Creating a Sense of Place for Iranian Immigrants in Canada

By

Shamim Arabzadeh Bahri

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Human Geography

Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

University of Alberta

Abstract

Immigration is a life-changing decision accompanied by new experiences for individuals. Depending on background, this experience can be varied from one to another and can influence the experience of sense of place in the new environment. This thesis contributes to this area of inquiry by applying a case study approach to examine Iranian immigrants' lived experiences and their sense of place in Toronto, Canada and to find out how Iranian community organizations play a role in the making of a sense of place for these immigrants. The research conducted in-depth interviews with Iranian immigrants who moved to Canada between 2005 and 2015 and found that factors such as age, prior experiences in the home country, personal traits, and family relations are all involved in how one settles in and the inclination to join a community organization. This work also found that these organizations need to perform better to satisfy their community.

Preface

   This thesis is an original work by Shamim Arabzadeh Bahri. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Examining the Role of Community Organizations in Creating a Sense of Place for Iranian Immigrants in Canada", No. Pro00111814, November 2021. A copy of the ethics approval is provided in Appendix A.

Dedication

To my beloved parents Farah and Mohammadreza, for love - for life.

To brave Iranian people, who are standing against injustice and oppression.

*To "**Woman, Life, Freedom**"*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Immigration

A part of settling in a new country is creating meaning and belonging in new locales (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014). As immigrants develop ties and create new identities, they change their surroundings to a place to live. This transformation is a learning process that begins the development of a sense of place over time (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014). It relies on a connection between the place itself and the immigrants' experiences (Agyekum et al., 2021). Their experiences will vary depending on how they feel about their new place and the push factors in their previous homeland (Marcu, 2012). The place as a site of meaning and an arena for people to negotiate and interact could be essential for immigrants seeking to develop their sense of place in their new countries (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008). In these new destinations, immigrants seek to build social and personal ties with residents, improving their sense of place (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008). Other factors, such as how the host society welcomes immigrants and recognizes foreign education and skills, correlate with immigrants' sense of place (Gallina & Williams, 2014).

In communities where immigrants have been settled, a sense of place could be attributed to 1) family relations: among immigrants, those with family relations in that place establish a stronger sense of place (Wang, 2019), and 2) being social (Shalit, 2019) and having social interactions (Sutherland, 2017), which can help immigrants to have a more profound sense of place.

Immigrants' sociodemographic characteristics derived from their place of residence are also crucial for developing their sense of place (Williams et al., 2010). For instance, those who face discrimination based on their gender or sexual identity could be forced to separate themselves from society (Pajouhandeh, 2004). Additionally, sociodemographic factors suggest that immigrants who spend more time in their neighborhoods are more likely to have a stronger sense of place (Gallina & Williams, 2014), even though their living conditions differ from their neighbors. Another critical factor in creating a sense of place is ethnicity. Immigrants who live primarily with their ethnic relatives may have an increased tendency to maintain traditional activities (Stodolska, 2000) and ritual events. Since they are more connected to their place of origin, their sense of place becomes stronger (Mazumdar, 2000). However, their racialization within society and religion can also lead to fragmented groups based on gender, ethnicity, and political beliefs (Mirfakhraie, 1999). All in all, creating a positive, supportive sense of place for immigrants is a process that requires governmental and social efforts to advocate for supportive policies and strategies (Agyekum & Newbold, 2016).

Community organizations are an example of how social and psychological support can be provided for immigrants (Sedighdeilami, 2002) and could be considered part of the immigration process. This study will investigate community organizations' contributions to immigrants' lives, as they can improve immigrants' sense of place. This research focused on how Iranian immigrants experience immigration and how community organizations contribute to the immigration experience by creating a sense of place.

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

The primary goal of this study is to examine immigrants from Iran who came to Canada and to investigate how they developed a sense of place following immigration. This work has three main questions:

1. How do immigrants from Iran experience their immigration?

2. Why do some immigrants join Iranian communities in Canada while others do not?

3. What role do community organizations play in creating a sense of place for Iranian immigrants in Canada?

1.3. Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 (this chapter) introduces immigration and presents the study's rationale, purpose, and objectives. It also outlines the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 presents a body of literature relevant to this study. I have situated the work within the literature about immigration, sense of place, sense of place among immigrants, and community organizations. This chapter also expands on factors affecting sense of place, and how those factors contribute to immigrants' lives. Finally, this chapter presents background information about Iran, its people and culture, and immigration from Iran to Canada.

Described in Chapter 3 are the design and implementation of the study's methodology. I describe the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) as the study area in detail. The chapter also delineates what qualitative method was used, as well as data collection strategies and

analysis. I explain the use of a case study, a description of recruitment techniques, interview practices, and data analysis procedures. In addition, I discuss the strategies I employed for ensuring rigor, as well as my own positionality.

Chapter 4 presents the main research findings resulting from the interviews. After transcripts were imported into NVIVO and coded based on research themes, results were divided into three parts. The first part presents findings about immigrants' sense of place and all factors involved in the making their sense of place. The second part presents findings about community organizations and their contribution to immigrants' experiences.

The discussion of the results is contained in Chapter 5. This chapter discusses a process of making sense of place for Iranian immigrants and influential elements in this process. It then examines the contribution of age, experiences, and residing in a place to the development of a sense of place. In the end, I discuss how community organizations serve as a source for immigrants' sense of place, and the future potential of these organizations.

Chapter 6 summarizes and concludes the dissertation and highlights research limitations and my contributions from the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter represents an intersection of bodies of literature that ties together a set of research related to immigration, Iranian immigrants, sense of place and factors contributing to sense of place, and community organizations. The following review consists of two parts. The first covers the existing literature on immigration, sense of place, and the nature of community organizations. In the second, I review and explore the connection between the sense of place and the role of community organizations. This chapter answers why studying Iranian immigrants in Canada is crucial and how community organizations can help contribute to feeling a part of their new place.

2.2 Immigrants

In Canada, the term "immigrant" refers to a landed immigrant or permanent resident granted permission to live in Canada by immigration officials (Statistics Canada, 2021). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines international immigrants as non-nationals who settle in another country. Some authors use more general definitions, such as an individual permanently relocating to a different place than the one in which they formerly resided. In this case, a "place" is generally understood as a locality, district, or administrative area (Gimeno-Feliu et al., 2019).

2.3 Immigration in Canada

Canada has a long history of immigration and has experienced multiple immigration flows over several centuries. Throughout this time, "many different groups have called Canada home, including First Nations groups as Canada's original settlers, to more recent groups of Asian immigrants" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2013). Since 1967, due to the introduction of a points system, immigrants have become a significant proportion of Canada's overall population (Verbeeten, 2007, p. 5). Table 2.1 shows how between 2011 and 2019, the number of immigrants admitted as permanent residents, students, and skilled foreign workers has grown over time. Most reside in Canada's large cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Statistics Canada (2011), Immigration and Ethno cultural Diversity in Canada, National Household Survey).

Table 2.1: Annual number of permanent and temporary residents admitted from 2011 to 2021 (IRCC, Annual Reports to Parliament on Immigration).

	Permanent Residency	Temporary Residency	Total
2011	248,748	289,225	537,973
2012	257,887	333,947	591,834
2013	258,953	346,290	605,243
2014	260,404	431,332	691,736
2015	271,845	385,999	657,844
2016	296,346	355,103	651,449
2017	286,479	396,116	682,585
2018	321,035	441,105	762,140
2019	341,180	465,447	806,627
2020	184,606	341,349	525,955
2021	221,919	549,328	771,247

2.4 Sense of Place

As a multifaceted and contemporary concept, a sense of place can be difficult to define (Lengen and Kistemann, 2012, as cited in Agyekum & Newbold, 2016). The concept can encompass geography, the environment, and community (Williams & Kitchen, 2012), or even individuals' experiences and perceptions of places, as well as the relationship between people and place (Gallinas & Williams, 2014).

In their analysis of sense of place, Foote and Azaryahu (2009) defined it as the emotional bonds and attachments that people develop or experience in particular places. The meaning of place is also used to describe the peculiarities and unique characteristics of a particular place or region. Sense of place may be associated with positive attachment of comfort, safety, and well-being produced by place, and negative feelings of anxiety, discomfort, and lack of place (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009).

According to Wilczyńska et al. (2015), we should consider the importance of a sense of place in immigrants' satisfaction, happiness, and longevity. For the work in this thesis, I employ a specific definition of sense of place used by Williams and Stewart, who defined it as "the collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals and groups associate with a particular locality" (1998, p: 19). Overall, sense of place refers to emotional bonds, values, meaning, and symbols linked to a place (Erel & Cohen, 2021).

2.4.1. Immigration and Sense of Place

An immigrant's experience is often characterized by forming a new community, building a new social network, and adapting to a new cultural context. It is also tied to adverse effects, such as losing their previous social network (Agyekum et al., 2021). Reconstructing new networks is challenging for immigrants (Sutherland, 2017) as they try to fill their new locale with meanings and attachments (Tuan, 1977, as cited in Nelson, J. et al., 2020). Community organizations can facilitate how immigrants organize their social, political, and economic structures and suggest strategies that will enable them to achieve social and economic positions in society (Couton, 2014). Throughout this study, community organizations will be examined in terms of how they help immigrants develop their sense of place, social and economic connections, and quality of life (National Research Council, 2002).

A part of settling in a new country is creating meaning in new locales (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014). As immigrants develop ties and create new identities, they change the surrounding 'space' to a 'place.' This transformation is a learning process that entails the development of a sense of place over time (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014). It relies on a growing connection between the place and the immigrants' experiences (Agyekum et al., 2021). Their experiences will vary depending on how they feel about their new 'place' and the push factors in their previous homeland (Marcu, 2012).

The 'place' itself as a site of meaning and an arena for people to negotiate and interact could be essential for immigrants seeking to develop their sense of place (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008, p. 322). In new destinations, immigrants seek to build social and personal ties with residents, improving their sense of place (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008). Other factors, such as how the host society welcomes immigrants and recognizes foreign education and skills, correlate with immigrants' sense of place (Gallina & Williams, 2014). Immigrants might also tend to move around for the first few years after their immigration. Therefore, their experience would differ from that of permanent residents, resulting in a floating sense of place (Marcu, 2021). In communities where immigrants have been settled, a sense of place has been attributed to:

- Immigrants' citizenship status: those with permanent status are more likely to have a sense of place (Agyekum & Newbold, 2019).
- Family relations: among immigrants, those with family relations in that place establish a stronger sense of place (Wang, 2019).

- Being social (Shalit, 2019) and having social interactions (Sutherland, 2017): these factors help immigrants to have a more profound sense of place.

Immigrants' sociodemographic characteristics are also crucial for developing their sense of place in the host society (Williams et al., 2010). For instance, those who face discrimination based on gender or sexual identity in the host country could be forced to separate themselves from society (Pajouhandeh, 2004). Additionally, sociodemographic factors can affect the time immigrants spend in a location. Those who engage more in their neighborhoods are more likely to have a stronger sense of place (Gallina & Williams, 2014), even though their living conditions differ from their neighbors.

Another key factor in creating a sense of place is ethnicity. Immigrants who live primarily with their ethnic relatives may have an increased tendency to maintain traditional activities (Stodolska, 2000) and ritual events. Mazumdar et al. (2000) believe that over time ethnic enclaves develop ties with their inhabitants through repeated visits, participation in a rich and varied social life, ritual celebrations, and the establishment of networks that bind people to the environment, leading to powerful sentiments. However, race and religion can also lead inhabitants into fragmented groups based on gender, ethnicity, and political beliefs (Mirfakhraie, 1999).

Overall, creating a sense of place for immigrants is a complex process that requires government officials and social efforts to advocate for supportive policies and strategies (Agyekum & Newbold, 2016). Community organizations are an example of such support

that provide social and psychological sustenance for immigrants (Sedighdeilami, 2002) and could be considered part of the immigration process. This study will investigate community organizations' contributions to immigrants' lives, as they can improve immigrants' growing sense of place.

2.4.2. Age at Arrival and Sense of Place

Immigration to a new country involves hope and uncertainties (Stephenson & Källström, 2020). It has often been a long and challenging journey, and many immigrants face unfamiliar and hostile environments in their destination countries (Hjern & Kadir, 2018). Earlier studies have suggested that age at arrival determines the number of outcomes considered markers of sense of place (Ben et al., 2020). For young people, especially those who have immigrated unaccompanied, it can be tough to establish, develop, and maintain a sense of place. A loss of being rooted and arriving in a new country without connections make them more vulnerable as they have been displaced and separated from family and social networks (Wernesjö, 2015).

Literature has shown that early life experiences exhibit lasting effects on adult outcomes. According to Hermansen (2017), the timing of immigration at different childhood stages may influence children's developmental trajectories as it is easier for children to learn new languages and achieve success than adolescents. Developmental theories of identity formation have also indicated that immigrants' social assimilation can be influenced by their age at arrival (Erikson, 1968). The earlier an immigrant enters the

new society, the easier it is to acclimate to formal and informal rules, as well as to acculturate and integrate into their new home (Hermansen, 2017).

2.4.3. Personality Traits and Sense of Place

Most accounts of the intention to immigrate focus on economic, demographic, and sociological factors. It is mainly economic opportunities that motivate people to immigrate (Canache et al., 2013). With such a dramatic change, people's psychological comfort levels will vary regardless of their support networks and prospects for economic gain. Consequently, personality traits, in addition to the other factors discussed here, likely play a role in determining an individual's intention to migrate (Canache et al., 2013).

Previous studies and current literature demonstrate a link between personality traits and immigration and how immigrants adapt to the new country and culture (Fouarge et al., 2019, Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004). The most prevalent personality dimensions are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Paulauskait, Eibokait, & Endriulaitien, 2010). This study attempts to distinguish the relationships between immigrants' openness and extraversion and developing a new sense of place.

