



Representations of Diasporic Iranian Identities in Commercial Food Spaces in London and Vancouver

By

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, **Priya Vadi**, hereby declare that this thesis, and the work presented in it, is my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of how diasporic Iranian identities are represented in commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver. I look at how these identities are represented in both Iranian and non-Iranian commercial spaces such as grocery stores, restaurants and food stalls. My research compares food practices in the two cities in order to grasp the role of local and national contexts in shaping these relations. The data collection draws upon a qualitative methodology. Empirical materials include photography, field notes and interviews. I also use restaurant websites, social media and restaurant review sites as part of my data collection. The literature review positions the research at the intersection of scholarship on diaspora, the circulation of material cultures, and diasporan interactions with food, with a specific focus to the Iranian diaspora in London and Vancouver, contributing to research agendas in the areas of diaspora and cultural production, and the wider studies on the Iranian diaspora. The first empirical chapter focuses on how Iranian commercial food spaces are marketed in terms of reflecting Iranian identities in terms of food spaces and commercial cultural production and representations. More specifically, it looks at the importance of advertising campaigns through print media, social media, and website advertising. I analyse how Iranian identities are performed and for whom by conducting a content analysis of marketing data. The second empirical chapter focuses on the ways in which these spaces function as sites of cultural

production and symbolism (Zukin, 1996) through the ways in which they are designed, organised and decorated. The final empirical chapter focuses on the food (meals and food items) sold in the various commercial Iranian food spaces in London and Vancouver. Chiefly, as elsewhere in the thesis, my focus is on the food provided in variant spaces, including food trucks and commercial supper clubs held at private homes. It reflects on the character of the food sold by diasporic Iranian providers and on how its making intersects with the production of diasporic identities.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother Prabha Patel (1934-1994), who taught me the value of education, and my uncle Jagu Leava (1955-2014) for teaching me that weird food combinations work and taste good.

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While such projects are generally thought to be undertaken alone, they are certainly not accomplished in isolation. First and foremost, I am indebted to Phil Crang for his guidance and patience of ploughing through many drafts filled with random ideas. I would like to express my gratitude to David Gilbert for his generous support and thoughtful comments. I am grateful to Paul Kingsbury, at Simon Fraser University, and Lenore Newman at the University of the Fraser Valley for mentoring me during my time in Vancouver. I am indebted to Jean Duruz and Tariq Jazeel who graciously agreed to be my examiners, for their thoughtful comments and questions, which will provide food for thought for years to come.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Declaration of Authorship..... | ii |
| Abstract..... | iii |
| Dedication | v |
| Acknowledgements..... | vi |
| Table of contents..... | viii |
| List of Figures..... | xi |
| Glossary | xvii |
| 1: Introducing Diasporic Iranian Food Spaces | 1 |
| 1.1 Introducing the Iranian Diaspora | 6 |
| 1.2 Research Aims and Objectives | 18 |
| 1.3 Chapter Outline | 19 |
| 2: Diaspora, Material Culture and Food: A Contextual Review | 24 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 24 |
| 2.1.1 Where Are You From? No, Where Are You <i>Really</i> From? Concepts and Definitions of Diaspora..... | 25 |
| 2.1.2 Defining Diaspora | 26 |
| 2.1.3 Diaspora as a Theoretical Framework | 31 |
| 2.1.4 Roots and Routes: Shaping and Forming Diasporic Identities..... | 35 |
| 2.2 Diasporas and the Circulation of Material Culture | 44 |
| 2.3 The Iranian Diaspora and Processes of Diaspora Identity Formation | 47 |
