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APPROACH AND METHODS

The project was a fact-finding and opinion research about Iranians and Iranian communities in Britain. In our invitation to participants, we explained that we hoped to produce qualitative and statistical data about Iranians living in Britain that could:

- promote better understanding of this significant minority population
- support new policies (national/local) and provision to address Iranian community needs
- reveal the range of activities already being pursued and provide incentive for greater cooperation amongst Iranian groups

We used a mix of research methods. We developed an online survey in English and in Persian that were both available on SurveyMonkey. We emailed information about this project with links to the survey to numerous community organizations and well-connected individuals and asked them to send it on. A Facebook page dedicated to informing Iranians about the project reached 250 people, with 79 ‘likes’; some useful data was also posted there. And 265 people completed the survey across both languages.

We also conducted over 30 interviews with individual respondents as well as with some heads of Iranian organizations (see Appendix A for details). Interviews were conducted in people’s homes or places of work and in either English or Persian, the latter requiring translation as well as transcription. Respondents have been anonymised, although our interviewees might recognise themselves among the lengthy quotations.

We commissioned some short reports, including an analysis of the census and other statistical data regarding Iranians in Britain as well as overviews of the Iranian media scene, the art scene, etc., all of which provided useful context for our project.

We collaborated with Ali Hessami, Mahmoud Norouzi and Simin Azimi of the management team of BICDO, an Iranian community organization that was keen to develop its own research capacity. Gholami and Sreberny organised three training-sessions for potential interviewers from BICDO, some of whom did indeed go on to deliver some very good interviews.

We would like to thank all those who worked with us in one capacity or another.

We would also like to thank all those Iranians who completed the survey, including writing in comments, and those who talked openly, critically and jokingly with the interviewers and provided some refreshingly forthright analyses and personal testimonies about the experiences of Iranians living in Britain.
SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

From the start, it was difficult to know the boundary of this project. There is by now amongst Iranians in Britain a plethora of voluntary associations, organizations, charities that are organised in a variety of ways. A brief history of Iranian organizations in London from 1979 was sketched by Ladjevardi and Saboonchian (2011). The range is now more complex. Some have formal, participatory structures with membership and subscriptions, while others are one-man bands of decision-making authority. Some organizations have highly locally-focussed activities. Numerous cultural groups exist which appeal to non-Iranian as well as Iranian audiences. There are many professional associations of doctors, architects, business people and more. There are internationally-focussed media outlets as well as free papers advertising local services for Iranians. And there are, of course, many Iranians involved across the range of British cultural and economic life who might have little to do with any sort of ‘community’.

We could envisage these activities as a series of circles. At the core, and strongly coloured, are organizations that are highly focussed on all Iranians. A subsequent, paler, circle of groups would include those that provide more targeted services and activities for particular sub-groups of Iranians. Further, there is a penumbra of associations involved with cultural activities that engage Iranians and non-Iranians alike, and lastly, there is a pale cloud of Iranians who simply live and work in Britain.

Thus, we suggest that all attempts to map diasporic communities must face this analytic problem of where does the ‘community’ or communities of a diasporic population end and the wider society begin? Iranians, for socio-economic and demographic reasons that become evident in the report, present this dilemma very vividly. Despite many concerns to the contrary, many Iranians could be said to be well-integrated in Britain, often married in to British society and to be high achievers in educational and occupational terms. This report focuses on that inner core of organizations that look inward and provide services specifically for Iranians. A complete map – whatever that might be – of Iranian socio-cultural activities and organizations in Britain still remains a worthwhile project; this is not that.

Also, despite our best intentions, this project remains heavily London-centric. Survey participants are mainly from London (74%). Some interviews were conducted in Brighton and Tunbridge Wells. There is patchy evidence of Iranian community activity in Birmingham and Manchester. Edinburgh now enjoys an Iranian film festival, and more. Sreberny (2000) coined the term the “ILIL” for Iranians living in London” and, in many ways, we have not managed to go much beyond that. Here, certainly, there is room for further work.

Let us look at the results from the bilingual surveys.
THE ON-LINE SURVEY: BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Between July 2014 and March 2015, we conducted two surveys, one in English the other in Persian, among Britain’s Iranian population. In addition to collecting general demographic information such as levels of education, immigration status and so forth, we wanted to gain insight into UK Iranians’ ideas of community; ways in which they connect with other Iranians; which organisations – Iranian or otherwise – they regard as the most significant; and what issues/challenges they identify as particularly pressing.

We decided to keep the surveys completely separate because of our overarching interest in the concept of ‘community’. That is, although issues of community were important to us as researchers as well as to our respondents, the English word ‘community’ and its semantic nuances and connotations cannot be rendered into Persian in an immediate and straightforward manner. Therefore, we became very interested in finding out whether keeping the English and Persian surveys separate would yield different results around a similar set of issues – and the findings are indeed intriguing. The common approach to bilingual surveys is that the respondent is offered one questionnaire which contains, either in each question or on different pages, both languages. As such, it is explicit that an attempt has been made at translating usually from what is perceived to be ‘the main’ (or ‘most important’) language to the respondent’s language. Our surveys are thus quite unique in that they did not ask participants to fill in a Persian version of an English questionnaire, but treated each survey as significant in its own right. This approach allowed us to explore the important role of language and related cultural logics in understandings and practices of ‘community’. Having a Persian survey instrument might have caught a different demographic: indeed, as discussed further below, those who completed it were predominantly born in Iran, unlike those who completed the English-language survey.

It should be noted that some of the results dealing with demographic information have been combined.

SAMPLING

It is extremely difficult to ‘locate’ and reach Iranians in a manner from which a truly random sample could be drawn. Even the UK Census and other large scale surveys such as the Labour Force Survey do not provide the necessary data (cf. Spellman 2004; Gholami 2015). This is due to several reasons. Firstly, because ‘Iranian’ is not recognised by the UK government as an ethnic category, it is not offered as an option for identification on official surveys. Therefore, significant variables relating to UK Iranians – including actual numbers and settlement patterns – are effectively unknown. For example, the 2011 Census records a total of 84,735 Iranians across the UK. But this is the number of Iranians by country of birth and excludes British-born Iranians. The figures become even more complicated when considering ethnic and national identity, as Iranians place themselves in a wide range of ethnic categories ranging from ‘Other’ to ‘Asian’ and even ‘White’ – and only just over 34,000 identify their nationality as Iranian.
Due to the inexact nature of official figures, and considering the funding and time limitations of our own project, we used a blend of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling methods. Our surveys were available online at SurveyMonkey, including through a link on the project’s Facebook page. Links were also sent out to prospective respondents via email, text messages and other common means of communication. Respondents were then encouraged to pass the information on to people they knew. We also utilised the mailing lists of Iranian organizations and of high-profile individuals with whom we were in touch. Finally, anyone who agreed to be interviewed for the project was also asked as part of their interview to fill in one of the questionnaires. All respondents had the choice of filling in either the English or the Persian survey. In terms of our target population, we specified that anyone who self-identified as ‘Iranian’ would be eligible to participate. The English survey attracted the most responses with 210 respondents, whereas 55 people took part in the Persian survey. Both surveys contained twenty questions and opened and closed on the same days.

In terms of gender and age, a combined calculation of both surveys shows that 56% of respondents identified as female and 44% as male. The majority of participants were aged between 22-60, with a handful of respondents falling below or above that range. We specified no age limit.

