FINDING THE CORRECT LANGUAGE:

DEFINING FRAGMENTED ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE SECOND GENERATION IRANIAN AMERICANS

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Introduction

"Imagine learning how to ride a bike, but being given a scooter. That's how it feels sometimes. Be Iranian, but in America. Like okay, I'll try." Sara's frustration of what it's like to grow up as an immigrant child in America stuck with me. She struggled to understand the foreign homeland where her parents grew up; Instead she was left to fully grasp the trauma they endured, having left during the turmoil of the Iranian Revolution. Second generation immigrants in America are a sizeable group of American society, but not much research has been conducted about Iranian Americans, a highly assimilated immigrant group. As a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the immigrants did not see their arrival as a permanent stay but rather as a temporary state of asylum. The two phases of Iranian immigration into America functions as a form of separation between those who came before the Revolution in 1978 (usually for educational purposes), and those who came after, consisting of mostly political refugees and religious groups fleeing from persecution, exiles. The next generation battles understanding their ethnic identity through two separate worlds, while subconsciously inheriting the political ideologies and class consciousness their parents.

Moreover, a lack of scholarly literature relating to Iran, and Iranian Americans, leaves questions unanswered and gaps open. Its history is inevitably hidden from those in the diaspora as a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 caused from Western Imperialism. As a majority of this generation undergoes socialization in a post 9/11 world, their ethnic identities remain racialized and separated through gender divisions and authority figures. Thus, the research question I pose is: how do class and gender shape how second generation Iranian Americans living in California maintain and understand their ethnic identity? How is this mediated through heritage language maintenance? With such data, we can better further our knowledge of Iranian Americans and their positionality between other immigrant groups, since California is home to the largest number of Iranian immigrants. Understanding these factors unveils the underlying implications of speaking a heritage language in the United States. Speakers are embarrassed and continue having difficulty understanding their ethnic identity because of their fragmented language skills.

Understanding ethnic identity maintenance is complex. I conducted 16 interviews with second generation Iranian Americans living in different parts of California and found that socioeconomic status is a significant determinant in self-identified ethnic identity: People from the upper class have more opportunities, such as greater resources to visit their homeland and engage with others within the diaspora, as well as maintain artifacts through connections of the homeland. Symbolic ethnicity is defined through the cultural capital of speaking Farsi within the Iranian American community. It is passed down generationally through status markers of English/Farsi fluency, and education of both parents and engagement with social groups, which lead to social divisions between those who grew up in politically charged households and those who did not. Predicating on the idea that Farsi is a language to be commodified, those from politically charged households see more capitalistic and further advancement for the future of the Persian language compared to their counterparts. This is because of the oppression of the media from not only the US government, but from the producers of Iranian TV. Throughout the events of 9/11 and onwards, men are more self-consciously aware of displaying their ethnic identity in public and create new boundaries for it. Men, more often, did not speak the language during high school because of the negative connotations of being called 'terrorists' in middle school and interventions with teachers and at airports. The difference between a choice and a pressure is that middle/upper class Iranian Americans feel that it is both, but mostly a choice, for those who are politically self-aware. Lower/middle class Iranian Americans maintain their ethnic identity through music. Second generation Iranian Americans will be compared through the lens of other immigrant groups, demonstrating the similarity of acculturation patterns within the hyphenated American identity. I draw in additional primary and secondary literature to back up my arguments. This research will add depth to current scholarship on second generation immigrant integration within American context and how children of immigrants continue to be ostracized through intergroup and outer group relations. Additionally, this paper brings another immigrant group into the conversation by incorporating concepts and methodologies from the social sciences (psychology, sociology, ethnic studies, and linguistic anthropology), serving as a reminder that language loss is prominent within all immigrant groups.

Defining class in the Iranian American community

Class status within the Iranian American community is understood through the lens of 'whiteness.' Mostofi [1] insists that Iranian Americans adhere to American civic nationalism and embrace neoliberalism in their everyday lives, contributing to them 'acting white.' In Mostofi's view, Iranian Americans demonstrate different ways of 'acting white' in bleached hair, fake contact lenses, plastic surgery, and removal of body hair in recreation of a new public image for group members. Through obeying to such capitalistic changes of commodifying the body, Iranian Americans also separate themselves from imposed terrorist labels. The Iranian American body is used as a commodity to blend in with the dominant society, since those who can afford to commodify their bodies, both economically and psychologically, do so. Iranian Americans in Southern California are often blamed for the Iranian Revolution because their ability to actively engage with US free markets and embrace neoliberal ideology enthusiastically brings them into invisibility, but does not necessarily lead to a creation of a community. While I agree with Mostofi, she overlooks important factors related to the intersection of language, class, and ethnic identity within Iranian Americans compared to other immigrant communities. I add to the argument that Iranian Americans are whitening through assimilation by not speaking the language in public as a result of interventions with authority figures. As a result, Farsi is not commodified the same in public versus the private sphere. Women are more likely to 'whiten' their bodies, but remove the mask of whiteness in the space of the home. For second generation Iranian Americans who keep liminal to the homeland, the ability to keep the language maintained means speaking comfortably in their new and permanent homeland, the dominant society in the eyes of other Americans. Iranians in Southern California are products of the Pahlavi era, belonging to the secular middle class in Iran and are more inclined to Western influence. My study is important because it explains how second generation of Iranian Americans view their class status to their ethnic identity.

In her recent work, Maghbouleh[2] asserts that Iranians occupy a conflicting space between white and non-white. While they are deemed white under the Census Bureau and legal proceedings, their racialized encounters at the airport and at school disable them from having complete 'white privilege.' Many are able to secure a job in the middle class through hard work ethic. Maghbouleh's work encompasses many different aspects of Iranian American identity, but does not differentiate how social class from the parents affects how the second generation view maintaining their ethnic identity through language. Naficy[3] gives note of the hegemonic processes that exist within Iranian American media, especially through the making of television productions and circulated periodicals. Class status is present in the making of television production. Royalist television serves as the dominant discourse of Iranian television at its start. However, class status has allowed Iranian Americans to be one of the leading ethnic groups producing exilic media, allowing the relationship between homeland and diaspora to be strengthened through its production and consumption. His book is a bit outdated, as some programs are not currently running and have been replaced by new ones. Nonetheless, it highlights the importance of diasporic cultural mediums and how these exilic television programs have helped maintain the Persian language in California. I ask critically who the consumers of these programs are.

