Correspondences: A personal photographic journey between past/Iran and present/Australia

By

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For my father who I only know through photographs
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Abstract

This research project is an autobiographical photography series entitled:

_Correspondences; A personal photographic journey between past/Iran and present/Australia._

This research is partly inspired by being born at the beginning of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and being part of a family that the revolution negatively affected. Also, emigrating to Australia after having the experience of living almost thirty years in Iran.

The research consists of an exegesis, which is a report on the photographic series and an exhibition of photographic images, which will be presented in two series:

Series one, explores my family, including myself, history back in Iran, compared between before Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution and in the three decades after the revolution. This is through juxtaposition of family photographs before the revolution from family albums and also the photographs that I have taken of the same family members recently.

Series two depicts my journey in Australia as a female Iranian student and immigrant. The viewer can see different stages of the immigration including nostalgia and loneliness, identity crisis, and the gradual detachment from the past and acculturation. By juxtaposition of two photographs a dialogue or a correspondence is created. These correspondences are between time and place, two different cultures, memory and present. By juxtaposing two different photographs also a connotative and denotative correspondence will be created. This strategy is a way of connection beyond past and present, bringing together memory and the reality and linking across these displacements of time and space, it has become a way of thinking about my family and relating memory from Iran and my life in Australia.
Chapter One: Introduction

Being born at the beginning of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and also being part of a family which the revolution negatively affected, and having the experience of living almost thirty years in Iran and immigrating to Australia afterwards, I have a personal story and approach that I would like to narrate and share through my practice in photography for my Masters degree.

This research project is an autobiographical photography series entitled:

Correspondences; A personal photographic journey between past/Iran and present/Australia.

The submission consists of a presentation of photographic images and will be presented in two series:

Series one explores my family, including myself, history back in Iran, compared between before Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution and in the three decades after the revolution. This comparison has been mainly made through juxtaposition of family photographs before the revolution from family albums and also the photographs that I have taken of the same family members recently. Moreover, there are correspondences through juxtaposition of two photographs: at times the pair of the photograph are both recent and/or old, which leads to creation of a new image or meaning.

Series two depicts my journey in Australia as a female Iranian student and immigrant. I have tried to represent the process of ups and downs of immigration and acculturation to a new country. The viewer can see different stages of the immigration including nostalgia and loneliness, identity crisis, the gradual detachment from the past and acculturation. This series will also deploy the strategy of juxtaposing two photographs. By juxtaposition of two photographs a dialogue or a correspondence is created. These correspondences are between time and place, two different cultures, memory and present. By juxtaposing also a connotative and denotative correspondence will be created. This strategy is a way of connection beyond past and present, bringing together memory and the reality and linking across these displacements of time and space, it has become a way of thinking about my family and relating memory from Iran and my life in Australia.
The theme of ‘Correspondences’ is explored through juxtaposition of every two photographs and in a few photographs there is correspondence within each photograph individually. Each pair addresses a different meaning of the keyword of this project, “correspondences” such as: comparison/consonance/resemblance/parallels/contrast/coincidence and mail communication. However, identifying the particular form of correspondences examined in each photograph is left to the viewer.

The accompanying exegesis is in the form of a memoir, narrating stories around the revolution and after and also about the different stages of my life in Australia and as a commentary reflecting upon the photographs.

The creative work for this research project address the following research question:

**How can I represent a personal narrative of the effects of revolution in Iran, which leads to the immigration, changes and acculturation to Australia on my life?**

The method I apply to address this question is the juxtaposition of two photographs in many different ways: two photographs, applying an old photograph from a personal family album and juxtaposed to a recent one; two types of photography: documentary and staged, image and text, image and object. The result of the exhibition and also each pair of photograph narrate a story of the revolution and its effects, Diaspora, and different stages in immigration.

I will also examine the book Identity, Language and Culture In Diaspora; A study of Iranian female migrants in Australia by Maryam Jamarani, 2012 and compare it to my own experiences/photographs in Australia.

Moreover, in the following chapters the works of a few other Iranian and Western artists that have been my influences, or have similar works to mine in regards to concept or technique, will be discussed in detail in order to relate them to my photographic practice and achieve the answer to the research question.
The theme of the project

This project has been conceived as and draws on the notion of correspondence. This is invoked across time and space. Through the ‘Correspondences’ between past and present and each two photographs, various layers of the effects of the Islamic revolution/regime in Iran on my family and me unfolds. Moreover in the second series of ‘correspondences’ in Australia, the complicated journey of immigration is displayed. Each photograph in ‘Correspondences’ is an individual photograph, however, the juxtaposition and combination of each pair of photographs creates a new connotation.

Execution at the time of the revolution, loss of career, depression, and the devaluation of women are the concepts that will be depicted through the juxtaposition of my photographs in the first series as the effects of the 1979 revolution on my family.

Loneliness, identity crisis, disconnection, nostalgia, Diaspora, and finally detaching from the past and acculturation are the reasons I needed to have a ‘Correspondence’ across the distances of time and place. I have come to realize that being away from my homeland and away from family and friends and familiar culture I need a correspondence subconsciously and this is the reason I have looked for listeners and friends and created this photographic work to communicate with my audience. Away from home, and family and friends in Diaspora, the thirst for a friend and listeners rises in us. Connecting through virtual correspondences such as social media and photographic or written correspondences we seek fulfilment of this need.

Through this work I engaged in a dialogue with my past and memories and my journey of immigration to Australia. But also it is produced for new audiences; be they friends, family or unknowns, my aim is to communicate and narrate my story to this new audience.
Background and context

This section gives an outline of my history in Iran and also my motivation and reasons for starting this project.

The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran profoundly affected Iranian lives and society. Many of those who took part in the protests for the revolution had a dream of democracy. However, their demands and desires were ignored and never fulfilled by the new leaders of the country. Instead the corrupted government managed to deceive the nation by making false promises for more than three decades. The Islamic regime and its associates are profiting from the national investments while oppressing their nation through autocracy and radical religious and mediaeval rules. Therefore, the Iranian Diaspora is a lasting legacy of the revolution; large numbers of Iranians emigrated during the three decades since, in search of a better life than the one that could be achieved in their homeland in the post-revolutionary conditions.

Moreover, members of some families opposed to the revolution were executed, imprisoned, lost their jobs, and some were abandoned to poverty or isolation. It raised emotional issues that these families have had to endure through all these years. People who had been affected by the revolution but were not be able to depart their homeland were persecuted in their own society.

I was always witnessing the conversations of my family members against the regime of the Islamic republic and how there was and still is always so much hatred and regret for the recent social, political situation. The memories from the glory days of Iran and therefore my family, and also the political and cultural changes, which transformed my family and the country forever, I have been only an observer of through these years.

My first memories about the impacts of the revolution were of the absence of my father. I was confused and unsure about the reasons for it until the truth was unfolded shockingly at primary school by one of my schoolmates who

had heard the truth from her mother. I was told by my mother that he had gone to Germany for a job, as she thought I was too young to stand the truth but the classmate told me about his execution in the revolution. My father was a victim of the crimes that happened at the time of the revolution because of his holding a political position in the Shah’s regime and this transformed my family forever.