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Distribution of respondents across the UK: Before examining and comparing specific results, it is useful to briefly look at where in the UK our respondents lived. The survey asked participants to either write the name of their town/city or the first three digits of their post code. Due to the demographic nature of this question, and to facilitate the ‘mapping’ of UK Iranians, we have combined the results from both surveys. In total, 247 people provided details of their area of residence. Of these, 183 individuals (74% ) said that they lived in London, whilst 64 (26% ) lived elsewhere in the UK. London Iranians spanned virtually the length and breadth of London with a small concentration around northern areas of the city. Iranians from other British towns/cities were also diverse in their settlement choices with no significant settlement patterns emerging – Newcastle, Manchester, Oxford, Bristol, Chichester, Brighton, Cardiff, Glasgow and Edinburgh, amongst others, were all listed as places of residence. Our figures seem to tally with other surveys and estimates that place the majority of Iranians in London. However, we were pleasantly surprised to receive a 26 percent response rate from outside London.

Place of birth: 86.6% of respondents to the English survey stated that they were born in Iran, whilst the remaining 13.4% ticked either the UK or ‘Other’ as their place of birth. Those in the latter category (14 individuals) listed Italy, Germany, France, Switzerland, USA, UAE and Afghanistan as their countries of birth. In comparison, the Persian survey was filled out overwhelmingly by people born in Iran (98.1%). Only two respondents who answered the Persian survey were born outside Iran, one in Britain and the other in France.
**Immigration status:** The figures presented here are, again, the combined results from both surveys. Out of a total of 236 respondents to this question, 70.7% said that they were British citizens, with another 10.1% having ‘Indefinite leave to remain’ in the UK, and a further 5.5% being EU citizens. Furthermore, 5.5% of the sample classified themselves as ‘Refugee’, with another 8% being in further or higher education. Finally, there were also some entries in the ‘Other’ option where people wrote responses such as ‘spouse of EU citizen’ and ‘work visa’.

**Educational background:** Aggregating the results of both of surveys, a whopping 56.7% of respondents stated that held a postgraduate degree (e.g. MA/PhD), followed by nearly 36% who had completed an undergraduate degree. Only 3.6% were educated to high school level, and less than 0.5% had little or no formal education. 3.2% of the sample was currently in education. These findings would confirm the commonly held belief that Iranians are generally a highly educated diasporic community; research from the United States has also shown consistently similar results (see for example Bozorgmehr 1998: 10). Indeed, the wordle diagram on page 9 shows that education is one of the top characteristics that Iranians use to describe themselves.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

*Figure 1: Is there an Iranian community in Britain?*

![Pie chart showing responses to the question of whether there is an Iranian community in Britain.](image)

Figure 1 shows respondents’ opinions as to whether or not an Iranian community can be said to exist in Britain. The overwhelming majority (64%) believe that one does; while only a minority (7.4%) have blankly answered in the negative. Given
preconceptions by Iranians and some non-Iranians that Iranians are disjointed and somewhat anti-communitarian, this is a significant finding.

It is very interesting, however, if not slightly baffling, that in the Persian survey opinions were somewhat more sharply divided with 32.7% answering ‘Yes’ against 34.5% saying ‘No’. Also interesting is the fact that 20% of respondents chose the ‘No comment’ option, compared to only 3.4% of respondents to the English survey. The word which replaces community in the Persian survey is *ejtema’* which more generally is used to mean ‘society’.

Figure 2 shows how connected respondents felt to an Iranian community. Interestingly, despite 64% saying that an Iranian community exists in Britain, only 10.2% feel very connected to it. A larger percentage (13.7%) feel no connection whatsoever, with a significant 35.6% stating that they feel hardly connected. These results would seem to corroborate the common view that Iranians tend to avoid each other and will rarely venture outside their immediate network of family and friends. They are, however, offset by the largest figure of 40.5% who said that they felt fairly connected. Putting this figure alongside those who answered ‘Yes’ to the previous question (in English), it can be suggested that views and attitudes around issues of community in the Iranian diasporic context are changing. That is, an increasing number of people believe that not only does a community exist but they also feel some sort of a connection to it.

*Figure 2: How connected do you feel to an Iranian community?*

However, here too the issue of language – which is probably linked to generational trends – must be looked at carefully. In the Persian survey, the majority (46.3%) said that they felt hardly connected while 24.1% felt no connection at all. The number of
people who felt fairly connected was also significantly smaller at only 16.7%. However, 13% felt very connected, which is only slightly larger than the figure recorded in the English survey. The difference in these figures is partly explained by the discursive context in which the concept of ‘connection’ is invoked/imagined. The Persian word we used for ‘connected’ is peyvasteh, because we were interested in finding out how deep running people felt their connections to be.

The surveys also asked respondents to describe Iranians in Britain in three words. In the English survey, the most commonly used words were ‘hard working’ (count = 40) followed by ‘educated’ (count = 39) and ‘successful’ (count = 15). Other positive terms included ‘integrated’, ‘friendly’ and ‘diverse’ while more ambiguous terms such as ‘proud’, ‘ambitious’, ‘posh’ and ‘selfish’ also figured highly.

The combined comments produced this wordle image in WORDITOUT:

‘Educated’ [tahsil kardeh] was also the most common descriptor used in the Persian survey (count = 5) followed by ‘lonely/alone’ [tanha] (count = 4) and ‘successful’ [movaffagh] (count = 4) Although two of the three words were identical in the two surveys, respondents to the Persian survey felt it important to express that Iranians are lonely/alone. It is also significant that tanha was their second choice, before movaffagh. Further, it is noteworthy that although both surveys returned a range of positive and negative adjectives, the Persian survey was generally more negative in its description of Britain’s Iranians, showing words such as jealous, uncultured, liars, hypocrites, frauds, dispersed, and confused.

Respondents were also asked to list up to five organisations – not necessarily Iranian – which they believed make a contribution to Iranian life in Britain. In the English survey, the Iranian Heritage Foundation was the most mentioned with 62 references. Second were Iranian language schools (50 references), with Rustam School being the
overwhelming favourite. The third most commonly mentioned organisation was SOAS, University of London (34 references), followed by BBC Persian (23 references). With 14 references each, Iranian Association and Kanoon-e Iran shared fifth place. Strangely, the data obtained on this question from the Persian survey is too inconsistent to report systematically. Firstly, over half of respondents chose not to answer the question. Those who did often responded erratically and sarcastically – e.g. ‘several associations’ or ‘I don’t know. Do Iranian organisations ever help?’ or simply ‘no-one’. Of the few useful responses, Kanoon-e Iran clearly stood out. Overall, it can be said that respondents mentioned a truly wide range of Iranian and non-Iranian, public and private organisations. This is a good indication of the socio-economic heterogeneity of UK Iranians, not to mention their ethnic and religious diversity. However, it does bring into question the overwhelming description of Iranians as educated and successful, which would suggest a great deal more socio-economic uniformity. A possible explanation for this discrepancy could be that terms such as ‘educated’ and ‘successful’ are not necessarily descriptive of a given respondent; rather, they may be how that individual imagines the Iranian diaspora to be.

We also asked respondents to specify how they connect to other Iranians, giving them a range of options of connection methods and frequencies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you connect to other Iranians?</th>
<th>daily</th>
<th>weekly</th>
<th>monthly</th>
<th>annually</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian language school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian music concert</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian film</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live performance (theatre, dance, etc)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian restaurant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian grocery shop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/college</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private parties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As figure 3 shows, monthly visits to Iranian restaurants are the most popular means of connecting with other Iranians, followed by monthly attendance at private parties. On the whole, Iranians seem to connect more around cultural events and cultural spaces than in social or educational ones. And almost in stark opposition to many other ethnic minority groups in the UK, particularly those of Muslim backgrounds, attendance at mosques or other religious spaces are their least favourite method of connection, with a significant majority answering ‘Never’ for these categories. A broadly similar picture emerges from the Persian survey: cultural spaces, especially restaurants, are the most popular followed by social and educational ones; and religious spaces are largely neglected.

