

Between Iran and the USA: Exploring Identity in the Memoirs of Azadeh Moaveni and Tara Bahrampour

Daniela Dostálová

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děkan

doc. Mgr. Roman Trušík, Ph.D.
ředitel ústavu

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rolí traumatu a identity v memoárech *Lipstick Jihad* od Azadeh Moaveni a *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America* od Tary Bahrampour. Tato práce také blíže popisuje to, jak autorky procházejí životem v íránské diaspoře a jak zkušenosti spojené s exilem, Íránskou revolucí a rodinnými vztahy ovlivňují jejich pocit sounáležitosti a formování identity. Práce se dále věnuje tématům jako nostalgie, postpaměť, hybridní identita a třetí prostor.

Klíčová slova: Azadeh Moaveni, Tara Bahrampour, nostalgie, trauma, postpaměť, identita, hybridita, třetí prostor, Nima Naghibi, práva žen, Íránská revoluce, diaspora, exil.

ABSTRACT

This Bachelor thesis explores the role of identity, trauma and nostalgia in the memoirs *Lipstick Jihad* by Azadeh Moaveni and *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America* by Tara Bahrampour. It focuses on how the authors navigate life in the Iranian diaspora and how experiences of living in exile, the Iranian Revolution, and their family dynamics, influence their sense of belonging and their identity formation. The thesis further explores the themes such as nostalgia, postmemory, hybrid identity, and third space.

Keywords: Azadeh Moaveni, Tara Bahrampour, nostalgia, trauma, postmemory, identity, hybridity, third-space, Nima Naghibi, women's rights, Iranian revolution, diaspora, exile.

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INTRODUCTION

Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* and Tara Bahrapour's *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America* offer valuable insight into what it means to live "in between" two cultures. Both memoirs capture the experiences of Iranians in the diaspora, whose families leave Iran because of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and settle in the United States. These displaced families often have to rebuild their lives while assimilating into a culture with contrasting values and norms. These people often view the pre-revolutionary Iran through a nostalgic lens, expressing longing for a lost homeland and a past marked by trauma, loss, and displacement.

These memories are passed on to the second generation and influence their identity formation. The questions *Who am I? Where do I belong? Should I embrace being different or try to fit in?* are shaping their childhood and adult experience. These identity struggles are common among the second generation of the diaspora, particularly because of the contrast between societal expectations and personal desires. People might feel pressured to act a certain way, according to societal rules and norms, to fit in and avoid rejection and judgment. This, however, creates a block in expressing their authentic selves.¹

This thesis aims to explore how trauma, nostalgia, family, and the life between two cultures affect the identity formation of Azadeh Moaveni and Tara Bahrapour. While both authors belong to the Iranian diaspora, their individual journeys provide unique perspectives on belonging, memory and life between two cultures, and the relationship each author has with her sense of Iranianness.

Moaveni's identity is influenced by her parents' narratives, their loss and nostalgia, and her brief visit to Tehran at the age of five. Born in the USA to Iranian parents who get divorced early on, she is raised by her Iranian mother, who attempts to fuse both the American and Iranian worlds. This results in Moaveni's identity confusion. In contrast, Tara Bahrapour was born to an Iranian father and an American mother and spends most of her childhood in pre-revolutionary Iran. She directly experiences the Iranian revolution before her family has to immigrate to the USA for safety.

Both authors return to Iran when they are adults, however, the Iran they imagined, influenced by personal memory or inherited stories, does not match the reality of post-

¹ Mekala Chiranjeevi, "Exploring The Multifaceted Themes of Identity And Belonging In Contemporary English Literature," *IJCRT* 11, no.6 (2023): 585, http://ijcrt.org/viewfull.php?&p_id=IJCRT2306519.

revolutionary life in Iran. Moaveni highlights the lack of women's rights, and political oppression that she faces as a journalist.

Despite addressing similar themes, their experiences complement each other. Moaveni provides a perspective on her life as an Iranian growing up in America, while Bahrampour recalls her childhood in Iran – the childhood, Moaveni is longing for.

To deepen the analysis of their stories, Nima Naghibi's *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora* will be used. Naghibi connects their personal stories to theoretical frameworks, such as Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory" – the transmission of traumatic memories from one generation to the next, or "genealogical nostalgia" defined by Jennifer Delisle as the motivation to explore and connect with one's familial roots. Furthermore, Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* and his concepts of hybridity and third space are relevant for understanding the complexity of the identity formation in the diaspora. The third space is a space of constantly shaping identities and blending cultures which allows for hybridity. Bhabha refers to hybridity as not being part of one or another culture, but something else, which includes parts of both.² These frameworks together with the memoirs, will help to understand the role of belonging, memory, family and identity in the lives of second-generation Iranians in the diaspora.

² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994) 28.

1 TRAUMA

The term *trauma* originally comes from the Greek, and it means a “wound.” It originally refers to a physical injury of a body. Later, Sigmund Freud describes it as a wound imposed on the mind.³ People experience trauma in many forms and various depths. Trauma can result from war, natural disasters, abuse, forced migration, or oppression. Even though trauma is generally related to individual experiences, it can also be collective, affecting communities and generations. Jeffrey C. Alexander, in his chapter *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma*, describes a theory which suggests that trauma occurs when a sudden negative event disrupts an individual’s or community’s sense of well-being. According to this, the trauma comes from the event itself, which can deeply affect individuals. The natural reaction to this event – feeling traumatized is seen as natural and immediate. This effect is known as PTSD – a post-traumatic stress disorder. From this perspective, trauma occurs when an event deeply threatens basic human needs, such as security, love, stability and connection.⁴ Trauma such as PTSD, affects people for a long time after experiencing a traumatic event, it is influencing their identities and behaviors, which can result in passing it down to other generations.

1.1 Collective trauma

As mentioned before, the concept of trauma is not only applied to individuals but also to communities and institutions. Individuals often describe themselves as traumatized, when in response to sudden, negative change in their social or personal surroundings.⁵ The collective trauma can be to a certain extent, related to the Iranian diaspora and people living in Iran. The revolution, and what it results in, is a traumatic event for Iranians in general, whether they are directly exposed to it or not. The surveillance, imprisonment of dissidents or loss of women’s rights become part of daily life, creating a persisting sense of fear.

Collective trauma refers to a deep disruption in the structure of a social life, weakening the connections that bind people together and disrupting the sense of community. Unlike individual trauma, which is usually sudden, collective trauma develops gradually. Even though it lacks an immediate shock factor, it is still marked by a realization that the

³ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.

⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (University of California Press, 2004), 2–3.

⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

community can no longer be an effective source of support. The sense of “we” as a community, is lost.⁶

1.1.1 Collective trauma of Iranian diaspora

People, who had to go to exile, because of the Iranian Revolution, share a collective trauma in various depths. Their longing for a lost home, they might never return to, their idealized memories, feeling of guilt for leaving the rest of their families behind, and struggles with adapting to a different culture, and language, are significantly influencing their lives in exile. Exile is not simply living in a different country, but also about emotional dislocation, where individuals are caught between longing for the past and an uncertain future.

