treated differently according to two different sets of rules (Hickman 2005). This policy was not effective immediately however. Upon announcement that the policy would be implemented, the number of migrants increased even more as many people moved quickly to “beat the ban” (Goulbourne 1998:44). Furthermore, there was also a steady flow of family reunification migration that followed. This led the government to take further measures to restrict the flow of migrants. In the early 1980s, citizenship itself was restricted, and being born in the UK was no longer enough to access it. Secondly, in 1993 the government introduced the The Primary Purpose Rule. According to this law those migrating to Britain in order to be with their spouses had to prove that their marriage was not initiated just for the purpose of migration. This was difficult to prove, of course, which led to a huge decrease in the number of migrating spouses. The rule was later deemed impractical and was lifted in 1997.

In more recent years, there has been a move away from commonwealth migration and a new focus on maximizing European labour resources. Britain is highly dependent on internal EU migration with many migrants now coming from all over the continent, but especially Eastern Europe (Modood and Salt 2011). According to Favell (2008) London has become the city attracting the most European migrants since the 1990s. Many of these migrants are young, and look to London (often on a temporary basis) for employment as they work towards certain career goals, or they wait for the economies in their own countries to improve. Many migrants have moved to Britain from Southern and Eastern Europe in recent years, making Britain increasingly European, despite Britain’s reluctance to adopt the Euro and its tendency to be skeptical of the EU project (Favell 2008). Many of these (especially Western) European migrants go uncounted as they move freely across Britain’s borders and are seldom seen as
problematic, given their contributions to the British labour market and the temporary nature of their stays.

In addition to being open to EU mobility, Britain has introduced a number of schemes to attract highly skilled migrants from countries outside the EU. It should be noted that from a labour perspective, decreased flows of postcolonial migrants, the decline of many industries, and the rise of the service sector, has led to an increase in the demand for skilled workers in Britain. Initially permits were introduced to meet labour needs; with time, these programs were gradually liberalized, so that some workers (such as high level company transferees, or those working on foreign investment projects) were exempt from needing permits. (Boswell 2003) Some years later, however, it became apparent that this was not enough to meet Britain’s growing demand for highly skilled labour in particular, and that the labour policies should be less restrictive (Modood and Salt 2011). In the year 2000, for example, the government began to acknowledge labour shortages in certain fields such as ICT (Boswell 2003). It therefore became easier for ICT workers to get permits. Later, in 2002, The Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, was introduced. The program was “designed to attract scientists, doctors, business and finance professionals to the UK.” (Boswell 2003:38) These professionals were allowed to come first for 1 year which could then be extended by 3 more years, and then they became eligible for permanent residence.

While the new system has been successful at attracting skilled migrants, it has been argued that the changing criteria used to admit people to Britain has made it harder for less skilled third country nationals to enter (Ho 2011). That said, there have been some exceptions. Looser rules have been put in place for admitting low skilled workers to find employment in certain sectors such as the hotel and food industry. As Boswell notes, however, low skilled labour tends to be treated in a more temporary way than highly skilled labour (Boswell 2003). Students have also come to play a very important role in both the British migration program as well as the British economy. Universities compete to attract the best international students, who then may transition into the British labour market (Modood and Salt 2011). As Modood and Salt note, student mobility and corporate mobility “reinforce each other to create a powerful combination that will inevitably lead to a more mobile global labour market and a more cosmopolitan, internationally mobile elite.” (Modood and Salt 2011: 255). This, in turn they argue, may lead to ongoing demand for places at British universities since prospective students know they might have the chance to stay in Britain following their graduation.
The ease with which the British government was able to impose migration schemes (especially for skilled migrants) relates directly to the country’s employment situation. In 2000 the unemployment rate was only at five percent. According to Boswell, “Under these conditions, it was relatively uncontroversial to make the case for immigrants filling gaps in the labour market.” (Boswell 2003:39) Furthermore, there has rarely been opposition between political parties on the issue of immigration in Britain, and the public has long subscribed to the idea of “economically productive immigration” (Boswell 2003:41). Compared to countries like Sweden, since the 1960s, Britain has been very strict about admitting asylum seekers. Instead, in Britain the strategy has been to carefully distinguish between economically beneficial and unbeneficial migrants, and attempts have been made to keep those deemed unable to contribute out of the country.

Despite the fact that both governments and citizens in Britain tend to recognize the economic benefits of migration, there have been growing concerns over the number of migrants entering the country on an annual basis. According to national statistics, more than 500,000 migrants enter the UK annually.

Ethnic Relations in Comparative Perspective

A survey of the European literature on migration suggests that at present there is a widespread anti-migration movement across the European continent. A number of academic studies have raised attention to the emergence of widespread anti-immigrant sentiments since the 1990s, something that is often expressed through the growing support for political parties which actively oppose immigration (Geddes and Favell 1999; Brubaker 2001), or the reversal of policies that encourage multiculturalism or even simply tolerance of difference (Modood and Meer 2012). Other studies have drawn attention to the growing political significance of Islam, and how Muslim migrants have faced increased marginalization in a number of European countries where they are seen as incompatible with Western society and so-called Western values (Werbner 2000; Freedman 2007). Finally, a third group of scholars have debated the strengthening of “Fortress Europe” through the easing of mobility restrictions within the European Union while the entry rights of those from outside (so-called third country nationals) have simultaneously been restricted (Ballard 1996; Tesfahuney 1998; Schuster 2004).
While there are a number of possible explanations for what some might view as rising levels of xenophobia in Europe over the last decades, of particular relevance to the present discussion is the changing role of the welfare state. Some scholars have argued that one explanation for the decreasing popularity of migrants in Europe over the last two decades may be related to the challenges that welfare states increasingly face in trying to maintain their hegemonic status. In an increasingly global world, and no less, in a time of economic insecurity, individual European nation states have struggled to maintain their welfare programs and provide for their citizens. This has led, according to some scholars, to increased concerns over who should and should not have access to state resources. As Faist notes:

Welfare states are ‘closed systems’ in which unlimited immigration and open borders could threaten the level of social rights and depress the working conditions and wages enjoyed by the native population and settled immigrants. (Faist 1995:177)

Moreover, the strengthening power of the European Union in recent years, has led to new ways of defining culture and belonging that challenges the nation state. It would seem that the presence of migrants only exacerbates already existing fears that the nation state is being replaced by a new world order.

Despite the many similarities across European countries, however, the way that individual nation states are dealing with these issues reflects the enduring ability of national policies to shape the lives of those who live within their borders, including (and perhaps especially) the lives of recently arrived migrants. There are several differences across states in terms of both how migrants are received and perhaps more importantly, how issues around ethnic difference are addressed.

Sweden and Britain have very different approaches to addressing relations between migrants and non-migrants, or between so-called majority and minority groups. While Sweden has an official multicultural policy that supports the maintenance of cultural identities, it has been slow to acknowledge structural inequalities between different groups. Britain, in contrast, while not formally a multicultural country, prioritizes the concept of “cultural community” much more than Sweden does, but is simultaneously more attentive to racial and ethnic discrimination.
Sweden: Ambiguous Multiculturalism

As a philosophical idea, multiculturalism supports the idea of plurality, and the harmonious existence of different cultures living together in one space. As a political approach, it encourages (in ethnically plural states) the maintenance of separate cultural identities by providing political protection and often even financial support to groups that define themselves as “different” (Taylor 1992:36). In practice, there is more than one interpretation of the concept, and different ways of implementing it politically. A number of critical scholars have argued that Swedish multiculturalism is characterized by ambiguity and many contradictions (Ålund and Schierup 1991; Pred 2000; Sawyer 2002).

As Sweden’s migration history suggests, it has in many ways been very open to migrants and has welcomed them with a high level of formal rights, including cultural rights. On the other hand it is a country that has been reluctant to address issues of difference and to acknowledge discrimination. Given its claimed neutrality during the second world war and the fact that it maintained only a small number of insignificant colonies, Sweden has tried to deny its history of racism and instead to depict itself as a liberal welfare state, lacking the racist colonial baggage of other European countries. As several post-colonial scholars have noted, however, Sweden like other European nations, was engaged in furthering colonial racism until the early part of the twentieth century (Pred 2000; Sawyer 2002). Sweden’s involvement in the advancement of racial biology is well known. For a time, it was argued both inside Sweden and in other parts of Europe that the Swedes were a superior race. Stereotyped as tall, blond haired blue eyed beautiful people, they were even seen as superior to other whites. While these beliefs have long been denounced, the country’s history of racism is not acknowledged to any significant extent. Even many Swedes are unaware that their country was in fact involved in the slave trade in the 18th century (Lindqvist 2009). This has led some researchers to argue that Sweden is a nation in denial of racism, and has consciously tried to forget this aspect of its not so distant past (Hübinette and Andersson 2012). This, in its turn, has led to difficulties with acknowledging and accepting difference.

Until the post-war period, the migrants that came to Sweden were encouraged to take up Swedish cultural norms and values, and become full-fledged members of Swedish society. The growing presence of foreign guest workers by the late 1960s, mostly from southern European countries and Finland, eventually led Sweden to rethink its integration policy. Finnish migrants in particular lobbied for the right to retain aspects of their culture in Sweden. A policy introduced in
1975 therefore aimed for “equality between immigrants and Swedes, freedom of cultural choice for immigrants, and cooperation and solidarity between the native Swedish majority and various ethnic minorities.” (Ring 1995:159) This meant that migrants now had the right to study their first language in school, voluntary migrant associations received subsidies, and even migrants without permanent residence status had the right to participate in municipal elections (Ring 1995: 163).

As the idea of cultural rights developed, so did the Swedish policy towards migrants. By the mid-1970s, Sweden had declared itself a full-fledged multicultural society. Sweden was following the path of other countries such as Canada and Australia who had declared themselves officially multicultural in the 1970s. It nevertheless maintained the Swedish model, the idea of a strong society and a strong welfare state. The specific definition of multiculturalism adopted in Sweden, however, meant acknowledging “cultural” difference, but not eradicating problems like Islamaphobia, and other forms of racism. Instead, a multicultural model was used to perpetuate the concept of “cultural difference” often with problematic results, as many people were denied a sense of full social and cultural belonging to the nation.

Furthermore, despite the optimism around the idea of a multicultural Swedish society, in practice it was challenging to implement for a number of reasons. Sweden’s experience with diversity was limited. Unlike traditional “immigration countries” and nations like Britain that had extensive empires, Sweden had long lived with the myth of a homogeneous society in which most citizens traced their ancestors back to Sweden for several generations. Although in reality many people had links to other parts of Europe, there had been great efforts to promote a strong homogeneous identity in the first half of the twentieth century (Schierup 2006:198). There was, therefore, a strong emphasis on Swedish culture, identity and tradition that clashed with the idea of a multicultural society which embraced many different cultures and alternative ways of life. Secondly, the state had centralist tendencies. The country ran on one system, and the uniformity of its citizens was reinforced by the Swedish church and national education system (Runblom 1994:632-634). Given the nature of the system, then, it was hard to determine what the government’s role in encouraging diversity should be. It was therefore decided that issues of cultural equality should be managed just like everything else in Sweden: by the state. Multicultural programs, including the provision of first language classes in the school system and similar initiatives were mediated through state monitoring and funding.
Government regulation extended even to migrant organizations, which, even now, are designed to fit a very specific model. In order to receive government funding, migrant organizations must follow certain protocol: meetings must be conducted according to specific guidelines and membership must be handled according to specific rules. Migrant organizations have therefore been left to themselves to define their own projects and initiatives, but are not permitted to run according to their own models (Emami 2012). Following the Swedish model has many advantages. It forces organizations to run democratically, thereby reducing potential inequalities between members. At the same time, heavy government monitoring and restriction reduces the potential power of the migrant lobby and the utility of the corporatist aspect of the Swedish model.

During the guest worker migration phase, it was still relatively easy to assimilate migrants, as they came from Southern and Eastern European countries and their values were generally viewed as compatible to those of Swedes. In contrast to later waves of migrants from the Middle East and Africa who ignited Islamophobia and fear of cultural difference, most labour migrants were Christians and spoke European languages. The refugees that came later in the 1970s and especially the 1980s, however, came from a much wider range of places and were seen as more “different” in comparison to Swedes. As the number of migrants increased, and the distance from where they had come also increased, new measures were taken to ensure peoples’ integration into the wider Swedish society. The government decided that it was not in complete control of its migration policy, and could no longer manage the influx of migrants in the way that it had during the guest worker phase. This realization led to an acknowledgement that, from the perspective of the Swedish majority, the practices of some migrant groups were undesirable and were not consistent with “Swedish values” such as specific notions of gender and class equality. Cultural rights, as such, were therefore reduced to rather superficial aspects of cultural life, like language and customs, while deeper “values deemed deviant by majority cultural standards” were seen as a threat (Soininen 1999:691). Migration, thus, was now seen as a “social problem” (Schierup 2006:222). Redefined, “multiculturalism” now meant choosing for oneself how to identify and how to live, but group rights were secondary in terms of formal policy. By the 1990s Sweden had, in practice, moved away from a traditional multicultural model and returned to one of “civic integration” in which a common national identity with corresponding national values was promoted (Schierup 2006).
As postcolonial theorists in particular have been apt to point out, when the growing number of refugee applicants led to increasing public concern over whether or not migrants could be successfully integrated into Swedish society the focus was above all else on “cultural difference”. In particular, discussions around “cultural distance” began to dominate the media, and political debates about refugee migration. Those who appeared to be from Africa, Asia or the Middle East were therefore labeled as the “Other” and in some cases, were singled out as the specific groups responsible for threatening Swedish values and norms (Tesfahuney 1998; Alinoo 2004). As noted in chapter 2, this particular type of othering has been termed “cultural racism” by critical race theorists such as Stuart Hall (1996). While earlier forms of racism were based on notions of biological difference, cultural racism was based on the idea that people were, fundamentally and incurably, culturally different, and inferior. According to the values of the welfare state, everyone has the individual right to practice their own culture, but some cultures are seen as better than others (Norman 2004:215). The result has been that cultural difference has been acknowledged in Sweden, but in a hierarchical way with some cultures having more value than others, depending on their proximity to the Swedish norm. Because immigrants are not in this sense encouraged to promote their own ethnic and cultural identities, and yet they are also not accepted as Swedish, they have instead emerged as subordinate to the majority culture and its “prescribed normality” (Ålund and Schierup 1991:83).

Ironically, it would seem that the focus on gender and class equality in Sweden has negatively affected the acceptance of ethnic difference. If individual groups are given real cultural rights, this may be perceived as threatening to “the promotion of social and economic equality” (Soininen 1999:690). By acknowledging cultural difference on a deeper level, thus, all forms of difference may be called into view (Norman 2004). As Norman notes:

In effect, the claim of sameness denies the meaning and value of difference, for in the end there should be none. This points to an aspect of commonly uttered Swedish notions of equality and individualism which tend to transform cultural difference into a lack or an anomaly… (Norman 2004:220).

One could argue that this has made it very difficult for migrants to have their unique backgrounds acknowledged in Swedish society and, moreover, to be accepted as part of the Swedish mainstream.

Sweden regards itself as a nation of tolerance and its refugee policy was meant to represent its commitment to humanitarian values and
solidarity with the developing world. Paradoxically, however, it would seem that Sweden’s political culture and its view of itself as a humanitarian and good-willed nation has hampered its ability to acknowledge problems of discrimination and material inequality between migrants and Swedes, between migrant groups, and between people more generally. The denial of structural inequality in Sweden, scholars like Pred have therefore argued, has led to latent forms of racism and structural discrimination which (whether acknowledged or not) have tended to permeate Swedish institutions and everyday relations (Pred 2000).

Britain: Emphasizing “Race Relations”

In a European context, Britain is often recognized for being particularly open to migration and particularly successful in terms of integrating diverse cultural groups. Compared to many other countries in Europe, Britain has strived to promote diversity, introduce anti-discrimination legislation and encourage the employment of all of its citizens, regardless of their background. That said, compared to traditional immigrant receiving countries like the United States, British society has been criticized for its imperial background as well as the ongoing salience of class divisions, both of which have affected how migrants are included and excluded from British society.

It has been argued that multiculturalism has long been an important concept in Britain (even before it was formally recognized) due to the incorporation of different territories such as Scotland, Wales and Ireland under the flag of the United Kingdom. The idea that membership was based on residence, rather than ethnicity, served as the founding ideology of British multiculturalism (Goulbourne 1998). This has worked in parallel with Britain’s “philosophy of minimalist state intervention, individual freedom and limited expectations about the duties and shared characteristics of citizens.” (Boswell 2003:77) In short, it could be said that Britain has long characterized itself as a liberal nation, open to diversity and difference.

Of course Britain’s colonial experience has also played a role in cultivating this self-image. British colonies in Africa, Asia, North America and Australia had an impact on British society and culture, as the British came into contact with people in distant places across the globe. Furthermore, the relative success in spreading the English language through the colonial project, for example, contributed to a cosmopolitan outlook in Britain. The English language, for example, was not attributed to those living in Britain only, but rather it was
seen as a common language shared by all those belonging to the British Empire. Britain was the central place in a large commonwealth union which, despite the existence of racism and British hegemony, nevertheless (and perhaps somewhat controversially) succeeded to incorporate different cultural and national communities under the title of the British crown. Unlike some other European countries like Sweden which received migrants from countries with which there was little prior connection, those moving to Britain were therefore often familiar with aspects of British society and culture. As Goulbourne argues, “This was so with respect to institutions, schooling, and the broad outlines of British history, literature, sports, architecture and so forth.” (Goulbourne 1998:40)

Britain, like most other European nations has, nevertheless, historically identified itself as a white country despite cultural differences within. Furthermore, as Hickman views it, ethnic minorities are by definition “British subjects but their classification as members of minorities securely locates them in a subordinate position in the hierarchy of ‘Britishness’.” (Hickman 2005:22). Although the UK has long had connections to other places, this does not mean that all British people necessarily understand or take an interest in the cultural and historical backgrounds of people moving to Britain. Instead, migrants are subject to the way they were (and continue to be) depicted in the British media and discourse; as colonial subjects, they are often positioned as subordinate to the white majority. Although most non-white immigrants are considered “ethnic minorities” in the British context, it has been argued that relations between the British majority and specific ethnic groups are based on colonial relations that involve invented racial categories, relative rankings and reference to stereotypical characteristics (Alleyne 2002:612-613). One could therefore argue that unlike in Sweden, where migrants are subject to discrimination on the basis of their status as asylum seekers or non-Europeans, in Britain the situation is more nuanced. Different groups are incorporated differently depending on where they are from, and what kind of class background they are associated with (Goulbourne 1998:49). This has led some migrants to be associated with the upper classes of British society, while others have been relegated to the lower classes.

Although Britain does not have an official multicultural program or policy, as Modood and Salt explain it, “this is a term used to characterise the British approach to integration and contrast it with that of some of its EU partners, such as France and Germany.” (Modood and Salt 2011:263) Indeed, since the 1960s Britain has embraced what
could be considered a multicultural approach to governance, with “toleration and celebration of difference” set as its main tenants (Goulbourne 1998:67). Britain has, for example, introduced the concept of multiculturalism into many of its mainstream institutions (Erel 2009). Even without an official multicultural program, by the 1980s, Britain had even begun to teach multicultural values in schools. Furthermore, state subsidization for schools of all denominations (not just Christian and Jewish schools as had previously been the case) was granted (Boswell 2003:78). Furthermore, Britain unlike most other European countries, has a history of black feminism and, a race relations paradigm that allowed “for structural discrimination to be acknowledged, and racism to be named.” (Erel 2009:28) As early as the 1960s, for example, legislation was introduced to combat racial discrimination in Britain, putting it at the forefront of anti-racist policy in a European context. In general, one could argue that Britain has been characterized as a country acutely aware of “race relations” and has actively strategized on how to prevent discrimination and conflict between groups.

Despite the efforts to eradicate racism little has been done to break down the concept of cultural difference, or to redefine the meaning of culture in a way that would reflect the mixed loyalties and complex identities of its diverse citizenry. While in Sweden it is the lack of policy against (race and ethnicity based) structural inequality that is a problem, in Britain it is precisely the current policy towards managing ethnicity and culture that is problematic. The colonial history of the migrants that moved to Britain, as well as the way migrants have been treated in the British context, has led to a strong focus on “ethnic communities”. In order to control and govern ethnic groups, the idea of “community” was introduced. As Alleyne views it:

The liberal consensus among the British political and intellectual mainstream grasped eagerly the notion of ethnic community- expanded to include Afro-Caribbeans – as it furnished a ready-made category to fill a slot in their idea of an emergent ‘multicultural’ Britain. (Alleyne 2002:614)

This approach to managing diversity has been questioned by some researchers who critique the way that migrant categories are perceived as bounded, thereby prohibiting their full integration and participation in British society (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992).

The allure of communal organizing is not only forced upon migrants, however, it is also frequently embraced by them. Despite efforts by intellectuals such as Stuart Hall to deconstruct the concept of
“ethnic community” since the 1970s, instead tactical essentialism emerged during that period as an important way by which migrant communities have fought oppression by the mainstream (Alleyne 2002:614). While in the 1960s people had organized around racial categories to fight oppression, the 1970s saw the rise of identity politics based on ethnicity. As a result, unlike in Sweden where the power of the migrant lobby is limited, in Britain, there has been a tendency to treat migrants as collectivities, and for migrants to resist their oppression as collectivities (Modood and Salt 2011). While migrants have faced discrimination in Britain, therefore, they have also used the political space afforded by “difference” to fight back for their interests.

Britain’s corporatist structure perhaps partly explains why the issue of religion has played an important role in debates around migration and ethnic relations in Britain. While giving people the space and the political means to practice their “culture” is generally accepted, the granting of political rights to religious communities is more contentious. In particular, Islam, with its association with fundamentalism, and transnational movements, is often depicted as a particular threat to the nation state (Soysal 1997). There has therefore been a great deal of discussion and debate around how to address Muslim rights in the public realm (Weller 2006). While discourses alluding to the threat of Islam have been common in Sweden as well, the country’s relative focus on civic integration has meant that there is no comparative discussion around how Swedish Muslims should or should not be able to influence public policy.

The emphasis placed on group rights in Britain has had some important practical implications. Unlike in Sweden where access to services and benefits is still handled on an individual level, in Britain, in contrast, migrant organizations play an important role in serving recently arrived migrants. While the government manages initial reception, and migrants are given access to health care and other social services through the state, their settlement needs are largely managed by associations catering to specific migrant communities. This has led to the proliferation of ethnic-based advocacy groups in Britain’s major cities, which are expected to meet the needs of their members. This raises a number of questions concerning how communities are defined, and to what extent they can actually provide the services that people require. Importantly, the funding for these organizations mostly comes from public sources (Wahlbeck 1998) and especially from local councils who are dependent on securing funding from other levels of government (White 2002). The competition for fund-
ing (which is often in short supply) means that power struggles ensue over what constitutes a community and what services they should be providing to their members. Community based organizations may provide members with all sorts of practical help that generalized refugee aid organizations might not be able to do (such as providing translation services and offering advice in specific languages) (Wahlbeck 1998). That said, pressure to get funding also results in organizations operating in ways that please the government. Often this involves organizing on the basis of a fixed “ethnic” identity. Furthermore, these organizations inevitably provide better for some of their members than they do for others. Organizations may, for example, overlook diversity based on gender, age, class, marital status, and education. Representing groups as unified voices thereby “denies and marginalises the role of dissent, contradiction and disagreement within communities.” (White 2002:77). Furthermore, the specific needs of refugees are often overlooked in this process insofar as they are simply regarded as “ethnic minorities” rather than as people in a specific political situation (Wahlbeck 1998).

While Britain has perhaps had an easier time than some European countries in adapting to diversity within its borders, it has nevertheless faced some difficulties in defining what it means to be British following the Second World War. The loss of the British Empire, as well as the loss of control over Scotland and Wales has proven problematic to British identity (Modood and Salt 2011). The ongoing focus on minority issues, furthermore, has meant that “some white English people feel aggrieved by the perceived special attention — symbolic and material — they feel the minorities are receiving.” (Modood and Salt 2011:261). Some measures have been taken to deal with this loss. While the anglo saxon tradition was based on granting citizenship according to birth (jus soli), for example, in 1971 Britain joined other European countries and changed its policy to citizenship according to decent (jus sanguinis) (Goulbourne 1998:54). This was done partly to retain strong ties to those who were of British origin, but who left Britain for the colonies of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Such attempts to retain a sense of British identity have also been accompanied by the rise of extreme right political movements (such as the British National Party), racially motivated riots in some urban centres, and declarations of the failure of “multiculturalism”.

In this sense, there are in fact many parallels between Britain and Sweden. There are however, some crucial differences between the two countries in terms of how issues around racism are actually dis-
cussed and addressed. Modood and Salt have argued that given the incorporation of people from very different backgrounds into British society, these migrants are seen as subordinate “ethnic minorities” rather than “immigrants”. This is a crucial difference when compared to Sweden, because it means that it is possible for British born racial minorities to no longer be regarded as foreigners and to, in this sense, belong to the nation (Modood and Salt 2011:258). Although it is hard to generalize, one could speculate that the enduring distinction made between “immigrants” and “Swedes” in Swedish immigration debates and in popular discourse, has meant that so far subsequent generations of migrants find it difficult to develop a full claim to national belonging.

Integration Patterns and Policies

Sweden and Britain are both welfare states that provide their residents with free basic education, free or largely subsidized healthcare and a range of other services. Beyond this, however, the states differ significantly in their approach to welfare. If we refer to Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare regimes, we can classify Sweden as the social democratic type, while Britain may be classified as the liberal type. Such regimes differ in terms of the role of the market, their approach to redistribution, and perhaps most importantly, the way they implement social policy. According to Esping-Andersen, the social democratic state is “ideally at least, characterized as integrative, comprehensive, and societal in scope” and in contrast to the liberal approach “recognizes no boundaries for social policy.” (Esping-Andersen 1985:230). The liberal model in contrast, stresses “private market provision” and promotes “self-reliant individualism” (Esping-Andersen 1985:233). It is therefore not surprising that there are significant differences in the way the two different welfare regime types approach the integration of migrants.

As noted in chapter 2, the concept of “integration” is highly contested. For the purpose of this discussion, however, I will use it to refer to the extent to which migrants are able to secure adequate employment, obtain affordable housing as well as carry out family life.

In Sweden, the integration of migrants is managed within the wider welfare system. Given that most migration to Sweden is based on the admission of refugees, “immigrant integration” programs are typically synonymous with refugee reception programs. Public and academic discourse supports the belief that successful integration is
important to building a healthy society, and frequently public policy is seen as the solution to addressing perceived integration challenges. Recent migrants are generally provided with support in the form of finding housing, language training and employment, all through standardized government programs.

Unlike in Sweden where integration policy is closely linked to Sweden’s wider welfare state policies, Britain does not have a specific integration program. As Boswell (2003) puts it, “the UK has had relatively low expectations of what integration should involve.” (Boswell 2003:77) As several scholars have noted, concern has been raised over Britain’s ability to integrate certain segments of the migrant population, and especially disadvantaged Muslim youth. Furthermore, the so-called ghettoization and unemployment of certain groups have been at the forefront of public concern in recent years (Boswell 2003; Modood 2007; Erel 2009). Despite this, even now little has been done to actually change the British approach to migrant integration. With the exception of the Home Secretary’s decision to introduce language and citizenship classes (Boswell 2003:91) and a citizenship test that is meant to test a person’s knowledge of life in Britain (Modood and Meer 2012), immigration controls rather than the implementation of widespread integration programs have been used to abate public concern (Modood and Salt 2011:264).

It is important to point out, however, that in the British context there is a clear distinction between refugees and other immigrants. For the majority of migrants coming independently to Britain by way of a commonwealth passport, family reunification programs, or EU mobility schemes, the expectation is that they will independently secure their own housing, employment and, if necessary, benefits. Asylum seekers and refugees, in contrast, receive some state funding and housing assistance, although in recent years the amount of support given to these groups has been significantly reduced (Steward 2005). Community associations, therefore, as noted earlier, have been the primary means of state-sponsored support for both refugees and immigrants navigating the British system.

The two different approaches to welfare in Sweden and Britain have implications for the way that different aspects of integration are approached. In what follows, I will therefore compare and contrast how meeting the employment, housing and family needs of migrants are managed in the two contexts.
Employment and Economic Integration

There are many different factors that may potentially influence the economic integration, and more specifically, the employment of migrants. At the macro level, the presence (or not) of labour market opportunities is significant. The time period in which migrants move, and the specific places where they move, may therefore play an important role in influencing their employment opportunities. Furthermore, the skills and education that migrants bring with them to destination countries may be more or less transferable to the new context, depending on what kind of opportunities are available. As Rooth and Ekberg point out (2006), refugees do not have the same capacity as, for example, labour migrants to choose destinations in relation to job opportunities or, from the perspective of human capital theory, in order to find the best match for their skills. Finally, the presence or absence of barriers to entering the labour market may play a role. Discrimination on the part of employers or professional associations, as well as other structural barriers, may greatly influence the ability of migrants to enter employment. The relative importance of these different factors in specific space-time contexts is of course debated, and depends in part on the theoretical orientation of those researching the issue. I will take these different points of view into consideration as I explore the case of migrant employment in both Sweden and Britain.

Sweden

As Dingku-Kyrklund (2005) points out, Sweden was in an exceptional economic situation following the Second World War. Because it had remained neutral during the war, its economy was booming; it did not have to rebuild its industries like many other countries on the continent. This created a huge demand for foreign labour (Dingku-Kyrklund 2005). Sweden’s luck continued into the 1980s, where it managed to repel the negative effects of the 1980s economic downturn very well. In fact it kept its high standard of nearly full employment until the early 1990s (Schierup 2006: 202). This created a very favorable economic environment for migrants who were interested in contributing to the Swedish economy.

When recession did hit Sweden in the early 1990s, however, it marked a shift in the welfare state. The ideal of full employment and active labour market participation could no longer be upheld. Sweden’s open unemployment rate went from 2.9 to 8.2 percent between 1991 and 1993 (Hjerm 2002). This raised new doubts over whether or not the public sector should have as much control over the economy
as it traditionally had. Restructuring began, and a trend toward neo-
liberalism gave new importance to the private sector. Migrants were
now seen as a “flexible resource for regional economic growth”
(Schierup 2006:223). Instead of using government run job search
programs, they were now encouraged to start their own businesses
and to take their own initiatives in order to enter the labour market.
While doing its best to maintain its social programs, Sweden joined
many other welfare states in a slow move toward economic liberaliza-
tion.

As the economy worsened, having a job was not something that
one could take for granted. To use Schierup’s words, “The contrast
between the heyday of the Swedish model in the 1970s and the inten-
sified exclusion that has materialized since the early 1990s is striking.”
(Schierup 2006:206) While the overall unemployment rate for Swedes
was high, it went up to more than 45% for some migrant categories
(Pred 1997:394). While at first it was thought that unemployment
may be a temporary problem, something that would be overcome as
migrants secured the necessary capital they needed to enter the Swe-
dish labour force, it later became apparent that Sweden was turning
into a segregated society based on ethnicity. Migrants soon came to
be regarded by some as an “underclass”, dependent on welfare bene-
fits.

Although the Swedish government normally prefers an active poli-
cy approach, little was done by the government in this case to im-
prove migrants’ access to the labour market. According to Nordin,
this was because the government feared that this would solicit a nega-
tive response from the public during an already politically insecure
time (Nordin 2005:132). So while in the 1960s and 1970s migrants
were warmly received because they could be provided with the same
resources and the same benefits as every other Swede, there was a
growing belief that economic equality was no longer a feasible goal.
Instead, the funding given to refugees was cut and the unemployment
of settled migrants emerged as a very serious issue (Sainsbury 2006).

The economic situation in Sweden has improved since the 1990s,
but employment has continued to be a major issue for many immi-
grants. Although employment levels for the foreign born population
have gone up considerably since the recession, they are still signifi-
cantly below the Swedish average. According to statistics Sweden
(AKU), in 2012 the unemployment rate for the Swedish born popula-
tion was 6% while the comparable figure for foreign-born persons
living in Sweden was 16.1%.
Popular discourses and sometimes even public rhetoric have promoted the idea that because Swedish migration programs are based on assisting refugees, the people entering Sweden have low level qualifications and therefore do not arrive with the capital they need to contribute to the economy. As noted earlier, post-colonial researchers have countered these claims, however, by arguing that in Sweden there is a tendency to blame migrants themselves, usually on the basis of their cultural background or their own lack of initiative to enter the labour market (Mulinari and Neergaard 2005). Attention, thus, has been diverted from issues of racism, and instead placed on perceived integration problems that mostly depend on the responsibility of migrants rather than society in general. This has made it difficult to address issues of discrimination in the labour market, which, according not only to post-colonial theorists but also economists is something in need of serious attention in the Swedish context (Rooth and Ekberg 2006).

Some recent studies have nevertheless been able to highlight the issue of discrimination. Some have shown that, in general, immigrants in Sweden have fewer employment opportunities relative to their education than native born Swedes (Rosholm, Scott and Husted 2006). Moreover, although the necessity of cultural capital to perform many types of work is itself questionable and should be problematized, some studies have been able to highlight how barriers to employment exist even when cultural capital and/or Sweden-specific experience is controlled for (Ålund and Schierup 1991; Knocke 2000; Rydgren 2004). Further evidence of the disadvantaged position of migrants in the labour market is their concentration in fields of work that natives do not want to be engaged in, or the fact that many have been forced to start businesses of their own in order to counteract the difficulties of getting into the labour market (Khosravi 1999).

It would appear that structural inequalities are severe in Sweden. While human capital issues may play a role in influencing the employment success of some refugees, as the above studies demonstrate, this does not explain the whole story. There are many highly educated refugees who have skills that are in demand in Sweden, who still face unemployment. Despite the extensive academic evidence and even widespread recognition in Swedish society that there is discrimination in the labour market, the problem continues to persist. The more subtle forms of discrimination such as the common preference for hiring so-called “ethnic Swedes”, as well as the continued emphasis many employers place on a narrowly defined concept of cultural capital, goes largely unaddressed. In this sense there is an ongoing denial
of the problem. Moreover, by drawing on Bauder (2001, 2003) who has used Bourdieu’s concept of capital and social reproduction to address the issue of labour market discrimination, it would seem that these are strategies that are consciously or subconsciously used by society to marginalize migrants and prevent them from becoming competition for native born people.

A final factor affecting the employment of migrants in Sweden relates to additional structural factors, and more specifically the role of labour unions in regulating employment and wages in Sweden. The Swedish labour market is characterized by very strong unions (Mulinari and Neergaard 2005; Alivin and Sverke 2000). Since corporatist bargaining has traditionally been based on class issues, rather than on issues of racial or ethnic discrimination, it has been difficult for migrants to negotiate their labour rights. According to Soininen (1999), there is “a coincidence of low levels of labour force participation and high unemployment with an absence of immigrants in the political process.” Mulinari and Neergaard (2005:58) similarly point out that while there has not been an explicit racist movement within the trade unions, the unions have nevertheless benefited from structural discrimination in the labour market itself, and have done little to eradicate it.

**Britain**

Britain, like Sweden and many continental European countries, did not implement large-scale migration programs to meet growing demands for labour in the postwar period. Instead, the country had only a few specific programs attracting certain types of labour such as seasonal agricultural workers (Boswell 2003). Instead, Britain relied mostly on migration from its colonies. These migrants filled labour shortages in specific industries that were booming following the Second World War (Robinson and Valeny 2005). The integration and especially the employment experiences of this group are, perhaps not surprisingly, therefore highly differentiated.

As Robinson and Valeny (2005) point out, the postcolonial migrants that came to the UK were not a reserve labour force, they were people with the right to stay in Britain. As a result, these people had to “adjust to changing national and local economic circumstances and chart their own responses to these.” (Robinson and Valeny 2005: 425). While some initially seized opportunities in Manchester and Leicester, for example, these cities were later affected by industrial decline. Those migrants who have been able to find a niche for themselves in the new global economy have, however, been able to find
success. Internal migration to more prosperous cities, as well as the capacity of these migrants to enter self-employment may be seen as initiatives affecting the relative success of some immigrant groups (Robinson and Valeny 2005).

One of the primary findings in the literature on migration and social mobility in Britain is that while certain ethnic groups have performed well in British society, others have not. Those with African Asians and Chinese backgrounds have done well, as have Indian male migrants. Migrants with Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Caribbean backgrounds, however, have done less well (Modood and Salt 2011:8-9). While this may reflect the specific class and educational backgrounds of these groups, this is not the whole story. Some migrant groups seem to have been able to use British education to overcome their difficulties in the labour market while others have not. While Indian migrants, for example, have been very successful by way of acquiring higher education, other groups such as the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have not been (Platt 2005). Furthermore, as Khattab et al. (2011) have argued, Muslims in general seem to remain in a disadvantaged position in the labour market over time. This is an interesting finding and one that, given the disproportionate levels of discrimination directed towards Muslims in the British context, raises the question of structural inequality in the British labour market.

Heath and McMahon have shown that while some groups have managed to succeed quite well in the labour market, as well as to ensure intergenerational mobility, they are still vulnerable to unemployment. As they put it, “Black, Indian, and Pakistani men have much higher unemployment rates than British-born whites with similar education and experience.” (Heath and McMahon 2005:412) It would therefore seem that in Britain, like in Sweden, first generation migrants have indeed experienced penalization in a number of ways. Like in Sweden, there is evidence pointing to the difficulty that some migrants have experienced in transferring foreign credentials and/or non-British work experience to the British context. Furthermore, like in Sweden, even when these human capital factors are controlled for, employers still seem to show discriminating tendencies, especially within professional and managerial occupations (Clark and Drinkwater 2007:47).