The issue of religion and religiosity is a very interesting one in the Iranian context; and studies exist which examine Iranians’ relationship with secularism and particularly Islam in great depth (e.g. Gholami 2015). However, as far as we are aware our project is the first one to provide statistical information regarding levels of
Iranian diasporic religiosity. As figure 4 shows, a massive 47.7% of respondents to the English survey did not hold any religious belief, followed by just over 30% who identified as non-practising. This challenges previous studies (e.g. McAuliffe 2007) which assumed that the majority of UK Iranians belong in the non-practising (or ‘cultural Muslim’) category. Only 6.2% of our sample identified as devoutly religious. The figures are even starker in the Persian survey, with nearly 52% saying that they have no religious belief and just over 42% categorising themselves as not practising. Less than 2% identified as devout.

Figure 4:

Another important issue which respondents were asked to comment on was the particular challenges with which they believed UK Iranians are faced. They were instructed to mention three challenges. The three most identified challenges revolved around issues of language (i.e. the barriers put up by not knowing enough English), jobs (i.e. being unemployed or de-skilled; not being able to get into desired profession; or not earning enough) and discrimination (particularly in terms of being seen as terrorists/religious extremists and associated with the ‘axis of evil’; but also racial/Islamophobic prejudice more generally). In terms of discrimination, furthermore, some respondents felt that Iranians were unfairly and inaccurately bundled in with other Middle-Eastern, especially Arab, countries. These challenges were closely followed by the difficulties of understanding and having access to the UK legal, political and immigration systems. This included frustration expressed at not being able to obtain tourist visas for family members (partially due to the breakdown of diplomatic relations between the British and Iranian governments in recent years). Respondents also mentioned intra-diasporic tensions and the lack of communal unity as challenges. It is also interesting, however, if not somewhat contradictory, that many saw it as a challenge to integrate or even assimilate into British society.
The results from the Persian survey also highlight challenges related to language and, to a lesser extent, jobs and discrimination. However, respondents here commented much more frequently on issues of disunity among Iranians. For some, this was expressed in terms of lack of trust among Iranians; while others mentioned disparity in political and religious views; and others still talked about problems of identity and belonging. Some respondents went as far as to suggest that UK Iranians face an ‘identity crisis’. Issues of integration and acceptance by British society, as well as challenges related to receiving social, educational and legal support were also mentioned.

The final point we will highlight in this report is the issue of language use. Given the wide age range of our participants as well as the fact that the majority chose to respond in English, the figures for ‘language spoken at home’ showed more similarity than we would have expected (see figures below).

Figure 5a: Respondents who used English

![Pie chart showing language use](image)

As figures 5a and 5b show, although the percentages for the categories vary, the proportion of responses is largely similar, with a clear majority in both surveys speaking Persian at home and with friends and family. 30.8% and 20.4% respectively speak English with family and friends. Overall, these results would suggest that Iranians remain very attached to the Persian language even beyond the migrating generation. To an extent, this contradicts anecdotal evidence, which can also come from professionals such as teachers, that Persian is fading in significance and usage. Also interesting, however, is the relatively high number of people in the English survey (11.3%) who use ‘Pinglish’ as their preferred language. More research needs to be done to understand the particularities of the deployment of Pinglish as a distinct field of discourse.
GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE SURVEYS

In addition to shedding important demographic light on Britain’s Iranian population, the two surveys have brought to attention a number of very important issues which pertain to the role that language plays in understandings and approaches to ideas of ‘community’ and what it means to belong to or be connected to a community.

Given our results, we could suggest that ‘community’ belongs in a British discursive constellation which may be partially or wholly alien in Persian discourses. By the same token, the explosion of online technology has in many ways expanded the notion of community in the English language. It is now ‘easier’ – or perhaps it requires less ideological commitment – to belong to, or connect to, all sorts of communities. In addition, the notion of belonging (to communities) also has currency in contemporary British politics. That is, it denotes a specific concept which has political recognition and incites political action at all levels. Therefore, subjects operating in the discursive field of English-speaking politics may feel more compelled to assert belonging to a community.

In Persian, however, not only is there no way to easily translate ‘community’ (or indeed belonging or being connected to it), the existing concepts arguably require a great deal more, or at least different, socio-political commitment of a given subject. ‘Being connected to a community’ could be translated into Persian as mottasal boodan be yek ejtema’, which could be seen to be so vague as to be almost meaningless; or peyvastgi baa yek gorooh/qawm, which is very specific and connotes ideological or moral agreement with a group, party or ethnicity. These semantic issues no doubt have links to Iran’s social, political and cultural transformations over the
past hundred or so years. At any rate, all these factors, amongst others, may explain why our surveys yielded such different results around notions of community. They also underscore the importance of carrying out separate surveys in English and Persian in order to get at these complex sites of meaning and experience. In fact, we would suggest that it is extremely difficult to gain a deep understanding of issues of Iranian community making and living, as well as issues of integration and wider social relations, without this methodological approach. Clearly, the issues we have identified demand further investigation, which we hope to be able to carry out in the near future.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS: HOW DO IRANIANS TALK ABOUT THEMSELVES?

The purpose of conducting interviews with both individuals and heads of organizations was precisely to flesh out the meanings given to the survey questions by participants. In short, how do Iranians talk about themselves, their experiences, their sense of what constitutes Iranian community and Iranian lives in Britain? The following section thus follows the order of survey questions to begin with, but then organizes the materials under themes that emerged from the interviews.

Appendix A provides a list of all the interviews/focus groups conducted and assigns each a numerical value; thus, a quotation can be linked to the interview. All but four were conducted in London. All participants were happy to speak on the record and to be quoted, often saying that they would be ready to be named. We have, however, anonymized all speakers, although participants might recognize themselves in the verbatim quotations we have used.

IS THERE AN IRANIAN COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN?

We began with a difficult question, “is there an Iranian community in Britain?” As already described in the survey analysis, part of the difficulty is the lack of a specific Persian term for ‘community’. The other difficulty is what is understood by the idea of ‘community’, which is exactly what we wanted to tease out from respondents.

Many respondents picked up on the distinction between the notion of a singular community or the prevalence of numerous communities. One repeated response was that there are “lots of them” (27, f, 22-30). Our interviewees mentioned various organizations and activities run by Iranians, often discriminating by their geographic location, their intra-Iranian ethnicity or their politics. It appears that Iranians function with quite a sophisticated understanding and mental map of the complexity of their socio-cultural environment. Here are a number of examples:

“Since there are movies in independent cinemas, music concerts, live performances, etc, solely in the Persian language though not necessarily just
for Iranians, then I’d say yes. If you include various religious communities and political communities, then definitely. (23, F, 31-45)

“Yes, lots of them actually. Especially in areas which are densely populated with Iranians, there will be Iranian grocery shops, restaurants and Iranian services. There are also Iranian religious communities such as those that congregate at the Islamic Centre in Kilburn or the Iranian Christian churches in Chiswick and Finchley or the Baha’i community. I am also aware of Iranian Jewish communities in the borough of Barnet or the Iranian Zoroastrian community which worship in their centre in Rayners Lane and staunchly uphold Persian cultural holidays such as Norouz and Jashn-e Mehregan. Oh and not forgetting politically affiliated Iranian communities which I don’t really need to go into.” (22, F, 22-30)

“Yes, I believe so. The main areas which I’ve noticed are Finchley, Mill Hill and Kensington. Outside of London I’d say Nottingham and Brighton, although I’ve only heard from friends. There are also a substantial amount of Iranian Jews living in Golders Green and Hendon, and Finchley seems to have a prominent Baha’i community. There are also many Christians here although I’m not sure where they’re based “(3, F, 31-45)

“Yes, a large one. But due to the diversity of Iranian people – ethnicity, religions, and political affiliations – there has been the emergence of a large yet somewhat segmented Iranian community…Iranians are extremely passionate people, especially in their social, religious and political beliefs. We do not blend as well as other ethnicities when it comes to a homogenous, community-wide group that can accept the religious and especially political beliefs of the other party…in simpler terms, Iranian Jews tend to be part of the Iranian Jewish community only. Iranian Mojahedin’s tend to be part of their own wider community, general monarchists, and so forth” (25, M, 22-30)

“Now, I have seen so many other schools start functioning on Saturdays in different parts of London, let alone in different cities. The concentration is in London, I think they have been doubled at least, the number of schools. The number of organizations, the community organizations has not doubled. But at the same time, you know, the new types of organizations, for instance the cyber organization, the younger generation are more in touch with each other through social networks. So, there is no one such organization with a constitution but, at the same time, they are a subculture. “(17, M, 60+)

HOW CONNECTED DO YOU FEEL?