People’s lives are influenced by their memories of the past. The memories can arise in many forms – smells, stories, music and even silences. The past is always present, encouraging individuals to reflect on what it means for them. They often revisit their experiences and the experiences of the collective and question how significant or impactful they are. The Iranian diaspora shares a complex memory of the Iranian Revolution. Even though individuals are trying to move forward, the memories of revolution, regardless of having directly experienced it, are shaping their present and future.⁷

Because of the revolution, many Iranians face a political oppression, because of connections to Shah, or simply because of disagreement with the new regime. It is dangerous for them and their families to stay in Iran, so they have to leave to the western countries. The US hostage crisis makes their lives abroad, especially in the United States difficult. Media play a key role in portraying Iranians as dangerous and hostile. Some Iranians are under a constant surveillance and a threat of having to depart.⁸

The strong sense of nostalgia, feeling of alienation and facing hate from the country they now live in can significantly affect their well-being. Growing up in families, where the trauma is present, it is likely that the second generation will struggle with belonging. These people are often feeling not feeling fully connected to Iran and not being fully accepted in the USA. This upbringing influences the identity formation of the second generation.

Nima Naghibi (2016) mentions that many Iranian writers who directly or indirectly experience the revolution, use *scriptotherapy* to process their trauma. Writing about their

⁶ Kai Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, (Simon and Schuster, 1976), 153-154.

⁷ Mammad Aidani, “Existential Accounts of Iranian Displacement and the Cultural Meanings of Categories” *Journal of Intercultural studies* 31, no. 2, (2010): 340, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256860903579061>

⁸ S. Sadeghi, *Conditional Belonging: The Racialization of Iranians in the Wake of Anti-Muslim Politics*, (New York University Press, 2023), 35.

memories marked by the revolution or loss of familiar home, helps them work through the trauma. The texts are influenced by the nostalgia that shapes their life in the diaspora.⁹

1.2 Postmemory

Traumatic events do not end only with the people who directly experience them, but a certain form of this trauma can be passed on through generations. This process is known as postmemory. Postmemory arises when the trauma is not directly experienced by an individual, but it is experienced by their parents. It is a form of an inherited trauma. This concept was developed by Marianne Hirsch, who uses it to refer to the trauma being transmitted across generations. Postmemory describes the way individuals have grown up influenced by the narratives that existed before their birth, the stories of the previous generation. Postmemory also reflects the relationship with their parent's experiences – wanting to understand it and wanting to inherit or distance themselves from their parents' knowledge.¹⁰ People who experience trauma often do not fully resolve or process it throughout their life, so the children may feel the urge to bring closure or preserve the family heritage. For children of parents who experience trauma, understanding their parents' past is often a way to form their own identity. While the children of victims, survivors, witnesses may experience postmemory differently, their family environment creates a space for the children to identify with past events. However, this is not only limited to family or to the groups that share an ethnic or national identity. Through processes such as identification, adoption, and projection, postmemory can be spread to a wider community.¹¹ Media play also play role in experiencing postmemory. If some specific kind of trauma is publicly discussed, later generations might feel more connected to their parents' past.

Postmemory is related to Moaveni's experience. As she grows up, she is strongly influenced by her family's narratives about their longing for pre-revolutionary Iran, political discussions and navigating their lives in exile in the USA – a country they are not fully assimilated to, sometimes by choice. She absorbs the trauma of their family without experiencing it. This childhood experience influences Moaveni's identity formation and her sense of belonging. As she inherits the sense of longing and fears, she becomes the one to process her inherited trauma when she returns to Iran.

⁹ Naghibi, Nima *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*. (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 129.

¹⁰ Hirsch, Marianne, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 12, <https://colab.ws/articles/10.1353%2Fyale.2001.0008>.

¹¹ Ibid, 9.

1.3 Nostalgia

The word nostalgia originally comes from the Greek *nostos* – to return home, and *algia* – a painful feeling. The condition nostalgia described was diagnosed as a severe and potentially life-threatening medical condition.¹² During history, nostalgia is seen as a medical disease, that can be cured, and later as a form of trauma. Over time, the perception changes and now it is no longer described like a form of trauma, but as an emotional wound.¹³ When someone is feeling nostalgic, they recall meaningful moments, often from their childhood, or past relationships. They usually see it with an idealized perspective, wishing to experience it again. This awakens a sentimental feeling and a longing for the past.¹⁴ Nostalgic memories of pre-revolutionary Iran are not only about missing a past that was lost, but mourning for one's future, a future that could have been.¹⁵ Many people born in diaspora, experience “genealogical nostalgia: the affective drive to uncover, preserve, and record our family history and homeland—this notion of feeling a place “in our bones,” despite never having seen it.”¹⁶

Nostalgia serves varying roles in individuals' lives. On one hand, it can provide comfort during struggles, helping individuals find meaning and maintain a connection to their cultural roots. On the other hand, excessive thinking about the past can slow down adaptation to a new life circumstances.

Both memoirs are marked by nostalgia. While Moaveni's experience of nostalgia is influenced by her early childhood visit in Tehran and longing for idealized prerevolutionary Iran of her family, Bahrapour's experience is influenced by her own positive memories of home, where she spent her childhood.

When Moaveni returns to Iran, she realizes that the reality behind her family's nostalgia no longer fully exists. Her negative perception of nostalgia is evident in the way she views Iranian diaspora and their longing for the idealized past. It encourages a rigid relationship with Iran and prevents them from understanding of the contemporary Iran and its politics, society, and culture.¹⁷ Her perspective on nostalgia is complex. She feels the nostalgia for

¹² Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *We Would Not Have Come Without You. In Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, (Routledge, 2006), 82.

¹³ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 75.

¹⁴ Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut, “Finding Meaning in Nostalgia,” *Review of General Psychology* 22, no. 1, (2018): 49, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000109>

¹⁵ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 76.

¹⁶ Jennifer Delisle, *Iraq in my Bones: Second-Generation Memory in the Age of Global Media*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 384.

¹⁷ Naghibi. *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 148.

an idealized pre-revolutionary Iran and her childhood memory, but she criticizes the nostalgia of Iranian diaspora.

On the other hand, Bahrapour expresses nostalgia in a much more positive light. Throughout her memoir, she describes her childhood through a nostalgic lens, recalling her memories filled with warmth. Bahrapour's recollection of her childhood memories is idyllic, reflecting the love for her homeland.¹⁸ While she cherishes her memories of Tehran, she acknowledges the political situation that shapes her childhood as well.

¹⁸ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 137.

2 IDENTITY

Identity becomes especially complex in the context of migration, exile, and living between two cultures. Individuals who live between two cultures often struggle with the expectations of both societies, questioning how they should act and where they belong. To understand this struggle, it is helpful to explore the theories that explain how identity is formed and influenced.

2.1 Goffman's theory

In the book *Stigma*, Erving Goffman introduces three aspects of identity. He explains that our identity is influenced not only by how we perceive ourselves, but also by how other people see us. He believes that our identity consists of our social, personal, and ego identities.

The first of these is the social identity. It refers to the roles and traits that others assign to us. When we meet someone, we immediately create a version of who we think they are. Goffman calls this a virtual social identity. However, sometimes, the imagined identity does not match the person's true attributes, especially if we perceive something negative about the individual's personality. This mismatch creates a stigma, where the individual is marked by a flaw often seen as socially unpleasant.¹⁹ Stigma is a way of showing that an individual does not fit into the standards that society perceives as normal.

Secondly, a personal identity refers to a person's biography and what makes them unique individuals within the social structure. He suggests that we carry specific signs that identify us throughout our lives. These signs can be our personal information or even our fingerprints, tattoos, birthmarks, etc. Additionally, Goffman suggests that this concept of personal identity is not about our sense of self, but about signs that distinguish us from others.²⁰ Goffman calls our unique signs "identity pegs". Every person has a unique combination of their identity pegs and personal history attached to them for their personal identity.²¹

Lastly, Goffman mentions a third kind of identity - ego identity. Ego identity is connected to our subjective sense of self. How we view ourselves, our feelings, and how we emotionally experience our lives.²²

¹⁹ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Pelican, 1968), 12.