After I learned about my father’s tragic history, my family, including aunts and uncles, were free to share with me their own stories and other members of my extended family’s stories about the revolution and its impact on them. They told me about their situation before the revolution and how the revolution changed their social statuses. The changes to their lives included sacking from jobs in the new regime, leaving the country as a political refugee to Europe, and also emotional troubles coping with the new situation. They were monarchists or Mossadegh followers and there were always discussions about how the country had been improving culturally and economically and how there had been much more freedom prior to the oppressive Islamic regime.

Therefore, the seed of opposition to the current government was planted in me from an early age. My family and I were bearers of the secrets of our history and were isolated from the majority of the society.

Later when I came to Australia as an Iranian student, I found this opportunity to narrate my stories and background and present them to an Australian audience. During the first steps of my candidature I wanted to show the disadvantages of the revolution on my family and their stories, which have been untold. However after completing a project on my family and background in the first year of the candidature, also always having the urge to work in a diary style and being constantly inspired by Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel; Persepolis 2007, I decided to expand my project to my life in Australia too and explore a story about loss and renewal in a correspondence method.
**Methodology**

In the first series with the same title of Correspondences, I mainly used old family photographs of my family members before revolution and juxtaposed these with the photographs I took of them in more recent times after the revolution. Through this methodology one could observe the changes of the revolution on my family members in different aspects.

These series of photographs seemed unfinished and unsatisfactory, as it was limited to my family and my background. The series implies reasons behind my emigration to Australia; however it didn’t indicate anything about my life as an Iranian in a foreign country, which I had to deal with on an every day basis.

The methodology was something that I created partly spontaneously and influenced by my earlier photographs and partly being inspired by the artists’ works that I reviewed; listed in my literature review. However, I was not satisfied totally and needed to explore other ways to push the boundaries and work on a project, which covers my background and current life, and also in a more ambiguous, conceptual method. Also during my research I have tried to look at the graphic novel; Persepolis as the main inspiration and reference but narrate my story through photography.

Besides being inspired by Marjane Satrapi’s character and her graphic novel, the lack of stories about Iranians in Diaspora and the reasons behind it was my motivation to start this project, especially in Melbourne where the population of Iranians is not high. I was also interested to keep a photographic diary of changes to my life and myself in Australia.
**Main inspiration and influence: Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis**

*In this section I will discuss the graphic novel Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi in order to identify the types of works that both address Iranian content and influence my photographic approach.*

I would like to use a similar approach by making my audience look at the hidden sides of the revolution and its impact on a particular family, leading to emigration and Diaspora. However, I will explore this through photography and by my personal method, informed by the notion of ‘correspondence’. The graphic novel, Persepolis is the base reference for my research, as I have similar stories and ideas as an Iranian woman who has the experience of life both in Iran after the revolution and the west. The final artefact is expected to have the same overview as the story of Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel. The aim of this project is to, through photography, tell my personal stories as an Iranian, my family’s history before the revolution and after its consequences, and my personal journey after moving to Australia.

*Persepolis* is a two volume autobiographical novel and animated film, which I am highly inspired by. It was created by Iranian Artist; Marjane Satrapi in France. The animated film was released after the book in 2007, depicting her childhood up to her early adult years in Iran and Europe during and after the Islamic revolution.

The Persepolis story is the story of many female Iranians, including me, who grew up in Iran after the revolution, at the time of the Iran/Iraq war, and have experienced the imposed changes and regulations on their life and surroundings.

Moreover, the experience of immigration and adapting to a new alien culture and situation, where westerners have a limited knowledge about Iran’s history and background is common for many Iranians including me.

However, because of the medium of the artefact (Persepolis is a graphic novel and animation), Satrapi has a broader space in her method to express her stories by adding humour to the dark situations or by drawing upon fantasy and dreams. While in my work, I depict a situation by documentary photography, choosing an intimate fraction of time from my character’s lives and also applying personal historic photographs. Documentary photography
must draw out the expressive character from the situation that exists in front of the camera while animation and graphic novels can invent forms and scenarios for the purposes of personal expression.

Figure 1: *Persepolis*, Marjan Satrapi, 2007
‘Correspondences’ the name of the series

This section discusses the origin of the name of the project and theme of the photographs: correspondence

The name of my project ‘Correspondences’ is similar to the name of a video letter dialogue between Abbas Kiarostami and Victor Erice, which was exhibited in ACMI Melbourne in 2008. When I found out about the Correspondences between Kiarostami and Erice, having already chosen my project’s name, I was very pleased to discover that my favourite Iranian director had been involved in a project with the same name.

These two filmmakers, from diverse backgrounds but with a shared profound and deliberate vision, made a video-letter exchange in 2005. The idea was collaboration in “visual letters” through video, photography and painting for an exhibition. They both were born in the same year but only met once before. (Stephenson, 2008)

Their correspondence is in many senses identifying the two parallel paths, which could be compared and interconnected. The video letters are biographical and creative echoes of childhood, landscape, folk tradition and silent cinema. (Martin, 2009)

These two artists engaged in a cross-country dialogue through cinema, still images, and letters, where they expressed their mutual admiration, revolving through the same issues.
Figure 2: **Victor Erice and Abbas Kiarostami, 'Correspondences' 2005**
Figure 3: Kiarostami’s postcard to Erice, 2005

Figure 4: Erice’s postcard to Kiarostami, 2005
Through the early months of my candidature, inspired by Kiarostami and Erice’s correspondences and also influenced by the advice of my former associate supervisor Stephen Goddard, I started to make a cross-country dialogue through photography with the collaboration of my cousin in Iran. I was intending at the time to design photographic post cards and correspondences as a tool to get involved with each other’s lives through means of everyday, mundane photography, which narrates two parallel lives in different countries.

However, after making a few post cards and not receiving any from her, I decided to stop. I also had difficulties finding different and intriguing motifs to work on. I believed that there are more personal important issues, which I could narrate through photographs, and through a challenging process I decided to work on my history in Iran and current life in Australia and make correspondences between past and the present.

Figure 5: *Postcard to my cousin in Iran 2011*

The spring is here finally after a long winter. The smell is in the air and blossoms on the trees; while I know you are getting ready for colder and shorter days, in Iran. You hope for rain and a clear Tehran’s sky while a rainy day, even in the middle of the summer here in Melbourne is not surprising.
The development of the photographs.

In this section I will explore my approach to photography and the way in which I have used the influence of the ideas, styles and approaches of the artists mentioned in this research.

The crucial change in my photographs since the undergraduate degree is modifying my style from documentary to a more conceptual method and also photographing in colour, achieving an approach to narrate my story.

Changing to a conceptual approach from a documentary style gradually took place over the last seven years, influenced by my mentor in Iran, Yahya Dehghanpoor, who always encouraged me to look at my surroundings carefully and from different point of views and discover a poetic and artistic way to express what is observed. Therefore, I gained a particular style in my undergraduate education, for example I would like to depict by not showing all of the subject and only a part of it or by juxtaposition of two or more photographs to create a new meaning or narrate a story.

Figure 6: *Conversation* - 2003
Figure 7: *Monologue- 2007*

My photography developed after finishing university by practicing new methods, for example making slideshows and adding sound to my photographs, such as the slideshow ‘A glance through the mirror’, 2007.