Emigration is conceptually and empirically associated with extraversion and openness to experience. The idea that extraversion and openness to experience indicate engagement in life activities is based on Olson's 2005 study, which shows that highly engaged individuals are more likely to actively seek out and explore new environments. Curiosity,

variety, and change are characteristics of openness to experience. Engagement involves being open to new experiences (openness) and motivating oneself to approach incentives and actively participate in experiences (extroversion). A person who is less engaged, who has lower levels of extroversion and openness, has a lower likelihood of exploring new environments and is more likely to "stay at home." (Canache et al., 2013)

Openness as an influential personality trait is related to cross-cultural adjustment (Leong et al., 2000). Generally, this is defined as a willingness to experiment and explore new ideas, activities, and ideologies and is one of the main prerequisites of adaptation (Wilson et al., 2013). Studies have shown that the higher immigrants' openness, the more successful their adjustment will be. Study results added that openness had directly contributed to how immigrants confront challenges after moving (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005). Among respondents who were more prepared for changes, eager to learn new manners, and blend into the new society (through, for example, studying in colleges or universities, joining ESL classes, and working as a general worker), a greater sense of place and attachment to place was obtained. Openness helped immigrants adjust well to the new country's culture (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005), language, and society. Such openness also exposed these immigrants to the new experiences needed to begin feeling a part of society. As immigrants tend to seek new experiences in their destination, their intention is affected by their openness (Tabor, 2010; Tabor & Milfont, 2011). Openness to experience is related to the tendency to relocate (Otto & Dalbert, 2012), as well as a willingness to try new activities and ideas, and an understanding of different social,

political, and religious ideologies (Wilson et al., 2013). Kunuroglu (2021) has hypothesized that the ability to adjust psychologically and socioculturally to the new destination is improved by greater openness. Studies by Ayhan et al. (2017) revealed that openness is positively correlated with migration propensity.

Extroversion is a tendency to seek interactions, be outgoing and social, and can result in feeling less strain when living in a multicultural setting (Shakiba & Stapleton, 2022). McCrae and Costa (2003) argue that extroversion has interpersonal and temperamental aspects. Assertiveness, gregariousness, and warmth are some of the interpersonal characteristics positively correlated with extroversion and sociability (Watson & Clark, 1997). Higher persistence, openness to new experiences, and previous international living experience increased the likelihood of a someone planning to move abroad (Kunuroglu, 2021; Tabor, Milfont, & Ward, 2015). Bütikofer and Peri (2017) also asserted a strong correlation between adaptability skills and immigration. Such personality traits and their relationship with migration are more extensively discussed in immigration psychology literature. Most studies agree on the positive relationship between openness, extraversion, and immigration (Camperio Ciani, Capiluppi, Veronese, & Sartori, 2007; Canache, Hayes, Mondak, & Wals, 2013; Jokela, Elovainio, Kivimäki, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2008).

2.4.4. Residence Time and Sense of Place

Residence time, as the length of time an immigrant has lived in a new country, has a positive correlation with attachment to place. Some researchers consider residence time as one of the measures of sense of place (Kleit & Manzo, 2006; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; Taylor et al., 1985). In the literature, there is a broad consensus that time spent in a place contributes to someone feeling at home (see, for example, Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021 and Massa & Bonfanti, 2020). Most notably, newcomers tend to establish new friendships and close connections as they spend more time in their new homes (Alba, Beck, & Basaran Sahin, 2018). Longevity of residence can affect the feeling of home and the factors that make someone feel at home. Most of the literature suggests that immigrants feel more at home when they stay in a place for extended periods (Lewicka, 2011; Jaspers, 2012; Boccagni, 2017). In a study by Tang et al. (2021), researchers discovered that short-term and long-term residents developed bonds with places. However, the sense of place among long-term residents was more intense and broader. Several reasons are behind this phenomenon; perception and interaction with surroundings (Raymond et al., 2017), sense of community and social capital (Hay, 1998), and local ties (Harlan et al., 2005; Lewicka, 2010) – all of which are essential in enhancing a sense of place.

2.5. Gender Inequalities and Choosing to Move

In recent years, many studies have investigated how the characteristics of immigrants' countries of origin impact their sense of place in the host country. One factor that has drawn significant scholarly attention is source-country gender inequalities (Stick, 2022). Unlike Canada, which has relatively high levels of gender equality, high levels of gender inequality persist in many immigrants' countries of origin, reflective of patriarchal gender norms that persist in some parts of the world (Guppy et al., 2019; Marshall, 2009; Kaida, 2015; also see Yeung, Desai, and Jones 2018).

Studies indicate that gender norms in the source country and culture shape women's employment patterns, gender-based responsibility to shoulder domestic tasks, and roles such as childbearing (Adserà & Ferrer, 2016; Fortin, 2005; Khoudja & Fleischmann, 2018). Consequently, several researchers have examined the sense of place immigrants feel in their host country and examined how their experiences pre- and post-migration affect their sense of place (Hou, Schellenberg, and Berry, 2018; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Wu, Schimmel, & Hou 2011; Wu, Hou, and Schimmel 2012).). Following immigration, a strong sense of place to the host country can enhance quality of life, foster attachment, and establish a desire to stay (Geurts, David, and Spierings 2021). For source countries with high levels of gender inequality, this can be a strong motivation for becoming an immigrant.

2.6. Role of Family Networks

The likelihood of emigration increases if the person has close a contact, usually a relative, living overseas (e.g., Heering, van der Erf, & Van Wissen, 2004). Those immigrating with family or joining families already in the host country may receive more support than those immigrating alone. Immigration and acculturation resources can be limited for those immigrating alone (Drever & Hoffmeister, 2008).

The lack of support networks and reliable information about locations and surroundings can affect immigrants. For example, Ryan (2009) found that immigrants are better prepared for their new physical, social and cultural environments if they have kinship and friendship networks in place on arrival. People will also likely migrate both temporarily and permanently if they have access to family migration networks. Migration through networks is location-specific, promoting migration to one location and discouraging migration to another. In these ways, international migration decisions are influenced primarily by personal experience and family connections (Ryan, 2009).

2.7. Community Organizations

Many immigrants rely on community organizations to meet their economic and social interests or to receive various supports (Couton, 2014). Organizations primarily serve immigrants with beneficial services (Couton, 2014) and to provide them with social support (Abreu, 2021).

"Community organization" as a process has various meanings, but generally refers to organizing people in a community to help them solve their problems (Pathare et al., 2010). This study will use a definition by Ross, who defines a *community organization* as:

> "a structure that identifies its people's needs or objectives, gives priority to them, develops confidence and will to work at them, finds resources (internal and external) to deal with them, and in doing so, extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community." (1967, p. 39)

In this context, community refers to people living in a specific geographic territory, or a group that shares a particular function or interest, such as welfare, agriculture, or education. Community organizations work towards a common interest or try to achieve a common goal to bring together key community members.

2.8. Iran, Persian Culture, and Immigration

2.8.1. Geography and Economics

Located in the southwest of Asia, Iran (see Figure 2.1) is a country where the vast majority of the population is Muslim, and the official language is Farsi (Joshanloo et al., 2012). It is a vast central plateau rimmed by mountain ranges, which is part of the Alpine-Himalayan Mountain system. Iran is surrounded by Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east; Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian Sea to the north; the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south; and Turkey and Iraq to the west.

Figure 2.1: Location of Iran on a world map (King & Cole, n.d)

The strategic location of Iran and its huge oil and gas reserves enhance its power and influence in and outside the Middle East. However, the severe constraints imposed by the outside world and the country's own internal chaos are frequently cited as explanations for Iran's poor economic performance. The Iranian economy's vitality is severely harmed by U.S., E.U. and U.S.-sponsored UN sanctions that discourage foreign investment and technology transfer (Nuruzzaman, 2009).

2.8.2. History of Iran

Iran is one of the world's oldest continuously operating major civilizations with historical settlements dating back to 7000 BC. The actual Iranian Empire was established during the Iron Age as a result of the influx of Iranian people. The Medes, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian Empires of classical antiquity were founded by Iranians. The

Islamic conquest of Persia from 633 to 654 marked a turning point in Iranian history and brought an end to the Sasanian Empire. Between the eighth and tenth centuries, Iran underwent Islamization, which eventually led to the decline of Zoroastrianism in Iran (Yarshater et al., 1983).

Iran has remained an Islamic country since that time, and from Sasanian to Pahlavi, a monarchy ruled the country. The Iranian Revolution was the revolution that changed Iran from being an absolute monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to being an Islamic republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, one of the revolution's leaders and the founder of the Islamic Republic. It began in January 1978 with the first major demonstrations and ended with the approval of the new theocratic Constitution in 1979. On April 1, 1979, an overwhelming majority of Iranians approved a national referendum to make Iran an Islamic Republic (Panah, 2007).

2.8.3. Social Context

Located in the southwest of Asia (see Figure 2.1 above), Iran is a country of non-Arab Muslims. The official language of the country is Farsi, and it is run by a theocratic government (Joshanloo et al. 2012). Since the Islamic Republic revolution in 1979, the country has been governed by Islamic rules. Under these rules, women are subjected to gender segregation as well as mandatory veiling (Shahrokni, 2022). So while women may appear in public, their behavior is highly constrained including being mandated to cover their hair and body (Gheytanchi, 2000). Gender is also used to divide city spaces. Some places, like football stadiums, remained closed to women while "women only" areas have

created in other areas. Women are banned from holding positions of authority and decision-making (such as being a judge), as well as many public activities including riding motorcycles, and singing in public.

As a result, over the past decades, men's dominance was codified and legalized and women were limited to the home with few economic opportunities outside the home (Katouzian, 2006; Kazemi, 2000). In the past few decades, family planning policies and socioeconomic and cultural factors, such as higher education and changing attitudes, have increased the awareness of gender issues among Iranian women of all levels (Ali Akbar, 2004). Nevertheless, women's rights have continued to be suppressed by the Islamic government. However, women have continued to demand a role in politics and society, and have been organizing protests, petitions, and legal challenges since 1980 to improve their position in society (Shahrokni, 2022).

The protests of 2022 cannot be separated from the waves of protest that came before them, such as the 2009 Green Movement (also known as the "Persian Awakening"). However the most recent protests are unique. Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman, was killed while being held by the morality police because she refused to cover her head. She became a tragic figure gaining international notoriety. In her story, issues related to women's rights, state repression, and injustice intersect. People from all over the country have come together since her death, but this time the protests are led by women. These are the first protests in which demands for women's bodily autonomy have led to calls for the end of the Republic in addition to an end to compulsory veiling (Shahrokni, 2022).

2.8.4. Family Culture

According to Gable (1959), in Iran, a person's entire life is dominated by their family and its relationships. Even prior to the the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iranians have placed a high value on the family as a social unit. Following the Islamic laws in Iran, some traditional kinship bonds remain strong and are considered a core part of the family system (Azadarmaki & Bahar, 2006). For example, it is not customary for children to live independently before marriage. Even for men, as well as women, age does not matter. As long as they are not married, adult children usually continue to live at home with their parents (Joshanloo et al., 2012).

2.9. Iranian Immigration to Canada

The community of Iranian immigrants in Canada, the subject of the present study, is a recent phenomenon that continues to grow (Rahnama, 2020). Over the past decade, the number of Iranian immigrants has steadily increased across Canada (Rahnama, 2020). The first wave of Iranian immigrants originally came to Canada for educational and economic opportunities before the Islamic Revolution of 1978. However, the majority who emigrated in the second wave, particularly in the 1980s, did so for two reasons: either because the Islamic Republic imposed cultural and social repression, or to escape political and religious persecution during the Iran-Iraq war. By the turn of the century, most began leaving Iran due to unfavorable social, economic, and political conditions (Pajouhandeh, 2004). Starting with the first wave, approximately 4000 Iranians came to

Canada in 1979, expanding to five times that number by the second wave at the end of

the 1980s (Pajouhandeh, 2004, p. 20). This growth was primarily due to the immigration

of educated professionals who left Iran because of economic factors (Garousi, 2005).

According to Statistics Canada's 2016 Census, around 155,000 Iranian immigrants

currently live in Canada, and that number grows each year (Statistics Canada-Census,

2016).

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1. Introduction

This study employs qualitative methods, more precisely a case study approach involving individual semi-structured interviews. This study explores the role of community organizations in creating a sense of place among Iranian immigrants. The objective is to investigate the role that a sense of place plays in immigrants' lives, which will be accomplished by answering three main questions:

1. How do immigrants from Iran experience their immigration?
2. Why do some immigrants join Iranian communities in Canada while others do not?
3. What role do community organizations play in creating a sense of place for Iranian immigrants in Canada?

This chapter provides a brief overview of the aims and practice of qualitative studies. In the following, qualitative research and case studies are presented as the method. Next, interviews and snowball sampling are discussed in detail as part of the study design, followed by an explanation of how data was collected and analyzed. Finally, techniques in qualitative research are discussed, as well as how they were used in this study.

3.2. Qualitative Research

The roots of qualitative research can be found in anthropology, philosophy, and sociology. Although it existed in a non-structured form for a long time before that,

anthropologists and sociologists began using it to investigate cultures and groups in their own and foreign settings in the early years of the twentieth century. Sociologists of the Chicago School, such as Park and Burgess (1925), and social anthropologists, such as Malinowski (1922), adopted more focused approaches in the 1920s and 1930s. Qualitative research at that time was considered more journalistic in nature (and many consider it unscientific now). (Bailey, 2014).

Since the 1960s, qualitative research has grown continuously, beginning with symbolic interactionist approaches (Becker et al., 1961) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In 1970, Filstead edited a volume of readings on qualitative research. Spradley's books also influenced the ethnographic approach (1979, 1980). However, most of the research was conducted by sociologists and anthropologists, with adaptations made by academics and practitioners in education and healthcare. Colaizzi (1978) and Giorgi (1985) developed psychological phenomenology research approaches modeled after Husserl.