It is very difficult to compare the position of migrants in the Swedish and British labour markets given the incomparability of data. One might hypothesize, however, that despite evidence of discrimination in the British labour market, the situation is less severe. My limited analysis would suggest that there is potentially more space in the
British labour market for upward mobility, although as Platt (2005) reminds us, this mobility is not equally available to everyone. In general, compared to Sweden it would seem that the incorporation of migrants into the British economy is highly nuanced, and several scholars have argued that peoples’ specific backgrounds can lead them to very different outcomes in the labour market (Modood 1997; Khattab et al. 2011). The way that migrants enter Britain, the ethnic group that they are associated with and also their religious affiliation can play an important role in determining what opportunities they will have. As Hickman (2005) notes, in Britain there is no specific “underclass correlated with ethnicity/race” but Britain “has produced a hierarchical society which is underpinned by disparities of social class, cross-cut by ethno-racial cleavages in which religion continues to play a significant part.” (Hickman 2005:46) This is different from Sweden where all migrants from non-European backgrounds appear to be at a significant disadvantage. Furthermore, unlike in Sweden, there is on the whole more attention to issues of racial and ethnic inequality. While Britain does not have affirmative action programs of the kind introduced in the United States, there has nevertheless been a demonstrated willingness to counter discrimination in the labour market. There is growing awareness of inequality in Britain, and some attempts have been made to overcome these inequalities. In 2000, for example, a Race Relations (Amendment) Act was introduced which “imposed a statutory requirement on public sector bodies to promote racial equality” (Clark and Drinkwater 2007:51). Initiatives of this kind are yet to be seen in Sweden.

Housing and Segregation

The housing situation of migrants is a point of concern in both Sweden and Britain. How to provide migrants (and especially refugees) with adequate housing has been an important issue. Perhaps even more significant than this, however, are the debates that have ensued over so-called “parallel lives”. In both contexts, the extent to which migrants choose or are forced to live in segregated areas has been debated (Molina 1997; Phillips 2006a; Phillips 2006b). While both housing provision and segregation have been hot topics in Sweden and Britain, however, the way these issues have been understood, as well as discussions over the extent to which the government should or should not intervene to address them, has differed in a number of important ways.
Sweden

Given the Swedish government’s long term interest in social planning and its ideological commitment to refugee aid, it is perhaps not very surprising that a policy was devised not to stop the flow of migration altogether, but rather to control its spatial impact. In 1985 the Swedish government practiced a policy of refugee dispersal called the “Sweden-wide” or “All of Sweden” strategy, which was meant to spread refugee communities out throughout the country. Migrants were settled in municipalities with available housing and were required to stay there for 18 months if they wished to receive social support during the first phase of their time in Sweden; most migrants took part in the program, and accepted to be placed (Åslund and Rooth 2007). The policy was meant to prevent migrant groups from congregating in Sweden’s largest cities, which would, it was hoped, encourage integration and help spread the burden of refugee reception (Pred 1997). The program was not sustainable and partly collapsed in 1994 not only on economic, but also ideological grounds. Now those migrants who are able to provide their own housing are not obliged to participate in the program; in recent years some migrants still go through the program but the majority of migrants have chosen to find their own solutions (Andersson et al. 2010).

Although the dispersal policy made Sweden as a whole much more multicultural in the short-term, in the long term it encouraged large-scale secondary migration of migrant communities across municipality borders, and especially to the three major cities of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö (Andersson 1998). After the 18 month placement period, many migrants moved to reunite with friends and family members, or simply to seek the opportunities afforded by larger urban centers. Migrants, in general, had few options for housing in Sweden’s highly regulated housing market, and most had to turn to the new housing establishments built at the periphery of the city limits, where housing was both available and affordable. These areas were highly populated by migrants, and while this housing may be considered of a fairly high standard compared to housing at the low end in many other European countries, it was often perceived as undesirable by ethnic Swedes.

Most of the housing in these areas was built during the 1960s and early 1970s as part of a project to dramatically increase the number of dwellings in Sweden in only a short period of time. As Pred notes, these buildings were “characterized by an architectural high-modernism that was stark, harsh and alienating” and by the 1980s, it had already lost much of its appeal (Pred 1997:396). As a result, much
of this housing was used as a form of reserve accommodation; when people really needed a place to live, they moved there, but otherwise these units were deemed unattractive (Andersson 1998). Since housing was affordable there, however, they came to be areas associated with people facing social problems, and namely those facing low incomes, employment difficulties, and migrants (Schierup 2006:210). This led these areas to become not only undesirable, but also stigmatized by the wider Swedish society. As Molina (1997) notes, there is nothing problematic with segregation unto itself, but the association of these areas with problems has led them to be seen as threatening and troublesome.

Britain

Indeed, in Britain like in Sweden, refugees have been subject to some carefully defined integration programs. Since they were allocated government funds, those seeking asylum were also subject to a dispersal policy (Phillimore and Goodson 2006). And, like in Sweden, many refugees who received the right to stay eventually moved to Britain’s urban centers, and particularly London (Phillips 2006a). However, as already noted, while the housing of refugees is a concern in Britain, it does not compare to the Swedish case. The relatively smaller number of refugees admitted to Britain has meant that the problems of refugees have been less noticeable. Moreover, finding adequate housing is an issue that affects people more generally in Britain. In particular, competition for council flats has played an important role in influencing the housing situation for the lower income members of British society. The cost of living in London in particular is very high, and not everybody can secure access to desirable housing. The rental market in London and England’s South East in particular is not affordable for many people, and many people therefore end up living in poor conditions (Phillips 2006a). Furthermore, the government standards concerning the quality of housing are lower in Britain than in Sweden.

The patterns of ethnic segregation are also different between the two contexts. In general, it could be said that ethnic segregation is more visible in Britain’s biggest cities. While segregation is a predominantly suburban phenomenon in Sweden, this is not necessarily the case in Britain. In London, for example, different neighbourhoods, many of which are in the city center, are home to specific ethnic groups. They are therefore more visible than similar concentrations in the Swedish context. Furthermore, while segregation is typically viewed by critical scholars in Sweden as a product of the relatively
low incomes and/or poor access to housing experienced by the majority of migrants to Sweden (Molina 1997), things are not as straightforward in Britain. There is often a correlation among income, employment type, ethnicity, and residential location, but like in the case of the British labour market, the British housing market appears to be nuanced with some migrants occupying high end neighborhoods and high end jobs, while other migrant groups are relegated to the lower end of both the employment and housing scale.

As Keith (2005) points out, in London one can see distinctive settlement patterns based on both ethnicity and employment type, with Sikhs from India living and working near Heathrow airport, for example, and Bengalis both living and running restaurants and shops in London’s East End. According to Keith, this may be traced back to colonial relations, with certain areas and certain groups being associated with certain colonial roles to play. For this reason, as Keith views it, some neighbourhoods may even be associated with certain communities and the cultural experiences and/or specific services they can provide. This is very different from the Swedish context, where segregated neighbourhoods do not serve any purpose for those living outside and are therefore typically avoided. It could be argued that while the Swedish approach has led to stigmatization and isolation, the British approach has led to the spatial commodification of cultural groups. As Keith argues:

> Discussions of boutique multiculture need to be placed within the histories of such epidermal commodification. The exotic has always had a price. Perhaps only the valorisation of cosmopolitan multiculture has changed, not its constitutive role in the labour process. (Keith 2005:119)

While Keith makes an important point concerning the spatial organization and exoticization of postcolonial migrants in British society, migrants who do not fall into these postcolonial relations also show certain patterns of settlement. While there is a great deal of council housing in the eastern part of Greater London, for example, in the West housing is more often ownership based (White 1998). The city is therefore divided according to interrelated income and housing tenure factors, with higher incomes being associated with home ownership. Furthermore, as White (1998) notes, developed world migrants such as Australians and French who are not considered ethnic minorities or postcolonial migrants have also shown a tendency to concentrate in certain areas. According to White, the reasons for this include the desire to access certain types of social networks and specific amenities. Family status and specific housing tenure needs are
also important, and do not relate only to income or class, but may also reflect specific groups’ purpose for migration to Britain, and the amount of time they intend to stay (White 1998). There are more council flats in the Eastern part of Greater London and more owner-occupied housing in Western London and, as White points out, there is often a correlation between high income and home ownership (White 1998). Some migrants, especially those working only temporarily on a contract basis, however, may be interested in temporary rental housing despite their high incomes. All of these factors affect the segregation of ethnic groups in the housing market.

As noted earlier, segregation unto itself does not have to be seen as problematic, although in the Swedish context it generally is viewed negatively (Molina 1997). In Britain in contrast, segregation becomes an issue primarily when it involves certain groups. While the segregation of British Jews, for example, who tend to be economically well off, may be perceived positively, the segregation of less advantaged ethnic groups is more often seen as problematic, particularly if it is viewed as politically threatened. Again, the widespread concern over the so-called voluntary “self-segregation” of Muslims in Britain provides a particularly salient example (Phillips 2006b).

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the gap between poor and rich neighbourhoods is even larger in the British case than in the Swedish context. Nowhere is this more the case than in London. As Butler and Robson note, parts of London may be regarded as the richest areas in the EU but the city is also home to three of the nation’s most “deprived boroughs”. (Butler and Robson 2003:13) This also affects the overall housing experiences of migrants who must, in the British setting, navigate a more nuanced but also much more unequal residential context.

Gender, Family and Equality in the Welfare State

Esping-Andersen (2009) highlights the differing family policies adopted by welfare states. The Scandinavian countries are unique in a European context, in their commitment to public support for family life. While the British government also provides families with certain benefits, consistent with its comparatively liberal approach, these are less extensive than in Sweden. The different polices adopted by the two contexts affect family life in a number of direct ways. But importantly, family policy also intersects with other welfare policies, thereby affecting other aspects of migrant integration. Of particular relevance to this study, is the relationship among labour policy, family
policy and gender equality. While in Sweden women’s employment is highly encouraged by the state, the same cannot be said for Britain. This in turn, has greatly impacted what opportunities are available to both migrant families and individual migrants, and the different ways in which they have navigated the welfare state in the two contexts.

**Sweden**

Swedish family policy is based on a dual earner model. Married partners are subject to individual taxation. Furthermore, if a couple has children, women’s employment is encouraged since both parents are expected to share the time allocated for parental leave (Duvander 2008). If the father cannot take leave for at least a few months, those months of leave are lost altogether. In order to further facilitate a balance between childrearing and labour market participation, daycare is readily available to children from the age of one and parents are only charged a small fee based on their income (Duvander 2008). In short, it could be argued that the Swedish system is designed to encourage a balance between family and work life, and everyone, on an individual level, is looked after by the state. It is perhaps for this reason that Sweden is commonly referred to as “Folkhemmet”, “the people’s home” which for Lindqvist (2009:45), implies that the state “cares for all of its citizens equally, from the cradle to the grave, as a parent cares for his or her children.”

The focus on gender equality in Sweden has had practical implications for some migrant families. Sweden has adopted a generous family reunification policy, but when it comes to securing benefits, migrants are still largely treated as individuals. This gives individuals a sense of economic security that is not necessarily available in many other countries, including Britain. Furthermore, the employment of migrant women in Sweden is higher than in other contexts. As Kesler (2006) pointed out in his comparative study of migrant employment in Britain, Germany and Sweden, while origin employment gaps are higher in Sweden, the employment of immigrant women is encouraged in Sweden much more than in the other two countries. As he notes:

> Immigrant women in Sweden work at much higher rates than their immigrant counterparts elsewhere, even though they work at rates far lower than the extremely high rates of Swedish-born women. (Kesler 2006:762)

While both men and women may, as already noted, face severe difficulties entering the labour market, women are nevertheless encouraged to participate in a way that they are not in other contexts. Wom-
en’s employment, in this sense, becomes a much more important matter than in other countries including Britain, where it could be argued that a male breadwinner model still tends to dominate migration policy and family policy more generally (Land 2010). The Swedish system may be considered more positive for women in this respect, insofar as it disrupts rather than reinforces what are commonly understood to be “traditional” gender relations in most contexts.

Despite the Swedish government’s commitment to gender equality and its potentially positive implications for women, it is nevertheless important to retain a critical perspective. Some scholars have analyzed the extent to which gender equality policies have actually changed the way family life is lived in Sweden. Jenny Ahlberg (2008) for example, has noted the enduring significance of traditional gender roles in Sweden, despite the country’s women friendly policies. Furthermore, while the ability to sustain high levels of female employment in the labour market has long been applauded, Swedish society is not as equalitarian as one might like to think. The reality is that Sweden has a highly gender-segregated labour market (Schierup 1991; Charles 2003). This is due to women’s tendency to be employed in the public sector which also means that many women work part-time, earning lower incomes than men.

It could be argued that the enduring but subtle gender inequality in Sweden has two important implications for migrants. The first is that migrant men and women are still subject to certain opportunities and limitations depending on their gender. Secondly, as postcolonial scholars point out, because of the difficulties migrants in Sweden face in terms of cultural racism and cultural stereotyping, their gender may in fact play an important role in how they are perceived and treated. Constructed in opposition to the Swedish norm of gender equality, migrant men are often depicted as dominant, while migrant women are typically viewed as passive and submissive (Khosravi 2009). The experience of migrating to Sweden, thus, may lead migrants to experience a mix of new opportunities as well as new challenges as they negotiate their intersectional position at both the societal and the household level.

**Britain**

As already noted, compared to Sweden, the British policies are based on a much more conservative conceptualization of family life, and fewer challenges have been posed to policies that favour the male breadwinner model. Furthermore, as Harriss and Shaw (2010) point out, migrant families in Britain are expected to abide by both family
laws and migration laws that are based very much on traditional conceptions of the nuclear family. Among other things, such polices expect that households will share income amongst all of their members. This has greatly affected Britain’s migration policy. As noted, by Harriss and Shaw note:

Since the 1988 Immigration Act, immigration law has stipulated that a spouse from a country like Pakistan only has the right to enter the UK if the sponsor (i.e. the British spouse) has adequate income and accommodation to support their overseas spouse without recourse to public funds. In an endeavor to prove their financial health and protect the immigration prospects of their spouses, many British Pakistanis are forced to survive without welfare benefits for six months. (Harriss and Shaw 2010:127)

Such policies not only stress families financially, they also tend to make assumptions about how families function in the British context, overlooking, for example, the role of extended family households, or the particular circumstances faced by individuals within the nuclear family unit.

The way that families are entitled to benefits after they settle in Britain also differs significantly from the Swedish context. Unlike in Sweden, where the amount of benefits given to families is generous, and all individuals are entitled to these benefits in an equal way, the same cannot be said for Britain. On the contrary, migrants must often prove their eligibility for certain benefits, and actively seek out social assistance.

In sum, it could be said that Britain lacks the general family support available to those with children in Sweden (Korpi 2000:147) as well as many of the Swedish policies meant to further gender equality both in the labour market and in the home. This means that migrants to Britain do not have the same opportunities to earn dual-incomes and acquire other types of family benefits in Britain, and nor do they have as many opportunities to challenge traditional gender roles.

Given that gender equality is not a strong policy priority in Britain, migrants may not face the same kind of generalized gendered othering as they do in Sweden. From a postcolonial perspective, however, Keith (2005) has pointed out that migrants from specific destinations may be subject to gendered constructions based on stereotypes of what it means to be a man or a woman coming from a certain cultural background. This has been particularly problematic in Britain, given the lack of state support for eradicating gender inequality. As a result, one could argue that Britain’s family policies and its approach to gen-
der equality shares some resemblance to Sweden’s policy towards ethnic and racial relations: little is done to address the problem.

Situating Onward Migrants in Sweden and Britain

In this chapter, I have focused on the context of the nation state, and have highlighted some of the major differences and similarities between Sweden and Britain in terms of the way the two countries admit and integrate migrants. While both Britain and Sweden are welfare states, interested in securing migrant labour and helping migrants to adapt to their societies, the two countries have approached this in different ways. While Sweden has focused on refugee migration and until recently done little to control the number of refugees entering the country, Britain has had the opposite approach, dissuading refugees, attracting skilled migrants and being very strict about entry rights.

Furthermore, while Sweden’s migration policy has tended to focus on the goal of “equality” in terms of gender and class, the British system has allowed for significant inequalities in both of these domains. Britain has, however, tackled “race relations” directly, while Sweden, in its turn, has faced major difficulties in dealing with issues around race and ethnicity, and moves to eradicate racism have often taken second place to gender and class-based movements. These dissimilarities in how difference is addressed in Sweden and Britain have, I have argued, greatly affected migrant experiences with integration, and in particular in terms of employment, housing and family life.

For the onward migrants in this study, these political differences would greatly shape their experiences in the two contexts, and even their desire to live in one place or another. In the chapter that follows, I will take the contextualization of the onward migration process one step further. This time, however, the focus will be specifically on the settlement experiences of diasporic Iranians in Sweden and Britain.
Chapter 6
Settling in Europe: The Iranian Diaspora in Sweden and Britain

Brah (1996) argues that every diaspora has its own unique history. The institutional frameworks and specific policies maintained by Britain and Sweden have shaped the way Iranians settled in and experienced these two places. In this chapter I would therefore like to build on some of the issues raised in Chapter 5, by focusing specifically on the differing settlement experiences of Iranians in Sweden and Britain.

This chapter integrates a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including statistics, research findings generated through interviews with Iranian-focused organizations, observations made and informal discussions conducted at Iranian-focused events throughout the course of fieldwork, as well as interviews with individual onward migrants.

Although this chapter frames the experiences of Iranians in the two contexts in a general way, it is meant to establish a background for understanding the experiences of Iranians moving from Sweden to London in particular. The chapter therefore begins by providing a detailed overview of the general experiences shared by many of the Iranians that moved to Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s. It then goes on to discuss aspects of the British diasporic context that might be of significance to Iranians moving from Sweden to London in particular. Finally, the chapter explores some of the general reasons why Iranians have chosen to move from Sweden to London. This will serve as an introduction to the next chapters, which will look at the experiences and narratives of individual onward migrants in more detail.
The Settlement Experience in Sweden

The Iranians that came to Sweden in the 1980s and early 1990s were treated according to Swedish welfare policies that emphasized the individual over the community, which meant that all matters related to the reception of migrants was handled by governments rather than NGOs or employers (Runblom 1994). There was a government-run system in place to receive immigrants, and assist them in their early process of settlement. This system was focused on securing migrants with housing, a basic allowance for survival, and access to language training.

Most Iranians that arrived as asylum seekers in the late 1980s and early 1990s were sent to refugee camps where they lived alongside other Iranian families and waited to have their applications processed (Eyrumlu 1997). It was not uncommon to spend up to a year in such camps (Pred 1997). Of course not all asylum applicants who were living in the camps were given the right to stay. Due to Sweden’s increasingly stringent policies on who was entitled to asylum, many Iranians that arrived in Sweden after 1985 were subsequently sent back. Families and friends were often abruptly separated when some persons were told they must return to Iran. According to the participants in this study, the separation from friends and family combined with what they described as shocking and horrifying news reports coming in from Iran, constituted the most emotional and difficult of their early experiences in Sweden. Many also faced severe economic hardship following their emigration from Iran; in some cases they had lost everything they had (jobs, businesses, properties) through the aftermath of the revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the process of emigration. It was a time of uncertainty for many who were unsure if they would someday return to Iran either as a result of deportation or voluntary repatriation, or whether they would spend the rest of their lives in Sweden.

Life in the camps was, however, of a very high standard. Iranians living in refugee camps in the 1980s and 1990s had access to a great deal of amenities and services. As noted in the previous chapter, during this period there was a high level of support for refugee reception programs, something that began to change in the 1990s. Refugee camps in Sweden today are therefore very different from the ones experienced by the majority of Iranians, who entered the country twenty to thirty years ago. Furthermore, many of the Iranians I spoke to remember their time spent in the camps as socially satisfying—many experienced a strong sense of community and felt a great deal of optimism about the future. The initial reception experience made
many Iranians feel like they were very welcome in Sweden. They were generally met at the airport by a kind person who wanted to put them at ease (Eyrumlu 1997). Some Baha’is even received a special letter of welcome from the King of Sweden inviting them to escape the discrimination they were experiencing in their own country, and to join Swedish society. The warm reception they received was very important on an emotional level for those who no longer felt welcome in their home country.

After spending a period of time in a refugee camp, processed applicants were then usually sent (in accordance with the dispersal policy) to live in various communities in Sweden where they started their “new life”. Many therefore found themselves living in remote parts of Sweden, including small towns in the north of the country which were very different from the (for the most part) urban environments they had left behind in Iran. The dispersal policy was challenging for Iranians in a number of ways. Most importantly, it separated the Iranian community, leaving many people feeling isolated and without access to a social network. This was in stark contrast to the experience of living in the camps alongside other people who shared their situation and to whom they could turn to for support and advice. Furthermore, life in small town Sweden was, as many of the participants described it, “very Swedish” and therefore there was a significant amount of pressure to adapt to their new environment. Motivated to integrate, many Iranians nevertheless used the opportunity to learn the Swedish language quickly, and adapt to their new situation (Eyrumlu 1997). As one leader of an Iranian organization based in northern Sweden viewed it,

> The integration process has been better or more optimal [in the northern part of Sweden] than in the bigger cities… Because when they form their own community, when they only speak Farsi with other people, they haven’t the same possibility to develop and learn the Swedish language.

Many of the individual research participants also experienced life in small towns positively, as it gave them a chance to make local friends and they generally felt that they did not experience as much racism and segregation in small towns as their counterparts had in bigger urban centers. Many people I spoke with had fond memories of taking part in the local traditions where they lived, and felt as though they had been included as one of the residents.

As noted in the previous chapter, according to the rules of the dispersal policy, refugees were expected to live where they were placed for 18 months. After this time, it was then possible to relocate.
to a destination of one’s choice. As the dispersal policy had hoped for (Andersson 1998) after time had passed, many Iranians felt quite settled in the places where they had been sent, and chose not to move again. Even today, when compared with other non-western migrants, Iranians show less of a tendency toward residential concentration, suggesting a relatively high level of spatial integration (Kelly 2011). Despite this, there were those who, after 18 months (or even before if they could support themselves) decided to move. They took the opportunity to reunite with friends and family in different parts of the country or in some cases simply moved to a bigger city, with Stockholm and Göteborg being the most popular. According to recent statistical data, 36% of Iranians in Sweden live in the Stockholm area, and 17% live in the Göteborg area. There are also large concentrations of Iranians in the medium-sized centers of Malmö, Uppsala, Linköping, Lund and Borås (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012a).

Figure 10. Distribution of Iranian Born Population in Sweden (2008)

Compared to many other migrant communities, Iranians are also less concentrated on the city level. Figure 11 illustrates the relatively high level of dispersion of Iranian-born people across the Stockholm area. That said, according to the leader of the Iranian Federation in Stockholm, the neighbourhoods in Stockholm that are most popular among Iranians are Sundbyberg, Akalla, Husby, Kista and Tensta, which is also confirmed by the map below. The larger dots on the
map illustrate these relatively large concentrations of Iranians in the northern part of the city.

Figure 11. Distribution of Iranian Born Population (Greater Stockholm Area, 2008)

All of these areas are suburban, and are densely populated with migrants from around the world. While popular discourses tend to depict migrant dense areas as the outcome of migrant preferences to settle among kin and friends, this appears to be only partly the case. Many of the Iranians involved in this study said that they had moved to urban centers like Stockholm and Göteborg in order to be closer to other Iranians, but only a few had actively chosen to live in segregated suburban areas. Instead many found that there were few affordable housing options in more central areas and, faced with limited alternatives, they were forced to look for housing in the suburbs.

According to the organization leaders and individual Iranians I spoke with, there were many advantages to moving to bigger urban centers. Indeed compared to the small towns, these areas did provide the opportunity to build stronger networks with other diasporic Iranians, which also meant having access to more Iranian-focused cultural opportunities. Iranian networks gave many people the comfort, support and information they lacked in smaller towns. Furthermore, the job market was much bigger and gave some Iranians more oppor-
opportunities for employment in their specific field of interest or training. The segregated nature of the suburban areas that many Iranians moved to, however, was generally perceived negatively. Since many of the neighbourhoods that Iranians found themselves in were stigmatized by the mainstream, those living there found themselves suddenly in opposition with Swedes. While this might have been a familiar experience for the people who lived in these areas from the time of their migration, for those that moved there from smaller towns, it was generally a new experience. Those migrants who had experienced life in smaller towns also noticed a distinct difference in the quality of education and other available services in these suburban centers compared to where they had lived before; the services in suburban areas were underfunded and appeared to be of a much lower quality than what had been available in Sweden’s smaller towns. For many Iranians, therefore, the Swedish experience included a move away from a small town where they felt like members of their communities, to an urban milieu where they experienced both a better social and in some cases work life, but became more aware of their (stigmatized) migrant status.

Finding their Place: Positionality and the Representation of Iranian Migrants

Iranians faced a number of social challenges upon moving to Sweden. Feelings of social isolation and loneliness were not uncommon as these migrants tried to accept that many of the values and “ways of being” they had cherished in Iran were of no value in Sweden. Many of the Iranians I met through fieldwork highlighted how it had taken them much longer than expected to make friends with Swedes. When they did build friendships with locals, they found that these new friends (understandably) could not relate to what they had been through in Iran. Thus, for the first generation in particular, the experience of processing what had happened to them, and transitioning to Swedish life was largely managed on the level of the nuclear family and (where possible) within the context of wider Iranian networks.

Despite feeling misunderstood by the wider Swedish society, however, many Iranian migrants have made a point of emphasizing their similarities to Swedes, and their ability to fit into Swedish society with ease. Most of the organization leaders interviewed through the course of this research generally viewed their community as open and cosmopolitan, and able to adapt quickly to the challenges that they faced. As already emphasized, the Iranians that moved to Sweden belonged
to a highly selective group belonging to the intellectual and educated classes of Iranian society. On average, they were more educated than their counterparts in Iran, and they were also on average more educated than Swedes (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012a). They were also largely secular, and therefore viewed themselves as sharing a similar mindset to many Swedes in this respect. As noted by Graham and Khosravi (1997:117) “Iranians are clearly similar to Swedes in terms of such things as education, previous occupation, and degree of travel abroad.” In short it could be said that Iranians saw themselves as belonging to a diasporic community in the traditional sense, as a community of forced exiles. They had not, like some migrants, moved to Sweden to benefit from the Swedish system. One leader even compared Iranians in a favourable light to the guest workers who had come before them:

Iranians didn’t come here to work. Before the revolution there were just 100 Iranians here as students. No Iranians came here to work. Because Iran is a rich land. Iranians don’t need to come here and make some money and go. It was not like that.

Despite their positive self-image, the majority of diasporic Iranians I spoke with nevertheless felt that Iranians were not viewed positively by Swedish society. This is a common theme in the academic literature discussing the experience of Iranians in Sweden as well. As Eyrumlu (1997) points out, not only did many Iranians feel misunderstood by the Swedish majority, but also that their perceived similarity to Swedes and their attributes as skilled middle class migrants often went unrecognized. As migrants, and especially as refugees, they felt as though they would never become true “insiders” in Swedish society. Many Iranians therefore felt that despite their potential contribution to Swedish society, they were reduced to their refugee status which (as noted in the previous chapter) by the 1990s, connoted notions of “difference” rather than similarity. As people from the Middle East, many Iranians believed that Swedes viewed them as people who lacked the capacity or the interest to adapt to the Swedish way of life.

Images of the Iran-Iraq War on Swedish television, as well as stereotypes that depicted people from the Middle East as backward, poor, war-torn and undemocratic made it difficult for Iranians to find the acknowledgment they were looking for in Sweden. Perhaps most significant, however, was the impact of Islamaphobia. Negative discourses around religion and Islam in particular added to the “difference” attributed to Iranian migrants, despite their largely secular orientation. According to Khosravi, this anti-Islamic sentiment is not so
much an anti-religious movement, but rather, a movement that has emerged out of discourses that situate Muslims as “culturally” or “racially” problematic. As he argues:

(When Muslims are represented as having characteristics that are immutable, innate, inevitable in their heritability and, importantly, essentially inferior, their religious identity becomes ‘racialised’. (Khosravi 2012:68)

Postcolonial scholars have highlighted the gendered ways by which Iranians were singled out as “Muslim Other”. When a number of high profile “honour killings” took place in the late 1990s within the Kurdish community, these scholars argue, many Iranians again felt like their presence was being questioned on the grounds of “cultural difference” and more specifically, their seemingly differing conceptions of equality between men and women. As Alinia (2004:179) has viewed it, “These crimes deepened the already existing conceptions of immigrant men from outside Europe as violent, and of immigrant women as victims and subjugated by men’s control.” It did not help that many Iranians moved to Sweden around the time that the film Not without My Daughter was released. This film featured the story of an American woman escaping from her Muslim extremist husband, who tried to kidnap her daughter in order to keep both the mother and daughter in Iran. As Khosravi (2009) notes, some Iranians felt that they could therefore only be seen in two ways: either as ruthless patriarchs unworthy of respect, or as nice guys who should be considered exceptions, different from the norm (Khosravi 2009). Moreover, as in other places (Afshar, Aitken and Franks 2005), limited distinctions were made between Iranian men and other “Muslim” men, and many therefore did not feel that their unique cultural attributes were understood by Swedish society. Instead, many Iranian men have felt invisible, unwanted, and undesired in the Swedish context (Khosravi 2009). Farahani (2012) similarly found in her study on Iranian diasporic masculinity, that many men show a tendency to deny the experience of discrimination, instead emphasizing their adaptability to the western context. Despite this, however, her findings suggest that many men nevertheless suffer not only from negative stereotyping, but also a loss of status and individuality in diasporic contexts.

In their turn, Farahani (2007) notes, women have also been subject to orientalizing discourses based on stereotyped understandings of the role of women in Iranian society. Generally speaking, many Iranian women have felt that they are depicted as passive victims, lacking the supposed capacity that Swedish women have to stand up for their
rights and fight for equality, or to define and take control over their own sexuality. Since September 11, 2001, it would seem that the level of discrimination towards Muslims has been growing, and this has also affected the way that Iranian women are perceived. While the hijab (veil), for example, has not been outlawed in Sweden as it has been in several other European countries; it has nevertheless sparked growing controversy. This is something that came up in my empirical findings as well. As one young leader living in a northern community in Sweden put it:

I can feel it, when I’m in our own community… the growing Muslim hate is just developing more and more… You see it, more and more people looking negatively on women wearing hijab.

The growing resentment towards Muslims has led to virulent anti-Muslim rhetoric from certain political parties, as well as more interpersonal attacks targeting those, like Iranians, simply associated with Muslim countries. This has been highly offensive to many Iranians, especially those who chose to leave Iran in response to growing Islamic radicalism; according to the findings of this study, many of these Iranians had in fact admired Sweden for its ability to sustain a secular society.

Whether motivated by Islamaphobia, anti-refugee sentiments, or racism more generally, many of the Iranians I spoke with at different points in the fieldwork noted that they had personally experienced random acts of violence committed by racist gangs or individuals. Like many other refugees who were attacked during the early 1990s, some were beaten up, others chased, while some watched as stones came through their windows. When “laser man”, John Ausonius shot several people of immigrant origin between 1991 and 1992, two Iranians were included. This increased fear of physical violence within the Iranian community and, according to the individuals I spoke with, led many to feel unsafe in public spaces.

In order to overcome their feelings of “Otherness”, Iranians have adopted a number of strategies. Given the pressure to assimilate in the 1990s, measures were taken by some to make themselves more like Swedes. According to the academic literature, these strategies have included changing their names (Bursell 2012; Khosravi 2012), and stressing their pre-Islamic heritage (Graham and Khosravi 1997). These are strategies that have, according to some, achieved their desired effects over time. As one young Stockholm-based man with a strong interest in Iranian history and culture told me:
Swedish people want immigrants to adapt to Swedish life... and in that way I think they appreciate Iranians more. I don’t like it; I’d rather see that people appreciate each other the way they are but the fact is that’s not the way it is.

Such attempts on the part of the Iranian community have clearly failed to challenge deeper structural inequalities faced by Iranians (and other non-western migrants) in Sweden. Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in the domain of employment.

The Issue of Employment

As outlined in the previous chapter, many non-Western migrants have faced challenges to securing meaningful employment in Sweden, and Iranians are no exception. Despite the exceptionally high levels of education achieved by many Iranian migrants, on average they have performed poorly in the labour market. According to Rooth and Ekberg (2006), there are two ways to measure labour market performance. One considers employment levels, while the other considers occupational position and mobility (Rooth and Ekberg 2006). In both cases, the Iranian population in Sweden has shown very disappointing results. Statistics (2006) suggest that the employment rate of individuals born in Iran is only 54.4%. This is an improvement over 1990, when it was only 49.3% and in 1995 during Sweden’s recession, when it was only 30% (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012b). The overall level of improvement has, however, been lower than expected given the long period of time Iranians have spent in the country. Furthermore, studies comparing the occupation that migrants held both prior to and following their migration from Iran to Sweden suggest that for the most part, Iranians have not been able to maintain their occupational status through migration (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997).

As figure 12 shows, Iranians are among the most highly educated of all of Sweden’s major migrant groups. When considering the number of years that migrants have spent studying at the tertiary level Iranians are tied only with Poles. 25% have three years or more of tertiary education, and more than 15% have less than 3 years, but have nevertheless spent time studying at the tertiary level. Despite this, they have one of the lowest employment rates.
The fieldwork interviews with Iranian leaders highlighted unemployment (and underemployment) as one of the most pressing issues facing the community (Kelly 2011). As noted in the previous chapter, there are many different explanations for the low employment rate of migrants in Sweden. Many of the Iranian leaders that I spoke with cited discrimination on the labour market, and the difficulty of transferring skills from Iran to Sweden as the primary barriers facing Iranians in particular.

Regardless of the specific reasons for their situation, after spending more than a decade in Sweden, many Iranians have begun to consider innovative ways to overcome some of the labour market challenges they face. According to the academic literature, these include continuing to re-educate themselves and develop their educational profile until gaining a competitive advantage and being attractive to employers (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012b), starting businesses to avoid the limitations of conventional hiring practices and workplace environments (Ahmadi 2012; Khosravi 1999), choosing to have children while being unemployed (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012b), and finally, onward migration (Kelly 2012). These are strategies that draw on the resources and the perspectives of middle class people who occupied a certain social position in Iran. Similar strategies have been less readily adopted by marginalized migrant communities who did not originate from a middle class context, and
were therefore more likely to accept their relegation to the lower end of the labour hierarchy (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012b).

Despite the strategies employed by many unemployed and underemployed Iranians in Sweden, it is perhaps important to point out that while some Iranian migrants have been successful in their attempts to overcome the challenges of the labour market, many others have been unsuccessful and have either decided to accept unemployment benefits instead of working at jobs that they consider beneath their level of expertise (Eyrumlu 1997). Others have reluctantly accepted jobs below their level of education, at least in the short-term, while hoping to secure higher level employment in the future. Such occupations typically include working in pizzerias or as taxi drivers. Interestingly according to Swedish statistics (2006) Iranians show a very low propensity for working in manufacturing. This is likely due to their white-collar urban backgrounds which may have limited their exposure to this sector of employment.

Educational attainment and economic independence are values that are highly connected to the middle class backgrounds from which most Iranians in Sweden have come; unemployment and underemployment have therefore been difficult for these people to accept. As Hosseini-Kaladjahi (1997) points out, negative experiences in the labour market are not just about monetary income, but are also about social status. According to my empirical findings, the Swedish discourse which depicts migrants as passive recipients of Sweden’s generous welfare policies did not apply to the majority of this migrant group who saw themselves as highly skilled workers, anxious to contribute to the economy.

According to previous studies, the new educational and employment horizons that Iranians encountered upon moving to Sweden were experienced very differently by men and women (Darvishpour 1999; Farahani 2007; Farahani 2012). Men often suffered more from unemployment and, compared to their position in Iran, faced a higher level of status degradation. As a result, many felt a huge loss of identity. For women, in contrast, Sweden presented social and employment opportunities that had not been available to them in Iran (Darvishpour 1999). Although many women were already highly educated in Iran, because of Sweden’s generous provision of free tertiary education as well as family policies that promoted women’s involvement in society, they could become even more educated and develop their skills further in the Swedish context. Furthermore, since many Iranian men could not secure adequate work in Sweden, many women who had not worked in Iran were encouraged by their families to enter the
labour market. This gave many women a sense of independence that they had lacked in Iran (Darvishpour 1999). Furthermore, unlike many men, women showed a tendency to take jobs beneath their level of education, and to slowly work their way into careers in Swedish society. According to Darvishpour, this has meant that while “women’s dependence on men has decreased dramatically, men’s dependence on women has increased.” (Darvishpour 1999:25) These changes within the economic structure of the family are often used as part of an explanation for the considerably high divorce rates among Iranians in the diaspora (Graham and Khosravi 1997; Darvishpour 1999). Due to the high divorce rate among Iranians there are now many female-headed households with children, and many men who live alone without family which has only exacerbated the general lack of well-being among Iranian men (Ghazinour, Richter and Eisemann 2004).

Internal Relations

Despite the divisions within the Iranian community, periodically cultural events and festivals bring hundreds and sometimes even thousands of Iranians together in the urban centers of Sweden. It is not uncommon for Iranian performers, poets and writers to visit from other parts of the Iranian diaspora, for example, and their performances always draw a large crowd (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012a). Furthermore, Iranian-focused festivals and events such as Eldfest, Melagan, Yalda, Caharsanba-sur, and Nowruz are of important significance to many Iranians in Sweden. In particular the Persian New Year festivities, which are pre-Islamic in origin, bring together many Iranians from different sub-groups, often in Sweden’s public parks and squares. This has given diasporic Iranians in Sweden the opportunity to come together as a united group and to share aspects of Iranian culture with the Swedish public. Such performances of culture and identity seem to be taking on more, rather than less importance with time, as Iranians have slowly built up the resources and the support to mobilize their cause (Kelly 2011).

