

Iranian Revolution: Effects on Identity

By: Gabriella Hassan

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Thesis Committee:

Professor Frieda Ekotto
Doctor Anthony Marcum

ABSTRACT

In 1979, the country of Iran underwent a drastic change in which the monarchy system of government, which had been in practice for centuries, was overthrown in a violent revolution. This revolution was not without consequence, as the revolution brought about a governmental change, but also changed the social and economic features of the country. Many Iranians were forced or chose to migrate to America, where they are plagued with the task of deciding how to identify themselves. Do they remain loyal to Iran and consider themselves fully Iranian despite the extreme changes, which they may or may not support, and their new country of residence? Does the American view of Iran, and the stigmas attached to the country due to the deteriorating Iranian- American relationship effect such identification? Additionally, what does this decision of self- identification tell us about the Iranian view of the country's recent changes? What role does American perception play in terms of identification choices and the Iranian- American immigrant predicament? These questions can be applied in a broader sense to countries that have experienced a similar revolution and rise in immigration. Immigrants into America from countries such as Cuba, who also experienced a country- altering revolution and subsequent deteriorating relationship with America, experience the same struggles of self- identification as those faced by Iranian- Americans.

I aim to answer these questions by analyzing the current state of Iran in comparison to its existence pre- revolution, specifically with regard to the opinions and views of Iranian- Americans. How and why they identify in the way that they do will shed light not only on the effects and power a revolution or change in fabric of a country can have on the self- identification of individuals and world perception of the country, but in a broader sense, the

effect it can have on the identification of all immigrants. The data and insight obtained through this thesis can then be applied to countries in parallel circumstances, and allow for a better understanding of those immigrating from revolutionary countries.

DEDICATIONS

To my American mother and Libyan father whose perfectly blended cultural differences unknowingly gave me the inspiration and idea for this thesis. Without your guidance and support, as well as your unwavering confidence in my eventual success, this thesis would not have been possible.

To my nana and poppy who inspire me daily, and whose faith and belief in me give me the motivation to succeed.

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Introduction

In today's world, the Middle East, and Iran in particular, is a highly sensitive topic in America as well the rest of the Western world. The deterioration of the US- Iranian relations began in 1979, with the Iranian Revolution, and has not been fully repaired since. While the study of the effect of the revolution on western relations has garnered much attention, this thesis focuses on: *the effect it had and continues to have, on the identities of Iranian immigrants and Iranian refugees living in the U.S.? How do Iranian born immigrants and refugees use methods other than their birthplace to self- identify? Has the legacy of the revolution and the current worldview of Iran continued to reinforce the revolution's effects as well as influence the way in which Iranian- American immigrants choose to identify?*

Today, many Iranians- American immigrants are faced with the task of choosing a means of self- identification. Since the revolution, extremist Islamist group in Iran have claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist acts and have changed how other individual Iranians regard their ties to their homeland on nation. A rift between those who migrated and their homeland of Iran has been formed by the revolution and exacerbated over time. This thesis will focus specifically on the direct effect of the revolution and aftermath on Iranian- American immigrants with regard to the way in which they choose to identify. The western view of Iran, some of which can be negative do to media reporting, undoubtedly affects the lives of Iranian- Americans and their personal identities. The research will employ methods including literary reviews, interviews and surveys, and a complete study of the revolution itself through the perspective of both Americans and Iranian- American immigrants. The goal is to study the effects and various perspectives of this displacement, and lack of complete identity, in an attempt to better

understand the causal impacts the Iranian revolutions and the struggling status of Iranian-American immigrants and immigrants worldwide. The information obtained in this thesis regarding Iranian-Americans and the implications of their identification will be applied to immigrants of countries of similar cases such as Cuba.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on the concept of identity. The definition of identity and its importance to the individual is explained. In addition, through the literary review of *Social Identity Theory*, by Tajfel and Turner, the motivations and reasoning for certain modes of identification are explored. The importance of standing and perception are revealed to be of the utmost importance and have a direct on self- identification. In addition, the popular and usual means of identification, revealed through a literary review of *National identity*, by Anthony Smith, is often that of national identity. This commonality stresses the importance of studying the cases in which individuals choose to dissociate from their national identity and choose new forms of identification, as seen in the Iranian- American immigrant case. This chapter includes a bar graph of a randomized survey of 20 individuals that back the national identity theory proposed by Smith. This information will be used in later chapters to analyze the identification of Iranian immigrants in America.

The specific case of the Iranian- American immigrant cannot be understood without background knowledge of the events that transpired before, during and after the 1979 revolution. Chapter 2 focuses on the social, political and economic status of Iran, pre and post revolution, and highlights the contrasts between the two. The chapter includes various sources that document the revolution and the change from a monarch system of governance to a theocratic religious rule. The consequential immigration of Iranian citizens out of the country and into foreign countries such as America is illustrated, and the changed worldview of the country is studied.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the Iranian- American relationship and states the specific events that have led to the troubled relationship. The roots and existences of established perceptions and stereotypes of Iran are analyzed in order to ascertain their effect on Iranian- American identification. The perceptions reveal to be shaped by Western media, which is found to be guilty of biased and one- sided reporting. The chapter includes an interview section in a randomized group of American born citizens answered various question to gauge their opinions and perceptions of Iranian- Americans. Interviewees are between the ages of 25-75, of both genders, and of various religions, races and ethnicities. Those who consented to the randomized survey are from states nationwide, including New York, Michigan, Chicago, California and Texas. Upon their consent they have answered a series of questions mostly concerned with their personal view of the country of Iran, as well as Iranian- American immigrants and their relation to America. This information is used to better understand the motivations of Iranian- Americans in their quest to identify themselves in a country that disapproves of their homeland.

Taking the information learned in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 goes on to disclose how the revolution has affected the lives of the Iranian immigrant population, with a concentration on the way in which Iranian- Americans choose to identify. An interview of Iranian-American immigrants was conducted in order to gauge ties and reactions towards Iran. The randomized group of interviewees consisted of individuals who left Iran at the eve, during, or after the revolution. They are between the ages of different 40-75, and those who chose to answer the randomized survey are of both genders and different religions, including Muslim, Jewish, Kurdish and Christian. They are from different states across the US including New York, Michigan, Texas and California. They were contacted and chosen upon their consent by referral from professors, Iranian groups, and organizations existent on the University of Michigan

campus. Most questions relate to how the revolution impacted their lives, their current view of Iran, and how and why they choose to self- identify in a certain manner. The interview reveals the Iranian contempt or affection for Iran post revolution, as well as how the effects and existent Iranian- American relationship and stigmas, have affected their choice to identify. The implication of the findings can be extended to include immigrants of any country that experience a drastic change and migration to a country that disapproves of their homeland.

While the main focus of this thesis is to uncover the effect the revolution had and has on the identification of Iranian- Americans, Chapter 6 explores how the implications of the discovery can also shed light on the state of Iran in a broader context. If findings indicate that many choose to dissociate from their Iranian origins do to the current status of Iran, it may influence the government to attempt to remedy the problem. In addition, the findings will shed light on the American perception of Iranian- American immigrants and the effects this view has on their choice identification. Furthermore this phenomenon can be extended and applied to the immigrant population of any country that shares a parallel experience, such as Cuba, that migrates to a country that has established stigmas with regard to their country of origin. Much can be learned through this study of identification and its relation to national identity and perception, both on the individual and broader spectrum, and can be applied to strengthen and improve the cohesive element of global acceptance and understanding.

CHAPTER 1: Identity

Introduction:

This chapter explores the concept of identity, as well as the individuals' motivations in choosing to self- identify in a certain manner. While the reasons for accepting or choosing a

certain category of identification are important, the desire to dissociate or reject a category is just as significant. Individuals are often labeled and categorized according to broad signifiers; however, this identification is challenged and complicated in the case of immigrants. The individual is forced to keep his or her national identity or choose a new means of identifying, a decision that sheds light on their perceptions of their own country as well the new one they have entered.

The definition of identity and the way one defines oneself is a complicated concept that takes into account various motivations and influences. Human beings are social characters that possess a need for a sense of belonging or control, which manifests itself in a specific identification. The category by which individuals choose to identify is of great importance, because through association with a certain category, an individual is able to establish a positive reputation and place in the world.¹ According to the *Social Identity Theory*, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, the groups that people belong to provide them with a vital source of pride and self-esteem, and therefore are enhanced in an effort to bolster their individual status and prestige. Individuals, therefore, strive to choose modes of identification that will provide them with the greatest status or ability to match up to the identities of other individuals.²

One basis for group identification is the place of one's birth, which is one's assumed identity, whether or not they actively claim it. However, most individuals do tend to claim this identification and identify themselves based on their citizenship, or country of origin, and thereby express proud or strong nationalistic ties to their country, claiming its superiority to all

¹ Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, 1979, (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole

² Ibid

else.³ This, in turn, creates two groups, one that is “in” and one that is “out”, leaving room for discrimination and prejudice as well as potential strife, especially among nations⁴. Often this strong nationalistic identity stems from a common cultural basis and creates the potential for membership qualifications and requirements that allow for cultural conflicts and instability within, as well as between, nations.⁵ Furthermore, this nationalistic identity automatically ties its members to preconceived stereotypes and association related to their specific country. When an individual chooses to identify by using their country, he or she acknowledges the reputations and statuses associated with their country, and has a vested interest in its success.⁶

Intense or drastic changes in government, national religion, or ideology can have life altering consequences for the citizens or members of such countries and challenge their loyalties and dedication to the country. Although national identity is the most popular means of identifying, citizens may go on to reject the new and different changes, even leaving their birth country to seek a new life and identity to better their lives and identification association.⁷ Therefore, while the initial and natural tie to one’s birthplace is strong, it is by no means permanent. It is important to note the difference between identification and self- identification, as the groups or categorization in which people are placed can only be considered valid if they accept such a placement and membership. The core of self- identification lay within the individuals’ identity to choose their mode of identifying for themselves. While others may associate an individual with a certain identification or category, the individual themselves may

³ Montserrat, Guibernau I Berdún M., John Hutchinson, and Anthony D. Smith. *History and National Destiny: Ethnosymbolism and Its Critics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

⁴ Lee, Yoonmi. *Modern Education, Textbooks, and the Image of the Nation: Politics and Modernization and Nationalism in Korean Education*. Routledge, 2012, p. 29

⁵ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Haslam, A. S. *Psychology in Organizations*. London, SAGE Publications, 2001, p 26-57

not agree or accept this identification when expressing their personal identification choices.⁸ One may come to reject his or her assumed identity and association with homeland, and turn to other ways of identifying his or herself, regardless of how others attempt to categorize his or her identity.

Ethnic and ideological foundations, as well as the perceptions that come with the choice to identify with a certain category directly affect self-identification. The actions and changes of a country coupled with the existent stigmas and stereotypes tied to it, particularly if negative can influence its standing on the world stage as well as membership population, who choose dissociate from negative involvements.⁹ These factors have a direct effect on the strength of its citizens' tie to their national identity and support of their country as a whole. The individual's decision to rescind his or her membership from this group or form of identity calls into question the actions and consequent stability of a country, while highlighting the multidimensional nature of identity. For this concept to be fully understood, the phenomenon and meaning of national identity, as well as the motivations and reasoning for one's self-identification, must be further analyzed and explained.

The motivations and pressures of self-identification are especially emphasized in cases where a country undergoes a change that has a huge effect on its citizens, as well as its standing on the international stage. This thesis focuses on the case of Iran, post the 1979 revolution, and the way in which Iranians who have immigrated or fled to America, choose to identify themselves. For example, while some individuals may consider an Iranian born American immigrant to be Iranian, he or she may identify using another signifier such as his or her current

⁸ Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, 1979, (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole

⁹ Ibid

country of dwelling, or religion, specifically if the immigrant is not in agreement with, or resentful of, the actions of their country of origin. The choice to reject national identity as a means of identification, by a significant number of individuals, speaks volumes to the opinions and views a country's citizens have of its actions and demands reasoning and explanation into the phenomenon.

Literary Review:

***National Identity* by Anthony D. Smith**

Anthony Smith is considered to be one of the founders in the field of nationalism studies. Although Smith does face some criticism regarding his ethnosymbolism theory, and its attempt to generalize a nationalist theory to fit the conditions of all countries¹⁰, *National Identity* gives a broad view of nationalism and the scholarship that surrounds it. The phenomenon and implications of national identity are developed by Anthony D. Smith in *National Identity*. To further understand the levels of identification, and how they relate to national identity, he conducts an in depth examination of the specifics between the degrees and forms of national identity across borders. In addition, he studies how the category of national identification differs from other signifiers such as racial, ethnic or regional identity, and reveals why it is the preferred choice of identification.¹¹

To understand national identity, the concept of a nation must first be understood. Smith defines a nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members”.¹² Out of this commonality comes a collective identity that finds its basis

¹⁰ Calhoun, Craig J. *Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 25.

¹¹ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991.

¹² Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991, 14

in a shared ethnicity, or experience, that connects its citizens. Smith develops an *Ethnosymbolist Theory* in which the study of *ethnies* or “named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity”¹³ is paramount. The “why and where particular nations are formed, and why nationalisms, though formally alike, possess such distinctive features and contents”¹⁴ are explained by focusing on the cultural and ethnic bases of a nation, and the attached sentiments. The territorial and emotional ties unique to the members of the land and community are unveiled through the historical foundations of a nation.