However, I had the urge to work on bigger issues and also broaden my perspective and push the boundaries. I was accustomed to photographing in black and white on film with a 35mm camera. Tehran being almost a grey city with less variety of colours was one reason for not making colour photographs. Difficulties with using colour film in interior space with low and/or artificial light and the need for postproduction were other problems.

I began to make small slide shows in Australia in a diary style to depict my situation in the early months of my immigration. The following images are taken from a slideshow I made when I was in search of a house and a place I could call home.
Figures 8,9,10: *Lost in Melbourne-2010*

I also made a slideshow for the times I was lonely and looking for company. I asked my cousin in Tehran who also is a good friend of mine to simultaneously take a self-portrait at a particular time every day with me. This collaboration, which continued for three weeks allowed us to know what the other was doing at a particular time of each day, and look at each other’s surroundings. In other words it allowed us to feel each other’s company in a visual approach. Both my cousin who is an amateur photographer and I used compact digital cameras for this collaboration since the photographs were not meant to be necessarily aesthetically strong but the stress was more on the method, which was simultaneous self-portraits and their juxtaposition.

In my final work, I have used one of these snap shots as a part of our correspondence and also believe this experience of juxtaposition was one of the main reasons for my choosing the method of juxtaposition in my main practice. I decided to make the juxtaposition with my own photographs in order to create a dialogue or a correspondence and narrate my personal past and present history through juxtaposition in different ways.
Figure 11: Postcards-2010
Chapter Two: Family Photographs in the first series

The reason I chose to use the family photographs from my personal family albums is that first of all, as Hirsch states in her book; Family Photographs Content, Meaning and Effect, 1981, is that family photographs are provoking. They make us curious about personalities and relationships. The display of eyes and hands and other features of unknown people seem to bring intimacy without any formal introductions. This seems a good way to introduce my family history through family photographs and their correspondences with present photographs. The family photographs seem as fragments in an ongoing historical and psychological procession, which includes active and passive participants. There is always someone who has taken the photograph with the motive to define the subject; there are those who had it taken to ensure their own visual immortality, those who look at the picture to answer their own curiosity, and people such as me who keep them for an imaginary exercise. [Hirsch, 1981 pp.6-9] I as a keeper of the photographs am able to create more meaning in them by juxtaposing the old family photos with the photographs that I have taken of the same family members at the present time. This way I am able to create a story or reveal some unknown truth and also discuss this history and aftermath of an event. The family photographs remind us of a history that we have forgotten.

In the following chapter I will demonstrate the different synonyms of Correspondence with their relation to the photographs of my project. Each section and pair of photographs starts with one synonym of ‘correspondence’, relating to that specific pair of works. I will also include examples of the practitioners and artefacts that I have been inspired by.
Resemblances

Figure 12: Family portrait, 2012

The exhibition and the narrative for my project start with this photograph, it is called coincidence a synonym for correspondence the name and theme of the project. The photograph is of my mother dressed in black, looking in despair, holding me as a newborn baby. The objects around her in the room reflect the disarray and despair of her mental and emotional state. She seems in a deep sorrow that doesn’t let her pay attention to the camera. Despite being in distress, she also seems graceful and serene, which perhaps comes from the greatness of her grief. I believe this photograph could be a metaphor for mothers oppressed by different causes such as poverty, being a single parent due to death or non existence of the husband, possibly convicted on false allegations as in the case of my father, and so on. The image is similar to many photographs of devoted and/or suffering mothers who are their children’s guardians.

It is also similar to many paintings and photographs taken representing Madonna and child. It is intriguing to know that the image of the family as a union also begins as the image of a single parent. Like in the Virgin Mary, all of them represent fertility and nurturance. The mother as the giver of food and embrace is depicted many times in paintings and photographs. (Hirsch, 1981 pp. 15-16)

In comparison to an Australian family photograph of mother and child, the picture of Lindy Chamberlain and her baby could be a good example. The mother in which, as the result of losing her baby to a dingo, later became
partly the iconic image of the sinner and partly oppression and prejudice in Australia.

However, this pair of mother and baby photographs, which have been taken with a one-year interval, are only taken as a means of family photography and are not art works. They do not share much in common denotatively except for the image of a mother holding her baby. Their comparison is based on the women’s roles as mothers in two different societies and the oppression imposed on both of them. They are both holding and guarding their babies but both victims in their countries. One suffers from the political injustice in Iran imposed on her husband, that caused his execution and his loss to his family, and the other is a victim of the false conviction of her society and the authorities in Australia. They remain ‘victim’ mothers for their entire life, for reasons that have been out of their control.

However, in my research by practice; correspondences I have applied a further context to this family photograph of my mother and I, by juxtaposing it with another photograph taken by me, to create a new work.

At first glance the photograph juxtaposed to it confuses us and seems irrelevant to the portrait of my mother and me. It shows a dusty floor covered with dark, dirty tiles and an engraved empty photo frame in the wall. But looking back at the history of my family the juxtaposition of this photograph to the one of my mother and I makes sense. As mentioned before I was born one month after the execution of my father; at the time of my birth my mother and all of my close family were still mourning. At the time the photograph of my mother and I was taken my father had recently been executed and rested in an unnamed grave with no photograph and no information on it. While in Australia it was constantly on my mind to take this photograph on my next trip to Iran. Thinking about the short gap between my birth and my father’s execution is always a strange and tragically intriguing incident to me and it was crucial to me to depict it in my photographs as practically a coincidence, which could make a fascinating correspondence, through juxtaposition of these two images. However, after taking this photograph and juxtaposing it to the photograph of my mother and I, which I always had with me, a new image was created. The dark tiles on the ground seem to form a continuous pattern with the lower part of the
photograph next to them. The empty frame engraved in the wall is the missing image of my father both connotatively and denotatively. The gap and the white margin between the photographs also could be read as a distance between us. Through the combination of these two photographs I am able to have a family photograph with both my parents on the new days of my birth.

Figure 13: *My mother and I, photographer unknown, 1979*
Figure 14: *Lindy Chamberlain and her baby*, photographer unknown, 1980
Figure 15: *Madonna and child*, Raphael, 1505
It is the subject matter that is an important element in Dorothea Lange’s photograph, even though it is categorized under the tradition of Madonna and Child, such as Henry Moore’s sculpture, which is a symbol not only for the relationship of the Madonna and Child, but of every mother and child or of Michelangelo’s Pieta, which is not only a certain biblical event but the agony of every mother at the death of her son. ([Lange and Cox, 1981](#))

The photograph of Migrant Mother is also an iconic photograph of the great depression in America in the 1930s. However, I believe it is a good example
of the image of mothers oppressed and victimized by poverty, death of the son, husband or any other cause, embracing their child/children. These images were constructed images and symbolized the plight of many women.