²⁰ Simon Clarke, "Culture and Identity," in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Tony Bennett and John Frow (SAGE Publications, 2008), 513.

²¹ Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 74.

²² Clarke, "Culture and Identity," 513.

Recognizing these three aspects of identity - social, personal, and ego, helps to understand that our identity is not only influenced by our subjective sense of self but also by other people and our identity pegs.

2.2 Narrative identity

After understanding Goffman's concept of three identity aspects, there is another aspect that influences the identity formation. The narrative identity gives us a better understanding of who we are by focusing on our personal interpretation of our experiences - how we give them meaning through stories and narratives.

Narrative identity is connected to storytelling which is closely related to interpersonal relationships. People naturally create stories to share them. The stories are usually connected with our social interactions – we share experiences that include facing challenges and pursuing goals. A story needs to have a protagonist, who faces obstacles and whose journey leads to resolution.²³

As people grow older and reach adolescence, the way they think about themselves evolves. They start to form a narrative identity through their life story, thinking more deeply about themselves and how their past experiences influence who they are now and who they are becoming. The narrative identity helps individuals to understand their life purpose and their life as a whole. People start identifying themselves as the main characters of their life story, while finding connections between different moments of their lives, recognizing important turning points, and finding out about their life lessons. This process is called autobiographical reasoning.²⁴ Life stories, that are filled with overcoming struggles are highly favored within the American society. These stories are strongly associated with positive personality traits, good mental health, and mature approach to adult life. However, the identity narrative is not created only based on an individual's life story, but it is influenced by stories and values within their culture. Therefore, the individual author of the life story becomes a co-author.²⁵

The narrative identity is especially important for the lives of both Moaveni and Bahrampour. Both authors reflect on who they are through storytelling and use autobiographical reasoning to understand the turning points and important experiences that

²³ Dan P. McAdams, "First We Invented Stories, Then They Changed Us: The Evolution of Narrative Identity," *ESIC Journal*, no. 1 (2019): 2, <https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/McAdamsFirstWeStoriesThenTheyChangedUs2019.pdf>.

²⁴ Ibid, 8.

²⁵ Ibid, 14.

led them to who they are now. The idea that an author of the life story is actually a co-author is especially connected to Moaveni's childhood because she grows up constantly hearing stories filled with nostalgia, trauma and fear that shape her sense of Iranianness during her early years.

2.3 Cultural identity

The cultural identity of an immigrant is formed through an interaction with their past and present in the third space of diaspora.²⁶ As mentioned previously, a combination of social interactions and self-awareness are the most important factors that form our identity. While focusing on these factors, we can divide immigrant's cultural identity formation into 3 aspects.

The first aspect is referred to as essentialism. It focuses on the way the individual inherits certain characteristics of a cultural community. Individuals naturally acquire values and traits that are unique for a specific community and exist beyond time. The major criticism of this approach is that it overlooks the role of social interactions and personal experience in the identity formation.²⁷

The second aspect is called social constructivism, and it describes the way that the cultural identity of an individual evolves by social interactions throughout the life. This approach claims that cultural communities and cultural identities are "continuously constructed, shaped and reshaped by individuals."²⁸ This approach emphasizes the fact, that cultural identity is not something fixed, but it is constantly changing and evolving through cultural influences. This approach, however, does not pay attention to the shared cultural values and historical experiences within a community.²⁹

The combination of these two aspects is summarized by S. Hall. He introduces the concepts of being and becoming.

Within his concept of being, he focuses on the similarities and oneness among a group of people based on their shared historical experiences and values that give people continuous stability and meaning despite the changes and disruptions in the actual history.³⁰

²⁶ Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, "Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review," *Journal of Political Science* 21 (2021): 101, <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v21i0.35268>.

²⁷ Ibid, 105.

²⁸ Diana Petkova and J. Lehtonen, *Cultural identity in intercultural context*, (University of Jyväskylä, 2005), 17.

²⁹ Bhandari, "Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review," 105.

³⁰ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Columbia University Press, 1994), 223.

This idea of oneness is seen as a stable source of meaning, based on shared culture and history. It suggests that a true, authentic cultural identity lies beneath the surface and acts as a powerful, creative force.³¹

On the other hand, he sees becoming as forming the cultural identity through constant changes in history, culture, and power. The cultural identity is influenced by both the past and the future and is continually transformed.³² Identity undergoes a constant process of both being and becoming and the continuous negotiations between the past and the present.³³

This is especially relevant for people who grow up between two cultures. Their identity is often influenced by navigating their lives between two contrasting social norms and values and between past, present, and future. What feels normal or accepted in one culture might seem strange or even wrong in the other. People living in this in-between space often find themselves switching between different versions of themselves depending on the cultural context they are in.

2.4 Third space and hybridity

The concepts of third space and hybridity, introduced by Homi Bhabha and are deeply connected. As most theorists agree, hybridity emerges from the interactions between colonizers and the colonized, resulting in the dual formation of identity. Bhabha argues that colonizers and the colonized are mutually dependent in constructing a shared culture.³⁴

The place where the cultural encounter of the colonizer and colonized happens and where the hybrid identity is formed, is called the “third space.” This space is marked by ambiguity, and resistance to the colonial dominance. It is characterized by dismantling of the binary of the East and West, self and other, or colonizer and colonized.³⁵ Bhabha explains that the power of the third space lies in its ability to transform the elements that are neither fully one thing nor the other into something in-between.³⁶ Colonizers are often trying to impose a specific cultural identity on the colonized which results in hybrid identities that are neither fully one thing or the other.³⁷

³¹ Bhandari, "Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review," 106.

³² Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.

³³ Bhandari, "Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review," 107.

³⁴ Haj Yazdiha, "Conceptualizing Hybridity: Deconstructing Boundaries through the Hybrid" (City University of New York, 2010), 31–32.

³⁵ Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, "Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review," *Prithvi Academic Journal* 5, (2022): 171, <https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v5i1.45049>.

³⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 28.

³⁷ Bhandari, "Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review," 172.

The third space is important because it functions as a room for new identities to emerge, allowing individuals to redefine existing traditions, values, and cultural norms. It is only when we acknowledge that all cultural systems are formed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation that we can understand why the idea of culturally pure identity is unsustainable, even before we look at historical evidence of hybridity.³⁸

Bhabha mentions how F. Fanon views hybridity. He offers an insight into hybridity with an example of the Algerian revolution. The people who initiate revolutionary cultural changes carry hybrid identities. During their struggle for liberation, the Algerian people move away from the fixed nationalist identity that once protected them from colonial influence. This break allows them to redefine their cultural identities in a fluid space influenced by cultural differences. The changed political situation can transform the meaning of their colonial past into symbols of freedom in the future.³⁹

The concepts of Third Space and hybridity strongly resonate with the diasporic experiences of Azadeh Moaveni and Tara Bahrapour. Moaveni navigates the contrast of being surrounded by her Iranian family as well as American culture, often feeling like she belongs to none. Bahrapour's childhood is marked by travelling between USA and Iran, with parents from both countries which creates sense of feeling in-between. The diaspora is basically a third space where identity is created by constant negotiation between two contrasting cultures and values. Many people in diaspora, including Bahrapour and Moaveni, represent a mix of both. Their hybrid identities are formed in this in-between space that is not entirely Iranian nor American. The concepts of third space and hybridity help us understand that cultural identity is not formed by choosing one culture over another, but by creating a new, hybrid identity.

³⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004), 54.

³⁹ Ibid, 55.

3 THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Both memoirs are strongly marked by the Iranian Revolution, and it is helpful to understand its process. Moaveni does not experience the revolution, however its impact shapes her identity through postmemory. On the other hand, Bahrampour goes through the revolution in Iran and consequently immigrates to the USA with her family.