Smith highlights four main issues related to national identity including;

- Its unique nature as opposed to other types of collective cultural identification
- The role ethnic bases have on the formation of such identity
- Nature and impact of types of nationalist ideology and symbolism on ethnic political identities
- Political consequence of national identity

Of all the collective identities in which human beings share today, national identity is perhaps “the most fundamental and inclusive”.¹⁵ The inclusive nature of national identity can be attributed to its distinctive multidimensional nature, as it encompasses various cultural or political ties along with potential religious, class or ideological elements.¹⁶ It is the most comprehensive and wide spread form of identification in which people of can unite under a shared trait or history. It consists of strong bonds of solidarity while possessing a flexible and

¹³ Ibid, 32

¹⁴ Ibid, 191

¹⁵ Ibid, 143

¹⁶ Ibid, 14

persistent force with its “external” and “internal” forces at work.¹⁷ The external forces include political, economic and territorial forces that provide citizens with legal rights and institutions, labor and goods markets, as well as defined and definite social space and history. In addition, the internal forces allow for the fulfillment of social necessities with a provided sense of belonging and unity. With this homogeneous ethnicity, culture and popular belief, emerges the existence of a nation, rather than just a country.¹⁸

National identity is a strong force in that it provides a “means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture”.¹⁹ It gives individuals the opportunity to belong to a collective being in which they can connect and contribute to the community as a whole. That being said, the decision to self-identify with one’s nation is essential to the concept of national identity, and the citizens’ devotion to nationalism. Nationalism is defined as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation”.²⁰ The unity and cohesive nature it represents determines the survival of a true nation, as opposed to a state or country, and exemplifies that the self-identification by means of national identity is linked, as well as dependent on the status of a country as a nation. A nation “consists of a distinct population of people that are bound together by a common culture, history, and tradition who are typically concentrated within a specific geographic region²¹”, rather than a country which is merely a “political unit that has sovereignty

¹⁷ Ibid, 16

¹⁸ Ibid, 143

¹⁹ Ibid, 17

²⁰ Ibid, 73

²¹ Fellmann, Jerome Donald, Arthur Getis, and Judith Getis. *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities*. Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown Publishers, 1992, ch.12

over an area of territory and the people within it”.²² Without the support of its citizenry, the nation simply ceases to exist, and becomes a country with a population that lacks the cohesive and unified identity that results from shared cultural, political and social histories and sentiments.

Individuals identify due to their need to belong and contribute to some sort of category or group, and take into account the benefits and disadvantages of certain associations when weighing their decision to identify. On the one hand, with national identity comes with favorable external factors related to the territorial, economic, and political spheres as well as internal factors tied to community, social bonds and authenticity.²³ It provides holy or spiritual places, creates a form of a shared economic community by encouraging the movements of goods and labor, and governs based on the best interest of the nation. However, as previously mentioned, the strongest benefit of national identity is self-identification, which doubles as its potential downfall. Humans have different ideologies, philosophies and beliefs as to what best serves a nation, in addition to what best serves themselves as an individual. The pursuit to do what is best for the nation can result in various opinionated oppositions, which rather than foster collective identity, create strife and hostility.²⁴ Often individuals who are in a position of power, or possess high governmental positions, take it upon themselves to decide what is best for the good of the whole. When the actions of a country are not approved or agreed upon, country-wide reactions often occur as a response, seen in countries such as Iran and Cuba. The consequence of the unapproved action is a citizenry rejection of the nation that implemented such actions, and creates a search for a new form of identification. Despite the fact that some may view certain actions as being in the best interest of the country, the inability to please all citizens, or even a

²² Ibid

²³ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991,16

²⁴ Ibid

majority, leads to the citizens' resentment and contempt of that country, and therefore a decrease in nationalism coupled with a desire to sever relationships. Additionally, the choices a country makes can often be discussed and evaluated on a global scale, and if not up to par, are condemned worldwide in a way that not only effects the reputation of the country, but its citizens as well. In this case, the beneficial elements of self-identification allow the individual to choose a new, more favorable, means of identifying.

Often countries undergo a change from the existent way of life or historical ethnics that serves as the basis of the established national identity, and leads to the expelling or immigration of its citizens. When a country has existed in a certain way for decades, or even hundreds or thousands of years, its citizens become accustomed to the way of life and expectations that come along with it. A drastic change to that way of life, such as a new form of government, new social order, or new established religion, can cause conflict stemming from the disapproval of its citizens. As a response, those who reject the new changes either choose to immigrate, as the country they once knew has been transformed into something unrecognizable, or are forced to leave, as their lifestyle and views do not abide by the new standards. The immigrant is now faced with his or her territorial ties to the nation, which clash against the newly introduced cultural or political positions of the country. In these situations, the question of self-identification and how it relates to the concept of national identification arises, as citizens are forced to decide whether they will maintain their self-identification with their country, despite its fundamental changes, or adopt a new means of identification. Therefore, this self-identification with the established nation can be threatened by differing ideologies or the refusal to surrender one's own liberties to benefit the nation as a whole.²⁵ This often leads to instability, discord, and confusion as well as a

²⁵ Ibid, 17

dismantling of the nation as a cohesive whole.²⁶ As ethnies develop and strengthen in their ideologies or beliefs internal quest for dominance as well as external competition arises as conflict crosses country borders and moves into the global sphere.²⁷

Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner

Humans are social beings that possess the need to identify in social settings, specifically to achieve the accompanying feelings of worth and belonging in a world filled with people. The Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, highlights three mental processes involved in the identification of others, as well as one's self; social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.²⁸ In addition, it sheds light on the motivations of self-identification as well as the reasons for rejecting certain categories of identification.

Individuals have a tendency to categorize others, as well as themselves, into groups in an attempt to identify or understand them. This categorization creates stereotypes or prejudices related to certain groups, and consequently, the individuals who identify themselves as members of such groups. These categories provide an "in", or shared links, to those who are members, while enabling those who are "out" to generalize or place a group of people to possess a group of traits.²⁹ This categorization is further denied or accepted by the subject, meaning an individual has the choice as to whether he or she decides to identify themselves as a member of a certain group, regardless of how others perceive their status. If accepted, the individual goes onto assume the traits or activities expected of the group, and gains self-esteem or pride in the

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ashmore, Richard D., Lee J. Jussim, and David Wilder. *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*. Oxford New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2001.

²⁸ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

²⁹ Ibid

process.³⁰ Once a member of a group, individuals compare their own group alongside others to bolster their own group and demean or overcome all adversaries. There exists an inescapable competition and desire to be regarded as superior.³¹

Individuals strive to “maintain or enhance their self- esteem” as well as maintain a “positive social identity”.³² That being said, the reputation or associations of a group are paramount to its members, as it is a reflection of their personal social status. When the standing of a group changes for the worse or fails to compare favorably against other groups, many of its members tend to dissociate and, as mentioned, search for a new means of identification.

Often democratic nations, such as the United States of America, employ the tactic of comparison when referring to countries run by autocratic governments or dictators, specifically those countries that are labeled as developing. As seen in today’s current environment, Americans have established an unfavorable view of developing countries, such as Iran, as their groups have become adversaries not only in a political and economic sense, but also in competition for superior identities.³³ In America, most individuals do not see the actions of Iran in a positive light; a sentiment that carries over to include those who are associated with Iran, and thereby causes many immigrants to question their chosen self- identification. While ties to national identity are strong, one’s overall success and esteem by group association is paramount.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Worchel, Stephen. *Social Identity: International Perspectives*. London: Sage, 1998.

³² Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

³³ Pletka, Danielle, Frederick W. Kagen, and J. Matthew McInnis. "America vs. Iran: The Competition for the Future of the ..." January 13, 2014. Accessed April 3, 2016. <http://www.aei.org/publication/america-vs-iran-the-competition-for-the-future-of-the-middle-east/>.

It is in situations such as these that the importance and versatility of self- identification is highlighted.³⁴

Perhaps the most important step in the process of social identification is its foundation, one's self- identification. A person not only possesses one "personal self", but various selves that fit into different molds and group memberships.³⁵ This morphic nature is most discernible in one's self- identification. If one rejects a supposed group or categorization, such as his or her national identity, he or she turns to new ways of identifying and connecting with a new group to replace that now vacant sense of belonging. This case is seen in the Iranian- American immigrant context, in which the new modes and means of identification will be studied in a later chapter.

Survey; Self- Identification

National identity provides the individual with a sense of pride and of belonging that other categorizations fail to fulfill and is therefore the most popular or instinctual means of identifying.³⁶ To test the assumption that most individuals first choose to identify using their national identity, I conducted a poll in which a random group of individuals were asked to state their first mode of identification. The polltakers were contacted through various available University of Michigan campus- wide organizations that have access to nation- wide community opinions and inputs. The 20 individuals, who consented to reply, were American born citizens of various ages, races, religion and sexual orientation. Ages ranged from 21-65, and included Caucasian, Asian and African- American races. The religions included Christian, Shi'ite and Sunni Muslim and Jewish. Not all individuals interviewed chose to identify their sexual

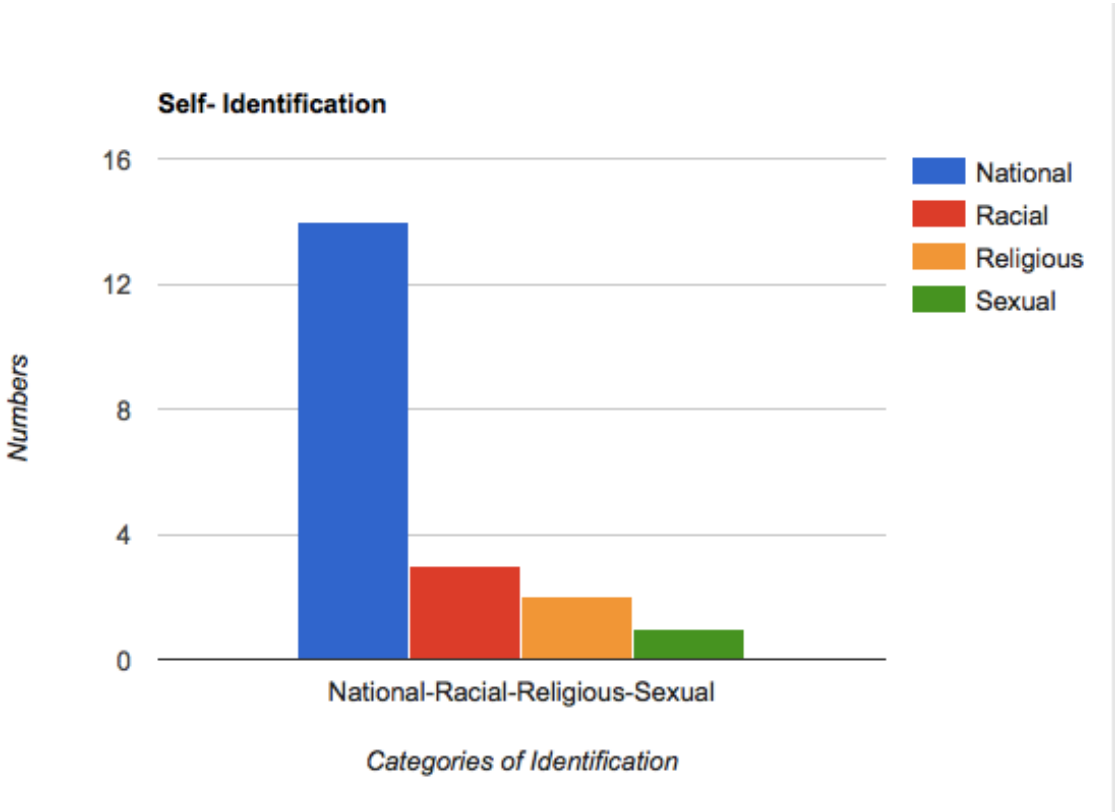
³⁴ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

orientation however, according to those who did answer; the sample pool included individuals of different sexual orientation. The individuals of the sample pool are citizens who possess a national identity, have never immigrated, and are members of a country that has not undergone a dramatic change to the fabric of its identity, such as a recent revolution. The results read as follows:

TABLE 1.1: CATEGORIES OF IDENTIFICATION³⁷



A strong majority of polltakers chose to identify by their national identity. Given the high tendency to employ the category of national identity, as seen above, it is important to study the factors that often lead to a deviation of such identification and its consequences. Examples of such dissociation with one’s national identity are seen in the case of citizens of countries who

³⁷ 4 first identified with their country of origin, 3 identified by their race, 2 identified by their religion, and 1 identified by his or her sexual orientation.

undergo a drastic change, such as a revolution. The Iranian revolution serves as a prime impetus for a rejection and quest for a new means of self- identification, specifically in reference to Iranian- American immigrants who oppose the new Islamic Republic. Moreover, though most individuals used national identity as the first category of self- identification, all those who were surveyed used a sub- category in defining themselves. The individuals regarded themselves as American, but American- Catholic, American- homosexual, and so on. The use of other minor or sub- categories in self- identification, demonstrates the adaptable and versatile nature of identification.

The appearance of sub- categories and question of dual citizenship and loyalties of an individual are brought into question when an immigrant, specifically one who has immigrated to a country that rivals his origin country of origin, is plagued with the task of self- identifying.³⁸ The reasons one has for alternative forms of identification can often be the direct outcome of the social, political and economic factors existent in their country of origin. When a new regime comes to power, an economic blow strikes, or social classes are challenged, loyalties and ties are contested and reconsidered. In these situations, the country with which a citizen identifies takes on a different identity and is often one that the citizen no longer relates to. In the case that an individual shares no connection, or even comes to reject the country they once called home, he or she is prompted to find a new means of identifying. In addition, in the case of revolution, which is usually accompanied by bloodshed, upheaval, and the uprooting of lives, citizens come to resent the country that brings them hardship and suffering.³⁹ Revolutions often pit two opposing sides against one another, usually the government and its supporter, versus those who contest it.