Many of the works originated in North America. In 1978, Qualitative Sociology was published, and in 1988, the International Journal for Qualitative Studies in Education. The comprehensive Handbook of Qualitative Research, edited in 1994 by Denzin and Lincoln, is now in its fifth edition (2017). Due to the use of qualitative research in educational sociology in Britain, it became fashionable in the 1970s and 1980s (Delamont, 1976; Burgess, 1985; Hammersley and Atkinson (1983). In addition, several health professionals at that time saw qualitative research as an appropriate approach to

their work (Webb, 1984; Field & Morse, 1985; Leininger, 1985; Melia, 1987), and in the 1980s and 1990s, this work proliferated (for instance, Morse, 1991, 1994; Smith, 1992; Benner, 1994; Morse & Field, 1996; Streubert and Carpenter,1999). In medicine, qualitative approaches are becoming more respected but still need to be entirely accepted as an alternative to quantitative approaches.

This type of research is only sometimes referred to as qualitative research; rather, it has different names. Some call it naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), field research (Burgess, 1984; Delamont, 1992), case study approaches (Stake, 1995; Travers, 2001), and interpretive (or sometimes interpretative) research (Bryman, 2001). Researchers such as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) also use ethnography as the general term for qualitative research. To achieve their goals, qualitative researchers prefer to employ several approaches, including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative analysis (Finlay, Ballinger 2006). Qualitative approaches are different from each other (Creswell, 1998). However, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between them since all of them are focused on the lived experience, people's interactions, and human communication.

3.3 The Ethics and Politics of Research

In this project, we adhered to the university's ethical guidelines for research. The REB1 (Research Ethics Board 1) approved the research proposal before the study began (See Appendix A), which required a thorough review of the research process. Informed

consent was also carefully monitored to ensure that all individuals were fully aware of their participation and thoroughly knew the research aims.

3.4 Research Approach

This study employs the single instrument case study as a qualitative approach as it involves the detailed and in-depth collection of information from multiple sources to describe a real-life experience over time (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Generally, case studies are categorized according to their focus of analysis, such as whether one person or several people are studied or whether a group or activity is examined. Depending on the intent of the case analysis, there are three variations (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, P:157):

- **The single instrument case study**

  To illustrate an issue or concern, a researcher chooses one bounded case to represent it.

- **The collective or multiple case study**

  Researchers selected multiple case studies. There can be several research sites or multiple programs within one site.

- **Intrinsic case study**

  The emphasis is on the case itself, which is unusual or unique.

The first step in case study research is identifying and describing a specific case to analyze (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p:159). In this study, being an Iranian citizen who

immigrated from 2005-2015 and having lived in Toronto are parameters that bound all existing cases. This group of people presented an in-depth understanding of the research questions.

3.4.1. Procedure for Conducting Case Study

For conducting a case study for this research, I primarily rely on Yin's (2014) four steps for doing a case study research:

1. Assessing the suitability of this approach for analyzing immigrants' sense of place. Since the cases were identifiable quickly, providing a deep understanding of how community organizations contributed to immigrants' sense of place was feasible using this approach.

2. Considering the intent and type of the case studies (single, collective, or intrinsic). The selected cases were several individuals that have similar characteristics.

3. Developing a procedure for collecting data. This study applied interviews to collect data.

4. Determining the analysis approach. Single instrument analysis was applied to identify issues within each case and then look for common themes. Common themes presented as outcomes of this study demonstrate participants' perception of a sense of place and the role played by community organizations as mediators between people and place.

3.5 Rigor

As research methods become more diverse, it becomes more important to critically assess the quality of research so that the findings are rigorous, helpful, and valuable (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Morse, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Rigor is essential in conducting an ethical study. This step demonstrates to the broader research community that the results are credible, shows respect for research participants' information (Dowling, 2000), and demonstrates to the broader research community that the study is coherent and transparent (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2000). In evaluating qualitative research findings, some strategies can be employed to ensure that work is plausible and accurate (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). The first strategy is the rationale for the methodology, which implies applying the most appropriate qualitative method that can adequately address the research question (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). This strategy includes paying attention to the coherency of methodology, congruency between research objectives, data collection strategies, data analysis, and research findings.

The second strategy includes providing brief but sufficient information about the research respondents, including how participants were recruited, their number, and gender ratio (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). I chose this strategy since understanding a description of participants' characteristics and backgrounds is vital for not overlooking people's experiences that can inform the research question and objectives.

Verification by respondents is the third strategy and consists of verifying interview transcripts and interpretations. In this, data and interview transcripts were returned to participants so that they could check the accuracy of the transcription and add, change, or edit the data they provided (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1803). Besides, to obtain assurance of the accuracy of themes, I asked another expert (my supervisor) to form another interpretation from a different perspective to check that what others understood was similar to what I was observing.

The final strategy is to describe how data were analyzed and converted into concepts (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Procedures for data analysis provide essential information on how transcripts transformed into themes and codes and show readers what stages were traversed to extract answers to research questions.

3.6 Research Design

3.6.1 Site Context

Data for this project was collected from people that either were living now, or had lived, in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ontario, which includes the City of Toronto and the regional municipalities of Durham, York, Peel, and Halton (Dastjerdi, 2012). The GTA is Canada's most populous metropolitan area, with about 6.7 million residents, and is considered a significant immigrant destination overall (Statistics Canada, 2021b-f). In addition, the GTA is the most popular destination for Iranian immigrants in Canada (see Figure 1). As of 2021, there were 182,940 immigrants from Iran living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021a) and nearly half of those (88,195) lived in the Greater Toronto

Area (GTA) (Statistics Canada, 2021g-k). From this population, a bulk of Iranian immigrants live in and around Richmond Hill. As of 2021, 20,635 Iranian people (approximately 23% of the GTA's Iranian population) are centralized in Richmond Hill in the York Region (Statistics Canada, 2021l), while about 37,190 Iranians (about 42% of the Iranian population in GTA) are living in the City of Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2021m). While these numbers represent those reporting Iranian immigrants, they also reflect where many Iranian immigrants continue to choose to locate on arrival to Canada.
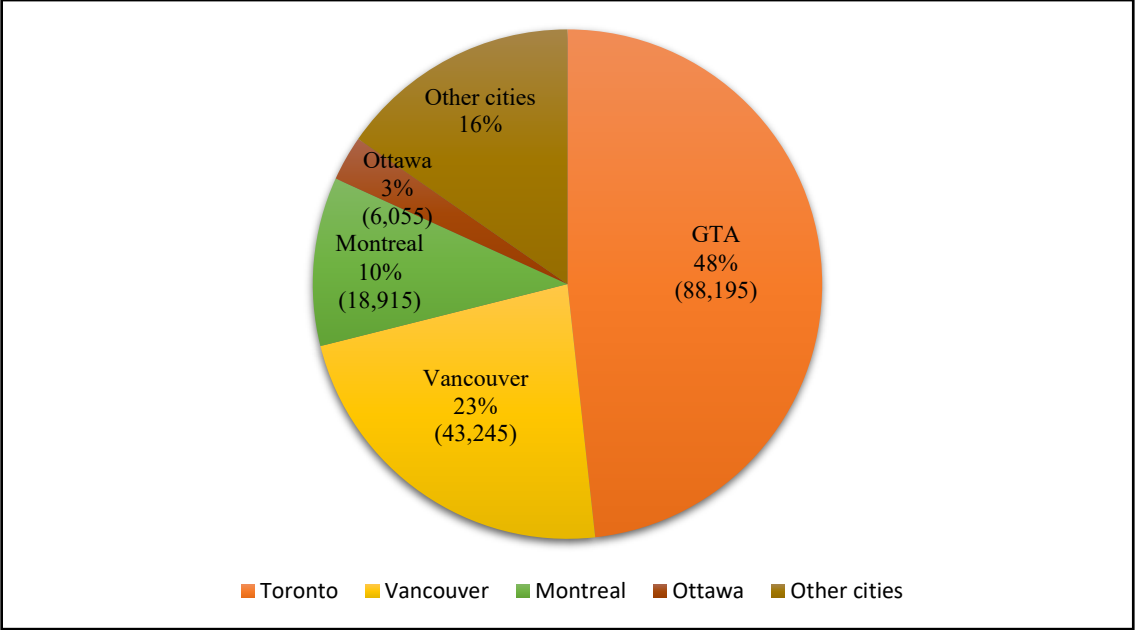
Figure 3.1: Percentage of Iranian immigrants in Canadian Cities and Metropolitan Areas (Statistics Canada, census 2021b-f,n,o,p)

3.6.2 Recruitment

For this study, a sample of Iranian immigrants who moved to Canada between 2005-2015 was selected using a snowball sampling strategy. Given the aim of the study, a list of Facebook groups, community organizations, and other virtual Iranian communities was searched, and communication established. In the end I interviewed 21 immigrants living in the GTA, and seven leaders of Iranian communities/organizations that serve those immigrants. Figure 3.2 illustrates the age and gender proportion of research participants.
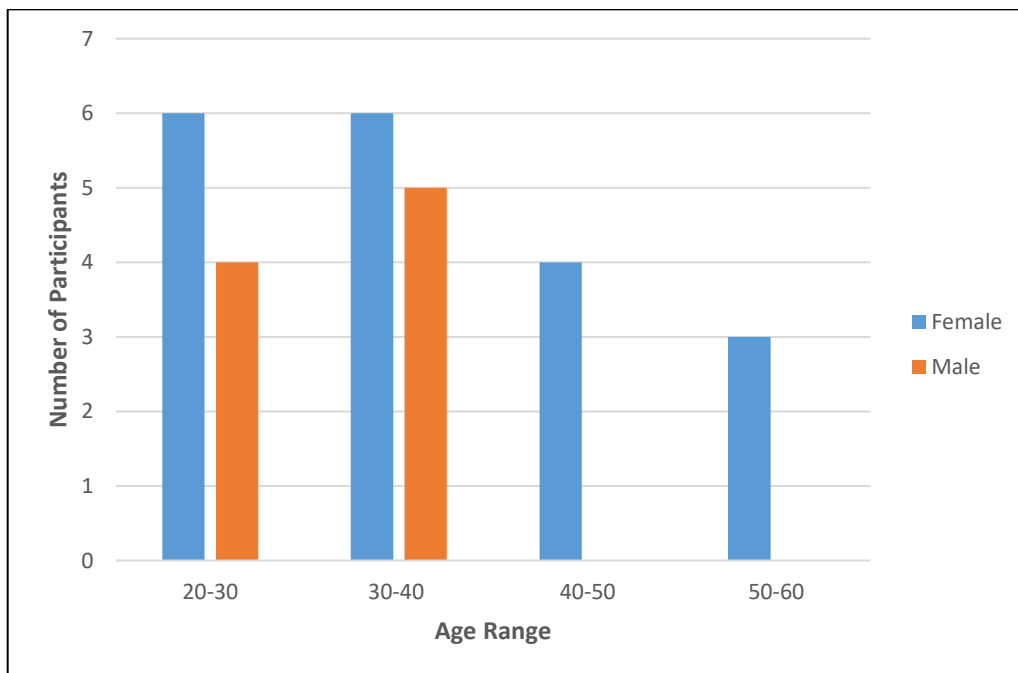
Figure 3.2: Participants' age and gender (N=28)

3.6.2.1 Participant Recruitment

I recruited immigrant participants in two ways. First, I found public groups on social media, such as Facebook groups for Iranian immigrants in Toronto. I used the keyword "Iranian in Toronto." As a result, I found six groups on Facebook, including Iranian women in Toronto, GTA Iranian community, and Iranian residents in Toronto. After introducing myself and my project, I sent a message to each group's administrator and asked them to post an invitation (See appendix E) on their groups. I waited for responses for a couple of days, and then after receiving approval uploaded a post inviting members to participate in the project. I kept posting every three days at different times (considering the time difference between Edmonton and Toronto), asking members to reach out to me if they were interested in participating. Since the number of members these groups varied from three to ten thousand, I received positive feedback and interest in participation via email and Facebook messenger. Around 50-60 people reached out to me and expressed their willingness to participate, and each received individual information letters (See Appendix B). They were asked to read the information letter and sign the consent form if they agreed to participate and to let me know their availability for an interview. Of those who received the information letter, 28 were interviewed via Zoom or on the phone. The characteristics of each respondent, including age at immigration and family status are presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Participants' Characteristics

	Name	Age	Year of immigration	Status Individual	Leader	Sex	Family Status
1	Golnaz	20-30	2014		*	F	Family
2	Mahsa	40-50	2010	*		F	Alone (Student)
3	Mahtaab	20-30	2013	*		F	Family
4	Maryam	40-50	2004	*		F	Family
5	Mandana	50-60	2002		*	F	Family
6	Nasim	30-40	2010	*		F	Family
7	Nazgol	40-50	2012	*		F	Family
8	Niaz	50-60	1998		*	F	Family
9	Niousha	20-30	2003	*		F	Family
10	Razhan	40-50	2006	*		F	Family
11	Sana	30-40	2011	*		F	with child
12	Sadaf	30-40	2008	*		F	Alone (Student)
13	Saina	20-30	2013	*		F	Alone (Student)
14	Samaneh	30-40	2014	*		F	Family
15	Sharareh	30-40	2011	*		F	Alone (Student)
16	Suri	30-40	2003	*		F	Family
17	Servat	50-60	2001	*		F	Family
18	Tanya	20-30	2001	*		F	Family
19	Yasmin	20-30	2014		*	F	Family
20	Arash	30-40	2006		*	M	Family
21	Ali	20-30	2012	*		M	Alone (Student)
22	Hassan	30-40	2014	*		M	Family
23	Khosro	20-25	2015	*		M	Alone (Student)
24	Kian	20-25	2013	*		M	Family
25	Mahboob	30-40	2008		*	M	Alone (Student)
26	Mahyar	30-40	2014	*		M	Alone (Worker)
27	Mohamad	20-25	2003		*	M	Family
28	Milad	30-40	2015	*		M	Alone (Student)

Among these participants, about ten of lived in Richmond Hill, 12 in the City of

Toronto and the rest are distributed throughout the GTA (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Participants' geographical distribution throughout the greater Toronto area. Each dot represents one participant. (Base map source: St Adobe Stock)

3.6.2.2. Community Group Leader Recruitment

I searched for community organizations via the internet by using the search phrase

"Iranian communities in Toronto". The names "Tirgan," "Parya Trillium," and

"Mohandes" emerged as a result. I contacted administrators via the organizational email

address provided on the website. I waited for seven days and if I did not hear back from

them I searched for their Facebook account and connected with them through Facebook

messenger (Appendix D). At the same time, I gathered names from their publicly-

available websites and sent an invitation letter to the leaders of each community through

their official email addresses. Ten days after sending the first letter, I followed up with an additional email asking if the leader would like to participate. From more than 50 emails and messages, 10 community leaders responded and asked for more information about this research (Appendix C). They all led to an interview at a time convenient for the participant. All interviews were conducted via Zoom.