In the 1970s, Iran is under the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. During his reign, Iran undergoes a rapid modernization - the country becomes reoriented from agriculture towards economic development, industrialization, and urbanization. What comes with it is, however a corruption and inequality.⁴⁰ His politics is controversial because of its pro-American orientation and the authoritative regime enforced by a secret intelligence organization SAVAK, which arrests and tortures people, who openly disagree with the regime.⁴¹

In the late 1970s, many Iranians become unhappy with the slow disappearance of their Iranian values over the Western. Among these people, Ayatollah Khomeini emerges as a central figure, calling for a return to Islamic values. In 1979, the monarchy is overthrown, and the Islamic Republic is established.⁴² Many people from the upper, and middle class emigrate due to the increased activity of the revolutionary courts that accuse corrupted businessmen, former functionaries of the Shah's regime, and many others, from crimes of being "at war with God." Some of these accusations are followed by executions. This is because the new regime follows a particularly harsh version of the Sharia law.⁴³

One of the most significant moments of the revolution is the U.S. Hostage Crisis. In October 1979, President Carter allows Shah in exile to enter the United States because of the medical treatment for his cancer. In a few days, Iranian students seize the American embassy in Tehran, holding 52 American diplomats hostage for 444 days.⁴⁴ For the United States, this means hostility towards Iran. Carter freezes all Iranian assets in the USA and bans trade. Iran is seen as the most anti-American country in the world, since then.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran* (Penguin Books, 2019), 94.

⁴¹ Vittorio Felci, "A Cumulative Image Problem: Human Rights and US Foreign Policy towards Iran in the Seventies," *Nidaba* 2, no. 1 (2017): 51, <https://journals.lub.lu.se/nidaba/article/view/16667/15061>.

⁴² Stephen Jones, "The Islamic Republic of Iran: an introduction," (Research Paper, House of Commons Library, 2009), 8, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/ukhcl/2009/en/71382>.

⁴³ Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran*, 147-148.

⁴⁴ Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, "Causes of the US Hostage Crisis in Iran: The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," *Taylor and Francis online*, Security Studies 26, no.4, (2017): 665.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 665-666.

The hostage crisis is particularly relevant for the Iranian diaspora in the USA. During that time, Iranians are often perceived with suspicion and hostility regardless of their political opinions.

4 LIPSTICK JIHAD

Moaveni's memoir gives us an outlook on how growing up in the Iranian diaspora in the USA shapes a person's identity formation. At the beginning of the memoir, she reflects on her childhood, her family, and her connection with Iran. She continues with the relation of her life in Cairo and in Tehran, where she moves in her early 20s. She discusses the problem of women's rights, as well as the political situation in Iran. Moaveni often uses examples of real conversations with people to highlight the issues of the society in Iran or the diaspora. She focuses on the problem of women's rights and often captures the stories of people in her life in Iran to show examples of the real life there.

4.1 Growing up suspended between two cultures

Moaveni was born in 1976 in Palo Alto, California to Iranian parents, who originally move to California without the intention of staying there forever. Moaveni calls her mother "Maman." Maman wants to stay in California for some time, because her mother moves there for the rest of her life, due to a heart disease that can be cured by a pacemaker and skilled cardiologists. Maman wants to accompany her as she settles there permanently.⁴⁶ However, the Iranian revolution breaks out and they have to stay in the USA for an uncertain period of time, with the possibility of staying there forever. Shortly after Azadeh Moaveni is born, her parents get divorced and Moaveni lives with her mum, while seeing her father only on the weekends.

Moaveni refers to her childhood as a confusing period of her life with a serious impact on her identity formation. Many Iranians perfectly integrate into American society, learn the language, and assimilate to a fast-paced way of life, while successfully moving their wealth and re-establishing their position quickly.⁴⁷ However, this is not the case with Moaveni. She grows up with a single mother, who is trying to fuse the traditional Iranian culture with modern American culture. In their family, there is a strong sense of regret, because they are perceived as the family who fails to rebuild their life.⁴⁸ At school. Moaveni learns to fit in with her classmates, sound, look, and act like them, but then comes home to a special, Persian world, full of a different language, "exotic" smells, food, and rituals.⁴⁹ The longing for a pre-revolutionary Iran – a result of "postmemory" is passed on to Moaveni by

⁴⁶ Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, (PublicAffairs, 2005), 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 19.

her family. Her family members directly or indirectly experienced the revolution and the hostage crisis in the USA. The family narratives and discussions about the revolution and Iranian politics are on a daily basis.⁵⁰ Moaveni's identity and longing for an idealized Iran are also significantly influenced by her early visit to Tehran, when she is 5 years old.

To me, it was like a fairy tale, and I peered through the netting to the living room, to the table heaped with plump dates and the dense, aromatic baklava we would nibble on later with tea.⁵¹

Iran has a magical feeling for her because as she grows up in the American suburbs, everything suddenly feels different in a good way. Her nostalgia is manifested by the desire to have a childhood and Iranian home, which she could never have, besides the visit to Tehran when she was 5 years old.⁵²

Moaveni refers to the fights with her mum over American and Iranian values. Moaveni's mother senses the importance of keeping her Iranian values, but she is also happy with gaining her American independence. She refuses to fully cling to one side or the other, which confuses Moaveni's life and sense of her identity. Moaveni's mother cherishes some aspects of American culture like freedom, independence, and openness, however, she criticizes their social skills and their outlook on sex and shopping. Even though she believes that premarital sex is okay for men, she believes that it is not okay for women.⁵³ Moaveni often expresses her disagreement. In contrast to her mother, Moaveni describes her father less frequently and more positively. She reflects on the only aspect of Iranian culture, her father cherishes - the admiration of nature. Moaveni recalls how every weekend her father picks her up to water his plants and Iranian herbs that grow on a plot of land that he rents. She also recalls long walks they take around the hills of Los Altos, distinguishing one tree from another.⁵⁴

4.2 The first generation of diaspora and displacement

Moaveni captures the stories of her family's struggles with assimilation into the American culture. The community and family are one of the most important aspects of life in Iran.

⁵⁰ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 147.

⁵¹ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 5.

⁵² Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 147.

⁵³ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 14-15.

Therefore, rebuilding their lives in a different country comes with struggles, as her family members experience a loss of their status, and connection to the community and family.

Some people face more challenges while living in the diaspora. Moaveni talks about her grandfather Agha Joon, who does not assimilate to American culture at all. Her grandfather lives in an apartment complex in a big Californian city, taking care of a small strip of green he has available, trying to recreate at least a bit of garden, he used to have back in Iran. Agha Joon spends most of the time reading Iranian poetry, going for walks, and maintaining his patch of garden.⁵⁵ He would only see the good and refuse to assimilate and adjust his life to something different. Agha Joon's nostalgia, on the one hand, helps him cope with the dislocation, but on the other hand, keeps him stuck in the past, clinging to an idealized version of Iran that is no longer present. It isolates him from the world around him and choosing not to learn English makes it impossible for him to assimilate and feel a sense of belonging in exile.

One of the most important people in her childhood and later on in her life, when she decides to move to Tehran, is her aunt Khaleh Farzi. She also experiences the trauma of dislocation. Khaleh Farzi experiences her exciting life full of parties in pre-revolutionary Tehran. She spends weekends at the Caspian Sea, loves wearing expensive clothes and fully enjoys her life. After the revolution, she finds herself in a shared apartment with her parents and she can no longer enjoy her free, party life. Because of her new life situation, with no money to spend in malls, she is forced to find a job, however with her useless college degree, she was only able to find a job as a waitress.⁵⁶ Her life is no longer a dream, but an unpleasant reality.