Hoffman[4] provides the claim that social status and prestige within the Iranian community has changed; it is not about being associated with American culture but with "remaining true to one's own culture and heritage." High social status in Iran correlates to education abroad. French and English are viewed as prestigious languages and the Persian language adopts a few words from these languages as well. Although Hoffman states there are 'possible signs' for an emerging community in Los Angeles, she offers no explanation for this. Iranians, unlike other immigrant groups, lack an 'ethnic enclave' and live in prosperous neighborhoods. With my research, I will determine if her claim is justifiable.

Symbolic Ethnic Identity in Language

1 Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of Iranian-American Identity."
2 Maghbouleh, "The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race."
3 Naficy, "The Making of Exile Culture: Iranian Television in Los Angeles."
4 Hoffman, "Language and Culture Acquisition among Iranians in the United States," 123.

The leading scholar in sociolinguistics and language and ethnicity, Joshua Fishman[5], argues that maintaining language is a practice of group membership and group loyalty. It is ambiguous whether social status has the ability to either maintain the language or cause language shift. While some contest that class status helps maintain the language, others argue that it is a confounding variable which leads to a faster shift to English. However, no model theory has been made to predict factors of language maintenance and shift across ethnic groups. These are determined through various language orientations: language as a right, language as a resource, and language as a problem. Ruiz's[6] defines language as a resource as a way to conserve and manage language, language-as-a-problem as a way to overcome economic and political disadvantages in order to integrate, and language as a right as a way to not discriminate against language use that links itself to culture. I argue the ways these concepts can be applied as a separate 'values system' for public and private symbolic identity, and through which outlets the second generation adopt specific ideologies. Herbert Gans[7], a leading scholar in ethnic identity, defines symbolic ethnicity as "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior." Common sense ideology would be quick to assume that because the largest diaspora of Iranians living outside of Iran are in California, language loss does not seem to be a problem. I examine this phenomenon through the lens of ethnolinguistic vitality theory, which looks at how an ethnolinguistic group behaves "as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations"[8] such variables include group status, demography, and institutional support. My research applies all three of these aspects in order to determine how the language promotes a positive ethno-linguistic consciousness or negative ethno-linguistic consciousness for ethnic identity and if it is viewed as a commodified asset in certain situations, while selectively privatized in others through different periods of life.

Second Generation Iranian Americans + Other Immigrant groups

Due to a lack of scholarly literature available about Iranian Americans, and even less on second generation Iranian Americans, I compare Cuban Americans and Asian Americans, the two other immigrant communities who follow similar 'model minority' trajectories. Because of Iranian Americans deemed whiteness, their experience is similar to Asian Americans. From a young age, Iranian Americans believe that there is an innate difference between themselves and other immigrant communities; However, they are not as unique as they think. This difference binds itself into similarity with other immigrant groups; in so forth English is the common language, the most important means of 'acting white.' One common misconception is that members from a 'model minority' group face no 'real' problems. Sociologists such as Mia Tuan's[9] study of third, fourth, and fifth generation Chinese and Japanese Americans helps broaden our understanding of how the 'model minority myth' within Asian ethnic groups shape their sense of belonging and bicultural behaviors. For example, survivors of the Japanese internment camps raised their kids without Japanese culture in efforts to Americanize them, believing that doing so would help them economically. Through giving their children "more Anglicized names"[10] would result blending in with dominant society – Japanese and Chinese Americans appear as more American during class time, role call, and grammar school. Cultural trauma for Asian Americans is still salient, which is similar to Iranian Americans. Both groups identify as American through key phrases and concepts of 'American-ness,' and domains of life where language is maintained. While Tuan's book is informative, her analysis lacks a comprehensive look at how class relations separate the ways ethnic identity is contested in the public and private spheres – and a more in depth analysis of how gender plays a role into that, which will be discussed more in my analysis portion of this research. Only two studies have been conducted that examines the ethnic identity construction of second generation Iranian Americans. Mahdi's[11] study, conducted in 1998, is outdated and shows the need for future research. He does not account for the various socio-political forces that have ultimately shaped how second generation Iranian

5 Fishman
6 Ruiz, "Orientations in Language Planning."
7 Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity," 9
8 Giles et. al,"Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations," 308.
9 Tuan, "Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today."
10 Tuan.
11 Mahdi, "Ethnic Identity Among Second Generation Iranian Americans in the United States."

Americans group consciousness is through internal and external ethnic power relations. In his survey results, which consisted of a biased sample of immigrants who were active in Iranian organizations, he found there to be a positive correlation between the negative stereotypes from the Iranian Hostage Crisis and a privatized Iranian American identity, indicating that many did not want to learn the language or improve on their minimal skills. My study is important because it focuses on the socialization time period after 9/11, another important socio-political event that subconsciously shapes how the second generation maintains their ethnic identity and offers a more detailed account of the fluidity of Iranian American identity through language. He states that the second generation's desire to maintain their identity predicates on an "Americanized" understanding of it, which is shown in the indifference of improving their language skills. In his study of 401 survey participants, 53.6% love to know Persian well while 44.5% have no interest to learn or improve. This is also because many members of the second generation cannot read or read Farsi, so my research will show the different ways it is maintained.