3.6.2.3. Iranian Community Organizations

As noted above, browsing the Iranian community organizations in Toronto on the internet and Facebook led me to find several organizations. In the process of reaching out to each organization, I realized many are no longer available and active. Some have been merged with more prominent organizations. For example, Nawran (an Iranian association) has been merged with Tirgan. Nonetheless, I discovered four active organizations. They are described in detail below.

Tirgan (https://tammuz.tirgan.ca/)

Tirgan gets its name from an ancient Iranian festival celebrated annually on Tir 13 (July 2, 3, or 4). This festival is celebrated by splashing water, dancing, reciting poetry, and serving traditional foods. Children also celebrate by wearing rainbow-colored wristbands for ten days and then throwing the wristbands into streams.

Tirgan is a registered Canadian charitable organization that is nonpartisan and non-religious. Their mission is to offer year-round cultural programs that promote cross-

cultural dialogue between Iranian Canadians and the broader world community. For the first time, they celebrated Nowruz in 2004. Since then, Tirgan has become one of the premier venues for celebrating Iranian art and culture through various programs throughout the year. The organization strives to foster unity and equal opportunity among artists, art enthusiasts, volunteers, and the entire community. It also provides a platform for artists and scholars of all backgrounds to showcase their passions and preserve, promote and celebrate Persian/Iranian arts and culture.

Parya Trillium (https://parya.org/**)**

Parya Trillium was founded in 2001 to provide culturally appropriate and Farsi-language services to Iranian Canadians, particularly seniors. In 2002, Parya officially became an incorporated organization and a registered charity after consulting with members of the Iranian - Canadian community and the federal government. Their mission is to provide programs and services to newcomers, youth, and seniors of the Iranian-Canadian community in a safe and welcoming environment and to educate and support the newcomer community through education, social interactions, and community development.

Mohandes (https://mohandes.com/**)**

A group of Iranian Engineers founded the Canadian Society of Iranian Engineers and Architects in early 1988. This society is a non-political, non-religious, and non-profit

organization that serves Iranian Engineers and Architects in Canada. Mohandes'
objectives are:

- Mentor newcomer engineers and provide guidance

- Provide professional development opportunities for Canadian-Iranian engineers
  and architects through seminars, workshops, networking events, and volunteer
  opportunities.

- Develop Canadian-Iranian perceptions in local, national, and global communities
  and associations.

UTIRAN (https://utiran.org/**)**

The Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (UTIRAN), 1999, is an academic
and social organization that seeks to improve Iranian culture and activities at the
University of Toronto. The mission of UTIRAN is to promote interactions among Iranian
students and provide academic assistance and a communication channel for the Iranian
student, alumni, and staff community.

3.7.   Data Collection

3.7.1. Interview Design

For this research, the interviews aimed to elicit immigrants' lived experiences, and in-
depth semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary form of data collection.
Semi-structured interviews are well suited to this aim because they allow the researcher

to have an interview guide based on the research objectives and ask follow-up questions based on participants' responses (Turner, 2010).

In qualitative research, there are three primary types of interview designs (Turner, 2010):

- Unstructured: Informal Conversational Interview
- Semi-structured: General Interview Guide Approach
- Structured: Standardized Open-Ended Interviews

Informal conversational interviews are entirely driven by questions posed during an interview; typically, questions arise as the interview moves forward. Rather than asking a specific type of question to the participants, the researcher relies on their interactions to guide the interview process (McNamara, 2008). Since this type of interview does not have a structure, it allows the researcher to be flexible in terms of asking questions. However, it is difficult to code data because of its inconsistent structure (Creswell, 2007). On the contrary, Structured interviews follow a standardized list of worded questions so that responses are open-ended, but limited. As a result of the open-ended nature of the interview, participants can provide as much detail as they want, and the researcher can ask probing questions as a follow-up. The nature of the questions allows participants to express their viewpoints and experiences. Finding similar themes or codes is easier because there is generally fewer unexpected responses (Creswell, 2007). Falling in between is the semi-structured interview with a general interview guide, which is more

structured than the informal conversational interview and more flexible than a structured interview (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The wording of questions depends on the researcher who is conducting the interview, and they can be posed interchangeably by the researcher.

Prior to the initiation of interviewing process, an interview guide was prepared (Appendix C), which let me have general ideas of topics for discussion and be open to new topics and ideas. Once participants indicated that they were willing to have an interview, I sent them consent forms and a zoom link. On average, each interview took approximately 50-60 minutes.

3.8. Data Analysis

All 28 interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's permission. All participants were provided informed consent and an information sheet before taking part. For transcribing, I subscribed to an online transcription service. After a while, due to a lack of precision, I used Google Docs as it was more accurate. Out of 28 interviews, only three were conducted in English, which only needed to be transcribed. I translated the rest in Farsi at the same time they were transcribed. In such a way, I played the recorded audio for transcription on Google Docs, and at the same time, while transcribing, I translated them into English. Once the interviews were transcribed, interview transcripts were sent to participants via email for checking and revision. Participants were given ten days to review, revise, or withdraw their transcripts. At the end of this time, the interview

text became part of the research data set. I heard back from 11 of the 28 participants with revisions or approval. Based on the signed consent forms, I was allowed to use the 17 that did not reply ten days of sending the transcriptions.

I employed a constant-comparative method for analyzing data. As transcripts were verified by participants, I began coding and organizing data using Nvivo™ qualitative data analysis software. Moreover, I used a narrative analysis process (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014) to reconstruct participants' immigration stories and the role played (or not played) by local organizations in assisting immigrants in developing their new sense of place. The analytical process used Cresswell's (2013) recommended five-stage process outlined below.

3.8.1. Data Organization

Original audio files, digital copies of interview transcripts, and field notes were classified into different folders to find information quickly. All the folders were uploaded on a shared google drive accessed only by my supervisor and myself.

3.8.2. Reading and Memoing

As a result of transcribing the interviews, I could hear subtleties that I may have neglected during interviews or things that seemed important at the time, gained or lost weight when re-played. I highlighted sections that seemed particularly relevant and put marginal notes. This stage is the basis for creating nodes/memos.

3.8.3. Describing the Data and Classifying it into Codes and Themes

As interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, all the responses were classified into each question to make sense of what participants were saying. Next, the commonalities and differences that created both unique codes and more significant themes emerging from the data were identified. According to McNiff (2016), this step is vital to the analysis process and helps researchers connect data to the main research questions. For the coding process, the interview transcripts were first coded into themes that emerged through reading and interpreting each paragraph.

3.8.4. Data Interpretation and Representation

Interpretation involves making sense of the data and the lessons learned from the participants' narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Providing the reader with an understanding of what the researcher sees and experiences during the interview, how the researcher evaluates the narratives, and what the researcher thinks about them is a form of interpretation (Wiles et al., 2004).

3.8.5. Data Reliability and Validity

I ensured the findings were reliable and valid using member checking and constant comparison. Member checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of data. In this strategy, data or results were returned to participants so that they could check the accuracy of the interview's transcription (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1803). The second strategy

for achieving reliability and validity was to collect and analyze data simultaneously. The results enabled me to find possible errors in the design of the interview process, such as the clarity of the questions (Morse et al., 2002).

3.8.6. Feedback Process

Once the research was thoroughly conducted, the results were extracted and submitted, and a copy of the draft report of preliminary findings in Microsoft Office Word format was sent to any participants who opted to hear back about the results. It could be a presentation or a report of the research summary. Parya's Vice President expressed interest in having copies of the results and asked me to present them in an online meeting.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine how Iranian immigrants in Canada develop a sense of place, and the role that community organizations play in that process. Chapter 3 discussed the project organization, and the data collection and analysis process. In this chapter, I present results from interviews. Results are divided into three parts:

A. Findings about the meaning of Toronto for participants and the reasons they chose to live there. This set of data shows the influence of Toronto in the process of creating a sense of place.

B. Findings about participants' sense of place and factors that are involved in the process of making sense of place: This set of data demonstrates how an individual has dealt with immigration, and what factors played a role in their way of creating a sense of place in a new society.

C. Findings about community organizations and their contribution to immigrants' sense of place: Throughout this section, the community organization's role in immigrants' lives, their efficacy, and how they can improve have been argued.

4.2. Findings Set A: Meaning of Toronto

4.2.1. The role of Toronto in Creating a Sense of Place.

Participants' responses to the question of why they chose Toronto as a destination or how it helped them to settle in revealed that this area is more than a place to live. The higher number of living Iranian immigrants in the GTA and closeness to the Persian culture, made it a better place to live, establish, and create a sense of place. In a way, the higher number of Iranian people already there meant that they could step into a pre-created sense of place reminiscent of Iran. So, in a way, there is enough of Iran to make them feel comfortable, but also enough to allow them to ease into Canadian society as they lived here longer and became more accustomed to it.

Yasmin is a young woman who immigrated with her family in 2014 and started living in Richmond Hill. At the time, she was a high school student and had no friends in Toronto. When she was asked to express her feelings about where she lived, she responded:

> *"Our neighborhood is mostly Iranians, but it is very interesting that there are no Iranians in our alley. The neighborhood is also full of Iranian shops. It helped us to settle in easier because we feel very close to the culture. For example, we never miss Sangak [a traditional Iranian bread]. It has helped us a lot not to miss it because sometimes I miss it so much and I want to go to the alley and walk. Here is a place called Vanak Square, because everything is Persian. That's why we do not feel homesickness. The last time I went to Iran was 5 years ago, but because of these things and the fact that we are in the Iranian region, I have missed Iran less."*

She also stated living in an Iranian dominant area (Richmond Hill) helped them to find friends and improve their sense of place:

"When we moved here, we were very close to our Iranian friends because we used to live in the south of Toronto and we were very far from our friends. But now that we have reached Richmond Hill, we are closer to everyone, and it only takes 10 minutes to get home. This change of neighborhood has helped us a lot to get closer to many Iranian shops and to be able to talk to Iranians who come to these shops and even make friends." … In my opinion, the fact that we have so many Iranian regions in Toronto, and we see the Iranian population has been very impressive for us so far. Of course, the previous place where we lived was not in the Iranian region at all, and I did not feel at home there. I think the people who live next to you are very important in creating this feeling. I mean, I think your home is wherever you are, wherever your family and friends are, there is a home. I think this is the most important thing."

Kian landed with his family in 2013, while he was 18 years old. They lived in north York for the first few months and then moved to Richmond Hill. He described how the place he lived improved his sense of belonging to Toronto, instead of Iran:

"When we arrived, the neighborhood was very peaceful for me. The driving was calm, and the people were calmer. I was less tense on the street. People generally loved each other more and respected each other much more … In 2017, I went back to Iran for my illness treatment. I was happy that I was going back home but when I got there, I wasn't happy anymore. Every little thing bothered me and made me nervous. From driving styles to dealing with people was annoying for me. I spent only two weeks in Iran, my illness also intensified the situation. But when I landed here [Canada], I had a sense of calm at the airport, like I come home now. I felt very good and calm. It was very pleasant for me to see people at the airport. At that point I realized that Toronto is now my home."

Arash immigrated to Canada with his wife in 2006. Since they did not have any friends or family in Toronto, they decided to live in an area that is closer to Iranian and Persian culture:

"We first came to North York. After we bought the house, we moved to an area around North York called Thornhill. Before moving here, we lived in the basement of a friend's house in Thornhill. And we realized that it is a very good neighborhood for living. Access to Iranian society is very easy. There are so many Iranian shops here. Any Iranian food you want is near you. And it was very good for us in that sense because we would not miss anything. You can meet Iranian people and I think it is natural to have something in common with each other, which is certainly the language and our culture. That's how you could build your community and start feeling this is your home."

4.3. Findings set B: Immigrants' Sense of Place

Immigrant participants identified five key influences on the sense of place: human rights, push factors (including dissatisfaction with Iran), socioeconomic status, factors that determine joining (or not) a community organization, and age.

4.3.1. Human Rights

Iran, as a country that governs by an Islamic, authoritarian, and theocratic regime, has been criticizes for its human rights abuses (Ebadi, 2009). Prior the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran was a secular society and women had considerable rights and freedom, including both education and the right to take part in political activity. However, since 1979 women in Iran have experienced ongoing injustice and gender discrimination. Since that time, women have had increasingly limited rights including rights of choice, personal autonomy, and ability to make decisions about themselves and others (Graves, 1996).

As Section 2.8 indicated, this situation escalated over time and resulted in several uprisings and protests especially in the last decade (Shahrokni, 2022). According to participants there had been no significant change in women's status when they decided to leave. Among respondents almost all women, and even some men, pointed out women's rights as a push factor for leaving Iran.