Formal Organizations

After counting the inventories of Iranian associations on homepages of the Iranian Federation in Iran (Iranska Riksförbundet i Sverige) and the Federation of Iranian Refugees in Sweden (Iranska Flyktingars Riksförbund i Sverige) Hassan Hosseini-Kaladjahi and
Kelly (2012) have estimated that there are approximately 125-130 Iranian-focused organizations throughout Sweden, and most are based in Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö and Uppsala (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012a). According to the more qualitative findings of a study I conducted on Iranian associations in Sweden (Kelly 2011), these organizations aim to meet the social, cultural and political needs of their members. As I have noted, these organizations did not develop immediately following Iranian migration to Sweden. This was for a number of reasons. Because Iranians were spread out all over the country during their first years in Sweden, they did not necessarily have the opportunity to organize. Furthermore, they did not have an adequate knowledge of how things worked, or of the Swedish language, to be able to set up and run societies in the Swedish context. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they were shocked and burdened by what had happened to Iran. It took time for them to be able to accept that they would probably not have the opportunity to return; it was only at this point that they began to establish Iranian-focused organizations.

When they started to develop their associations nearly a decade after their arrival, diasporic Iranians did so largely along political lines. According to Emami (2003), political parties that were not allowed to exist in Iran, thrived in the Swedish context. As noted in the previous chapter, however, all migrant-focused organizations had to meet the criteria of the Swedish authorities when starting and running an association. Organizations were meant to serve the goals of both maintaining Iranian culture while simultaneously encouraging integration into Swedish society (Emami 2012). As a result, many Iranian societies were set up as “cultural” associations, despite their political activities. This was not true for all associations, however. Some were created purely for social or for philanthropic reasons (Kelly 2011). These associations encouraged bonding between Iranians in the diaspora, and/or made it possible for Iranians to keep their ties to Iran through charitable works (i.e. making donations to Iranian societies, raising awareness of social issues in Iran) without being overtly political.

Naturally, with time, the need for Iranian-focused organizations has changed and in some cases diminished. According to the leaders I interviewed for this study, many organizations have closed or changed their focus as members became less politically and/or culturally engaged. The growing acceptance that a return to Iran may not be possible changed the way Iranians related to Iran, as well as the Swedish society in which they were now immersed (Kelly 2011).
While the organizations that were initially established by Iranians in Sweden were largely set up by first generation Iranians who naturally placed a higher degree of importance on events in Iran, many organization leaders informed me of a growing tendency for second generation Iranians to return to their parents’ organizations in recent years. While younger Iranians raised in the diaspora have been generally more concerned about life in Sweden and less concerned about events in Iran, the Green Revolution which is largely a youth movement transcending former divisions has, I was told by some organization leaders, appealed to many young Iranians and made them want to get involved (Kelly 2011).

Politics and Relations with Iran
As already discussed in chapter 4, Iranians in Sweden come primarily from leftist backgrounds. Many were politically active during the revolution and in many cases also for a period of time afterwards. Despite this, there has been a growing observation among scholars of a trend towards de-politicization, or even a move toward more right-wing politics in recent years (Hajighasemi 2012). This has created more divisions within the community. While some diasporic Iranians have become increasingly right-wing in their political preferences and have become generally more open to connecting with Iran, others have kept a hard anti-political stance. As my fieldwork with Iranian-focused organizations in Sweden revealed, there are some leaders who think it is important to continue fighting against the regime in Iran, while others are much more concerned with improving the situation of Iranians in Swedish society.

On the whole, however, there has been a growing realization that things in Iran are not going to change quickly, and that only so much can be done to change the regime from afar. In the past there was a strong movement against those that chose to travel back and forth between Sweden and Iran since travel to Iran meant supporting the regime. There were even protests at Stockholm Arlanda airport on the day that Tehran Air flew direct from Stockholm to Tehran, giving the Iranian community a very radical image in the eyes of both the Iranian authorities, as well as Iranians living in other parts of the diaspora. Recently, however, these social restrictions have been loosening, and more Iranians have found it possible or even attractive to return to Iran periodically for pleasure but also for work or business. This has been partly made possible by the Iranian government’s increasing openness toward its diaspora, something reflected in, for
example, the government’s growing tolerance of dual citizenship (Graham and Khosravi 1997).

Sweden as Home?

I have tried to discuss how the Iranians that moved to Sweden faced a number of challenges and opportunities. Migration affected their material circumstances, their social life, their identity, and their self-image. Moving to Sweden gave many Iranians the security that they needed, and they were met with great opportunities in terms of education and other welfare benefits. Women in particular benefitted from a society that was, at least in terms of policy and discourse, more committed to promoting women’s rights than the Iranian regime had been. Despite these benefits, however, many Iranians struggled in Sweden and felt that they could not fully achieve what they had hoped to. Their middle class lives in Iran had given them certain dreams and expectations for their future, which they were anxious to fulfill. At the core of the problem was a feeling that they did not belong to Swedish society. As Graham and Khosravi (1997) put it, many Iranians feel that “They occupy ‘space’ in Sweden this way, but cannot inhabit it in a unselfconscious way; it is not a ‘place’ where they feel at home.” The sacrifices involved in settling in and becoming a part of Swedish society were high for many Iranians. Most Iranians that moved to Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s stayed there and tried to make the most of the situation. There were others, however, whose complex life trajectories led to other parts of the Iranian diaspora. Indeed, many chose to move to Britain, and particularly to London, which provided a very different diasporic context.

The Settlement Experience in Britain

As noted in chapter 4, Britain attracted Iranian migrants in subsequent waves: first as students, and later as refugees of various types. It is perhaps because of the history of Iranian migration to Britain that Iranians here are, like in Sweden, quite geographically dispersed. Today Iranians can be found all over Britain, and indeed all over the city of London. As the map below based on census data from 2011 illustrates, more than half of Britain’s Iranian population is based in London.
The spatial distribution of Iranians in Britain is indicative of the lack of a concentrated Iranian community (Sreberny 2000). Even in London, at most Iranians make up approximately 2% of the population in the areas where they live. This both reflects and impacts their relationship to the British majority.

**Relations to the British Majority**

Given the multicultural context of Britain, and the dominance of postcolonial migrant groups like Pakistanis and Indians, Iranians have in many ways been an invisible migrant community in Britain. Rather like the Arabs in Caroline Nagel’s (2001) work, Iranians have been deemed unclassifiable in the British context. Until recently they could not even identify themselves as a distinct group on the British census. According to several of the Iranian leaders I spoke with in London, this invisibility has been furthered by the reluctance many Iranians show to identify as Iranian and the priority they have instead put on
fitting into the British mainstream. The reluctance to identify with the Iranian community extends from most Iranians’ dissatisfaction with the Iranian regime. Furthermore, the tendency for pre-revolutionary Iranian migrants in particular to be highly Westernized initially led this group to see itself as highly adapted to the British way of life. As one British Iranian told me, most Iranians in Britain are “Shah type” immigrants, and do not want to be put in the same category, or treated in the same way as other immigrants, especially so-called “labour migrants” from South Asia. So it is not surprising that those who arrived shortly after the installation of the Iranian regime were primarily concerned with combatting their negative image in the English language media, and blending in with British society (Spellman 2004). This theme is given a personal touch in the book, *The Beginner’s Guide to Acting English* (2010), where Shappi Khorsandi tells the story of her family’s migration from Iran to London, and their experience of adaptation and settlement.

For more recent migrants, the problem, according to some of the Iranian cultural leaders I spoke with, is that because Iranian migrants are relatively new to Britain, the community is less established than many others. In a country where identity politics are frequently promoted along the lines of community and culture, this is actually a practical problem. Services are provided to immigrants according to their ability to lobby as a community. As a result, some Iranians have begun to promote Iranian cultural activities by way of large Iranian New Year celebrations and cultural displays in the form of film festivals, art shows, and other events. Furthermore, the opening of an Iranian Studies Centre at SOAS (The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) in 2010 has been regarded as an achievement by many Iranians living in London. As both the population and the visibility of Iranians has been growing, however, so too have the discussions around how to best promote the identity and interests of Iranians in Britain.

While discrimination has been a problem for some Iranians in Britain, identifying and being classified as Iranian has been less easy than in the Swedish context. Although some scholars have noted the inability of some groups to fit into Britain’s postcolonial structure as potentially problematic (Erel 2009) based on my findings, it seemed to present an opportunity. In Britain it was possible to avoid the stigmatization and racialization faced by other (significantly larger) migrant groups with which Britain had stronger colonial ties. As previously noted, Iranians in Britain cannot be seen as belonging to a certain category such as “refugee” or “economic migrant” or “stu-
dent”. They also cannot be stereotyped according to level of wealth, given that while some Iranians have struggled in Britain, others have been very successful. The interviews I conduct with organization leaders highlighted this diversity. Indeed, some studies have noted that Iranians who identify as Muslim have been subject to stigmatizing discourses. In their study of Iranian youth in London Jafari and Goulding (2008), for example, found that Muslim Iranians felt pressure to remove signifiers of their Islamic identity (particularly the headscarf) and to replace it with western dress. In general, however, it could be said that secular Iranians have an almost invisible presence in Britain because they do not fit into the post-colonial framework that stratifies other groups in terms of housing, employment and other aspects of integration. As they try to lobby for more economic support and financial recognition in Britain, therefore, the task is to organize along ethnic lines while at the same time defying the “community” logic typically used to define postcolonial migrant groups.

According to the leader of the British Iranian Business Association (BIBA) things are changing for British Iranians. As he told me,

*British Iranians are starting to develop a separate identity. British are starting to learn about who Iranians in the UK are over the last four to five years.*

For the leader of BIBA, however, Iranians should not promote their cultural heritage, but rather their ability to integrate into the mainstream. For him, the successful contributions that Iranians have made to the British economy should be the basis of a new and passionately promoted “British Iranian” identity. BIBA, which is very well known among Iranians in London in particular, has been working on branding “British Iranians” since 1994. BIBA aims, therefore to encourage Iranians to become part of the mainstream by supporting one another, while culture and customs are kept in the background. The same could be said for Iranian professional associations such as the Iranian Medical Society (IMS). Rather than focusing on cultural heritage, these organizations (several of which are listed in Table 3) aim to build a successful network of Iranian medical professionals in Britain, and especially in the London area.

**The Economic Situation of Iranians in Britain**

Despite the positive image promoted by organizations such as BIBA the reality is that many Iranians in Britain struggle to gain legal status as well as basic employment. According to almost all of the leaders I spoke with, there are many Iranians struggling to get by in Britain, and this is something that is over overlooked. Many recent refugee
arrivals in particular have faced difficulties, and according to one of the leaders I interviewed who was working at a cultural center that aimed to assist Iranian refugees, at the time (in 2010) there were approximately 2,500 Iranian refugees living in the UK without status. Some of these migrants had been in the country for up to 20 years, but could not pursue a normal life without leave to remain. Most of the Iranians that have been struggling in the UK are, according to the same man, those that entered the country as refugees, suggesting that mode of entry has been very important for determining the success of Iranians in Britain.

Britain’s wealthiest Iranians are those that left Iran with their capital intact, usually directly before or after the revolution. Some of these immigrants live in the city’s most upscale neighbourhoods, attend elite schools, and according to the Iranian leaders I spoke with, tend to be overrepresented in professional occupations. A closer look at where Iranians live in London (Figure 14) illustrates their presence in the affluent districts of Kensington and Chelsea. But the wider distribution of the Iranian population also reflects the class diversity among those with Iranian origins.
Interestingly, based on both my fieldwork findings as well as several secondary sources, the social and working environment in Britain and in London in particular, is perceived by many Iranians as similar to that of Iran’s. In a study of Iranian youth in Sydney, Vancouver and London by McAuliffe (2008), it was found that “In London the existent class separations were seen by some as bearing a degree of congruence to the class separations of Iran” (McAuliffe 2008: 68). This is very different from the Swedish context where class divisions are highly discouraged.

Internal Relations

Like in Sweden (Kelly 2011), the first Iranians to arrive in Britain showed a tendency to maintain their political views and a decidedly “homeland” orientation; in short, it could be argued that they were reluctant to establish an Iranian community in Britain. As Raji (2010) points out:

For Iranians in Britain, much like their counterparts in the USA, the tense political situation of the 1980s, including mistrust between pro-royalist, pro-mujahedin, pro-Islamist and other leftist groups, meant that there was very little cohesion in the Iranian diaspora. Furthermore, because the first genera-
Despite their initial reluctance to form a community, and ongoing suspicion within the Iranian community, many Iranians have nevertheless retained a strong sense of identity and have made efforts to preserve Iranian culture, especially in the private sphere. In more recent years, there has also been a growing tendency towards the institutionalization of Iranian culture. As in Sweden, with time came the realization that a return home would likely not be possible in the immediate future. Iranians in Britain therefore had the “desire to maintain and recreate Iranian culture, social circles and cultural events in London.” (Spellman 2004:42) Today there are multiple newspapers, radio stations and television channels catering to Iranians in the British context, and especially to London’s growing community of both established and newly arrived Iranians.

Furthermore, since the mid-1980s, several community centers and Iranian-focused organizations have been established. According to Spellman (2004), these organizations played an important role in assisting with the settlement process. These organizations grew in number at the turn of the decade. This was followed in the 1990s by a growing acceptance of the idea of permanent settlement and the formation of an array of Iranian-focused educational, socio-cultural organizations and businesses (Spellman 2004).

Table 3 briefly lists and describes the characteristics of some of the major Iranian-focused organizations in London.
Table 3. Some of the Major Iranian-Focused Associations in London

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Clients/Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anjoman</td>
<td>An Iranian business and professional society. Offers monthly meetings, guest speakers, social events.</td>
<td>Iranians working in business or the professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Iranian Business Association</td>
<td>Serves as a networking organization for professional and business-oriented Iranians. Offers regular meetings and social events.</td>
<td>Iranians working in business or the professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian Medical Society</td>
<td>Offers networking opportunities, guest lectures, support to Iranian medical staff and Iranian patients in the UK.</td>
<td>Iranian medical professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Iranian Medical Association</td>
<td>Serves as a networking organization for Iranian medical professionals.</td>
<td>Targets second generation medical students and professionals in particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organiz</td>
<td>Assists female victims of domestic violence, forced marriage, and ‘honour’ related abuse by offering counseling and training to women and girls.</td>
<td>Vulnerable women and girls from the Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Iranian Association</td>
<td>A general organization offering counseling, translation services, a number of educational programs, and socio-cultural events.</td>
<td>The Iranian community, but especially those facing integration difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian Community Centre (London)</td>
<td>Provides services to Iranian newcomers.</td>
<td>Refugees and recent migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian Community Centre (Barnet)</td>
<td>Provides services to Iranian newcomers.</td>
<td>Refugees and recent migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Library for Iranian Studies</td>
<td>Provides books, newspapers and periodicals in Farsi, and offers Farsi language classes.</td>
<td>The library is open to the public for a small membership fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran Heritage</td>
<td>Encourages the study and preservation of Iran’s cultural heritage.</td>
<td>Artists, academics, and others interested in preserving Iranian heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted previously, in Sweden Iranian organizations are officially delineated by “country of birth” although they often represent political interests. In the British context, in contrast, there is a plethora of
different organizations serving a broad range of purposes. The basic reason for this difference is that the British government does not manage community organizations in the same way as the Swedish government does. Furthermore, while in Sweden organizations are (at least officially) cultural in focus, in Britain they have a much stronger integration and social service role. Moreover, unlike in Sweden where religion plays a less prevalent role in society in general, and where the Iranian community aims to promote a secular image, religious institutions catering to Iranians are important in Britain. The Islamic Republic of Iran has even built a mosque in London. This raises another important issue: the ties that Iranians in Britain maintain to Iran.

The relations Iran maintains with the British-Iranian diaspora are infinitely more complex than the relations it maintains with the Iranian diaspora in Sweden. This may be explained partly by the history of international relations between the two countries. As noted in chapter 4, the British maintained strong historical links to Iran throughout the twentieth century, and perhaps because of this ongoing albeit deeply controversial relationship, there are still many Iranians (affiliated with the current Iranian regime) living and working in London alongside others who consider themselves exiles. While in Sweden Iranians show a tendency to completely reject the Iranian government, and even apply social pressure to boycott Iran, in Britain the diverse Iranian population has followed a full range of approaches to diaspora-homeland relations. According to some of the onward migrants in this study who had observed both contexts, there are many Iranians in Britain who are against the regime in Iran, but still foster a relationship to the country. It is considered more acceptable, for example, to make visits to Iran, run businesses there, and maintain various other types of social, economic and cultural ties.

The Circumstances Leading to Onward Migration from Sweden to London

In many ways the differences between the Iranian diasporas in Britain and Sweden are reflective of the two countries’ differing migration policies. While the Iranians that moved to Britain tended to be a mix of wealthy monarchists, Islamic regime supporters and refugees, in Sweden Iranian migrants were predominantly refugees. As this chapter and the one preceding it have illustrated, the opportunities available to Iranians in the two contexts have been affected by the two countries’ differing welfare systems, and in particular, these govern-
ments’ specific approaches to integrating migrants. While Britain might be broadly described as a place where one could carry out a variety of economic and cultural projects that may eventually lead to financial success and social recognition, Sweden was perhaps a better place for securing family benefits, human rights and gender equality. As I was frequently told by Iranians I met in the field, London in particular was a great place if you had financial resources and ambition, while Sweden was a better place to be if you wanted a more relaxed pace of life. The reasons leading to the onward migration of individual migrants, however, cannot be so easily defined.

The Iranians that have left Sweden for London have been motivated by a variety of economic, social and cultural considerations. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, it is not my intention to identify the precise reasons for onward migration. The focus of this dissertation is rather on contextualizing the phenomenon and drawing out some of the nuanced ways in which people live across places. It therefore cannot be argued that one context or the other is better or worse for Iranian migrants. For the participants in this study, however, finding the right match between personal needs and characteristics was important. From this point of view, many different factors came into play for these individual onward migrants. While one official reason may predominate, there could be multiple reasons that interact, thereby influencing individual decisions to move on. This will be illustrated further in the next chapters. Before going into a more detailed discussion of individual lives, however, I would first like to provide a brief overview of some of the general reasons for onward migration, as they were defined and highlighted by study participants, including both individual onward migrants, as well as the leaders of Iranian-focused organizations in Sweden and London.

Social networks obviously play an important role in migration decision making, and there has been no shortage of studies on the role that social networks play in facilitating migration flows (Boyd 1989; Ryan et al. 2008; Haug 2008; Ryan 2011). In an EU context where migration is open, people may cross borders to join family, friends, or even networks of individuals with whom they are not close but share a common (i.e. political, religious or cultural) interest. While the participants in this study were quite similar in terms of background, level of education, and occupational status, they differed significantly in terms of who they socialized with, and where their social networks were located. While some had large networks of families and friends spread all over the world, others had more localized networks. Furthermore, political background and religion played an important role
in determining how much social capital each participant had, and perhaps most importantly, how it could be mobilized.

The majority of the participants in the study had a loose framework of what are commonly termed “strong tie” contacts in the form of Iranian friends and relatives who had been separated through migration and therefore spread out around the world. While these contacts were seldom mentioned as a reason for moving to London, they were certainly called upon to help facilitate the process of settlement. These contacts often helped the participants to orient themselves to their new surroundings, and in some cases had accommodated them in their homes on a temporary basis. Some of the participants also had strong networks based on “loose ties”. This was facilitated by their membership in formal networks. The only Baha’i participant in the study, for example, had a very extensive, multicultural network of fellow Baha’is which she could make contact with almost anywhere she went. Indeed this had played a role in her decision to move to London, insofar as she thought she could have a fulfilling social life on account of her membership in a globally dispersed community.

According to many of the Iranians that I spoke with in formal interviews and in informal interactions, one of the major factors motivating onward migration is the pursuit of perceived career and job opportunities in London. Many of the Iranian leaders I spoke with in London, for example, were familiar with the onward migration of Iranians from Sweden (and Scandinavia more generally) to Britain, and based on their contact with these onward migrants, felt that the opportunities that London offered relative to Sweden was the main impetus behind onward migration. One man, who was familiar with many onward migrant dentists in particular, noted that people move because they have “heard of success here… and people have an above average life.” He noted that many Iranians are living very well in London and are “very capable”. This is attractive to Swedish Iranians who, as he viewed it, compare themselves to their British counterparts, and desire the same success.

Indeed among the individual participants, for some, moving on was simply about overcoming unemployment. For others, however, it was more about securing better employment, more consistent with the qualifications that they had received either in Iran or in Sweden. While many felt that they were somewhat limited in Sweden, they believed that through moving to London, they could find more opportunities, and secure access to social mobility. According to these participants, job openings in Sweden were relatively few. The work environment was relatively closed and encouraged people to stay
committed to their employers for several years at a time, thereby limiting career progression. The British, and particularly the London context, was more attractive in this regard.

Educational opportunities were seen differently from work opportunities. Many of the onward migrants that I met during the course of fieldwork initially left Sweden for the official purpose of pursuing their educations abroad, either in the United States, Canada, or Britain. Quality of education issues were generally not the primary incentive for studying abroad, but rather, it gave these (mostly young) people the chance to get away, experience new things, and escape what was often considered to be an unfavorable social situation in Sweden. Pursuing education abroad was also sometimes used as a way to pursue education in one’s field of choice, which was sometimes not so readily available in Sweden. Indeed by studying in English these individuals gained skills that could later be transferred to a more international work environment, which as they viewed it, opened up many job opportunities for them on an international level.

Many of the onward migrant participants felt that, because of their Iranian background and their status as refugees in Sweden, they could not achieve everything they were capable of achieving. This was a main theme in the life history interviews, and it was also something that was reaffirmed by the organization leaders I spoke with in both Sweden and London. As one leader in London put it when speaking about membership in his organization, “We’ve had many refugees who have left Sweden, Denmark, France”. According to him, they have left because of perceived opportunities for socializing in the multicultural context of London, something that Sweden could not offer. “I think it’s difficult there” he noted when referring to the social experiences of the onward migrants he had met.

While the younger participants in the present study had integrated quite well into Swedish society in terms of educational attainment, language learning and making social contacts, they still felt barriers to achieving their goals in Swedish society. Despite securing high levels of education, Swedish friends, and in some cases high level jobs, a dominant narrative to come out of the interviews was that these young onward migrants did not feel fully accepted by Swedish society. For some onward migrants then, moving on was not only about finding more opportunities in an objective sense, but also about securing a stronger sense of place belonging.

Although many of the individual participants were quite successful in Sweden, many nevertheless felt that they did not quite “fit” somehow into the Swedish context which they viewed as being highly
homogeneous and based on a very narrow universal welfare system. This was expressed by these participants as a desire “to belong” in a way that many did not feel was possible in Sweden, but may be possible in other places with a broader range of opportunities, and a more diverse population, including a more diverse Iranian community. This in many ways parallels the findings of Ghorashi (2002) who compared Iranians in the Netherlands and the United States by highlighting how the economic, political and cultural contexts of destination countries can dramatically impact migrants’ subjective experiences. But belonging of course takes place at many different levels of scale, including the family, the locality, the nation state and even the world. Furthermore, belonging is implicated by class, gender, and religion.

One might conclude that finding one’s “place in a place” is intimately connected with making one’s life meaningful. This becomes evident in the narratives that the individual study participants told me about how they experienced Iran, Sweden and London respectively. According to my interpretation, the study participants delivered several overlapping narratives about what moving on has actually meant to them. Because all life stories can be interpreted and presented from a variety of different perspectives, I have therefore chosen to relay my participants’ narratives in the next chapters, in relation to three selected themes, namely: the family, the search for success, and the concept of place belonging.

In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to explore the trajectories and narratives of these individual onward migrants, as they made their way from Iran to Sweden to London. This part of the dissertation begins by considering how the lives of individual onward migrants have been influenced and structured by their membership in mobile families.
Chapter 7
Mobile Families

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that onward migration, and more generally, the relationship between settlement and mobility, is ideally understood in the context of everyday life. For most people, family life is one important aspect of the everyday. In her (1998) article Beck-Gernsheim uses the term “post-familial family” to refer to the impact of individualization on traditional family structures. Her argument is that elective belonging has come to replace the stronger bonds traditionally associated with family ties. Given the ruptures that migration often creates in peoples’ lives, one might posit that migrants are particularly vulnerable to these new individualizing processes. The findings of the study suggest, however, that family continues to play a very important role in migrant life trajectories, albeit in complex ways.

The participants in this study have led what some might consider highly fragmented lives. In the process of making multiple migrations over the course of space and time, many have experienced separation from their family members. Furthermore, subsequent migrations have challenged many of the power structures that initially defined and ordered the family unit. In particular, gender roles have been renegotiated, and relationships between children and their parents have been altered. Despite these disruptions, the ongoing negotiation of family life across space has emerged as a salient finding from this research.

In this chapter, the family lives of the individual onward migrants in the study will be discussed. I will begin by highlighting the centrality of the family, and in particular, the role that families have played in influencing, among other things, the migration decision making of individuals. In doing so, the chapter hopes to illustrate how the participants in the study, even when presenting themselves as individuals, clearly situate their personal narratives and trajectories within the context of the family. The chapter then moves on to look at how family life, and in particular the upbringing of children, has influenced these onward migrants, as they considered what they wanted for their
children, and what places offered the best opportunities for social reproduction. Finally, the chapter concludes by sharing the life stories of two individual onward migrants, showing how both family life and social reproduction have influenced their decision to onward migrate.

The Centrality of Family Life

This section begins by introducing three of the “family stories” that emerged from the research with individual onward migrants, thereby highlighting how family biographies have shaped the migration trajectories of individual onward migrants in both direct and indirect ways.

Dara: The Bonds of Brotherhood

Dara was part of a large land-owning family in Iran. As a young man, he left the country assisted by smugglers, following in the footsteps of his older brother who had left before him. Although the two were not sure of their eventual destination they were sure of one thing: they wanted to stay together. When Dara’s brother Behrouz found himself in Sweden, Dara quickly established himself there, too. He benefited from his brother’s knowledge of the society. Behrouz was able to provide him with a place to sleep, gave him the information he needed to start studying Swedish, and even helped him to obtain a simple job right after his arrival. Eventually both Dara and Behrouz finished university in Sweden. Dara could not get a job as a dentist, so the two brothers moved to Britain. Dara and Behrouz live in separate flats but are a short drive apart. Years after their emigration from Iran, Dara is glad to have the company of his brother. Although he has felt a growing distance between himself and his family in Iran, especially in terms of lifestyle and outlook, he still feels well understood by his brother. Dara was married to another Iranian in Sweden, but he divorced before moving to London, and at the time of our second interview (2011), was not sure if he would remarry. Remarriage, he said, would be the only reason for him to leave London.

Azadeh: Renegotiating Family Life

Azadeh was born into an affluent family in Iran. Her mother passed away suddenly when she was still very young, but her father decided to continue with the plan he had been working on with his wife for some time: move the family to Sweden. Growing up, Azadeh was obliged to step in and play the role of mother quite often, doing household chores and looking after her younger siblings. She de-
scribes her father as authoritarian, but somebody who was determined to be a good single father and manage his family in a new and foreign context. This often meant following the strict rules that he himself had grown up with. This led to the close monitoring of his children, and especially his girls. As the eldest girl, Azadeh faced particular pressures to help her father and to avoid what other Swedish youth were doing: going out, dating and having fun. Although Azadeh felt restrained and stressed by her family situation, she found it difficult to resist her father’s demands. After she finished high school, however, she independently moved to London where she slowly began to experience life without the restrictions she had grown up with. Azadeh began to go to parties and experiment with her gender in a way that she had not felt free to do before. Eventually her sister joined her in London. Their relationship has its strong and weak points, but as she grows older Azadeh has come to appreciate her sister’s company more and more. At the time of our last interview (2011) Azadeh was dating someone and was thinking it may be her life partner. She said she would only return to Sweden if she decided to have children, in which case she would welcome the support that her family would be able to provide.

Neda: The Tied Mover

Neda moved to Sweden at a young age with her parents and brother. She grew up in a small town and adapted to Sweden very well. Her father, however, was very depressed because he could not seem to find steady, enjoyable work in Sweden. He tried many different strategies: opening businesses, reeducating himself, and doing everything he could to find a good job. He could not seem to find anything that gave him as much satisfaction as his former position in Iran. Eventually her mother and father began to have a lot of fights. Neda’s mother had become the steady wage earner in their household which, according to Neda, was a source of tension as it challenged the gender roles the couple had practiced in Iran. Eventually her father insisted that the family move to Britain where he hoped there would be more opportunities not only for himself, but also for his children in the future. At the time that her father initiated onward migration, Neda was very happy with her life in Sweden and was very upset with his decision. Although she was nearing adulthood at the time, she felt compelled to go with her parents, so she reluctantly followed them. The move did not save her parents’ relationship, however, and they divorced. Both of her parents eventually remarried. At the time of
our last interview (2011), Neda still lived with her mother in London, while her father had returned to Iran.

As these brief vignettes illustrate, the lives of the participants in this study were highly influenced by their place within familial structures. While the stories relayed here vary from one another, what they all demonstrate is the central role that family has played in their lives, including their decision to onward migrate.

While Beck-Gernsheim’s (1998) argument about individualization and the reduced role of family in structuring society is relatively new, the notion that individuals rather than families are central to understanding migration processes is hardly novel. In fact, until recently, migration was typically conceptualized as an individual event in which persons rationally decided where they could best profit from their human capital. As noted in chapters 1 and 2, this perspective is still widely taken up in the migration literature, especially when considering the migration of highly skilled or highly educated migrants. As the above vignettes have attempted to show, however, even individual migration stories can be told from the perspective of the family. Individuals seldom make migration decisions without considering their position in familial networks and, in many cases, negotiating migration decisions with other family members (Raghuram 2004). A family perspective, therefore, has much to contribute to migration studies. As Varrel points out,

Taking into account the family dimension unravels the complexity of migration itineraries at the individual and family level, beyond the far too simple explanatory pattern of ‘skills circulation’. (Varrel 2011:335)

In recent years, growing attention has been placed on “linked lives” and in particular, how families strategize as a collection of individual members with differential opportunities to cross borders (Yeoh and Huang 2000; Bonizzoni 2011). The family may be seen as both a unit as well as a collection of individuals in negotiation with one another. In this way, the transnational family, in the words of Skrbis (2008), “implies dynamics, flux and change, yet it is also embedded in unyielding and stable structures that impact upon the experiences of family members.” (Skrbis 2008) The process of migration disrupts families, changes them, and in many ways challenges them, and yet family ties continue to be an influential force in the lives of many people.

Before discussing the relationship between onward migration and family life in more explicit detail, I would first like to briefly introduce
Changing Family Structures

With the exodus of many Iranians from Iran following the revolution of 1979, extended families were often split apart, and their members dispersed over several continents. This was in some cases against the will of those wishing to remain together, but according to some of the participants in this study, it was also a strategy frequently employed by emigrant Iranians in order to keep their options open. Like in Bun’s (1997) study of Chinese families who intentionally spread out between different places to achieve their shared goals, many of the Iranian families in this study split up, moved to variable destinations, and waited to see what kind of opportunities were available in specific places of settlement. It was thought that if family members moved to a variety of destinations and one place worked out better than another, there may be a possibility to onward migrate and reunite in the most suitable destination. Through the process of emigration from Iran, many Iranians therefore participated in the formation of widely dispersed family-based networks.

When it came to the nuclear family, most families wanted to stay together. As some of my participants’ biographies reveal, however, even many nuclear families were initially split apart. This was not because families wished to keep their options open so much as they wanted all family members to successfully leave Iran. Sometimes women came to Sweden first, while their husbands stayed behind in Iran to sell the family property and/or business. Many couples were therefore initially separated and then reunited after years of separation. In other cases, couples moved to Sweden together, but one spouse (usually the male) continued to live all or part of the time in Iran for work. These families therefore came to resemble the “astronaut” families studied by Waters (2002) where mothers raised children in Canada while fathers ran businesses in Asia and made regular trips back and forth.

In other cases, siblings came to Sweden one at a time, often unaccompanied by their parents. One young man in this study, for example, was sent to Sweden when he was only a child. He lived with his aunt and cousins while he waited for his parents and sister to join him. Several others migrated independently as young adults, and
waited to be joined by their siblings or parents, although it often took many years before the entire family was reunited in one place. These initial patterns of emigration from Iran later influenced how onward migration was carried out. Several onward migrants had cousins, siblings, and other relatives in Britain, and a move to a place like London often helped to facilitate family reunion. As a result, the location and the definition of “close family” were often in flux for many emigrant Iranians who experienced family separation and reunification over time. The important role that family played in individual lives, however, remained strong despite the changing circumstances.

The family cannot be considered a static, unchanging concept especially in light of the changing circumstances in which migrant families found themselves. Over time and in response to the upheavals of migration families often did not stay intact, and family breakup and reformation was not uncommon. As already noted in chapter 6, the divorce rate is high among diasporic Iranians (Darvishpour 1999) and, as was implied in Neda’s story shared earlier, this may be partly attributed to changing gender roles encountered in the Swedish context. In addition to having to adapt to changing gender roles, the first generation also had to contend with the fact that their children were now being socialized in a new context. Children who moved to Sweden at a young age who grew up all or partly in Sweden were more socialized into the Swedish context, and this affected dynamics within the family unit. The values, norms and behaviour these children acquired from “outside” the family, in the school system or through peer networks, challenged many parents’ understandings since it was beyond the scope of their own experience. Tension between generations was therefore an additional source of stress for families.

The fact that children tend to adapt more quickly to new contexts also led, in some cases, to a role reversal. As has been found in other studies about migrant families, children may take on a great deal of their parents’ responsibilities as the latter struggle to find work and acquire new language skills. In their study of migrant youth from East Asia in New Zealand, for example, Bartley and Spoonley found that “a disruption in the normal roles, routines and structures of power within families could be the source of significant generational conflict.” (Bartley and Spoonley 2008:275) Such conflicts were frequently alluded to by the participants in this study as well. The conflict was even more intense between Swedish-raised youth and adult members of the family who arrived later in Sweden. Difficulties in communication, and disagreements over how to approach life in the new society, were not uncommon. As Torres (2001) has noted, Iranian and Swe-
dish family structure differs significantly in terms of the respect warranted to elders. It is therefore not surprising that many older Iranians struggled with the lack of respect they felt their Swedish-raised children or grandchildren were willing to show them. Bonizzoni notes that “For couples, parents and children, living together again is a moment that is certainly as hard-fought as it is longed for.” (Bonizzoni 2011:324) Indeed, according to the findings of this study, the changes experienced by families led some to lose their closeness, to break-up, or to work even harder to regain what was lost through migration. Rather than simply following their individual preferences, however, it would seem that most individuals were highly affected by their familial relationships, regardless of the circumstances. Importantly, the significance of family life itself did not disappear for most people.

Intersectional Approaches to Understanding Social Change

The social changes experienced by families were greatly affected by individual family members’ experiences of diasporic life. It is commonly noted in the migration studies literature that migration is experienced differently by men and women (Yeoh and Huang 2000; Waters 2002). Men and women moving between the same origin and destination places may experience the power relations they encounter differently and male and female migrants may have more to lose or gain from moving to a new context. Many of the participants in this study commented on how they experienced their gender roles differently in the different places they had lived. As already noted in Chapter 6, the taken-for-granted patriarchal society in Iran was more often challenged in Sweden, leading to reduced power for men, and enhanced opportunities for women. Generally speaking, the concept of gender equality promoted by government policies and society more generally in Sweden, was seen positively by Iranian women, while it was more problematic for men. The comparatively conservative gender regime in Britain in contrast, appealed to the participants to different degrees, but most agreed that Britain provided a much more flexible environment for deciding how to divide labour within the family. Hence, as husband and wife negotiated their changing gender roles following emigration from Iran, place mattered. The new ways of defining gender roles and family life, however, were shaped not only by the level of the nation state, but simultaneously, also other levels of scale (McDowell 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2001; Datta et al.
The local contexts in which migrant families found themselves, as well as the transnational social fields that connected them with their counterparts in various parts of the world, influenced how they negotiated family life. While some wished to preserve some aspects of “traditional” Iranian gender roles by maintaining their connection to Iranian history and heritage, therefore, many (especially women but also some men) found themselves simultaneously challenging many of the assumptions about gender typically upheld in Iran by incorporating other perspectives. Life in Sweden greatly changed the ideals defining family life, as did the more localized experiences of individual families. Among other things, the specific employment and social opportunities in different parts of Sweden affected the renegotiation of gendered roles in the family. In those places where men could not find work, women often became the primary breadwinner of the household. In other cases, as already noted, men retained stronger ties to Iran while women stayed in Sweden looking after the children. The spatial separation of husband and wife, as well as the different degree to which they were exposed to different types of family norms, led to diverging views on gender roles that had to be negotiated. Like the families moving from Hong Kong to Canada in Salaff et al.’s study, these families therefore “strategized around migration regulations to maintain social structure while at the same time migration experiences modified these structures and their meanings.” (Salaff et al. 2010).