There was a wide range of responses to this question. Some respondents were utterly negative, saying “not at all”, (2, F, 31-45); “not at all” (26, M, 45-60); or ‘hardly” (1, M, 45-60).

Some were even negative about the whole idea of a community organization:
“I think these communities are not useful for the Iranians like us because all of us have our own relatives and friends here. I think only uneducated people need to get help from those communities. England is a very developed country and all the social services act in a way to simplify the everyday life of people here. Therefore individuals could independently have access to all the daily services they need. We do not need to be dependent on a particular community” (26, M, 45-60)

Others did not feel very connected to any formal kind of organization yet clearly lived their lives predominantly amongst Iranians:

“All of my friends are Iranian. I don’t have any foreign friends. I feel very much connected to my Iranian friends because I can share more things with them.. we mostly gather once a week and we go to an Iranian restaurant.” (24, F, 22-30)

I don’t feel particularly connected to the ‘community’ but I do have many Iranian friends.” (3, F, 31-45)

“I’d say quite connected because most of the days of the week I’m able to speak outside the home in Persian. For example, if I go into shops which are Iranian or have Iranian staff, as a matter of default I would speak Farsi to them. So the fact that I live in an area of London where a lot of Iranians reside or work, it in a sense connects me to an Iranian community, whether it is out of choice or subconsciously in the background” (23, F, 31-45).

“Would say fairly connected …..I attend a lot of Iranian events be it Iranian music concerts, theatre and live performances. I also find myself going to Persian restaurants on a bi-monthly basis. I also tend to hang out with Iranian friends more as we enjoy the same kind of things and can use Persian or Pinglish to avoid being understood in public- it’s very handy! Also I find I can connect more to Iranian friends, more so second generation Persians because we generally share the same experiences, family upbringing and challenges growing up as a British-Iranian”, (22, F, 22-30)

“I think if someone works with Iranians then they are automatically connected to an Iranian community or at least some kind of Iranian community. In my case, I think being involved with an Iranian school in London has helped me a lot to meet other Iranians in London.” (21, F, 22-30)

“Luckily Britain or more specifically London has a lot of Iranians unlike other countries or cities, so you don’t fell like you’re completely out of touch with Iranians or being Iranian…..if you’re feeling a bit homesick you can always go to a grocery store or an Iranian club or if you miss your mom’s cooking, there’s plenty of Iranian restaurants you can go to.” (27, F, 22-30)

| 17 |
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS?

Interviewees were asked what they thought was the purpose of community organizations. This elicited some interesting general analysis about the history of Iranians in Britain:

“Historically I think they were based to help the Iranians, guide them in the 1980s, due to the influx of political refugees, I think, small communities in big towns like Manchester, Edinburgh, London, actually provided some guidance on how to get housing or how to apply for your passport. But later on, I think because of the second generation, kids coming along, I think there were quite a few communities organising schools for the second generation kids, and same goes with the elderly, there was some communities they were catering for the elderly so these are the ones I have come across, that I would define as communities. But these communities I would say haven’t progressed, haven’t evolved, to reach out to the general needs of a community. So they are still emphasising on what they were emphasising about 20 years ago, which is your legal rights, your school rights, for example your housing rights, but they haven’t they can’t encompass the wider community needs. (1, M, 45-60)

Some felt that the lack of external support meant the decline of community organizations:

“I think the height of the communities was back in the ‘90s, that was the height of it, because, all these communities in order to survive they need some sort of funding, and the councils used to provide funding to these communities, these small communities in the 90s. Particularly the London, what was it called, GLC, Greater London Council. They used to provide a lot of funding for all sorts of communities. Now I think with the lack of funding the communities are diminishing even more… Although there are quite a few, I don’t know, wealthy Iranians that could actually easily fund this, but the thing is how easily we will be able to as a community run it, use it, utilise it, and improve it.? “(1, M, 45-60)

“Space, I think. I mean I have worked within the community for many years now and have been very active with very many organisations. Space has always been the big issue, space and funding, these two “ (18, F. 46-60)

While others felt there was a new mood of involvement:

“I think the more organisations you have, the better it is because that’s the democratic way of doing things. I think people are getting involved, rolling up their sleeves and trying to do something” (16)

The challenges faced by Iranians included both external and internal matters, what can be described as exogenous and endogenous factors, although it often becomes difficult to make a clear distinction between the two. The distinction made here is based on the focus and language of the participants themselves.
ENDOGENOUS FACTORS: INTERNAL ISSUES AMONG IRANIANS

Participants spoke freely about cultural and psychological dynamics they recognised amongst Iranians themselves. Such a critical eye is perhaps a function of diasporic movement, since living in a different culture promotes a lively awareness of difference that includes a reflexivity that might not be engendered in more ordinary, non-migratory circumstances where the social world is taken-for-granted (cf. Knott 1997).

There were comparisons made between Iranian and British culture and recognition that social interactions work differently in the two countries.

“I’m trying to say is that Iranians like to pick and choose aspects and pointers on British lifestyle and culture to add and improve their Iranian identity and culture. For example, it is not uncommon for Iranians in Britain to celebrate Christmas or cohabitate with partners pre-marriage, which is not culturally acceptable in Iran. I think Iranians are gradually becoming more and more aware and accepting of norms here and British culture. Although sometimes parents like to use this against us when they are concerned of us becoming too liberal and westernized. You’re never far off from hearing, ‘well when I was your age’ or ‘when I was in Iran…’ so it is much harder for the more conservative and older generation parents to quite accept some things or speak about taboo subjects.” (22, F, 22-30)

There were some negative comments about certain behaviours among Iranians. For example,

I could be a bit pessimistic on this view because I tend to meet many more of [Iranian] new-comers and / or those in my neighbourhood, rather than those that are well established over a long period. They tend to lie and cheat a lot. They go into false marriages. They tend to do these things to be able to stay and be able to work. It would help if they were able to work legally while staying here. Unfortunately it doesn’t end when they get their refugee status … they then move onto [defrauding] the benefit system… If they can work [legally] and earn money more easily and if they can have their legal status decided more quickly, they may do less illegal and unethical stuff. (2, F, 31-45)

A recurring theme is a profound sense of internal dividing lines among Iranians, defined variously by religion, ethnic, language, political persuasion, generation and class.