There is sparse research on second generation Iranian Americans and their ethnic identity as well as Persian language maintenance in the United States. My study also targets a few individuals who are not actively involved in Iranian community organizations as a way to diversify the sample. Mehdi Bozorgmehr[12], a leading scholar in studying the Iranian American community, conducted a study in 2010 involving how second generation Iranian Americans define success in comparison to other second generation immigrant children in America. He uses quantitative data for his research from Immigration and Naturalization Services and Department of Homeland Security, as well as American Community Survey data from 2005-2007 to determine if they follow this 'segmented assimilation' trajectory, which looks specifically at factors of education, language, and occupational status. He found minimal differences for gender in regards to educational and occupational success of the second generation. Following as a mirror to my study, he only uses quantitative data, while using qualitative interviews can offer a more holistic perspective on how much of a role class and gender affect maintaining ethnic identity through language. He also leaves room at the end of his research for more research to be conducted, especially in regards to comparing Iranian Americans to other immigrant groups. This is what my research will be doing.
One of the studies guiding this paper was Ramezanzadeh's[13] work, where she looked at socio-psychological, socio-institutional, and socio-political forces that play a role into heritage language loss of second generation Iranian Americans in New York and New Jersey. She argues that Farsi is a language that has been "othered" by society and heritage language loss is strongest within the Iranian community than other immigrant groups. This is due to how Iran is seen as an "Axis of Evil" deemed by the US, how Iranians are grouped in as terrorists after the 9/11 attacks, and media representations of Islam and the Middle East that have contributed into situated Iranian American identity in different spheres: she terms this "contemporary orientalism." Using an interpretative/ qualitative methodology, she concludes that second generation Iranian American college students are not strong enough to combat the forces against them in order to maintain their heritage language. At the end of her research, she leaves room for future research to be conducted in California, where a larger Iranian population exists. There are some gaps in her work, as she does not analyze factors of social class within the Iranian community plays a role into their acculturation process and ethnic identity development in the presence of a larger community – where media production is present. My work is a continuation of hers. What I am also arguing is the universal phenomenon that is occurring within all immigrant groups at almost precisely the same rate, making Iranian American immigrant children no less different than their counterparts.

Methods

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and purposive sampling. The researcher acknowledges possible bias that can result in this research method; However, this methodology was chosen because Iranian Americans do not trust researchers[14] and gaining access to study the Iranian community is difficult[15] (Higgins 2004; Mostofi 2003). I conducted sixteen interviews: nine women and seven men. Participants ranged from ages

12 Bozorgmehr, "Success(ion): Second Generation Iranian-Americans."

13 Ramezanzadeh, "Unveiling the Veiled and Veiling the Unveiled: Revealing the Underlying Linguistic Ideologies and their Impact on Persian Language Loss and Maintenance among Second-Generation Iranian-American College Students."

14 Mostofi, "Who We Are: The Perplexity of the Iranian American Identity."

15 Higgins, "Interviewing Iranian Immigrant Parents and Adolescents."

18-36. Two participants were recruited through Persian language classes at UC Berkeley, four were recruited through various Iranian Student Cultural Organizations from different college campuses (UC Berkeley, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, San Francisco State, UC Irvine), two are friends, one family member, and the remaining were referred through interviewees. While a survey response might have gained more participants, semi-structured in depth interviews were chosen, allowing for more personal experiences to emerge. Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 2.5 hours. Eight follow up interviews were conducted with select participants in order to gain a better understanding of how their parent's immigration history/class status affects their positionality within the community, and against Iran. [See Appendix for challenges faced recruiting participants and a further breakdown of the characteristics of participants]. Class is defined through educational level of the parents and level of fluency of English from the parents, as well as from self-identification of participants and from a demographics questionnaire sent out. "Middle class" was how Iranian Americans mostly identified themselves, either in categories of "lower-middle" or "middle-upper." The questionnaire consisted of participant's educational level, education levels of mother and father, personal income, income of the family, and fluency of English. I recruited participants who weren't only from the middle/upper class and was able to yield an even number from those who were from the lower/middle class and middle/upper class: 8 from each.

Different ages were also chosen to understand how political climates affect ethnic identity maintenance for those in the diaspora in relation to their language practices: a pre/post 9/11 socialization environment in elementary, middle, and high school. Additionally, sampling criteria included: being born in America or arriving before age 7, at least 18 years of age, having varying levels of Farsi proficiency, and have at least one parent belonging to the 'secular' Muslim group. Participant's parents either came to America for education or for political/religious reasons, falling under the category of 'exile.' I focus on the Muslim Iranian community because according to sociologist and leading scholar in conducting research on the Iranian American community, Mehdi Bozorgmehr[16] implies that they are the "least ethnic" religious group within the Iranian community, excluding Jewish, Armenian, and Baha'I. They are the "least ethnic" because of their desire to create distance between themselves and the Islamic Republic. While other religious groups are able to maintain ethnicity through actively keeping networks because of persecution and suppression in the home country, the question for how well the secular Muslim community maintains ethnicity through language remains. Due to time constraints, I was unable to conduct interviews with the parents of select interviewees. In lieu of this, follow up interviews with select participants were conducted in order to gauge a more in depth understanding of the cultural traumas endured by their parents when migrating here and how that has ultimately affected maintaining their ethnic identity and speaking the language.

Questions were derived from Tuan: *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*[17] and from Ramezanzadeh's dissertation, as well as some original questions from the researcher. When conducting this research, it is important to acknowledge my own insider status as a researcher that could result in bias. However, it is my role as an insider that has allowed me to gain access in studying this community. Participants feel more comfortable sharing intimate stories and experiences with me. All names have been changed for confidentiality.

Role of Class

While I originally hypothesized that social status would not play a critical role in how Iranian Americans understand and maintain their ethnic identity, class relations and status markers reproduce themselves in the host country. Status plays a role in how they view themselves as members of the 'imagined community.' The home country ideals and characterization carry over, creating the same unequal practices that shape how the second generation understands their bicultural orientations. For second generation Iranian Americans, their dual identities in relation to their transnationality and language practices reflect the conscious desire to separate themselves from their transnational past, especially for the lower/middle class Iranian Americans. The upper/middle class all share in common their mother obtaining at least a high school diploma and stricter language planning policies in their

16 Bozorgmehr, "Iranian Ethnicity: Iranians in Los Angeles."

17 Tuan.

households, while lower/middle class Iranian Americans all had mothers that only obtained a high school diploma and viewed practicing the language as a problem more so than their counterparts.