Moaveni also writes about the real struggle that many other Iranians have to go through. Husbands are suddenly unable to provide and lose their respect, and elderly people cannot retire in the comfort of their home.⁵⁷ Since Moaveni is a second generation of Iranian diaspora, her experiences and struggles with belonging are different.

4.3 Identity formation, nostalgia, and belonging

Moaveni has a conflicting relationship with Iran and her identity throughout her memoir. Since she lives between two worlds – an American school and an Iranian household with contrasting values and expectations, she has to suppress one part of her identity to make the

⁵⁵ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 12-13.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 12.

other part more visible when needed. At school, she naturally wants to fit in with her classmates and be more American, but at home, she naturally wants to fulfill the expectations and social norms of her family. Moaveni's sense of her identity as an Iranian amplifies as she starts attending university. Moaveni studies journalism at the University of California in Los Angeles. Because she meets people who are proud to have a different ethnicity than American, she feels safe and proud to embrace her Iranian identity.⁵⁸ As she feels like she does not fully belong to America and in her mind, she becomes a "plain Iranian." She assumes that Iran is the place where she will fully belong.⁵⁹

Iran represents a lost homeland that she has mostly known through the nostalgic stories of her family members, a first generation in exile who often romanticize pre-revolutionary Iran while criticizing the post-revolutionary regime.⁶⁰ She also has her own nostalgia that comes from her early childhood visit in Tehran and her beautiful memories from that time. Her strong sense of nostalgia for Iran can also be explained by the concept of postmemory – Moaveni "inherits" the longing for a lost homeland and imagines Iran as a beautiful, poetic, and mythical place. Nima Naghibi (2016) explains that this is connected to the "postmemory" – the transmission of memory from one generation to the next. Related to this, Moaveni desires to move "back" to a homeland she never fully personally knew.⁶¹ In connection with postmemory, Moaveni also experiences the "genealogical nostalgia," "the affective drive to uncover, preserve, and record our family history and homeland-this notion of feeling a place 'in our bones,' despite having never seen it"⁶² which is common for the second generation in exile and is shaped by a gap between personal memory and inherited family stories,⁶³ she naturally becomes interested in learning about the history of the Iranian revolution and discovers modern Iranian poetry.

To pursue a career in journalism focused on the Middle East, Moaveni decides to move to Cairo. Moaveni likes the city and lives there for a year. When she finds out that an important independent newspaper in Tehran is closing and there have been several students' demonstrations, which lead to a raid of security forces of the student's dormitories attacking students while sleeping, she does not hesitate and decides to move to Tehran.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 27.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁶⁰ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 149

⁶¹ Ibid, 13-14.

⁶² Ibid, 147.

⁶³ Delisle, *Iraq in My Bones': Second-Generation Memory in the Age of Global Media*, 138.

⁶⁴ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 34-35.

Moaveni first romanticizes her arrival in Tehran. She can finally revisit her old memories, the history of the country, and her ancestors that up until now, mostly exist in her family members' narratives.⁶⁵ However, the question of her Iranian identity becomes more complex. When she first arrives, she believes to be Iranian in a similar way as other Iranians are and assumes that it would take her a month to assimilate. She starts realizing that her Iranian identity is not shaped in the same way as the identity of Iranians living their whole lives in the Islamic Republic. Moaveni reflects:

I hadn't done what so many of my Iranian peers were doing, retreating into the mountains to make out with boyfriends, numbing myself with drugs because a chemical haze was more bearable than the stark reality of daily life.⁶⁶

After living her whole life alienated in America with many people thinking, she comes from a country full of women in veils and terrorists⁶⁷ and later believing that Iran is the place she will finally belong to, leaves her disappointed and confused.

At what point, I asked her, will I stop being considered an outsider? I live here, I breathe the pollution, I suffer the bureaucracy, I carry the passport, both my parents are Iranian, and I know more about Shiism and Iranian poetry than half the girls my age.⁶⁸

After a while of living in Iran, Moaveni starts to be aware of her American consciousness and later admits that she is partly American. The more she tries to fit her idea of being Iranian into the reality of life in Iran, the more she realizes that it does not match. She reflects that she believes in an unconditional love, as an American. However, in Iran, love seems to be conditional. People are entitled to love by prenuptial agreement and love is more about fulfilling expectations, rather than being loved for who they truly are.⁶⁹

By the end of the memoir, Moaveni has not found a place where she fully belongs. Her experience of living in Iran does not resolve her identity conflict but instead deepens it. She recognizes the tension between her American values and the expectations of Iranian society, particularly regarding gender roles, love, and freedom. Moaveni realizes that rather than fitting into one single cultural identity, she lives somewhere in-between. Even though

⁶⁵ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 149.

⁶⁶ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 136.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 108.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 136.

her parents are Iranian, she cannot deny the influence of most of her life spent in America. By the end of the memoir, Moaveni writes about people who were born as the second generation of the Iranian diaspora as “fated to be at home nowhere – not completely in America, not completely in Iran.”⁷⁰ Her sense of home and belonging changes to a communal space of people who are also partly Iranian and American.

4.4 Women’s rights

Moaveni reflects a lot on the lack of women’s rights in Iran. It is not only about the mandatory veil but also about who the women in Iran became after so many years of living under patriarchal rule. How their voices and self-expression have to become suppressed, how women navigate their relationships, that they have to suppress their needs and desires and do what their husbands, clerics, or thought police say. She describes the segregation of men and women.

Moaveni describes that before the revolution, it was normal for people to be in the presence of an opposite gender, at least in the cities. Men and women do not have to be married or family in order to show signs of friendship or love in public. In highly traditional communities, people are usually segregated but after the revolution, everything changes.

The revolution reversed this. It threw up obstacles everywhere to casual coexistence between the sexes: segregated elementary schools and university classes, segregated buses, segregated restaurant lines, segregated passport offices.⁷¹

For a long time, masculinity and femininity in Iran have been related to space and movement. Men can freely participate in activities outside the house without any restrictions. On the other hand, women are expected to stay in the house. Femininity and the ideal woman are defined by staying in the house, warned against mobility.⁷² Women are allowed to participate in activities outside only if she is fully covered. If she is not, her freedom of movement is diminished.⁷³ Minoo Moalem, in her book *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister*, shows that women’s role in society is viewed as mothers, sisters, and daughters, rather than as autonomous individuals. Their connection to God is mediated through male-centered familial roles, denying them a direct, unfiltered spiritual agency. Women have to become

⁷⁰ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 246.

⁷¹ Ibid, 190.

⁷² Fazareh Milani, *Words not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*, (Syracuse University Press, 2011), 4-5.

⁷³ Ibid, 10.

dependent on men and community before becoming independent individuals before God. Women's value is thus recognized only when aligned with domestic duties and communal functions, reinforcing their dependence on patriarchal validation.⁷⁴

Moaveni often reflects on the mandatory veil for women. She believes it to be a symbol of the failure of the system. At the beginning of the revolution, women go to protests in veils to show disagreement with Westernization, however after the revolution, every woman has to wear the veil compulsorily because mullahs made it a law. Moaveni says that as a person who was born after the revolution, this was what she considered as a truth. As she gets to know how the reality is like Iran, she realizes that it is not the worst restriction for most modern-day Iranian women, but still, it symbolizes how the country ignores women's legal status. The veil disables women to freely express themselves, which Moaveni claims, to be a basic human right.⁷⁵

As Moaveni returns to Iran, it is generally safe for women to subtly break the rules. They choose to only cover their hair partially and they wear makeup. Only when they see members of the Basij, they quickly have to remove their lipstick and cover their hair back. Otherwise, they might face problems.