In terms of religion, while the majority of Iranians in Britain have Shia Muslim backgrounds, there are discernible minorities of Jews and Bahai’i. There is also a growing body of Iranian Christians, with a number of churches (in Doncaster, Glasgow, Brighton, Birmingham, Newcastle, Chiswick and Finchley, etc) listed under the Worldwide Directory of Iranian Christian Churches.
Sometimes this internal differentiation was articulated as stemming from a strong cultural trait of individualism:

“Actually, Iranians are very self-sufficient and that ideology which I carry also. If you have one Iranian on his own, he won't do anything. If you have two they start discussing politics. If you have three, they form a party. If you have four you suddenly get a division… you could have maybe 50 British people because they know how to work in a group. We have a different culture.” (16, M, 46-60)

“There is a joke. They say that if there are twelve Brazilians, they form a football team. But if there are three Iranians they form a party -- a political party (laughing). Teamwork, unfortunately, we're not very good with teamwork. Often very similar organisations with very similar goals and objectives simply can't work with each other…there is this problem of, this political baggage and political differences… and people not getting along’” (18, F, 45-60)

A sense of a lack of trust among Iranians was pervasive:

“Lack of support amongst ourselves, who don’t back or trust anyone they don’t know personally. Lack of trust in general. We all have a very negative perception of people living in our community.” (3, F, 45-60)

On the other hand, a strong interdependency, at least in Iran, was also noted:

“We have fairly strange characteristics as a tribe of Iranians where we are very dependent tribally on each other’s assistance. And when people arrive here and find themselves almost having to swim or sink, they find it extremely difficult because they have been brought up in an atmosphere and in a setting where they could always depend on someone, family, friends, everyone is dependent on someone else. It’s nothing like that here. Everyone’s busy enough to handle their own affairs, let alone somone else’s weight” (12, M, 60+)

Subsequent waves of immigrants often seem to expect more help from the earlier arrivees than they feel is provided:

“They are not generous and look for any opportunity to take advantage and being Iranian for a friend makes no difference to them. They see you as a potential source of income.” (2, F, 31-45)

“Some people introduced me to XXX...I went there and I did not find them very friendly. They just gave me some online links for more information” (24, F, 22-30)

Many organizations make it an explicit policy aim to cater for all Iranians:

“We are an umbrella for a wide desk of races, ethnicities, backgrounds. The number of tribes constituting the Iranian society if quite large, from Arabs and
Balichies to Turks and Fars, then Kurds and god knows what. So our understanding is to do away with such prejudice or classification..anyone who recognises themselves and wishes to be associated with Iranian culture, an Iranian society, is part of the community” (12, M, 60+)

COMPARISONS WITH OTHERS

Interviewees often made explicit, sometimes implicit comparisons with other minority groups in Britain. Some groups are seen to offer negative role models:

“Arabs who come here from Gulf nations, they without fail stay in the same areas, go to the same restaurants, spend their leisure time exactly how they would if they were back home and only make friends within their own community” (27,F, 22-30)

While other groups appear to offer something that Iranians were seen to lack:

“Lack of trust – there is absolutely no unity amongst Iranians. I know why the Jewish community in England is so prosperous: it is because they are united and they trust each other. This is the worst kind of problem for our community. I believe it’s a cultural thing, but there also religious boundaries that people seem to set and divide themselves based on that. Politics also divides us greatly, as in every gathering there is some sort of political debate going on.” (3, F, 31-45)

“...the most successful has been the Jewish culture or race, whatever. And the reason why they are so successful is that they argue with each other and they get something positive out of it. I would like Iranians to become more like the eggs and bacon jews” (16)

Some offered a vague sense that other minority groups function better:

“We can learn a great deal from other communities who strive to help one another in all manners and matters of life in order to increase the social mobility and impact of their people” (25, M, 22-30)

EXOGENOUS FACTORS:
STEREOTYPES AND REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA:

Running as a repetitive thread through many interviews was a strong concern with reputation, with how Iranians are perceived by the wider world.

“I would say that the main challenge is negative media coverage. Stereotypes, you know, things to do with nuclear weapons, how Iranian women are oppressed, how we’re fanatical Muslims who self-mutilate during Ashura, that we all chant ‘death to the West’, that kind of stuff. These stereotypes are most
definitely not representative of the whole nation or our people. It’s just Western misconceptions and misinterpretations. It’s all to do with the global media and the negative way in which it shows Iranains, we’re always being shown for the wrong reasons and so people who don’t know any Iranians would go along thinking the stereotypes we’re labeled with” (27,F, 22-30)

“Stereotyping: especially amongst non-Iranians who presume we are terrorists or extremists”(3, F, 31-45).

“Trying to teach and guide non-Iranians in the UK about what Iran is really like and what our people are really like. More to the point, trying to dispel the incorrect and damaging image the British media and politicians place on Iran – that it is a terrorist-funding government, that it is a war-mongering country; that its people are fanatical and completely removed from the modernized world. These things are the challenges British-Iranians and ethnic Iranians face in today’s world” (25, M, 22-30)

“Unfortunately because of the wrong media communication and, um, on Iranian political situation, and the fact that based on that, they don’t have the right perception, the ordinary man out there won’t have the right perception until they come across one and get in touch in closer encounters, Then they realise that yeah, we are striving people we are successful people, we are proud people. But generally, I think they don’t have a good perception of us.” (1, M, 45-60).

Clearly, a concern about media stereotypes was mainly a concern about how Iran was being represented although that was rarely explicitly said. This was quickly transposed into a concern about the impact such representation would have on Iranians living here.

Other external difficulties include a sense of being an outsider, racism and lack of acceptance:

“I found that growing up, every time I would tell someone I’m Iranian, I was met with a lot of hostility by a bunch of ignoranus’! In the 80’s if I told someone I was Iranian they would think it’s synonymous with Khomeini which really annoyed me. I think an ongoing challenge for us Iranians in Britain is trying to ‘educate’ or show others that not all Iranians are fanatical Islamists who hate Britain and America. Obviously any negative media coverage Iran gets has an impact on how Britons perceive us.” (23, F, 31-45)

We quote one vivid account at length:

“I grew up with primarily white-British friends, there was only myself and maybe one other non-white British in my class at junior school so I was very aware that although I was born in Britain I was very different from ethnically ‘British’ children. Unfortunately, on some occasions I did hear some negative or upsetting remarks because of my dark features and hair or when asked what my name was, I’d be sniggered at and called names. I will never forget the time I was about 7 or 8 and my English friend came round after school to play.
At the time my grandmother was looking after me and she spoke no English and came and asked us if we wanted anything to eat or drink. My friend got really scared and upset because my grandmother was speaking Farsi and when I told her what we had for dinner it wasn’t to her taste because, of course, it was Iranian food. It was as if she saw my Iranian grandmother as an alien from another planet and all of a sudden I was not the same best friend she would play with at school. She actually called her sister to come and pick her up. That really upset me and that memory has never left me since. As a child I remember thinking well I was born here, went to school here and spoke English- in fact I was one of the best pupils in my year and achieved better results than all the native ‘white-British’ kids but I guess when you were at school you were taken out of the ‘Iranian’ home environment and nobody saw or heard anything about you being different to them. So at school I was as ‘British’ as I could be and at home I was the little Iranian girl, and that stayed with me until I reached high school and I was able to be more confident and vocal about my background and everyone had to know I was Persian!” (22, F, 22-30)

Racism was also seen to produce a sense of solidarity where none existed before:

“..there are little pockets or individuals, if you like, of Iranian descent that have taken on a dual culture and nationality or they feel something dual about them, that they are neither fully English nor are they fully Iranian somehow…but I think they would have had experiences in this country, by and large, that have made them stop and think ‘it’s because I’m not English’…the one thing they all share would be stigmatism..whether they would vocalise it or not, they would still all of them share that stigmatism” (13, m, 45-60)

Others were more sanguine about Iranian life in Britain:

“As individuals, I don’t see a major challenge for the Iranians to overcome, any barriers to overcome. I think culturally, socially, politically, they are on board; when I say they are on board, they are informed, they know what’s going on. In terms of, I don’t know, language barriers and other barriers, no I can’t see anything. They are overcoming them. But probably, yeah, having that sense of community and identity that would help the next generation, that’s lacking; yep, that’s what we don’t have.” (1, M, 45-60)

THE QUESTION OF INTEGRATION

Although ‘integrated’ figured strongly as a descriptor by Iranians in the combined wordle, there was a considerable amount of discussion about the nature and extent of Iranian integration into Britain.