Figure 17: **Henry Moore Madonna and Child, 1943-1944**
Figure 18: Michelangelo *Pieta* 1498-1499
The photographs above, are art works from Iranian artist Shirana Shahbazi and Australian artist Tracey Moffatt. Both images of mother and child, one in Iran and one in Australia, but in different concepts. The photograph of Madonna and child in Iran, a staged photograph but in documentary style, is from Shabazi’s series Good Word, 2000-2001, which depicts ordinary people in Tehran-Iran. An Iranian mother is dressed with Islamic code holding her baby in the streets of Tehran. The artist had the photograph painted as a mural, which are often seen in the streets of Tehran as advertisements or images of war martyrs and iconic Ayatolahs. Perhaps the mural is the artist’s intention to magnify the significance of madonna and child in Iran.

Moffatt’s photograph from her series Up in the sky-1997 is a staged and theatrical photolithograph, featuring mother and child/Madonna and child set in an outback town in Australia. The Up in the sky series, and particularly this photograph, recalls the story of the Stolen Generation, which was the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents from 1869-1969- in
Australia. The central characters in this photograph are a white mother and a black/Aboriginal baby who are followed and menaced by witch-like nuns who want to grasp the black child.

Moffatt herself has Aboriginal background but was adopted to a white, working class family. However, she saw both her mothers as strong role models throughout her life and was grounded in both Aboriginal and white culture.

All the images of Mother and child above in different art forms and different times and place emphasis on the importance of the mother and child historically as a family unit. They all signify endurance, courage and strength. Comparing the photograph of my mother and I to these works of art I decided to include this photograph to begin my project. The juxtaposition with the photograph of the empty floor and the empty frame on the wall connects the two photographs together and helps to unfold the hidden stories of mother and child.
Comparison 1

Figure 22: My uncle before and after revolution, 2011

The same change of identity can be observed in this pair of photographs. Through juxtaposition of the old family photograph at the left and the recent photograph of the same person the social changes and acculturation or surrender to a new situation effected by the changes from the government is distinguished. All the signifiers in the old family photograph at the left; the confident pose with a smile smoking and reading the newspaper, the Mosadegh poster on the wall with the direction of his hand toward the person in the photograph depicts the state of power. However, the same man in the photograph juxtaposed to it, photographed thirty years after, is in a contrary condition, lying on an almost bare floor, in an inconvenient and poor status while the pictures on the wall are reminiscences of the luxury, dignity, and ambition of the past. The new work and correspondence created of the two photographs juxtaposed persuade the viewer to imagine the hidden story and events in between these periods of time.

Long after I made this pair of correspondence about my uncle being a journalist before Iran’s revolution and losing his job after, James Mc Ardle suggested the photography book ‘AFTERWARDS’-2011, contemporary photography confronting the past, for me to look at. It is a book curated by Nathalie Herschdorfer, and is about post-catastrophic events. Accompanied
by essays, the book shows the nature of trauma. Herschdorfer states that when looking at an image taken after a disaster, viewers are given the opportunity to reflect, to contemplate and to empathize.

There is a series of photographs by Gustavo Germano which immediately strikes me as being produced through a method similar to my own.

In Ausencias, 2006, Germano the Argentinian photographer depicted people who were affected by the extermination campaign carried out by Argentina’s military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. 30,000 people disappeared during this period. Germano through his simple and direct method created portraits of missing loved ones using photographs from family albums of thirty years ago. He photographed the families in the same place and under similar conditions but without those who ‘disappeared’. He brilliantly expresses the pain of these families who are living with a gap in their lives.

One of the most powerful motivating forces behind the creation of images is the experience of death: the image appears as a kind of response or reaction to the absence of a family member. However, in Germano’s photographs the disappeared ones take on a physical form through their absence from the second picture. The fact that the pictures have a strong emotional charge and an impression of complete accuracy make Germano’s photographs powerful.

The method I have used for the first series of my photographs, which is about the history of my family before and after the Islamic revolution in Iran, is quite similar to Gustavo Germano’s approach, however the series ‘correspondences’ are more personal. My series is a story of a great loss in many aspects of the lives of my family; physically, psychologically and emotionally. I believe my project shares a common method and concept with Germano in depiction of people and their situations after trauma and loss. (Herschdorfer, 2011 pp.84-89)
Figure 23: **Gustavo Germano, The Me’ndez family, 1976**
Figure 24: **Gustavo Germano, Laura Cecilia Me’ndez Olivia, 2006**
There are also some Iranian photographers who have photography series about their family members and their life story after the revolution. Maziar Moradi, Iranian photographer in his series, “1979” has portrayed his family during the Islamic revolution and Iran-Iraq war. As some members of his family had lived through the revolution and war with profound repercussions, he asked them to recreate their roles so he could record their story. This chaotic period in Iran’s history was Moradi’s inspiration for this series.

Likewise, I have asked the members of my family to play a role in my series; however, by playing a role I don’t refer to stage photography. I only asked them to sit in front of my camera or took portraits of them engaged in everyday life. Similar to Moradi, my inspiration for this series is the 1979 revolution and the repression that my family had to go through as an outcome of that. However, the methodology and the style of our story telling are very different. My method applies old family photographs and juxtaposition of photographs of the same people in the present, while Moradi tends to recreate the events in the history of his family by staged photography and artificial lighting. (Herschdorfer, 2011pp.122-127)
Figure 25: **Maziar Moradi, Untitled- from ‘1979’ series, 2007**

Tabrizian is an Iranian/British photographer and film director. She is also a professor of photography at the University of Westminster in London, England. In her series of work; Tehran 2006 (2006), she has depicted everyday Iranian people in one of the outer suburbs of Tehran, where they are depicted in suspense and uncertainty, in a deserted area of the capital city. At the background of the panoramic photograph, there are newly constructed buildings as the result of Government’s destruction of our cultural heritage and a mural of Khomeini and Khamenei, former and current supreme leaders of Iran.

Figure 26: **Mitra Tabrizian, Tehran, 2006**
In response to Rosa Issa asking about the concept behind Tehran 2006, Tabrizian states that, “Tehran 2006, looks at the reality of everyday life and ordinary in extraordinary times”. Issa, 2008. While Tehran is a modern, overpopulated city like many other capital cities, Tabrizian chose this certain spot, a newly built, developing, post-revolutionary landscape, which looks as if it is in the middle of nowhere, despite the background and newly constructed buildings in the foreground. People in this photograph look like they are “exiled” in their own country and have nowhere to go. The crowds are a mixture of different groups of Iranians who are struggling and have been disenchanted by the government’s promises; for instance, a Taxi driver, cleaner, factory worker, builder, housewives, caretaker and etc. These people live already on the edge; they are the most disadvantaged by the economic sanctions, and their lives will be most affected in the event of military action, (since they can’t afford to leave their country). However, even with all the conflicts inside Iran and while other countries accuse Iran and Iranians of being threats, life goes on and people try to survive. This view is strongly shared by the majority in Iran today and conceptually the project is about the notion of survival.

Like much of Tabrizian’s work, which is mostly staged, using models and actors, Tehran 2006 is also staged, structured and panoramic but with a ‘documentary look’. The photograph is about the recent few years of everyday people’s social- political situation in Iran. These people are from the majority group of a disenchanted culture in Iran, a culture who believed in the 1979 revolution and had high hopes for a better future and democracy, while in three decades have been let down by the promises of the revolution.