Upper/middle class Iranian Americans that I interviewed were more likely to maintain their ethnic identity through community organizations. Those who are children of political refugees, also categorized as 'exiles,' are more likely to attend these events than those whose parents came here for educational purposes. This is because 'exiles' cling on to the notion of the homeland more so than other diasporic typologies - and have different resources to maintain and recreate their ethnic identity. Children of political refugees attract more inter-ethnic friends. All their parents are from Tehran, which relates to how they consume Iranian identity and maintain it through redefining and creating their transnational past. For example, I found that members of this group used technology as a means to maintain their ethnic identity, particularly Instagram came up as a recurring theme amongst the upper/middle class. The materialistic understanding of what it means to be Iranian for the privileged class creates a divide in the community of symbolic ethnicity and a different sense of cultural nostalgia.

Those who had the means to obtain an education in America fantasize about both the pre-Islamic past and lavish lifestyle of America, such as describing being Iranian American as 'houses filled with decor and vases.' Material items were factors that determined 'being American enough', such as the clothes you wear and engaging in American capitalistic and/or neo-colonial holidays (such as celebrating Christmas and/or Thanksgiving). Their social circles and groups were made up of more Iranian friends and defined more as a factor of symbolic ethnicity for those who were from the middle/upper class. While all participants did note being American, those who come from upper/middle class have a different understanding of what it means to be Iranian American than lower/middle class. Upper/middle class base Americanism through its foreign policies, through interventions with Iran, and in a clearer opposition of America and celebrating cultural holidays. They also noted their positionality as a 'model minority immigrant group' and problematize it.

When asked, 'what support would help you in maintaining the language?' a common theme that middle/upper class Iranian Americans shared was the need for a more cohesive community, rather than lower/middle class Iranian Americans. They were well aware of how their class status affected their ability to interact with the community and find resources to maintain their ethnic identity, but still faced the problem of the language being lost. Andre, a member of this group whose mother came here for political reasons, is an active board member of an Iranian club on his college campus. He shared that "creating more unity within the Iranian community is important, fostering less competition will ensure that the language can be passed down to the next generation, because at this point, I see it as dying out. It's a concern I feel everyone has." Yet, not everyone does have this concern. Through an institutional perspective of Persian language maintenance and language loss in California, Naficy himself writes that the Iranian radio adoption of '"Penglish," a mixture of Persian and English, will bring "interethnic pluralism and multiculturalism" within the Iranian American community.[18] However, shortly after the creation of an outlet for exilic media in 1991, talk shows air programs three days in Persian and two days in English. The linguistic transformation demonstrates the rapid acculturation of Iranians in America and desire to separate themselves from the Islamic Republic – while viewership is dictated by the first generation, the second generation keeps liminal ties through exposure from their parents. This is one of the only mediums of circulation for the Persian language within the United States. It is apparent then that the second generation Iranian Americans who hear this become aware that speaking in English more is acceptable from their Iranian and American counterparts, leading to assimilation through language and adoption of 'language-as-a-problem' subconscious ideology because of how it is ostracised from dominant society and even within the Iranian community. Naficy argues that the creation of exilic media in Los Angeles fetishizes the 'motherland' for Iranians in exile, which links strong nationalistic and racially prejudiced discourse together.[19] Political groups such as the National Council of Resistance of Iran, also known as Mojahedin, use such Royalist television as a discourse of power to discredit their opponents both within –their opponent is both the Islamic Republic and the United States, however, they use different tactics of what they show on television in order to achieve this. The body of an exile not the same 'old' but transformed into a new physicality and reconstruction. This relates to ethnic identity contestations of the second generation, because the ways in which gender plays a role in where/who Iranian Americans contest their identities in public/private.

18 Naficy, 43.

19 Naficy.

The language is commodified through different circumstances. Rhonda, a daughter of two political refugees in Iran and a member of the middle-upper class, now actively attends socio-cultural events in America as one of the only outlets, besides the maintenance of exilic television, to maintain her ethnic identity. Her father was one of the main activists involved in the political group National Council of Resistance, which attempted to overthrow the Islamic Republic. She tells me that her parents would go back to Iran, if given the chance of the regime change. This is because the creation of such networks historically were based through status structures: political exiles in the 1980s funded the periodicals.[20] As community organizations are her only way to maintain her ethnic identity, besides exilic television, common sense would assume that attachment to group membership is present. However, she remarks that "In the community, there's this toxic environment, of when you speak Farsi to them [others in the community from opposing class views], they might talk back to you in a condescending tone. Or just make comments, sarcastic comments like 'oh, look at her, she knows Farsi too.'" Although this doesn't stop Rhonda from speaking the language in general, it stops her from speaking the language in front of other Iranians and limits its use to private spaces with her parents and other family members. Rhonda's point is that social divisions within the Iranian community in the United States as a result of class capital carried from Iran disengages her interest in speaking the language. This also has historical meaning behind it. The US governments marking the National Council of Resistance as a "terrorist group" and banning its television programming makes Rhonda more aware of which parts of her ethnic identity to display. Speaking of such political events openly is considered 'taboo,' Rhonda points out. With newer Iranian migrants, "They tend to be a lot more sarcastic and insulting than other people. "I usually don't speak Farsi to them. Based on what I observe of them, I assess the situation and I choose whether or not to speak Farsi, or to be a different type of Iranian." And it is here that Rhonda exhibits signs of viewing speaking Farsi under the 'language-as-a-problem' ideology and chooses to not display her ethnic identity in public. The "different type of Iranian" is based on materialism, superficiality, and higher status, and even though she is a member of this group, she makes a distinction between herself and others. Patricia, who is also a daughter of political refugees, expresses the discomfort when she says "I feel odd only speaking in Farsi constantly." When I asked her why, she referred to speaking English as being cooler because of growing up in America. She also uses code-switching often: "Sometimes I sub the word in English, but I'll just say the whole sentence in Farsi and just use the few words in English. It's just easier in English." It's easier to speak English, not only for the convenience of it being one of her primary languages, but in order to avoid getting stopped and looked out for speaking the language.