Sadaf, a single woman, moved to Canada in 2008, told her story of how she felt in Iran and how her bad experience with divorce in Iran not only pushed her away , but the supportive divorce laws pulled her towards Canada:

> *"I always wanted to live in a developed country that respects women's rights. As I did not feel it in Iran, I decided to emigrate. Canada was a great country with opportunities for growth, freedom, and human rights. The most valuable thing that I have ever felt and experienced here was divorce law and how legislation supported me as a woman. That made me feel this is my home".*

Sharareh moved to Canada as a student at 24 in 2011. She worked for a couple of years in Iran and gave a slightly different perspective:

> *"The reason for my immigration is common with other Iranians, the more freedoms we can have here in a country outside Iran. Another reason was that in Iran, due to the existing laws, women are not allowed to progress as men do. And that was not enough for me. Those rules did not match my standards and way of thinking, and it was always a question for me why this is like that!"*

Mahsa, a physician who applied for the skilled worker program in 2010, mentioned how inequalities drove her away from Iran:

> *"As a woman and a physician, I did not feel justice and gain the social position I expected. I always worked and studied hard, I am a well-educated person, but I did not achieve what I deserved."*

Nasim, a woman who immigrated with her family, added to this by telling a story from her father's perspective:

> *"My mother is a physician. At the time, the Canadian government announced an immigration plan for physicians, and my mother applied for it. My father was most eager to emigrate, and when I asked him about it, he said: "You will understand ten years later." Now I understand how much forethought he had. You know, we are three women in our family (my mother, sister, and myself). My father knew that the situation in Iran, in terms of freedom, was getting worse, and then he made this decision. After all these years, every*

time I go back to Iran, I feel and experience what freedom means and how it is missing in Iran."

However, Sara, a single mother, told a different story. Her husband divorced her in Iran and she moved to Toronto in 2001 with her son and had difficulties afterward. Although she mentioned that what she had been through after moving to Canada was difficult, it did not make her disappointed in her immigration decision:

> *"I spent hard times here to make a good life for my son all alone. I had to study to get my certification and could not spend enough time with my child. I faced various challenges during studying, which were so unfair and cruel. That is why I still do not feel at home here. However, it does not mean I regret my decision. You know, the situation was not that good for a woman in Iran, and I did not want to stay."*

4.3.2. Dissatisfaction with Iran

Interviews revealed that those who were more certain of their immigration decision found it easier to overcome homesickness and integrate into Canadian society. Tragedies, unpleasant experiences, and dissatisfactions are some of the leading causes of solidifying immigration decisions. Regardless of the push factors in Iran that made immigrants more determined to emigrate, one of the most frequent responses that participants mentioned was the crash of flight PS752, which solidified that making the choice to leave was the right decision. Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 was shot down on January 8th, 2020, and everyone on board died including 176 passengers and crew. According to Iranian officials, 146 passengers left Iran with Iranian passports (including students and families residing in Canada); and some victims from Canada were Canadian Iranian citizens (Moshtaghian et al., 2020). This heartbreaking tragedy had a huge impact on the Iranian diaspora in Canada, especially for those who lost a friend, family or loved ones.

This incident was not an accident; the plane was shot down by two missiles fired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps (PS752justice.com). For this reason, it had a huge impact on both Iranian and Canadian society. Participants reported that after this disastrous incident they lost their connection to Iran. This possibly originated from the dislike for the Islamic government. Some participants noted specifically that this crash had an impact on their sense of place in Canada.

Samaneh moved to Toronto with her husband and children in 2014. She was the main applicant (as a skilled worker) and applied for whole family. When she was asked how they overcame challenges and when she accepted Canada as her home, she responded:

> *"To be honest, when we decided to immigrate, we were very determined to move and prepared to overcome all possible obstacles. I did not feel dependent on my family anymore. I even considered this place my home before I became a citizen here. I was excited to move here and prepared myself for all the challenges. And now I enjoy living here. But after the airplane crash [PS752], I made sure here was my home. I mean, I should not say that, but I feel no belonging to Iran anymore. I will not miss there; I just missed my parents."*

Mahsa, told the same story about how two tragic incidents she experienced in her life made her decide to leave Iran and to make Canada her home:

> *"I was always thinking about emigration, but it was just a thought. In July 2007, during protests against election results in Iran, I experienced difficulties getting home from work. Guards were everywhere, and I had to change my route several times. After that night, I felt assured about emigration … I can say I felt belonging to Canada from the depth of my heart after the plane crash, PS752. I lost my friends in that horrible incident and felt dreadful for almost two months. The sense of belonging to Canada was cultivated deeply in me right after that when I saw how supportive and sympathetic people were."*

Mahboob, the Vice President of the Mohandes organization and Ph.D. alumnus at the University of Toronto, explained his story and what he experienced after this incident:

"I remember every Iranian person I knew here was in shock. None of us could have believed what happened. I knew a couple on that plane; one of my supervisors at the University of Toronto was also on that plane. It was a tough day. We held a memorial at the University of Toronto, and I saw how Iranian people in Toronto sympathized with each other; the anger we had got stronger after this incident. We will never forget this pain."

This finding can be elaborated and further supported by the following story. Niusha was a 14-year-old girl when she moved with her family to Toronto in 2003. At the time, there was a war in one of the middle eastern countries [1], which initiated her family's emigration. She described how their experiences in Iran led them to think about it. She has two older brothers, and they were the main reasons for this decision:

"I remember a war in one of the Middle Eastern countries. Since I have two brothers, my father was scared that my brothers would be sent to war. On the other hand, I was a disobedient child, but not in a bad way. I did not particularly appreciate wearing a headscarf when I went to school or other places. My father knew it, and he realized that Iran was not a good place for his children. Although my family had a perfect situation in Iran, my father decided to give us a free life without any pressure and danger".

4.3.3. The Role of Socioeconomic Status

Although making a new life from scratch is complex, established people with higher social and economic resources chose to leave Iran to escape the restrictions and to grow and thrive. Because Canada's immigration policies require considerable resources, most Iranian immigrants are from a high socioeconomic status (Government of Canada, 2022). Having a strong bankroll and financial resources in Iran to prove their financial independence is one of the most significant ways that immigrants can apply for a

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[1] Although the participant did not specify which war she meant, it seems that she referred to the United States-led invasion of the Republic of Iraq and the first stage of the Iraq War (CFR).

Canadian visa. Among applicants, some had strong and successful businesses. On the surface, it seems a huge challenge to leave behind successful lives and companies and think about immigration. However, because the economic system in Iran is stagnated, business owners found the situation difficult for growth and development.

The unstable economic situation mostly originates from sanctions. In 1979, the US government imposed sanctions on Iran for the first time due to Iran's violation of international diplomatic norms by the hostage crisis (Ghodsi et al., 2018). Multinational corporations (MNEs) were discouraged from investing in Iran and doing business with Iran because these sanctions. This situation worsened after the European Union intensified sanctions in March 2012 over concerns about Iran's nuclear program. As a result, Iran's total exports decreased by 32% in 2012-2013, which led to a severe economic recession (Ghodsi et al., 2018).

Maryam, whose husband was a successful entrepreneur in Iran, talked about the effects of these sanctions, especially the earlier ones. They immigrated to Canada due to the difficulties that her husband faced in his business because of the economic problems in Iran:

> *"My husband was a very successful entrepreneur in Iran. He had his own company, making foams and their derivatives. While the company was at the top of its productivity and profitability, he handed over the company to his sons (from his first marriage) and moved here for a fresh start. Over time he became bothered by the bureaucratic system and government in Iran. At the same time, the economic situation worsened, and he told me: We cannot live here anymore! We applied for an entrepreneur visa, and he built his own company again as soon as we arrived."*

Nasim, who immigrated to Toronto with her family, stated that her father's decision to immigrate was not due to economic pressure in Iran. Rather, her parents left behind their careers to give a chance of a better life for their children and themselves:

> *"I grew up in a wealthy family. We had a good life in Iran. We had a good house; my parents had a good job. We had no specific problem with immigrating except having a better future."*

To conclude this section, I should note that since the restrictions on women continue in Iran, most women reported finding freedom and opportunities in migrating to Canada. Some have a higher socio-economic status that made immigration easier. But for others such as students or middle-class families from Iran, providing sufficient financial resources to meet immigration regulations was difficult. Among women participants who had the financial support of their spouse or family, few mentioned financial issues as a reason for their move to Canada.

4.3.4. Effects on Participation in a Community Organization

Participants reported at least four effects on how and why they chose to get involved with community organizations. Personal priorities were one of the most frequent answers to why participants did or did not join. Other reasons included: family and friends, and how important they might be from immigrants' perspective; the length of time participants had been in Canada; and age at immigration.

4.3.4.1.   Personal Priorities

Deciding whether to join community organizations depends on immigrants'

expectations of what they will get from that community organization. Demands varied

from person to person since their priorities, manners, and personalities are different.

Some people appreciated joining community groups and found it a prerequisite for

creating a social network. Mahtaab, who immigrated with her family, was educated in

Canada. She believed that attending university and being exposed to people helped her to

find herself. She is grateful for the university's groups and students' clubs:

> *"If I did not go to university, I would not be exposed to the opportunity of joining groups. But it was a more complicated situation for those who did not attend school here and missed this opportunity… Going to college was a great opportunity to meet people and make friends. I met so many people there and found so many friends... It was hard, though, because as an immigrant, you do not have many options to make your friendships; a limited number of people could match with me."*

Mahtaab also talked about preferences that came from her personal characteristics and

how that determined which type of communities to join:

> *"Well, I prefer to be in contact and spend my time with Iranian people. It is my preference, but I do not have a problem hanging out with non-Iranian people, like my classmates and colleagues. However, for deeper relationships, Iranian people are my favorite. That is why this was and is my challenge. I was not able to find those groups at first, and It took me time to find and join them. They are not accessible, so you might feel you cannot belong to society."*

For some participants, however, this experience was different. This group chose to be on their

own and not rely on communities for socializing. They asserted they were more open to new

experiences and aware of the challenges they were going to face. Kian moved to Canada when

he was 18 with his family. He believed his experience in university made him prepared to be

independent in the future and socialize on his own:

"Well, at that time, I was more interested in being independent and finding my network over time, not finding them via any platform or organization. I wanted to experience being friends with different types of people. But since I have my network now, I want to join communities to check what they are presenting."

Sharareh moved to Canada as a student at the age of 24. It was her first time getting far away from her family, and she did not have any friends or family. She told me how she enjoyed every challenge on her way and how she decided to make her society by herself, which refers to her openness and readiness to change her life:

"I did not want to develop my social network by finding friends in these [Persian] communities. Instead, I preferred to find my desired friends in society, workplace, or university, build my connection on my own, and move by the flow… I accepted all the possible challenges before I started my life here. I wanted to experience different things by myself, with no one's help. Because it was my decision, and no one forced me to immigrate. I must deal with every challenge".

4.3.4.2.   Family & Friends

Participants indicated that being accompanied by family or knowing people in Canada is the other factor that reduced the probability of joining community organizations. They mentioned that being alone might increase the chance of joining communities. Kian, who spent his adolescence in Canada stated his family as an important reason for staying out of community organizations:

"To be honest, we did not find it necessary to be a member of such organizations. We already had our family here, and my brother and I went to high school and made our friendships there."

He also commented that communities and groups could work better for those who do not have their family:

"When I was in university, I saw that Iranian students who came alone were looking for groups to join. I guess It could be for not being bored, not feeling alone, or anything that can fulfill their needs."

On the other hand, Saina, who came in 2013 as an undergraduate university student, said that although she had relatives and friends here in Canada, joining university groups helped her to find friends and settle in:

"At that time, I was choosing between Canada and the United States, and since I was 19, I preferred to choose somewhere I know someone and have a relative. So I chose Toronto because I had family and some of my friends from Iran here. They helped me a lot. I remember my university also had an International Student Services that held many events for international students. Those events were also so helpful in terms of providing information in the process of settling in."

4.3.4.3.   Length of Time Since Immigration

Alongside personal traits and preferences, almost 30 percent of participants reported that residence time is also important. The time immigrants spend in a new place can be a scale to measure how attached and integrated they get over time. Khosro stated how hard it was for him to start living in Toronto but over time he got used to the culture but that time could fix most things:

"Joining the Iranian community helped me adjust to the current situation, but in terms of getting more familiar with Canadian culture, only time helped me out… All [the differences] made things difficult for anyone who just came here. But over time, maybe about a year, you get used to the new environment and adapt to the conditions here. Over time, you get to know the culture more, the topics that people usually talk about come to our attention more, but what I did was I tried very hard to communicate with Canadians."

Milad, who moved to Canada as a student in 2015, talked about how he got used to living in a country with a different culture. Before leaving Iran, he had never been to any

other countries, and he had never lived alone. Since he did not have the opportunity to live independently in Iran, living in Canada was a challenge for him:

> "Before I came to Canada, I had never been living by myself and never had been cooking, shopping, and other daily activities. To be honest, I always depended on my parents (laughing). Everything was my FIRST when I immigrated; I had to take care of myself and, at the same time, study and find friends. The first few months were extremely difficult, but I got used to it after a while. I went to campus and found the Iranian students' association. I made many friendships there that helped me to my new life. It took time, but you will find your way after the first couple of years."

Samaneh told a similar story about her family. Her family struggled for the first three years after immigration until they felt more established and settled:

> "I felt tough times were over in 2018, three years after our immigration. I found a better job and established my company. My husband also got hired by a company then, so we settled in more than the beginning, although we had a tough time."

Tania moved with her parents to Toronto in 2002 as a teenager. She talked about her experiences and her parents' struggles to fit into society. She mentioned it takes time for immigrants settle in:

> "I do not think immigrants should expect to be…[pause] I do not think they should expect to get it right away. And you know, have everything be established right away. And no one you meet here can do that right away for you. That takes time. What these [cultural] events do is help with making you feel not alone. While you are doing that, right? That takes time. But it takes time to learn the culture, language, the social, you know, social, the way people carry themselves here, right?"