³⁸ Amit, Karin. "Social Integration and Identity of Immigrants from Western Countries, the FSU and Ethiopia in Israel." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 7 (2012): 1287-310.

³⁹ Mobasher, Mohsen M. *Iranians in Texas: Migration, Politics, and Ethnic Identity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012, 79

The government is often prompted to fight against its dissidents, in an event that ends in death and loss. When such a revolution ends, those who opposed the government that comes to power cannot fathom living under a rule that has had such a detrimental effect on their lives. Another factor taken into account with the onset of revolution and question of identification is the world's perceptions of the country undergoing the revolution. According to the study of self-identification and the factors that individuals take into account, the opinions of others and an individual's reputation or status is of the utmost importance.⁴⁰ Every individual strives to associate themselves with a group that compares favorable to others, as perception is a key motivation in identifying. The media often presents developing countries and countries undergoing revolution or a drastic change in government, resulting in a restriction of liberties, in a negative and biased light.⁴¹ No individual wants to be associated with an identification that is regarded as negative since the status of their category directly reflects on their individual status. The stigmas that often form with regard to certain countries, such as those who are or have experienced a revolution, drive citizens to dissociate from them. Immigrants are especially sensitive to this phenomenon as they insert themselves into countries that hold these stigmas concerning their countries of origin, and do not want to be linked to or assumed to carry its bad reputation.

Due to the turmoil within the country and the Western disapproval of Iran, many Iranian-American immigrants choose to identify using their sub-categories of identification, such as current place of residence, religion, or race. They turn to their sub-categories to identify as they

⁴⁰ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

⁴¹ Alam, Shahidul. "The Changing Landscape of Development Education." *The Changing Landscape of Development Education*. 2007. Accessed April 03, 2016. <http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue5-perspectives6>.

view the association with Iran as a disadvantage. Iranian- American immigrants' self identification is directly effected by the current prejudices and stigmas in America attached to Iran as a country, and consequently those who are associated with it.⁴² Iranian- American immigrants who find themselves in a new country with a new language and culture that rejects the current regime in Iran, often choose to adapt and identify using an identity other than their nationality to avoid alienation or unwarranted dislike.⁴³

An individual's automatic inclinations to self- identify by association with his or her country of origin, contributes to the creation of a strong nation and popular sense of national identity. The decision to reject one's national identity has dire effects on the country and its overall stability and strength. The citizens' disapproval and subsequent disassociation with regard to its country's actions leads way to the outbreak of internal conflict, the breakdown of the country, and the immigration of citizens to a new country.⁴⁴ Iran experienced this breakdown during the 1979 revolution. The revolution, and the turbulent events leading up to and following its occurrence, changed the fabric and norms of Iran as a nation as many immigrated or fled in opposition to the new regime and way of life. The consequences, such as the resentment of its former citizens and a less favorable world perception of the country, had and continue to have a lasting effect, which manifests itself in the identification of Iranian immigrants. Through the study of the effects of the revolution and the new American perception of Iran, a better understanding of the struggles and motivations of the self- identification of Iranian- American immigrants will be revealed. In addition, the information learned could be used and applied to

⁴² Emami, Jessica. "Iranian Americans Immigration and Assimilation." April 2014. Accessed April 3, 2016. <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/pdfs/iranian-americans---immigration-and-assimilation.pdf>.

⁴³ Bozorgmehr, Mehdi. *Internal Ethnicity: Armenian, Bahai, Jewish, and Muslim Iranians in Los Angeles*. 1992.

⁴⁴ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991

better understand the predicaments of immigrants of any country that has experienced a similar change to their country and worldwide perception.

In order to gain a comprehensive view of the specific case of Iran and its citizens' choice to self- identify with, or dissociate from the country, an in depth analysis of the country with regard to the why, where, when, how, and who of its history and current status is necessary. To understand the changes and effects brought about by the revolution, the certain circumstances, way of life, and norms must be studied and compared to the current day practices. By highlighting the differences and contrasts between pre and post revolution Iran, a deeper understanding of the citizens who have immigrated, as well as their personal choices to maintain or reject Iran as a portion of their identity, will be established. The following chapter will shed light on the history and current day norms and ways of life, while highlighting the rapid and continuous changes in Iran.

CHAPTER 2: Iran and the Revolution

Introduction:

The country of Iran boasts a rich history that overtime has gone through drastic changes. This thesis will focus on the events leading up to the 1979 revolution, the revolution itself, and the resulting consequences that have, and continue to have a lasting effect on Iran as a country, as well as its people. Although the details of the revolution are immense, this thesis will focus on highlighting the political, economic and social changes during and post revolution, in comparison to pre- revolution ways. This analysis and background will provide a means of better understanding the Iranian population, as well as their individual motives and positions related how they self- identify, whether it by their national identity or signifiers such as religion, or new country of dwelling. Although there will be an analysis of the revolution itself there will be a

greater focus on the changes between the pre and post- war atmosphere to emphasize the reasons and motivations for individual loyalties or rejections of the nation as a means of self-identification. The specific political, economic and social changes will be further analyzed, however the prior status quo must be documented to understand the causes for the revolution and the degree to which the country has changed, which is reflected in the identifications of Iranian Americans.

In order to provide a whole and well- rounded account of the history of Iran and the specific events of the revolution, I will reference various sources documenting the events that occurred. Sources will include: *Reign of the Ayatollahs*, by Shaul Bakhash, *Roots of Revolution; an interpretive history of modern Iran*, by Nikki Keddie, and *The Fall of The Shah* by Fereydoon Hoveyda. All sources are of different backgrounds, origins, and religions with the goal of attaining a non- biased recount of the time period and series of events. All sources are considered experts in their respective fields, the history of Iran, and provide different perspectives on the revolution.

Background

On January 16, 1979, the political, economic and social stability and character of Iran drastically changed. Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi was sent in to exile and the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini marked the end of the fifty-year Pahlavi dynasty. The centuries old monarchy system was eliminated and an Islamic republic was established. Secular laws were replaced with Islamic laws, the economy moved from privately run to government run, and the social strata was transformed in which the military elite replaced the court related businessmen and high ranking

citizens.¹ The newly established Islamic Republic was supported mainly by Islamic and leftist organizations, such as the Islamic Leftist Republic (ILR).

Culture of Iran: Pre vs. Post Revolution

Pre- revolution Iran possessed a multi- ethnic and multicultural society, as Iran was a continuously growing country and migration hub. Half of the population spoke Persian, while the rest spoke languages such as Indo- European, Semitic languages, Turkic or other languages from countries of their origin¹. However, regardless of language or religion, the majority of Iranian inhabitants, such as Kurds, Turkmen and Assyrians, chose to identify with Iranian culture and civilization. It possessed a strong national sentiment and identity connected by a shared tie to the land and its history as well as traditions.³

The culture of Iran was rooted in the belief and adherence to tradition. Much of this tradition consisted of religion, class and patriarchy. The culture was class-based, which means that an individual's status was dependent on income and family genealogy. Social mobility was not uncommon and could be achieved through gaining an education or wealth and respect of fellow Iranians.⁴ Furthermore, pre- revolution Iran saw a move towards secularization, especially with regards to attaining an education, secularization were encouraged and began to appear increasingly in the Iranian way of life. Women entered the workforce, individuals wore western apparel, and secular law was established in the judiciary. Education was not limited to religious

¹ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 4

¹ Beeman, William O. "Iran." *Countries and Their Cultures*. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Iran.html>.

³ Goldstein, Warren. "Secularization and the Iranian Revolution." *Secularization and the Iranian Revolution*. 2010. Accessed April 03, 2016.

http://www.academia.edu/4049976/Secularization_and_the_Iranian_Revolution

⁴ Beeman, William O. "Iran." *Countries and Their Cultures*. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Iran.html>.

studies, but was nationally secularized to include western studies and subjects such as math and science.⁵

In 1979, the establishment of the Islamic Republic marked an important change in the fabric and culture of Iran, as it meant a return to a national religion, which transformed Iran into a country foreign to most of its citizens. Especially effected were the Individuals who immigrated into Iran from elsewhere, that had become accustomed to the liberalization and secular elements introduced at the onset of the Pahlavi dynasty. This change completely affected every day life in Iran, reflected in the various restrictions introduced by Khomeini. Iran, a country that had been tolerant of all religions and managed to control the degree of governmental influence into the private and religious choices of its citizens, now demanded dedication and adherence to the Islamic faith.⁶

Post- revolution Iran brought about changes and new laws that citizens were forced to accept and adapt to. Although the class system remains today as it had in before the revolution, the content and methods of education have changed drastically. While the Shah's government introduced secular learning requirements, the class agenda under Khomeini is overwhelmingly based on Islamic law.⁷ As Iran was and is a patriarchal society, males are granted higher status and there exists strong gender roles. Males are given more freedoms and are expected to provide an income, and are considered to be the head of the family. Women are more restricted, in both their actions and dress, and are expected to rear and raise children. Many of the liberties granted to women in the Pahlavi dynasty were either rescinded or limited at the start of the revolution,

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Harrison, Theresa. "Culture of Iran Before the Islamic Revolution." Culture of Iran Before the Islamic Revolution. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://people.opposingviews.com/culture-iran-before-islamic-revolution-9240.html>.

⁷ Ibid

and though women have achieved gains in some fields, they are required to abide by traditional Islamic roles such as the imposition of the hijab.⁸

Although this republic continues to exist, the death of Khomeini has led the younger generation of Iranian people to demand a change and a return to the way of life and liberties granted to them in pre- revolutionary Iran. Iran evolves and transforms everyday as in current times many Iranian citizens are calling for a return to the “historic balance of religion and secularism that has characterized the nation for most of its history”.⁹ The effects and specific changes of the Revolution will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Roots of the Revolution

The Pahlavi dynasty began in 1925 and was supported by many Western countries, including the United States of America. The Shah’s rule was threatened as early as the 1950’s, and required the assistance of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) forces to restore power and stability. Although the Pahlavi family remained in power and began to see improvements in their popularity and leadership, especially in the economic sphere, growing discontent and eventual upheaval overshadowed this progress. The first wave of intense riots broke out in 1963 under the influence of religious leader Ruhollah Khomeini. The years leading up to the revolution would see increased discontent and unrest stemming from the Shah’s failure to please the people and Khomeini’s ability to attract the people, and would eventually lead to the outbreak of the 1979 revolution. The revolution itself gave way to repression, overthrowing of government, mass execution and a complete change in the fabric of Iran.¹⁰

⁸ Beeman, William O. "Iran." Countries and Their Cultures. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Iran.html>.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 4

Political Atmosphere Pre- Revolution

Shah Reza Pahlavi ruled Iran for 38 years from 1941- 1979. The Shah made a conscious effort to quash independent parties and ensure his continued rule. He filled the parliament with officials of his choosing and therefore had no doubt that his political agenda would be supported. He discouraged dissidence, however claimed to be on a path of “liberalization” in an attempt to please the West, though his actions were far from democratically oriented.¹¹ The government’s control extended over the labor union, trade guilds and other organizations, in an act that angered many of the working class population. Moreover, the Shah took it a step further when he began to “impose state controls over universities, private schools, business groups, religious endowments, and numerous other private organizations”.¹² As Bakhash states, this bureaucratic invasion into the private lives of citizens, enraged many and had the effect of mobilizing those unlikely to otherwise involve themselves in politics. This increased state control put many citizens in a vulnerable position, allowing rebellious parties to take advantage of their desperation to bring about reform and change. Although the government under the Shah fought hard to maintain power, the National Front (NF), a coalition composed of various parties, continued to oppose the Shah and his increasingly autocratic tendencies. The NF would eventually split into the Mojahedin-e Khalq and Fadayan-e Khalq guerilla movements, who along with zealous religious movements, would successfully rebel against the Shah in 1979.¹³ These parties, heavily influenced by Khomeini, rallied the people who were easily recruited to a mission that was dedicated to bringing about change and improvement to the current governmental system. In 1975 tensions reached a high as the Shah eliminated political parties

¹¹ Hoveyda, Fereydoun. *The Fall of the Shah*. New York: Wyndham Books, 1980, 18

¹² Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 11

¹³ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984

and installed Rastakhiz (Resurgence) as the single party. All Iranians who refused to associate with the political order were in danger of having their passports taken and exiled.¹⁴ Once again, those who were typically nonpolitical were forced to “publically identify with a royal political party”.¹⁵

By 1977 the outbreak of riots was anything but surprising as the Shah ordered private homes to be demolished in order to pave new streets and avenues. Secondary schools were nationalized, industrialists were forced to sell their shares, and villages were forced off their farmlands relocated.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Shah began to rule by imperial decree, which did not abide by the regulations of the constitution. Public protests ensued, which resulted in mass violence and police brutality. The public, specifically the members of the NF, pleaded for the “the restoration of press freedoms, the implementation of the constitution, and the freeing of political prisoners”.¹⁷ In 1977, The Iranian Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, along with other organizations, was formed in the attempt to fight alongside the NF Front to combat the Shah’s abuse of power and arbitrary rule.