4.5 Surveillance, censorship, and fear

Moaveni offers a unique personal insight into the political oppression in post-revolutionary Iran. As a journalist, she has to be careful about what she writes about. One of the major aspects of Moaveni's job in Tehran is surveillance and censorship. She describes going through a series of meetings with Ministry of intelligence officers, "Mr. X" and "Mr. Sleepy." They keep interviewing her about everything, often threatening the safety of her and her family.

Worst of all, they made references to my family, casually mentioning where a cousin or an uncle worked, to show me they knew even my distant relatives, implying that even they were vulnerable through association with me. Every session was a battle of wills. I lectured them about journalistic ethics; they lectured me about national security. In the end, I was always shaking and drenched with sweat.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Minoo Moalem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, (University of California Press, 2005), 113.

⁷⁵ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 170.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 130.

In the post-revolutionary Iran, fear is present most of the time. Moaveni later reflects, that life in Tehran is difficult and compares it to a “minefield that demands a constant, intense vigilance.” While realizing that this is the harsh reality.⁷⁷ Moaveni also reflects on how professional friendships are influenced by the regime’s manipulation. She learns that most journalists are also under constant surveillance, going through a series of interviews with officers like Mr. X, often forced to report on each other.⁷⁸ This form of manipulation helps to gain control over people and the media.

Moaveni observes how political repression is institutionalized. She writes about the regime having a campaign structured to discourage the opposition by making expressions of disagreement with the regime dangerous. Activists are sentenced to 1 to 10 years in prison and are often targets of blackmailing, threatened by the expose of their old scandals or affairs. Many of the targeted people have to sign documents, where they confess to their “crimes” to save their reputation. As a result, many people give up on their political work.⁷⁹

Moaveni often discusses the Basiji, a kind of unofficial moral police that often violently enforces not following Islamic values. She describes her terrifying encounter that happens a few days before the elections.⁸⁰ Moaveni and her friend Dariush are stopped at one of the checkpoints that Basiji usually set up during special occasions. She describes how being a woman, improperly wearing her hijab, and sitting in a car with a man make her behavior inappropriate and immoral. The Interrogator shortly interviews them and after seeing that she is American, and her response to who is she going to vote for, the interrogator commands them to go to a place that Moaveni refers to as “Basiji barrack.”⁸¹ They are detained for about an hour or two there, threatened with a possibility of being taken to the Intelligence Ministry, where “beating, sexual assault and possibly a charge of espionage” can possibly happen. Eventually, both of them are released, shocked by what happened and could happen.⁸²

Regarding the politics and administration, Moaveni criticizes the clerics for being the face of a system where religion is used to justify control and repression, blurring the line between religion and power.

⁷⁷ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 111.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 113.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 114.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 137.

⁸¹ Ibid, 138-139.

⁸² Ibid, 140-141.

It was only over time, after repeated exposure to womanizing clerics, clerics who stole from the state and built financial empires, who ordered assassinations like gangsters, who gave Friday sermons attacking poodles, that I came to understand the virulence of my father and my uncle's hate for the Iranian clergy. Perhaps their flaws were no greater than those of ordinary mortals, but ordinary mortals did not claim divine right to rule, ineptly, over seventy million people.⁸³

Despite this and more, Moaveni still continues with her work as a journalist. Even though she faces constant surveillance, she refuses to be silenced.

⁸³ Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad*, 101.

5 TO SEE AND SEE AGAIN: A LIFE IN IRAN AND AMERICA

Tara Bahrapour was born 12 years before the revolution. Her mother is from the USA and works as a singer. Her father is born to an upper-class Iranian family and works as a supervisor at the University and later as an architect. In the memoir, Bahrapour often refers to them as “Mama” and “Baba.” She has 2 younger siblings – Sufi and Ali and attends an international school in Tehran. With her mother they travel between Tehran and Los Angeles. In the memoir, Bahrapour describes her story with nostalgia and positivity through her childhood eyes which adds up to the authenticity of her story. Bahrapour emphasizes descriptions, painting the atmosphere and catching real conversations. This helps us to see what it is exactly like for a child to grow up in Iran, move to America, and cope with dislocation.

5.1 Childhood and belonging in Tehran

Bahrapour’s family moves to Tehran when she is 3 years old. Tara Bahrapour’s early childhood in Tehran is painted with a sense of warmth in detail. She remembers her childhood as idyllic because she feels free – a typical Iranian family would not approve of it. She also does not feel like a stranger in Iran as she might feel like if she came from a purely American family.⁸⁴

But in real life it’s not easy to get into trouble at our house. Mama and Baba don’t make us eat all the food off our plates or take naps the way parents do in books, and there is nothing in the house that we are not allowed to play with.⁸⁵

This shows how their life in Iran is not typical – it is much less strict than in traditional families. Their mum also lets little Tara and Ali play outside - something that is not common for Iranian children and the older family members disapprove of it. Bahrapour vividly captures her surroundings, as for example their garden where she spends a lot of time playing with her siblings:

⁸⁴ Tara Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America* (University of California Press, 1999), 203.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 52.

Our garden has a tiled driveway, a family of cats, a canopy of sour-grape vines, and a small wading pool with a hose to water the trees and cool the hot tiles; but from the street all you see are a few branches hanging over the top of the bricks.⁸⁶

One of the important themes of her childhood is how she has to act or speak to feel “Iranian enough.” As a half-Iranian child, she sometimes struggles with the language and expectations of her Iranian family members. They sometimes fail to understand that she does not always speak Farsi correctly or does not know all the traditions. Bahrapour also writes about her mum, who has to assimilate to an Iranian culture to belong. She converts to Islam to be better accepted by her husband’s family, as a gesture that reflects her willingness to integrate and be respectful of Iranian customs. Rather than being judged harshly for her cultural differences, her “foreignness” gives her a kind of protected status.

Mama is like a child performing adult tasks - if she doesn’t get them right it’s okay because she’s foreign; and if she does get them right, they praise her lavishly, talking over her head as if she still doesn’t understand them.⁸⁷

As Bahrapour writes, “Being foreign, she was considered an expert on anything Western,” including health advice or her style.⁸⁸ She never expresses any disappointment throughout her life in Tehran, however, she later admits that she has some sense of regret because she only spends time painting in their house in Tehran, while she could have been a successful singer in Hollywood.⁸⁹

As little Bahrapour struggles with Farsi, she starts attending a course “Quick Farsi,” which is for the students, whose Farsi is not good enough. She describes an old Iranian lady who enters the room and starts speaking the fastest Farsi, Tara has ever heard.⁹⁰ She recalls the memory when “everyone takes out a piece of paper and starts to write. The teacher talks on, and soon I can’t see her or anyone else because my eyes are brimming with tears.”⁹¹

Although the first Farsi class is not the best experience for her, Bahrapour quickly starts to enjoy learning Farsi and learns one new word every day. Learning Farsi becomes

⁸⁶ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 54-55.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 54.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 202.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 49.

⁹¹ Ibid.

like a game. Something like “breaking of a secret code.”⁹² She later understands and speaks Farsi very well and especially understands the slow accent of her relatives.

As a child growing up in Tehran before the revolution, Bahrapour experiences a strong sense of belonging. She describes her Iranian childhood with a playful curiosity and warmth of her family. However, she later learns that her mother has felt guilty about raising her and her brother in Iran, believing they might be missing out on an American childhood. During their childhood, her mother tries to combine the warmth and closeness of Iranian family life with the freedom of American culture, organizing special birthday parties and combining an upbringing that reflects both worlds. When her mother reveals this guilt, Bahrapour finds it unexpected.⁹³ She later questions how much her understanding of Iran is shaped by the way her parents present it.