In contrast, the characters of my photographs are people who I have known very closely and grew up with through my life. They had nothing against the previous regime, lived fully in an ideal life during the Shah’s regime and the revolution made a transition in them. The “Correspondence” project depicts partially intimate moments of my family’s lives, which I have selected and documented through photography. I haven’t applied any artificial setting or lighting. These are images of my observations of their lives.

Tehran 2006 is a portrait of a crowd in despair and distress in alienation with their homeland, Iran. Isolation and hardship on both sides of the ‘border’ is what connect the two projects together. Those who live overseas, long for
'home' and those who live in Iran idealize life in the West. What both have in common is the will to resist the hardship and survive. According to Rose Issa; “We are in a way between a rock and a hard place, we have to carve a perilous path to find a way to save our mental space. We have to resist misrepresentation or non-representation of our intellectuals, artists, and even ordinary members of the public. “(Issa-2008).
**Comparison 2**

![Figure 27: My aunt before and after revolution, 2012](image)

In this pair of photographs I try to depict the status of some women in Iran through comparison of a photograph from before the revolution and another photograph of the same person after the revolution.

The photograph on the left is from a family album and an old picture of one of my family members from the sixties during the Shah’s regime. From her pose sitting on a log, her form of dress, and her appearance she seems a dominant female figure. The two men placed in the background are contrasted with her position in front. The second image at the right is to the contrary. Aside from the effects of age in thirty years time, she seems subdued, sitting in a closed space while a portrait of a man is above her head.

In Iranian popular/traditional culture, we have an expression/prayer which is “May the shadow of your man stand by your head forever”. It is a wish from the elder members of the family to married women that the man of the unit lives long and accompanies the woman through life as an advisor and/or in a superior role.

It could represent a change and the effects of the Islamic and male favouring rules in the past thirty three years which have changed the roles of women in
the society. The authorities of the government try their best to oppress the women by limiting their freedom in every aspect of social life, such as work, education, marriage and obligatory dress code in public places. Hence, the change of identity is distinguishable in this pair through correspondence between the two photographs. In her book, *Women and Revolution in Iran, 1983* Guity Nashat details the impact of the Iranian revolution on women. Nashat (now research fellow at the Hoover Institution and professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern history at the University of Illinois at Chicago) argues that women’s participation in the events leading to the 1979 revolution was influential in its success. However, ironically women may have suffered more than any other group from the disadvantages imposed by leaders of the current regime. *(Nashat, 1983pp.1-6)*

The revolution not only imposed negative regulations such as obligatory veil for women, but the religious leaders of the Islamic regime have also supported a passive role of women in society. They condemn women to accept an inferior position to men and to concern themselves only with the affairs of the household. This fact is shown clearly in the correspondence photographs above.
Figure 28: Abbas Attar – IRAN, Tehran, 1998. Irene ZAZIANS, famous actress before the revolution, shows a cover from the time of her glory
Mail Communication

Figure 29: She goes to school with this scarf, 2012

The term 'becoming' rather 'being' could be applied to the photographs as well. For instance, the polaroid which was taken of me as a kid beginning school is seen differently now when I look at it after almost three decades. However, as Hirsch states; “family photographs themselves do not change, only the stories we tell about them do” (Hirsch, 1981).

The polaroid was taken by my mother with the intention of sending it to my aunt overseas to inform her about the changes in Iran with the new Islamic regime and to show her my school uniform and my school appearance as a surprise. The polaroid camera and films were easy to access and use and convenient for sending news immediately in the eighties. However, looking at it after all this time and the changes that I have experienced, the juxtaposition and new context transforms the photo; it is not the same photograph and it brings a new perspective to the observer. I am not the same little girl beginning school any more; I have lost touch with those immediate feelings and that situation. In the Polaroid juxtaposed to it the blackness, which is the same photograph but in reverse, is a metaphor for the beginning of the darkness. It suggests an ending to the beautiful days of childhood and stepping into a more serious world, the world of grown ups which has its own regulations and dress codes. It is also proof for me of how my family and I were in opposition to the changes and negative effects of the Islamic regime and is a reminder of my resistance and the urge to leave Iran. I believe this photograph is a good example of 'being', a forced 'being' at times in the first
series of photographs in which I depict the effects of the 1979 revolution and
the Islamic regime, leading to the process of ‘becoming’ in the second series;
immigration and acculturation.

**Identity, Language and culture in Diaspora/ A study of
Iranian female migrants in Australia-Maryam Jamarani**

For the second series of my photographs I will compare my project in
practice-led research in photography with Maryam Jamarani’s research, 2012
in sociolinguistic and migrant studies, which is focused on ‘diasporic
identities’. Jamarani investigates the modification and challenges of identity of
first generation Iranian Muslim women immigrants in Australia. Her research
emphasizes the distinctive effects that such experiences have had on the
linguistic, cultural, and national, gender and religious identities of individuals
within this group. She identifies the core values that these women continue
to hold after migration, as well as areas where their values have altered.

In the last few months of my candidature I came across this book by Jamarani
through my research. The title of the book resonated with the concept of my
research except that mine is research by practice and on creative and
personal terms. In other words, I could be one of the participants in the
diasporic identities project, depicting my situation as an Iranian female
immigrant in Diaspora and in Australia through photography. I was amazed
by the similar experiences that I have had through my journey in Australia as
well as the terms she applies in her thesis. Phrases such as ‘acculturation’
really made sense to me as I am experiencing it in Australia and have tried to
demonstrate it in my photographs through correspondences.

However, in my creative practice by research I take a different approach to
show the effects of immigration, the flux of identity and acculturation on my
own personal life. The comparison of the photographs from my family
albums reveals their situation in the past in relation to the present time. Also,
the juxtaposition of my photographs in Australia, including self-portraits-and
their correspondences, depicts my story as a female immigrant in Australia
through creative practice.

Jamarani’s book surveyed a number of Iranian female immigrants in
Australia. The choice of the Iranian community in this research is partly a
result of the researcher’s Iranian nationality and also because it allows the
analysis of several views of acculturation of a fast growing migrant group in Australia. She mentions that Iranian immigration to Australia is quite recent and is mainly after the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran. It is from three successive waves over a period of approximately forty years that the Iranian presence in Australia has resulted. The minor wave started before the revolution during the Shah’s regime. The next major wave began after the Islamic revolution in Iran and the start of the eight year long Iran-Iraq war (1980-8), followed by another in the past ten years. The individuals who migrated during the last major waves were largely middle class, highly educated, professional people or young couples and students whose decision to depart Iran was as a result of an unstable economic situation, or because their ideological and/or political views were opposed to the ruling Islamic government. ([Jamarani, 2012pp.xii-xiii]

The study was conducted by using observations, questionnaires and in-depth interviews, which she conducted with her subjects. The questionnaire data provided some initial numerical figures and correlational diagrams, while the interviews/recorded language data was used for analysis of the participants’ attitudes and behaviours in more depth. She collected some keywords such as identity modifications and acculturation as signs of the effects of the immigration and analysed them as data.