January of 1978 saw a new wave of violence and protests as the riots adopted an increasingly religious element. The religious center of Qon began to see a rise in political involvement and unrest. Much of protestor’s influence came from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a religious leader who was expelled in the 1960’s as a result of his attack on the Shah.¹⁸ As a result of the Shah’s decrees and the subsequent violent protests, the violence and death count escalated, as did the discontent and movement of the masses. The popularity of Khomeini grew,

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid, 14

¹⁸ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

as seen by the slogan “Khomeini is our leader”¹⁹, while the popularity of the Shah, especially as violence amplified, severely decreased. The Shah attempted to combat this uprising not only through increased autocracy, but also through the declaration of martial law that resulted in the Jaleh Square massacre, or “Black Friday” and the death of 88 citizens.²⁰ This was a “turning point in the protest movement” in which “compromise with the Shah became near impossible” and moderates felt no choice but to take a radical stance.²¹ With the influx of protests and strikes, the economy rapidly deteriorated, fueling the unrest and revolutionary atmosphere, and is a topic that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Due to the uncontrollable riots, the Shah conceded to many of the public’s desires, such as free elections and the release of prisoners, however, his efforts failed to satisfy those who opposed him, specifically those who pledged their allegiance to Khomeini. He was unaware of the severity of the current state of affairs, including his own popularity, and this disillusionment proved to be detrimental in terms of making strategic political decisions.²² Much of the Shah’s indecisive and arbitrary actions can be attributed to his reliance on guidance or advice from Western countries, such as America, whose inability to reach a unanimous consensus, regarding the sensitive internal conflict, exacerbated the situation.²³ At this point, the NF entered in agreement with Khomeini that refused to acknowledge the Shah as leader of Iran. After turning to NF leaders, the Shah made a deal with Shapour Bakhtiar in which he handed over the prime minister position, gave authority to a regency council, and on January 16, 1979, left the country indefinitely. Although Bakhtiar tried to control the masses and delay Khomeini’s return from

¹⁹ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 14

²⁰ Ibid, 16

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid, 27

²³ Hoveyda, Fereydoun. *The Fall of the Shah*. New York: Wyndham Books, 1980

exile, the people took to the streets and within a month, his government had been dissolved. With the revolution in full swing, Khomeini returned and established the Islamic State.²⁴

Political Atmosphere: During and Post Revolution

January of 1979, as well as the preceding and following years, was characterized by complete disarray and uncertainty. While many Iranians were dissatisfied with the Shah and welcomed his dethroning, large portions of the population felt threatened by the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini, and were caught in between two unsatisfactory scenarios. Khomeini's takeover and establishment of Revolutionary Council left only two options; support his government and the Shi'ite Islamic religion wholeheartedly, or leave Iran.²⁵ Citizenry had control of barracks and weapons, as police and army no longer occupied their posts. No formal government had been established, which fostered instability and chaos. The economy was completely transformed with a shift towards commerce, rather than the rural economy that had defined the nation for so long. Revolutionary committees, or *komitehs*, began popping up everywhere, whose members were executed, jailed or restricted from leaving the country at the will of officials.²⁶

Revolutionary tribunals were established and were often conducted in secrecy or private areas and resulted in a large number of executions, mostly of army and members of the secret police known as SAVAK. Additionally, under the orders of Khomeini, a revolutionary guard, or Pasdaran-e Enqelab, was established which allowed for an armed retainer to combat the revolutionary committees and an organized armed force for the radical clerics.²⁷ Bargazan, the

²⁴ Bakhsh, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 19

²⁵ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Bakhsh, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 23

moderate prime minister, was tasked with communicating with the radical clerical party, the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) who was given governmental powers as members of the Revolutionary Council, backed by Khomeini. The Islamic People's Republic Party was formed in opposition to the IRP and advocated for a more moderate Islamic state. Rapidly, political parties with strong beliefs unwilling to negotiate formed, led to a loss of governmental control, and forced Bargazan, to resign as he felt as though his government was a "knife without a blade".²⁸ His resignation ended all hope for normalization with America, as he was one of the only moderates high up in the government, served as a huge setback for the moderates, and began a bitter war over control of the Islamic Republic.

During Post- Revolution Iran, Khomeini was tasked with drafting and passing a new constitution. After debate, protests and compromise, a constitution essentially granting complete power to the *faqih*, or religious jurists, with no required duties, was passed. No legislature was included as the Koran would be the law whose dissidents would be tried in Islamic tribunals.²⁹ His rule crushed the power of other groups, such as the conservatives and moderates in the NF, secular Muslims, and minorities including Sunni Muslims, Turks and Kurds, as well as religious opponents.³⁰ As a result, there were many riots, which were quashed, in a continued atmosphere of instability and lack of structure. Although a president, Bani- Sadr, was appointed, he failed to maintain continued control over the government, despite his goal of a return to normalcy through moderate policy. The new government began a "purification" period in which hundreds were

²⁸ Ibid, 69

²⁹ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

³⁰ Ibid

executed and an attempt to dissociate ties and dependency from any western country was implemented.³¹

Over the next few years Iran would experience violence and warfare within, as well as from outside, its country. Those who were dissatisfied grouped together and used guerilla warfare resulting in two factions and pressures for radical measures. Additionally, Iran became involved in war with Iraq, which came to involve countries worldwide. The ongoing conflict contributed to its state of violence or uncertainty as well as the Western mistrust of the country as a whole.³²

Economic Atmosphere: Pre- Revolution

The decade of 1963-1973 was characterized by “rapid economic growth” in Iran.³³ This, in turn, allowed for progress in social sectors such as increased education and opportunities and higher standards of living, accompanying increased income. However, what was not evident was the intense stratification and unbalanced spread of wealth. Government policies favored large shareholder or famers over small cultivator or workshop owners, and the urban areas saw far more wealth than the countryside. This wealth disparity was manageable until the 1974 oil boom, and the onset of the government’s reckless spending program in aims of establishing the “Great Civilization”, also known as the Shah’s vision for a world dominant Iran.³⁴ The results of which were detrimental to the economy and personal lives of the citizens.

³¹ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 112

³² Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

³³ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 12

³⁴ Ibid

The cost of living soared as seen in the prices of basic necessities such as housing, food, and necessities. Shortages of skilled workers, cement, and steel spread nationwide. Large numbers of foreigners who migrated in to take advantage of job opportunities caused electricity and power outages, drained the countryside of agricultural labor, and overpopulated urban areas. Furthermore, while the lower class saw a decline in salaries, the wealthy made an immense profit thereby widening the already existent gap.³⁵

The government attempted to remedy the economic grievances by campaigning against the business community. However, their efforts increased the peoples' frustrations and disgruntlement. Industrialists and shopkeepers were exiled, fined or jailed, projects were curtailed, employment decreased, and business opportunities dwindled. Resentment towards the Shah and the government grew, fueling not only economic, but also political and social unrest. The middle class could no longer afford the luxuries or even necessities they had become accustomed too and melted into the lower class. This resulted in a rigid social class system consisting of the poor or masses as opposed to the few upper-class elite.³⁶

Iran's unstable economy and high stratification of wealth gave way to a myriad of social problems that played were deeply rooted in the revolution.

Economic Atmosphere: During and Post Revolution

The post revolution economy of Iran was more concerned with protecting the individual's property rights and private sector of the people and did away with many of the policies implemented by the Shah under the "new order".³⁷ However during the transfer of power and

³⁵ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Maloney, Suzanne. "The Iran Primer." *The Revolutionary Economy*. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/revolutionary-economy>.

instability that ensued, the economy began to collapse under the turbulent times and the internal debate regarding the economic direction. With the traditional conservative clerics on one side, and the Islamic leftists on the other, intense debate and competition erupted until finally the leftist came out on top, and their policies were implemented. Major sectors of Iran's economy were nationalized, assets of the wealthy elite were absorbed, and resulted in a continued economic downturn.³⁸

Furthermore, war with Iraq along with a collapse in oil process and a US sanction, the Iranian economy plummeted leaving Iran in dire need of reform and reconstruction.³⁹

Transition of Social and Religious Atmosphere: Shah vs. Khomeini

One of the most influential catalysts of the revolution was Shi'ite religious leader and Ulama political member, Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini had an enormous following ranging from Islamic fundamentalists to Western intellectuals, who adopted his vision of an Islamic State.⁴⁰ Many Iranians saw him as a prophet or "the Imam"⁴¹ who would lead the country to achieve its highest potential. Although sent into exile in 1964 for opposing the Shah, Khomeini maintained a chain of Iranian clerical leaders, students and political activists, who kept his presence and influence alive in Iran.

The core of disagreement between the Khomeini and the Pahlavi dynasty lay within the topic of Western or secular influence. The Shah believed that Iran not only needed a strong central government, but also a Westernization and modernization that was hindered by the

³⁸ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

³⁹ Maloney, Suzanne. "The Iran Primer." *The Revolutionary Economy*. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/revolutionary-economy>.

⁴⁰ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984., 19

⁴¹ Ibid

existence of religious classes. He was a secular Muslim, and therefore secularized laws and removed religious clerics, as well as stripped them of their governmental powers, and replaced those in official positions with individuals who possessed the merits and qualification required. Khomeini, however, strongly believed and preached that “Islam and Iran needed to be independent of both Eastern and Western colonialism” and that it was the job of the clerics to act on behalf of the oppressed worldwide.⁴² The clerics, who felt harassed by the increasingly secular government and their attempt to modernize, turned to Khomeini for support.

In 1962, under the Shah, changes were made to voting requirements granting women the right to vote, eliminating the requirement to adhere to the Islam faith, and swearing on a “holy book” rather than specifically the Koran in an attempt to acknowledge all religions.⁴³ Although some of population approved of this form of modernization and the strides gained for women, many religious leaders completely rejected what they saw as a violation of the code of Islam. As seen in Khomeini’s book *Kashf ol- Asrar*, he, along with his followers, denounced the Shah’s government as illegitimate.⁴⁴ They called for laws and regulations that acknowledged abided by the Islamic code. Additionally, in that same year, the government launched a land distribution program in which Literacy Corps were dispatched to rural areas to teach citizens to read and write. While many were becoming secularized in the sense that they were gaining more democratic rights, as well as a better education, Khomeini and his followers regarded this program as an infringement upon their private property rights.⁴⁵ Every modernizing reform was vehemently opposed by Khomeini who refused to stand down, and gave way to what he referred

⁴² Ibid, 21

⁴³ Ibid, 24

⁴⁴ Hoveyda, Fereydoun. *The Fall of the Shah*. New York: Wyndham Books, 1980

⁴⁵ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 25

as to as the “White Revolution”.⁴⁶ He focused on the lower struggling classes and warned of the “interests of the Jews, America and Israel”⁴⁷ who sought to destroy Islam and all it stood for. Khomeini’s public denunciation of the Shah, the government’s policies, and American relations coupled with his organized protests and uprisings, led to his exile in 1964.

As the Shah’s government became associated with the West, secularization and modernization, Khomeini’s opposition came to represent the opposite. The Pahlavi monarchy and “the association with the Shah’s regime with Western culture, commodities and vices brought on a traditionalist reaction even among many former Westernizers, which often took an Islamic form”.⁴⁸

After his exile, his influence did not end; rather support for Khomeini grew and strengthened exponentially. Though exiled to Iraq, Khomeini continued to condemn the current government and American influence, while stressing the imminent threat to Islam and the independence of Iran. He took advantage of the unrest and disorders within Iran, radically calling for an end to the monarchy as a whole, and the onset of a revolution. Over the years, as distaste and anger for the Shah grew, so did hatred for the West as a result of their association. All those who were not of Islamic religion or belief, specifically belonging to the Shi’ite sect, were labeled “infidels” and not considered to be rightful inhabitants of Iran.⁴⁹ This rejection of all Western and secular laws and governance would lead to many conflicts in the future, not only between Iran and Western countries, but within the country of Iran itself.

⁴⁶ Bakhsh, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, 28

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, 182

⁴⁹ Keddie, Nikki R., and Yann Richard. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981

In 1979, Khomeini returned to Iran where the Pahlavi monarchy had been dismantled and replaced by Mehdi Bargazan, head of Iran Freedom Movement, who served as the Prime Minister. He was appointed by Khomeini to serve the provincial government, which found itself in a drastic transition. The revolution, and ultimate establishment of the Islamic republic, polarized Iran into a country of radical Islamists who despised the West, and of those who had become accustomed to and come to enjoy the democratic freedoms and religious tolerance introduced by the Shah.⁵⁰

Post- Revolutionary Effects

As discussed above, the revolution changed political, economic, social and ideological elements of Iran. Although Iran is continuously challenged by internal and external factors, it has struggled and fought to maintain a balanced and reliable government. The economy was nationalized and businesses were expropriated in an attempt to deal with the economic crisis. Land was nationalized, seized and redistributed and continues to have a lasting effect on social life in Iran. Ideologically, all were expected to follow the Shi'ite belief, as an Islamic republic had been established along with laws and codes of behavior molded according to the Koran. Dissidents were punished and many felt threatened and disillusioned with the unrecognizable country that Iran had become.

Due to the changing conditions many immigrated out of, or fled from, Iran. Around 500,000 middle class citizens fled, nearly 10,000 people were executed, and 300,000 were wounded in the Iraqi war, which overall resulted in 2 million refugees.⁵¹ All public supporters and members of the former Shah's government fled in fear of persecution. Religious minorities

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Bakhash, Shaul. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1984

such as Jews, Assyrians and Armenians fled in fear as their beliefs did not coincide with the Islamic religion, and its official tie to the Iranian state. After the rise of Khomeini, large numbers of intellectuals, professionals, academics, and entrepreneurs immigrated out as a response to the de- secularization of the education system and nationalization of the economy.⁵² Many young Iranian students studying abroad refused to return home once they heard about the violence and chaos of the revolution and had their families settle in their current country of study. A breakdown of the waves and numbers of Iranian immigrants can be seen in the chart below supplied by the Migration Policy institute: The chart breaks down the number and destination of immigrants by nine year intervals, the highest of which is post – revolution, between 1981-2000.⁵³

⁵² Hakimzadeh, Shirin. "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home." Migrationpolicy.org. September 01, 2006. Accessed April 04, 2016. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home/>.