The gendered experiences of Iranian men and women were also influenced by their social class. Being a middle class woman or a middle class man had certain implications in Iran, which was later challenged in Sweden. As noted in chapter 6, proletarianization was often experienced more negatively by men who suffered greatly from the loss of their middle class position. While women also faced class marginalization in Sweden, the new context afforded opportunities that had been closed to them in Iran; unlike their male counterparts, they therefore weighed class concerns against gender concerns, and therefore on the whole suffered less from class marginalization than their male counterparts. Gender roles, class identities, and family life more generally it has been argued by a number of geographers, are negotiated by simultaneous reference to multiple spatial and cultural contexts (Walton-Roberts and Pratt 2005; Yeoh et al. 2005). The findings from this study reflect this, and also reinforce the conclusions of other studies that have emphasized how migration may both challenge and reinforce class and gender identities simultaneously (Batnitzky et al. 2008).
All of the things discussed above: the reunification and dissolution of the family unit, changing gender roles, and the renegotiation of family life have, in a number of multi-faceted ways, influenced onward migration. Rather than identifying the individual cases where this has been so, I prefer to discuss one aspect of family life that was discussed by the majority of the participants in the study: social reproduction and the raising of children. In what follows, I will therefore focus more explicitly on this aspect of family life. As families lived their lives across borders it was, after all, mostly in the domain of social reproduction where the meaning of class, gender and ethnicity was (re)negotiated, and where parents could try to pass their middle class privilege onto their children. It is perhaps for this reason that the findings of this study show an important relationship between the desire for social reproduction and onward migration.

Raising Families across Borders

Both the everyday practices of migrants, as well as the long term planning they carried out to ensure their children’s futures were of great importance to my study. As already noted, many of those who moved to Iran following the revolution were young adults. They therefore moved either with young children, or were of childbearing age. Many were therefore in the position of raising their children in Sweden, despite having only a limited understanding of and familiarity with the new context. In light of this, certain issues and questions came to the fore for these participants when considering when, where and how to raise their families.

The family is typically recognized as the first and closest domain where class and culture are reproduced (Crompton 2008). In the case of the participants in this study, however, social reproduction must be understood in relation to the changing situations in which diasporic Iranians found themselves. The perception of themselves as outsiders in Swedish society, the class degradation they had experienced upon moving to Sweden, as well as their membership in a globally dispersed diasporic community, for example, all played a role in determining what they felt was best for their children, and how they hoped to raise them. Reproducing aspects of their middle class Iranian lifestyle, material class position and cultural identity, was, of course, very difficult given the changing structures they encountered in social space. As Dara told me:
First, you want that your children to grow up and have a happy childhood like yourself…

First you immigrate to a new culture, language, in adulthood; you have never experienced childhood in Sweden or England. So how can you do? You are not sure about your own life. How can you talk about the happiness this country or any other country could bring to your children? Of course when they grow up, this is their home now, the children’s home.

(Dara 3)

As Dara’s statement suggests, for first generation Iranian migrants, the disruption caused by migration has led to a lack of confidence around raising children in a new context. There is an acute awareness that the environment their children will grow up in will be different from the one in which they were raised, and as a result, parenting becomes an uncertain task.

As has been noted in some of the literature dealing with relations between first and second generation migrants, when parents do not fully understand the new context they find themselves in, they turn to specific strategies that they believe are most likely to prepare their children for upward mobility (Shavarini 2004). For the parents and future parents in this study, these strategies appeared to include two things: securing quality education for their children, and finding housing in a desirable area. In fact, school and neighborhood preferences had sometimes even contributed to their decision to onward migrate.

**Education and Neighborhood Choice**

For the predominantly “new” middle class people that left Iran for Europe and North America, education, and especially an education acquired in the West, was partly what distinguished them from their lower class counterparts. This was true for certain sub-categories of the population in particular. For many women, education was seen as one of the few pathways available to social mobility and independence. Middle class girls, for example, saw particular value in obtaining an education and this still seems to be the case in Iran today. Furthermore, some scholars (Keddie 2003) have documented how religious minorities, such as the Baha’is made dramatic educational achievements over the course of only a few generations, and consequently enjoyed class mobility, during the Shah era. The emphasis on education in pre-revolutionary Iran should therefore be emphasized. As Shavarini notes:

In Iran, whose ancient history already exalted education, the ‘magic’ of education became even more powerful during the quest for modernization. This high regard for education was a common thread throughout Iranian society: The rural populace saw it as a way to better life (Kinnane 1971); the middle class saw education as the only means toward upper social and economic
mobility; the upper class considered higher education the way to secure their status quo. The emphasis on higher education as the social vehicle for advancement continued to grow throughout the 1970s. Obtaining a higher education qualification was decidedly prestigious and a symbol of social achievement and status (Zonis 1971). (Shavarini 2005:334)

According to Kelley, a “Western” education was the most sought after class marker of all. In the later part of the twentieth century, “educating a child in Europe (for those who could afford it) became the measure of dignity, refinement, respectability, and ‘high class’.” (Kelley 1993b:260) This was due, as outlined in chapter 4, to Iran’s semi-colonial status prior to the Iranian revolution, and the tendency to emulate a western way of life among the middle and upper classes.

We may therefore argue that many of the migrants who moved from Iran to Sweden as well as other Western countries in the 1980s and 1990s, thus, already placed a significant value on education even during their time in Iran. Attributing educational attainment with class mobility (or maintenance), they also encouraged their children to obtain high levels of education. In the Swedish case, this may explain in part, why Iranians showed a tendency not only to be highly educated upon their arrival in Sweden, but also to pursue tertiary education following their migration (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012b).

For the onward migrants in this study, ensuring the educational success of the next generation was an important goal. This should not be understood only in the context of Iran and its diaspora, however. It could also be considered a middle class interest more generally. Butler and Robson (2003) note that, it is common for middle class parents to adopt strategies which will promote and secure the education of their children. They have a long term vision for education that starts from an early point in the child’s life, and continues to the level of tertiary education. This involves sending children to good schools, monitoring their progress, and making sure they make appropriate choices for higher education and their future careers. In this sense, children are raised with certain expectations of what their educational trajectory will look like, and their parents go about making sure that the educational goals that are set are achieved.

In cultivating the educational trajectories of their children, geography plays an important role. As Butler and Robson view it:

the geography of educational provision is bounded by different localities at different stages in the education career. We believe that what is important is how the immediate locality of residence enables access to a wider locality of educational provision, especially at secondary school level. (Butler and Robson 2003:139)
While Butler and Robson were primarily concerned with the local level in London in their study, I would argue that such a finding could be extended to the international and national levels as well. As some scholars have shown, parents seek opportunities for their children, assessing not only local schools, but also the nature of national education systems, and what opportunities are available in the wider global education market (Waters 2009; Varrel 2011).

Many of the middle class strategies discussed here can be related to the priorities of the onward migrants in this study, who expressed the desire to secure educational success for their children. For these participants, both national and local locations were frequently discussed in relation to educational opportunities. Sweden was often regarded as a good place for getting a basic education. The Swedish public education system was seen as offering a broad, well-funded program, which “taught children how to think”. Furthermore, unlike in Iran, the education was secular, which was looked upon favorably by the participants. On the down side, compared to Iran, the Swedish system was regarded as very relaxed and less competitive. Moreover, the schools in some of the migrant-dense areas where the participants had lived were poorly funded, and appeared to be below the standard of the schools in the rest of the country. Some parents therefore preferred to send their children to the seemingly more “disciplined” and better funded private schools in Sweden. Some had even sent their children to English language schools in order to help prepare them for global labour market opportunities and eventual emigration from Sweden. The desire to provide children with an ideal education, it would seem, was therefore something that transcended national borders. The definition of what constituted a good education, and the ability to provide it, was therefore carefully considered within the broader context of the transnational social field of the Iranian diaspora.

For those now living in London and thinking about their children’s education in a more local context, it would seem that neighborhood considerations were also taken into account when determining where to raise and educate one’s children. Laleh, for example, talked about how she and her partner were now considering buying a house in London, and how the quality of schools would be one of their primary considerations when selecting a neighborhood. Both Dara and Azita similarly talked about how they had moved to areas outside of central London in order to affordably access the best public schools. Azita, for example, motivates her move to an area outside of the city as follows:
Yeah because we were thinking long term, you know. We’re not the kind of people who would send children to boarding schools, like many people do here. And staying in London with teenagers is not your ideal situation. And also the private schools were very very expensive. So we heard that here there’s very good schools, state schools. And then you have grammar schools for high school. And then we could have a big house for the price of a flat in London. (Azita 3)

Dara similarly notes the importance of living in an area with good schools. Although he does not yet have children of his own, he was concerned about what was best for his nephew.

So Behrouz’s children were coming to the age when they wanted to start school, and my sister in law did research on state schools in England, and saw that there’s a couple of schools in [area outside London], government schools, state schools, that are highly ranked in the whole of England… and then we moved [there]. (Dara 3)

Both of these quotes highlight the relationship between good schools and neighborhood choice. In fact neighborhood choice and school choice are so interlinked that it is often hard to separate them.

For the onward migrants in this study, having the power to choose where to raise children and send them to school was of special significance. These were parents who had often been restricted in their choices in Sweden. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was not uncommon for Iranian migrants (regardless of their class background) to live (not by their own choice) in areas that were densely concentrated with migrants. Several of the participants who came from large urban centers (or who had lived in one at some point), experienced this kind of segregation. Others had lived in smaller towns where segregation was not so prevalent. In both cases, however, issues around migrant integration and the problems encountered in segregated areas were frequently mentioned in participant narratives, and strategies to avoid and distance one’s family from some of the problems associated with living in these areas (including poor quality schooling in these areas) were brought to the fore.

For some of the participants in this study the strategy to avoid downward mobility also included making sure that youth were surrounded by the “right” kind of people, and kept away from peers who were seen as posing potentially negative influences. This often involved close family involvement and the passing on of values that were deemed as important for “proper” social reproduction. This is not to say, however, that all the participants were protected from these so-called negative influences. The younger participants in the study were particularly well positioned to reflect on their own experiences in this regard. Bijan, for example, frequently observed his
friends engaging in gang related activities, especially between immigrants and Swedes, in his segregated neighborhood outside of a large Swedish city. Some of the other young participants in the study had encountered migrant youth who had encouraged them to steal or rebel in other ways. Generally speaking, however, these participants managed to get themselves out of these situations, and to resist future “bad behaviour” by reflecting on how they saw themselves as people coming from a “good” background and a “good” family, and how this type of behaviour was not consistent with the values by which their families had raised them. They used this, therefore, to avoid future social challenges, and to move forward with their lives. In doing so, an important resource that they drew on was (ethnic) cultural capital. As they struggled to view themselves as middle class Iranian migrants, rather than as marginalized “others” in the context of Sweden’s segregated cities, these participants were able to continue pursuing their interests and goals. Interestingly, as they actively promoted certain understandings of themselves, and as they tried to counteract potential threats to their middle class Iranian identities, many of these youth at the same time positioned themselves for onward migration. In distinguishing themselves from the other disadvantaged migrants with whom they had grown up, these migrant youth were, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, compelled to onward migrate; in some cases this was a conscious decision, and in other cases it was more indirect, with small decisions embedded in the life course eventually leading them to move on. I would therefore like to look more closely at the role of cultural capital in influencing onward migration among the younger participants in the study.

Making the Most of Ethnic Capital

In parallel to the discussion around the integration of immigrant youth, is the debate over whether or not capital brought from one place (usually the country of origin) can be successfully deployed in other contexts (Zhou 1997; Portes et al. 2009). In general, while cultural assimilation was once considered the best way forward for migrants, there has been growing acknowledgement of how cultural capital from one place may become an important resource in another. As Fernandez-Kelly’s (2008) work in the United States reveals:

At least in some cases, immigrants who live modestly and take menial jobs in the United States carry within them a hidden stock of knowledge that belies their lowly position in the receiving society. (Fernandez-Kelly 2008:118)
Interestingly, for the participants in this study, real or imagined cultural capital from Iran appeared to be very important and this applied also to those facing economic disadvantage in Sweden. Embodied traits like “elite” ways of behaving, speaking, and eating were mentioned by some of these individuals as highly valuable, and essential to the maintenance of an Iranian middle class habitus. For other participants, values, attitudes and ways of showing respect were considered important. The specific types of capital embraced by individual participants in the study varied. The extent to which “Persian culture” was valued depended on both the participants’ age and level of socialization into Iranian middle class culture. Other factors related to their individual background, such as whether or not they identified as religious, also played a role.

When conducting interviews with the older participants in my study, there was a great deal of discussion around their desire to raise their children in a certain way. They wanted to be able to pass certain aspects of Iranian culture on. Azita, for example, argued how important it was for her to be involved in her children’s lives; she wanted to guide them, and to raise them in what she considered to be the best way.

For younger participants who did not have children of their own yet, there was similarly a great deal of reflection on how cultural capital had benefited them, and how they intended to pass it down to their children. Bijan, for example, was very studious in Sweden but often felt that his achievements were undermined by his situation. Bijan lived in a segregated community where there was a lot of tension between “Swedes” and “Other” migrant groups. Not only did this stress Bijan, but he also felt subject to discrimination. He had teachers who, as he saw it, discriminated against him by giving him low grades or sending him to remedial classes. Still, however, Bijan was able to draw on a constructed memory of where he came from that helped him to remain proud of his minority status.

There’s a lot about the Iranian culture that I feel very very strongly about: I think it has served me very well. Iranians have a lot of customs that they do and all of them started out of respect... And this has allowed me to have somewhere in my backbone, to be courteous perhaps, respectful towards elders and there is a [way of being in] society which is something that is an attribute of better off people, perhaps an elite sort of etiquette... And I think it’s very important that if I have children, I pass that along with the language. (Bijan 3)

Bijan was therefore able to maintain his self-esteem despite his situation. This carried him through the difficult times, and from the way he tells his life story, considerations around how to make use of this
cultural capital had also contributed to his eventual emigration from Sweden. A common concern between both younger and older participants was that in Sweden, only full assimilation to Swedish society could lead to full, successful integration in the Swedish context. Bijan compared himself to his Iranian friends who had stayed in Sweden and who had assimilated to a much higher degree than himself; he said that probably these friends would not teach their children Farsi and would give them Swedish names. This was problematic for Bijan who instead preferred to live in places where he felt it was easier for him to make use of his cultural capital.

As implied by Bijan’s quote as well as the stories told by a number of other participants, in order to validate Iranian cultural capital, a flexible environment for social reproduction is required. While much of the support given by the state in Sweden: daycare services, free education, and other educational programs was regarded favorably by the participants, some also felt that the widespread (and highly uniform) nature of these programs limited their role as (future) parents, and particularly their ability to transmit values to their children. As scholars of the Swedish welfare state such as Duvander (2008) have noted, the universal nature by which family services are administered in Sweden, limits the way that people can use them. For the onward migrants in this study, this was definitely perceived negatively as they felt that it limited their ability to make use of their cultural capital in the Swedish context.

It should be emphasized, however, that the participants’ reluctance to fully assimilate to Swedish society should not be confused with an inability to integrate or adapt to the new circumstances encountered in Sweden. It would appear that for most, it was important to strike a balance between adapting to Sweden, while still maintaining their dignity as middle class despite the degradation they had experienced. Consequently, some class specific values, norms, and ways of raising children were maintained, even when their value was not recognized by the wider society. On the other hand, the importance of successful “integration” was also emphasized as a major theme in the majority of the participants’ narratives. Many of the younger participants in particular told me how their parents had encouraged them to integrate, to learn Swedish, and to “get into” the society. The emphasis placed on integration in Sweden’s Iranian community more generally was perhaps best summed up by a second generation Iranian restaurant owner I spoke to at the beginning of my research. As he viewed it, parents tell their children that they should “get along with society they live in”. Most importantly, they should “änpassa [adapt], speak
the language, work with people” As he viewed it, “almost every second generation Iranian child has this printed inside somewhere.” This was something that came out in the discussions with onward migrants as well. For the participants in this study, “integration” and “assimilation” were sensitive topics, that they had considered carefully and often especially in relation to their decision to onward migrate.

Based on my findings it would seem that structural integration was often encouraged: learning the Swedish language, succeeding in the Swedish education system, and developing friendships with Swedes was considered important. Cultural assimilation: taking on the values and perspectives of the Swedish majority, in contrast, was discouraged. Consistent with the findings of other studies addressing the maintenance of cultural capital in the context of the Iranian diaspora (Shavarini 2004; Mobasher 2012), the participants in this study also found it strategic and advantageous to retain what they considered to be core “Iranian values”. But many also spoke about taking “the best of both cultures” rather than assimilating completely into one.

The narratives of these participants seem to suggest that onward migration provided an ideal opportunity to make use of their mixed capital. They could make use of the unique middle class Iranian cultural capital with which they were imbued while also integrating other influences into their lifestyles. This was a strategy adopted even across generations. That said, onward migration should not be seen in relation to the unproblematic reproduction of culture. Young Iranians in particular had different views concerning the extent to which their parents’ values and practices should be adopted. For some of the younger participants in the study, onward migration can even be understood in the context of social change as they challenged the traditional middle class Iranian norms and ideals of their parents.

**Breaking with the Norm: Changing Perspectives among Iranian Youth**

As many geographers have pointed out, the home should not be idealized as a place of unproblematic social reproduction and harmony between its members (McDowell 1999; Ehrkamp 2013). In contrast, the home may be viewed as a place where power struggles ensue and new social norms are negotiated. Seen from this point of view, the migrant family perhaps more than any other type cannot be studied in normative terms; as already noted, they should instead be viewed as dynamic and constantly changing.

Among the participants in this study, those who had been raised for all or part of their lives in Sweden were familiar with approaches
to educational and career mobility typically taken up in Iran, but also in Sweden. They were therefore obviously highly influenced by social networks and institutions outside their individual families: the Swedish school system, their friends, extra-curricular activities, and peer networks had all played a role in their socialization. These youth were therefore able to incorporate different perspectives and approaches when managing their own education, as well as when considering how to facilitate the social reproduction of their own children.

As scholars have pointed out, Bourdieu did not intend for the habitus to be a rigid determinist concept; in contrast, as people operate between opportunity and constraint, they have a certain degree of flexibility, and some degree of choice (Kelly 2006). This is why Pimlott-Wilson argues that in studying how young peoples’ aspirations are influenced by their parents, we must consider “how children perceive and make sense of the habitus, acknowledging their active role in the creation of their own life paths and the simultaneous influence of social conditions.” (Pimlott-Wilson 2011:113) As she argues, while “children inculcate family practices into the habitus, their aspirations for their own future are not simply a carbon copy of what has occurred before” (Pimlott-Wilson 2011:115).

The so-called 1.5 generation is perhaps the most uniquely placed when it comes to negotiating between the norms and practices of different generations. There is a small but growing body of literature (Bartley and Spoonley 2008; Kebede 2010) that addresses the unique perspective and position of these young people who were not born in the country of migration, but moved there at a young age. Although definitions vary, Bartley and Spoonley have, for example, defined these youth as those who left their country of birth and started life in a new country between the ages of approximately 6 and 18 years. These youth are said to be in-between origin and destination, majority and minority and adulthood and childhood (Bartley and Spoonley 2008). For youth in this particular predicament, it may be necessary, as Erel (2009) points out, for young people to negotiate with their parents around what “ethnically specific resources” are useful and when and how they should be used. This is an interesting point, and certainly one of relevance to the present study. While the younger participants in the study often shared their parents’ interest in education, for example, unlike their parents, they also had a much broader sense of how to achieve success without uncritically adopting their parents’ strategies.

Farah, for example, was raised by her mother. When the rest of the family left Iran, her father could not join them. Instead he had to
stay back and look after the family business. Looking back, Farah is grateful because she describes her mother as unreligious and very open-minded; according to Farah, she was (even more than most Iranian parents) open to adapting to Swedish norms. Like many of her Swedish peers, Farah therefore had a lot of freedom during her school years and was not pressured as much as some Iranian children to study. When her father eventually came to Sweden, however, he was very struck by her lack of diligence. He could not believe Farah’s casual approach to studying, and the fact that she spent many hours enjoying leisure activities. Although initially upset by her approach, he later watched as she achieved a masters degree. Farah took things at her own pace, and when her grades were not high enough to be admitted into a desirable program in Sweden, she moved to London to pursue her education there.

Melissa: You said [your father] wanted everything to be the way it was in Iran?

Farah: Yeah, you know, in Iran, because the stupid government, there is nothing that people, that young people they can do. So the only thing they concentrate on is they have to study. Education is the only thing they think of. That’s why they become so anti-social, because they study so they don’t even know how to talk to people. They just study. And many of them get scholarship like from different countries and I don’t know if you know that but even statistically in Sweden, Iranian is the most people that like- like doing this education, doing this doctorate, because it’s in our stupid culture, sometimes we don’t even know how to have fun. And we think the only thing to survive is study. Not anymore, but back then, for many of us. So my dad, he still thinks like that. Maybe not that much, but he still thinks, If you don’t have education, you have nothing. So if my brother doesn’t study he thinks “Abhh! This is the end of the world, how can you not study? You have to have something to fall back on.” So he couldn’t handle me when I didn’t study. Now he’s laughing, he say “I can’t believe it, I never saw you study but still you managed to do all of it.” I say “that’s why you could have just leave me alone.” [We both laugh] (Farah 2)

Stories like Farah’s illustrate the ability of younger participants to seize opportunities in a different way from their parents, drawing on the insider knowledge they possess about the society in which they were raised. Rather than breaking completely with the family norm, however, often these young people found strategies that, as Farah’s case illustrates, succeeded to please both themselves and their parents.

**Family Planning Narratives**

In acknowledging the changing habitus and perspectives of the younger participants in the study, an interesting question that comes
to the fore is how these young people envision their own family lives in the future. Since they had lived their lives between Iran, Sweden and Britain, these young people were well positioned to make critical assessments about what they saw as the ideal “family life” and also which places would best serve their interests as parents. The young people involved in the study who so far had no children of their own, naturally evaluated future considerations around social reproduction and place quite differently from their parents. In what follows I will therefore consider the narratives they delivered regarding their future family life.

To begin with, many of the younger participants in the study talked about who they considered to be an ideal partner. These young people, who spoke multiple languages and were familiar with a range of cultural backgrounds, frequently found themselves in multicultural contexts where they had the possibility to meet potential partners from a variety of places. While scholars like Beck-Gernsheim (1998) have argued that in today’s modern world many couples easily come together regardless of the varying class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of the two spouses, my findings would suggest that the process of finding an ideal partner is not as random as Beck-Gernsheim’s theory would suggest. Instead, the young people in my study carefully considered what constituted the ideal partner, and how such a partner should match their own background and life experiences. Rather than stating in clear terms what the ideal partner would be, these young people mostly drew on narratives that aimed to link their own self understandings with who they felt constituted an ideal match.

While some of my participants stated openly that they preferred to have Iranian partners, others were only concerned that they should be able to pass on certain “Iranian values” and the Farsi language to their children. In fact some adamantly opposed the idea of being with an Iranian partner because they did not want to reproduce “stereotypical” Iranian family culture, thereby distancing themselves from what they saw as a patriarchal or traditional way of life. In all cases, however, there was a conscious reflection about what constituted the ideal match, and in some cases, places were even deemed as offering certain opportunities to meet the ideal person. Azadeh, for example, found that in London’s diverse population, she could meet people who were more likely to share her unique background. For Azadeh, this experience was articulated in terms of “cultural” affinity, although she did not think she could find this affinity with either an Iranian or a Swedish man. When talking about how her life might
have been if she had stayed in Sweden, Azadeh makes the following statement:

I think I would have never found the friends I found here, that I have. I most probably wouldn’t have met [my boyfriend], and I don’t think I would have ever fallen in love with someone in Sweden in the way that I fell in love with [name removed], and obviously, he’s very special, he’s from [Southern Europe], so his culture I think is more like our culture than Swedish. But as I said, I’m not fully Iranian, so it’s good to have this European sense of him as well. Cause he’s not Middle Eastern, I don’t think I could be with a Middle Eastern man. I’ve never dated one… (Azadeh 1)

For Azadeh then, London’s diverse population has provided a suitable environment for social pursuits, including those of a romantic nature. Her choice of partner is not completely open, however, insofar as she cites both culture (and later in the interview also lifestyle and social situation) as being important factors in securing the right match. Her narrative points to her biographical work, and her desire to produce a coherent sense of self as she plans her future in accordance with her self-understanding as a middle class person who has lived in a number of places and had a broad range of experiences.

Sometimes the pathway to self-understanding is less clear, however, and the biographical work more difficult. Unlike Azadeh, Bijan, for example, has found himself dating mostly Iranians, although he explicitly states that this is not his conscious preference. Bijan left Sweden to attend university in the United States and then returned briefly to Sweden before moving to London. As he describes it:

…ever since I moved back to Sweden [after the United States] it seems as though every girl I dated was Iranian and every time I dated an Iranian girl and it ended up not working, I said never again with an Iranian. But it’s interesting how every single time I managed to meet another Iranian. I don’t think I’ve dated anyone non-Iranian since, which is interesting. (Bijan 3)

Bijan’s narrative points to the complex relations that people may have with their place of origin as they evaluate the future role that it should or should not play in their lives. While Bijan obviously has strong ties to the Iranian diaspora, and meets many Iranian women with whom he develops a connection, he simultaneously wishes to distance himself from aspects of Iranian (dating) culture. As such, his self-understanding is in this sense ambivalent, as he struggles to determine how he wants his future family life to be. He knows that he wants to settle down, but deciding on the “right match” has proven more challenging for Bijan.
The diverse backgrounds of the young onward migrants in this study are clearly reflected in their views about family life, and in particular, what they believe constitutes the ideal partner. It would seem that their choices are both influenced by structures (class, race and gender) as well as issues of culture which they must then integrate with their own self-understanding.

The younger participants in the study were not only concerned with discussing future partners, however. They also carefully considered what kind of family life they would like to have. Some talked about what kind of parent they would like to be, and what kind of gender roles they felt they should play. Often this was done by making reference to differences in the “Iranian” “British” and “Swedish” family structure. Many of the men in the study expressed their desire to be a breadwinner for their families, and how important it was for them to be in a context that provided them with a salary high enough that they would be able to do that. The women, in their turn, contemplated what kind of work-family balance they felt was appropriate, and how to go about achieving this. In all these narratives, the role of place was central.

As people now in their twenties and thirties, the younger participants in this study generally felt that they had benefited from Sweden’s welfare state: its daycares, schools and other services and believed that Sweden’s generous welfare policies were very compatible with raising a family. Many noted how they had taken these benefits for granted when they actually lived in Sweden, but how after leaving the country behind and seeing how relatively under-resourced many social programs and the education system was in Britain, they had come to appreciate Sweden more. Sweden, in this way, was attractive for some of the participants thinking about having families. This reflects how needs change depending on the stage of the life course. Such concerns were also expressed when thinking about the ideal locality in third country destinations to raise children. Bijan, for example, who had already lived in the United States on several occasions, and felt that it would be his destination again in the future, contemplated the best city in which to raise a family. As he notes,

*I think the hectic cities really went well and coincided with my hectic life, if I settle down perhaps the place should be a bit more settled.* (Bijan 3)

Bijan’s words point to idea that one’s desired place to live is dynamic, and changes with the life course and with one’s sense of self. While the United States’ biggest cities had served Bijan well in his twenties,
he felt that a mid-size city would serve him well in the future when he became more of a family man.

Entwined with these narratives about finding a place that fit well with one’s lifestyle, however, was also a consideration of one’s positionality in place, and in particular what implications being a minority may have on the future of one’s family. One salient narrative to emerge, therefore, was that while Sweden may provide the ideal environment for raising a family in a general sense, the challenges faced by migrants there made it a somewhat undesirable country for migrant families. The lack of satisfaction the participants felt with Sweden in this regard was enough to make them consider having children in London, despite the extra challenges and expense this entailed, or they would consider moving to a fourth country in order to have a family. These feelings were not related to a lack of understanding or compatibility with Swedish society as expressed by the first generation, but rather, the structural challenges they had experienced as young people growing up in Sweden. As Kaveh puts it:

I am being seen as a second-class citizen. This feeling doesn’t really encourage you to live here [in Sweden], basically. More than that, I don’t want my child or my children one day having that feeling. I don’t want them to feel that. Me, moving here, immigrating here, fine. But I don’t want that for my children. I want—obviously every parent wants the best for their kids. I want to create for them something better than I had to go through. (Kaveh 2)

Pari expressed similar sentiments:

If I ever have kids, for example, I would never have them in an all white school, I would make sure there is diversity. It would never happen. I would never do that. It would be really important for me- only because- I grew up in an all white school and you don’t feel like you belong. (Pari 2)

These narratives reflect a very strong desire on the part of these future parents to provide their children with an environment where they will experience acceptance, develop a sense of belonging, and access a full range of opportunities. This is perhaps essential to social reproduction, insofar as without these basic things it is difficult for individuals to reproduce their privileged lifestyles.

Familial Status and Attachment to Place

In exploring the relationship between settlement and mobility, a great deal of literature emphasizes how the more “settled” people are, the
less likely they are to move. Fischer and Malmberg summarize many of the factors typically noted when discussing immobility:

People with strong ties to other people, projects and places are in general much less prone to move. Having children, owning a house, being married and being employed are conditions that constrain migration. (Fischer and Malmberg 2001:368)

For all the participants in the study, the desire to stay in London or the expressed willingness to move away from it was viewed to some extent in relation to their family status. For several, the sense of belonging they felt to London was narrated through the maintenance of a local relationship. Laleh, who had lived in several different cities around the world, found that having a London-based partner, and particularly one of British decent, gave her a sense of grounding that she had not previously felt before. As she explains it:

I mean up till the point I started with my current boyfriend, I didn't really feel like London was home, here was my home. I felt London is my home in the sense of [residence], but I think since I started to go out with my current boyfriend, I feel it more. It's like “I'm going home”. It's more of a stronger feeling. And there was a time when I was thinking of leaving UK, just purely for job purposes, I think that's sort of... My boyfriend and I talked about it quite a lot. You know, we sort of both decided, I'll just stay here and if I have periods of unemployment, I'll just deal with it and I'll just sort of... So I think my relationship made me, to make London more my home, if that makes sense. And we're buying a house here, and, you know, if I end up staying with him, then I guess wherever we live together will be our home. (Laleh 3)

Conversely, not having a partner in London meant that some participants expressed a will to move on if their personal circumstances changed.

Dara: As I said, a long time ago there's was an old Persian saying, ‘Where do you come from?’ “I'm not sure, I haven't got married yet.” You see there's much more in that than that the woman dictates or decides where you should live. You see it's an ancient saying, for thousands of years.

In the same interview, he later goes on to say that

I would move... if I get married again and decide to have children, I would move to the country of the mother of my unborn children. That would be a strong reason or enough reason to move. (Dara 3)

Based on participants’ accounts it becomes clear that for somebody who has been through the social upheavals caused by migration, a lack of feeling “settled” in a place could contribute to the possibility
of moving again. Having children or a partner who is settled in a place can, however, incidentally affect one’s own sense of belonging to it. As Azita told me when referring to her children, “wherever you think they’re most comfortable, is where you are most comfortable”.

As Azita’s words suggest, being able to raise one’s children somewhere stable may in fact help to fulfill the needs of parents, who are given a stronger sense of belonging to a place than might have otherwise been the case. Similarly, in the present study, moving on to London fulfilled not only the ability of onward migrants to raise their children in the way that they wanted, but also to develop their own sense of belonging.

It should be pointed out, however, that often the costs of developing this type of belonging, this close attachment to place through intimate relationships and the nuclear family, came at the expense of broader ties to the extended family. Although parents generally supported their children, for example, to move on independently to Britain in order to advance their education and careers, the separation between parents and children was often questioned, and created a great deal of sadness and longing on both sides.

For Farah, a single woman who moved independently to London to pursue her career, there is always a longing to see her family, as well as some degree of negotiation over how to reunite extended families without losing the benefits of being in the new context. As she told me:

[My parents] always say “Oh do you want to like come back and live in Sweden?” I always tell them “No, but you can come [to London] in the future.” For now, I don’t know. There’s no way I can live there but I think they just say that. They know I wouldn’t. Maybe they try to like test me “Oh when you have children imagine you might be here with us.” I think “Sure, or you be here with me.” [laughter] (Farah 2)

Hamid showed similar considerations.

Melissa: Do your parents hope that you’ll move back to Sweden?

Hamid: Yeah, they would like me to move back. Because my aunt once said that my grandfather is very old now. He’s like having his last breath… or however you want to say that- that’s in Iranian/Farsi [saying]. And my aunt told me when I was in Sweden a few months back that the age that you are in, and the age that we are in, like my aunt and my mom and so on- that’s exactly the age they left Iran, their parents. And before you know it, 25-30 years is gone and they are 80-90 years old. You know? So that was very strong for me, and I always think of it. It’s like, is it really worth it… the life? Before you know it, 20 years is gone, and you see your parents once or twice a year and then they’re gone. Cuz that’s the circle of life. (Hamid 3)
While Farah and Hamid have chosen to make sacrifices in order to find their place in London on an individual level, not all of the participants felt that it was worth it. Hassan, a single man also in his thirties, similarly missed his family, to the point that he returned to Sweden because he could not be away from his parents and his sisters. As he explained it to me:

*We were a very tight family. After just 3 weeks I was homesick every day. I enjoyed life over there. They have a lot of students from Argentina, Brazil, and it was really nice. But this other part, it was much stronger... I don’t regret it, but still I wonder what it would have been like if I had stayed over there.* (Hassan 2)

For all migrants who have been separated from their immediate or extended families, it is not unusual to question and reflect upon the meaning of these (lost) ties and to consider what they wanted for their children not only in terms of education and cultural values, but also in terms of mobility/stability. In considering whether or not she will stay in London, Laleh reflects on this:

*I also, as I get older, I’m realizing how important family is and how important... I sort of... If I have kids I would like them to see their grandparents and for them to sort of do things that I missed out on more. I think that would be quite important for me, to be closer to family and friends and having a good strong network.* (Laleh 3)

Interestingly, in this study, family care needs and in particular the needs of ageing parents were not explicitly brought up by the majority of the participants. This, however, may be due to their relatively young age. The only older participant in the study who had her parents in Sweden did in fact return to Sweden for one year to attend to them.

Of course, not all the participants in my study were close to their families. Disruption through migration made sustaining strong family ties impossible for some, especially those politically oriented migrants who moved to Sweden on their own and could (possibly) never return to Iran. One could argue that for these migrants, *not* having a family, at least in Sweden, was in fact something that encouraged mobility as they adopted other strategies to finding meaning in their lives.

Milad, a political activist who left Iran after spending most of his teenage years in prison, felt very little connection with his immediate family in Iran. Although he kept in touch with his parents and sister, and they occasionally visited him, he felt that they could not understand him. This was not only because of the geographical distance between them, but also because of his involvement in leftist activities,
which he felt set him apart from what he described as his more materialistic sister and more traditional parents. He notes with some disappointment how he initially wanted to help his sister migrate to Europe, but then decided that he felt more motivated to help his friends:

“My sister, she wanted to come, but then… I tried to send her a visa, student visa and all these things. But I really didn’t help her, you know, because for her the reason was just showing off, telling to everyone I was in the UK or in Sweden. It was so shallow. I really tried really hard to understand her. I said “How can you?” She says “I’m happy here, I have everything.” I said “How could you be happy there? They humiliate you every second, how could you be happy?” But then people are different. And she’s happy. Have I told you? She likes to come here and go to Oxford Street and buy some clothes. But all these things for me is stupid, you know? I really prefer to help my friends that they really have problems there. (Milad 3)

For Milad, the friends that he made in prison, or through political activities, have played an important role in his life; one could even argue that his politically active friends have filled the role that his family could not. He relays how the commitment of these friends was “unconditional” and that he could count on them for anything. I would argue that Milad’s reliance on friends rather than family could not be considered a case of the casual elective belonging identified by Beck-Gernsheim (1998) however. It is, rather, a product of the long term irreconcilable separation of family members, and a number of extenuating circumstances that have, in this case, dramatically transformed family life. Although Milad has had long-term relationships, he is now single and has no strong desire to have children. He says that for him, because of his experience, what most people consider to be everyday life: having a partner, having children, is not really a priority. As a result, he lacks the ability of the other participants in the study, to really see himself as belonging to a place, even by way of children or the formation of a nuclear family.

Individual Trajectories and Family Scripts

As many of the participant narratives and stories have suggested, there are both commonalities and differences in the experiences of individual onward migrants. It is therefore important to introduce a more complete picture of how family life and social reproduction have played out in the transnational lives of selected participants. The Iranians involved in this study moved to Sweden at a range of different ages. As noted in chapter 2, it is difficult to determine who is
inside and outside of a diasporic transnational field by using a criterion like age. That said, in order to highlight how factors like age and family status affect onward migration in a contingent way, I have decided to share the trajectories of two participants who arrived in Sweden at different ages, and are currently at different stages in the life course. While Azita’s narrative focuses mostly on what she wants for her children, Hamid’s story is focused more on how he personally was raised by his parents. Both stories nevertheless highlight the importance of family scripts in shaping individual trajectories and lives. These “scripts” include family memories and identities, and more specifically, ideas about what norms and values should guide the social reproduction of family members across space and time.

Azita: Maintaining Privilege by Preserving Family Values and Practices

Azita, now in her early fifties, was born into a liberal, middle class family in Tehran. She pursued her university studies in France, which she enjoyed immensely. After her return to Tehran, however, her family soon decided to move to Sweden where they already had relatives. Azita did not want to go, and although she eventually agreed to join her parents, she was not particularly happy in Sweden. Although she quickly learned perfect Swedish, had a job, and a decent salary, she was bored and unfulfilled. She left Sweden and tried living in several different countries, but eventually returned to Sweden for a one year period to look after her ageing parents. During that year, her husband, who was British Iranian, tried to run a business in Stockholm, but it was not easy for him to succeed there, and eventually the couple decided to move to London. Azita was happy with the choice not only because it made the family business more lucrative, but also because it gave Azita a better opportunity to raise her children in the way that she desired. Although Azita talks about a range of topics during our first meeting, she elaborates mainly on issues related to the raising of her children.