Middle/lower class Iranian Americans, meaning those whose mothers only obtained a high school diploma and have limited Farsi fluency, maintain their ethnic identity and language maintenance practices through fewer interactions with the Iranian American community. A common theme was that they maintain Iranian ethnic identity through music consumption. This group also has more paranoia against the Islamic Republic. They associate Iran with a state of 'terrorism' as a threat to their identity – as a threat of ethnic identity development through language. The Islamic Republic's' oppression of such artifacts calls for motivation of these second generation Iranian Americans to maintain it through these outlets. They maintain the language through classroom settings and have limited Farsi capabilities and criteria to speak the language is through 'creating fluid and function sentences' or through 'talking about anything going on in our lives, rather than just small talk.' Their parents are not from Tehran, where upper/middle class gatherings most often took place. Sara, who falls under this category, remarks how "being in a room with so many Iranians is tiring." The 'superficiality' and 'materialism' that defines the hyphenated Iranian American symbolic ethnicity does not suit the lower/middle class into conforming within it. She is excluded from the Iranian social circles that transcend social status on the basis of educational outcomes and language fluency. Instead, she finds a recreation of symbolic ethnicity in forming her own social circles with those who aren't Iranian American.

A common theme that has come up in my interviews was the lack of support from the community to encourage the use of spoken Farsi.. Sam, who is from the lower/middle class, goes into detail about her own experience within the Iranian American community: "They can be kind of judgey, I know that's myself, but I don't want them to make fun of me. Or to think that I'm not speaking correctly. I don't speak at a Persian event. Less judgement would be good. More support from the community as a whole because I'm not the only person

20 Naficy.

who is…who speaks this way. I don't want them to make fun of me. Or to think that I'm not speaking correctly. It's happened to me a few times and it's just too much, so that's why I stopped speaking it." The support from the community and support from elders is helpful. Sam expands on this by saying "So if older people just encouraged us to speak more Farsi instead of laughing at us when we didn't speak it right, it would make an impact." She notes this as also a factor that have led to less chances for her to practice the language actively. "It's so bad that sometimes I won't hang out with my dad unless I know my sister will be there. Because my dad doesn't understand my Farsi, he doesn't understand the way I speak. I want it to be better, but I don't know, I don't really do anything special to make it better, I try talking more but even then it's so limited. It's just not one of those languages where you think 'oh I'm going to learn this.'" Her mother's switch to English and lower educational opportunities that play a part in her social class demonstrates how well she can maintain it today. Less opportunities afforded to speak it. By not speaking their heritage language, second generation Iranian Americans diminishment of their cultural ties are also at stake.

While negative stereotypes of Iran affect all in the diaspora, the lower/middle class related it more to how often they speak the language today and how often interactions with the community emerge. May, who is also from the lower/middle class, remarks limited practical usage of the language: "If anything, you can just put it on your resume." Denoting the status of the language to being inferior to other languages that are more universal in America, where speakers aren't necessarily associated with the nation-state of "terrorism." Linguist Thomas Ricento's expansion of Ruiz's ideology of language-as-a-resource discusses how the status of Farsi as a "Critical Needs Language" by the US State Department's National Security Language Initiatives detaches the value of the language with the group that speaks it, becoming an extension of "foreign-ness."[21] It serves as a political and economic commodity in ensuring the security needs of the country, but not the security needs of the heritage speakers. Languages in this orientation are seen as commodities with economic and political qualities and values. He asserts that the "foreign-ness" and "un-American-ness" of Farsi is what allows for speakers of the language to assimilate quickly into being English monolinguals. Josh's language orientation transformed from a problem into a resource, from the inconvenience of driving to Los Angeles led Josh to adapt the language-as-a-problem ideology of Farsi. He grew up in a rural town near Sacramento and viewed his status of group consciousness and membership to the Iranian community as somewhat problematic until he reached graduate school at the age of 27. Now, it now affords him the opportunity to move in-between spaces of white/non-white, and the commodification of the language enables him security into both spaces due to his status of being half Iranian. He states: "For me, to have access to the community, Farsi is a requirement. It's also impressive for them to see some white kid speaking their language." For full Iranians and for those who come from higher social class, this isn't necessarily the case, to 'impress' those at socio-cultural events. In fact, it is the opposite: even though full Iranians make up the attendance of these events, they avoid speaking the language and do not care to attain the same level of social cohesion. The language is manipulated to create a symbolic boundary of ethnicity that is more commonly acknowledged across third generation immigrant children in America.

Symbolic Ethnicity through Language in LA

All participants noted how LA would serve as a place for an 'imagined community' to emerge as a means of maintaining nationalistic ties, but because of the divide within the community, linguistically tying the community together does not seem probable. While it would be assumed that higher class individuals assert more confidence and less embarrassment speaking their heritage language, being too "Persian" is seen as not only a political asset, but as a barrier that stops Iranian Americans from becoming truly "American." Moreover, we see the creation of a self from other-ization, not only in the absence of Iranians, but even in the presence of many Iranians. The second generation faces the obstacle of American-izing to mainstream society, while keeping and maintaining cultural norms and values of the parents, embedded within the Persian language. The maintenance practices are low, and almost non-existent for the young second generation Iranian Americans that I interviewed. May, from the lower/middle class, reported that "I personally don't feel very comfortable speaking it [Farsi] down in Los Angeles. LA Persians are a different breed altogether, everyone around me has a very completely different understanding

21 Ricento, "Problems with the 'language-as-resource' discourse in the promotion of heritage languages in the USA."

of what it means to speak Farsi." Because he does not substantially have the means to participate in the Iranian American community, being Iranian for him fell into definitions without monetary value.