Iranians have long been open to inter-marriage and this phenomenon is acknowledged and accepted:
“It is interesting to see that so many of the children who come to our school come from mixed marriages and yet their parent or grandparents are adamant they learn Farsi as a way of upholding and maintaining their Iranian roots and heritage and also as a way for them to be able to connect to other Iranian or half-Iranian children as well as perhaps older generation family members who don’t speak much English. “ (21, F, 22-30)

“One thing about Iranians which is good, is that Iranians are not religious, that's a good thing. So religion doesn't play -- so mixed marriages is quite common, there is not an issue -- Any religion, to marry any religion is not an issue. So you could marry a Jewish person, a Christian or whatever. Iranian with Iranian or Iranian with non-Iranian. I’m saying that a lot of Iranians they don't find women or men marrying non-Iranians of different religions, different cultures. Once you have no problem with the religion, you have no problem with the culture too. So when they are in the United Kingdom, mixed marriages are quite common. They find it easy to adopt different religions -- in that terms yes there's not a problem” (16)

Some contradictory tendencies were identified:

“Many of them seem to have a feeling of mixed or clashing identities, as they pick up negative cultural aspects from Europe and Britain such as partying too much and losing their faith in God. They also pick up many negative aspects from Iranian culture, such as occasionally turning quite extreme religiously and becoming small-minded in relation to other communities.” (3, F,

The tension between learning a new culture but not losing one’s own was evident, as was the issue of not absorbing the worst of the new culture:

“Learning extra language and culture is good and could help to the process of integration. However it does not mean that you forget your original culture” (24, F, 22-30)

“Learning proper English, Getting adapted to a culture. Do not learn the bad things of the society” (26,M, 45-60)

The notion of becoming some kind of cultural hybrid, acknowledging being of both cultures, was seen as a positive process:

“To get on with their lives to the best of their ability and try and put behind them their past struggles and circumstances, so the priority issue I’d say is to rebuild a new life which isn’t marred by political upheaval and hardships. So I guess that links into the point of acceptance, being accepted as an Iranian living in Britain or a ‘British-Iranian’, being recognised as not just someone who’s parents or themselves came to Britain as a safe haven and who has taken from the British system but who is now able to give back something back to our host country. (22, F, 22-30)

And the emergence of some well-known Iranians was felt to be a good thing:
“As you’re aware we have British-Iranians in some very important positions spanning across different sectors; business, legal, arts, etc; for example, Farhad Moshiri, Camila Batmanghelidjh or the architect Farshid Mousavi who’s most recently been in the papers for designing Victoria Beckham’s new boutique. It is always great to hear of Iranians who are making an impact in Britain - for all the right reasons, of course!” (22, F, 22-30)

A sense of being inadequately recognised as a successful and dynamic minority ran through some interviews:

“..as a community we were not well represented nor were we particularly understood or recognised for the contribution that this community has made. Judging from the size and sort of aspirations and achievements of the similar community in the US, in the UK we are heavily underestimated in terms of size and contribution..we would very much like to honour achievements of our fellow countrymen in this society..we need to engage with central government, present a representative of Iranian community achievements just to maintain some recognition of Iranains in the British community” (12, m, 60+)

Quite whether there was felt to be a lack of recognition amongst Iranians themselves for what each other has accomplished or a more inchoate desire to be better recognised by mainstream British society is not very clear.

The issues around a changing immigrant status were mentioned:

“It’s very hard to migrate here as a refugee as people tend to look down to you and speak in a condescending tone. It is also much harder to return to your native country when you are listed as a refugee rather than an immigrant. It’s also hard when you’re not so fluent in English. I believe the Iranians who immigrated here before 1979 had more prestige and a much better national image, as Iran wasn’t portrayed as a terrorist state as it is today. “ (3, F, 31-45)

An interesting argument was that the very development of Iranian culture and media in Britain could have a negative impact on integration:

“I have to say we were going forward with integration recently with a number of Persian television channels coming on satellite. But actually, it’s taking a step back, because before everybody had to watch BBC, ITV or maybe SKY. Now, the entire day you could just watch Arabic news, Persian news or a Turkish one, so you actually live in that country because if you have a television of that country, you live in that country…I have issues with my own wife. She watches some Persian soap operas because she says ‘this way I don’t need to go to Iran; if I watch them, I don’t feel that I miss Iran.’ I say ‘ok, but we’re running an English house, right, because we are here…it shouldn’t be more than 20-30% of what you watch’. I watch the Persian news because I want know what the Iranians are saying in terms of news. But besides that I don't watch the channels. Not that I don't like them but I think since I'm here I have to become more integrated here” (16, M, 46-60)
The notion of a hyphenated identity, often seen as an American form of identity-politics, was mentioned by some:

“We want to try to facilitate growth within people and communities and to give them a voice, a platform for British-Iranians. Although the ‘word ‘British-Iranian’ is something that we want to learn more about. When you delve deeply, we really don’t know half the time what it actually means. But we use it loosely to refer to people who have settled in this country in one shape or another” (13, m, 46-60)

ISSUES AROUND IDENTITY

A good deal of discussion focussed on issues of identity and a sense that Iranians are betwixt and between Persian and British culture.

“There is confusion whether they are Iranians or British; I mean the younger generation, because the confusion is for that. My answer is integration, generation gap, huge generation gap and confusion.” (17, M, 60+)

“Speaking from the perspective of a young British-Iranian who was born here and having only been to Iran once, I would say my main challenge is my identity. Not knowing whether to assimilate or integrate as an Iranian in Britain. When asked by someone where I’m from, without hesitation I always tell them I’m Iranian. But when I went to Iran for the first time when I was 18, I found myself as un-Iranian as it gets. I didn’t get girls my age there, I didn’t share the same interests as most. I didn’t dress like them and even more annoyingly, I didn’t understand half the words and lingo they would use - and my Farsi is actually quite good! It was as if they were making up completely new words and phrases into the Persian language! I guess I have a lot of pride in being ‘Iranian’ here, so much so that I’m not willing to let that part of my identity go, no matter how few times I’ve actually visited my motherland.” (22, F, 22-30)

“We also have cultural issue challenges, where strict Iranian families want their children brought up in particular way so they don’t deter or defer to ‘non-Iranian’ ways, so their challenge is not to let their kids become too westernised and lose their ehsalat (heritage/roots) (23, F, 31-45)

For some, integration was seen as an impossible goal and the link to one’s place of origin was paramount:

“I have come to this conclusion that when you change your country and you're not in your youth, in your middle range, around 30, it is almost impossible, generally speaking. There might be exceptions but if you are living in your country, it is impossible to become British fully integrated. The moment you open and speak it is noticeable that you are not British, I mean this is something. And for instance for me, the politics, my main focus on politics is the Iranian politics. It's not even Armenian politics, it's Iranian. (17)
“Iranians are very happy people that find a simple way to live happily. They make a lot of effort to get their goals. Most of them are very educated and knowledgeable. However, I think they forget that they are getting older in a foreign country” (24, F, 22-30)

Yet the difficulty of return was also acknowledged:

“Going back to Iran, it is a big mistake, depends on your age, to go back to your roots. After so many years living in Western countries and getting used to this culture, going back there makes you feel as a foreigner there” (26, M, 45-60)

**CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Interviewees were asked to identify the major challenges facing Iranians living in Britain.