Azita was very critical of the way children are brought up in Sweden where she perceived a lack of discipline and too much independence during childhood and adolescence.

Yeah, many of my friends who live there [in Sweden] and who have teenagers, you know, it's very normal for Swedish teenagers at a very young age to go out and drink whereas here, still, you are a girl of 13-14, you don't go out at the beach with your friends and drink, or 15-16 even. 15-16 you start having wine. And that's what I did when I was in Iran, at that age, not regularly, but my father, you know, in a party said, "Do you wanna have wine?" And I said, "Oh this is so nice, I'm a grown up I can have wine" you know? Whereas a friend of mine [in Sweden] has two daughters, and also I have other friends,
but this one’s closer to me, she had to struggle and her daughters went through such a rough time, because of course you want to do like your friends, of course you want to do what they’re doing, and your mother doesn’t want you to, so even the compromise was very hard. Because she didn’t say to them “You have to stay at home, you cannot go anywhere,” But she had a curfew like when you were 15 you come home at 10 o’clock in the evening, which I think was appropriate. But the other friends, either had no curfew or their curfew was 12 o’clock or 1 o’clock in the morning. (Azita 2)

While these things were disturbing for Azita, the real problem, as she saw it, was that if you were a parent in Sweden, it was difficult to have full control over your children. Azita believed that in Sweden too much power was given to the society, and not enough to the individual. This extended to the way that children were brought up. She had very strong ideas about how she wanted to raise her children, what they could and could not do, and how they should be taught to behave. Her power as a parent in Sweden would, however, as she viewed it, always be overpowered by a strong society that was able to exert a great deal of control over its people.

You are not in touch with your children because the society tells you what to do, and I don’t like that. I want, I want… you know… I want some things… I have some principles that I want to, you know. (Azita 2)

Azita tells me that just because she has the views that she does, she is not a “stereotypical Iranian.” Although she makes frequent references to the good schooling, and the proper way that she was raised, she never refers to the “Iranian” way of doing things.

It’s not like… Many Iranians who come from religious families, from very closed, like, you know, disciplined families, they can’t even live in Sweden. I come from a family where I had a boyfriend, I could drink, I don’t come from a religious family, I don’t come from a family that was uh, like a stereotype, you know, Iranian-like… Because we’re not like that, we were not like that when the revolution happened. After the revolution, it became like that again. But if I compare myself with a French or British family that has my age and my, you know, uh situation… They are… I think the same as they do. (Azita 2)

Rather than defending her motivations by way of a desire to preserve “Iranian culture” therefore, she draws attention to the link between class and morality, referring, for example, to the middle class people who share her opinion in Britain and France. In this way, Azita references the differing class structure in these societies, and their corresponding (and preferred) cultural practices. In this sense Azita distances herself from the working class in Britain, as well as from Sweden’s more flat social structure. In doing so she claims what Skeggs (1997) would call “respectability” or “moral authority”. This is also
reflected in some of the biographical details she highlights, including the way she has chosen both a school and neighborhood that she believes are best for her children. Azita and her husband moved to the suburbs of London, to preserve both their lifestyle and to ensure the security of their family. Although well-off, they cannot afford to have exactly what they need in London, so they compromise by moving to a suburban area. As Azita tells me in our second meeting, “The ideal situation would be having a big house in London, sending your children to private schools [laughs] But you know…”

Azita wishes that her children could have the same educational experience and upbringing that she had in Iran. Instead, she has found a compromise by raising her children in a place which she perceives to be more similar to her (imagined) homeland which she very reluctantly left behind. Basically, Azita loves the idea of pre-Islamic Iran and misses Iran immensely. No other country can be home for her, only the pre-revolutionary Iran that she keeps in her memory. Although Azita’s tone is sad when she realizes what she has lost, she tries to put a positive spin on the highly mobile life that she has led. She sees herself as an open person who has been able to incorporate different aspects of the different cultures she has encountered into her world view. Rather than simply passing on Iranian middle class values to her children, this multifaceted perspective is also something she also hopes that will benefit her children.

I think it’s a very good asset for my children. The way I bring them up I think is an asset to them because they’re not British, they’re not Swedish, they’re not Iranian, they’re a mixture of all that. And um, and I think that is… I think that’s going to be very helpful to them in the future because they’re a citizen of the world. (Azita 3)

In order for them to reap the benefits of this unique perspective, however, she wants her children to grow up in a cultural context that is open to this diversity, and in her mind, this is not Sweden. “Everybody has the same culture. It’s like a factory.” she tells me in our first meeting. Clearly for Azita, Britain’s comparatively liberal approach to family life provides a space for social reproduction that was not available in Sweden.

**Hamid: Being in the Right Place, with the Right People**

Hamid, who was born into a middle class family in Iran, was sent to Sweden as an unaccompanied child. His parents and sister were not ready to migrate, but it was important that Hamid move as quickly as possible. This was a time when the migration of boys in particular was restricted, since they were seen as a valuable resource in the Iran-
Iraq War. Hamid’s parents consequently thought that it was important for him to leave Iran before it was too late. Hamid already had family in both Sweden and Denmark but his parents chose to send him to Sweden because they believed his relatives there were better placed to prevent him from getting into any trouble. Some months later Hamid was joined by the rest of his family, and they settled in an unsegregated small town.

Hamid’s parents made an effort to avoid segregation. They could see that other migrants were struggling, and felt it was better for their children to grow up among Swedes rather than poorly integrated Iranians. In Hamid’s region of Sweden, Iranians had a reputation for engaging in drug dealing and other minor criminal acts, and as a result, his parents were even wary of the few Iranians in their particular town. As Hamid told me:

This is the thing, my parents didn’t want me to spend a lot of time with those Iranians because there was not many—There was 3, 4 Iranians—and they were not, according to my parents, appropriate Iranian. And I didn’t go with them. Not that they were like heavy criminals or something like that. They maybe sold some and smoked some, but they were not—you know what I mean? (Hamid 3)

Controlling the social relations of middle class children is a class strategy that reflects the middle class’ position between opportunity and constraint (Kaufman 2005). Clearly Hamid’s parents believed that he was at risk of associating with the “wrong Iranians” doing things that did not reflect the family’s middle class background. By protecting their son from bad influences, therefore, Hamid’s parents helped the family to keep their middle class habitus intact. Part of this also involved protecting their son’s Iranian identity and keeping his middle class Iranian cultural capital intact.

Despite being in a predominantly Swedish school and neighborhood, Hamid’s parents cultivated an understanding and a respect for Iranian history and culture in the home.

Melissa: So what exposure did you have to Iranian culture growing up?

Hamid: A lot, at home. Very very traditional. I must say actually I had the best growing up, and all thanks to my mom actually. Definitely. I always say, there’s no doubt about it.

Melissa: Why do you say that?

Hamid: Because it was very important for her. ‘Cause you know in Iran, it’s not like Europe or anywhere else where most of the people is like the same class—I don’t talk about the financial—I mean like the mentality, the way of thinking. There is a lot of… You see
like two three families in Iran, whose like very open minded, and you see 90% who doesn’t even know anything except Mohammed and Ali, literally nothing. And then there’s a few others who know something else. You know what I mean? There’s a lot of those kind of things. (Hamid 3)

Hamid was happy that his parents had raised him in what he considered to be a “traditional” Iranian way, appropriate for his family’s respectable class standing. Hamid’s family was of “noble” descent which is clearly something that he took pride in. Although he did not see his family as particularly privileged in the economic sense, he nevertheless felt that he had a superior sense of cultural and symbolic capital when compared to most Iranians in Sweden. He complains that too many Iranians in Sweden pretend to be linked to the Shah, for example, and that he can tell the difference between those Iranians who really occupy a high social position, and the many Iranians that only pretend to have such a status, despite Sweden’s flat social structure.

Because when you talk to them [the other Iranians] how can your father do that and you grew up like this? Even when you go home to them, the way… You know, the manner, the eating, the interaction between the family… And you’re like wait a minute. You know what I mean? (Hamid 3)

The specific cultural capital that Hamid felt had been advantageous to him: ways of eating, ways of being, and his parents’ degrees from elite university institutions, had somehow lost their value in the Swedish context where many Iranians from his perspective lacked these attributes, did not value them, or, as he views it, could easily pretend that they were from a higher class background than they actually were. Hamid, however, held onto to what he believed were his special cultural attributes, which gave him a sense of distinction, and the confidence to pursue his ambitions.

Hamid himself got what he believed to be an excellent education in one of Sweden’s top universities. While he was successful in Sweden, he nevertheless felt that the Swedish system limited his opportunities. As he saw it, the characteristics that his parents had fostered in him and that he cherished about himself: ambition, an outgoing disposition, enthusiasm for new challenges, could not be fully used or appreciated in the Swedish context. He therefore did his best to get useful work experience in Sweden, created the best CV he could, and looked for jobs in London shortly after his graduation.

While Hamid has been very successful in London’s labour market, slowly working himself up to higher and higher positions, his story contains a number of references to the social and material success he
has achieved outside of work. While he works mostly with non-Iranians, his social life is filled with other successful Iranians, many who have grown up in Britain, or in Iran. Although his parents quietly imbued him with cultural capital that he could not employ in the Swedish context, or even in Sweden’s Iranian diaspora, he was now with people who understood him and his attributes.

Furthermore, the point Hamid made of living alongside other successful Iranians may be viewed as part of a spatial strategy to retain his middle class position. Although Hamid’s parents had made an effort to avoid segregation and instead chose to live in a small town among Swedes, later, in London, Hamid was also very careful about where he lived.

Melissa: How did you find your place?

Hamid: I know an Iranian here in the property business. And I said where I wanted to live. Actually they told me to live here. He said this is the place to live because there’s a lot of Iranians. But the quality is better than Kensington blah blah blah... And when I went there I said geez, this area is exactly like Sweden: the red brings and beautiful and green, and hey, this is it. It is high class, and there’s lots of Iranians and various people. (Hamid 3)

For Hamid, the choice to live in a “high class” area was, it would seem, closely aligned with a desire to socialize with like-minded people who would confirm his identity, reflect his own self-understanding, and moreover, help him to perpetuate his middle class position.

Transnational Predicaments and Enduring Ties

This chapter has attempted to illustrate how Iranian diasporic families have adapted to their changing circumstances across space and time. The findings shared in this chapter point to the enduring importance of family life across space, time and generations. It would seem that mobile families may offer an important site of belonging for people who have been uprooted from their original place of origin. In a migration context, family life may be considered one of the few ways to create continuity across space and time; it allows for the reproduction of some aspects of the familiar and, related to this, allows individuals to cultivate a sense of belonging in a context where other types of belonging may be less accessible.

At the same time, however, it cannot be said that family life is unproblematically reproduced across space, time and generations. Instead, the families discussed in this chapter have been forced to rene-
gotiate everything from gender roles, to the role of spatial proximity in defining family life, to what they think constitutes successful social reproduction. This renegotiation has occurred in a transnational social field linking Iran, its diaspora, and a number of more localized contexts.

Moreover, for the onward migrants included in this research, family concerns have played an important part in past and future migration decision making. As discussed, the desire to maintain family ties, build stable families, and raise children in a meaningful way, have all been reflected in the participants’ individual migration decisions.

Having established an understanding of family life in diasporic context, and how family life may contribute to an understanding of onward migration, I will now turn to look at how individuals have gone about pursuing their goals, and particularly their goal of success, across both space and time.
Chapter 8
In Search of Success

Many of the Iranians that moved to Sweden in the 1980s were young and ready to start their careers. They had envisioned that their futures would take shape in a certain way in Iran, and were anxious to actualize their personal and career goals even after moving to Sweden. The move to Sweden, however, was very disruptive for many who, as I have discussed in chapter 6, found that they had to struggle for recognition in Swedish society. As noted, although these migrants were generally highly educated and, in many cases also highly skilled, they could not easily achieve their goals in the Swedish context. This is something that became particularly apparent to these migrants when they compared the situation of Iranians in Sweden, with the situation of Iranians in other parts of the diaspora. Iranians are known in many diasporic contexts for their material wealth, and their high levels of achievement.

In this chapter the motives underlying onward migration will be further contextualized and explored, by looking specifically at how the desire for recognition, status and achievement spurred several of the study participants to move on. Rather than taking a purely economic approach to understanding how these people went about defining and achieving their goals as they moved from one context to another, the link between culture, the economy and place is in focus. While acknowledging that there are differing definitions of success within the global Iranian community, the attention in this chapter is nevertheless on how the study participants positioned themselves in relation to dominant discourses and narratives of success in the transnational fields connecting Iranians in different places. The chapter begins with a discussion on the concept of success, especially as it relates to the Iranian diaspora. This is followed by an overview of how onward migrants have used space to achieve their goals. The chapter then turns to individual narratives and trajectories, and discusses how success is viewed differently by the participants depending on their positionality.
A Successful Diaspora

The Iranian diaspora is large and highly differentiated. As I have already highlighted in chapters 4 and 6, one can find considerable diversity in terms of class, ethnicity, religious and political affiliation among Iranians living outside of Iran. But, as I have also argued, the Iranians that left Iran were, on the whole, relatively well off. Those who left Iran were people who could, at the very least, afford to leave the country. Most people either had to pay large sums of money to smugglers, or if they used formal channels they had to have social connections in high places. As emphasized in chapter 4, many of the Iranians that chose to leave Iran at the time of the revolution, were part of the “new middle class”. This new middle class was made up of the intellectuals and professionals that had been produced through the Shah’s reforms. These reforms were, for the most part, highly influenced by Western markers of privilege, including everything from Western-style educations, to household appliances, cars, and clothing. The middle classes who adopted a Western way of life generally saw themselves as being in opposition to the more religious traditional middle classes (Kelley 1993b). They therefore developed their own lifestyle which was distinguished by its secular orientation and its connection to “modernity,” and was therefore not something to which all Iranians (and especially the lower classes) had access. Moving to the West was therefore a way to preserve not only the significant financial assets that this new middle class had accumulated over the course of only a few generations, but also an opportunity to preserve their outlook and their values. They believed that in the West they could preserve what they considered to be the desirable middle class lifestyles that were under attack by the Islamic regime.

Essential to preserving this middle class identity in the diaspora, has been, for many diasporic Iranians, the promotion of certain markers of individual and family success. “Success” cannot be used as a taken for granted concept, however, and requires some definition (Torres 2001). It may be understood as part of the growing neoliberal focus on individual responsibility, and the pressure people feel to maximize their output in an increasingly competitive world. I would argue that in the particular diasporic context discussed here, however, it should also be viewed in relation to Iran’s afore mentioned modernity process, which encouraged people to demonstrate their newfound wealth and, related to this, their ability to make a contribution to modern Iranian society. Central to this, has been a belief that education furthers development, and that some career pursuits are more valuable than others (Shavarini 2004). In Iran peo-
ple working within some occupational fields have therefore been rewarded with a particularly high status while others have not been. Many of these distinctions have been carried over to diasporic contexts, with some Iranians being perceived as highly successful and others less so.

Given the Iranian government’s focus on science and technology, the engineering profession is held in particular esteem in Iran. This probably relates to the fact that Iran is a developing country that is building its foundations; since the 1960s, there has been a special demand for the services of engineers, architects, and others involved in the building profession. Healthcare workers also have a high status in Iran, something that is perpetuated by the ongoing difficulty of entering fields like medicine and dentistry, and the very unbalanced ratio between doctors and patients. Interestingly, however, despite the fact that there is less demand for people with these skills in many diasporic contexts, Iranians are still often overrepresented in these professions, and many Iranians regard those working in these occupations with high levels of respect. Finally, business, in some places, has been very important for diasporic Iranians. This is especially the case in Los Angeles where Iranians have been seen as particularly influential in the fashion industry and in real estate. Iranians involved in business do not necessarily have high levels of education. Typically they come from privileged backgrounds in Iran, however, which gave them the capital they needed to invest following their migration. By using their social contacts wisely, as well as being lucky in terms of the timing of their investments, these Iranians have also been very successful (Kelley 1993b).

Certain lifestyle factors are also associated with high levels of status and wealth. For many Iranians, success is performed by way of conspicuous consumption practices in particular. McAuliffe’s study of Iranian class divisions in Sydney, Vancouver and London suggests that “The conspicuous consumption extended from the purchase of quality groceries from boutique grocery stores through to a preoccupation with luxury cars.” (McAuliffe 2008:72) Kelley’s work on Los Angeles has also been revealing. As he puts it:

In Los Angeles, wealthy and even middle-class Iranian exiles have continued their obsession with French and Italian fashions and European automobiles: Mercedes (a favorite choice), BMW, and Rolls Royce. More than ever before, they display their prosperity to affirm their high status. (Kelley (1993b:260)

Studies such as these have shown the importance that some wealthy Iranians put on coveting not only education and certain occupational
titles, but also certain status symbols, many of which can be used in the public realm as markers of status and success.

The materialism expressed through luxury objects is also reflected in residential decision making, with Iranians in many parts of the diaspora being concentrated in high status neighborhoods. McAuliffe found that wealthy Iranians who left Iran just after the revolution could be found living in high end suburbs of Chatswood, St. Ives or Hornsby, in Sydney. In Vancouver they could be found in the wealthy North and West parts of the city, while in London, as already noted in chapter 6, they could be found in the prestigious Kensington and Knightsbridge areas (McAuliffe 2008). Kelley similarly found that in Los Angeles, the majority of Iranians could be found in the affluent neighborhoods of Westwood, Beverly Hills, and Glendale (Kelley 1993b). The decision to live in these expensive areas may be a reflection of the lifestyle choices some have made to distinguish themselves from other migrants, who are deemed less successful and less affluent.

According to McAuliffe’s (2008) findings, many of the standards associated with status and success in the Iranian diaspora have, interestingly, been shared across diverse sub-groups. McAuliffe illustrates how Baha’i and Muslim Iranians have many similar residential preferences, for example, despite the Baha’i philosophy of equality and more practical aim of population dispersal. Kelley (1993b) similarly notes how Armenian and Jewish Iranians seem to share similar ideals of affluence in Los Angeles, despite having different backgrounds, and being connected to different social networks.

While these communities may share similar definitions of success, of course not all Iranians are equally given access to the status symbols they require to be considered “successful”. The experience of migration impacted people in different ways. While some were able to transfer their assets out of Iran before losing them, others lost everything when the new regime was established. In particular, the period in which Iranians left Iran has been one of the major factors separating the more and less affluent. Moreover, those who left immediately for places like Los Angeles (for the most part followers of the Shah) were best positioned to preserve their wealth, while those who later left as refugees for European countries in many ways struggled to retain what they had built up. It is therefore important to consider how the geography of opportunity overlaps with the geography of the Iranian diaspora, and where Iranians have been best situated to “find success” and why.
Without a doubt, the stereotype of the wealthy and successful Iranian has long been attached to Iranians in the United States. According to Mobasher, for example, in 2008, Iranian families had an average income of $86,087 which was $22,876 above the American average. Furthermore, 62% of Iranian families also “lived in owned properties with a median value of $553,800” (Mobasher 2012:141). As a result, Iranians in the United States are frequently viewed as a model minority. In other parts of the world, the image of Iranians as wealthy and successful is perhaps less pervasive. As discussed in chapter 6, in the British context, although there are many successful Iranians, they represent a relatively unknown migrant community. Following in the footsteps of their American counterparts, however, there is a movement towards promoting the image of Iranians as successful. Organizations like the Iranian Business Association and the Iranian Medical Association in London have been at the forefront of these initiatives. Although there is no similar development in Sweden and, as I have noted, many Iranians have in fact faced barriers to achieving affluence, academics (Hosseini-Kaladjahi and Kelly 2012a) have stressed that the Iranian community is highly educated and highly skilled.

Naturally, not all Iranians fit the stereotype of the highly educated (and often affluent) model minority. Even in Los Angeles those moving as refugees in particular have faced significant financial difficulties (Kelley 1993b). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the stereotypical lofty goals associated with elite Iranians: starting successful businesses, and achieving success in the professions, have been unattainable, or even undesirable, for those Iranians from less affluent backgrounds, or those with more politically motivated ambitions. It is nevertheless hard to deny that both the class backgrounds most diasporic Iranians come from, as well as the stereotypes associated with their success in the global diaspora, have forced individual diasporic Iranians to confront dominant notions of “success” that they have subsequently had to position themselves in relation to. While some may be indifferent about maintaining their pre-revolutionary class position, for those wishing to do so, “the class context into which Iranian families have migrated offers different degrees of opportunity to transcend class position and ‘rise up the social ladder’.” (McAuliffe 2008:68) While classed identities have, according to McAuliffe been very much emphasized in cities such as London, Sydney and Vancouver (McAuliffe 2008) or Los Angeles (Kelley 1993b), retaining class identity has proven to be more difficult in Sweden for a number of reasons.
The Pursuit of Success in Transnational Spaces

Many Iranians came to Sweden with nothing, and were forced to start from scratch again. According to the participants in this study, however, this did not impede their ambition. All of the onward migrants involved in this research identified with a strong desire to obtain educational and career advancement, and the majority were also anxious to secure what several deemed to be “a middle class lifestyle” for themselves in the diaspora. In fact, for the participants in this study, the desire for success was one of the driving factors behind choosing to live outside of Sweden.

Most of the barriers that Iranians have faced to achieving their ambitions have been discussed in previous chapters. The main factor of relevance here is the class degradation that many experienced in Sweden, on account of the marginalized status attached to being a refugee from a developing country. Many also felt that Sweden’s welfare system, while securing a high level of security for its citizens, inhibited, rather than encouraged, high levels of ambition. This was detrimental to the maintenance of a middle class position insofar as it did not allow this particular group of people to distinguish themselves from the average citizen.

With migration to Sweden, Iranians had to find their way not only in Swedish society, but also within the Iranian community in Sweden. This, too, had several implications for class-based identities, insofar as the class structure in Iran could not be unproblematically reproduced in Sweden. As Kelly (2007:13) notes, “migration brings places together such that class, in all its dimensions in one place is complicated by class in another.” The class structure that Iranians found in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s differed greatly from the class structure that they had left behind in pre-revolutionary Iran, and as such, they were exposed to different definitions of class, and different opportunities for showing class distinction. Not only did they have to fight to maintain their middle class position in a general sense, thus, but the class hierarchy they encountered in Sweden presented new challenges for intra-group distinction.

While it may be convenient to refer to the Iranians that came to Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s as a unified middle class, this is a somewhat simplified way of looking at this group. Those who arrived in Sweden belonged to the middle class to different degrees. While some were from particularly wealthy families, others were simply from ordinary middle class backgrounds. Some came from the upwardly mobile capital, Tehran, while others came from more provincial cities, or even smaller towns that were typically deemed by urban-
ites to be less sophisticated, if not less affluent. Furthermore, as refugees, these people found themselves in different economic circumstances upon their arrival in Sweden depending on what had happened to their businesses and economic assets after the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war.

In Sweden, where equality (at least according to formal rhetoric) was viewed as an important goal, the playing field between these various subgroups was in many ways leveled. Not only did the extra-privileged status of some families go unrecognized by Swedes but according to my findings, it was challenged by other Iranians within Sweden’s flat social structure. Given the new circumstances created by the migration context, some Iranians who had been less privileged in Iran saw an opportunity to challenge those who had considered themselves more elite. According to some of the participants, a silent class battle, probably unbeknown to most Swedes, therefore characterized the intra-group experience of Iranians in Sweden; some tried to assert their intra-group distinction while others used the opportunity to claim a higher status. While the participants typically depicted these intra-group class distinctions as secondary to the marginalization they had experienced in Swedish society, these internal group dynamics nevertheless played a role in their identity formation and also how they situated themselves first in Iran, then in Sweden, and later in London.

In this sense, the findings of this study find resonance with the work of McAuliffe (2008) who argues that the social reproduction of class divisions must be negotiated with reference to transnational and national experiences, but they are also situated in the specific (often localized) contexts in which people find themselves. While Sweden generously opened its doors to Iranian migrants, consistent with its political agenda, it did so in an egalitarian way that did not distinguish between skilled or unskilled workers, or rich or poor people. The result has been that the Iranians that took the opportunity to come to Sweden have experienced differential impacts on their status. Some Iranians lost their sense of distinction while others gained a sense of equality within the Iranian community.

This last point is important, insofar as it suggests that not all Iranians were unhappy with their experience in Sweden. For some, moving to Sweden was a way to secure a higher position than they had occupied in Iran. For the majority, however, moving to Sweden coincided with downward social mobility (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997). The experience of being relegated to the “lower classes” in Sweden had some interesting effects. While some chose to accept their marginal-
ized position, many used education, and in the case of the participants in this study also onward migration, to avoid this downward mobility or, perhaps more simply, to secure opportunities that were not available to them in Sweden.

Seizing Opportunities
For the diasporic Iranians in this study who left Sweden behind, moving on was explained almost unanimously as a strategy to overcome barriers faced in the Swedish context, and to take advantage of opportunities in the London context. Place, in the participants’ narratives, was typically depicted as being very important in shaping the opportunities available. In this sense, their stories were both about how opportunities varied between places as well as how they personally could or could not access these different opportunities. Although the opportunities I am referring to include the prospects that people perceived in the social and cultural domains as well as the economic, for the purpose of this part of the chapter the focus will be on employment opportunities.

As discussed in chapter 5, there are several differences between the way that migrants are economically integrated in Sweden and Britain. On a national level, migrants are more often regarded as a source of labour in the British context, rather than as a social responsibility as they are in the Swedish context. But it is also important to highlight some of the specific characteristics of London’s labour market. London is in many ways a special place within Britain. From an economic point of view, London is generally considered to be on par with a handful of other global cities such as New York and Tokyo which are at the epicenter of the global economy and represent the spatial concentration of finance, services and associated agglomeration economies (Sassen 1991). It is therefore perhaps not that surprising that on a national level, living in London and its surrounding area, “increases the probability that an individual has a professional/managerial position” (Clark and Drinkwater 2007:40). There are many opportunities for white collar workers in London’s economy. It has also been argued, however, that the city’s labour market is highly diversified, and that there are many jobs available on all different levels of the skill spectrum (Butler and Robson 2003). London therefore offers a very different economic context than Sweden, which has a smaller, less diversified labour market.

From the perspective of the onward migrants in this study, the contextual differences that mattered could be summed up as follows:
in London there were job opportunities that were not available in Sweden; with the right skills it was easier to progress more quickly up the ladder in the British context; and finally, opportunities could be accessed in London without as much fear of racial discrimination. My findings are not entirely unique. As Rezaei and Goli (2011) found in their study of onward migration from Denmark’s welfare state:

> revenue opportunities, structural opportunities and experiences with the host country, mainly related to what is affecting immigrants and descendants comparative advantages and disadvantages that influence the decision to stay or to leave the country. (Rezaei and Goli 2011:248)

Of course when many Iranians first moved to Sweden, they had not been aware of the country’s relative drawbacks, and had been more focused on what it had to offer. As the leader of an Iranian community centre in London told me, in Scandinavia, refugees may have an easier time in the beginning when they first settle, because they are given more support than they are in Britain. Once established, however, it is common for them to reconsider their place preferences in accordance with their changing needs and expectations.

It is perhaps important to point out, however, that in terms of opportunity, Britain was frequently not regarded by the participants in this study as the absolute best country to work in. Many expressed an ultimate desire to move to the United States for the relatively better opportunities available there. For most of the participants, however, Britain (or at least London) provided a good compromise. While Britain might not have been able to provide the same level of opportunity as the USA, it was generally seen as closer to home, easier to move to, and, as Swedish citizens it was possible for them to move there without applying for a visa. As Hamid told me,

> In case the paperwork takes 6 months, 1 year or whatever, to get a job in the US, why not move here? Because you can do it, as I said, overnight. You just get the plane, start to work, bum bum buah bum bum buah. Meanwhile you apply for things in the US, and if it doesn’t work out you stay here. (Hamid 2)

It would seem that for the onward migrants in this study, it was opportunity, and the desire to make something of one’s career that led many to look to new horizons, especially upon entering the labour market. In considering different places, however, they also had to carefully consider their own unique attributes, and what was required in order to achieve their goals.
Making Success Happen: The Geographical Specificity of Capital Exchange

Most of the onward migrants in the study have met their goals by accumulating capital in different places and moving it from one place to another where it took on a different exchange value. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of capital and exchange, one could argue that these people were actively engaged in exchanging and accumulating capital within a transnational field that offered different opportunities for both the accumulation of capital of various kinds, and different exchange rates for this capital in different parts of the diaspora. At the local level, capital acquired in both Iran, Sweden and in some cases also in third and fourth countries, was put to use in specific segments of the London labour market.

After the upheavals of migration, most arrived in Sweden where they had to start from scratch. While some still had businesses and financial assets in Iran, as already mentioned, most lost much of their economic capital, and in many cases the degrees and skills that they brought from Iran were devalued. These findings mirror similar scenarios in, for example, the Canadian context, where, as Bauder has emphasized, migrants need Canadian work experience in order to secure a job, and this in a sense helps employers to discriminate against those with foreign backgrounds (Bauder 2001).

In Sweden, however, Iranians faced challenges transferring their existing capital but also had new opportunities at their disposal. As recent migrants, Iranian migrants were able to build up new types of cultural capital that were considered useful in the new context. These included Swedish university degrees, the acquisition of Swedish citizenship (and consequently an EU passport), and language skills in both Swedish and English. These were all made available through Sweden’s generous welfare state which encouraged fast naturalization and offered free language training as well as tertiary level education. Many Iranians embraced these opportunities. Although after time they appeared to be seemingly highly qualified for the Swedish labour market, however, it later seemed that not only was the capital they brought from Iran devalued, but so was much of the cultural capital they had accumulated in Sweden. The Swedish labour market required more. From the perspective of many of these diasporic Iranians, symbolic capital—and especially symbolically belonging to the nation—became an important prerequisite to achieving success in the labour market and elsewhere in society. But symbolic capital was very difficult for these people to acquire because of their racialized position in Swedish society, and their status as refugees.
The move to London, it could be argued, therefore helped these migrants to exchange the cultural capital they had acquired in Sweden, back into the economic and symbolic capital they had left behind in Iran. In Britain, skill shortages are common, as there is less emphasis on training and education and more emphasis on job place learning (Roberts et al. 1994). This increased the value of the university degrees these Swedish Iranians had acquired, but also their specialized training in highly skilled fields such as dentistry. This, in the context of a society that defined symbolic capital differently and was more accustomed to incorporating foreign workers into the labour market, made it easy for Iranians to transfer their capital to the British context. On the other hand, the emphasis on skills, rather than on education, in the British context, made it possible for those Iranians with high levels of ambition to quickly work their way into top positions, something that had not been possible in the Swedish context. Consequently many of the study participants felt that if they were hard working, smart, and ambitious enough, they could achieve almost anything they set their mind to.

Although many Iranian onward migrants felt limited in Sweden, ironically, had they moved to Britain first, as refugees, they may not have had the same possibilities for success as they had going first to Sweden. Sweden gave them what were in some cases highly valuable educations and skills, and access to institutionalized capital in the form of an easily and quickly acquired European passport. The time spent in Sweden even provided these diasporic Iranians with embodied capital in the form of, for example, language (and especially English language skills) which further facilitated their move to London. By moving first to Sweden and then to London, thus, they were able to achieve their goals, albeit not necessarily in the most direct way.

The Temporality of Capital Exchange

Naturally, the exchange rate for different types of capital is not fixed, and varies not only across space, but also across time. For the study participants then, transferring their capital from one context to another was partly about timing. Some of the younger participants, for example, believed that they had benefited greatly from the Swedish education system, and only needed to move on when it came time to enter the labour market. It was at this point in the life course, usually as they came into adulthood, that they came to a full realization of the limitations they faced in Sweden. They were happy, therefore, that they could benefit from Sweden’s generous education programs (sometimes up to the university level), but did not want to stay in
Sweden for work. Furthermore, some (such as the dentists who will be discussed in more detail shortly) moved on just at the moment when they were needed in Britain, which greatly improved their chances of being successful there and ensured them the highest return on their education. There was also the question of when return would or would not be a viable option. Although most of the participants in my study had no intention of returning to Sweden, they also felt that they could achieve more in Sweden, should they decide to return, than would have been the case if they had never left at all.

It is important to recognize that onward migration is not a strategy that would lead to equally positive outcomes for all migrants. The opportunities available through mobility are not the same for everybody, and some may have more or less opportunities to advance their capital and benefit from changing contexts. Furthermore, as has been noted by scholars such as Skeggs (2004), mobility itself may be considered a (convertible) form of capital to which not everybody has equal access. Having already had the experience of migration, some migrants may foresee the possibility of moving again and know how to execute these moves successfully. Many of the Iranians in this study, for example, had developed a strong diaspora consciousness; they were accustomed to thinking beyond the communities in which they lived, and instead saw a differentiated world of opportunities waiting to be seized. As noted in the previous chapter, when families left Iran, they used their transnational vision of the world to disperse their family members, thereby opening up opportunities in a range of places. The same could be applied here as again, this diasporic consciousness was used as a resource by those who wished to be open to employment opportunities in a variety of places.

For educated, middle class Iranians then, moving on to London, a place they had known about well before their departure from Iran, was not a huge step. Moving from Iran to Sweden had been very disruptive and very challenging for many of these individuals, but making a second move came much easier. The stories the participants told usually had two parts: in the first place they wanted to secure safety for their families, but after a time of adjusting, they wanted to pursue the life they really wanted. Ghorashi (2002) has argued that it is not the place that offers the opportunity, but one’s position in it. I would say this is highly applicable in the case of the onward migrants studied here, who were differentially situated not only across space, but also across time. As their needs changed, they used different places to achieve their goals.
While useful for understanding how capital is (and is not) validated and exchanged across space, the approach I have taken in this section can of course provide only a very simple picture of how migrants actually went about mobilizing their capital to secure their ambitions through onward migration. It goes without saying that the participants in the study took very diverse pathways to achieving their goals. Furthermore, despite coming from middle class Iranian backgrounds, they did not have equal amounts of exchangeable capital. As Erel (2010), has argued, a rug sack approach to understanding capital exchange through migration assumes that all migrants from a certain place have the exact same types of capital at their disposal in the exact same quantities, thereby overlooking the differences between individual migrants. I agree that this is an important point that should be addressed. In the case of this study, this is perhaps best done by considering individual migrants, and situating them in relation to the specific career fields in which they hoped to achieve something.

The Habitus at Work: Getting Ahead in Specific Career Fields

While it is possible to make some generalizations about the labour markets in Britain and Sweden and the relative opportunities for migrants in both contexts as I have done both in this chapter and in chapter 5, in order to understand how Iranians succeeded in the new context, some attention to specific fields of work is required. Although I do not intend to use Bourdieu’s concept of field in its full sense, some aspects of the concept are useful for explaining the employment of capital within specific fields of work. The definition of field provided by Bourdieu is as follows:

a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field. (Bourdieu 2005:30)

As Bourdieu views it, people are situated in specific and overlapping fields in which they must, as agents, “react” to the structural forces they encounter. In this sense, they use their limited opportunities for agency, to influence their situation in specific fields (Bourdieu 2005:30). Rather like in a game of sport, one’s position in a field is based on what he or she can bring to the game. As Thomson (2012) notes:
According to Bourdieu, the game that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive, with various agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of capitals: they are both the process in, and product of a field. (Thomson 2012:67)

As already discussed in chapter 2, these capitals may be of the social, economic, or cultural variety, and while one type of capital may be of particular importance to succeeding in one field, another type of capital may dominate in another. “Players” in a given field will therefore benefit from having combinations of capital that will help them to succeed in the game. The combinations of capital that they possess, also make up their habitus, or “system of schemes of perception and thought” (Bourdieu 1977:18).

While the habitus cannot be used as a reified concept that applies to carefully defined class groups, it is something that is shared and recognized by many people. As Friedmann points out, the term dispositions “is critical to the definition of habitus”. According to his interpretation of Bourdieu “the habitus therefore serves as a kind of template which generates strong, normative propensities of actual social practices that are considered normal, acceptable conduct” within a specific field (Friedmann 2002:300). Moreover, there are many different fields in a given social space, and while they may bear their own specificity, they also overlap in various ways.

While in the previous chapter I drew primarily on the concept of diasporic transnational fields, here the focus will instead be on transnational occupational fields, and where possible, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital will be used. In particular, I will demarcate between three broadly defined fields of work in which some of the participants engaged: the corporate sector, dentistry, and political activism. My interest in describing these career fields is not to provide a clear outline of how these fields function per se, but rather to illustrate how some of the onward migrants in the study were able to participate in them across transnational social spaces. By drawing on their dispositions, as well as the capital (and especially the degrees, training and experience they had acquired through their experience in Iran and Sweden) they were able to mobilize their careers across space and time, thereby achieving the success that many had aspired to attain.

The Corporate Sector

According to Modood and Salt (2011), the recruitment of labour in the corporate sector is industry driven. As they put it, the task of recruiting migrants with the right skills “is left to employers acting on
their own perceived corporate requirements.” (Modood and Salt 2011: 253) This means that those wishing to enter high level positions in the corporate sector have to bring certain attributes to the game as defined by specific industries; valuable capital may include (business) degrees from institutions with a good reputation, and experience. But the specific capital needed to succeed is not defined uniformly across the international corporate world. On the contrary, it differs geographically, with specific requirements emerging in different contexts.