Saina, who experienced homesickness more than other participants, also stated time as a solution for overcoming her challenge:

> "It was a process for me that took a couple of years. In my first five years here, I returned to Iran every summer to stay with my family. Iran was my home at that time, and Toronto was just a place where I was studying in. I always felt homesick as well. The moment that I started to accept Toronto as my home, not Iran, was when I graduated

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from the university and found a job. At that point, I felt more settled in. The relationship I started with my partner also helped me feel like I belonged."

4.3.5. Age at Immigration

Participants' ages influenced their ability to settle in. They reported that youngsters are usually more open and adaptive to a new situation and can adjust to a new environment faster than older immigrants. Hassan, 43, a physiotherapist, immigrated because of his son, who was 8 at the time of immigration. He talked about how age plays a role in the formation of the sense of place and how it affected his decision:

> *"It also depends on the age. If you come here as a high school student, you can blend in with people and make friendships with anyone easily. University students mostly have Iranian friends but high school students have friends from around the world. I believe university friendships are shallow and superficial compared to high school friendships. That is why immigrant children who grew up here are more established than immigrant university students. If you were well established in Iran or graduated from the university, it gets harder to blend into the society because you had something before and got used to it, and then you need to build it again."*

Golnaz, 23, moved with her family in 2014 when she was 12 years old. She started her education in high school and believed that helped her adjust more to society:

> *"When I began high school, that took a lot of adjustments for me at first, but it was all right. But then, for English, I sometimes needed help understanding the teacher for some of the courses. And then, I started like ESL. I had one semester of ESL, which helped a lot. And some courses they taught us about, like all of the holidays in Canada, it was almost like both English and some of the culture. So that also, I think, helped to adjust more maybe. And then, other than that, I think it is like when I was in Iran, you know, how it is like your parents, they know everything, they help you out. But then, especially because when I turned 18, I started university. Then I had to do a lot of things on my own. I started to live in my own house. I pay the bills, like learning how to do stuff, find things if you need help, and reach out to people. So, yeah, I just like a lot more responsibility in general. It was hard at first, but then it just felt better."*

4.4. Findings set B: Community Organizations' Contribution to Sense of Place

This section investigates the functionality of community organizations from the perspective of leaders and users. The leaders of the most well-known Iranian community in Iran were asked about services they provided, and how users responded to them. Table 4.1 shows the list of community organizations and the five leaders interviewed and included in this work.

Table 4.1: Community Organizations

Name of Organization	Type of Organization	Leaders interviewed	Size of Group
Parya Trillium	Iranian community organizations particularly for seniors and a registered charity	Mandana	7 Board members 170 Supporters 1100 members
Tirgan	nonpartisan, non-religious, nonprofit Canadian registered charitable organization	Niaz	+ 200 committee member 14K Facebook members
Mohandes	non-political, non-religious and non-profit organization, which serves Engineers and Architectures in Toronto	Mahboob	About 20 committee members 1200 members
UTIRAN (University of Toronto Iranian students' association)	Nonprofit student organization based in University of Toronto	Mohammadreza Golnaz Yasmin	About 4200 members
Iranian in Toronto	Facebook group	Arash (Admin and creator of group)	16.3 K member

4.4.1. Community Organizations' Positive Impacts

Most responses acknowledged that community organizations have positively influenced how participants felt they belonged to Canadian society. Although there were some contradictory comments about the efficacy of such organizations, their role in immigrants' lives cannot be neglected. Mahtaab, as a potential user and advocate of community organizations, believed that organizations based at universities are the best place to learn, communicate, socialize, and experience, which can lead to a better sense of place:

> *"This type of organization [Academic organizations] can show newcomers how to live, adapt or even have fun here. Community organizations can give them a reason to learn about this place and accept it as your home. It is normal if the transition process is hard for some people, they just need a reason to make sure they are accepted in society. And I believe for other immigrants it is just like that. You can feel there is a place for you somewhere… It is super helpful and I believe most of their basic challenges will be fulfilled and that they need to accept this place as home."*

Golnaz started with being a member of the University of Toronto student community group (UTIRAN). At first, she joined the group as a user since she found it interesting and helpful to get involved. After a while that she got to know how the group worked, she ended up volunteering as Vice President:

> *"I think it definitely has helped me fit in more with them. I met a lot more people, and just like this circle keeps getting bigger and bigger. If I have questions or problems, I can ask them for their recommendations. I asked them a couple of times. I like different events, not even school-related, but just for services I want to use. So their knowledge really helped me, like improving my knowledge and knowing how to, I don't know, how to live better in the city or use all available resources."*

Milad, another potential user of such organizations, emphasized how the University of Concordia Iranian students' organization played a central role in his social life:

> *"I did not have any friends in the first couple of months. I got to know student organizations through one of my Iranian classmates. After I joined the community, I could find many Iranian people who became my friends afterward. You know, Concordia has a lot of Iranian students, so the community was like a social hub for all of them. We had the chance to talk about everyday stuff, which is what you need when you have just arrived. That made you feel better about yourself in the new society and prevented you from being homesick."*

In addition to all university-based communities, the other organizations, mainly located in Toronto, provide a variety of services. Tirgan, Parya, and Mohandes are the most popular communities referred to by participants. In the following, Mohammad the President of the University of Toronto student group UTIRAN, talked about his experiences:

> *"Yeah. So, I mean, I am currently the President of the Iranian Association at the University of Toronto. We have also been connected with a bunch of other organizations that I was not a part of, but I have known them. I know people from Tirgan who work there. That also happens to be because of the UTIRAN background. I know people from the York University Iranian Association; I know people from the Ryerson universities association. We have done events with them. I know people from the Mohandes association. It is like an Iranian association of like Iranian engineers. I was mainly providing services in most of these associations. But Tirgan is the only one that I went to. So I went to their concert, I went to their social events, I went to your kind of like the Nowrooz events. It was fun. It was a good vibe. It was a good environment.*

4.4.2. Improvement of Services

Most Iranian community organizations are focused on holding Persian cultural events such as Nowrouz (Persian-language term for the day of the Iranian New Year) and Yalda (the longest night of the year). They spend little time or energy educating newcomers on

Canadian society and providing information such as how to find a job, how to adapt to the new culture, and specific social and cultural rules. Saina, who had a good experience with Mohandes association, believed although this association is helpful, it has to be changed:

> *"That is my preference to learn about Canadian culture and be open to new experiences. For instance, the Mohandes group could have speakers from other cultures, not just Iranian people. You know, it is better to hear people's experiences who are different from you to understand their challenges and what they did to find a job, for example."*

Golnaz, on behalf of her family, expressed their experience with community organizations and suggested some improvements in this area:

> *"Organizations can add some practical events to their schedules. My parents had been told to join some job fairs which were presented for newcomer immigrants. I did not remember their name, but they helped people to make CVs and taught them how to search for jobs and what to choose. We can have these services in Iranian organizations too."*

4.4.3. Lack of a Proper Advertisement

Community organizations as service providers need to be known to their audiences. Since some of the organizations do not have an active social media platform, they lose the chance of being seen by hundreds of people who could potentially be a user. When asked what these organizations could do better, Saina suggested:

> *"They can advertise their events in Farsi and English to attract non-Iranian people. They can use billboards downtown or distribute flyers all around downtown to inform people about their event. I guess that would also help organizations improve the quality of their events and merge different cultures in them."*

Khosro also pointed out he did not participate in community organizations since he did not know or hear about them:

> *"I mostly know Tirgan, which is not very specific to immigrants. All Iranians in Toronto can use it. They hold traditional celebrations. But in other organizations, which are mostly for immigrants, no, I did not participate, and I do not know them that much."*

Some respondents also referred to the fact that if there is a community in the place they live, they would not know about it because of the lack of advertisement. This means even if an organization provides useful services for immigrants, it would not have a chance of being seen if they can't represent themselves to the community via advertisements.

Golnaz, the Vice President of UTIRAN, confirmed that the lack of advertisement can be an issue and how they overcame it in their association:

> *"It is just hard to find the resources, I think, in a bigger city or bigger setting. So it is just, I think one thing that even organizations can improve is finding out different ways to reach out to people that would be helpful in our cities, like in UTIRAN. We share like different student groups of friends. So if people are interested, they can go to their events. But even like many services, I still need to learn about many services there, like in the Iranian communities. It is just how to reach out to people and then try to broaden their audience because many people just do not know about them and say they might want to use them."*

4.5. Conclusion

Although participants in this research had different backgrounds and diverse characteristics, they shared some similarities in what they experienced in Iran and as immigrants in Canada. Their individual characteristics including personality, socioeconomic status, age and gender all influenced the immigrant experience. For

women participants, women's rights and freedoms were important. For men, opportunities and having a better life were the most frequent answers to reasons for immigration. In trying to meet the need of Iranian immigrants, community organization leaders reported their challenges with reaching out to potential members and providing services that meet their members' needs.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The findings of this study reflected a process of Iranian immigrants making a place for themselves and influential elements in this process. It then examines the attachment to sense of place, and the contribution of age, location, and residing in a place. The following discussion continues into six main areas. It starts with discussing the effect of Toronto as a place, gender-based issues, the power of push factors, and the role of personal characteristics, and ends with the how community organizations play a part in creating a sense of place.

5.2. Role of Toronto in Creating the Sense of Place

Analyzing sense of place amongst Iranian immigrants in Toronto revealed that the location they had chosen to reside had a direct connection to their sense of place. Iranian immigrants residing in Richmond hill stated that the unique characteristic of Toronto, more specifically Richmond hill, area have evoked a positive sensation. Accessibility to Persian food, culture, and stores, as well as the opportunity of interacting with other Iranian people has made this area an ideal place to live, and more importantly has improved the sense of place in Iranian immigrants. As Foote and Azaryahu (2009) stated, sense of place is associated with the positive attachments to the place that immigrants live. Since for most of the participants, living in city of Toronto or Richmond Hill is accompanied with feeling home, we can conclude that the place itself has had an influence on their sense of place after immigration.

5.3.   Personal Characteristics as an Influence on Creating a Sense of Place

Both individual traits and priorities, as well as having ready access to friends and family, seem to have influenced participants' ability to feel more comfortable making the immigration transition.

5.3.1.   Personal Traits and Priorities

Immigration is an inherently bold decision and involves social interaction with strangers (Deaux, 2006). As immigrants enter a new society, they undergo an acculturation process, which can be defined as "cultural change that occurs when people from different cultures live together for long periods in close contact with each other" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). In Berry's (1997) acculturation model, immigrants face two major challenges in this new context: (a) maintaining their former cultural identity and (b) adapting to the values of the new group in order to develop close relationships in the new society. Based on studies reviewed in Chapter Two, cross-cultural adaptation has been linked to personality traits (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004). This raises the question as to whether openness can be influential in accepting a new culture. According to Wilson, Ward & Fisher (2013), openness, as a willingness to experiment and explore new ideas, activities, and ideologies, is one of the prerequisites of adaptation. In this project, findings showed that the participants' openness and readiness for new experiences increased their reported attachment to Canada. For instance, Sharareh, who moved alone to Canada at 24, explicitly stated she accepted all the

challenges before leaving Iran and was eager to have different experiences. This example shows that openness to experiences is important and explains that although the adjustment process is complex, the willingness to accept awaiting challenges makes the process more tolerable.

Joining ESL classes, working in general jobs, studying in colleges, or attending university are the examples mentioned by participants as tools for adjusting to their new society. As Huang, Chi, & Lawler (2005) emphasized, openness helps immigrants adjust well to the new country's culture, language, and society. It also exposes them to more new experiences than those with less openness. Respondents with a sensation-seeking character and a preference for new people faced more interaction opportunities. In contrast, those who preferred to stay in the Iranian community had less chance to understand their new environment since they were dealing with homesickness or cultural barriers. That is why having the mentality of accepting differences has consistently been found to play a substantial role in how people may react to changes.

Shakiba & Stapleton (2022) characterized extroversion as "a tendency to seek interactions, and being outgoing and sociable, and feeling less strain when living in a multicultural setting." Previous studies showed that extroversion is associated with higher engagement and a higher sense of place (Olson, 2007). When participants were asked to talk about their engagement in Iranian community organizations, some mentioned they joined communities or a specific event to meet new people, socialize and make friendships. Although they had not been asked directly to talk about how being

extroverted affects their social life, they did report whether or not they took part in activities. For instance, joining events to socialize, eagerness to find and meet new people, and the mentality of seeking new interactions and engaging in society (via volunteering in communities) represented immigrants' tendency to extroversion.

Personal traits and characteristics have been studied as a determining factor of immigration intention and creating a sense of place after immigration. What may be neglected in literature is the role of *necessity* in human actions and behaviors. A number of participants stated that they changed after immigration because the situation demanded it. They needed to change their social behaviors to be able to fit into Canadian society and to survive. Those who were not naturally outgoing and extroverted found it necessary to socialize with new people to learn and blend in. Those who were scared of being exposed to new experiences had to accept all the changes and challenges as a step forward their new life.

5.3.2. Family and Friends Matter

Participants in this research can be delineated into four main groups based on whether or not they had family in Canada:

1. Those who moved with their family and had relatives in Canada.

2. Those who moved with their family but had no relatives in Canada.

3. Those who immigrated alone and had relatives in Canada.

4. Those who immigrated alone and had no relatives in Canada.

Those with relatives in Canada declared that their experience of immigration was smoother than those with no family in Canada. Mahtaab, for instance, is a Group 1 immigrant. She moved with her whole family to Canada and appreciated her relatives and family friends already in Toronto since they provided helpful information on arrival. Relatives provided support networks, and kinship helped her family to have a community right away (see similar findings in Ryan, 2009). Overall, participants found it easier to immigrate if they had friends or family in the new country, and individuals who can help them navigate the challenges of moving to another country.