⁵³ Ibid

TABLE 2.1: IRANIAN IMMIGRANTS ADMITTED TO COUNTRIES ABROAD

Table 1. Iranian Immigrants Admitted to the United States, Canada, Germany, the UK and Sweden: 1961 to 2005

	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2005
USA	10,291	46,152	154,857	112,597	55,098
Germany	7,298*	14,173	67,022	24,131	6,024**
Canada	620	3,455	20,700	41,329	25,350**
Sweden***	384	3,249	38,167	16,804	6,086
UK	---	---	---	12,665	8,640

Notes:

*excludes 1961

**excludes 2005

*** In some years Swedish data was based on Iranian immigrants by place of birth while in other years it was based on place of last residence

Sources:

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics; Federal Statistical Office of Germany; Sweden Statistics; Statistics Canada; UK Home Office

As seen in the chart above, United States is the top destination country of Iranian- Born immigrants, despite the fact that Iranian- American ties are not on the best terms. This puts Iranian- Americans in a precarious position. Do they maintain the tie with their birth country despite its changes and unrecognizable nature? Does the fact that they chose, or were forced, to leave influence their decision to adopt a new identity? The Iranian- American immigrant's identification as Iranian holds potential threat, as many Americans regard Iran with disapproval or disdain given their relationship as a result of recent conflict. This creates the potential for other means of identification though categories such as religion, sexual orientation, or new country of residence. Using the background information with regard to the changes and subsequent effects of the revolution felt within and outside of Iran, a further analysis into American Perspective of Iranians and its effect on the self- identification of Iranian- Americans will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3: American Perceptions of Iran and Iranian- Americans

Introduction:

The Iranian- American relationship thrived under the Pahlavi dynasty, however, has rapidly deteriorated in the years following the 1979 revolution. The troubled Iranian- American relationship has, in turn, has led to established stereotypes and prejudices on both Iranian and American sides. The relationship and its problems are merely strengthened by media and news coverage, which is often biased in favor of certain sides, and exacerbates the bad relations.¹ The effects of the worsening relationship are increasingly felt among the Iranian- American population, specifically among those who emigrated from Iran to America as a result of the revolution. Discourse and general popular opinion with regard to a country have tremendous effects on the strength of a population's national identity, as reputation and status directly affect identification. When a country is portrayed in a negative light, its citizens are automatically associated with its problems, which lower their status and ability to compete with citizens of other countries. The idea of status and self- worth gained from specific group ties are paramount to individuals, and therefore complicates the Iranian immigrant's task of self-identifying.² In order to understand the extent of the effects on Iranian- American identity, the consequences of the revolution must be understood and analyzed.

Brief history: Iran and America

As stated in the previous chapter, America shared a good relationship with Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty, and supported the Shah who pushed for westernization and secularization.

¹ "Western Media's Image of Iran Serves Only Neo-Con Warmongers." RT International. November 12, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/204907-iran-media-israel-war/>.

² Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* , 1979, (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole

However, many Iranians opposed the Shah's rule, which resulted in a revolution that preached a disdain for America and all imposed Westernization. Secularization was seen as a threat to the existence of Islam and the existence of Iran. One of the themes of the revolution was a return to cultural Iran and an anti-westernization sentiment, rejecting all things secular.³ The major events that were directly influenced by the difficult relationship are listed below in chronological order.

In the years following the revolution and the establishment of the Islamic republic, Iran experienced a series of dealings, all of which involved America and strongly effected Iranian-American relations. Starting in 1979 to present day, the US and Iran have been involved in almost a dozen altercations. In 1979, the US embassy was faced with a hostage crisis and tasked with negotiating with Iran to retrieve their captured troops.⁴ This event created an anti-Iranian sentiment in America resulting in the discrimination, attack, and deportation of many Iranian-American immigrants.⁵ Soon after, in 1985, Iran and America were involved in an illegal weapons trade in a secret operation, which resulted in the profit of Contra Nicaraguan rebels. While America actually aided Iran, with their own agenda in mind, the scandal and Iranian-American association had negative effects on the standings of both countries.⁶ The scandalous events between the countries continued in 1988, when the US shot down an Iranian passenger plane, mistaken for a fighter jet, killing all 290 people on board.⁷ Unsurprisingly, this tragic event bolstered the already existent tensions between the countries and gave Iran another reason

³ Hoveyda, Fereydoun. *The Fall of the Shah*. New York: Wyndham Books, 1980

⁴ "US-Iran Relations: A Brief Guide - BBC News." BBC News. November 24, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24316661>.

⁵ Mills, Gregory J. *Beyond the Backlash Muslim and Middle Eastern Immigrants' Experiences in America, Ten Years Post-9/11*. PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2012.

⁶ Sabato, Larry J. Washington Post. 1998. Accessed April 05, 2016.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/frenzy/iran.htm>.

⁷ "US-Iran Relations: A Brief Guide - BBC News." BBC News. November 24, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24316661>.

to mistrust the West. With the election of Mohammed Khatami in 1997, during the Bush presidency, came hope for Iranian- American dialect, however these hopes failed to come to fruition. President Bush announced his plan to “export democracy” to the Middle East, to which Khatami regarded as “a great joke”.⁸ On the contrary, Iran was condemned by President Bush as member of an “axis of evil”, thereby infuriating the Iranians.⁹ American opposition grew and the threat of nuclear weapons came to the forefront, which resulted in the UN ratification of sanctions on Iran. These sanctions also affected the Iranian financial sector and caused an economic downturn.¹⁰ The distrust between America and Iran served as the impetus for many of the aforementioned events, which only exacerbated the existing tensions.

Relations only worsened with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s election to presidency. The ultra- conservatist made extreme and controversial claims regarding the Holocaust, and America’s involvement in 9/11 and other highly sensitive topics. He aimed to bolster Iranian nationalism by casting doubt on the willingness of the West to negotiate, and spreading the threat of Western invasion.¹¹ His presidency led to the peak degree of internal unrest the country had seen since the revolution. His successor, Hassan Rouhani, who is the current president of Iran, took a different approach towards the Iranian- American conflict, specifically with relation to the nuclear issue, and engaged in talks with president Obama in 2013.¹² Rouhani’s willingness to improve relations with the US was a positive change of tone, however the core differences

⁸ "BBC NEWS | Middle East | Khatami Labels US Policy 'a Joke'" BBC News. November 02, 2006. Accessed April 05, 2016. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6108798.stm.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ "US-Iran Relations: A Brief Guide - BBC News." BBC News. November 24, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24316661>.

¹¹ Keddie, Nikki R., Yann Richard, and Nikki R. Keddie. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003, 329

¹² US-Iran Relations: A Brief Guide - BBC News." BBC News. November 24, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24316661>.

between the two nations remained, and continue to exist today. Iran continues to govern under an Islamic republic that limits the freedoms and tolerations allowed by the doctrine of democracy practiced in America. Whether the Iranian- American relationship stands to see a permanent improvement remains to be seen.

Today: Iran and America

As a result of continued conflict and lack of accurate information, many Americans hold certain preconceived notions, or prejudices, against Iran and its citizens as a whole. These stereotypes are further affected and enforced by the Western media's portrayal of the Iranian-American relationship, and the country of Iran as a whole, which is often depicted in a negative light.¹³ News reports tend to focus on the American side of conflicts and do not allow for the other country to share their point of view, as seen in the lack of any Iranian representative during the televised announcement of the Iran nuclear deal.¹⁴ This biased reporting is unfortunate as "American perceptions of Iran, Iranians and Iranian Americans are mostly formed by media reports on Iran that are for the most part focused on the political situation there and the state of relations between the two countries".¹⁵ The consequential American stigma against Iran puts Iranian- American immigrants in a difficult predicament with regard to identifying themselves, while living in a country is in direct conflict with their country of origin. As previously

¹³ "Western Media's Image of Iran Serves Only Neo-Con Warmongers." RT International. November 12, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/204907-iran-media-israel-war/>.

¹⁴ O'day, John C. "Side-By-Side Coverage of Cuba and Iran Highlights Shift in US Media Villain-Making." FAIR. July 24, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://fair.org/home/side-by-side-coverage-of-cuba-and-iran-highlights-shift-in-us-media-villain-making/>.

¹⁵ Public Opinion Survey of American Perception of Iranian Americans." Commissioned by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) and conducted by Zogby International. December 2008. Available online at <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/PDFs/finalreport-surveyofamericanperceptions.pdf>.

mentioned, there are various reasons individuals have for choosing to dissociate from identifying themselves using national identity, and the perceptions and evaluations of others is one of the major factors. In order to identify the existent attitudes towards Iranian- Americans that result from the current relationship, and the effects they have on Iranian- American identification, I conducted a survey whose questions are listed below.

Survey of American Born Citizens

The 20 individuals interviewed were randomly selected from a pool of American citizens, born and raised in the U.S. They were contacted through University of Michigan organizations that have access to organizations and email list serves nationwide. I distributed the survey via email, inviting participants to answer the questions anonymously. While the interviewees were anonymous, they were asked to list their age, religion, race and ethnicity to ascertain the population pool demographic. All were between the ages of 21-70, of religions including Christian, Jewish and Muslim, and of mixed races. The variety of the subject pool helped to account for potential biases.

TABLE 4.1: AMERICAN OPINIONS REGARDING IRAN AND ITS IMMIGRANTS
1) Do you consider yourself to be well informed on current events? If so, what are the sources for your information?
2) What are your views on Iran as a country?
3) What are your thoughts regarding Iran and the current Iranian- American relationship?
4) What is your first reaction to the term Iranian- American?
5) Do you consider immigrants who have immigrated to America and gained citizenship to be truly American? *If not, does this opinion hold for all immigrants, or Iranian immigrants in particular?

The main goal in asking these questions was to ascertain whether the current relationship, between Iran and America, negatively impacts the status or American view of Iranian- American immigrants. An unacceptable or negative outlook of Iran in American eyes can directly effect how Iranian- Americans choose to identify, as they may or may not want to be associated with the reputation of the country.

Results

Question 1: Do you consider yourself to be well informed on current events? If so, what are the sources for your information?

Out of the 20 individuals interviewed, 18 believed themselves to be well informed, while the remaining two stated that they do not go out of their way keep up with current affairs. A majority of individuals stated they were well informed on current events, as they are avid followers of official news outlets and social media platforms such as Facebook. It is important to note that their knowledge and information is gained from Western media outlets and social media sites because it demonstrates the power and influence discourse and media can have in shaping an individual's, and population's, point of view. While Western news and media outlets can be a good source of information, they are not without bias and tend to favor the Western side, thereby affecting the viewers' perception of certain events¹⁶. Furthermore, individual opinions posted to social media sites, such as Facebook, are by no means fact, and spread certain ideas or trains of thought with individuals who are less educated, or less informed, and therefore misconstrue opinions for fact.

¹⁶ "Western Media's Image of Iran Serves Only Neo-Con Warmongers." RT International. November 12, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/204907-iran-media-israel-war/>.

Question 2: What are your views on Iran as a country?

While the specifics of the answers varied, there was an overwhelming sense of disapproval towards Iran's political actions and the perceived lack of citizens' rights. Whether accurate or not, most Americans interviewed believed that Iran represses its citizens. Problems regarding women's rights, adherence to human rights, and religious tolerance were repeatedly brought up by participants. In addition, many interviewees noted that the presence of extremists in Iran is highly detrimental to the status of the country as a whole. One interviewee stated,

“I think that Iranians in general are good people, however the presence of radicalists [sic] in the country give it a bad reputation. They overshadow all other aspects of Iran and Iranian culture and give the country a bad name”.

Many individuals expressed disapproval regarding the fact that Iran has an established state religion, and is not a democracy. They maintained a western viewpoint with regard to politics and government, and found issue with the government of Iran and the fact that it does not allow for many of the same liberties granted by Western democracies.

More than half stated that they did not know enough about the country to make a thorough judgment regarding its status, whether political economic or social, however did not possess a positive outlook of the country. They stated that the country must be highly scrutinized for a reason, and according to popular opinion, is in need of improvement. As one interviewee stated:

“To be honest I do not know the specifics regarding the political life, economic situation or cultural aspects of Iran, but based on the media and conversations I have been exposed to, believe that something must be done to improve conditions. The citizens deserve the same rights that are granted to democratic nations and should not be suppressed. Additionally, the Western

world, which is democratic and aims to adhere to human rights, disapproves of many of the actions in Iran which leads me to believe that there are rights being violated.”

Another important point raised by 4 of the interviewees concerned the threat Iran poses to America. One interview said:

“They hate America and everything that we represent. They raise their children to blame America and westernization for many of the problems they face which breeds hatred and poses a barrier between Iran and all western nations”.

Answers included information that was not fact, rather popular opinion, including prejudices and stereotypes that hurt the status and world- standing of Iran. In addition, the fear or perceived threat of Iran, bolstered by western media, feeds into the American mistrust and negative vision of the country. Many Americans believe that Iranians possess hatred and disdain for America, and all things considered to be western or secular, which contributes to the misunderstandings and judgments between the two countries. These factors have detrimental implications for Iranian-Americans whose acceptance and assimilation into American culture is subsequently questioned by Americans, who take into considerations the negative reputation and stereotypes of Iran. It makes being an American while also being an Iranian extremely different. How can one regard oneself as the makeup of two conflicting nations? Furthermore, the concept of reputation, and its importance to most individuals, influences one to distance oneself from any associations that can hurt one’s status.¹⁷ In the case of Iranian- American immigrants, the undesirable associations are rooted within their ties to Iran.