As noted in chapter 5, there are many differences between the Swedish and British labour markets, and this is reflected even in the relatively transnational and highly liberalized corporate sector. In the British context, ultimately one must be able to perform on the job and labour turnover is high. Incompetence may lead to employment termination and in order to succeed, one must demonstrate individual competence. In Sweden, in contrast, labour laws carefully protect employees’ rights, and it is relatively more difficult to fire employees. On the other hand, jobs are harder to find and acquire in Sweden. Frequently, it is expected that employees adapt to the culture of their company, and only with time and loyalty is it possible to rise to the top. Given the different systems of redistribution in Britain and Sweden, the salaries also differ between the two contexts, with salaries being significantly higher (but less secure) in Britain in comparison to Sweden.

Despite these differences in the two national contexts, however, the corporate world could also be described as very international, with competition for labour transcending nation states. Therefore, as Modood and Salt (2011) point out, “Those with high-level skills, actual and potential, may expect to work wherever their expertise is required or where their career development may be maximised.” (Modood and Salt 2011:254) Mobility then may itself be a prerequisite for success. As noted earlier, being willing and able to move may be seen as a type of capital, and this is perhaps especially true for those engaged in the corporate sector. The tension, therefore, between the need for transnational labour flows, and the ongoing significance of national and local work cultures (Bartley et al. 2012), raises some interesting considerations around what type of capital can be used in what context.

In the present study there were 3 participants who worked in what could broadly be defined as the corporate world: Hamid, Kaveh, and Azita. All had different trajectories. Hamid had worked his way up in London, taking on one job after the next until he reached his desired position. Kaveh worked for a bank in London, but returned to Swe-
den when his contract was up. He was looking forward to going somewhere else (and hopefully back to London) as soon as another opportunity arose. Azita studied in France, and then worked for companies in Iran and Sweden before moving to London where she helped her husband develop his business.

In the case of all three participants, European degrees were used as the starting point for their careers. All had what they considered to be a solid tertiary education in business from a European university. Kaveh and Hamid were very happy with the response they got to their Swedish university educations.

Hamid: Swedish people in this country’s actually very good stamped by the British. When you say you’re from Sweden they respect you a lot here, I mean in the UK.

Melissa: And with a Swedish degree?

Hamid: Yeah yeah. Very high. (Hamid 3)

All three participants also used work experience in order to slowly climb the ladder to meet their goals. Azita, for example, first used her French education to obtain a job with a French company in Sweden, before joining a Swedish company, and then eventually started her own business. The other two participants worked their way up from regular “9 to 5 jobs” in smaller companies, before securing high level positions in bigger firms. In all cases, their experience in Sweden (which ranged from summer jobs and contracts to full-fledged employment) later facilitated their success in London.

Compared to Sweden, all three of the participants perceived not only the British, but especially the London corporate environment as challenging and competitive. For these participants, however, this was not problematic since they felt they had the necessary tools to bring to London’s corporate game. According to Hamid and Kaveh, the attributes they needed to succeed such as “enthusiasm” and “ambition” were largely embodied. These were characteristics which they felt had been promoted by their Iranian friends and extended family members. These characteristics were seen as something that gave them an advantage in the London corporate world where these embodied traits were looked upon favorably. These traits would also help them in Sweden, but only in the long term. In fact, at the lower levels of Sweden’s corporate game, both felt that these attributes would be negatively rather than positively perceived. Instead, they viewed Sweden’s work environment as very hierarchal; it was generally felt that it took time in Sweden, to reach the top, while in London
it was possible to draw on one’s individual personality to reach high level positions in just a few years. From Azita’s point of view, the business climate in London was also more favourable in this regard. Although workplace culture was less of an issue for Azita and her husband since they were self-employed, Azita nevertheless noted how Britain’s liberal approach to business ownership has helped to further her husband’s business development. While the couple had tried to run the business in Sweden, they ultimately could not make the same profit, or watch the business grow as quickly, as they could in London.

In her study of Iranian entrepreneurs in Europe and North America, Moallem (2000) illustrates how her participants used different types of capital to navigate around the opportunities and constraints they faced in achieving success in the global Iranian diaspora. While her findings also emphasize that many Iranians have faced impediments such as racism and structural difficulties in Western labour markets, she notes that Iranians have nevertheless been able to use different types of cultural and social capital to ensure their success. This was also a finding of the present study, although in my analysis I have also identified international mobility as an important form of capital. Several of the onward migrant participants used a variety of strategies to achieve their goals not only within spaces, but also across them. For the three participants working in the corporate sector, mobility itself proved to be a resource, and a willingness to be mobile was rewarded with economic success.

**Dentistry**

The second career field that is of relevance to the present study is dentistry. Dentistry is an occupation that requires a very specialized academic training and the acquisition of a specific technical skill set which, one could argue, is highly transferable to any context. But since most dentists work in practices that serve clients, one could also argue that working in the field requires business skills, and more specifically interpersonal skills and language skills. This latter set of criteria is, like in the case of the corporate field, much more geographically specific. The extent to which dentistry is an international field could therefore be debated. In this sense, the challenges associated with the transnational transferability of dentistry skills bears some resemblance to the issues faced by the social work occupation as studied by Bartley et al. (2012). Indeed many professions have become “transnational” as the demand for skills has become increasingly global; but skills may not be considered completely transferable in
all respects. This was an issue that was very salient for many Iranian migrants who aspired to move their capital within the transnational occupational space of dentistry.

According to Swedish statistics, many onward migrants with an Iranian background belong to the dentistry profession. Interestingly, in Sweden in the 1990s one of the programs that was relatively easy to get into and had a relatively low level of entry competition was dentistry. It had become a known fact that the market for dentists was flooded, and that there would be little work for students graduating from dentistry programs in the coming years. As a result, many Swedes avoided entering the program. For Iranians, however, this presented an excellent opportunity.

Dentistry was regarded as an extremely prestigious occupation in Iran, and being able to acquire the status of a dentist was a highly desirable albeit difficult task in the Iranian context. For many Iranians, then, the chance to become a dentist was an opportunity not to be turned down, despite the uncertain future it may hold for graduates wishing to work in Sweden. It was also an education program that, compared to some others such as law, the humanities and the social sciences, was based on math and the sciences rather than language skills. Many Iranians found that compared to Swedish students, they had very strong math and science skills due to a rigorous training in these subjects in Iran, while their Swedish language skills were, as one might expect, relatively weak. Dentistry, then, was a choice that many Iranians made in accordance with the Iranian class hierarchy, as well as practical considerations based on the kind of knowledge they were able to bring from Iran to the new society. The four dental schools in Sweden therefore experienced a huge influx of Iranian students, and according to several dentistry graduates that I spoke to, at some point in time Iranian students were said to make up more than 50% of the students studying dentistry.

As could be expected given the predicted low demand for dentists, however, many Iranians struggled to find employment following their graduation from dentistry school. At this time, however, there was an extreme shortage of dentists in Britain. Sweden, which was regarded as a very high-tech country with up-to-date training, became a very desirable place from which to recruit dentists. In 1998, 184 Swedish dentists registered with the General Dental Council (UK) making Sweden the number one source country for dentists moving to the UK. According to the Swedish Dental Association, the emigration of Swedish dentists reached its peak in the late 1990s when about 40% of dental school graduates went abroad. The trend only began to turn
around in the early 2000s when Sweden began to experience a shortage of dentists due to the large number of graduates leaving the country each year.

The reduced opportunities for dentists in Sweden during the 1990s nevertheless raised a number of questions concerning what constitutes the ideal “Swedish dentist” and who was best qualified for the few existing jobs. According to the findings of this study, there was considerable debate over the extent to which embodied attributes like Swedish language skills, and having an understanding of Swedish culture took priority over the technical skills needed to perform the job well. Interestingly, however, there have been, at least to my knowledge, no similar debates over the importance of English language skills and a familiarity with English culture in the dentistry field in Britain. The seemingly different expectations for cultural capital between the British and Swedish labour markets relates perhaps to the high demand for dentists in Britain. Speaking perfect English and understanding “English culture” were therefore not requirements, but being able to perform the job technically well was. Given the high value attached to Swedish training, therefore, the ability to be a good dentist outweighed any other prerequisite. Furthermore, as outlined in chapter 5, Iranians were not placed in a low position on the ethnic hierarchy in Britain, which meant that, capital issues aside, they were subject to less discrimination in Britain than they had been in Sweden. Symbolically, therefore, “race” or “ethnic identity” was less of an issue for dentists entering the new context.

There were two dentists in my study: Dara and Abbas. Both of these dentists had followed similar paths insofar as they received their dental training from Sweden, and then immediately left the country in search of work. They did not try very hard to find work in Sweden, because they both believed that jobs would first be given to Swedish graduates. They felt that their inability to speak flawless Swedish and their Iranian backgrounds would be problematic for them if they wanted to have a career in Sweden. Both Dara and Abbas expected to find work right away, and they were not disappointed. Both found jobs immediately, and were received with the high level of appreciation and respect that they always anticipated to have when they finished dental school.

**Political Activism**

Throughout the course of conducting fieldwork I met several Swedish-Iranian onward migrants who subscribed to different political philosophies and beliefs. While the majority of these people were
never that involved politically, others had been moderately to highly
involved in politics in both Iran and the diaspora. For some, howev-
er, political involvement remains at the center of their lives, and they
have even tried to make careers in fields like social work that coincide
with their political philosophy. Rather than defining the “field” as
social work, however, I have chosen to discuss the field of “political
activism” as, according to my analysis, this is the wider field to which
these particular participants aspire to belong.

Historically, the members of leftist parties in Iran put a priority on
being intellectual, rather than on being “careerists” (people simply
trying to better their own lives and careers). The individualistic drive
to acquire fame and fortune frequently embraced in other facets of
Iranian society was therefore condemned by party members, although
political organizations were themselves very hierarchical with strict
rules for membership and participation (Ghorashi 2002). It would
seem that the field of political activism was instead characterized by a
very strong need for social capital in the form of social support and
networks, and the ability to command respect through demonstrated
leadership abilities. Furthermore, members were expected to demon-
strate loyalty and commitment to “the cause” which in this case was a
(broadly defined) leftist revolution in Iran.

While today these leftist political organizations have largely dis-
banded, those involved in such organizations at the time of the revolu-
tion were, on the whole, highly affected by their experience
(Ghorashi 2002). Many sacrificed years of their lives to the cause, and
in some cases were imprisoned for doing so. This led many former
activists on a lifelong path of political engagement. This has been
encouraged, in part, by the maintenance of social contacts between
former political activists who, perhaps in order to bring meaning to
their experience, have tried to keep the dream of social justice alive
(Levy 1999).

Only two out of the 15 participants who volunteered their extend-
ed life stories for this study could be considered politically active in all
three countries: Iran, Sweden and the UK, and defined political ac-
tivity as central to their lives. These participants were Milad and Ze-
inab. While both Milad and Zeinab were no longer actively involved
with Iranian political parties, they still considered themselves leftists.
Furthermore, they engaged regularly in broadly defined political activ-
ities such as protests, street marches, and socially oriented projects.
While for Milad this involvement now happened mostly on an infor-
mal level and he was more invested in contributing to the world
through his work in the social services, for Zeinab, it was a fulltime
lifestyle. Zeinab was aiming to start her own migrant women’s organization in London, and was trying to find the funding and social contacts needed to move her project ahead.

Both Milad and Zeinab were highly supported by strong social networks of former comrades, or simply like-minded politically engaged people, in both Sweden and London. While for Milad this provided him with a social sense of belonging everywhere in the world, for Zeinab it had more practical purposes. Zeinab was anxious to make use of and expand her network, in order to establish her own organization. Furthermore, like her counterparts in other career fields, Zeinab drew on her Swedish work experience as a starting point, but in her case the most valuable asset she had was her experience as a women’s rights activist in Sweden. Zeinab had been very successful in Sweden, and hoped that in London she would be able to do new (and perhaps even bigger) things.

Both Milad and Zeinab have used their Swedish university degrees to carry out their projects. Unlike many Iranians who came from similar family backgrounds, however, these two participants have downplayed materialism, and have instead embraced low paying jobs in social work in order to better contribute to society. Furthermore, their education reflects these choices. Unlike many Iranians who have chosen to study engineering, dentistry or law, both have put an emphasis on studying social science, counseling, and acquiring practical skills that would be useful for them in field of activism. While this has led them to lead a less luxurious life than might have been available to them had they chosen another path, it has also helped to confirm their membership in the political community. Unlike participants in other fields who have seen a big increase in their salaries following onward migration, with the money Milad and Zeinab make at their jobs in London, they cannot have the same standard of living as they had in Sweden. That said, they have even more opportunities to be politically active and to engage in politically oriented networks, and this is partly what inspired them to move on to London and to stay there.

Having now established a rough sketch of how several of the study participants have used both specific places as well as onward migration to achieve their goals, I will now turn to the individual narrative accounts of some of the participants. The goal in doing this is to highlight how the individual participants in the study positioned themselves in relation to dominant discourses on success, and how they actually made the decision to move from Sweden to London.
The focus here is therefore on the meaning that onward migrants attach to their decision to leave Sweden for London.

Narratives of Success

I compare myself... I've been here for five years, right? Me and my friends in Sweden in five years. I'm looking at how much we have expanded. They are doing... Literally, their job is very... They're not even half of the level not even one third of the level. And then again, my mom is always arguing, challenging me on that and says that they don't want it, you know what I mean? Because they're happy with what they're doing. But I'm thinking, I know my friends, they wouldn't say no to have something that I'm doing. (Hamid 2)

The environment is so different. I was doing [job title removed]. It gave me a lot, I'm really thankful, and I would have never got that in Sweden, like really. And I knew that all along, when I came here to study, I knew that if I would stay in Sweden, I would most probably get a job, but if I would get it, it would be in a little city because even if you want it or not, there is racism in the Swedish workplace. (Azadeh 1)

Stories like these, “success narratives” as I have chosen to call them, were extremely common in this research. Having already explored many of the structural factors underpinning the opportunities available to Iranian migrants in Sweden and London in this chapter, as well as in chapters 5 and 6, I would now like to take a closer look at these narratives, and what they say about onward migration and success. I think this is important, since it can shed light on how people relate to the structural and cultural contexts in which they find themselves in a more subjective way, and what meanings they give to their experiences. As Bertaux-Wiame (1979) puts it, the contents only make up part of the story, and much can also be learned from looking at how stories are told.

As discussed in chapter 3, asking people to construct narratives about themselves requires that they draw on discourses and deliver a version of the story that can be understood by the listener. I therefore view my participants’ narratives as a form of self-presentation, in which they have tried to show me as an outsider (I am not Swedish, British nor Iranian) why they moved from Sweden to London. In doing so, there was a certain justification for their actions, as they turned themselves into what Skeggs (2005) has called “visualizing
moral subjects” who aim to present themselves in a positive light, and to be understood by the person listening to them.

In the case of my study, my participants were people with high levels of education, and the ability to present themselves in a way that conforms not only to Iranian middle class definitions of success, but also to Western conceptions of success. The latter is important considering that as I conducted the interviews, my association with a European institution of higher education may have affected the way I was perceived and the kind of self-presentations my participants chose to deliver. These were people who were, in general, well spoken, and presented a strong case for why they had left Sweden. At the same time, however, they sat in a specific relationship to the “immigrant” stereotype in Sweden. This no doubt influenced the specific version of the story that they told me as they tried to emphasize their worthiness, and along with that, their relationship to a middle class habitus.

Moving to London as Planned Happenstance

If one were to listen to the participants’ narratives and take them at face value, one could argue that onward migration was a rather straightforward event that they made as they moved from a place where they felt limited, to a place that offered them something better. Of course, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, however, onward migration is not as simple and straightforward as it first may seem. If this were the case, it is probable that onward migration may be much more common than it actually is. Instead, different factors had to come together in the migrant’s life in order for it to happen. This is why I like to refer to onward migration as “planned happenstance”.

For many of the highly skilled, middle class Iranians I interviewed, moving on to London was described as the solution to overcoming the status degradation they had experienced in Sweden. Neda’s dad, who was very wealthy in Iran, struggled in Sweden with menial work and failed business ventures. His disappointment with his labour market experience in Sweden led him to search for opportunities in other places:

My dad tried to, in his kind of search for what to do now, he was also trying to see if it was possible to you know maybe it’s better to move abroad somewhere else. He went once to America to try and see if it was possible to move there and get a better life there, maybe a job or whatever I don’t know and be also came to UK and um… So he came to the UK and saw that there is quite a lot of opportunities here: jobs and so on and then he came
Like Neda’s dad, some of the participants moved on because they believed that they could achieve their goals easier elsewhere. Bijan, for example, left because he did not like how the Swedish school system held him back from being an outstanding student, while Hamid left to advance his career in a place where he felt he would be more appreciated.

Not all the accounts given by the participants contain this kind of causality, however. Although the narratives of the onward migrants in the study generally depicted the move to London as a story of overcoming obstacles and attaining access to new opportunities, the actual decision and act of moving to London often took place in a much less direct way. As emphasized throughout this dissertation, the circumstances underlying onward migration are complex, and it is difficult to pinpoint an exact reason that explains it. If one considers only the chronology of events in these peoples’ lives, the picture that emerges looks somewhat different from the way that participants relayed their life histories; the actual lived life is in fact much less linear than one might expect. By comparing the actual trajectories of the participants, with the stories that they told about them, this becomes clear. For these participants, moving to London was not motivated by a clear understanding of what the city might be able to offer them in a general sense, but rather was prompted by specific events like getting a job offer or admission to an educational program.

Abbas was a dentist, and like many other recent dental graduates, faced unemployment upon finishing university. While he was enjoying himself in Sweden, he had to move for work.

You never know, if there was a job for me in Sweden, I would probably stay in Sweden. You never know... Maybe I wouldn’t bother to move to a new country and start from [scratch]. Although I had nothing at that time... But in the end it’s a bit difficult to move and start a new job. But I’m glad that I didn’t find a job. (Abbas 3)

From his current perspective, Abbas mentions how racism, the extremely high levels of tax, and the lack of opportunities for social mobility have now made Sweden seem, but only in hindsight, an undesirable place to live.

Farah’s story is similar. From her current point of view, Farah notes how she experienced many integration challenges as a child and often felt like she did not “fit into” Swedish society. As she describes it, however, it would seem that she has only identified the difficulties
she experienced as “integration problems” in retrospect. At the time, she perceived her situation as normal, what one as a migrant could expect. She never anticipated that onward migration would provide her with the opportunities that it has. After being forced to move to London to pursue her desired study program, however, her perspective has changed; she now says that she will never move back.

There’s something in Sweden makes me really really depressed. I can’t help it. I love to go visit because I have so much good memories from there as well. I love when I go to [my old town], I see around, I walk around and I feel OK. It’s not that I feel bad. But I can’t live there, see my life there, the rest of my life… I can’t handle that. So in Sweden they didn’t let me study [the program I wanted], that was really bad, so I had to do it here. Whereas as maybe I would have stayed if I got into university. (Farah 1)

So while in some individual narratives onward migration was clearly taken as one step to overcoming a carefully identified challenge, other narratives lacked this causality. What is interesting, however, is that despite this, the themes that emerge are somewhat similar. Regardless of the specific event that triggered a move to London, the overcoming of obstacles which were encountered in Sweden is usually presented as the main thrust of the story. This would reflect the fact that these stories are produced in hindsight, from the perspective of people who have had new experiences in the British context. In this sense one could argue that the act of making the decision to leave is constantly being reconsidered, as migrants weigh what they have left behind, and what they have gained in the new context. We cannot, therefore, with this type of narrative material, draw a clear causal link when studying what led onward migrants to move on. What we can do, however, is better understand how migrants make sense of, and giving meaning, to their experiences.

What emerges from the findings, then, is that while not every Iranian who has faced difficulties in Sweden has made the decision to move on, the potential for onward migration is there, and may be triggered by the right circumstances. As it seems from their current point of view, the participants in the study were somehow unhappy with their experience in Sweden. They were, thus, prepared to move when it became necessary for them to do so. Perhaps if, for example, Farah had been very happy in Sweden, she would have changed study programs, rather than countries. Perhaps Abbas would have waited to find a job. Instead, they decided that place mattered less to them than going after what they wanted, and they only realized after moving what could be gained from moving in a fuller sense.
Not surprisingly, the narratives of the participants were rich with evaluations of the different places in which they have lived, as well as justifications for choosing London as a (for the time being) final destination. In order to make sense of their life trajectories, they tried to justify their decision to live in London, and most emphasized their own agency in making the decision to settle there. Places, as already noted, were seen as having certain things to offer, and most of the participants viewed themselves as people exercising their agency as they decided to move between places that would best help them to achieve their goals.

One way of bringing out the success narrative was to draw on the concept of lifestyle choices. While Sweden was seen as following a very traditional eight hour work day culture that provided people with a nice work-life balance but limited opportunities for success, London was seen as offering the opposite: a stressful, but more exciting life, especially in terms of career. Neda’s quote helps to highlight this:

I look at my friends, my childhood friends in Sweden, and they’re all living the typical life. You know, they’ve all bought an apartment and they have a nice, very beautiful apartment, obviously, and they’re living with their boyfriends or husbands, they’re all having the kind of life that is expected of them. One of them is a teacher, one is working in an insurance company… Um and, their lives are so much calmer in the sense that life in London is different. I miss that calm, I guess. But I don’t know, I mean I go to Sweden and then after three days I get really bored. (Neda 2)

Hamid similarly justified his choice of London over Sweden by reference to lifestyle preferences:

I mean during the 20 years that I lived there I noticed racism towards me a couple of times but it’s really not that… I mean, generally, this is the thing. When you go somewhere… and you’re so eager, and you find that that eagerness is not good, and you’re thinking, “OK, that’s good everywhere else in the world, and this is me how I am so… there’s probably nothing wrong with me now… So… maybe I should just leave if I wanna be like, live my lifestyle.” So that’s what you do. (Hamid 2)

While one might be inclined to argue, based on these quotes, therefore, that the Iranians that moved on are simply high achieving individuals who prefer the lifestyle that London offers, as Skeggs (2004) argues, there are many structural aspects to lifestyle choices as well.

The pressure many Iranians face to achieve carefully defined definitions of success may play a role in influencing which “lifestyles” are most desirable. Many of the participants mentioned in passing that they believed Sweden did not provide them with a context where they
could achieve the level of success that many Iranians were expected to achieve. Bijan’s quote helps to highlight this:

If you’re an elite student in the US, you’ll find ways and you’ll be promoted to excel, same in the UK and same in many places in the world. Not in Sweden. You don’t excel in Sweden. You don’t find yourself far above the average. Perhaps that’s why a lot of my Iranian friends decided to move out. Not saying they saw themselves as geniuses compared to the rest of the people in Sweden but perhaps they had a drive that was bigger than mediocre. I know that’s the case with me. (Bijan 2)

It would seem that by moving on to London, then, some individuals were better positioned to achieve success as it had been defined by the wider Iranian community.

In this sense the findings of this study reinforce those of many other class-based studies which emphasize that while narratives around career and social mobility may be highly individualized, we should avoid studying them outside of their structural context (Roberts et al. 1994). Even when presented as lifestyle choices, many practices are still structural at base (Bourdieu 1984).

I cannot continue this discussion any further, however, without paying particular attention to the role that gender has played in influencing how the study participants defined success, and how they explained their onward migration.

Exploring Gendered Definitions of Success

If we measure success using the terms with which I have been broadly speaking: as obtaining a high salary, and securing a good job, we could argue that, as I have already done in several chapters of this dissertation, in general men suffered more from class degradation than women with the migration from Iran to Sweden. After all, men had more to lose through emigration from Iran. The idea that onward migration is a way to escape marginalization and seize opportunities, must therefore be studied in an intersectional way that gives attention to gender as well as class.

Neda’s narrative brought out some of these gendered aspects of onward migration in an explicit way. Neda moved with her family to London as a teenager. Although her family had never discussed it directly, from her perspective, it appeared that onward migration was a result of her father’s downward mobility. Much of her initial, unprompted narrative was about how migration from Iran to Sweden had changed dynamics within her family. Her father, who could not easily continue with what had been his specialized profession in Iran,
experimented with many new things in Sweden including several unsuccessful business startups. While her father become unemployed and disappointed, her mother successfully maintained her position as a nurse between Iran, Sweden and Britain. As Neda tells it:

And throughout this time my mother had a job: she was working as a nurse and she would always have a job, basically. And I mean, partly that created quite a lot of arguments between my parents because my mom had a job and he was depressed, and usually Iranian culture it’s actually very opposite. Traditionally, the man is the one who works and the woman is the one who is the housewife and then things became quite different in Sweden. It was always quite the opposite. (Neda 1)

This eventually led Neda’s father to initiate a move to London where he perceived better opportunities. Neda and her mother were not very motivated to make the move, but Neda’s father insisted. Neda’s story therefore illustrates how for some, onward migration was a highly gendered process by which men in particular tried to reclaim their lost status.

It was not only the content of the stories the participants told that was interesting from a gender perspective, however, but also the way they told these narratives. Neda, a social scientist by training herself, objectified her father’s experience and saw the gendered elements in it. Several of my male participants, however, told their own stories, and in doing so, uncritically depicted themselves as rational actors, eager to take control of their futures and go after the jobs and salaries to which they believed they were entitled.

While acknowledging their marginalization in Sweden, these men were reluctant to be depicted as victims, and instead oscillated between acknowledging racism in Sweden, and denying it for the sake of emphasizing their own agency. Abbas, for example, experienced great hardship in the pursuit of his dream to become a dentist. His emigration from Iran was long and difficult and when he was caught once on his way out of Iran, he was put in prison for a few months. Impressively, he kept focused on his goal. When he finally made it to Sweden, Abbas immediately set his mind to studies. When no other opportunities to work came up, he worked in low level jobs with other migrants. At the same time, however, he also studied Swedish extensively, and as soon as he could, successfully finished dental school. His narrative is one of overcoming obstacles by way of his own agency. When I ask him, at the end of our last meeting, if he would like to conclude with any final statement, he delivered the following narrative:
Probably I've had a challenging life, difficult life, you know, but no, I don't complain. I've done well I think. I was lucky, maybe, or I was stubborn. I'm a fighter, maybe. But life is good. I make life good. You make life what you make it. For example, you always have your choices. I agree with people saying that some people they don't have choices. Yes, somebody whose born in Africa, in that country where there's no opportunity, you know how it is in some African... Yeah, because even if he wanted to be something he couldn't. So for me, maybe I was lucky. Because I went after the opportunity, you know, I tried to find it, and I tried to get closer to it, and then stage by stage to grab what I want and then just build it up little by little. Not to rush too much. But then all of a sudden you see 20 years is gone, and this is where you are now. And then when you think back, then sometimes you can say I'm lucky and sometimes you can say, no, I'm not lucky. I am what I am. I made it. (Abbas 3)

Many of the accounts delivered by men like Abbas did not reflect on the role that gender had played in shaping their life story, or for that matter, their definitions of success. On the contrary, the expectation that they should be highly successful and ambitious was taken for granted. This may in part be because these men have, at least according to their narrative accounts, achieved what they set out to do.

In this study there is one exception, which may make for an interesting comparison. Hassan went to London like all the other men, hoping to secure the same things: a good education, a successful career, and so on. In the end, however, he found that he missed his family so much that he could not stay there. Instead he has chosen to return to Sweden. Although he feels that he suffers from a negative stigma in Sweden, he is trying to accept this and deal with it. He is also trying to develop a more relaxed approach to the concept of achievement. Although he has felt considerable pressure to achieve success in his life, he has grown tired of the constant pressure. As he explains it:

I think one of the problems in my life has been that you always have to prove that you're good. And since you were, you have to continue with that. I never revolted. When people come into puberty they start to revolt against their parents. I missed that period. So finally it got to me. (Hassan 2)

According to his account, it was his failure to achieve the goals that he set out to accomplish that led him to reflect on and redefine his definition of success. Unlike other men in the study, Hassan also talked a lot about how his position as the boy in his family impacted him, and how this contributed to the pressure put on him to succeed.

Naturally the success narrative is both culturally produced by both Iranian discourses as well as by (especially in the London context) more individualizing processes that encourage people to fulfill their ambitions and maximize their personal attributes. By taking part in
onward migration, and experiencing success (as it is conventionally defined by the global Iranian community), not only a middle class habitus, but also a gendered narrative of success is reproduced.

Broadening the Definition of Success

Given that success is not a pre-defined concept but rather a social construction, it is perhaps not surprising that the way men and women view and discuss success differs (Wagner and Wodak 2006). The women involved in my study have been as “successful” as their male counterparts in most respects. Like the male participants in London, they have managed to secure high levels of education and skill, and to achieve positions that they believe would not be available to them in Sweden. Despite the similarities, however, they have been less inclined to reproduce the success narrative so clearly articulated by the male participants in the study.

The different ways that men and women understand success are complex and may relate to a number of factors. In their article about the high education and economic achievements of second generation Iranians in the United States, Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2011) have noted that between the first and second generations, the gender gap has become much smaller. In other words, while first generation women have been successful, they have become even more successful relative to their male counterparts over time. This would suggest that the criteria typically used to understand (male) success: career and educational achievement, are becoming increasingly acquired by Iranian women in diasporic contexts. Whether or not men’s and women’s understandings of success are similar, however, requires more investigation.

According to the findings of this study, the differing gendered experiences of men and women have led to highly gendered understandings of success. As noted in the previous chapter, given that many Iranian women have been less privileged than their male counterparts, they have had to balance their class interests with their gender interests. As is mentioned by the Personal Narratives Group (1989), gender is typically seen as central to women’s lives, while this is not necessarily the case for men. It is therefore not that surprising that women’s life stories tend to incorporate explicit gendered aspects while men’s do not. This is perhaps particularly relevant in the Iranian context where gender has been a particularly hot topic and, consequently, probably something that my participants felt I as a researcher wanted to discuss. Many of the women I spoke with were very forth-
coming about their views on hijab, Iranian women’s rights, and “Scandinavian feminism” and situated themselves in relation to each of these things accordingly. As noted earlier, in chapters 5 and 6, migration from Iran to Sweden had offered these women new opportunities to actualize themselves, and therefore moving on to London was seen as less essential to their success.

While the men involved in the research were more inclined to speak as individuals, women often included stories about how they had combined the achievement of academic or career goals alongside the maintenance of personal relationships. Azita, for example, a graduate from a high ranking business program, speaks mostly about her husband’s business ventures, and her interest in onward migration is mostly about what she thinks is best for him and her children. Laleh and Azadeh talk much more about their personal relationships than any of my male participants, and believe that it is partly the fact that they have found partners in London that makes their life there fulfilling.

While the men in my study often viewed themselves as moving on to achieve their pre-defined career goals (some of which had developed in Iran), the women had a more flexible approach. While they also wanted to achieve high levels of education and high career goals (and the majority had already done so), this was less mandatory than it was for the men. Furthermore doing so was only possible through the achievement of other related goals such as securing independence and, in some cases, breaking free of family constraints. While they had perhaps faced less pressure than their male counterparts to succeed according to Iranian middle class discourses of success, many had also had fewer opportunities to explore their potential. While moving from Iran to Sweden gave these women newfound freedoms, some still described their families as overly protective. Moving to London therefore provided them not only with new opportunities to achieve their career goals but also to simultaneously develop a stronger sense of independence and individual identity.

Azadeh’s narrative perhaps helps to illustrate this point. Azadeh describes herself as coming from a fairly traditional family. She felt that her father was highly protective, and that he was especially strict with her because she was a girl. In the telling of her life story, for example, she highlighted how she always felt constrained by the pressures she felt at home. She was expected to behave a certain way, dress modestly and look after her younger siblings. After she moved to London, however, she suddenly experienced a degree of freedom and independence that she had never felt before. Although her father
was not happy with her leaving for London, she nevertheless decided to stay there, even after encountering financial difficulties. In the first, uninterrupted segment of our first interview, she delivers the following narrative about her father:

*He was really upset that I was in London. He was like a girl should be near her family. He’s like “Come back, come back!” I’m like “I’m not gonna come back.” But he’s like, I’m not going to send you the credit card. If you want it, then you have to come back. I was like “No, I’m not coming back then.” ‘Cause I was so upset that he was trying to control me, so I’m like “I’m not coming back.”*

A few minutes later in the interview she continues:

*Because I didn’t have money and I didn’t want to go home, I was just like “I’m gonna win this, I’m gonna do this, I want to be independent, I don’t want to be at home anymore, I want to have my life.* (Azadeh 1)

In general, the female narratives in the study tended to emphasize themes of personal exploration and freedom more than the more economistic narratives of success presented by the men. In both the male and female narratives, however, narratives of success were presented; the stories told illustrated the overcoming of obstacles toward the pursuit of something better. This has led me to conclude that onward migration may be understood as a creative strategy for maintaining the middle class habitus of Iranian migrants, albeit within new structures of opportunity and constraint. In particular, the young women in this study, while aware of their middle class habitus, played with the privilege that they had, to explore new things, especially within the realm of gender roles.

**Individual Trajectories**

As in the previous chapter, I think it is useful to provide some more complete personal accounts that draw out the complexity of the processes discussed in the preceding pages. In what follows I will therefore outline the stories of two individuals in more detail: Dara and Zeinab.

**Dara: The Self Reflexive Dentist**

Dara is in many ways the prototypical Swedish Iranian migrant, and onward migrant. Moving to Sweden to escape the Iran-Iraq war in his twenties, he quickly set his mind to learning Swedish and starting university. Although he dreamed of becoming a pilot, when the op-
portunity to study dentistry came up, his family and friends convinced him that it was the right thing to do.

Melissa: You said that you started dentistry school. How did that happen?

Dara: Again, I think it's cultural as well, because in my culture you have to be either an engineer or a doctor. If I had the choice again, I wouldn't study that. Trust me. If I had a choice to do it, I wouldn't do that. I did it because I grew up in a society that if you're a doctor you're respected, you will earn a lot of money and you will be highly... sort of wanted. (Dara 2)

Although reluctant at first, Dara followed this path, hoping that it would earn him job security, and a high social status. Although he knew his job prospects may not be good in Sweden, he thought that someday he would return to Iran, and that he would be able to use his education there.

When he graduated from his studies, Dara realized that not only did he not have a job in Sweden, but he did not have the same level of status and respect as a dentist that he had anticipated. In fact, worse than that, like many others he was unemployed. Dara moved to London and suddenly he felt like a “first class citizen” enjoying a high salary, and even a BMW that his boss had given him as an incentive to stay. He enjoyed this newly secured sense of appreciation, as well as the respect that he got from his clients. The system, as he saw it, was much more similar to what he had been familiar with in Iran’s and consequently the career expectations that he had when he entered dental school in Sweden were easily fulfilled in the British context.

There was one problem, however. Dara did not really enjoy the dentistry occupation. So he returned to Scandinavia, and studied again to become an orthodontist. Although he enjoyed his job as an orthodontist much more, he still wasn’t very happy with working all the time, and wanted to do other things. He therefore decided to make a change in his life by reducing his hours. As he viewed it, making this decision had to do with the experience of living in Europe, and gaining a new perspective on work and life.

And now I work three days a week because I don’t need more. It’s enough for me. I want to see more of my life, I want to explore different things. And of course, I’m not a separatist. I’m not something too different from Iranian people. I was like them, I am still like them. I come from a little village. But, you know, just because you’re Iranian and you’ve been doing these things for so many years, it doesn’t mean that you have to continue doing this. You know what I mean? It’s not that I don’t like money. Everybody does. But you have to pay a price for that. I’m not prepared to pay that. So it’s... you know, you learn
so many things: in Sweden, in England, in other places. And then, it becomes a part of your personality without you knowing it. (Dara 2)

Unlike some other dentists who uncritically evaluate their drive to become dentists and earn high salaries (thereby also naturalizing their preference for London over Sweden), Dara’s narrative was very self-reflexive. Unlike many of his Swedish Iranian colleagues working in Britain, he had begun to regret following the path laid out for him by his family and friends, and wished that he had done something different. Although dentistry seemed like a good thing to do when Dara first arrived in Sweden, in the years that had passed, he had changed considerably. The time he spent in Sweden, and later in London, had led him to see things from a new perspective. He has reconciled his situation somewhat, by using his professional skills to earn him a high salary and status, but he only works part-time, so that he can do other things with his life. In this sense, London has turned out to be the best place for him to work, because he can make a high salary, even if he only works part-time. This would not be possible in Sweden where he would have to work more hours for less money. He is extremely grateful to Sweden for giving him the chance to pursue his goals, however, even if he is now unsure if he made the right decisions.

As Kaufman puts it, some middle class people

have the structural resources to reject a particular middle-class path, knowing full well that their acts of resistance do not necessarily disqualify them from remaining middle class. (Kaufman 2005:254)

Dara is one of these people insofar as he has all of the benefits of being recognized as middle class: a good salary and a good job title, but he has also given himself room to explore other things, something which he attributes to his experience in Europe where, as he sees it, more value is attached to enjoying one’s life and less value is attached to status. Dara does not see himself as somebody who has been able to completely free himself from the way he was socialized, but in the British context he has gained some perspective that has helped him to navigate around opportunity and constraint in novel ways.

Zeinab: Kurdish Women’s Rights Activist

Zeinab was a teenager when the revolution broke out. Soon after, she began working with a leftist organization in Kurdistan. She worked closely with other family members for the cause. Zeinab lost several brothers and a boyfriend in the process, and was herself forced into
hiding for more than a decade. After the Islamic Republic was formed and persecution of the Kurdish community worsened, Zeinab was forced to flee the country. She moved first to Kurdistan in Iraq and later to Turkey, undergoing a difficult escape plan. Eventually she found herself seeking asylum in Sweden. Zeinab said that despite her difficult situation, she “didn’t have time to think about being depressed”. Instead, as she puts it, she “took all opportunities”, working, studying and eventually becoming engaged in social welfare.