“Several studies (Cross, 1978; Phinney, 1989, 1996; Saylor & Aries, 1999) have proposed that ethnic identity can be conceptualised as a process in which individuals progress from an early stage to an achieved ethnic identity that reflects a secure, confident sense of oneself as a member of a group. However, as argued by Phinney (1996, p.923) even an achieved ethnic identity is not necessarily a static end point of development” (Jamarani, p.14)

“Individuals may re-experience earlier developmental stages by re-examining their ethnicity throughout their lives.” (Jamarani, p.14)

“Ethnic identity changes since it is dynamic and it develops with time and context, by moving through a process of exploration.” (Atkinson, Morton & Sue, Cross, Phinney, cited in Jamarani, 2012, p.14)

Jamarani’s study and my creative project are based on a theory of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’. In most of the photographs in my project the viewer could aesthetically and/or through signifiers read the effects of acculturation or resistance to a social change. For a family, a photo album is a record of their
lives, but incidentally, and in retrospect, it becomes a record of changes
effected by the events in life. In most of my photographs the juxtaposition of
two photographs, correspondences, creates a new image, a new meaning and
new version of the story.

In the first series, in a few pairs of correspondences, I demonstrate my family
history through old family photos juxtaposed with their recent photographs,
as the effects of the changing regime in Iran and a new culture emerge,
resistance to which leads to emigration and Diaspora. In the second stage, the
photographs signify the challenges of immigration and changes to my
identity over time.


**Chapter Three: The second series**

This series of photographs started after a very long and frustrating pause. As I mentioned before I achieved the result for my first stage photographs sooner than I expected. This is due to its relation to facts that I grew up with, the effects and memories of which were ever present. I have thought about the history of my family and the consequences of the revolution frequently in my life and had to deal with it through my life. Therefore, coming up with the first stage, after referring to my family history and applying the method of using the family photographs from a personal family album was not too time consuming and challenging. It was time to continue the project and in the mean time deal with the challenges of life in a new country. Surprisingly, the confusion and challenge that I was confronted with to pursue the remaining time of my research and create new works was parallel and in coincidence with my emotional state and confusion. I knew that I had to come up with more work and new ideas but I was very much confused about what it was that I wanted to achieve. I was also bombarded with different ideas and opinions about my research from colleagues, lecturers and friends and not many of them conformed to what I was experiencing as a foreign Iranian student and immigrant in Australia. The ideas such as displacement and loss of identity were not concepts that I was interested in or concerned about in my life in Australia. After a long pause and confusion or “artist’s or writer’s block” in between my research, I decided to make my *correspondences*, photographs based on the changes in my experiences and emotions in Australia. In other words I allowed myself to “go with the flow” and at the same time to be honest with myself and create work about the way I felt in my present state. Therefore the correspondences in this stage are my different experiences of emotion and identity in my journey in Australia. They are my attempts to depict the varying statuses of my challenges and acculturation to my new home.

At the same time, while unable to continue my research and create new work, I made a trip to the USA for the first time to visit my brother and his family and reunite after ten years, and also try to find an opportunity to make new photographs and come up with new work while I was there. Unfortunately, the result of the trip was very disappointing and in fact it made me feel worse and hopeless. Getting back to the culture and roots that I came from after living in Australia for a few years made me more culturally confused. Also the results of disconnection with my brother for ten years, and living in Diaspora
made us very distant and created two very different people.

A while after I came back to Australia I wrote a letter to my brother and made a photograph to send to him, which I never posted to him. (I will include the letter and the photograph in the appendix) The letter and the photograph were more a monologue I had with myself in order to make sense of my emotions.
Consonance

Figure 30: Self-portrait in the Middle Eastern restaurant, 2010

Figure 31: Self-portrait in the Middle Eastern restaurant, 2012
These self-portraits were taken in a Middle Eastern restaurant in Melbourne in two different periods of time. I am looking puzzled in the first, which I took a year ago, and in the second, taken more recently, I am between an Iranian and a Western element. This pair depicts my story of cultural confusion and changes/‘becoming’ through time in Australia.

Parallel

Figure 32: Self-portraits with my cousin in Iran, 2011-2012

This correspondence consists of three or four photographs, depending on how the viewer prefers to read it. It could read as two stories, two individual correspondences or one. The photos were taken in Australia and Iran with two year intervals. They narrate the story of my loneliness in Australia, and my taking refuge in video calls and skype talks with my best and oldest friend in Iran. The last two photographs also represent the ups and downs of friendships affected by Diaspora. In the first correspondence above, taken in
Australia, I am in skype correspondence with my friend in Iran, looking lonely/homesick and in the hope of union. While my Australian housemate is gathered with friends in the backyard, relaxing on the lawn, and enjoying her time, I seem to be kept in a claustrophobic virtual or physical space. The reason could be my being new to Australian culture and feeling shy to communicate with new people. Therefore I look back at my life in Iran and attempt to keep my links with old friends. As Jamarani mentions in her research, when people meet unfamiliar situations in the host culture, they tend to feel stressed because of the disintegration of the context that they obtain in their native culture. In order to resolve this, they direct their attention through their native culture and select aspects of it, trying to provide integration of information. (Nishida cited in Jamrani, 2012)

The middle photograph above is a staged photograph but acquiring the same repeating condition. I have returned ‘home’ to the same friend but find her to be preoccupied in her virtual world-iPad. At the same time I have my back to her and am living in my own world, feeling disconnected. There is a glass window style door in between us, which has a doorknob, but it is closed. I am sitting on the balcony in fresh air and in front of trees but iron fences disrupt my vision. Her face is lit from her iPad but there is the dark shadow of a curtain on top of her head and mine. I felt disconnected and separated from my cousin who is also my best friend. We grew up together for quite a long time. The friend I remembered was not the same when I visited her back home after two years. She changed as much as I have changed living in another country. Our ideologies in life were different and we grew to be very different individuals. However, there were times on the same trip I felt very connected to her again and felt united having no borders between us. I have applied the Polaroid I took of us in Tehran on this trip, while we were friends like before once again for a short period. The use of a Polaroid photograph is a symbol of immediacy and the quality of bringing one into direct and instant involvement with someone. It is also a one off image and therefore it is more unique and precious.
**Concurrence**

“Identity is rather about identifying oneself with others or in relation to others and not just an individual experience.” (Ghorashi cited in Jamarani, 2012, p.33) To this we might add that to be positively evaluated by others is an important consideration.

The two photographs above are taken from different pairs of correspondences but a good example of changes to my situation in Australia and acculturation to the western world. It also depicts the change of my solitary status to the state of finding new friendships and connections by building a new identity.

According to Elizur (cited in Jamrani, 2012, p.23) ethnic identity relates to the individual’s sense of belonging to a social group and is basically cognitive. As with identity in general, ethnic identity is a dynamic construct.

The experience of immigration becomes pleasant-for me- by making a new social group, gradual acculturation and also exchanging cultures.
Figure 33: **Nick Cave (Australian musician) with PJ Harvey**

Figure 34: **Chris and I disguised as Nick Cave and PJ Harvey, 2012**
Figure 35: *Chris my Australian friend, in Iran-Persepolis, 2012*
Figure 36: **Pooneh Maghazehe, Hell’s Puerto Rico in Amish garment and a cross in hand, photographed in local supermarket’s oriental section, 2009**

Amongst Iranian artists residing and exhibiting outside Iran I found Pooneh Maghazehe’s work, which is intriguing and similar to my ideas and research. She is an Iranian American artist residing in the USA. She largely uses photography of her sculptures and objects. However, I believe this performance/photograph is a correspondence between cultures or subcultures, which makes it similar to my work. Through a correspondence with her I received this statement about her work.