Those who immigrated with family but did not have any relatives in Canada belong to Group 2 and are exemplified by Sana, who moved with her young son to Canada in 2011. At the time of their arrival, her child needed care while she was doing a course in college. She did not have any friends or family to ask to take care of her child and had to take him to daycare. Her story illustrates how the responsibilities of family (especially those with young children) can be obstacles in the process of creation of sense of place.

Group 3 shared experiences with Group 1. Since both had families or friends in Canada, the experiences were somewhat easier than other groups. Khosro, a student who immigrated alone, had his older brother in Canada, who, according to him, was the most important reason for choosing Canada as the destination as opposed to the United States. As Heering et al. (2004) stated, close contact can increase the likelihood of immigration to that destination.

On the other hand, those that had no relatives in Canada (Group 4) reported they faced more challenges at the beginning since they did not have any background or information about their new home. Mahsa, for instance, came without any family. She did not get any support when she arrived and had limited resources. While she was able to find a community over time, she experienced many difficulties in the process.

In total, those participants who had their family during immigration, or had relatives in Canada, encountered fewer challenges and were provided with more information about the society, which influenced whether they needed to reach out to community organizations. However, those who do not have relatives sought information about the society from Persian organizations.

5.3.3.   Age Matters

Age can affect how people understand immigration and how they make efforts to create sense of place. Participants' ages at the time of immigration ranged from 14-40 years old, and includes early immigrants, students who came recently, adults that moved with children, and adults who came as a student and stayed on to establish their lives in Canada. Results show that those who immigrated younger were more likely to adapt to a new environment while elder immigrants found the transition more difficult. The positive benefits of early life mobility are various, including easier language acquisition and a smoother cultural transitions (Coulthard et al., 2002). Such decisions can give younger people an opportunity to learn and study in the education system of new society, and get

accustomed to culture, language and social manners. As sociologist Harmansen (2017) concluded, immigration in the early stages of life directly influences challenges immigrants face in a new country. However, immigration after the early formative period makes transition more difficult. The place where immigrants grow up and spend their adolescence directly impacts attitudes, behavior, and social skills. For this reason, participants who moved to Canada in the early stages of life, or experienced university or high school, mentioned that they had more opportunities and interactions with Canadian society, resulting in learning English and Canadian culture faster than their parents.

5.4.   Gender

5.4.1. Human's Rights

Studies showed that gender inequality in an immigrants' country of origin can be a very important impetus for immigration (Boyd, 2006). In recent years, a country like Canada has become a desired destination for Iranian immigrants because of relatively high levels of gender-based equality (Guppy et al. 2019). Although women in Iran are mostly educated and enrolled in universities at almost similar rates to men, relatively few women hold high level leadership and management positions. Most women participants acknowledged that they had good job positions in Iran, but since gender discrimination restricts women's progression (Rahbari, 2016), their opportunities to advance were limited. They concluded that they could not have reached the position they got in Canada if they were living in Iran, and this is their main reason for immigration. Interviewees also reported that with achieving higher social positions, equality, freedom and women's

rights, they feel like they belong to the place they live. Related literature also confirms this finding. As Geurts et al. (2021) asserted, immigrants' ability to establish a sense of place in the host society may be affected by gender inequality in source countries. In addition, feeling like one belongs in a new country enhances quality of life, fosters attachment, and establishes a desire for permanent residency. The freedom and rights that women gain by living in Canada are substantial enough to make it a livable home – something that they would miss living in Iran. Participants mentioned that their abilities and skills are seen in Canada and that women are valued based on their capabilities. This makes them feel like a real citizen even if they have not obtained their Canadian passport. The sense of being supported by their new society fosters and enables a sense of place.

5.4.2. Living Independently

Persian culture is family oriented. In this culture, living separately from parents and being independent seldom happens since traditions say children can only leave parents' houses when married. This situation is made more difficult for women since it is not a social norm and families have difficulty accepting this difference (Azadarmaki & Bahar (2006)). For example, Sharareh, one of the participants who came to Canada alone as a student, indicated this as a reason for immigration. She wanted the opportunity to live independently and experience individual growth.

Although not all the participants explicitly mentioned "living independently" as a reason for immigration, they did talk about wanting to live an independent life. In

Sharareh's case, planning to become independent alongside what she experienced in Iran as a woman contributed to her making the choice to come to Canada. In some other cases, talking about readiness for challenges after immigration could indicate the desire for independence, although participants acknowledged there were challenges on the way. In conclusion, the more some participants were willing to experience an independent life in Canada, the more prepared and determined they were upon their arrival.

5.5. The Power of Push Factors

Push factors in the country of origin make a person think about emigration and that includes leaving behind belongings, memories, and loved ones to live in another country. Although participants in this study changed their geography and now live in a different country, they acknowledged the emotional ties and bonds that still exist in Iran. However, over time the connection with the home country declined. Memories of the original push factors, especially the lack of opportunity, made them think less about returning. Rather, they focused on the opportunities Canada gave for the future – from a business to more rights for women, and more opportunities for children. An interesting insight that came out of the interviews is that the decision to emigrate is not limited to a certain age range. From students who had just graduated from college to elder immigrants who were well established in Iran, it seems they all decided to leave Iran from a commonly shared dislike of the Islamic Republic regime and the situation it has made for its residents.

The more participants reported disliking the current regime, the higher their sense of place seemed to be after immigration. Marcu (2012) had similar findings showing the connection between the level of sense of place and push factors. She believed immigrants' *emotions* play a crucial role in the process of connecting individuals to the environment in which they live. In this study rage, anger and disappointment about the current regime were the most powerful emotions communicated in the interviews. However, what Canada offers to immigrants as a destination also contributed to immigrants' emotions. Regardless of the straightforward immigration process [2], participants reported that they felt safe and secure living in Canada. They also mentioned Canada as a land of educational and economic opportunity, making it place where they could build a future.

5.5.1. Tragedies

For some participants, having a good job or creating a family in Canada was the main reason for thinking less of Iran. For others, a sorrowful incident played a role in making Canada a *home*. For many participants of this study, the downing of flight PS752 was a tragedy that severed their connection to Iran. This can be explained by Schmid's (2011) findings that countries of origin with human rights violations or terrorism can force their civilians to move to countries where their rights can be fulfilled. Also, there is a possibility that immigrants ignored all connections to the source country due to a high

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[2] Canada immigration policies let applicants to apply for Permanent Residency (PR) after having a full time job for at least 12 months. This is one of the reasons that Canada is a favorable destination (CIC).

level of rage and anger toward the government. Although releasing attachments and a sense of commitment to the country of origin is usually gradual (Sigmon et al., 2002), tragedies such as PS752 can accelerate the process.

Because all participants moved to Canada many years before this incident, their decision to immigrate was not influenced by this event. However, it did relate to how participants reported their level of sense of place in Canada now. I assume each situation that arises in Iran (uprisings, oppression, or sanctions) will easily capture Iranian immigrants' attention from around the world. My interviews took place prior to the recent women's protests in Iran so my participants did not speak specifically about those events. However, there is evidence that Iranian immigrants have been standing up for Iranian protestors over the past several months (Wintour, 2022).

5.6. The Role of Community Organizations

Interviews with immigrants who had experience using the services of community organizations identified two main categories of community organizations. First, the Welcoming Centers, which provide services for all newcomers such as ESL, informative workshops about the banking system, taxation, and how to settle into Canada. Second, the ones who mainly focus on Iranian immigrants. The work reported here, focused on this second set of organizations: Iranian organizations primarily celebrating Persian events and reviving ancient cultural activities. However, the services provided by this second group are getting repetitive for some immigrants and prevent them from getting

more involved. Based on interviews, most of the participants reported that they preferred receiving more useful services from Iranian organizations rather than what the Canadian government offers. They suggested that they would find it easier to integrate if services were provided in Farsi and they could communicate from a common language and social background. A controversy here is why Iranian community organizations do not offer such services since the communities said they would be beneficial.

Interviews with leaders of community organizations revealed that community organizations' maintenance requires financial resources. As community organizations' budgets are limited, leaders do not have the ability nor the resources to provide the immigration services identified by interview participants. However, participants believed that Iranian organizations could divide responsibilities and each focus on a specific area. Among all community organizations that participants indicated, Mohandes got higher grades in terms of purpose and services.

Despite some deficiencies that Iranian community organizations have, some respondents believe they feel more at home whenever they are connected to Iranian community organizations (Tirgan or Parya). Celebrating Yalda (the longest night of the year), Nowrooz (the Persian new year), and Charshanbeh Soori (the last Wednesday of the Persian calendar) helped them experience a feeling of home even while living far from Iran. From their perspective, this is what makes Canada home: celebrating Persian cultural events while living in Canada. On the contrary, some participants claimed that they did not find it helpful to be a member of Iranian organizations due to the unattractive

services. It is worth mentioning, however, that sense of place and how an immigrant defines it varies from one case to another. This research has covered a diversity of Iranian immigrants with different backgrounds.

5.7.   Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the contribution of research findings from Chapter Four in the context of the body of literature provided in Chapter Two. In most cases, literature confirmed the research outcomes however in some areas such as the role of necessity of human behaviors, further research studies seem called for.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study has (1) examined the immigration experience and sense of place development in Iranian immigrants, (2) shown how experience evolved over time, and (3) explored how community organizations contributed to the sense of place among the Iranian immigrant population in Canada. This study sought to answer the question how Iranian immigrants experienced immigration and what actions they took to increase their sense of place within Canadian society. The project focused on established to semi-established immigrants within the context of the residential neighborhoods within large cities in Canada. Throughout this chapter, the study's contribution and implications are

summarized for human geographers, immigration policymakers, and sociologists. It also considers research strengths and limitations.

6.2. Research Contributions

This research has provided contributions to the field of human geography, especially in regard to sense of place. First, this research has helped to represent a small community of immigrants to Canada, concentrated on their characteristics, and internal and external causes of immigration, and identified their needs and demands as a group of settlers and citizens in Canada.

Canada is typically regarded as an immigration recipient country (Liston & Carens, 2008). Since over 50 percent of all Canadian immigrants are from Asia and Pacific areas such as India or China (Walton-Roberts, 2003), most of recent studies focus these countries. However, my work centers on the experiences of a much smaller community and the challenges faced by people coming in from lesser-known countries. By examining Iranian immigrants my work illustrates immigration challenges for people arriving in Canada from a smaller country with a less vibrant and well-developed ethnic immigrant infrastructure. Almost all participants experienced difficulties that made staying in their own country challenging and, in most cases, impossible. Lessons learned from hearing these immigrants' stories have shed light on the importance of personal experiences in deciding on immigration. The context immigrants originated from is the first and most important factor that should be considered in immigration studies.

However, other factors, such as age, personal characteristics, and family relations, are also involved in immigration.

Second, working with this small immigrant group, participants' engagement was higher than expected. By engagement, I mean sharing, reading, and putting comments on Facebook invitations, and responding and reaching out to me after each contact. Although I believe being an Iranian immigrant woman myself was also influential in developing trust and reliability in such a small community.

6.3 Study Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the recruitment of participants. I mainly used Facebook platforms to invite immigrants for participation. However, the time difference between Edmonton and Toronto made this process challenging. I had to post invitations based on each time zone to increase its chance of being seen. On the other hand, given the Facebook algorithm, to get the post on the top, you need to post it every 3-4 hours, considering the time difference this was a time-consuming process.

The second study limitation is related to conducting interviews. After sharing information letters with interested participants, they were given some suggested time to choose. However, from about 50 interviews that had been scheduled, only 28 interviews occurred due to participants not showing up at the prescribed time. This made the process of conducting interviews take longer than expected.

6.4 Study Highlights

One of the most interesting discoveries I made throughout the study was the higher number of women interested in this topic. When I began recruiting people through Facebook groups, the number of women that reached out to me was more than the number of men. I discovered that the fact that I am also an Iranian woman affected this process, which helped gain women participants' trust to take part in this research. During each interview, I discovered how open and comfortable they were with me. Sharing the same background and experiences we all had in Iran and being an immigrant woman, myself were the reasons that helped to improve the feeling of empathy and unity between us.

6.5 Relocating Myself

Reflexivity relates to the researcher's role in qualitative research, actively participating in the research process (Gouldner, 1971, p. 16). The concept of reflexivity refers to how researchers reflect on their values (Parahoo, 2006) and recognize, examine, and understand how their social background and assumptions affect their research practice (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 17). Considering this point, I also paid attention to my orientation to a sense of place. I firmly believe that immigrants' sense of place depends on their experiences throughout their journey. Especially for women who have lived and grown up in an Islamic and authoritarian country, leaving home and finding sense of place to a foreign country may not be as easy as it might appear. Before starting this study, I had an

idea about what I would hear from participants about why they immigrated since we had an experience in common. As a girl raised and living in Iran, I was aware of all the sufferings they endured, which made me more passionate about doing this study. I find it supportive and helpful if someone can speak of what people are experiencing in Iran and what they had been through for years before immigration. In my opinion, Iranian people's stories must be heard and learned so that I can contribute to any helpful and effective policies to make their lives easier.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Notification of Approval (Renewal)

Date:	October 19, 2022
Renewal ID:	Pro00111814_REN1
Principal Investigator:	Shamim Arabzadeh Bahri
Study ID:	Pro00111814
Study Title:	Examining the Role of Community Organizations in Creating a Sense of Place for Persian Immigrants in Canada
Supervisor:	Theresa Garvin
Approval Expiry Date:	Wednesday, October 18, 2023

Thank you for submitting this renewal application. Your application has been reviewed and approved.

This re-approval is valid for one year. If your study continues past the expiration date as noted above, you will be required to complete another renewal request. Beginning at 30 days prior to the expiration date, you will receive notices that the study is about to expire. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the REB does not constitute authorization to initiate the conduct of this research. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring required approvals from other involved organizations (e.g., Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, community organizations, school boards) are obtained, before the research begins.