The language remains seen as a problem, neither a right or a resource. The presence of bakeries, rug shops, and tangible Iranian commodities made hearing Farsi for the first generation on the streets normal, says Jay. Yet, in these shops, shop-keepers know to initiate English to second generation instead of Farsi. The norm in LA is "to be Persian and not speak Farsi. At least in the second generation. I don't really feel comfortable speaking it [Persian language] in LA. Other LA Persians, they're not going to get it. They're going to look at me and be like 'You're *really Persian* Jay.'" Similar to Rhonda, Jay's parents are living in a state of 'exile' – unable to return to Iran for political reasons. The language is selectively privatized. Yet, both groups face a sense of discomfort speaking the language, which should serve as a tool to binding people of the same ethnic group together. English is used within the 'imagined community' – meaning that language, a huge cultural factor, is not necessarily an indicator of tying people together. Within the 'imagined community' people feel embarrassed, ashamed, and uncomfortable to speak the language. Speaking Farsi doesn't necessarily serve as a sign of group membership, as a few of my interviewees even went so far to mention pretending to not know the language at gatherings in order to separate themselves from their ethnicity and create a pan-ethnic hyphenated identity instead. Cultural nostalgia is more apparent in the younger diaspora members than in the older diaspora members I interviewed. Social dynamics at such cultural events predicates not only on politically based class relations, but on the outside socialization differences between men and women in elementary, middle, and high school.

Role of Gender and "Othering" Through Different Times in School

Regardless of age and social class, second generation Iranian Americans are embarrassed to speak their language in public and private. A theme they all shared was that they felt like being "too Persian" is a problem and they maintain the language only with family in the private sphere. However, I did find there to be a difference in gender as to how political events, such as 9/11, shaping formative experiences in school. All the first memories that came to mind of the men participants when asked to narrate a story about the language in relation to the school setting involved some sort of intervention or instance of 'othering' by an authority figure. The theme occurring was 'othering' by a teacher. Had I not gone back at my interview transcripts, I would have missed this pattern. While previous scholarship has looked at "terrorism as the organizing logic behind the gendered racialization of Iranian American boys and men as they attempted to fly to their destinations," [22] the same concept can be applied to men's ethnic identity in the public institutional realm of the schooling system, in comparison to women. Men were called out on their Iranian identity in the classroom setting by their teachers more so than women were. Men were more likely to be called out for their Iranian identity in high school than Iranian women were – yet still self-identified themselves as Iranian rather than Persian, which has been condoned as being a more assimilative ethnic label for Iranian Americans, demonstrated through Andre's comment: "I really, really try to say Iranian. That's my goal. But even then, I find myself saying I'm Persian, in front of certain people." When it comes to the dominant group, Andre will use saying that he's Persian as a cover up.

Iranian women were called out for their Iranian identity and felt most uncomfortable symbolically defining it in elementary school or middle school and not as often in high school. Men have less Iranian friends than women do. Through formative experiences in school, their goal of assimilation was deeply ingrained in a post 9/11 era where 'other-ism' dictates their language practices through friends. Men often heard these types of comments from their friends as well: Andre, who is an active member of his Iranian club on campus, underwent various interventions with his classmates, friends, teachers, and strangers, and acknowledges his place as an outsider throughout his schooling life. He received comments such as: "Farsi sounds gross, and disgusting;" "What is this language that sound so hoarse to them." Andre: "Another thing, a lot of my teachers were very impressed…... More just interested to learn about Iran. After hearing me speak Farsi with my Iranian friends. They'd be very intrigued when we would speak Farsi. And so...it… almost felt like we were being exoticized in a sense. They were very like…..They just didn't really understand the concept of what Iran was. We were being treated sort of like...subjects to pry questions out of. Especially about political issues they might have heard about on the news.

22 Maghbouleh, 120.

They were just confused and wanted to learn more. Using us as a medium to do so. But it made me much more self-aware of speaking the language in public, I wouldn't speak it in school after all this happened. I remember in 9th grade, in my geometry class, we came back from winter break, and my teacher asked everyone where we went, she said Christmas break. And I said "oh, I went to Iran" [nervously says]. And she said "oh, that's very Christmass-y" or something like that. Something so stupid. I was like, that was such a distasteful comment, I felt so weird, it was a lot." Josh adds: "Like even having a billboard to read in Farsi here, people would freak out. 'Oh it's terrorist attacks.' People will just lose it; people aren't used to that. That set me off to learn the language, it was just odd growing up." The men in my study received these comments more often, resorting to hiding parts of their ethnic identity in public by speaking English and also were indifferent when asked if they wanted to improve their heritage language skills.

Women, who attended elementary school during 9/11, contested their identity development and language through private spheres and against men. Men wanted to learn and maintain the language for "themselves," while women wanted to learn and maintain the language to pass it down for future generations. Yet, being Iranian and not speaking Farsi was seen as acceptable. The definition of a 'good Persian person' to the girls I interviewed – meant not speaking the language in public and hiding Farsi and an Iranian identity into private spaces and resulting in fragmented ethnic solidarity. Brianna, whose parents travel often to Iran and is from the middle/upper class, explained to me that being seen as a "FOB" was something she worked hard against: "I didn't want other people at school to hear me talking with my friend and think 'oh, annoying Persian person. I was worried about how people would view me, especially post 9/11.'" She was six when 9/11 happened and reported that: "It was embarrassing to be speaking Farsi loudly." Brianna explains this when she explains how her dad hid his Persian identity: "My dad owned a pizza shop, and he wouldn't tell people he was Persian. A lot of people would assume he was Italian and he would just play it off very cooley. I remember wondering why he wouldn't just tell them he's Persian, or spoke Farsi. I remember getting annoyed about that. When I was in 6th grade, someone came in speaking Italian, my dad was like 'oh I don't know Italian,' and so she asked if he was Italian and he said 'half,' he just lied." Her comment is important because she then models after her father's behavior about where and when it is safe to publicly display her "Iranian-ness" to the rest of the world – and when it is not. Elias' childhood experiences of being "othered" by classmates and his babysitter because of his ethnic background is related to his limited language maintenance practices as an adult and his limited abilities to practice the language in all its forms. In order to blend in with the dominant society, he has distanced himself away from using and maintaining the language, and continues to do so today. The same trend is shown with Frank: "Every time, we would go out to an American restaurant, I would get angst of, I don't want to go through this process [with my dad]." Frank, who was nine years old when 9/11 happened, also received comments from his schoolmates/school peers, such as: "why does your dad do this [in response to 9/11]" but he justifies his bullying as a normative aspect of growing up in the United States: "that's what kids do I guess."