“The Puritan Pride garments and Colour Study photos:
These garments are pre-owned Amish “plain clothes”, worn everyday by women in the Amish community. Intentionally kept stark and unembellished, the garments function as formal canvas, objects that have use in the world, and represent a lexicon of behaviours and norms that connote Amish life. The Amish garment was the point of departure in infusing my personal reaction and history onto its surface. These works are a historical account of my past. The combinations of cultural iconographies exemplify the narcissistic pledge of allegiance to subcultures that I have espoused. Resurrecting the sense of loyalty and allegiance that drew me to each community, I revive the puritan flag, sanctify a kinship with hip hop culture, collide with centuries old Islamic
pattern, revere the commitment to Catholicism, and revisit an adolescent familiarity with brotherhood found in motorcycle and car clubs.” (email, 1, October 2012)

Bringing together icons of different cultures and placing them in a self-portrait was an interesting point for me when I was thinking about creating my photographs in the second series. I was trying to make correspondences between my past and present in Australia to depict issues about immigration experiences, therefore applying items from two different cultures was a good practice.

“Immigration is a process –permanent or temporary- in which there is a separation from 'home' and familiar social frames. Although the immigrant leaves home, influences from the home culture continue to exert an impact on the person's sense of self and quality of life (Mcconatha et al, cited in Jamrani 2012,p 15).”

The influences and characteristics I carry from my Iranian background have impacted my life style and relationships in Australia. I exchange my culture with Australian culture through friendship with my new social group, which I have tried to depict some effects of in the above photographs.

As Jamrani states, Contextual change may lead to the emergence of questions of identity, values and priorities in life in an individual's consciousness. It compels people to re-evaluate different aspects of their identities, relationships, and behaviour, as well as many other aspects of their social and individual lives. The immigrants are constantly challenged to reposition and adjust their identities, through being in constant firsthand contact with a variety of different cultural values and attitudes. Diaspora may be a threat to the integrity of the immigrant’s self-esteem; therefore they might try to behave more in accordance with the behavioural norms and practices of the host society. (Jamarani, p16-17)

In my personal immigration journey I went through many challenges such as isolation, looking for friendship, nostalgia, a quest for ‘home’ and security, culture confusion and the process of detaching from the past. I finally adapted to the culture through time; finding a like-minded social group and the security of a home. Through sharing the same values, life styles and behaviours with my new Australian social group and also their positive
evaluation of my identity, fortunately there is no need any more for me to make a great effort to be in accordance with Australian culture.

The longer the immigrants are exposed to the host culture, the more immigrants shed their home culture and adopt host culture elements. Therefore, immigrants gradually are likely to show an improvement in their host group identity and decline in their ethnic identity. (Jamarani, p.22)

As time passes and the more I feel at home and in a comfort zone in Australia, the more I sense the gap and disconnection with my life and associates in Iran. Our lives are growing apart through distance and Diaspora, however, the influences of my past and Iranian culture remain with me permanently.
At some point, I realized that it is time for me to distance from the past and move on with my life in Australia. Working on this research and being away from home, family and acquaintances made me look back at my life frequently and over analyse it. It made me feel alienated and depressed. There was so much sadness and depth to my past and also Iranian culture; literature, music, films which I wanted to escape from. Once I heard in a documentary about an Iranian author, Kader Abdolah, who lives in exile in Netherlands, that the reason behind sadness in Persian culture is the loss of many battles in our history. The sadness and intensity I was acquainted with was unbearable and dislocated in the Australian context. I was not able to discuss it with anyone in Australia, as I believed they could not understand it as people my age have not had experiences like me in their lives, so I felt lonely most of the times with a heavy burden on my shoulders. Later when I found a house with Australians my age, educated and like-minded, they could notice when I was deeply sad and there were times I could discuss it with them, which was an exhilarating and relieving feeling.

In the early stages of my research, when I was making postcards to send to my cousin-as mentioned earlier- I took a photograph of the wall in my room, where a photograph of my mother and prayer beads were hung. My bed was close to that wall and the items on the wall were sacred to me. I took a nap in a Sunday afternoon and when I woke up there was a beautiful light on that wall and I remembered a dream I had. I took a photograph of the wall and made this post card as a correspondence to my cousin.
I woke up with a bad dream
A dream of someone we have lost
This Sunday was like many sad Fridays* in Tehran

* We have only one holiday in the week in Iran which is Friday and it is famous that Friday afternoon brings sadness.

Figure 37: *Postcard to my cousin, 2010*

Later after I had changed my shared house many times and finally found like-minded Australian friends, and felt more at home and acculturated and had a sense of detaching from my past I collected the same photograph and photographed it with the actual prayer beads on it. The beads were accidentally torn apart and that event was a symbol of detaching to me.
The inclusion of objects

The film, A Separation, Asghar Farhadi, is the image and product of the society in Iran after the 2009 election. It depicts the challenges of Iranians to survive in Iran with a complex life style under a corrupted, theocratic authority, and the price they have to pay to leave their homeland.

The medium is film but it is the narration of intimate life of Iranian families in the difficult days after 2009 election. I have applied an image of this film in one of my photographs juxtaposed with a coaster bearing a reproduction of the Australian painting; The Pioneer by Fredrick McCubbin, 1904. I believe the juxtaposition of these two images from Iran and Australia has a lot to say about my situation. It is a scene of my everyday life in my house where ‘A Separation’ s cinema brochure is sitting next to a glass of Australian Shiraz wine on the ‘The Pioneer’ coaster. These signs all have metaphoric connections. A Separation is the symbol of the current condition of many Iranians such as me, separating from my homeland and roots and beginning a new life in Australia, while the coaster with the painting The Pioneer, a large-scale narrative painting in three parts that celebrates the hard work and achievements of ‘the pioneer’ in settling Australia, depicts new Australians who have ventured in to the bush and started a new life and social identity.

Moreover, there is a bottle of red Shiraz wine with a product of Australia caption on the table. Shirazi wine was the finest wine in the Middle East historically before the revolution and has been mentioned in Persian poetry and literature often. Many Iranians are prejudiced about Shiraz wine and believe that the seed of Shiraz wine is originally from Shiraz the city in Iran, though this is unlikely. Shiraz wine is popular in many countries such as Australia but Shirazi wine is not produced in Shiraz anymore because of the Islamic rules. The vineyards of Iran are instead used for the production of grapes and raisins.
Figure 38: “A Separation” and “The Pioneer” – part of the inclusion of the objects, 2012
This photograph was made as a consequence to the prayer beads getting torn, which symbolized for me that I am detaching from my beliefs—perhaps subconsciously religious—and also from the sad memories from the past and at the same time reconciliation with the loss and separation. The decision of applying an actual object with my photograph was also in tandem with research I had on some artists who use objects in their works, such as the Iranian-Australian artist Hossein Valamanesh.