¹⁷ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

Question 3: What are your thoughts regarding Iran and the current Iranian-American relationship?

This question was a bit complex as, in recent times, President Obama and Congress successfully passed the highly controversial Iranian nuclear deal. While the individuals interviewed had varying opinions as to the deal itself, there was a general consensus that the relationship between Iran and America was, and remains, rocky at best. The responses fit into two basic categories: either Iran was seen as an enemy of the US on less than favorable relationship terms, or Iran and America were considered to be on the path to improving their relationship, however are not yet on good terms. One interviewee stated:

“The nuclear deal that just passed was a big step in repairing trust and relations with Iran, however I think we have a long way to go. First of all, only time will tell if both sides will keep their end of the bargain, and secondly, this is the first time in years that the US and Iran have had cordial dealings. For the past few decades, Iran has been seen as an enemy to the US and I think that many Americans still [sic] possess that sentiment.”

All of the interviewees, whether well informed or not, were aware that Iran and America have had a tumultuous relationship.

Ten out of the twenty individuals interviewed had something to say about the Iranian view of America. According to these individuals, the conflict between Iran and America stems from the Iranian side rather than the America side, which is just trying to protect the interest and safety of its citizens. The Americans interviewed stated that do not believe that America is at fault for the rocky relationship, rather that Iran antagonizes the situation. A majority of interviewees believe that America is the target of the strong and growing anti- western sentiment in Iran, and must take measures to protect itself against unwarranted aggression. This underlying

view is a core contributor to the negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with Iran. One individual stated:

“Any action America takes against Iran is not out of spite [sic] of dislike, but to keep Americans safe and free from any perceived threat. The core of the conflict lay with the anti- western and pro- extremist mantra of Iran established with the Islamic republic. They are after America and we as a country do what we can to protect ourselves against threats of terror.”

Americans consider Iran, specifically due to the extremism existent in the country, to be at fault with regard to the troubled Iranian- American relationship. There exists a complex in which Americans believe that Iran is an anti- western anti-secular state that finds fault with America, and acts as the antagonist in an already unstable relationship.

Question 4: What is your first reaction to the term Iranian- American?

There were few overly strong responses to the term Iranian- America. However, one interesting response received from 3 of the interviewees revolved around the topic of religion and homosexuality. These two categories are taboo in Iran as the established religion, Islam, forbids and condemns homosexuality.¹⁸ The Americans interviewed seemed to be under the impression that there is no liberty or freedom of expression in Iran with regard to faith or sexuality. As one interviewee stated

“When I think of Iranian- Americans, I envision Iranians who have fled Iran due to unlivable circumstances. Either due to religious differences [sic] people left Iran in order to gain more rights such as the freedom to practice any religion or express their sexual orientation.”

Another interviewee asked for a clarification stating,

¹⁸ "Islam and Homosexuality." Islam and Homosexuality. Accessed April 07, 2016. <http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/homosexuality.htm>.

“Do you mean Iranians who were forced to leave or flee Iran because of the bad conditions?”

It was as if there was an implied sense of urgency or forceful exile from Iran, rather than a choice to leave, independent of the political and social atmosphere following the revolution. Interestingly, some interviewed believed that the only way Iranians would become American was if they rejected the current status and actions of their country. This belief contributes to the pressures Iranian-Americans feel to choose reject Iran as their country of identification, in order to become members of America and improve their social standing as a whole. Additionally, interviewees felt as though the Iranian immigrants were in some sort of danger in their homeland, and were better off immigrating to the democratic United States of America. They believe that without a western styled government of democracy, which allows for rights such as religious tolerance and freedom of expression, Iranians were constantly in fear for their lives and forced to abide by a rigid set of rules. Many interviewed were not aware of the possibility that some Iranians chose to leave for other reasons, such as to further education or experience a new culture.

Question 5: Do you consider immigrants who have immigrated to America and gained citizenship to be truly American? *If not, does this opinion hold for all immigrants, or Iranian immigrants in particular?

The majority of answers were easy split into three categories: Eleven who said Yes, 3 who said No, and six who said Yes, but contingent on certain factors.

For those who said yes, all agreed that any immigrant of a foreign country who went through the proper channels to gain citizenship is considered to be a true American. As one interviewee mentioned:

“America is a melting pot. It is made up of all different cultures and is accepting of everyone who wants to contribute to the diverse community”.

Another stated:

“Everyone was once an immigrant from somewhere. If you legally come to America you should have all of the rights that other Americans have too”.

The immigrants’ country of origin, or reasons for immigrating were not considered to be relevant or indicative of their American status. The interviewees considered the bulk of American population to be diverse and multicultural as it is the result of a population mostly composed of immigrants and their generations that follow.¹⁹

Those who said no, immigrants who have gained citizenship are not truly American, were asked to specify why they said no, specifically regarding whether or not this decision was restricted to Iranians, or all immigrants in general. Of the 3 who replied no, 2 stated that all immigrants could never be truly American in a cultural sense, due to the fact that they were not born in America. One stated that specifically Iranian immigrants could not be considered completely American.

“Without growing up in America and having America TV shows, pop culture, media and more you just cant fully understand or [sic] be American. Obviously there should be no discrimination of immigrants who legally are here, but they still carry the ideals and culture of the country they came from”.

The one interviewee who singled out Iranian immigrants stated:

¹⁹ Millet, Joyce. "Culturalsavvy.com | Understanding American Culture - From Melting Pot to Salad Bowl." Culturalsavvy.com | Understanding American Culture - From Melting Pot to Salad Bowl. Accessed April 07, 2016.
http://www.culturalsavvy.com/understanding_american_culture.htm.

“I would not consider an Iranian immigrant to be truly American for a number of reasons. The biggest reasons are because of the language and cultural barriers, but mainly because the Iranian beliefs and government go against everything America stands for and have posed a threat to America on more than one occasion”.

The political and social atmosphere, coupled with the Iranian- American relationship caused this interviewee to reject the possibility of an Iranian immigrants potential of becoming a true American.

The remaining six individuals agreed that it was possible for Iranian immigrants to be considered truly American, however, only under certain circumstances. Some of the conditions included:

“ They must have been raised by American parents, and be fluent in English”

“ The immigrant would have had to leave Iran at a very young age”

“The only way an Iranian immigrant could be a member of American society is if he or she denounced the actions and wrongdoings of their current government and supported democracy since that is the foundation of America.”

These recorded answers shed light on how Iranians are perceived by Americans, as well as how Iranians themselves believe Americans perceive the actions of their homeland.

Americans consider Iranian immigrants to be a special case in that they differ from other immigrants because they not only do they possess a different language and but emigrate from a country that has been in direct conflict with America. They view Iran as a perpetrator, at fault for some violation of human rights and lack of basic democracy that many Americans view as unacceptable. In addition, they see Iran as a threat to America and the safety of its citizens. These American views and stigmas, which are known to the world, have a strong influence of the Iranian- American’s decision on how to identify.

The struggles faced by Iranian- American immigrants to self- identify, as a result of the unpopularity and poor relationship with Iran in America, can be observed and applied to immigrants of any disliked country that has experienced a drastic change. Cuba, for example, underwent a similar revolutionary change of government, which resulted in a major conflict between Cuba and America. The western media coverage of Cuba is similar to that of Iran as the reports are guilty of a biased that favors US policy at the expense of the reputation of its enemy countries.²⁰ Cuba has been denied American airtime and opportunity to garner American sympathy or supporters and as an enemy of America, has been repeatedly criticized over national television. Only in recent times, with the resumption of formal diplomatic ties, has Cuba been allowed to make their opinion public to the American audience.²¹ Cuban- American immigrants face the stigmas resulting from association with their birth- country, similar to Iranian- American immigrants, and struggle with the same pressure of self- identifying. The information learned from the perceptions of Iranian- Americans, by Americans, can be extended to understand the Cuban- American immigrant predicament, as well as the struggles of other immigrants in analogous situations.

Discourse and National Identity

The power of discourse related to the concept of national identity is of the utmost importance as at the core, “national identity is thus the product of discourse”.²² As seen in the surveys above, western news outlets and biased popular discourse focus on specific parts of a

²⁰ O'day, John C. "Side-By-Side Coverage of Cuba and Iran Highlights Shift in US Media Villain-Making." FAIR. July 24, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://fair.org/home/side-by-side-coverage-of-cuba-and-iran-highlights-shift-in-us-media-villain-making/>.

²¹ Ibid

²² Wodak, Ruth. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, 22

nation's identity depending on the setting or mood of the international stage. Unfortunately, for some countries, discourse tends to revolve around the controversial or negative topics of their countries actions, and causes their citizens to question their sense of belonging and identification with their country.²³ This negative discourse has a direct effect on national identity as immigrants of countries that are debated on the international level are stuck at a crossroads, in which they are pressured to choose a means of self- identification. They can either identify with their country of origin, despite the existent discourse and negative associations that inevitably follow, or reject their national identity and adopt a new identification. This deeper understanding into the identification of immigrants is relevant to Iranian- American immigrants, but also to immigrants of any country that share a parallel experience, such as Cuban- American immigrants.

As stated by Tajfel and Turner in their self- identification theory, individuals strive to associate themselves with groups that provide them with a positive image or status.²⁴ In cases where a nation is shaped or depicted in a negative and undesirable manner, the task of self- identification becomes tricky. Clearly, dependent on a country's ongoing changes and conditions, new narratives can change people's perceptions of what constitutes their national identity, and may result in a change of personal identification.²⁵ It is clear that Iran is subjected to discourse and scrutiny, specifically in America, as ten out of the twenty individuals interviewed had something to say about the Iranian view of America, as well as the American view of Iran. Now that the current Iranian discourse, comprising of American based stereotypes and prejudices

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

²⁵ Galasinska, A. "Ruth Wodak, Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart: The Discursive Construction of National Identity. Second Edition. Transl. by Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten and J. W. Unger." *Applied Linguistics* 31, no. 1 (2009): 166-68.

has been established, the specific effects it has on the identification of Iranian- American immigrants can be examined.

CHAPTER 4: Iranian- Americans' Self- Identification

Introduction:

The 1979 Iranian revolution transformed life within Iran, as well as the world's perceptions of the country. The post- revolutionary era saw waves of immigration in which hundreds of thousand Iranian immigrants left the country and immigrated to America.¹ As previously stated, the revolution marked a start to the deterioration of Iranian- American relations, which had a direct effect on Iranian immigrants. The growing conflict between the countries, coupled with the changes that Iran experienced, led and continues to lead Iranian- American immigrants to distance themselves from their country of birth, and identify themselves by other means.

Immigration and Exile

The highest influx of immigrants occurred during the years following the revolution from 1979- 1982.² The new wave of immigrants, post 1979, included upper and middle class families, individuals diverse in ethnic, religious and political backgrounds, and of minorities, unlike the population of immigrants of past generations.³ The individuals were classified as exiles or

¹ Hakimzadeh, Shirin. "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home." Migrationpolicy.org. September 01, 2006. Accessed April 04, 2016. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home/>.

² *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. Washington: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service.

³ Emami, Jessica. "Iranian Americans Immigration and Assimilation." April 2014. Accessed April 3, 2016. <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/pdfs/iranian-americans---immigration-and-assimilation.pdf>.

political refugees, contrary to those who immigrated before the revolution, which produced differing personal feelings with regard to Iran and their ties with the country.

Self- Identification

Due to the escalating conflict between Iran and America, Iranian- American immigrants began to experience prejudice and discrimination in America. The distrust of Iran prompted by the 1979 hostage crisis, as well as those associated with it, prompted the US government to investigate and intrude into the everyday lives of Iranian- American immigrants. In 1979, and into the early 1980's, immigrants without proper identification or legal documents were deported, while over 800 Iranian students agreed to leave America voluntarily.⁴ Iranian students were attacked and discriminated against, and businesses were boycotted.⁵ Additionally, Iranians were continuously portrayed negatively in the media and associated with the actions of the extremists in their country of origin.⁶ As a result, many Iranian- American immigrants directed their anger and hatred towards Iran, the country whose revolution catapulted their lives.

Interviews of Iranian- American Immigrants

To acquire a better idea of how and why Iranian- American immigrants self- identify in certain ways, I conducted a survey of 25 individuals of various religions, ages and sexualities. The individuals who chose to respond to the randomized survey are between the ages of 40-75 and are dispersed around America, including the states of New York, California, Michigan and

⁴ Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "Iran," in *The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration Since 1965*, First (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 469–78.

⁵ Mills, Gregory J. "Beyond the Backlash Muslim and Middle Eastern Immigrants' Experiences in America, Ten Years Post-9/11." PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2012.

⁶ Public Opinion Survey of American Perception of Iranian Americans." Commissioned by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) and conducted by Zogby International. December 2008. Available online at <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/PDFs/finalreport-surveyofamericanperceptions.pdf>.

Texas, which helps avoid potential biases. All interviewees were born in Iran and experienced the revolution for some part of their lives. My main motivation in this interview was to uncover their choice of self- identification, whether it is by their country of origin, religion, race etc. Second, I wanted to uncover why they identified in such a way, potentially as a result of the impact the revolution had on their lives and the importance of the new life they started. In addition, I wanted to know what implications the revolution and its consequences had on the life of the Iranian immigrants in America, specifically given the troubled Iranian- American relationship.