Lack of adequate English-language proficiency was mentioned, sometimes related to problems for the older generation:

“Challenges which lack of language skills brings about. The older generation has the challenge of language issues because they have a closed-off community, who are retired or are living with grown up children and their grandchildren so don’t have much interaction with outside world in Britain and don’t need to learn English to integrate. Actually, having said that there are still many Iranians who moved here after the revolution who have had children either born here or who have lived here most their lives and who can’t speak English that well so their children have to translate or speak on their behalf. That’s hard for not only their children but also more importantly, their parents who were used to do everything themselves in Iran but ever since moving to an alien country, have to rely on their children or other people helping them to do things because they are either unfamiliar with the system or are at a disadvantage because of language. On that note, Iranians who have come here recently, like the students I teach, also face language barriers and so are trying to learn English a means of overcoming challenges so they can lead better lives and integrate better into British society. (23, F, 31-45)

Another challenge is separation from and the difficulties of keep in touch with family in Iran and elsewhere. Sometimes, a strong sense of a scattered population came through and the complexity of travel in being Iranian:

“being separated from family and loved ones…who are scattered all around the world. And if they don’t have a British passport, it is often difficult to travel freely. I sometimes have issues at airports just because I have an Iranian passport and they get really confused how I can speak such good English but have an Iranian passport!” (27,F,22-30)
“being connected with other family members who live in Iran. It is a challenge to be able to afford and be in touch with family members, to be able to travel backwards and forwards to visit them. My father is dying in the hospital and I cannot just go and see him. I cannot be there if they need me and they cannot come with Iranian passports; getting a visa has got a long process for Iranians. (26, M, 45-60)

Being accepted was a strong theme:

“.to be accepted as not only an Iranian in Britain but also as British. To achieve their full potential so they can make a reputable name for themselves. So they can be taken seriously and well-respected in Britain and the rest of the world. I also think making the most of opportunities given here is a huge priority for Iranians living in Britain” (27, F, 22-30)

Erm, I’d say another challenge is the fact that most British people can’t pronounce our names, that’s a challenge I personally face every other occasion! Can I say that? Is that relevant? As a result, I know most of my Iranian friends who have children here take that into consideration before choosing a name for their child” (23, F, 31-45)

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Interviewees were asked for their opinions as to what were the most significant issues facing Iranians in Britain. There was a wide variety of comments.

“I would say trying to maintain our culture and keep our language alive and I am lucky enough to see that at first-hand at work. As I previously mentioned, many children are being born into mixed marriages, some with only one parent being half-Iranian and yet they are still making sure they’re children are growing up to learn about the family roots, our celebrations and heritage despite being second or third generation Iranians. And for those who moved here from Iran or who’s parents moved here, their main priority is to be accepted, not only as an Iranian living in Britain but also as a British-Iranian who make up the British community.”, (21, F, 22-30)

Iranians have to educate themselves. Sitting home makes people sick and socializing makes them active. Socializing in a foreign country needs the knowledge or language and culture. Iranians who are living here have to get connected to new people and learn from them” (26, M, 45-60)

“Iranians in Britain need to learn how to work alongside each other and, more importantly, how to help each other. Unfortunately, there is a dog-eat-dog mentality with Iranians, especially in the working world. An Iranian refuses to help another Iranian in the same field of work due to the fact that they do not want them to reach a potentially higher level than them. (25, M, 22-30)

“it's a transitional period that the Iranian community is going from a migrant community towards becoming more settled” (17, M, 45-60)
**Internal division:**

That we shouldn’t segregate one particular race, creed or nationality by looking at how we may be different but see ourselves as one family and consider the earth as one country. As an Iranian from a religious minority, I am able to see this at first hand. (23, F, 31-45)

**Work issues:**

“I cannot imagine that I am a housewife here while I was a very active doctor in Iran. I was working in the hospital full time with the honour and respect. While here, I am only going to English class and then feel very useless” (24, F, 22-30).

**Expense and wealth:**

“In England we need to spend a lot of money for the simplest things that we could have in our own country. For example, in Iran we could register to the dance class or gym easily with our incomes. However, although there are very good sport centres here, I could not afford to go there” (24, F, 22-30)

Yet many Iranians are very, not to say extremely, well-off, in comparison to other migrant communities and the wider British population. At times a profound sense of status anxiety surfaced:

I think the biggest problem for Iranians is to do with wealth, how much money they have. I think that's the biggest barrier in terms of social mobility is not that they cannot adapt to new norms or they have religious or cultural problems adapting to, no it will be whether they are making money to be accepted -- to be able to go higher in social mobility. (16, M, 46-60)

There was occasional recognition of a certain negativity within Iranian culture:

“I find that Iranians in Britain seem to quite often enjoy playing the ‘victim’ card, you know” (21, F, 22-30)

A sense of the on-going arrival of Iranians, producing discernible ‘waves’ of migrants, meant that the community was never stable:

“My understanding is a new generation came to this country or migrated to this country after 2009, a big wave. They are deeply rooted in Iran and their first language is Persian, they know very well Persian culture, literature, they are mostly media activists or artists, and quite highly educated. But at the same time they think globally. They are more interested to become quickly settled in this country. I mean, when I compare it with the older generation, our generation, they are more flexible. They are socializing with other groups, ethnic groups, English-speaking people. They are more open, they are more
cosmopolitan. Funny enough they are not very political. We are more political, the older generation. My impression is they are fed up with the politics. The challenge they have is they are trying their best, doing their best to become more quickly and finally settled in this country.

But it's a very complicated situation. Because at the same time there are more Iranians coming to this country, the fresh blood is coming to the Iranian community and it's postponing the high degree of settlement, the integration in this country because new ways are coming. And they are diverting the attention more towards Iran and the political and social situation within Iran.” (17, M, 60+)

This constant renewal of population, many coming directly from Iran, was seen to have implications for Iranian community organization:

“I think there's a gap between the traditional organizations and the younger, more recently arrived migrants in the country. And they haven't been covered by the network of these organizations…Some people think that the Iranian community is already settled and integrated community. And the next step is to promote the profile of the community in this country, for instance, to enter the politics, or make the younger generation more interested into British politics and try to activate them in this field…it is premature. There is over 30 years now of community building and residency in Britain, but this is made more complicated by new waves of people coming in. Are these organizations adequate? Are the needs of the Iranian communities being fulfilled? (17, M. 60+)

While not overtly critical, there is a recognition that existing forms of organization might not suit the new generation:

“There is no thinking or planning, for instance, about what they are aiming for. Instead, there’s a tradition, like something that Dr. X has been doing for over 30 years; it is something has already been established. But most of the members are in their 70s and 80s. It is an aging organization, and every time that there is a meeting, somebody has passed away, not necessarily members but people who were famous for instance in the Iranian migrant community” (17, M, 45-60)

There is a strong sense of organizations replicating what each other are doing while needing some greater strategy and coordination:

“So my suggestion was that instead of just starting giving advice, form filling and these kind of services, for which there are so many other groups providing, why don't you try and go one level up and turn yourself into an umbrella organisation, so that you can empower these workers. This is the direction that I'm seeing for X. If anybody can be doing it, X should be the one who can do it. And it's a big name for what they are doing; it's quite big shoes to fill.” (18, F, 45-60)

Competition amongst organizations for scarce resources was mentioned:
“Unfortunately we were snubbed by two quite well-established and wealthy organisations X and Y. These two snubbed us. They came to the meetings but they said no, this is ghettoisation. And on that basis - about what a community should be doing, how it should deal with British people and British culture – there is an argument. Because I think one aspect of it is snobbery. As far as X is concerned, they said, no, no, no, if we do a project we want it to be either Oxford University or with the British Museum or de, de, de. We don't want to do anything with, we've got nothing to do with, the grassroots, we're not concerned with the grassroots, okay. So there is a culture of philanthropy, but everything goes into X. It's like a sponge. (17, m, 60+)