They were not talking about “my” Iran. We had left at the end of my childhood, and like childhood it had frozen in my mind into a mythical land. Once we landed in America, I lost the power to separate Iran from my memories of what it had been.⁹⁴

When Bahrapour’s parents decide to move to Iran, she hesitantly adapts to the Iranian culture. But as she has to relocate to the USA, she must adapt again.⁹⁵

5.2 The Iranian Revolution

Bahrapour’s parents do a good job of not letting their true feelings and emotions about the revolution to have a negative impact on their children.

Bahrapour recalls the first memories of hearing gunshots. “But now the shots are right outside our house. We hear them while we’re watching *The Flintstones*, and we run into Mama and Baba’s room to look out the window.”⁹⁶ These are the early signs of the revolution and soon after, their school closes. Even though the signs of the revolution are visible, Bahrapour’s parents joke about it. Her mother jokes about BBC referring to the unrest as a “revolution,” and continues: “How can it be a revolution when the nafti still clanks down the alley with his big greasy canisters, singing “Naft!” in his piercing voice?”⁹⁷

⁹² Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 49.

⁹³ Ibid, 202.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 203.

⁹⁵ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 132.

⁹⁶ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 94.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 109.

Even though they are almost out of cooking gas and they have to eat food that does not require cooking, they are trying to keep it light.

It's fun to eat from a tin, and Ali and I take turns winding the metal key around the triangle until it pops open to reveal our pink dinner, glistening in the light of the oil lamp.⁹⁸

The situation becomes more serious when Baba's name appears on the "List of Freemasons." It is a list targeting Westernized Iranians and potential enemies of the revolution.⁹⁹ Both parents keep telling the kids, that the situation will get better, even though they have to stay at home all day, and many people including Tara's friends are leaving. One day Baba brings 4 tickets to Los Angeles.¹⁰⁰ Bahrapour believes that they are going to the USA only for a short period of time to see their grandparents and wait until schools open again. "Schools do not shut down for good, and neither do countries."¹⁰¹

Tara does not even look carefully at her house before leaving. She does not realize she will never return to it in the same way. As she boards the plane, she looks back at Tehran: "This was my home. It was in trouble, and I was leaving it. At that moment, Iran in all its shakiness became more precious to me than any safe country could ever be."¹⁰²

By the time her family leaves Iran, the situation in Iran becomes terrifying. People are taken from their homes based on accusations - having studied in America, married a foreigner, or even played tennis at the U.S. Embassy could make someone a target. She later learns that even their neighbor had been shot while hanging laundry on her balcony.¹⁰³

Nima Naghibi in *Women Write Iran* states that Bahrapour along with other Iranian authors share a similar understanding of the revolution which causes a "traumatic break" in their lives.¹⁰⁴

5.3 The life in the USA

Even though Bahrapour is half-American, life in exile is especially challenging at first. She has a strong nostalgia for her childhood in Tehran and compares it with her life in

⁹⁸ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 112.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 116.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 163.

¹⁰⁴ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 14.

America which is not as warm and filled with joy. She dreams about the childhood she could have had. In Iran, her family was building a new house, her father had established his career, but in the USA, everything is lost. When the family arrives in America, it feels like Mama and Baba silently agree that their old way of living has been wrong. Before, they follow their own desires and live freely but after everything starts falling apart, they seem to treat their new life in rainy Portland as a kind of consequence, almost like they are punishing themselves for the freedom they once had.¹⁰⁵ They “choose” to struggle – the father works manual jobs and the mother changes her direction many times rather than going back to pursue her career as a singer.

Life in Portland is challenging for Bahrapour at first. Even though she tries to see things positively, it does not always help. She often changes schools, as her family moves to different sides of the city, and often describes finally making some friends, but having to move to another school. Even though she is half-American and speaks perfect English, she struggles with belonging and often dreams about her life without struggles in pre-revolutionary Tehran. Her new school in America looks like a “jail” compared to her school in Iran. She hates that she has to be the first one of her siblings to face this unfamiliar world.¹⁰⁶

This is especially clear during the hostage crisis in 1979, which becomes a turning point in how she perceives her identity and how others perceive her. She vividly recalls how her classmates distribute yellow ribbons in solidarity with the American hostages: “I curl down in my chair, betting no one will pass one to me... I hate the people on TV who wear yellow ribbons and shout for Iranians to get on their camels and go back to the desert”¹⁰⁷. She recalls a moment in school when a boy looks at her and says: “Go home, Iranian.” This amplifies her feeling of alienation. She writes, “At my new school, no one gathers around to welcome me or ask me for stories... along with the girl from special ed, I am always the last to be picked for gym-class teams.”¹⁰⁸

During her teenage years, she recalls the fights with her father. He used to be more benevolent, but because of his strong sense of alienation in America, he suddenly becomes more negative and wants Bahrapour to stick more to the Iranian values and way of life. Their once gentle, playful bond they had during childhood in Iran, begins to fade under the

¹⁰⁵ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 248.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 131-132.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 130.

weight of their changed circumstances. Her father, once a respected architect, now works as a carpenter in muddy construction clothes, returning home exhausted.¹⁰⁹

Now he mostly yells a lot. He yells if we play music too loudly or if we leave the back door open or if we turn the heat up too high. He yells at me the most, because I get mad and yell back, and our yelling explodes into huge fights, after which we don't speak to each other for days.¹¹⁰

Her longing for belonging becomes her driving force. Starting high school, she enrolls in everything - choir, drama, school events. Her friends often complain about school, but she quietly loves it, especially the sense of belonging it gives her.¹¹¹ But in America, nothing lasts long. When Tara finally feels like she belongs, they move again. She sometimes tries to convince her parents that Portland is actually good just to make them stay there. But her parents are running out of money and decide to move to California, where she later starts attending university at Berkeley.

5.4 Return to Iran

Bahrapour promises herself to go back to Iran after some time. She knows deep down that Iran will be different from her childhood memories filled with nostalgia. As she comes back, she recognizes some aspects and ordinary things that stay the same:

Walking alone in Tehran for the first time in fifteen years, I feel as if I've been given the key to a locked garden... In fact, the merchandise here is so familiar that I don't even need to look at it carefully—I know the unbleached paper notebooks whose stapled binding falls apart after a day, I know the rooster-brand chiclets that have to be worked in the mouth before they become soft enough to chew,...¹¹²

But something feels strange and unfamiliar. She describes visiting her old house which now looks and feels different.

A tightness wells up in my throat - a sadness shot through with elation. Almost nothing of ours remains, and yet I am wildly happy, simply for the fact that this house is still here and I am standing inside it.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 135.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 155.

¹¹² Ibid, 234.

¹¹³ Ibid, 251.

This moment describes the bittersweet feeling of her return. The home is both familiar and foreign, filled with love and loss all at once. She describes how terrified she feels because of the moral police and how shocked she is by the fact that everyone accepts it as normal. Bahrapour recalls a moment when a group of *komiteh*, the moral police, enter the wedding and she feels scared because she does not have a scarf to cover her head. At that moment, the only thing she thinks about is the cases of women being raped or killed due to breaking these laws. She runs to hide along with other women and when the *komiteh* are gone, everyone acts like nothing happened.¹¹⁴ They accept the fact that this is now a part of life but for Bahrapour, this is something strange.

During her visit to Tehran, Bahrapour reflects a lot on her memories, past and present. On how Iran is now different and how she does not fully fit in. The return to Tehran is not a return to “home” in any complete sense, but a recognition of something in-between. As Naghibi writes, Bahrapour’s memoir “situates her as a more or less fluid border crosser who can live in either or both countries,”¹¹⁵ and embraces “the two cultures rather than the fraught relationship implied by between.”¹¹⁶ This will be explained further in the next subchapter.