In summary, those who were in elementary school during 9/11 are more uncomfortable to speak Farsi in public than those who were in middle and high school when 9/11 happened. For example, when asked "what are some advantages and disadvantages that you see in speaking Farsi," Aislinn, who was an eighteen-year-old woman when 9/11 happened, can point to the positive connotation of how Farsi can be seen as a right and as a resource, and not necessarily as a problem in comparison to other languages: "The fact that people don't know [Farsi] is awesome. When people hear it they're like, 'what language is that?' They think it's awesome to know another language." Yet, for younger members of the diaspora who were in elementary school after 9/11 happened, they were met with comments in the school system leading to an internalized and externalized sense of Orientalism in their ethnic identities through language. This resulted in lower language maintenance practices today and a complication in defining ethnic identity, resulting in embarrassment. Elias, who was five when 9/11 happened, reported an experience when he was a child, at the movies with his dad and brother where an outsider had asked if his dad was speaking Spanish. He felt ashamed to be Iranian at school, due to others calling him a "terrorist." To this day, Elias reported maintaining the language through glancing at a Wikipedia article once a week "when he's bored" and growing up, would not maintain the language on his own, even when his parents would. "I never would watch Iranian TV when my parents would. Maybe I'd watch for 5 minutes if I was really bored." He has perceived the language to be inferior than other languages by marking it as 'boring' - thus to Elias,

the maintenance of the language is unimportant.

Children who were socialized in the 9/11 era undergo a process of language loss which contributes to how they appositionally view themselves and Iran. Ethnic solidarity and group consciousness is altered due to negative stereotypes regarding Iran that the second generation has internalized, and as a result, expresses a separate public identity. Interviewees expressed more concern with the language being spoken by men than by women. Ally, who was in elementary school when 9/11 happened, explains to me the spiraling effect political events have on not just how she symbolically defines her ethnic identity through language use, but how it also transmitted to her parents as well in the public sphere: "My mom is scared to speak Farsi at the airport. She doesn't really. My dad has a very projecting voice, so sometimes he will speak Farsi at the airport, he'll speak it so loud too. And so many people will just look, I hate it. My mom and I will tell him to be quiet. It really only happens in America though, not Europe." To add on, Casey recalls his experience at the airport: "I had a stubble and a beard, I had a stamp in my passport from Iran from 3 years before when I was 12. At that point, I wanted to make myself seem as white as possible. Yeah, that's me." For Casey, being as "white as possible" means speaking English – in which he masks his ethnic identity in the public sphere.

Through my interviews, a common theme is code-switching when with friends, but none of my participants reported that they have active conversations with people in only Farsi who are also Persian, even those who were actively involved in campus organizations and did take part in the community organizations. I argue that being selective with who you speak Farsi to serves as a sign of capital and status and reinforces social divisions within the Iranian American community. This is best explained through Rhonda's comment: "I don't want to speak Farsi with them, I don't want to give them the satisfaction of speaking Farsi with me." People's experiences with the community make an impact in how comfortable they feel to speak their native language in public, and in private spaces. Rhonda explains this: "I would stop speaking Farsi to my friends in public because people would come up to me and ask me how long it's been that I've been in America. As in, they thought I was born in Iran. I didn't want to attract attention."

"Othering" in different immigrant groups:

Although heritage language maintenance is viewed as a problem for second generation Iranian Americans based on underlying socio-psychological and socio-institutional forces,[23] contrary to Ramezanzadeh's argument, Iranian Americans are not the only immigrant group that are undergoing this at the worst. The process of language maintenance is further complicated by the sense of belonging that members of the Iranian community feel when speaking Farsi: as a linkage to the 'projected homeland' and as a way to distance themselves from their transnational pasts. When people were younger, they didn't want to speak the language for fear of being 'othered' by the dominant community. Now, people don't want to speak the language because they don't want to be 'othered' by the Iranian community for their lack of Farsi skills. This is not only true of Iranians, but of other immigrant groups in the United States as well.

Due to the lack of literature on second generation Iranian Americans, I will draw in other primary and secondary sources from other immigrant communities to show how the process of 'othering' is universal across different immigrant groups in America. Examining second generation Cubans contrasts as a perfect comparison because of their similar immigration history to Iranian Americans. Their status as 'Golden Exiles,'[24] similar to the 'model minority myth' Iranian Americans have inherited marks them as an interesting case study to analyze. Immigration for Cuban Americans occurred in two waves: higher capital for those who came before the Cuban Revolution versus those who came after the Cuban Revolution, mirror the characteristics of Iranian immigrants and Iranian exiles. Miami has risen as a center for an 'imagined community' of Spanish speakers of Cuban descent.[25] However, college students in Miami note how social divisions within the Hispanic community bring a sense of marginalization as a result of their limited Spanish abilities. Expressing emotions of doubt, embarrassment, and self-consciousness contributed to how they viewed their ethnic identities in relation to an 'imagined linguistic community' of Spanish speakers that could emerge. [26] Participants noted facing comments such as: "Oh, you're

23 Ramezanzadeh.

24 Lanier, "Identity and Language Perception among Second-Generation Spanish Speakers in Miami."

25 Lanier.

26 Lanier, 47.

Hispanic, you can't even speak the language correctly."[27] Additionally, Lanier refers to studies conducted by Lynch, which links her results of Miami-born Cubans distancing themselves for their heritage language in order to create a distance from them and more recent immigrants from Cuba.[28] Similarly, found from my data, when asked how often they go to community events, Frank expressed that his reason for not going to the events anymore was "there's a lot of very new Persians there now, there's just a divide. My Farsi isn't as good as theirs, I don't really find the appeal to talk to them. We might not have much in common and we just don't make an effort to talk to each other." This can be best explained from how even in a single 'linguistic community,' there is an establishment of relations for linguistic domination.[29] Although a theme came up in my interviewees about how speaking Spanish results in less stares from others and more opportunities to practice the language, Spanish speakers debate this through limited classes offered at school: "[you] take classes up to fifth grade…and they still don't speak Spanish because it's only up to when you're 11 years old, and then they'll never take Spanish again unless it's for high school."[30] It would be wrongful to say that second generation Iranian Americans' reason for losing their heritage language is a unique experience that only applies to them and the dominant forces of society that work against them; these dominant forces of society work and act against other members of other immigrant communities.