While some see upward social mobility as aspirational, others see it as producing or reinforcing class division among Iranians. For example, the following two participants disagree with each other:

“I thought how can we make it easier for Iranians to become more socially mobile, that is to go up – hopefully, not down! – the different class levels in society. People were interested as soon as I used the term social mobility because that gets everybody’s back up and they start thinking. We hold our meetings in one of most prominent locations in terms of business…something like 20,000 people have gone there because of our meetings over the last twenty years…we have been bringing them to top locations, having big speakers and doing it free as a gift to them…we have helped so much towards social mobility…we’ve said that you can go to expensive places, you can attend important meetings and you could learn from it…it has given hope and aspiration to others” (16, m, 46-60)

but

“Mr. X used to say ‘I want us to spread our wings. I don't want us to become entrapped in one cultural organisation. I want the whole of London to be our roof’. That’s okay I liked the idea, but I think it's too idealist. It's not going to happen because not everybody can afford an expensive hotel!” (18, F, 46-60)

Some participants offered very specific practical suggestions regarding things that Iranians needed:

“A good health service. I think the health service in the UK is very poor. I wish organizations could provide us some Iranian doctors. British doctors don’t understand our requirements. They have different cultures of confronting patients” (24, F, 22-30)

There is, of course, a British Iranian Medical Association, founded in 2009 (http://www.bima-uk.com/) and a London-based ante-natal group for parents-to-be is being planned for autumn 2015.

“They should have an intensive class like an introduction to a new society. They need to have a good knowledge of common traditions and culture of England. For example, I become very embarrassed when I see Iranians who do not have any manners, let’s say for instance that they are talking and
laughing very loud on the street. These people do not have English social manners, people see them as strangers without manners” (26, M, 45-60)

“The first thing that comes to mind is a place to organize traditional events, an event for the Persian new year..they could arrange markets with Iranian food and music (24, F, 22-30)

The latter comment was made by someone based in Brighton. In London, to the contrary, there are numerous Noruz parties, from the very chic and expensive to cheap student bashes.

Various interviewees hinted at the need for a material centre, a building, which was sometimes quite specifically described:

“A centre, sort of a reasonably big centre that would be reflective of the Iranians, their status; that would be a centre for all aspects of our activities. I think of the Polish centre; it’s a cultural centre, as well as you can walk in there and go and have a beer, for example. At the same time it’s got galleries in there, it’s got a theatre, a room that would be a centre for Iranians as a community to use, to go in there to socialise, to find out things, or get to know the others, and start from there on. I mean, whatever the issues or concerns the Iranians have, they can be under the same roof… What I have in my mind is a UK-wide representative of the community. If you had a centre, probably that would help a lot, whether showing off a new film or bringing a play or getting the second generation interested in theatre, politics, other things cultural. That would be a centre, that would be a good cause to go and visit and get in touch with the community.” (1, M, 45-60)

“I think we need a centre. My model is something like the Irish Centre or the Polish Centre in Hammersmith. I think that model would work. It's got a place, it's got a cafe, it's got a theatre hall, it's got offices for various people to work in. And that could bring people together…Mr. X believes that the software connects people. I believe that the hardware can actually simulate that software. When you have a space, then there is bound to be some kind of interaction and cooperation and it's all happening under one roof. Whereas where it's all in the air, on-line, it's much more difficult to solidify. That is my argument. So we need a building, a venue…..Part of my argument is that I'm very much concerned about older Iranians. They are stranded in the city because young people go to work. The older people can't go to the mainstream elderly centres like Age UK or Age Concern because of the language barrier. They are too old to learn the language. So they either have to sit there waiting for the younger generation to come back from work and keep them company or they are stranded in McDonalds or, maybe if they are richer, in Selfridges. But there is nowhere to house them, there is nowhere where they would feel ‘okay, this is my environment, I can go there, I can meet people, I can read the paper, I can play backgammon maybe, have a tea’. I think for me I would say that is our number one priority. A cultural centre is very important, a venue for schools -- because Rustam School is also struggling with school. They have to move Rustam School. Andisheh struggles, Kanoon Iran struggles, everybody is struggling to find a venue. (18, F, 45-60)
What is interesting about such comments is the fact that, for example, the Iranian Library in Acton (http://www.iranianlibrary.org.uk/) is supposedly a building for the community. It needs refurbishment and development but does offer considerable space for Iranians. Whether there is a lack of knowledge about it or differences of opinion as to its purpose is hard to tell.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The project provides vivid evidence once again of the particular demographic of Iranian migrants as a highly educated minority with strong professional backgrounds. The interviewees revealed their articulacy in describing and analysing issues pertinent to Iranians living in Britain. Clearly, the different waves of migration might evidence shifts in class background that could not be explored in detail here while matters around generation were raised by some interviewees. Gender was not especially articulated as a concern, and both women and men have had lives and careers interrupted; but we feel a more focussed investigation of gender dynamics and issues amongst Iranians could prove interesting.

There was noticeably little mention of Iran and Iranian politics across all the interviews – but we did not directly solicit such comments either. And in the general spirit of articulate disagreement, one person’s perception was readily countermanded by another’s opposing view.

Some of the concerns raised point to issues within the Iranian communities in Britain, while others point to difficulties and obstacles external to them, a mix of endogenous and exogenous factors. These are obviously very difficult to clearly separate.

There has clearly been significant change within the Iranian communities in Britain over the past few years, with turbulence in Iranian politics producing ripples in diaspora contexts. Perhaps, with a successful outcome to the P5+1 negotiations with Iran and the resumption of British diplomatic and consular relations with the Islamic Republic, some of the specific difficulties associated with sanctions, including travel restrictions and visa problems, might begin to disappear and stronger trade and cultural ties will be re-established.

The growing size and diversity of Iranians living in Britain would seem to speak to the need for and capacity to support a range of community and cultural organizations. It might be that the desire of some to lead or drive activities will be counter-productive as the various communities learn by doing and find a range of diverse voices and modes of representing themselves.

There is plenty of food for thought here for Iranian community organizations – indeed, for Iranians in general – to ponder as they develop further activities in Britain. There are also issues raised here that should concern local authorities at a time of rampant Islamophobia and considerable anxiety among minority communities. We hope this research helps foster more conversation and more research.
We will leave the last words to two of our interviewees:

“I think we as British-Irans need to be more encouraging of other fellow British-Iranians rather than see them as competition or rivals. At the end of the day, ‘we’ as ‘British-Iranians’ are a community within ourselves and it is from us that all the other Iranian communities in Britain branch off into so we should try and help each other more and be more unified - *laughs* - wishful thinking, right!?” (22, F, 22-30)

and

“The more truthful we are, the more we can actually address these issues” (16)
## APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

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NOTES:

i The interviewers included Annabelle Sreberny, Reza Gholami, Mahmoud Noroozi, Marral Shamshiri, Manna Shamshiri, Behnoosh Amandi, Setareh Roohi. The analysts who provided short reports include Maryam Violet; Sahba Ladjavardi; Adom Sabonchian; Tara Aghdashloo. Sami Everett provided the demographic data. Aki Elborzi of the SOAS Iranian Society helped with connections to Iranian university student groups. Sara Cannizaro and Ali Afrasiabi provided analysis of the English and Persian write-in components of the surveys, and Sara also devised mind-maps. Rahim Namy provided information about Iranian activities in Manchester.

ii آیا در پریتانیا یک اجتماع ایرانی وجود دارد؟