| 2.3.1 Existing Iranian Diaspora Scholarship | 48 |
| 2.3.2 An Overview of Iranian Migration | 49 |
| 2.3.3 The Revolution as a Cause of Migration | 51 |
| 2.3.4 Patterns of Settlement | 54 |
| 2.3.5 Negotiating and Performing Iranianness..... | 63 |
| 2.4 Diasporic Food Consumption | 68 |
| 2.4.1 Food in the Diaspora Space | 69 |
| 2.4.2 Restaurants as Diasporic Spaces of Consumption..... | 72 |
| 2.4.3 Grocery Stores as Diasporic Spaces of Consumption | 77 |
| 2.4.4 Questioning Authenticity | 82 |
| 2.4.5 Bodily Engagements with Food and Foodscapes | 88 |
| 2.5 Conclusion..... | 99 |
| 3: Researching Iranian Food Spaces in London and Vancouver | 101 |
| 3.1 Introduction..... | 101 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|------------|
| 3.2 | Site Selection: Establishing London and Vancouver as Research Sites..... | 102 |
| 3.3 | Surveying the Spaces: Mapping, Observations, and Photographic Documentation | 107 |
| 3.4 | Interviewing | 112 |
| 3.5 | Media Analysis | 119 |
| 3.6 | Data Analysis, Textualisation and Presentation | 123 |
| 3.7 | Engaging with the Iranian Community..... | 126 |
| 3.8 | Challenges, Limitations and Ethics..... | 129 |
| 3.9 | Conclusions..... | 135 |
| 4: | Marketing the Iranian | 137 |
| 4.1 | Introduction..... | 137 |
| 4.2 | Advertising Forms | 143 |
| 4.3 | Diaspora Designation | 148 |
| 4.4 | Other Naming Practices and their Geographical Associations | 160 |
| 4.5 | Marketing Socialities | 166 |
| 4.6 | Marketing Atmospheres: From Opulence to Simplicity..... | 176 |
| 4.7 | Promoting Authenticity | 184 |
| 4.8 | Food and Pedagogy | 192 |
| 4.9 | Conclusion..... | 201 |
| 4.9.1 | Summary | 201 |
| 4.9.2 | Main Argument..... | 202 |
| 5: | Curating And Designing Iranian Identities In Diasporic Commercial Food Spaces | 206 |
| 5.1 | Introduction..... | 206 |
| 5.2 | Displaying Iranianness | 214 |
| 5.3 | Materialising Iranianness..... | 237 |
| 5.3.1 | Iranian Things | 238 |
| 5.3.2 | Iranian and Persian Symbols: | 245 |
| 5.3.3 | Iranian Atmospheres..... | 265 |
| 5.4 | Designing Different Diasporic Iranianness: Nostalgia and Modernity..... | 271 |
| 5.4.1 | Designs on Nostalgia | 272 |
| 5.4.2 | Modern Looks | 280 |
| 5.5 | Conclusion..... | 289 |
| 5.5.1 | Summary | 289 |
| 5.5.2 | Main Arguments..... | 290 |
| 6: | Iranian on the Menu: Tradition and Innovation in the Commercial Iranian Food Spaces of London and Vancouver | 297 |
| 6.1 | Introduction..... | 297 |
| 6.2 | Tradition on the Shelves:..... | 300 |
| 6.3 | Tradition on the Menu: | 310 |
| 6.4 | Bridging Foods and Widening Markets (or, the Contentious Geographies of Hummus): | 318 |
| 6.5 | Creativity and the Diasporan Innovation of Iranian Food..... | 331 |

| | | |
|--|--|------------|
| 6.5.1 | The Appeals of Creative Gastronomy | 331 |
| 6.5.2 | Case Study One: Hamid Salimian and his ‘New Persian’ Cuisine..... | 335 |
| 6.5.3 | Case Study Two: Sabrina Ghayour..... | 343 |
| 6.6 | Conclusion..... | 355 |
| 6.6.1 | Summary | 355 |
| 6.6.2 | Main Arguments..... | 358 |
| 7: Conclusion: Representing Iranianness in Commercial Food Spaces | | 365 |
| 7.1 | Research Outcomes..... | 365 |
| 7.1.1 | Summary | 365 |
| 7.1.2 | Main Arguments..... | 374 |
| 7.2 | Future Research Agendas | 383 |
| Appendices | | 388 |
| Appendix A: Iranian Food Outlets in London and Vancouver | | 388 |
| Appendix B: Iranian Food Outlets Advertised in London and Vancouver | | 397 |
| Reference List..... | | 405 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 1.1 Beryani (Biryani, n.d.) | 8 |
| Figure 1.2 Iranian services in North Vancouver (2013) | 10 |
| Figure 1.3 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in London (2015) | 12 |
| Figure 1.4 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in Westminster (2015) | 13 |
| Figure 1.5 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in Vancouver | 14 |
| Figure 1.6 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in the City of North Vancouver (2015) | 15 |
| Figure 1.7 Persian pizza from Cafe Glace, Westwood, Los Angeles (2013) | 18 |
| Figure 2.1 Persian Square signage in a shop window front, Westwood, Los Angeles (2013) | 56 |
| Figure 2.2 Iranian Yellow Pages at Westwood, Los Angeles (2013) | 81 |
| Figure 4.1 Cazba's food truck, Cazba Express at the Nowruz Bazaar in North Vancouver (2013) | 147 |