Sincerely,

Charmaine Kabatoff, REB Consultant, for

Theresa Garvin, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Appendix B: Individuals information letter and consent

Title of the study: Examining the role of community organizations in creating the sense of place for immigrants.

Investigator: Shamim Arabzadeh Bahri
Email: sarabzad@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Theresa Garvin, Professor
Human Geography Program
Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2E3
(780) 492-4593 (voicemail only)
Email: theresa.garvin@ualberta.ca

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research study about the role of community organizations in creating a sense of place for immigrants.

Purpose of the study: From this research we wish to understand the immigration experiences of Iranian immigrants in Toronto, and the role played by community organizations in helping them to settle and make a new life.

Study Procedures: Your participation entails a 1-2 hour interview on your immigration experience. This interview may take place face to face or online (via zoom, skype or other video chat platforms) at a place and time convenient to you. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline the interview, stop the interview at any time, and do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. The interview will be conducted in either Farsi or English, as you prefer. The interview will be digitally-recorded and, once complete, a written transcript will be made from the discussion. This transcript will be returned to you and you will have 10 days to review the document. At that time, you can ask for your interview to be withdrawn, or can make any changes, deletions and revisions to the document. As interviews are completed, they will be put together with other interviews to uncover common themes, experiences, and ideas about Iranian immigration to Canada.

Benefits:

This research can help you in:

- Having a better understanding of immigration and sense of place, including your own immigration experience.

- Learning about the similarities and differences of Iranian immigrants.

- Documenting the history of Iranian immigrants in Toronto

Risks:

The risks of this research are not higher than in your everyday life. However, there is a small chance that your identity might be determined based on the details you tell about yourself. All efforts will be made to remove identifying information and ensure confidentiality in the information you provide. If the interview is conducted in person, there may also be risks associated with Covid-19. In order to mitigate those risks, wearing a face mask and physical distancing is mandatory during in person interviews. If you develop any symptoms, stay home and we can set up an interview through video chat (Zoom, Google meet, Facetime).

Confidentiality: The information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people who will have access to the research data are myself and my supervisor. Both the research ethics board and U of A auditors may also have access to the data for audit purposes. When the interview is transcribed, we will use a pseudonym or a fake name to protect your identity. You are welcome to choose your own pseudonym, or we can choose one for you. You are also able to use your own name if you choose. If you want to use your real name at the time of the interview, you have the right to change it to a pseudonym after.

Data Storage: Recorded audios of the interviews will be stored on my personal laptop and after uploading them to the university's secure online storage they will be deleted from my laptop. Transcripts and field notes also will be kept in the university's secure online storage for a minimum period of 5 years according to university regulations.

Voluntary Participation and Freedom to Withdraw: You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. You can request the recorder or camera be shut off at any time. You can withdraw from the study completely anytime up until you approve your transcript. After the

interview, our discussion will be transcribed to text and sent to you to check the accuracy of your statements. You will have 10 days after receiving the transcript to make changes. If you have not responded during that time, I will assume that the transcript meets your approval and it will become part of my data set. Once your information becomes a part of my data set, it cannot be withdrawn because analysis will begin.

Information about the Study Results: A summary of the research results will be made available on completion of the project. If you would like a copy of the research summary, or a digital copy of my finalized thesis, please check the related box on the consent form. An online presentation of the study findings may take place at the end of the study. If you wish to attend this online presentation, please check the related box on the consent form.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact me (sarabzad@ualberta.ca) or my supervisor (theresa.garvin@ualberta.ca).

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.

Please keep this form for your records. You should print a copy for your records or keep a pdf version of it that can be downloaded.

I have read the information sheet attached to this addendum and agree to take part in this research.

I have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

This signature on this Information & Consent Form Addendum means that I agree to continue to take part in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation and my data up to 10 days following receiving the text of my interview.

Pseudonyms

I would like the research team to assign a pseudonym (fake name) Yes   No

I would like to choose my own pseudonym Yes   No

The name I would like to use is: _____

Research results

I would like to receive a copy of the research summary.   Yes   No

I would like to receive a digital copy of Shamim's thesis.   Yes   No

I would like to be notified of the online presentation of the research results.

Yes   No

Signature of Participant: ---------------------------------------   Name (Printed)   Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent-----------------------   Name (Printed)   Date

A SIGNED COPY OF THIS ADDENDUM MUST BE GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Appendix C: Leaders information letter and consent

Title of the study: Examining the role of community organizations in creating the sense of place for immigrants.

Investigator:	Shamim Arabzadeh Bahri
	Email: sarabzad@ualberta.ca
Supervisor:	Dr. Theresa Garvin, Professor
	Human Geography Program
	Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
	University of Alberta
	Edmonton, AB T6G 2E3
	(780) 492-4593 (voicemail only)
	Email: theresa.garvin@ualberta.ca

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research study about the role of community organizations in creating a sense of place for immigrants. I'm inviting you because of your leadership role among Iranian immigrants in Toronto.

Purpose: From this research we wish to understand the immigration experiences of Iranian immigrants in Toronto, and the role played by community organizations in helping them to settle and make a new life.

Study Procedures: Your participation entails a 1-2 hour interview. This interview may take place face to face or online (via zoom, skype or other video chat platforms) at a place and time convenient to you. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline the interview, stop the interview at any time, and do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. The interview will be conducted in either Farsi or English, as you prefer. The interview will be digitally-recorded and, once complete, a written transcript will be made from the discussion. This transcript will be returned to you and you will have 10 days to review the document. At that time, you can ask for your interview to be withdrawn, or can make any changes and deletions and revisions to the document. As interviews are completed, they will be put together with other interviews to uncover common themes, experiences, and ideas about Iranian immigration to Canada and the role that organizations like yours play in the immigration experience.

Benefits:

This research can help you in:

- Having a better understanding of immigration and sense of place. It may also help increase the visibility of the role of your organization in Toronto's broader immigrant community.

- Having the opportunity to learn from other organizations' experience dealing with immigrants.

- Documenting the history of Iranian immigrants in Toronto

Risks:

The risks of this research are not higher than in your everyday life. However, there is a small chance that your identity might be determined based on the details you tell about yourself. All efforts will be made to remove identifying information and ensure confidentiality in the information

you provide. If the interview is conducted in person, there may also be risks associated with Covid-19. In order to mitigate those risks, wearing a face mask and physical distancing is mandatory during in person interviews. If you develop any symptoms, stay home and we can set up an interview through video chat (Zoom, Google meet, Facetime.)

Confidentiality: The information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people who will have access to the research data are myself and my supervisor. Both the research ethics board and U of A auditors may also have access to the data for audit purposes. When the interview is transcribed, we will use a pseudonym or a fake name to protect your identity. You are welcome to choose your own pseudonym, or we can choose one for you. You are also able to use your own name if you choose. If you want to use your real name at the time of the interview, you have the right to change it to a pseudonym after.

Data Storage: Recorded audios of the interviews will be stored on my personal laptop and after uploading them to the university's secure online storage they will be deleted from my laptop. Transcripts and field notes also will be kept in the university's secure online storage for a minimum period of 5 years according to university regulations.

Voluntary Participation and Freedom to Withdraw: You are under no obligation to

participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. You can request the recorder or camera be shut off at any time. You can withdraw from the study completely anytime up until you approve your transcript. After the interview, our discussion will be transcribed to text and sent to you to check the accuracy of your statements. You will have 10 days after receiving the transcript to make changes. If you have not responded during that time, I will assume that the transcript meets your approval and it will become part of my data set. Once your information becomes a part of my data set, it cannot be withdrawn because analysis will begin.

Information about the Study Results: A summary of the research result will be made available on completion of the project. If you would like a copy of the research summary, or a digital copy of my finalized thesis, please check the related box on the consent form. An online presentation of the study findings may take place at the end of the study. If you wish to attend this online presentation, please check the related box on the consent form.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact me (sarabzad@ualberta.ca) or my supervisor (theresa.garvin@ualberta.ca).

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.

Please keep this form for your records. You should print a copy for your records or keep a pdf version of it that can be downloaded.

I have read the information sheet and agree to take part in this research.

I have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

My signature on this Information & Consent Form means that I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation and my data up to 10 days following receiving the text of my interview.

Pseudonyms

I would like the research team to assign a pseudonym (fake name)

Yes   No

I would like to choose my own pseudonym

Yes   No

The name I would like to use is: _____

Research results

I would like to receive a copy of the research summary. Yes   No

I would like to receive a digital copy of Shamim's thesis.   Yes   No

I would like to be notified of the online presentation of the research results.

Yes   No

Signature of Participant: ---------------------------------------   Name (Printed)   Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent-----------------------   Name (Printed)   Date

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A SIGNED COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM MUST BE GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Appendix C: Facebook Invitation

Would you like to help voice the concerns of the Iranian community?

Hi, I'm Shamim.

A graduate student in Geography at the University of Alberta, who need your help to understand **how Iranian immigrants are adapting to their community in Canada.**

If you have been in Canada between **2005-2015**, I would be more than happy to hear your story of how you came to Canada, in an online or in-person interview.

For more information, please contact me via facebook direct message or at: **sarabzad@ualberta.ca**

Thank you

Appendix D: Email to leaders/board members

Dear Ms./Mr. …… (The name of the institute leader)

My name is Shamim Bahri and I am a Human Geography master's student at the University of Alberta, (Edmonton, AB). I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project by taking part in an interview (in person or online) about Iranian immigrants in the metro Toronto region. My work is examining the role of community organizations in creating a sense of place for Iranian immigrants. I discovered your name on your organization's website as someone that might have interesting insights that could inform my work.

If you are interested in taking part, or would like more information on the project, please feel free to contact me and I will be happy to answer your questions or provide additional information.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Shamim Bahri

sarabzad@ualberta.ca

Appendix E: Preliminary questioning path for Individuals

Hi, thank you so much for your time. My name is Shamim and we're here to talk about your immigration experience. I'll be asking some questions and we'll continue our conversation based on them. It should take about 1-2 hours.

If it is okay with you I start to record our conversation. It is just for analysis later and so I can more easily focus on what you are saying. This discussion is confidential and will be used just for internal purposes.

If you have already read the information letter you have been provided, please declare your consent and sign the sheet. Do you have any questions about the information letter?

Note: If the interview is online, participants will give oral consent.

Theme 1: Immigration story

• Tell me the story of how you came to live in Canada. How and why did you come here?

- What factors in Iran encouraged you to immigrate?

- Why did you choose Canada? Why did you not choose other countries?

- Did you arrive here with your family? Why/Why not?

- What was your family's role in your decision?/How did your family affect your decision?

• What do you think about having relatives here in canada? In what ways do you think they can affect your post-immigration experience?

Theme 2: After immigration

• Can you please describe your feelings/experiences once you got here?

- How were your first few months after arriving?

- What were your greatest challenges at that time? How did you handle them? Was anything easy for you?"

• Where do you live now (neighborhood)?

• Why did you choose this neighborhood?

• What are the positive and negative features of your current neighborhood?

• Where else would you prefer to live? Why?

Theme 3: Sense of place

• After these years, how are you feeling about the place you now live?

- How do you feel about Canadian society?

- Have you ever experienced racism in Canada? Can you explain how you felt?

- What do you think about belonging to society?

- Can you describe your emotional bonds/ties to your neighborhood?

- Could you please explain what you have done so far to develop your social connections?

• Do you consider your neighborhood your home? If not, what do you consider your home?

Theme 4: Community organizations

• What do you think about community organizations efficacy?

- Which organizations have you heard of?

-       Which ones have you joined? Why?

❖   If the participant is a member:

- What was your reason for joining this organization?

- In what ways did this organization affect your life?

- Can you describe your life before and after joining this organization?

- In what ways do you think your attitudes toward your place of living changed?

- Can you evaluate the quality of your social life before and after joining the organization?

❖   If the participant is not a member:

- Can I ask why you did not join any community organizations?

-     If you know relatives or friends who attend these organizations, how do your experiences differ from theirs?

- Have you struggled with social challenges without the help of other people?

- How did you develop your social bonds and attachments in society?

Thank you for all that valuable information, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

Appendix F: Preliminary questioning path for Organizations' leaders

Hi, thank you so much for your time. My name is Shamim and we're here to talk about your organization and your experience dealing with Iranian immigrants. I'll be asking some questions and we'll continue our conversation based on them. It should take about 1-2 hours.

If it is okay with you I start to record our conversation. It is just for analysis later and so I can more easily focus on what you are saying. This discussion is confidential and will be used just for internal purposes.

If you have already read the information letter you have been provided, please declare your consent and sign the sheet. Do you have any questions about the information letter?

Note: If the interview is online, participants will give oral consent.

During the interview, participants will be asked to answer these open ended questions, in order.

If the interviewee is the **founder** of the organization:

- Tell me the story of establishing this organization.

    - What was your first incentive to establish this organization?

If the interviewee is a **leader/worker** of the organization:

- Tell me the story of joining this organization and your experience working there.

    - How did you join this organization? What was the main reason you joined?

    - *How do you feel about working at this organization during your first years here?*

-        As a leader/worker, what do you do for the organization?

Questions in common with these two groups:

• Why did you decide to stay in Toronto? Why didn't you choose another city to establish your organization/ join community organizations?

• What were the greatest challenges you initially encountered? What did you find easy?"

• Who are your colleagues/workers? What are their stories?

• What sort of things do you do at this organization?

• Whom did you aim to serve?

-        *Tell me more about your relationship with your members.* What are their stories of immigration?

-        In what ways are you going to help Iranian immigrants? What services will you present to your members?

-        *Can you please describe the attitudes of the individuals working in your organization?*

-        How do you think you are fulfilling your members' demands and desires?

Thank you for all that valuable information, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end