Hossein Valamanesh was born in Iran in 1949, educated as an artist in Tehran and immigrated to Australia in 1973. As Knight states, a sense of place informed by cultural history and personal memory lies at the centre of his art. Iranian poetry and Sufi poetic tradition are the themes which Valamanesh draws on from Iranian culture. Like the work; Longing belonging the space proposes a tension between loss, separation and yearning, and reconciliation with being in a new place. His works advise us that the state of belonging is complex and evolving. (Knight, 2011, page 91)

In ‘Longing belonging’ a burnt Persian carpet is presented in front of a photograph of a carpet burning in the Australian Mallee scrub. This unlikely
event; the burning of the carpet in a dubious place (desert scrubland) indicates the needs and disjunction of finding oneself in a new land and integration into an alien landscape. There are similarities between the Australian desert and the often-dry landscapes of Iran for Valamanesh, even though they are not the same. The carpet is the symbol of Iranian cultural traditions and their designs often include landscapes. This work represents a sense of trying to situate cultures and the inherent brutality of this process, substituting one way of life for another and needing to give up part of oneself in order to adjust to a new life.

Valamanesh is an Iranian, Australian Artist whose work I came across while in Australia. Part of his art is his concerns; which, similar to mine, are about his homeland and belonging, separation and the process of adjustment to Australia. He applies mostly Iranian items in his work as symbols to signify meanings, such as the actual carpet and the photograph of the burning carpet in Longing belonging. I began to look at Valamanesh’s work when I decided to use objects in my work, to show my nostalgia or apply them symbolically to tell my stories. I liked the idea of using an actual object from a detail of a photograph and locating it in the gallery space. However, since I am not repeating this method in all of my photographs, and also since other artists such as Valamanesh have already used this method, I decided to place the object on my photograph and rephotograph them or photograph the object and juxtapose it with the bigger picture. This method will give me more control, whereas if I leave the object at the gallery for the viewer, I don’t have the same control. The correspondence of the object withdrawn from the photograph and the actual photograph create new meanings.

In the photograph of my parents having dessert, I collected the actual photograph from the family album. The photograph shows my parents and guests eating from china crockery on the table, in a family gathering. Since I can remember, I grew up eating from these plates and also looking at the same crockery in everyday life of my parents in their photographs from the time before revolution. I was not born yet and there were images of happy periods of the life of my family. I grew up looking at the images of this crockery and also using them through my life before coming to Australia. There was a sense of being accustomed, attachment, belonging and nostalgia about these plates for me. One day I accidentally found this set of China plates in a flea market in Melbourne, I hesitated to buy any of them since it belonged to a stranger. However in my last trip to Iran while I was unpacking
them amongst boxes of old items, I found them wrapped in newspapers and
decided to bring one of them with me to Australia. This trivial object, which is
so old, used for many years in my family and has a crack on it, is a sign of
belonging to and nostalgia for my Iranian heritage and my family. There is a
family having a picnic in an open field pictured on the crockery, while my
family are eating at gathering from the same china. I placed the bowl on a
lamp in the photograph, which makes it to look like a small tree as a family
tree. In comparison to the application of items in Valamanesh’s work, the
object I have chosen and the concept behind the work is more nostalgic
rather than cultural or poetic. It draws from a personal story, which is
connected to my family history, the loss of my parents in early age and a
sense of connection to them through images and everyday objects, which can
bring me a sense of place, home, belonging and memory.

Applying old family photographs was a method I used in the first series to
explore and narrate my ideas and stories about the revolution and its effects
on my family and I. The use of staged photographs, and objects was my
method to narrate the immigration story and its process in the second series.
The photographs and the methods I have applied for all the photographs
might seem very different and confusing without reading the commentary
exegesis. However, the viewer is able to make sense of it or make a personal
story knowing the methods I have applied and the reason for using them.
Conclusion: a Parallel life

Living in Melbourne, I am leading more of a Western life, and communicating, befriending and living with Australian friends and getting acquainted more with a Western culture. Through my conversations with different people and friends, I looked back at my life and reflected on my history, culture and religion more carefully and objectively since I was not involved in it much any more. Also since I had to talk about my past, my self and my country from cultural and political points of view to my friends I had to look back and learn more about them again through analysing them, and looking at things that I had to believe or obey while living in Iran, for instance being forced to be a Muslim since beginning school and learn and read texts and values that I never believed in truthfully. I was able to distinguish my likes and dislikes more accurately and have an opportunity to create a new and fresh identity while I was away from all of them.

These two photographs are result of very accidental coincidence while I was
walking in Sydney road and carrying my camera with me. The milky water on
the ground is a reminder of a frightening memory of pools of blood at the
time of Qurban Eid/Eid Al Adha, a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims
with the sacrifice of sheep to honour the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice
his son as an act of obedience to God. This pair of photographs is a sign of
liberation for me - the liberating feeling of being away from things that I
disliked but were forced on me living in a radical religious country. It also
involves the idea of coincidence in my correspondences. When I was feeling
liberated and happy in a new country I coincidentally passed by the icon and
the text on the shop-window that, and the milky water on the ground which
was reminiscent of the bloody water scenery that I was acquainted to and
disgusted by.

My immigration and being distant from Iran were a great trigger for this
research and photographic project. I had to make a correspondence through
photography, the skill and art form that I was familiar with and could relate
to in order to have a voice. Through my research and practices I realised
through juxtaposition of two photographs I could create new meanings and
dialogues. These dialogues were between the past and present of my family
and myself, which was informative and creative. Also they were connotative
and denotative - there are more in depth meaning to them than only the
aesthetic. I could create images beyond time and space to connect with family
that I have lost and those I have left behind. Through juxtaposition of images
I was able to express my feelings about the current events or upheavals in
Iran, from a distance. And finally I could depict the process of my
immigration and acculturation to a new country.
Figure 41: *Islamic relief, 2012*
Appendix

Note: There are a few photographs in this exegesis that I have not included in the final exhibition such as the last pair of photographs (Islamic relief Australia) and also a few photographs in the final exhibition that I have not included in my exegesis. The exhibition is only a selection of the whole project. I am intending to continue this project after submission, as in the final stages I apply new strategies such as inclusion of the objects, which I am interested to practice more.

Figure 42: Literal and photographic correspondence, 2011

This work, which is a correspondence in the form of a post card, is a family photograph of my brother and I when we were young and a letter to him in Farsi. The photograph is juxtaposed with the same picture but digitally dissolved over the letter. It is a metaphor for our relationship in the past and its replacement with thoughts and words of doubts and agony. Later I decided that I wont include this photograph in my final work, as it is more nostalgic and not very similar to the rest of the work. I did another work juxtaposing a photograph that I took of him in USA, depicting him in conversation with me about his life while looking helpless with a close up of myself depicting how I felt there. This pair of photographs portrays our relationship and status in the USA, just by juxtaposing two portraits of us depicting our feelings.
Figure 43: *Correspondence with brother, 2011*
Bibliography

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Farhadi, A. 2011, A separation, Tehran, Iran, Hopscotch films.


Shahbazi, S, 2001, Good Words, Zurich, Codax

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