Although interested in leftist Kurdish and Iranian politics, Zeinab’s primary longstanding interest has been women’s issues. As Mojab and Gorman (2007) point out, in the Kurdish nationalist movement, women have a special place. In promoting their nation building project, Kurds typically do not challenge the traditional gender roles typically ascribed in Kurdish society. Many women’s organizations have therefore emerged to fight patriarchy within the context of Kurdish nationalism. These issues become even more salient in a diasporic context in which women must also consider how they are depicted in relation to the male members of their community. Often migration policy treats Kurds as a group, thereby not paying adequate attention to women’s struggles. This is where many women like Zeinab found their place in political activism. Although Zeinab was interested in women’s issues even before moving to Sweden, her place in the diaspora has opened up new opportunities for activism. Zeinab has actively been fighting against honour-related violence, and encouraged the Swedish government to treat these acts of violence according to Swedish law (rather than relegating them to the realm of Kurdish culture).

Zeinab presented herself to me as a busy and hardworking person. While struggling in many ways with emotional, physical and financial problems, she wanted me to understand that she was eager to make things happen. Even when reflecting on her time in Sweden, she describes herself as busy and motivated:

I tried everything when I got there: food, music, texts with music. I still do that. If I like a song then I will try to learn the text to go with it. I enjoyed walking and cycling. I cycled all over Gotland, Stockholm, Uppsala and so on. I wasn’t like a lazy… (Zeinab 2)

She also depicted herself as brave. In the process of developing her political projects, Zeinab has faced resistance from more traditional Kurdish people, especially men, who saw her as going against the expectations of Kurdish society. On the other hand, she received a great deal of positive attention from other activists, including some with a Swedish background. Zeinab soon reached what she now de-
fines as “the height of her career”. Swedish society had created a space for her to achieve this, and although she was focused on supporting a specific cause, her narrative suggests that in doing so, she herself was rewarded with a great sense of personal pride and satisfaction.

Although Zeinab was happy with her experience in Sweden, she felt it was not enough to stay there. She wanted to take her cause to the next level: to London, which attracted her for a number of reasons. She deemed London as a strategic place for Iranians. Moving to London would, furthermore, give her the opportunity to develop her English, and to further build her activist network. Her hope was to establish a women’s organization in London that would promote her views around the treatment of minority women in Western societies.

Zeinab’s narrative mirrored the success narratives delivered by some of the other participants in the study. Like them, Zeinab moved to London in order to achieve her goals, although unlike many of them, these were articulated through a desire to help and make the world a better place, as opposed to the desire to acquire status and material benefits. She quickly took up many activities that would help her to further her ability to engage in politics and help people, women in particular.

Although it wasn’t clear to me in the first meeting why Zeinab had chosen to pursue her goals in London rather than Sweden, in our final meeting together she implied that she felt that she could have achieved more in London, but that things had not turned out as well as she had hoped. For Zeinab, clearly the struggle of supporting herself in London proved more difficult than she had initially thought. In this sense, Zeinab cannot help but look back on what she had in Sweden with some degree of remorse.

_I was settled in Sweden: I could speak Swedish, I got a good job, the media knew me… I had work and activities… I could improve my career there. When I came here, I had to start from the beginning. I had better opportunities there. I have a harder life here._

(Zeinab 2)

Despite this, Zeinab has no intention of returning to Sweden, at least in the immediate future. Instead, she is determined to succeed, and will continue pursuing her goals. She sometimes experiences stress, especially around managing her time, but feels that until she retires, her life depends on engaging in activist work and she still believes that London is the right place for her to be.

When I ask Zeinab whether she misses Iran, she looks sad and says that she does not want to talk about it. Instead, she wants to
discuss the activism that she has engaged in throughout her life. In an attempt to make sense of the life that she has led, she turns it into a resource:

*People always say, how do you manage here all by yourself? But in Europe, it was so easy for me to be tough and independent. My experiences helped me to be more human.* (Zeinab 2)

It is perhaps through Zeinab’s story more than any other in my study, that it becomes clear that the search for “success” is more about developing a sense of self-worth, and continuity in the life trajectory, than simply acquiring status and money.

**Linking Economic, Cultural and Place Perspectives**

As mentioned in chapter 1, studies suggest that human capital issues are important for understanding onward migration. Those who move on tend to be highly educated, and may even show above average levels of formal integration in the first country of destination. This raises a number of questions concerning the nuances of the integration experience, and what might motivate people to stay in or move on from a given place. The findings of this study suggest that human capital concerns should be understood in a nuanced way that considers how migrants define success as well as their strategies for achieving it over space and time.

For the participants in this study, the transnational social spaces of the Iranian diaspora have played an important role in influencing understandings, strategies and expectations for success. Because of their social and familial networks across space, this particular group of migrants was well placed to learn about opportunities in other places. They were then able to mobilize capital within transnational occupational career spaces to achieve their desired goals. This capital, as I have noted, was acquired in Iran, Sweden (and in some cases even more countries), before it was successfully employed in the London context. Hence, for this particular group of migrants, formal integration into the Swedish work and educational context ironically played a role in facilitating their eventual onward migration away from Sweden. Both the participants’ willingness to move, as well as the capital they had built up by remaining in specific places, thus, helped them to achieve their goals. It could be said that the path to success was achieved by a combination of settlement and mobility strategies.
Importantly, however, I have also tried to emphasize that the migration pathways adopted by the participants were not always as straightforward as they might have first appeared to be, and that the reasons for migration are complex and embedded in other facets of the life course such as looking for a job, or starting an education program. While the participants may have understood what opportunities were available in different places, their decisions to move on have more often been spontaneous and circumstantial than carefully calculated. Their understandings of the relative opportunities available in London and Sweden have been constructed in hindsight, after they have experienced both places. Furthermore, despite the frequently articulated conceptions about what constitutes success in the Iranian diaspora, the participants have positioned themselves in relation to these discourses in different ways. While some have gone after high status professions and set high material goals, others (especially young women and political activists) have dared to define success in alternative ways.

The narratives of success presented by the participants can be understood as intimately linked to the desire to find a sense of belonging and to reaffirm their self-understanding across both space and time. This topic will be developed further in the next chapter, where the issue of belonging is explored in more detail.
Chapter 9
Situated Belonging and Cosmopolitan Lives

As the narratives presented in the previous chapter have suggested, the satisfaction that comes from finding work or having a successful career may point to a broader need to feel a sense of belonging and purpose in one’s life. One might argue, therefore that part of the aspiration to succeed in fact relates to the desire to feel at ease with one’s identity and to create continuity in one’s life story and sense of self over space and time. I hope this chapter will provide another layer of insight into onward migration by considering how the entwined desires for success and belonging play out in the lives and narratives of the participants as they reflect on both their settlement and mobility experiences.

The concept of belonging is complex, especially in a context of mobility. As I have argued in earlier parts of this dissertation, in the geographical literature, there is an expressed tension between mobility and homemaking, and so-called locals and cosmopolitans (Grillo 2007; Ralph and Staeheli 2011). In exploring what it means to belong to a place, both should be considered. As some scholars have argued (Harvey 2000), rather than simply debating the extent to which place still matters, we should explore the connection between mobility and emplacement and, importantly, situate this relationship in the context of specific power relationships that transcend the settlement-mobility divide.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of why the nation state has not satisfied the belonging needs of the participants in the study, and how they have consequently negotiated their belonging at other (often multiple) levels of geographical scale. It then goes on to explore the link between mobility and emplacement by illustrating how the participants reflect on their highly mobile lives, by drawing on cosmopolitan discourses that reflect their position in specific power structures. By presenting themselves as subjects with certain dispositions and inclinations, the participants demonstrate their mid-
dle class positionality, but also the limited possibilities they have for belonging to a single place.

The Challenge of Belonging to the Nation

Belonging is a fuzzy term, typically associated (and even conflated with) citizenship and/or identity in both common usage and even in academic literature. This is erroneous, however, insofar as citizenship is a more limited concept (focusing on the rights and responsibilities of individuals within a given political community) while identity is a concept that tends to lead to static and essentialized ideas about peoples’ self-understandings. Furthermore, the concept of belonging tends to be taken for granted, or is used in most cases to discuss ethnic or national identity rather than more complex positionalities (Anthias 2006). This is problematic insofar as it defines belonging in only national or ethnic terms, while belonging may well be related to a range of factors including, among other things, gender and religious affiliation (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006).

There have been some recent attempts to clarify the concept of belonging. Several scholars have tried to distinguish between personal and social belonging. Alzetta (2012), for example, argues that:

> on the one hand, belonging pertains to a more inward-looking and reflective process of self-identification, while on the other hand, self-positioning implies an outward-looking process in relation to a public and social context. (Alzetta 2012:173)

Fenster (2005) and van Bochove (2012) take things a step further by distinguishing between official, everyday and symbolic belonging. While official belonging refers to citizenship status or the legal right to stay in a place, everyday belonging refers to being familiar with one’s surroundings and living life in a specific place. Finally symbolic belonging refers to the relationship between peoples’ identities and the place in which they find themselves. The latter may be constructed according to historical developments and experiences for example.

In his attempt to clarify the concept of belonging particularly from a geographical perspective, Antonsich (2010) similarly argues that:

> belonging should be analyzed both as a personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging). (Antonsich 2010:644)
I think this is a useful distinction to make. Often if we only look at one dimension of belonging, other important (usually the more personal, emotive aspects) are left out. Within a nation state context, there are different ways of defining belonging. While the literature on inclusion, exclusion and belonging typically focuses on quantitative variables pertaining to integration such as employment, education, housing and so on, this is sometimes not enough to get at some of the more subtle ways that people feel included or excluded from a given nation state or society. As Fangen et al. (2012b) illustrate in their study of migrant youth in Europe:

> the inter-human and social dimension is also extremely important for the well-being of the individual. Feeling included in social networks and not being stigmatized as someone different by people on the street, by politicians, by the media, by people in positions of authority, and by peers at school and elsewhere has to do with being recognized, acknowledged and accepted as the person you are. (Fangen et al. 2012b:213)

Anthias similarly points out that it is increasingly important to think of a sense of belonging in terms of preconditions for quality of life, and not purely in terms of cultural initiation or cultural identity. This includes a focus on the range of experiences of enablement in society, as well as experiences of hurdles. (Anthias 2006:20)

These “hurdles” may well be symbolic or material, but the two often overlap.

By looking at peoples’ understandings of themselves as well as the structural contexts in which they find themselves, we can better capture the contradictions in peoples’ relationships to places. Furthermore, we can try to understand how individuals forge ties to certain places in a way that goes beyond the simplistic framework usually used to understand “identity”. As Anthias puts it:

> Displacing the concern with identity, by focusing on location and positionality, enables a complete abandonment of the residual elements of essentialisation retained even within the idea of fragmented and multiple identities… (Anthias 2006: 20)

Although we can recognize that certain constructed categories of people in society may experience social inclusion or exclusion in similar ways, in order to give due justice to peoples’ complex experiences and self-understandings, we must also pay attention to the way that individuals negotiate a sense of belonging, drawing on both their
experiences as individuals and as member of advantaged or disadvan-
taged social categories.

In adopting the kind of multifaceted approach encouraged by
scholars such as Yuval-Davis, it becomes necessary to develop an
understanding of belonging that goes beyond the nation state. In-
deed, belonging may be experienced at a number of different scalar
levels, and while people may feel excluded from, for example, the
nation, they may still feel connected to their local environment, to
transnational communities, or to the world at large (hooks 2009;
Christensen and Jensen 2011). As already noted in several parts of
this dissertation, high levels of migration, the decline of the welfare
state, globalization, the rise of regional governments (such as the EU)
and other related developments have increasingly led scholars to
question the importance of the nation in influencing peoples’ sense of
belonging in recent years. It is important to point out, however, that
while these processes might be seen as undermining the power of the
nation state, the nation state is still without doubt the most persuasive
power in determining who belongs to which territory. Nationally
defined policies continue to play an important role in determining
who should and should not enter a given national territory, and how
they should be included in the nation after they are admitted. Second-
ly, and perhaps more significantly, however, the nation state contin-
ues to be an important social space where power struggles over how
to identify national belonging and entitlement to rights ensue (West-
wood and Phizacklea 2000). As already noted in chapter 5, welfare
states in particular may be concerned with citizenship rights and who
should and should not be able to access resources provided by the
state. These may be material, but they may also be symbolic. Clearly,
different countries offer differential opportunities for migrants, not
only in terms of employment opportunities, but also in terms of the
extent to which migrants are fully incorporated into host societies.
For migrants in particular, then, who are generally more likely to face
exclusion when compared to “natives”, developing a full sense of
belonging involves negotiating with the nation state, but also finding
ways to navigate around it, and transcend it.

Belonging beyond the Nation

Many scholars are still concerned with specific issues faced by nation
states in trying to develop a national sense of belonging among mi-
grants. This may relate to specific integration issues such as housing
and employment, or it may relate to policies designed to incorporate migrants on a national level. Many of the concepts and policies used to integrate migrants in nation state contexts have already been discussed in chapters 2 and 5. A wide and ever growing body of literature, however, argues that belonging should also be studied by moving beyond the nation state context to explore the other ways that migrants develop place attachments (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006). While not completely new, such arguments have gained salience in a context of globalization, which has inspired a great deal of debate around the relative erosion or ongoing importance of place in fulfilling peoples’ belonging needs. Many scholars seem to agree that trying to move beyond the context of the nation, and particularly to develop an understanding of how migrants develop attachments to different levels of scale, is an important goal.

As already emphasized throughout this dissertation, transnationalism has surely posed a challenge to the nation state by highlighting the various ways that migrants retain ties (real and imagined) to the places from which they come. Such ties are viewed as transcending the level of the nation state, thereby challenging its authority. A related way of addressing how migrants maintain ties to multiple places is through the study of diasporas. The concept of diaspora (also outlined in chapter 2), focuses on the relations that people maintain to their place of origin. Through social networks, the sending of remittances and the maintenance of properties and businesses in places of origin and destination, people stay simultaneously connected to both “here” and “there”. Engaging in these transnational practices may involve thinking of oneself as belonging to both nations, or being influenced by a mix of two different (national) cultures. The diasporic formations that have emerged have therefore made it possible for those who are motivated to do so, to retain ties to other people who share their background. Some research coming out of the postcolonial tradition in particular has highlighted the “hybrid” nature of those whose lives have transcended multiple nation states (Bhaba 1994; Werbner 2000).

As Anthias points out, however, many of these perspectives are partial insofar as they are vague and in some cases poorly constructed. She notes that “A concern with multiple and fragmented identities still suggests that identity might be a possessive property of individuals rather than a process.” (Anthias 2006:20) Rather “than envisioning a passage from territorialized to de-territorialized forms of belonging,
as some scholars have too simplistically advocated” then, as Antonsich (2010) points out:

it seems more plausible to think of contemporary societies as characterized by the co-presence of a plurality of forms of belonging, differently imbricated in space and variously constituted in relation to the permeability of their identity boundaries. (Antonsich 2010:653)

I agree that this is an important point, and one that should be taken into consideration when addressing how people identify, as well as how they cultivate a sense of place belonging at specific times in specific places.

There are of course several different ways of relating to place. By drawing on conceptions of diaspora, transnationalism and hybridity, therefore, I will nevertheless take Anthias’ critique into account, and see how different factors affect the place belonging of the participants in this study in an individual way. Rather than considering the participants as a migrant “category” in this sense, I will view them as individuals who have adopted different approaches to cultivating a sense of belonging at different levels of scale.

Participant Perspectives: Belonging to Places

In chapter 5, I outlined some of the factors that may encourage as well as limit migrants’ attachments to Sweden. The tendency to treat migrants in Sweden as outsiders who “belong” to another place, naturally affects the sense of belonging that refugee groups are able to kindle to the Swedish nation. Furthermore, the construction of Sweden as a homogeneous nation of people with a very specific culture, language and even physical appearance makes it difficult for migrants to fully belong. They may be included in many respects. Most migrants easily obtain naturalization, and can access free education, and if necessary, benefits. But many migrants feel excluded in terms of symbolic belonging in a deeper, more meaningful way. As Fangen et al. (2012a) point out, in the Nordic countries it is common that migrants may experience material inclusion due to the generosity and inclusivity of the Nordic welfare states, but they often experience symbolic exclusion. Belonging may therefore be understood as a hierarchical concept with some having a fuller claim to it than others.

For diasporic communities made up of people who are largely uninterested in returning to their place of origin, and who see Sweden as their only home, the limited way to which they can belong to the
Swedish nation is difficult to accept. Ghorashi’s (2002) work highlights how many Iranians who later became refugees first became strangers in Iran. Because of their ideological outlook or lifestyle, they did not feel that they could fit into Iranian society. Although many cannot return to Iran for security reasons, furthermore, most now feel that Iran is even less their home than it was before. Through the experience of migration they have become increasingly disconnected from Iran. The findings of this study would similarly suggest that the idea of return is unthinkable for many Iranians, especially those who left Iran to build their lives in the West at a young age. So, on the one hand they are cut off from their place of origin, but at the same time they are relegated to a lower status in the place of destination.

All the participants in the study expressed concern over the lack of belonging they personally felt in Sweden, or the difficulty that migrants in Sweden in general face. Issues around belonging were articulated in a variety of ways, however. While some expressed explicit concern over “racism” in Sweden, for the majority, the lack of belonging they felt was more subtle. Some attributed the lack of belonging they experienced by referring to structural conditions such as residential segregation and unemployment, but for the majority, more symbolic forms of discrimination such as physical attacks, rude comments, but most significantly, the very indirect ways in which they had come to believe that they were not “100% Swedish” was considered problematic. While several older participants in the study expressed frustration over how their difference was not accepted in Sweden, and how they had lost the sense of belonging that they had in Iran leaving them feeling “out of place” in a variety of ways, younger participants were more concerned with the fact that (despite showing a high level of adaptation to Swedish society) they were still not considered Swedish. Many connected this feeling that they did not fully belong in Swedish society to their desire to leave Sweden, or their wish not to return there in the future.

*Here they judge you as you. In Sweden, there’s these obstacles. First you become like ‘this foreigner’, even though you lived there your life or whatever, you’re not like one of us. Not in a bad way like they should be rude to you, but you always know that there’s something in the back of their head. You can notice that very clearly that you aren’t ‘one of us’. But here it’s not about that. Here you never see anyone say ‘Oh you’re not British’. (Hamid 2)*

*There’s this mentality that you’re accepted and in Sweden it’s not… You live three generations in Sweden and people still ask you, “Where are you from?”… And I think here in London it’s not like that. You’re more accepted, people are more open. And if you’re not, you get forced to be that because everybody is … in a sense they are. (Azadeh 1)*
In parallel with the narratives of success discussed in the last chapter, therefore, were narratives about how moving on had contributed to a stronger sense of belonging and entitlement to being in a place. Some of the reasons why these participants felt this heightened sense of belonging in London must be discussed in relation to scale. As noted in chapter 5, the British nation has had a different approach to integrating and admitting foreigners than Sweden has. On a national level, thus, there is a difference in political culture that affects the extent to which migrants can or cannot be part of the nation. But most important to the current discussion, is the specific environment of London, and its openness to difference. As Vertovec (2007) has noted, the UK but London in particular has entered a state of “superdiversity” in which the population has become complexly diverse in terms of place of origin, religious affiliation, political status, and languages spoken. In fact in 2003, about 20% of London’s recorded population was foreign born, and it is possible that this number is an underestimate (Butler and Robson 2003). Furthermore, according to Census data from 2011, only about 45% of London residents identify themselves as English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British, regardless of where they were born. From a cultural point of view, according to Hannerz (1996), London is one of the cities in the world that may be considered truly transnational. As he puts it, many people in world cities like London may be present “for some larger or smaller parts of their lives, but they also have strong ties to some other place in the world.” (Hannerz 1996: 129) The flow of people into world cities like London has created possibilities for cultural exchange and experimentation that are not widely available in other places.

This international ambience has been one of the things that appeals to many people who have chosen to live in London, regardless of their origins. The cultural mixing and cosmopolitan vibe created by the city has been emphasized as part of its identity (Butler and Robson 2003). Conradson and Latham (2005a) similarly note that London is characterized by a number of qualities not available elsewhere, including “the presence of internationally connected cultural and social institutions, a certain cosmopolitan milieu, and national-level business and public sector functions” (Conradson and Latham 2005a:162). In this sense, London has long been and continues to be, perceived as a place for not only professional, but also personal growth.

The special environment provided by the city of London was something that was highly appreciated by the participants in this study. Given that many had moved to London from small and medi-
um sized towns in Sweden, the social and cultural diversity they encountered in London was different from anything they had experienced in Sweden, and was experienced very intensely. Moreover, the city has also provided a different diasporic context than what was available in Sweden. As already noted in chapter 6, it could be argued that Iranians in London do not face the same negative stigma that they do in Sweden. In this sense, belonging in London might be furthered by an acknowledgment of the special attributes of Iranian migrants, or at least by the lack of negative associations attached to being Iranian. This has made the labour market for Iranians more open, but it has also contributed to the possibility to cultivate a more positive sense of belonging to the London context.

Although the participants in the study did not aspire to belong to the British nation, in London they found that they had other possibilities to cultivate a sense of belonging that transcended the nation state altogether. Compared to the Swedish context, the London context provided people with a number of opportunities to cultivate alternative types of belonging at both more localized and transnational levels of scale. Place, in a sense, was therefore very important to these onward migrants, but not in the sense that they felt “British” or like “a Londoner”. Instead, the flexible alternatives to national belonging available in London were very important to these onward migrants, who capitalized on them in different ways. Their unique backgrounds as well as their positionalities in different social categories played an important role in determining which opportunities for belonging they perceived.

In light of this point, I have decided to discuss some of the different types of belonging that were available to the participants in London. I will then draw on the life histories of these participants to discuss how specific opportunities for belonging were seized. I should say from the outset that while belonging should not be studied only from the perspective of ethnicity and race, indeed it was a dominant theme in the life stories of the study participants. This is probably partly due to the fact that the participants knew that I was only conducting interviews with Iranians, and also because ethnicity appeared to be the most salient feature determining their experience of exclusion in Sweden.

**Belonging to Multicultural London**

Although the participants in the study laughed or were taken aback when I asked them if they felt like “Londoners” most stressed their
local attachments to London in terms of everyday routines. Like in Datta’s (2011) study of Polish migrants to London, the neighborhood was an important place where mobile lives became situated. Friendship networks, favourite cafes and restaurants, as well as aesthetic preferences concerning architecture and green space, were important to many of the participants, and facilitated their local attachments. This localized belonging has often been furthered by the maintenance of a job or a relationship on the local level. As I emphasized in chapter 7, family can play an important role in encouraging attachment to place. For many of the participants, this localized belonging was but one type of belonging that was often affected by other levels of scale. It would seem that for Pari, however, the neighborhood served as her primary place attachment in the London context.

Pari was born to an Iranian father and a Swedish mother. She grew up in a small Swedish town where she was one of the few children in school that were not “completely Swedish”. For Pari, this was very confusing, because she was treated as different, and yet she had little exposure to or understanding of Iranian culture. In fact, like many of her peers, she felt that Iran was a scary and mysterious place. After visiting Iran as a teenager, however, she was struck by the warmness of her relatives and started to embrace her “Iranian side” more. She began to see herself as a hybrid individual straddling two cultures (Bhaba 1994). She no longer looked upon her difference negatively, and started to embrace it. Partly because of her desire to reconcile her background and identity, Pari wanted to live in a more multicultural open environment. After finishing high school, she decided to move to London. Pari loves living in a working class multicultural neighborhood. In such an environment, she feels she can just be herself, without worrying about what others think of her. While she sometimes entertains a fantasy of moving to Iran, she realizes this would not be possible for her given the language barrier and the fact that, after all, she is very removed from that cultural context. She has only a few Iranians friends and has no meaningful interaction with the Iranian diaspora in London. Instead, London, and specifically the neighborhood where she lives, has accommodated her belonging needs. Finding a multicultural neighborhood in London where she could embrace the different sides of herself has fulfilled her need to belong to a place. In this sense, what London offered Pari was symbolic acceptance and an everyday openness to difference (Valentine 2008).
Second generation Iranians like Pari who do not necessarily speak Farsi, or belong to any religious group, for example, may find it more difficult (or simply less necessary) to access Iranian networks or engage in more transnational forms of belonging. It may be for this reason that for Pari, cultivating a localized form of belonging was so appealing. While sharing much in common with the other participants in terms of her perceptions of Sweden, unlike them, Pari does not have the same opportunities for transnational belonging. Furthermore, for Pari Sweden is still considered home in many respects. Swedish is her first language and her parents still live in Sweden. She enjoys going back to visit her small town and her friends. Despite this, she prefers to view Sweden as the place where she was raised, and while regarding herself as Swedish, she now sees herself as more connected to London.

Pari was somewhat unique in the study insofar as she was the only participant who was fairly confident that she would not be compelled to move on again, and that she has truly found her place in London. For the rest of the participants in the study, the localized belonging embraced by Pari, was not enough. Some participants instead prioritized more transnational understandings of belonging, and viewed their attachments to local places more tentatively and usually in relation to other levels of geographic scale.

Diasporic Connections: Finding Belonging in the British Iranian Diaspora

As already noted in chapter 6, while the Iranian communities in Britain and Sweden are similar in terms of absolute numbers, the Iranian community in Sweden is much larger in relation to the national population and also when compared to the proportion of migrants in total. In this sense, the Iranian community in Sweden was often described to me as much more “tight-knit” than the Iranian community in Britain. That said, many of the onward migrants in this study moved from small towns in Sweden where they were among the only minorities, to London where (if they wanted to) they could surround themselves with other Iranians. Furthermore, as has already been noted, Iranians in London may be seen as occupying a higher social position when compared to Iranians in Sweden; Iranians in London represent a much more diverse community in terms of political and religious affiliation. So the London context provided two different options for Iranians moving there from Sweden: they could either detach themselves and seek out a sense of belonging in another way, or they could
become involved in the British Iranian community which was very different from the Iranian community in Sweden.

Much of the literature on diasporic ties overlooks the classed and gendered relations that structure diasporic contexts. The internal relations of diasporic communities have obvious implications for the members of diasporic communities insofar as not everybody has the same access to cultural resources and identities by way of diasporic networks. This may help to explain why for some of the participants in the study, involvement in the British Iranian diaspora was considered desirable while for others avoiding involvement was preferred. It is perhaps partly because of his understanding of himself as upwardly mobile and well prepared for middle class life that Hamid was one of the participants in the study who found diasporic involvement so attractive in London.

Hamid, whose story was introduced in some detail in chapter 7, befriended a number of Iranians for the first time in his life after moving to London and now associates almost exclusively with Iranians. Many of the Iranians that he is connected with understand the importance of his family’s status as well as his own class ambitions. He lives in an upper class neighborhood that exemplifies his belonging to an elite facet of Iranian society, and regularly takes part in a number of Iranian-focused organizations and events. This sense of belonging is flexible and elective, however, insofar as he consciously chooses it. As will be discussed further, Hamid not only enjoys the company of Iranians, but he uses his Iranian networks to advance himself professionally and socially. He is acutely aware of this, however, and says that maybe he will try to find some British friends in the coming year. In fact, he has made it his new year’s resolution to do so.

For Hamid, then, belonging to a wider Iranian community was a way of securing membership and a sense of belonging. Being Iranian in London, however, was different from being Iranian in Sweden. He felt more recognition for his particular class background in the British context; not only was British society more class conscious, but the Iranian community was generally more elite, and more aware of the nuances of Iranian high culture. His heightened involvement with Iranians in London has led him to become even more interested in Iran, and he now speaks better Farsi than ever. It would seem then, that for Hamid, belonging is about receiving the recognition that he always wanted in Sweden: recognition for his ascribed and achieved statuses. His way of achieving this was not by compromising his Iranian identity, but rather, by embracing it. In this sense it could be said.
that what Hamid demonstrates is a form of performative belonging in which he consciously develops his “Iranian” capital: mastering the Persian language, actively joining Iranian-focused organizations, and actively seeking out Iranian friends in order to achieve both his material and social goals. Despite not visiting Iran since he emigrated more than twenty years ago, he has used his (imagined) national belonging to Iran to further his other (career and class) objectives in London. Hamid has retained elements of his Iranian culture that he sees as advantageous to his career, and has made use of networks delineated along Iranian diasporic lines.

Hamid’s approach to belonging resembles the transnational kind, although his focus on a specific diasporic community means that his personal network and understanding of belonging is spatially situated in the places to which Iranians have moved. London in particular has helped him to further his sense of belonging, by serving as the backdrop for Iranian success and the preservation of Iranian high culture. But Hamid would also consider living in other places to which he has connections, especially the United States. Iran is used by people such as Hamid as a symbolic point of reference, therefore, but for the time being London is the place that actually facilitates a particular Iranian identity and allows Iranians like himself with certain ambitions to meet their need to belong.

Belonging to Transnational Communities

Based on the findings of this research, those that faced persecution by the Iranian government on account of their religion or ethnicity felt like they could not identify with “Iran” or “Iranians” in the same way as Iranians of Muslim background like Hamid could. For such migrants, other identifications and corresponding social networks took precedence, and this greatly affected their sense of belonging. These diasporic Iranians could draw on transnational communities that often thrived formally and informally in the British context. Generally speaking these were religious, political, or in some cases career networks that connected people with shared beliefs, ideologies or lifestyles across multiple sites.

Milad is one such case. Unlike Hamid who was comfortable mixing with all different types of Iranians, Milad did not express a strong interest in the Iranian diaspora. While acknowledging his Iranian background and experience, he simply felt that he did not have much in common with most Iranians, and preferred to associate with those who shared his ideological beliefs. Among his circle of friends there
were many such Iranians, but also people from other parts of the world that he felt had a similar background and worldview.

Although Milad had found Swedish society somewhat closed to foreigners, he preferred not to criticize the country for that in the way that some of the other participants had. Instead, he said that he used his leftist perspective to give him distance from the confines of culture, and did not feel that he really belonged anywhere. For the time being, however, Milad had found himself at home in London. He was actively engaged in a number of political projects, and enjoyed his work. As he viewed it, in London there is always something happening which gave him the inspiration he needed to live a meaningful life. Milad, however, was not fixed in place. He said he would consider moving to another country if an opportunity to perform humanitarian work came up. He was already thinking of moving to Turkey, France or Canada in the future.

Milad’s account reflects another form of transnational belonging in which it is not the diaspora, but rather a common interest that connects people in and across places, thereby facilitating a shared sense of belonging. These dispersed networks, help to facilitate the belonging of their members wherever they go. Although Milad found London exciting, as he viewed it, it would probably only meet his needs in the short term. For people like Milad, thus, place belonging is flexible, insofar as they make the most of a place when they are there, but may consider moving again if certain opportunities arise.

Positionality and Place

Obviously there are many different ways of belonging to a place, and the biographies shared here are only meant to be suggestive of the differing ways that people can and do cultivate place belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006) has noted that the way that people articulate a sense of belonging depends greatly on what kind of resources they have to draw on. Ethnicity as well as other types of identifications relate to structural contexts (Scheibelhofer 2007), and these are of course multilayered and shifting. As in the case of success discussed in the previous chapter, the changing resources that migrants possess, as well as the changing social spaces in which they intend to use them, play an important role in how place belonging is cultivated.

Indeed for all the participants in this study, moving on to multicultural London presented new opportunities for belonging, especially of the elective variety. Rather than desiring to belong to a religious or ethnic category in a simplistic way, however, it would appear that
many participants’ attachments were highly flexible, and deeply dependent on context. Moreover, as the participants moved from place to place, their sense of belonging shifted. While Pari, for example, went from being totally disconnected from her Iranian background, this later became more important to her, especially after she discovered that in certain parts of London it would help rather than hinder her belonging. Hamid similarly went through different phases. While in the past he avoided Iranians, he now has a strong sense of belonging to the Iranian diaspora. He is thinking critically about this, however, and may change his approach again. Milad has demonstrated a similar flexibility in defining and cultivating his social and place attachments. The types of belonging that the participants forged in London were therefore clearly situated between structural constraints and opportunities. Rather than going to London to “find their own people” as might be hypothesized or assumed, their sense of belonging appears to be fluid and open to renegotiation as circumstances change.

Ralph and Staeheli (2011) have tried to conceptualize the idea of finding home in mobility by describing it as an accordion:

in that it both stretches to expand outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed people in their proximate and immediate locales and social relations. (Ralph and Staeheli 2012:525)

I think this is an accurate way of describing the participants in this study who identified with places in different ways and took part in very different social networks that connected them to various localized, national and transnational levels of scale (often simultaneously). Despite the many different connections they maintained, one thing they shared in common was a tendency to present their sense of belonging as multi-scalar and multi-faceted. Place belonging in this sense, takes a degree of negotiating as individuals decide which places can best meet different aspects of their belonging needs. Moreover, as the biographies presented above also suggest, belonging is not necessarily permanent, and people may move to a place, cultivate a sense of belonging, but still choose to move again.

Belonging beyond Specific Places: Being Mobile

In her study of Senegalese migrants in Italy, Giulia Sinatti (2006) argues that there are two types of transnational migrants: those who are able to build a home in one context, by drawing on their transnational
attachments to other places, and those who are more mobile, carrying their relationship to the homeland inside of them as they traverse the world. Although I think Sinatti raises a number of interesting points for discussion, I disagree with her clear-cut distinction between transnational migrants who move, and transnational migrants who remain situated in place. The onward migrants in this study, for example, may be considered nomadic insofar as they have made multiple migrations, but as I hope I have adequately illustrated in the preceding pages, they have still succeeded to develop a sense of belonging to place in various situated ways. In order to further disrupt the binary between mobility and settlement however, I would now like to look at belonging from the other end of the spectrum, that is, from the perspective of mobility. Since belonging is a process that is both differentiated and flexible, if people keep moving, what role can and do places play in their lives?

Although I have illustrated how several participants in this study were able to cultivate a strong sense of belonging in London by way of several different spatial scales, this did not apply to all of the participants. Some did not feel at home in London, and viewed their time there as very temporary. Moreover, even those who have been able to develop a strong sense of place belonging have led lives that transcended several contexts.

The lack of a causal relationship between leaving Sweden and moving to London discussed in the previous chapter, is mirrored also by a lack of spatial linearity in the biographies of the participants. While some left Sweden for London directly and had decided to stay there indefinitely, two had moved first to Los Angeles and from there one moved first to Wales and then to London, while the other moved directly to London; another moved to London and then moved between several other countries before returning to live in a town just outside London; another had moved to another destination in Europe, then Canada, back to Sweden and then to London; one had moved to London, moved back to Sweden and then moved on to London again; and finally two had moved to London but returned to Sweden and for the time being are still there. These complex spatial trajectories would suggest that moving on to London was hardly an isolated event, but something that happened as part of a larger process of seeking out opportunities and finding one’s way in the world.

I would therefore argue that for the onward migrants in this study, belonging was not easily reduced to the attachments that they felt (sometimes temporarily) to specific places, or even the simultaneous connections they maintained to all of them. Instead, in order to make
sense of living in multiple contexts, they also had to reflect on their lives in broader perspective, and to integrate the over-arching experience of being highly mobile into their self-understandings. In order to do so, one strategy was to draw on discourses that emphasized the specific role that mobility had played in shaping who they were as individuals. It is for this reason that I would like to explore how the concept of cosmopolitanism reflects the self-representations and self-understandings of several of the participants.

Cosmopolitanism, according to Vertovec and Cohen, is something that simultaneously: (a) transcends the seemingly exhausted nation-state model; (b) is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local; (c) is culturally anti-essentialist; and (d) is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiances, identity and interest. (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:4)

While this is a solid, over-arching definition, as several scholars have pointed out, the specific ways of understanding and applying the cosmopolitan concept is contested. It is sometimes used to refer to a state of consciousness, and in other cases an on the ground reality which is largely associated with a class based neo-liberal reality (Grillo 2007; Amin 2009). From these differing understandings of cosmopolitanism have come more nuanced debates around who can and cannot be cosmopolitan. From the perspective of migration studies, the dominant trend in the literature is to depict cosmopolitanism as the property of elites who are constantly in transit, usually in connection with the capitalism economy (Lasch 1995; Sklair 2001). The term has, however, also been taken up by other scholars who choose to view it not as a fixed lifestyle, but rather as an orientation, a “disposition” (Hannerz 1996). This latter usage of the term has also been applied to elites as well as to less privileged groups of people who nevertheless live a life characterized by a multiplicity of cultural experiences (Werbner 1999).

The understanding of cosmopolitanism to emerge from this study builds on Skeggs’ (2004) notion that cosmopolitanism may be seen as a form of capital that can be mobilized. Applied in this way, cosmopolitanism may not simply reflect the kind of lifestyle described by Lasch and Sklair, but it may still denote privilege in other respects. As Skeggs, drawing on Bourdieu, notes, while being cosmopolitan may appear to be a disposition (as Hannerz for example has proposed) acquiring these dispositions nevertheless requires a certain degree of privilege and as such, the ability to be cosmopolitanism may
indeed be viewed as something available mostly to the middle and upper classes.