The questions asked were:

TABLE 5.1: INTERVIEW OF IRANIAN- AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS
1) How do you self- identify? (Options include but not limited to: Iranian, American, Christian, Arab, Jewish, etc.)
2) Did you leave Iran by Choice or force?
3) Do you feel a close tie or relation to your birth land (Iran)?
4) Did the Iranian Revolution have an impact on your life? If so how and to what extent?
5) What are your personal feeling towards the revolution and the current government?
6) Do you feel the revolution and its consequences have altered America’s view of Iran? If so, how does this affect your life in America and choice of identification?

The answers yielded interesting results, and although they were not all unanimous, they shared commonalities related to certain topics and loyalties.

Question 1: How do you self- identify? (Options include but not limited to: Iranian, American, Christian, Arab, Jewish, etc.)

Out of the 25 individuals interviewed, only 4 stated Iranian as their main and only mode of identification. The remainder of individuals all used more than one category to define himself or herself, such as Jewish- American- Persian, or Gay- Iranian- American. 14 included America in their identification, while almost all included their religion. 4 interviewed mentioned their race, while only 2 brought up sexuality.

It is important to note that 20 of the individuals interviewed made it a point to state that they were Persian or of Iranian descent, even if it was not their main way of identifying themselves. When speaking of America, the individuals praised the country as one that accepted them for who they are, and took them in during their time of need, as opposed to Iran, their supposed home. One interviewee who fled Iran in fear or persecution stated:

“When the revolution broke out I was scared for my life and had nowhere to turn. America opened its arms to me and my family and I am proud to call myself an American”.

While the decision to reject or remain associated with Iran was difficult, the question of whether or not to adopt an American identification was not. The immigrants interviewed all expressed gratitude and appreciation to the country that took them in and ensured their safety. The topic of sub- categories with relation to religion also played a big role in the identification process as interviewees made sure to specify that, regardless of whether they identified as American or Iranian, that they were Jewish, Catholic, Kurdish, Muslim, etc. These interviewees take their religious beliefs seriously, as they were huge motivations for leaving Iran, as well as a constant continuous part of their lives.

“I identify as American, but first as a Muslim. I do not agree with my Iran’s current government, but I do have faith and follow the laws of the Koran. Just because I do not support

the actions of the Islamic republic, it does not mean [sic] I am not still worship Allah and consider myself a religious Muslim”.

Many of the immigrants choose to identify with a category that is not connected to a certain geographical position, but one that is mobile and reflective of their itinerant lifestyle. When one is uprooted and forced to move from one place or another, he or she turns to find a sense of belonging with a category that is not dependent on their location, but their beliefs and lifestyles. It is harder to trust identifiers that rely on location, as the immigrants have been relocated in the past. Instead, Iranian immigrants, who were forced to leave their homeland, take with them pieces that can continue to exist in their everyday lives. Their religion, sexual orientation and cultural practices are not tied to any specific location, but can be practiced and expressed in any location, such as America. After experiencing a revolution that forced them to leave the country they identified with, Iranian immigrants are weary of developing another dependent attachment to a land, as opposed to a transient identification.

Question 2: Did you leave Iran by choice or force?

This question garnered mixed responses as many left by choice, however would not have chosen to do so under different circumstances. One Jewish Iranian- American interviewed stated:

“I left by choice, as we were afraid what the future [sic] was for the Jewish people”.

Others claimed that they had left prior to the revolution to further their education, however, due to the outbreak of the revolution, felt as though it was no longer safe to return home. Instead, they remained abroad and arranged for their families to join them in their new country of residence.

“I Came to US to continue my high school education and get a degree at [sic] university at a US Institution & then go back to Iran. Islamic Revolution of 1979, changed the whole picture of my future & consequently all my family to stay or emigrate to USA”.

Interviewees stated that they loved their lives in Iran prior to the years leading up to the revolution. Had conditions not changed and produced an unstable and threatening atmosphere, many Iranians would never have left the country.

Unfortunately, for 15 of the individuals interviewed, their immigration was by no means a choice, and more of an exile. All of these individuals either had expressed strong opposition to the new Islamic Republic, as many of them were of minority religions, or were persecuted for their sexuality. One interviewee stated that he feared for his life, despite the fact that he was Muslim, because he was gay.

“Everyday I feared somehow someone would find out and that I would be jailed, or even worse, killed. I left because I needed to escape and find a place that would accept my personal choices”.

The Islamic Republic denies the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals in Iran, as the government believes it to be in violation of the Koran, and forces these individuals to live under social and state repression. There are documented cases of LGBT members being persecuted either by a forced exile or even a death sentence.⁷

Individuals whose family was publicly supportive or tied to the Shah and his government faced grave threats to their lives. Some were forced to witness the murders of their family members who had been affiliated with the Pahlavi dynasty, despite the fact that they were innocent of any

⁷ Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. "Iran's Persecution of Gay Community Revealed." The Guardian. May 17, 2012. Accessed April 08, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/17/iran-persecution-gay-community-revealed>.

crime. One interviewee recalled a tragic memory in which his older brother, who had been a member of the Shah's government, was removed from his home and executed under Khomeini's orders.

"It is a sight I will never forget and think of everyday. I could do nothing as Khomeini's government arrested and executed my brother and left me and my family no choice but to run for our lives".

The majority did not want to leave, however felt compelled as their safety was at risk. This expulsion had a direct affect on the immigrants' view of Iran, and their feeling of connection to the country, both reflected in their choice to identify by means other than their national identity. Humans possess a fundamental need to possess a sense of belonging and purpose, as it is directly tied to their self- esteem and degree of control.⁸ They strive to avoid rejection and ostracism at all costs, as these factors threaten their fundamental needs, and can result in psychological or even physical pain.⁹ Therefore, individuals are driven to avoid such pain by removing themselves from situations in which the likelihood of others ostracizing them is a possibility. In post-revolution Iran, many of those who did not support Khomeini's new government were excluded and shunned. This led to the migration of many citizens out of the country in the hopes of avoiding such rejection and challenges to their basic need for identity and belonging. Furthermore, as in the case of Iran, individuals who are socially snubbed or rejected experience a cascade of emotions that cause them to lash out, as they develop feelings of increased anger,

⁸ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

⁹ Manfred A. Max-Neef with Antonio Elizalde, Martin Hopenhayn. Human scale development: conception, application and further reflections. New York: Apex. Chpt. 2. "Development and Human Needs", 1989

anxiety, depression, jealousy and sadness.¹⁰ In the case of the Iranian- American immigrant, these feelings are reflected in their newly found contempt and rejection of Iran, the country that has expelled or ostracized them, despite the fact that it is a place they once called home. They practice a defense mechanism in which that which rejected them, the country of Iran, is now what they choose to reject.

Question 3: Do you feel a close tie or relation to your birth land (Iran)?

With the exception of 2 interviewed, 23 individuals stated that they felt a close tie to Iran, however, to the culture and actual land itself rather than the people and government today. One interviewee stated:

“I feel a connection to the place and the culture rather than people. The culture is part of who I am and I raise my kids with the same cultural values that I was taught. Persian culture and [sic] the Iran that I grew up in will always have a place in my heart, but I am sad that this same Iran does not exist.”

The cultural and traditional aspects of Iran remain strong in most of the individuals, despite the fact that their ties to the current people, or geographical location of Iran, does not. Those interviewed mainly expressed a continued connection to the aspects of the Persian culture related to social etiquette and the inner workings of a household. The respect for one’s elder’s, the importance of family bonds, and the practice of social gatherings continue to remain a part of their everyday lives in America. In social settings, the immigrants speak Farsi, eat Persian food and drink *chai*, or tea. When asked about their connection to the land itself, those interviewed stated that their childhood homes and familiar places held a special place in their hearts,

¹⁰ Weir, Kirstin. "The Pain of Social Rejection." [Http://www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org). April 2012. Accessed April 08, 2016. <http://apa.org/monitor/2012/04/rejection.aspx>.

however, were a thing of the past as those same places no longer exist under the new regime. They expressed more of a tie to the Iran that they grew up in, rather than the one that currently exists. The same sentiment was applied to the people of Iran today, versus those who inhabited the country pre- revolution. The immigrants interviewed stated that everyone they loved and cared about either left with them from Iran, or migrated shortly after.

One interviewee stated,

“If I went back I would not have anyone to go to to see. I wouldn’t know where to go because [sic] I have no house or family or business there. Everybody left when I left or very soon after me”.

The actual country and borders of Iran served as a shell or dwelling, in which the true culture and traditions of the citizens was able to thrive. Once restrictions and limitations were put on the expression of this culture, Iranians moved to a place where they could once again practice their transportable culture. Their Persian culture is by no means dependent on their physical location, as is seen by its longevity and widespread practice, despite the immigrants’ lack of connection to the land and people they once called home.

15 of those interviewed mentioned that after immigrating to America, they started families and had children. They were steadfast in their determination to raise their children with the same cultural and traditional values instilled upon them in Iran.

“For me Iran is a culture not a political country. It is so important for me and my family to teach my children Persian culture and tradition so they do not forget. It is a part of who we are and [sic] how we were raised and is different from the political elements of the country today”.

The value of culture, and the significance it holds for many of the Iranian- American immigrants interviewed, has stopped them from completely assimilating to American culture, as they fear that in generations to come, the remnants of the Iran they once knew will disappear forever.

“I left my birth-place and [sic] started in another country a new life. I still don’t think I assimilated completely because I am mostly with the people just like me that left their birth-place. I could not stay in Iran because it changed but I loved the country it was for me when I was growing up and I want it to be remembered that way by my kids here in America”.

All four of the individuals who used Iranian as their sole identifier stated that they had strong ties to Iran, as many of their family members remained there, but nevertheless, believe that the current government and instability needs repairing. The cultural and sentimental ties with Iran are the main reasons that 23 of the 25 interviewed stated not to have severed all ties with Iran, regardless of their disapproval of its current state.

Question 4: Did the Iranian Revolution affect you life in Iran? What do you think of Iran’s status as an Islamic Republic?

Every single one of the 25 interviewed responded yes to this question. Although individuals were affected in different ways dependent on socioeconomic status, political views, and religion, all agreed that the revolution changed their life in some way, whether they were living in Iran or abroad. In addition, the world’s perception post- revolution negatively impacted all individuals interviewed, as they became associated with the actions of the newly established Islamic republic that was rejected by many western countries.¹¹

The revolution had a direct impact on everyday life and norms in Iran. As one interviewee stated:

¹¹ Emami, Jessica. "Iranian Americans Immigration and Assimilation." April 2014. Accessed April 3, 2016. <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/pdfs/iranian-americans---immigration-and-assimilation.pdf>.

“The outbreak of the revolution and the years to follow were just chaotic. I stayed about 3 years before I felt as though I needed to leave to make sure [sic] me and my family would be safe. The government was completely changed and continued to change over and over. I used to host social gatherings and parties, but became very afraid to after the revolution. So unfortunate to see what is happening to a country that was center of civilization, Equality in Human Rights, art and literature”.

The political change had a direct effect on the social and economic lives of the Iranians interviewed, and created an ominous atmosphere, which limited the expression of emotions and art that once thrived. Many of the interviewees, who were of upper and middle class standing, immigrated with their families due to the economic shift to a nationalization of business, as it had a detrimental effect on their livelihoods. The rich businesses of the elite were dismantled and the upper and middle classes were left to pick up the pieces of their once prospering businesses, and move elsewhere. Individuals who had spoken out against the new regime, or publicly supported the Pahlavi monarchy, were in danger and forced to take all their belongings and life savings and relocate to a safer place.

“I was raised in a very Rich and Respectable Area of Iran and was [sic] became accustomed to a high living standard because it was what I was born into. My father was a government official in Shah Reza Pahlavi’s government. My life completely changed when the revolution broke out and the social classes and monarchy collapsed. We were forced to take everything we could and flee to America. It took my family years to rebuild even half of what we had in Iran before the revolution”.

Interestingly, many interviewees did not find a problem with the fact that the Pahlavi monarchy was overthrown, but disapproved of the methods of violence and intolerance they experienced

under the subsequent government. They found themselves disillusioned with the new government, and the promises the revolution had promised to bring about. None of the interviewees denied the corrupt or negative aspects of the Shah's rule, however completely rejected the actions of the Islamic republic that followed, as it failed to remedy the existent problems and created new ones.

“The problems did not start in 1979 that is just when they exploded. There [sic] was the very rich and the very poor and many people thought that the revolution would help to make things even and fix the country. This did not happen because extremists took over and convinced many people that everyone who did not follow the teachings of the Koran was the enemy. I am Muslim, but absolutely could not continue living in a place that was not just to everybody.”

One of the strongest emotions expressed with regard to the outbreak of the revolution was of sadness rather than anger or hatred. That being said, many of the individuals interviewed turned towards an optimistic way of thinking, in which they take the outbreak of the revolution as a blessing in disguise, which allows them to find a better life in America.

“I feel sad that the revolution happened but it again helped my life to a great extent. And the present government is an embarrassment to me. I don't agree with any of their policies and their way of living”.

“For sure, [sic] I am not a pro Islamic government, & I don't approve of the revolution and at the same time I am Thrilled & Content that G-d has given me the opportunity to continue my life in country that respects every human being for who they are. I think I am blessed”.

America is seen as a beacon of hope and possibility for the Iranian- American immigrants, who left the chaos and violence of their homeland, to be welcomed into a country and allowed to rebuild their lives.