5.5 Identity, trauma, and nostalgia

Bahrapour’s choice of the title for the memoir: *To See and See Again: “A Life in Iran and America,”* suggests that she embraces both cultures. Iranian “and” American. She finds her identity more with ease than other diasporic authors - the fluid space in-between is a “product of two cultures with an American mother and an Iranian father.”¹¹⁷ Her memoir highlights the importance of remembering and piecing memories – such as her parent’s or friend’s stories, together.¹¹⁸

Throughout the memoir, Bahrapour does not think about herself as an “expat” or “immigrant.” Even though she admits that her life in Iran was in some ways similar to the expat life. However, the “Americanness” of her family – Her mother being American and her father being educated in the USA, Tara attending the Community School, “provide an extra mark of distinction.”¹¹⁹ Bahrapour recalls a moment of having a talk with her

¹¹⁴ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 225-226.

¹¹⁵ Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 132-133.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 133.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 137.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 127.

¹¹⁹ Bahrapour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 354.

childhood friend about belonging and realizes that even when she was four, she feels different from the people around her. She realizes that if she wanted, she sometimes dressed up as an Iranian woman for a day.

You don't see children of immigrants to America dressing up as Americans for a day; they make sure to dress American every day. But despite all this, my family were not expats in Iran. We were growing up there, our relatives lived there; it was our home.¹²⁰

Bahrampour also states that she does not consider herself an immigrant to America. She speaks perfect English and immediately after landing in the USA, she remembers visiting her grandparent's house. She then shows an appreciation for her unordinary life:

Abroad, our lives had been unlike anyone else's. We had not fit into any mold; compared to Iranian kids in Iran or American kids in America, we had had a sense of being untethered in the world... With no model to follow, we could imagine ourselves anywhere in the world...¹²¹

Bahrampour reflects on the process of accepting her Iranian roots while also embracing her American identity, highlighting how the trauma and a lasting sense of loss deeply affect the people in her generation who were children when it occurred.¹²² She observes that the sense of displacement is particularly strong among Iranians her age: individuals who are young enough to adapt to life in the U.S., but old enough to still carry memories of Iran. They struggle with their sense of belonging, influenced by choices made by their parents rather than by themselves.¹²³ She remembers seeing people trying to find their old Iranian friends – wanting to reconnect with the nostalgia and the sense of home they once felt in Iran. She realizes that she does the same.¹²⁴

Bahrampour becomes aware of a collective effort to reconnect with their past as a way of finding a sense of belonging again. This reflection leads her to realize that she is also engaged in this process, piecing together the old memories not to return to a specific place of origin, but to build a meaningful identity that exists in the space between two worlds.

¹²⁰ Bahrampour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 354.

¹²¹ Ibid, 354-355.

¹²² Naghibi, *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*, 138.

¹²³ Bahrampour, *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America*, 348.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 349.

COMPARISON AND EVALUATION

Both memoirs deal with the topics of belonging, identity formation, nostalgia, and the influence of the Iranian revolution and the life in diaspora on author's lives. Even though the memoirs explore similar topics, both authors emphasize slightly different themes.

Azadeh Moaveni in *Lipstick Jihad* explores her sense of identity – she often questions who she is - whether she is Iranian or American, because she is born into an Iranian family, but spends her whole childhood in the USA influenced by American values. Her writing style is sharper and more journalistic, focusing on capturing the political situation in Iran. Since Moaveni moves to Tehran to work as a journalist, she deals with the themes of political oppression and women's rights a lot. Even though Bahrampour also writes about these topics, Moaveni explores them more in-depth and uses many examples from her own experiences. The other thing that distinguishes her memoir from Bahrampour's is that she was born as the second generation of the Iranian diaspora, and she does not experience the revolution. Even though she does not have a direct experience of it, she is influenced by the "postmemory" of her family. She inherits their narratives and stories that shape her sense of Iranianness. This and her short visit in Tehran lead to a longing for the childhood in Iran she could have had. She struggles with the perception of her identity, at some point, she believes to be "plain Iranian" but as she moves to Tehran, she realizes that her life in America played a huge role in her identity formation and that she cannot deny its influence on her identity and values.

Bahrampour, in contrast, is born 12 years before the revolution and spends most of her childhood in Tehran, the childhood Moaveni was longing for. Her writing style is more descriptive and poetic, capturing the small moments that reveal larger truths about displacement, longing, and memory. She emphasizes careful descriptions, almost like "painting" the atmosphere with words. Her views and what she describes give the readers a perfect sense of how it is in Iran and later in America. Her memoir is more focused on her family dynamics and the experiences of her family members, rather than the political situation and women's rights, even though she writes about it to a certain extent. She beautifully describes her story through her childhood eyes.

Both memoirs are unique in their own way and complement each other. We obtain both Moaveni's personal experiences with the lack of women's rights and the political oppression in the journalism field. We can see what it is like to grow up in the third space of an Iranian diaspora, influenced by the two different cultures and forming a hybrid identity. On the other

hand, Bahrapour provides a beautiful outlook on pre-revolutionary Iran and on growing up as a child of an American and an Iranian. We can also see how displacement and loss of status and home influence the family dynamics and the sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

In the theoretical part, the thesis explored the themes of trauma, identity, nostalgia, and the Iranian Revolution, providing an understanding of the memoirs that the thesis analyzes. The aim was to see how these themes influence the identity formation of Azadeh Moaveni and Tara Bahrampour.

Azadeh Moaveni's memoir highlights the challenges of navigating life as a second generation of the diaspora. She focuses on her identity formation as well as the political situation in Iran and the lack of women's rights – topics that are further explored in the analysis of her memoir. On the other hand, Tara Bahrampour focuses on descriptions, especially on her childhood in Tehran, and how nostalgia shapes her life in America where she lives after the revolution.

The impact of living between two cultures on identity formation is significant. Authors often go through phases of not knowing where they belong, feeling somewhere in-between, not fully Iranian or American. As they grow up, they sometimes try to suppress one of their ethnicities in order to make the other ethnicity more visible. However, they still end up being too American in Iran or too Iranian in America, which is influenced by their lives in America and not experiencing life in Iran for their whole lives. Eventually, they both end up seeing and embracing their identities as something more fluid, not fixed.

Nostalgia influences both author's lives in America – Moaveni is longing for a childhood she could have had if she lived in Iran, and her nostalgia is influenced by the visit to Iran when she was 5 years old. Bahrampour's nostalgia reflects her memories of her idyllic Iranian childhood that she lost. As she moves to the USA, she struggles with longing for her childhood home, the friends that she had, and the parents that were emotionally feeling better.

Trauma is also an important aspect of both author's lives. Moaveni experiences a postmemory – inherited trauma from her older family members who went through struggles with assimilating to a new culture and holding onto the past. They romanticize the pre-revolutionary Iran and discuss the politics frequently. Since Moaveni grows up in this environment, she inherits their nostalgia and longing for Iran. Bahrampour experiences trauma and loss when she moves from Iran to a rainy Portland which is not as idyllic. She struggles with belonging and faces judgement from her classmates because of the U.S. hostage crisis. The trauma of dislocation influences especially her father who loses his status and wants Bahrampour to live more by Iranian values which leads to many fights.

Together, their stories reveal how memory, trauma, and life between two cultures influence the identity formation. Their identities are constantly evolving and rather than fitting into one culture, they are somewhere in-between. Both authors complement each other with their unique perspectives on belonging, life in the diaspora, Iran, and their identities.

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