Narrating Cosmopolitan Lives

In the case of this study, the participants’ international (but also middle class backgrounds) have made it possible for them to present themselves as people who have indeed lived cosmopolitan lives. Rather than depicting themselves as vulnerable exiles who had been forced to flee their homeland, the primary narrative put forward by these participants was that while they were born in Iran, they had become “citizens of the world” belonging to multiple national contexts simultaneously, and constantly being open to new cultural experiences. Although moving through a variety of highly situated social, political and cultural networks, and despite establishing place attachments of various kinds, many nevertheless emphasized their unique ability to transcend the confines of both culture and nation. Rather than noting the upheaval that becoming a refugee had caused in their lives, some emphasized the opportunities they had to overcome parochial attachments. As Milad eloquently put it in our second meeting,

*I don’t use the term exile to describe myself. Everywhere is my country, I have no country, it doesn’t matter.*

The presentation of an individualized “cosmopolitan” self, however, requires some more careful scrutiny. I would therefore like to discuss different aspects of the participants’ narratives, to unravel what it means to “belong to the world”. While their accounts may be “global” in presentation, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that indeed their sense of belonging is nevertheless highly structured by social relations.

Cosmopolitan Opportunities: Becoming “Citizens of the World”

For all the participants, there was a certain emphasis placed on their inability to be categorized by one nation state, and they saw themselves as a product of their diverse cultural experiences. When meeting the participants for a second time, I asked each of them to reflect on their lives as highly mobile, transcending several countries. These were some of the responses:
Azita: *Culturally I’m not an Iranian, I’m not British, I’m not Swedish… Culturally I am my own person that is a mixture of all these things. I don’t think people can identify me as either of these…by my nationality, you know.*

Bijan: *I am a mixture of all the cultures that I’ve encountered in my life, and can only identify myself as such.*

Laleh: *When I’m around Iranians, I do feel like I’m actually not the typical Iranian. I do feel there’s quite a lot of differences, and maybe I’m too liberal or maybe I’m too this or too that. When I’m among Swedish people, I don’t feel too Swedish either. Because… I don’t know… I feel like I’m much louder, I’m much more expressive. I don’t feel very English either. So I guess I just define myself as me, and not really… I don’t put a label on it.*

These quotes, while alluding to experiences of settlement and situated experience, nevertheless suggest that mobility has played an important part in making them who they are. These participants saw themselves as unique, hybrid; these were people who believed that their lives had been shaped by a string of multiple settlement and mobility experiences. As they objectified themselves in their personal narratives, the fact that they had moved several times was something that was portrayed positively by the participants. They noted, for example, the adventures that they had had, as well as the many things that they had learned from living in different contexts.

Bijan, who has made several moves between North America and more than one European country viewed his lifestyle as follows:

*I get to experience new things, I get to live different lives, I get to… perhaps have the freedom of doing things that a lot of people who are confined don’t.* (Bijan 3)

In several of these cosmopolitan narratives, mobility was given a heightened status, and was often contrasted with being inflexibly fixed in place. Some of the narratives, including the one delivered by Bijan above, included a subtle condemnation of more “localized” lives. Farah, who tells me at great length how she struggled to fit into Swedish society especially after moving to a small Swedish city at the age of 10, felt that moving away had liberated her from a narrow-minded parochial milieu. When comparing herself to her friends who had only internally migrated to Stockholm, she noted the following:

*I feel sorry when they think they go there and they actually see the world. But Stockholm is not the world. It’s just a very small dot on the map and you can’t even see that. But it’s beautiful. It’s very beautiful. I have to say that.* (Farah 2)

The story that she tells about herself is one of dynamism and change, and at the same time a reluctance to give up her core self. For Farah
then, mobility itself may be considered part of her self-understanding. For her, living in multiple places is an ideal lifestyle.

I thought when I finish with everything [her projects in London] maybe I will move to America, I’m not sure yet. I’ve thought about it a lot. Because I don’t want to live in just one place. I like to change and so I have to find a way. (Farah 2)

For several participants in the study, therefore, making multiple migrations was something they believed had made them flexible and confident; it was something that had contributed to their social, cultural and personal development.

Being “Good” at Cultural Adaptation

In presenting themselves as highly mobile, the participants in the study were nevertheless careful to offset any accusations that they might be “bad” at integration and cultural adaptation. On the contrary, and consistent with cosmopolitan definitions of cultural flexibility, they demonstrated a commitment to integrating into local contexts. As Hannerz (1996) points out, tourists are those who do not engage with the new context in which they find themselves, while cosmopolitans make every effort to become part of the social worlds that they find themselves in. This was particularly important for the study participants when they reflected on their integration experiences in Sweden.

Laleh’s narrative, for example, illustrates how while she was forced to live in segregated neighbourhoods like other foreigners, she did not identify with the segregated lifestyles she felt other migrants followed:

Laleh: The first area we lived in wasn’t a great area to be honest and there were loads of foreigners. Some of them were really like… low class, I would say, not low class but some of their behaviors were really like… uncivilized and you know. I was just like “Oh my god, who are these people?” (Laleh 2)

The next time I met Laleh I was curious to hear what she would say when I asked her to explicitly reflect on her approach to integration.

Melissa: You said last time that you really try to integrate to whatever country you’re in.

Laleh: Yeah… I think that’s quite important. I find it silly if people move to a country and they can’t be bothered learning the language, they can’t be bothered learning the culture. (Laleh 3)
Many other participants made similar statements. For example, Shala stated the following:

\[ \text{My parents and the rest of my family as well really made an effort to be integrated and learn the language as quick as possible and as well as possible. They never wanted to be those like “half” like the ones that kept to their own community. They didn’t want to do that. We have lots of Swedish friends and we made an effort to do that. (Shala 2)} \]

Shala later also made an effort to fit in in London. She was initially based in a segregated part of the city that had several Muslim residents. This was something that made her feel uncomfortable, and she moved out of it as soon as she could find an affordable place in the city center.

By showing a willingness to adapt, these participants were able to argue that mobility was a choice, and that while they always did their best to settle well in various local contexts, they had simultaneously \textit{chosen} to be more international. As in the case of the success narratives, however, the degree to which people choose their lifestyles can be a subject for debate. For the participants in this study it would seem that their understandings of themselves as middle class, as adaptable and as international, had oriented them towards living a certain lifestyle, one that could involve (or that even required) living in multiple places in order to be maintained. Their personal biographies and life trajectories, in other words, took on more meaning in a context of mobility than they did in a context of permanent settlement.

\section*{Cosmopolitanism and the Search for Selfhood}

As I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, although the participants were very much underprivileged on account of becoming refugees, they also had the social, economic and cultural capital that enabled them to be geographically and socially mobile. As noted in the previous chapters, their language skills, high levels of education and social connections in particular helped to facilitate their mobility. By drawing on their experiences and understandings of various places these onward migrants were therefore able to mobilize capital in a way that not only furthered their careers, but also their sense of belonging to interconnected communities of people who shared their preferred lifestyles. As Bauman notes:

\[ \text{Mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values- and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed com-} \]
modernity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or post-modern times. (Bauman 1998:2)

But it is not only mobility that should be considered a resource; rather, the personality and personal characteristics needed to integrate and find success in a range of places may be considered equally important. And these attributes, as Skeggs (2004) reminds us, are not something to which everyone has equal access. Being able to cultivate open-mindedness, flexibility and understanding in a range of different contexts is in fact something typically associated with highly educated people as well as those with connections to a range of places (Daun 1993). As Skeggs (2004:171), drawing on Bourdieu views it, “Cosmopolitanism is a disposition made in the way of all dispositions; that is, by way of distinction and differentiation.”

There is clearly a strong link therefore, between narratives of success and narratives of mobility and belonging, both of which might be connected to a class-based search for selfhood. Kaveh’s account is quite telling in this regard. Within the first two minutes of his unsolicited narrative, Kaveh delivers the following account, which later becomes the basis for explaining why he has lived his life in the way that he has, successfully settling in different places, but also being open to a more mobile way of life:

*It was quite uncommon for people in [my father’s] position [as a medical professional] to make their children to study in common... in public schools. Because the public schools, you know, it has quite a low quality, people see it as a low quality schools, instead they send them to private schools. But my father believed that if I want to learn how to live in this society, then obviously I have to grow up with them. I know, you know, people coming from poor background and you know, just learn to interact with them. And that was there, actually it was quite nice. Obviously there were some issues. But at the end of the day, I think now that it was... it helped me a lot to have that as a background for me. I do believe that I can interact now, with people from all over the world, with different culture and ethnic backgrounds easier because of that. Because of my acceptance of diversity instead of everyone being homogeneous, you know, everything’s same: The same background, the same thinking the same music, the same clothes and everything else.* (Kaveh 1)

Later in the same interview, however, he himself says how important it is for him to live around other people who reflect his own ambitions for material and social success. Realizing the contradiction he has made in his own self-presentation, he acknowledges it and laughs. But what appears to be a contradiction may not really be one at all. Instead, the two concepts are intimately interrelated, insofar as an openness to diversity (including class diversity) may be considered an asset by those who view themselves as cosmopolitans; this way of being in the world may help to reaffirm their understandings of
themselves as privileged individuals. After all, as Melucci points out, not everyone has access to the same resources needed to “construct a specific self” (Melucci 2001:71). Being “a global citizen” or emphasizing one’s international character and openness to diversity, can be understood as one way in which individuals use the resources they have available to develop a sense of self. As Skeggs notes:

The intellectual cosmopolitans learn to know themselves through travelling through the cultures of others. This then is the aesthetic/prosthetic self, shopping, sizing-up the value of what is available, participating in the art-culture system of others… (Skeggs 2004:158)

What may actually be happening in the process, according to Skeggs, however, is “the propertizing of the self.” (Skeggs 2004:158)

In this sense, by “going global” the Iranians in this study were able to pick and choose what they liked and did not like about a whole range of “cultures” and “places” and to incorporate chosen elements into their own individualized self-understandings. This cultivation of selfhood is closely linked to the success narrative discussed in the previous chapter. The act of seizing opportunities in transnational space, being open to different influences, and all the while exercising and trying to maintain one’s privileged position over space and time, are typical features in the life stories of several of the participants in this study. Indeed, for many, the desire to achieve a full sense of belonging often coincided with the desire to obtain career success and live a lifestyle consistent with the way they understood themselves. I would like to highlight this by sharing Bijan’s story in some detail.

**Bijan: In Search of Belonging and Success**

Bijan was born in Iran. When he was a young boy his family initially planned on going to the United States, but seemingly by accident, they found themselves in Sweden. Throughout his life, however, Bijan has made several trips back and forth between Sweden and the United States, and now also Britain. For Bijan, Sweden, the USA and Britain have different things to offer, and by moving between these countries Bijan has tried to maximize the opportunities available to him across space. In this sense, his story fits very well with the “success narratives” presented in the previous chapter. According to Bijan, the primary reason he left Sweden in the first place was because he felt held back from succeeding in his career. Underlying Bijan’s broader life story, however, is also the desire to achieve “authenticity”. He wants the opportunity to both “be himself” as well as to continuously develop himself as a person. He resents how some of his
Iranian friends have, from his point of view, fully assimilated to Swedish society in order to be successful there, and instead speaks to the value of seeking “input” from a diverse range of places and experiences and building his life in a transnational way that draws on what he perceives to be the best available in several different contexts. In the process of moving around, he has also learned, from his point of view, to be adaptable and to deal with a variety of situations. As he notes:

*I mean I know a lot of my friends in Sweden who are successful, haven't seen half the things I've seen in life. And perhaps when it comes to dealing with problems, they might not have the same sight or foresight which is helpful in dealing with those situations.* (Bijan 3)

Despite feeling limited by the country, Bijan believes that Sweden has played an important part in making him who he is today. Looking back, he is very happy that he had the chance to begin his life in Sweden in a small town where his family was highly integrated, and he had the opportunity to immerse himself in Swedish culture.

*We uh- had all of the dancing around the midsummer pole, the dancing around the trees, the Easter songs, performing at church, singing along. And all of the above... And all of the Swedish cultural traditional stories were read to us in class. And I sort of became acculturated with everything that had to do with Swedish culture.* (Bijan 2)

Bijan was very impressed with his early school experiences, noting the quality of the building and the high level of education he was able to receive. After Bijan moved to a segregated area outside of a major urban center, however, things were not so easy. Bijan found himself segregated from mainstream society, and the opportunities he had to mix with Swedes and become integrated into Swedish society were now limited. Rather than turning this into a major problem, however, Bijan turned it into a resource. For him, this was where his life as a cosmopolitan began.

*I got to socially mix with people who were from Iraq, there were Kurds there were Syrians, Assyrians. Imagine there's a difference! Turks, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Imagine... any sort of culture very well. So both through the education and through the social experience, Sweden became culturally educative.* (Bijan 2)

Although Bijan felt that Sweden had presented him with a good opportunity to mix with and learn about other cultures, later in his life, after living in other places and returning to Sweden, he did not feel that Sweden had much to offer him anymore.
I felt as though there was nothing more that I could take in experience-wise. And so I really needed a new environment... to sort of soak in. So I moved, and I am extremely happy that I did. To this day, when I go back to my hometown, and I speak to my friends, we don't speak the same language we did back when. They speak the same language, I don't. We don't have the same frame of mind. We don't think about things the same anymore. I've seen a whole new world and they are just where they were before I left.

(Bijan 2)

The experiences that Bijan seeks out however, are not random and are very much consistent with how he sees himself, and what he aspires to be in the future. Although Bijan is not very clear on what he wants to do, he plans on being intellectually engaged, successful and preferably wealthy; interestingly, he has often put himself in the company of people who have already achieved such goals. When he went to the USA as a student, for example, Bijan found himself socializing with many wealthy Iranians. He sometimes had to make economic sacrifices in his daily life in order to be able to share the lifestyle of these celebrities, who enjoyed going to expensive bars and clubs. Although he struggled, he looks back on the experience today with no regrets, noting how it gave him a sense of adventure, and added to his life experience. This was not the last stop for Bijan, who later found himself working briefly on a project in New York, where again, he was surrounded by a group of elite academics and politicians. The experience he said, gave him “a lot of input”. Reflecting back on his life, Bijan says that it was in this context that he had never felt more himself, and he is currently working towards finding that feeling again, possibly in another city or another milieu.

It would seem that for Bijan, there is a strong link between mobility, success and belonging, insofar as he believes that his mobile lifestyle has made him who he is, and that it has facilitated his success.

The Limits to Cosmopolitan Discourse

I have tried to illustrate that several of the participants like Bijan were able to deliver very strong cosmopolitan narratives that made mobility a property of the self, a property which, as they tried to rationalize their biographies, they viewed as something they had actively cultivated. In this section, however, I would like to explore the limits of cosmopolitan discourse, or more specifically, to revisit the extent to which the cosmopolitan image presented and lifestyle adopted by some of the participants could really be considered a choice. It could be argued that while some of the participants were perhaps genuinely happy living a highly mobile life, cosmopolitanism did not replace their need to belong to a place. In fact, for some of the participants in
this study, the seemingly footloose nature by which they lived their lives across borders may be seen not only as a lifestyle, but also as a strategy as they navigated around other limitations to place belonging. While drawing on their middle class privilege to mobilize a cosmopolitan self-understanding, these participants cannot be categorized by the usual framework for understanding cosmopolitanism. Instead, by being both middle class and refugees, they were uniquely situated and were, based on my analysis, using the cosmopolitan narrative to make sense of their fragmented place belongings, and to reclaim a sense of dignity.

So while many participants typically saw their connections to multiple places as a positive thing, and drew on discourses of cosmopolitanism to describe themselves, since through their lives they had learned to be adaptable and to “fit in everywhere”, however, these discourses sometimes fell short of articulating their broader experience, and in particular, the challenges they have faced in trying to belong to one place. “Global citizenship” in this sense may be seen more as a strategy than a choice. As Elspeth Probyn, notes in her classic work, belonging is a process that also involves a degree of longing for “becoming-other” (1996).

The narratives offered by a few of the participants in fact highlighted this contradiction. It is perhaps Shala who was most forthcoming about how her cosmopolitan understanding of self had been cultivated in a context that did not allow her full membership in any one place.

So it’s a bit like I just try and see it in a positive way that I’m just international instead of like thinking that I have no country. (Shala 2)

The difficulties of belonging to place was perhaps most salient for people like Shala who due to their minority status were discriminated against in Iran. It has commonly been noted that the international Baha’i community is a cosmopolitan one, with weaker national attachments than many other diasporic groups (McAuliffe 2005). But several other participants expressed similar contradictions or ambiguities in their narrative accounts. While Azita, for example, was generally positive about her experience, in our second meeting she paused and made the following reflection:

All this moving around is very very good because I think my life is much richer, and I think my vision of life and the world is so… without me knowing it… it has become so much tolerant of all people. But on the other hand, it’s that… you know… So I didn’t do this because I wanted to. I don’t know if I would have done it if I didn’t have to. I don’t think I would have done it. (Azita 3)
Like the others, Azita is happy for what she has gained, but she is also aware that she has lost the fundamental attachment to place that she might have had if her life were different, if she had not been forced to leave Iran.

Cosmopolitanism, in this sense, may be considered a coping strategy, a classed strategy that allowed participants to deal with both their spatial displacement, as well as their class marginalization in Sweden. This relates back to the idea that people are compelled to find consistency in their lives, and in the case of many of the participants in this study, mobility itself was used to find this consistency, and to reaffirm participants’ self-understandings. As Sennett notes, “One of the unintended consequences of modern capitalism is that it has strengthened the value of place, aroused a longing for community.” (Sennett 1998:138) Based on the accounts delivered by the participants in this study, this would appear to be the case. Several found themselves somewhere between finding belonging in movement and at the same time mourning the fact that they do not have one fixed place to belong to. In order to draw this experience out in more detail, I will conclude this discussion by sharing Shala’s story.

Shala: The Reluctant Cosmopolitan

After facing persecution for their Baha’i faith, Shala’s parents decided to seek refuge in Sweden. Shala grew up in a medium sized Swedish city. She was in many ways very integrated into Swedish society. She lived in a predominantly Swedish neighborhood, had mostly Swedish friends, and grew up speaking Swedish and Farsi as if she had two mother tongues. Because of her Baha’i identity, Shala did not feel Iranian, and had no desire to return to Iran. She therefore prioritized her Baha’i identity over her Iranian one and, due to a Baha’i philosophy that encourages local integration, tried her best to fit into Swedish society as much as possible. She did not even know many Baha’i people, as there were relatively few in Sweden. At some point, however, Shala felt that she wasn’t able to avoid doing some of the things that her non-Baha’i friends did (such as drinking and smoking) without compromising her own values. She decided to leave Sweden for places where she had strong Baha’i networks and could comfortably be who she was while avoiding teenage life in Sweden. Eventually she found herself in London where she has several Baha’i friends.

Shala’s narrative is focused on her experience of being “the outsider” in many of the places that she has lived. She emphasizes how the Iranian regime persecuted Baha’is. Most of all, however, she talks about her experience in Sweden with a great degree of disappoint-
ment. While Shala’s family was met well in Sweden, over time things changed. As she tells me,

_We came to Sweden where we were met very well. It was, you know, we actually got a letter from the King of Sweden like welcoming us… They gave us flats, like big flats, with several rooms and everything was prepared. The kitchen was stacked, there was furniture, it was all furnished. They had prepared baby stuff. Like buggies, baby buggies. Everything. Everything was prepared. Incredible. I'm sure it's not like that anymore. Actually, I'm quite sure it's not like this anymore, but this was in the 80s so…_ (Shala 1)

While Shala herself was only an infant upon arriving in Sweden, through her family’s recollection of past events, Shala has come to believe that attitudes towards migrants changed greatly during her time in Sweden. She feels that while her family was received generously, with the onslaught of further migration from the Middle East, migrants slowly lost respect in Sweden. While Sweden still accepted many refugees, Shala felt that they were not wanted there and that Swedish society looked down on them for being different, especially if they practiced Islam. For Shala the perception of being labeled culturally different (and consequently inferior) was perhaps more intense than it was for the average migrant because while she looked Iranian, and felt that she was stereotyped as Middle Eastern, at the same time she also harboured her own resentment towards Islam and the Iranian regime. “So yeah, so I often make that point: “I am not Muslim” is one of the first things that she tells me about herself. Later she goes on to say that

_I mean people assume that I am Muslim as well and we’re not very popular in Sweden. Neither foreigners in general, especially not if you're Muslim._ (Shala 2)

Shala’s story is one of frustration over misrecognition. She recalls being put in remedial Swedish classes although she was perfectly fluent in Swedish in school. She also notes with sadness how people did not try to learn to pronounce her name properly, and how she felt that she was watched with special care when performing tasks like shopping, as though she were a potential thief. For Shala, being associated with “those foreigners” that she herself looked down on was so hurtful that she tried to avoid being in areas with a high concentration of Middle Eastern migrants even if it was just for shopping or a casual visit.

Shala’s high level of integration into Swedish society ironically made living there difficult for her, because she felt like an insider, but on account of her appearance and her history, was unable to see herself as a full Swedish “citizen”. In both of our meetings, she tells me
how she sees Sweden’s migration dilemma from both sides. Although bitter about not being fully accepted by Swedish society, she herself is critical of migrants who fail to integrate, constantly emphasizing her own family’s efforts to do so. When speaking of Christmas for example, she says that

*It’s not a religious thing for us. It’s what they do in this country, and we live in this country, so let’s- I don’t know. It’s more… And it’s fun. I think it’s fun! I love Christmas. It’s my favourite holiday.* (Shala 2)

Deeming herself emotionally stateless, Shala therefore became internationally oriented, despite her strong desire to belong to a place. From her point of view, unlike other migrants in Sweden, she was open and willing to take on Swedish culture. Unlike the average Swede, however, she was international and affected by her experiences in other parts of the world. She sees herself as the product of many international experiences and influences that have, by this time in her life, given her what she considers to be a mixed culture. For Shala then, belonging was defined by “global citizenship” a cosmopolitan way of being in the world.

Unlike the many participants in this study who uncritically presented themselves as cosmopolitans, Shala states directly that she has had no other option. Because of her biography, she believes that true place belonging is not something available to her. For Shala, religion offers one alternative form of membership which helps, in part, to ground her otherwise global existence. Because the Baha’i faith encourages cross-cultural exchange and international mobility, Shala expects that she will continue to move through the world to meet her different needs at different phases of her life. But it is not only religion that has helped Shala. On the contrary, being “cosmopolitan” more generally has given Shala a new way of relating to Sweden. Interestingly, taking on the identity of an internationally oriented person (rather than a refugee) has elevated her social status. Because she has spent many years abroad, Shala speaks perfect English. When she visits Sweden she therefore chooses to speak English rather than Swedish, and feels that people treat her better because of it.

*So a lot of times when I’m home for holidays, when I got into a shop, I just speak English. And it’s such a huge difference. Like it’s… I did not think it would be but it’s a huge difference! All of a sudden I’m very popular. But the minute I start speaking Swedish it’s like Oh, Foreigner. One of those foreigners, like the Middle Eastern kind.* (Shala 2)

Shala’s statement again draws us back to the notion that belonging is not only about place, but it is also about one’s position in that place,
and ensuring that this is congruent with one’s life story. For Shala, then, being raised to be well educated and middle class was not congruent with the life available (as she saw it) to her as an “immigrant” in Sweden. She therefore chose to move on to preserve not only her dignity, but also her identity as a middle class Iranian coming from a family that, in her view, raised her with strong Baha’i values that have served her well.

As Colic-Peisker (2010) notes, the term identity-belonging “reflects an inextricable association between the two concepts: a feeling of belonging is understood as a central part of identity.” (Colic-Peisker 2010:469) This seems to be the case in this study as well, as participants actively tried to reinforce what they believed to be the more positive aspects of their identities by moving into contexts that helped them to confirm the stories they believed about themselves.

Belonging to and Beyond Places

This chapter has emphasized how place is important for developing a sense of belonging, although in complex ways that are not always adequately addressed by the migration studies literature. The binary framework which is frequently drawn upon to classify people as either global (cosmopolitans) or as fixed in place (locals) does not adequately capture the experiences of the group under study.

Indeed for the participants in this study, particular towns in Sweden have played an important role in facilitating a basic sense of belonging. This is, after all, where many grew up and continue to have family members. Most identify with Sweden through speaking the language, and maintaining friendship and family ties. London, however, has provided better opportunities for asserting the more individualized aspects of the participants’ identities, and in particular, for facilitating their transnational connections. Many of the participants were able to develop a sense of belonging in London that they were not able to cultivate in Sweden. London, in this sense, was a place where belonging of a different kind: a feeling of societal acceptance was experienced by the participants.

Despite their ability to develop a sense of belonging to London, however, the majority of the participants did not view London as a final destination, but rather as one stop along the road to more experiences. While some had developed a sense of belonging through, as noted in the previous chapters, work and family life, their attachments to place, including to London, could not be considered deep,
and did not always compensate for what was lost through emigration from Iran. By drawing on cosmopolitan discourses and presenting themselves as “global” I have argued, some of these people have nevertheless been able to make sense of their fragmented biographies, particularly in a way that emphasizes their position as middle class. In this sense their individualized self-understandings have also been mediated by opportunities and constraints, and the specific ways in which they have cultivated a sense of belonging cannot be viewed as entirely voluntary. This is demonstrated by some of the participants’ counter-narratives, which demonstrate the ongoing importance of place and the limits of cosmopolitan discourse.
Chapter 10
Conclusion

Onward migration is a relatively understudied topic which disrupts the notion that migration is a straightforward event by which people move from one place to another only to adapt, integrate, and remain settled for the rest of their lives. Instead, by considering the multiple migrations made by individuals and families, the present study has aimed to illustrate the dynamic ways that lives are lived across borders.

This dissertation has highlighted the experiences of a group of people who moved as refugees from Iran to Sweden, and then subsequently moved on again to London. Although concerned with the mobility patterns of the selected group, the study has aimed to situate this mobility in specific space-time contexts. The dissertation therefore combined the findings of life history interviews conducted with individual onward migrants with a broader understanding of the social relations that structure diasporic, national and local spaces. By drawing on a number of theoretical approaches including transnational social fields, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital, intersectionality, and a life course approach, the dissertation has situated peoples’ settlement and mobility experiences, while simultaneously taking into account the importance of different levels of geographical scale.

In what follows, the key findings of the dissertation will be summarized in more detail. Firstly, how the participant narratives presented in chapters 7-9 address the research questions raised in chapter 1 will be considered. This is followed by a brief discussion on the dissertation’s primary contributions.

Revisiting the Research Questions

The first major research question was to address how highly educated onward migrants live their lives across spaces. As the narratives presented in the last chapters reveal, the participants in the study have indeed
used different places to achieve their various goals, often in accordance with specific life course stages. While many viewed Sweden as an ideal place to acquire migrant status, primary and even tertiary level education, for example, London was seen as a better place for pursuing career related goals. The migrants under study have therefore demonstrated an ability to pursue opportunities across space, in order to meet both their everyday needs in terms of employment, education and family life, as well as their longer term goals.

As the participant narratives also highlight, the opportunities available in social space are not only spatially situated but are allocated intersectionally; the intertwined relations of race, class and gender in different places have therefore played a particular role in influencing the opportunities available to the participants in the study. Many of the narratives shared by the participants reflect the intersectional relations they have experienced in specific space-time contexts. While Sweden encourages class and gender equality, for example, the country’s relatively closed approach to ethnic difference led participants to feel that their Iranian background excluded them from belonging to the Swedish nation. Moreover, while most of the participants experienced class degradation upon migrating to Sweden from Iran, men and women were affected differently. While women enjoyed increased employment and educational opportunities following their migration from Iran to Sweden, the opposite tended to be true for men. These experiences greatly affected participants’ perceptions of place, and the more objective opportunities available to them in certain contexts.

It is important to point out, however, that while particular places were seen as offering certain social and economic opportunities to these migrants, these places unto themselves did not determine the lives of the people under study. According to the participant narratives, gender roles and family norms, for instance, are neither simply imported from one place to another nor defined solely by the place of destination. Instead, they are defined with reference to all of the contexts to which the individual participants are connected. The same could be said for notions of career success and belonging. While both culture and structure are by no means fixed, in moving between different contexts, some aspects of both were preserved, while others were renegotiated. In this sense, the participants in the study could be seen not only as moving between places, but also living across them in broadly defined transnational social fields. The connections they maintained to Iran, the networks that connected them to Iranians in other parts of the diaspora, as well as their more localized experiences in
specific locations of settlement, all helped the study participants to renegotiate how they lived their lives.

Despite living highly mobile lives, one of the primary findings from the study is that place matters greatly even to very mobile migrants. As they built their lives across and between specific places, the participants in this research seized available opportunities in specific places at specific times. It was the highly connected processes of settlement and onward migration that enabled them to identify and access these opportunities which affected virtually every aspect of their lives including their work, education and family lives. Settlement was necessary for laying the groundwork for future opportunity: degrees were obtained, languages learned, and relationships forged. The participants in the study were advantaged in many ways in Iran and they did what they could to transfer this privilege to Sweden. Subsequently, the social, economic, and cultural capital accumulated in Sweden was employed in the London context. As they assessed opportunities in different places, they did not completely abandon where they had lived before, but rather tried to integrate what they deemed to be the best each place had to offer into their own personalized self-understandings. The goal of most of the participants was to move on where they could best preserve their privilege, make use of their assets, and progress with their lives.

While emphasizing the importance of place in a mobile world, the study also aimed to understand the significance that mobility itself plays in peoples’ lives. Skeggs’ (2004) postulation that mobility may be a resource that is not equally available to everyone was an important theme explored in this dissertation. For the participants in this study, mobility was facilitated by way of unique personal histories, diasporic consciousness, diasporic networks, and high levels of education and skill. As a result the participants were able to pursue opportunities across space much more readily than most people with fewer international connections and lower education and skill levels.

Importantly, however, although the participants in the research have lived their lives across three or more differentiated spaces, another finding to emerge from the narratives was that they did not view themselves as fragmented subjects, and rather, worked to produce a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives. The biographical work undertaken by the participants in this study, and the seemingly coherent sense of self that many of the participants were able to present, was highlighted by the specific methodology used in this research. By using biographical narrative interviews, the study aimed to capture migrant subjectivity and in particular, how individual par-
Participants rationalized and made sense of both their settlement and mobility experiences. The specific ways that participants have narrated their lives has therefore helped to illuminate some of their own understandings, and the meanings they attach to their linked settlement and mobility experiences.

In chapter 7, for example, several narratives were shared which addressed the desire for social reproduction and in particular the middle class habitus across both individual lives and also generations. In chapter 8, participants similarly positioned themselves in relation to dominant discourses of success, and in particular how this connected to their self-understandings as raced, classed and gendered subjects. Most participants saw themselves as living out a coherent middle class biography rather than as migrants moving uncertainly through the world. Finally, chapter 9 illustrated the ways in which these participants have tried to build a sense of place belonging. For most participants, this involved developing a coherent sense of self which, according to their narratives, involved adopting certain lifestyles that reflected their middle class backgrounds, as well as their diverse cultural experiences. In these narratives, place (and settlement) was sometimes articulated as important for cultivating a sense of belonging, but so too was mobility. By moving between places, participants were able to draw on what each one had to offer, thereby confirming their understanding of themselves as cosmopolitan “global citizens”.

A second aim of the dissertation was to explore the relevant circumstances behind the migrants’ decision making. Onward migration itself is connected to broader events in peoples’ lives. As this dissertation has illustrated, for middle class migrants moving within the EU, migration may not be carefully calculated. Based on the findings of this study, there is no single factor that could be said to determine the likelihood of onward migration. Instead, I have tried to call attention to the complexity of causality by emphasizing the multifaceted nature of migration decision making. For the individuals studied here, the circumstances underlying the migration decision making process were multidimensional, and could be related to other developments in the onward migrant’s everyday life such as searching for employment and trying to secure a meaningful family life. Often multiple factors coalesced to trigger onward migration at a certain point in the participants’ life trajectory. In this sense, as outlined in chapter 2, the complexity of onward migration cannot be understood by drawing on economistic or rational choice theories. Instead, as the narratives have illustrated, migrants have found themselves in complex circum-

302
stances that have either encouraged or discouraged their mobility over time. Onward migration can be understood not as a significant event unto itself, therefore, but rather as embedded in other processes.

Central to understanding the circumstances that underlie onward migration, is the issue of structure and agency. The participants at the center of this study were social actors acting on opportunities in the presence of constraints. While privileged by their high levels of education and their social backgrounds, they experienced a great deal of disruption in their lives through the process of becoming refugees in Europe. The findings of this dissertation suggest that onward migration may be seen as part of a strategy used by these migrants to overcome some of the economic, social, and cultural constraints they faced as they pursued opportunities and made their way in a new social context. As onward migrants they became active agents as opposed to passive refugees. They did so by using their skills and education in combination with their diasporic networks to pursue new opportunities and to allow their lives to evolve in new places and social contexts.

The specific circumstances underlying onward migration were not completely individual, however, and were often related to broader power relations in society. As highlighted in chapter 5, the specific policies and approaches of individual European welfare states create contexts that can be more or less favourable for migrants and for people situated in certain race, class and gender categories. For many of the middle class participants in this study, the difficulties associated with cultivating a sense of belonging in the Swedish context directly or indirectly spurred migration to Britain, which was perceived by the participants as more welcoming and open to ethnic difference. The ways in which this lack of belonging to the Swedish nation was defined, however, varied from participant to participant. While some felt self-conscious and uncomfortable because they felt different from the rest of society, others were more concerned with the way that their foreign background may negatively affect their employment possibilities and their ability to cultivate a meaningful career. Moreover, the ways in which London met their need to belong to a place varied considerably. While some found the city appealing because of its cosmopolitan culture and multicultural ambience, for others career and financial opportunities were emphasized. The specific ways in which these migrants “found their place” in London, thus, depended significantly on their stage in the life course, religious background, and a number of other individual and categorical factors. Despite
differences in the experiences of participants, however, the idea that London was a place that provided social, economic and cultural opportunities that were not available in Sweden was a dominant narrative. As I have emphasized in chapters 7, 8 and 9, the narratives presented by the participants tended to illustrate the ways in which they had managed to overcome obstacles by way of onward migration.

The third and final aim of the dissertation was to consider the expectations that onward migrants have of specific migration destinations. Clearly the narratives delivered by the participants in this regard are reflective of their specific positionality. Their perception of what constitutes “success” and their preference for “cosmopolitan lifestyles” may be attributed to their middle class backgrounds, high levels of education and their migration histories. Compared to Sweden, London appeared to be a place that favoured their middle class background and high level of education. Moreover, having an Iranian background was seen as less problematic in the British context. As noted in chapter 5, Britain may in many ways be considered a much more difficult country to move to, insofar as migrants receive fewer benefits than they do in Sweden and, due to the nature of Britain’s liberal welfare regime, are expected to support themselves in a way that would not be necessary in Sweden. For these migrants, however, it was precisely the opportunity to succeed independently that was appealing. Many emphasized how important it was for them to be independent and to feel that they did not need government support. This is clear in both chapters 7 and 8 where participants situate themselves in relation to the structural opportunities and constraints presented by the two study contexts. Clearly, for the participants in this study, integration in the formal sense (accessing adequate housing, securing a good education, finding a job) was not enough. The majority preferred a more liberal context in which, as they viewed it, their ambition was rewarded and the opportunities were more numerous.

Primary Contributions of the Dissertation

This dissertation has brought attention to the understudied yet exciting topic of onward migration. Since little is known about this particular type of movement, pursuing it involves stepping across and between the categories and classifications typically used to study migration processes. The dissertation has therefore tried to conceptualize onward migration in a way that acknowledges its links to other types of migration, while identifying it as a unique process. By looking at
how onward migration relates to other fields of migration studies, contextualizing onward moves and exploring the perspectives of onward migrants in depth, I hope that I have raised interest in the topic and helped to define it, thereby giving other researchers a starting point for further research.

Rather than trying to identify the specific factors that determine onward migration, the dissertation has instead adopted an approach that acknowledges and strives to take account of the complexity of migration decision making. In doing so, the onward migration phenomenon, and in particular the sending and receiving contexts, has been carefully contextualized. In this way, the study contributes to an understanding of how micro and macro perspectives may be linked, and how both global and local contexts influence transnational migration. By focusing on individual people and their narratives, but relating them to larger structural contexts, I have tried to use theory and methodology in this dissertation that transcends the usual frameworks used to study population movements. The research therefore follows the integrated approach encouraged by King (2011) as well as many other geographers determined to move the study of population in new directions. Furthermore, by looking at the link between class and culture, the study contributes to debates and innovations taking place at the heart of social theory in a range of social science disciplines.

While there is a great deal of research on mobility, and a great deal of research on settlement, the literature that brings the two together is limited. It is therefore hoped that the dissertation has helped to illustrate how the two processes may be connected. By focusing on the experiences of one specific group of onward migrants, the dissertation has tried to highlight which aspects of both settlement and mobility these people have employed, to meet their interests over space and time. It would seem that while place still matters to these onward migrants in terms of accumulating the social, economic and cultural capital they need to achieve their desired lifestyles, belonging to place, and particularly to the nation, has proven more difficult, at least in the Swedish context. The findings therefore suggest that by combining settlement with onward migration, some migrants have been able to maximize their opportunities and further their long term goals; additionally, and importantly, however, this spatial strategy may also reflect the desire to overcome feelings of displacement in the nation state context.

The study, in this sense, brings new understanding to the way that the integration of refugees is commonly understood. Rather than
viewing migration as something that completely ruptures the lives of migrants and forces them to start their lives over again as the passive subjects of nation states, the findings suggest that we should adopt a more nuanced approach to understanding all types of migration, but forced migration in particular. Developing an understanding of the strategies migrants themselves employ as they attempt to develop a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives as they move across both space and time is central to this endeavor.


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Geographica
Utges av Kulturgeografiska institutionen vid Uppsala universitet.
Published by the Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University.


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