It is also worth noting the Chinese and Japanese languages are classified as 'Critical Needs Languages' alongside with Farsi. Therefore, Asian Americans undergo the same cycle of struggling to symbolically define their ethnic identity: Tuan's study of interviewing 3rd, 4th, and 5th generation Chinese and Japanese Americans living in Northern and Southern California closely mirrors my study. She looks at the case of California because with the largest number of Asian Americans living here, it serves as the perfect case study to see how salient of a role ethnic identity plays in their lives. A male interviewee expressed his ethnicity as a burden in public: "You feel kinda conscious about how they're gonna treat you and that kind of thing, and I think it actually has socially hindered me in some ways. I use [being on alert] as a safety mechanism because you never actually know what's going to happen."[31] Her results highlight a trend of men hiding their ethnic identity more so in public than women do, which are consistent with my findings of second generation Iranian American identity. Similar to my interviewees answers, one of her interviewees who didn't know Chinese confessed having limited opportunities to use it even if she had the knowledge: "To tell you the truth, I don't really know where I'd be using it except if I had a job where speaking Chinese was a necessity."[32] The difference is that second generation Iranian Americans are both choosing not to associate with their ethnic identity in order to recreate a racial boundary of 'whiteness' between themselves and the new arrivals from the Islamic Republic through monetary gains. For example, Patricia justifies "some of them would be like, asking me to write their papers. They'd be like 'Oh, I'll pay $100 if you write a paper for me.' Then I would, in a way, be like, 'oh in America, that doesn't cut it.'" While it can be argued that the language can be seen as a resource, she problematizes its use by reinforcing the social divisions herself within the Iranian American community. In summary, our studies show the various pathways immigrant children are exceptionally excluded from the status quo, but the issue of how to better incorporate all immigrants remains unresolved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social class in the host country works as a continuous boundary for members of a diasporic community who struggle to understand their place through exceptionally short outlets. Because a huge part of language maintenance falls on these community organizations as support, what can be done, as a community, to make these spaces feel more inviting for different classes to practice the language and express ethnic identity? The problem is that Iranian Americans do not feel comfortable themselves speaking their heritage language, as children and as now adults. The need for resources in this community are apparent in order to better understand the historical context of Iranians in California and the process which language loss is occurring in the sociocultural

27 Lanier, 26.
28 Lanier, 26.
29 Bourdeui, "Language and Symbolic Power," 429.
30 Lanier, 53.
31 Tuan, 223.
32 Tuan, 107.

and institutional spheres. While participants in my study noted the need for more accessible resources as well, the continued altered relations between Iran and the United States will work its way against the language maintenance of this group, and other groups in America. The fluidity of ethnic identities of second generation immigrants are complicated through group cohesion and broader socio-political forces, such as living in a post 9/11 world. Consistent with other literature on generational ties that immigrants hold in America, it is safe to hypothesize that as Iranian Americans progress generationally, symbolic ethnicity will hold itself less and less through language and more through materialistic cultural symbols. Unfortunately, it will be reinforcing a divide within the community. Until recently, within this century, scholars have not adequately researched the experiences of the new second generation – doing so is important in understanding the economic and social outcomes of how the country will ultimately be shaped. The US strategically places heritage language values as having a subtractive value depending on their own agenda, which is shaped through outside political forces. In history, heritage languages are usually seen as being less, and even outlawed in certain states. Thus, I argue and reiterate that linking languages as commodities de-links them to communities and links them to economic and military events, especially after 9/11 and even in the ongoing War on Terror and updated Muslim Ban. This research adds onto the limited, but growing scholarship of Iranian American identity and to second generation immigration studies within American context. Media representations as harmful: through 'terrorists' to 'materialist' on Shahs of Sunset where language exposure is also minimal. Iranian Americans, as a 'model minority group' still face their own problems. Future research should interview Farsi speakers who are not solely from Iran; the case of Afghan Americans holds different political and social implications than for Iranian Americans in relation to their ethnic identity development and contestation. Future research can offer to include factors of sexuality and mental health which critically play a role into ethnic identity development and its relation to language use. Additionally, conducting detailed research studies on mixed Iranian Americans, as well as comparative studies between Jewish Iranian Americans and Baha'I Iranian Americans, also adds more to dialogue to the scholarly literature available on how symbolic ethnicity is seen as a choice or a pressure between other immigrant groups who are also mixed as well. Gaining access to these communities is difficult, but pose the important question of how ethnic identity is maintained in different realms of the Iranian American community and will contribute to the lack of literature on the perception of political and cultural values of Iranian American youth living in California. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges the inability to generalize the entire Iranian American population – its extremely heterogeneous nature and various pathways of assimilation/ acculturation differ on a variety of factors. I am hoping that fields of ethnic studies, sociology, and psychology can better incorporate the Middle Eastern community and Iranian American research as time progresses. This research works as a pathway to begin understanding more about the history of the Iranian American community, specifically Muslim Iranian American community – as they are here to stay.

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Appendices

Challenges recruiting participants:

Two participants, who were older men in their 40s and came here as young children, that I reached out to expressed an interest to participate, but refused to be interviewed. Their reasoning was because of the painful memories that were brought back into immigrating into this country. One potential participant had stated that talking about his experience acculturating into American society 'brings back too many painful memories to think and talk about. I don't like to think about it in any way.' Additionally, I reached out to Iranian student organizations at Cal State Fresno and Cal State Bakersfield and was not met with a response. Most importantly, I attempted to get a mixed number of people from different parts of California. I was able to yield an equal number of participants from Northern California and Southern California. I additionally planned to interview three parents in order to holistically understand their perspective immigrating but was unable to, due to time constraints.