5) Does the post- revolution Iranian status and the Iranian- American relationship affect your new life in America? Does this contribute to your choice of identification?

21 of the Individuals interviewed stated that the revolution and the consequences it brought about changed the way in which they identified themselves. The responses can be separated into three main reasons for the change in identity.

First, many expressed contempt for, and disapproval of, Iran that had completely transformed into an unrecognizable country, and caused their immigration. Many of the individuals, who were forced or chose to leave Iran in response to the upheaval brought about by the revolution, hold Iran responsible for their suffering, and refuse to associate themselves with the country that it has become. Iran's rejection of its citizens hurt many individuals who subsequently immigrated, and as a response and reaction to their exclusions, reject Iran as a part of their identity.¹²

As one interviewee stated:

“The revolution cost me everything. I had to leave my home and [sic] my family was separated. I did not want to go to a different country because I loved my life in Iran before the revolution. It changed into an ugly thing and it is a different place that I do not know”.

Upon coming to America, immigrants chose to distance themselves from the new Islamic Republic and its extremism that became rampant throughout the country. They valued the liberties granted to them in America that had been taken from them in Iran. The new government, which gave way to crises such as the hostage crisis, put Iran under a spotlight to be criticized by the Western world. Some individuals interviewed rejected their Iranian identity

¹² Weir, Kirstin. "The Pain of Social Rejection." [Http://www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org). April 2012. Accessed April 08, 2016. <http://apa.org/monitor/2012/04/rejection.aspx>.

because of the hardship the country caused them, but also because the reputation and associations with the country had become too grueling to bear.

“I do not want to associate myself with such a tyrannical country. My heritage is a part of me, I am Persian and I speak farsi and I eat Persian food but I am not Iranian anymore. Because now if you are Iranian it is like saying you could live in the country not and I cannot.”

The second cause for a shift in Iranian immigrant identity is the appreciation and gratitude felt for America, the country that welcomed them in their time of need. America admitted Iranian immigrants prior, during and post the 1979 revolution, and passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) that allowed thousands of immigrants who were not legal, to become legal permanent American residents. After the revolution and Iran- Iraqi War, this act proved to be highly beneficial to the 116,172 Iranian immigrants who could now live openly without the fear of deportation.¹³ The Iranian- American immigrants interviewed have not forgotten this act and consider America to be their savior. America is seen as haven, in which they assimilated at their own pace, however are free keep their cultural heritage as America is a melting pot itself, made up of multiple cultures.

“ We are better off in USA. I am Thrilled [sic] & Content that G-d has given me the opportunity to continue my life in country that respects every human being for who they are. I think I am blessed”.

“I am an American. I am also Persian and Jewish but I am American. I love America and I am so proud that I am a part of it. It is land [sic] of free where I can still practice my religion and my traditions because of democracy.”

¹³ US department of Homeland security, Fiscal Year 2001 Statistical Yearbook, Immigration by Regional and Selected Country of Last residence Table, pages 6-8

America has become a part of their identity, as it is their new country of dwelling, whose political, social, and economic liberties they support and admire. This tie to America, however, leads way to a third reason for a change in identity and a distancing from Iranian identification. Many Iranian- Americans fear to associate themselves with Iran while living in America, given the bad relationship between the countries and the prejudices and discriminations against Iranians.

Although America opened it doors to hundreds of thousands of Iranian- American immigrants, the subsequent tensions in the relationship between the two countries has had adverse effects on the immigrants.¹⁴ The media often portrays Iran in a less than favorable way and focuses on the extremist activity, causing all Iranians to be associated with their actions.¹⁵ As a result, Iranian-Americans have faced discrimination, violence, boycotts, physical attacks, and rises in tuition.¹⁶ The immigrants interviewed stated that they had just picked up their lives and moved because they rejected their countries actions, and were now associated with the actions they denounced. As a result they distanced themselves from their Iranian identification, turning to their religion or culture as a mode of identification.

"I did not want to be hated because of the country I came from. I do not want to be called Iranian [sic] and looked at like I am going to do something wrong because I hate everything that

¹⁴ Emami, Jessica. "Iranian Americans Immigration and Assimilation." April 2014. Accessed April 3, 2016. <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/pdfs/iranian-americans---immigration-and-assimilation.pdf>.

¹⁵ Western Media's Image of Iran Serves Only Neo-Con Warmongers." RT International. November 12, 2014. Accessed April 05, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/204907-iran-media-israel-war/>.

¹⁶ "The Hostage Crisis and Integration of Iranians in the United States." Immigrants in American History: Arrival, Adaptation, and Integration. Ed. Elliott Robert Barkan. Vol. 3. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013. 1002. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 18 May 2013.

they are doing in that country. I am American but I am also Persian and Muslim,. It is a part of me forever, but Iran is just a land that I now do not know”.

The pressures to choose a side or mode of identification are heightened as the tensions between America and Iran grow. On the one hand, Iranians are grateful to America that has allowed them to establish a new life full of freedoms they are denied in Iran. On the other hand, while they vehemently reject the current country of Iran, it is harder to forget the Iran that was once a part of their identity, despite the fact that it no longer exists. The western media and the anti- Iranian sentiment it creates, strengthens this need to dissociate from Iran while living in America and helps to remind immigrants that their country is not what it once was.

One interviewee stated:

“I think the [sic] americans don’t know the real Iran still, because it is not there right now. For me the real Iran is the one that I grew up in before the revolution and it is the one that I connect with”.

The Iranian- American immigrants are aware of the American perception of Iran, as they are exposed to the same media reports. Immigrants watch the Hollywood movies that are guilty of a “misrepresentation of Iranians and their collective identity” which unfortunately instills fear and judgments in the eyes of Americans.¹⁷ The extremism and violation of rights tied to Iran makes it an undesirable identifier and influences the immigrants to embrace their American or cultural and religious identifiers.

Analysis of Responses

¹⁷ Afrasiabi, Kaveh L. "'Axis of Evil' Seeps into Hollywood." Asia Times Online. Accessed April 09, 2016. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/IC24Ak02.html.

After conducting this interview, one point remained clear; most Iranian- American immigrants do not support the actions of the current government, however still connect to Iran on a cultural and sentimental level. Their choice to identify by American, Persian, or religion speaks volumes to their outlook on the current state of Iran as well as how they choose to be perceived.

On a political and national level, the Iranian- American immigrants identify as American, and true believers in democracy and the freedom it has granted to them. Their immigration from Iran, and denunciation of its theocratic republic, are only reinforced by their dedication to America. America provided the Iranian immigrants with a refuge and safe haven, while Iran, their homeland, expelled and deserted them. Although many immigrants hold Iran in contempt for the hardships it has caused them, they continue to practice the cultural and traditional elements they took with them from Iran. The country serves more of a source of their religion and culture than a national sentiment or national identity. They are able to pick and choose elements of their so- called Iranian identity, and incorporate those elements into their lives in a manner that best suits them. The culture they take with them is not stationary or fixed to a certain geographic location, and allows them to bring their practices to wherever they choose to settle. In this sense, Iranian immigrants develop a new “diasporic” identity, which allows them to connect others like them, through memories and attachment to their homeland without physically being there.¹⁸ As Mostofi states:

“The Iranian diasporic community may view its national, American identity as being related to political and civic, and national responsibilities, while at the same time incorporating

¹⁸ Mostofi, Nilou. "WHO WE ARE: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity." *Sociological Quarterly The Sociological Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2003): 681-703. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2003.tb00531.x.

elements of Iranian cultural and ethnic practices, and a strong sense of family ties, especially within the private domain”.¹⁹

The Iranian- American immigrants are able to contribute to the melting pot of American identity and culture without sacrificing their own Persian culture and heritage.

Additionally, the power of the media as well as the perceptions it instills, prove to be a key factor in the motivation of identification. As Iran is often studied under a microscope, specifically with regard to its extremist activity, the popular perception of the country is negative.²⁰ As Tajfel and Turner state in their identification theory, an individual strives to associate his or herself with the category and mode of identification that will yield the most benefit and success.²¹ The personal immigrants' personal feelings towards Iran and the suffering it has caused them coupled with the negative world outlook of the country increases the propensity to distance oneself from identifying with Iran. This information highlights how the media can be used as a tool for shaping perception, and must be used in the correct manner due to its power.

Understanding the Iranian immigrants' motivations and reasoning to self- identify sheds light on the struggles they experience and decisions they are forced to make. The immigrants are required to relocate and adapt to a new way of life, but also to choose whether or not they wish to associate with the country they left. Their decision reveals the implications of their country's actions, as well as the effects that the media and world perception can have on an individual's

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Emami, Jessica. "Iranian Americans Immigration and Assimilation." April 2014. Accessed April 3, 2016. <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/Data/Sites/1/pdfs/iranian-americans---immigration-and-assimilation.pdf>.

²¹ Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C, The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel and L. W. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Ha, 1986

decision to identify. By considering these struggles, motivations and decision, a better understanding of Iranian- American immigrants can be established, and the way in which they are treated and perceived, can be changed for the better.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The research presented in this thesis has helped reveal key aspects related to the self-identification of Iranian- American immigrants, and the identification of immigrants as a whole. Regardless of location, ethnicity or religion, all human beings possess a need or drive to associate themselves with a group or category with which they feel a connection. The world is a big place, and the sense of belonging and purpose is vital to humans' social survival. While this identification is important and applicable to all humans, the choice of which category to belong to is crucial as well. An individual aims to associate his or herself with the group that will provide them with the highest degree of self- esteem and positive image. This is where the immigrant's loyalties and identity is called into question.

In the case of Iran, citizens were forced to leave as a result of a dramatic and tragic revolution, and change in government and way of life. Many immigrated to America, a country that does not share a good relationship with Iran. This, in turn, has lead to negative perceptions of Iran and those associated with it, largely due to the recurrent biased news reports and media coverage. The Iranian- American immigrant's opinions concerning Iran's current state, his or her feelings regarding America, and his or her desire to possess a positive and coveted status of identification, all contribute to his or her decision to self- identify. Iranian- American immigrants, however, are not the only ones who face this challenge. Immigrants, from any country where a major revolution took place, who immigrate to a new country that does not share a good relationship with their country, such as Cuba, are put in the same situation.

The findings, with regard to the immigrant self- identification predicament, are significant in that they can help gauge internal opinions with regard to a country's actions, and possibly bring about change. The widespread acknowledgement of some immigrants' choice to dissociate may alert their former country's government of their missteps and popular disappointment regarding their rule. It also possesses the potential to alert the rest of the world of the possible corrupt or even inhumane acts occurring in a post- revolutionary country that drive its citizens to immigrate.

In addition, the findings also shed light on the power that perception and reputation can have on an individual's decision to identify in a certain way. Perception and subsequent stereotypes often formed by the media, have been accused of framing their reports in a way that promotes their own countries foreign policy as opposed to a whole rounded and two- sided report. Media outlets are notorious for portraying countries with which they do not share a good relationship, in a biased and negative light¹. American news outlets are guilty of this media framing, as seen in the new reports of Iran and Cuba. American media tends to focus on the extremism activity in Iran, including headlines such as "*Wipe Israel of the Map*",² and create a stigma and image of Iran that American citizens extend to include all those who identify as Iranian. The same media biased and framing of perception can be seen in the case of Cuba, whose leader Fidel Castro, has even been compared to Hitler, in American media. Cuba has only

¹ O'Day, John C. "Side-By-Side Coverage of Cuba and Iran Highlights Shift in US Media Villain-Making." FAIR. July 24, 2015. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://fair.org/home/side-by-side-coverage-of-cuba-and-iran-highlights-shift-in-us-media-villain-making/>.

² Sudan, Richard. "Western Media's Image of Iran Serves Only Neo-Con Warmongers." *RT International*. 12 Nov. 2014. Web. 01 Apr. 2016.

recently been granted increased airtime and a platform to express its views, as the Cuban-American relationship has begun the process of repair³.

It is important to acknowledge this bias and one-sided reporting, as often, the American viewers are not given the full picture of certain events, and form a stereotypical regard for Iran or Cuba, and apply this view to their citizens as a whole. This has a direct affect on the stigmas developed, and treatment of immigrants of these countries in America. It creates an unfair pressured atmosphere in which the immigrant feels the need to either reject his or her original national identity, or strongly support it at the risk of experiencing discrimination in response. The immigrants of any country should not have to be on the receiving end of the American backlash and anger towards their country of origin, and should not be put in a decision to reject their national identity.

The grasping of the challenges and pressures faced by revolutionary immigrants into countries that are not on good terms with the country they have migrated from, are important as a deeper understanding of their predicament can facilitate in bettering relationships between counties, as well as individuals. The findings can be used to make Americans, and native populations of migration hubs worldwide, more aware and sympathetic of the immigrants' position. By acknowledging and spreading awareness of the media biased, its effect of perception, and therefore on identification, we will be able to eliminate inaccurate stigmas and stereotypes. The individuals of countries who accept immigrants will be more open to accepting immigrants based on their own merits and beliefs, rather than grouping and associating them with a negative image that has been formed by the media. The Iranian- American immigrant case

³ O'Day, John C. "Side-By-Side Coverage of Cuba and Iran Highlights Shift in US Media Villain-Making." FAIR. July 24, 2015. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://fair.org/home/side-by-side-coverage-of-cuba-and-iran-highlights-shift-in-us-media-villain-making/>.

of self- identification can be applied to immigrants of countries worldwide and warrants more research and analysis to better the lives of individuals and repair nation relations on a global scale.

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