| Figure 4.2 Banner at Persepolis restaurant indicating it will change from Iranian to Italian, North Vancouver (2013) | 154 |
| Figure 4.3 The Mediterranean Grill, Vancouver (2013) | 156 |
| Figure 4.4 : Advertisement for LeVant Grill, Barnet, London (Bahar-e- Haftah, 2013) | 157 |
| Figure 4.5 Advertisement for Saloniki, Vancouver (Payam, 2013) | 159 |
| Figure 4.6 Story of Kakh beer on the label (2013) | 165 |
| Figure 4.7 The Persian Tea House, Vancouver (FourSquare, 2014) | 168 |
| Figure 4.8 Advertisement for 'Ladies Night' at Chateau Nega, Vancouver (Daneshmand Magazine, 2013) | 172 |
| Figure 4.9 Caspian Express represents Iranian and Arabic identities, North Vancouver (Daneshmand Magazine, 2013) | 173 |
| Figure 4.10 The Pride flag hangs off a fixture outside Cazba restaurant in the West End Vancouver (2013) | 175 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 4.11 Opulence displayed at Anar Persian Kitchen in Notting Hill, London (top menu, bottom left exterior and bottom right interior) (2012) | 177 |
| Figure 4.12 A snapshot of the 'Hafez room' at Behest restaurant (Behest, 2014b) | 179 |
| Figure 4.13 Advertisement for Alounak restaurant (Deevan Magazine, 2012) | 181 |
| Figure 4.14 Closer look at village painting from Figure 4.13 (Zagat, 2015) | 182 |
| Figure 4.15 Advertisement for Milad restaurant, Cricklewood, London (Deevan Magazine, 2012) | 183 |
| Figure 4.16 Advertisement for Little Persia, Bayswater, London (Nobahar, 2013) | 187 |
| Figure 4.17 Persopaedia from Persepolis in Peckham which provides information on Iranian foods and culture (Persepolis, 2014a)..... | 195 |
| Figure 4.18 Post from Persopedia on Eight things to do with a whacking great bag of <i>za'atar</i> (Persepolis, 2014b)..... | 195 |
| Figure 4.19 Cazba asking about <i>kookoo sabzi</i> . (From Cazba's Facebook page August 28th 2013) | 197 |
| Figure 4.20 Edited Twitter conversation on Iranian culture with Cazba restaurant (August 21, 2013)..... | 198 |
| Figure 5.1 Super Mazandaran labels itself as a continental shop, Ealing, London (2013) | 215 |
| Figure 5.2 Baskets of dried products displayed in baskets at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013) | 216 |
| Figure 5.3 Tea sets displayed behind the pastry counter at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013) | 217 |
| Figure 5.4 Opulence is formed by the chandelier and dark wood panels on the ceiling at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)..... | 217 |
| Figure 5.5 Various Iranian confectionary are displayed at the front of the store near the pastry counter at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013) | 218 |
| Figure 5.6 Window display at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013) | 219 |
| Figure 5.7 Sketch map of Super Mazandaran (2013)..... | 221 |
| Figure 5.8 Concert posters displayed at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013) | 223 |
| Figure 5.9 Poster for the film <i>Prince of Persia</i> displayed at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013) | 223 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 5.10 Quirky note displayed by biscuits at Persepolis in Peckham, Peckham, London (2012) | 225 |
| Figure 5.11 Layout of Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)..... | 227 |
| Figure 5.12 Ceramic containers used display nuts in a shop in Tehran (Corrias, 2011)..... | 229 |
| Figure 5.13 Blue dishes brought from Iran displayed at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)..... | 230 |
| Figure 5.14 A closer look at one of the display containers at Ayoub's Denman Street Store, Vancouver (2013) | 231 |
| Figure 5.15 A closer look at one of the scenes from Persian poetry carved out on the display bowls at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013) | 231 |
| Figure 5.16 The Canadian flag and moose carved on one of the display bowls at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013) | 232 |
| Figure 5.17 Cabinets at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver which are reminiscent of the columns at Persepolis (2013) | 233 |
| Figure 5.18 Roasting area at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013) | 236 |
| Figure 5.19 Persian carpet displayed on the floor at Orkideh restaurant, Golders Green London (2013)..... | 240 |
| Figure 5.20 Persian carpets displayed on benches outside at Pardis restaurant, Marble Arch, London (2012) | 240 |
| Figure 5.21 Persian carpets displayed on the ceiling at Behest restaurant in Harlesden, London (2012) | 240 |
| Figure 5.22 Persian carpets displayed on the walls at Sufi restaurant in Shepherd's Bush, London (2012)..... | 241 |
| Figure 5.23 Persian carpets are depicted as paintings at Laavash restaurant in Golders Green, London (2013) | 241 |
| Figure 5.24 Tea sets at Orkideh, Golders Green, London (2013)..... | 242 |
| Figure 5.25 <i>Tanoor</i> at Sufi, Shepherd's Bush, London (2012)..... | 244 |
| Figure 5.26 Black and white photograph showing <i>sangak</i> being baked displayed at Sufi, Shepherd's Bush, London (2012) | 245 |
| Figure 5.27 A range of Iranian flags displayed during the World Cup at Reza Patisserie, Kensington, London (Walby, 2014) | 248 |
| Figure 5.28 Sun and Lion flag displayed at Hormouz, Golders Green, London (2012) | 249 |
| Figure 5.29 Sun and Lion flags displayed on the counter at Pars, North Vancouver (2013) | 249 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 5.30 Shop front at Reza Patisserie, Kensington, London where the word "Iranian" is displayed in the form of the Iranian flag (2012) | 250 |
| Figure 5.31 The sun and lion symbol are used as the logo for Meat Shop and Deli, North Vancouver (2013) | 251 |
| Figure 5.32 Cazba's logo as seen on the sandwich board displayed at Davie Street, Vancouver (2013) | 251 |
| Figure 5.33 Photos of the Iranian Royal family and lion and sun flag displayed at Yas restaurant, Kensington, London (2013) | 254 |
| Figure 5.34 Painting of Zarathura displayed at Dishoom, Shoreditch, London (2012) | 256 |
| Figure 5.35 Exterior of Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013) | 257 |
| Figure 5.36 Scene of Persepolis displayed on a wall at Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013) | 257 |
| Figure 5.37 The <i>Farvahar</i> displayed on a wall at Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013) | 258 |
| Figure 5.38 The <i>Farvahar</i> displayed on the staff uniform at Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013) | 258 |
| Figure 5.39 The back wall of Simirugh (Covent Garden, London) reflects an Islamic identity (2012) | 260 |
| Figure 5.40 <i>Haft sin</i> display at Assal Patisserie, Marble Arch, London (2014) | 262 |
| Figure 5.41 <i>Haft sin</i> at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013) | 263 |
| Figure 5.42 <i>Nowruz</i> foods display at Fresh St. Market, West Vancouver (2013) | 264 |
| Figure 5.43 <i>Sangak</i> displayed at Fresh St. Market, West Vancouver for <i>Nowruz</i> (2013) | 264 |
| Figure 5.44 Fish in one the many water features at Behest, Harlesden, London (2013) | 268 |
| Figure 5.45 Straw and clay walls at Fanoos, Richmond, London (2012) | 273 |
| Figure 5.46 Straw and clay walls at Persia restaurant, Crickelwood, London (2012) | 273 |
| Figure 5.47 Painting of Masuleh, a mountain village located in the Gilan province in Iran displayed at Sufi, Shepherd's Bush, London (2012) | 275 |
| Figure 5.48 The "Rules of the cafe" displayed at Dishoom, Covent Garden, London (2012) | 278 |
| Figure 5.49 Juice kiosk at Dishoom, Kings Cross, London (Courtesy of Dishoom, Personal communication, 2015) | 279 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 5.50 Art works and artefacts displayed on the walls at Hafez, Bayswater, London (2012)..... | 283 |
| Figure 5.51 A map of the Persian Empire depicted on a tie displayed at Hafez restaurant, Bayswater, London (2013) | 285 |
| Figure 5.52 Cookbook repurposed as a lampshade at Hafez restaurant, Bayswater, London (2013)..... | 286 |
| Figure 5.53 Rumi corner at Molana restaurant, Ealing, London (2013) | 287 |
| Figure 5.54 Interior of Zeitoon, North Vancouver (2013) | 288 |
| Figure 5.55 Photos of Tehran displayed at Zeitoon restaurant, North Vancouver (2013) | 289 |
| Figure 6.1 Saman Bakery <i>taftoon</i> and other Saman Bakery goods sold at Afra Bakery, North Vancouver (2013)..... | 302 |
| Figure 6.2 <i>Sangak</i> at Naan Hut, North Vancouver (2013) | 307 |
| Figure 6.3 Saffron banana split at Persepolis in Peckham, Peckham, London (2015) | 309 |
| Figure 6.4 <i>Ash reshteh</i> and barley soup sold in convenience form at Tavazo, Ealing, London (2013)..... | 310 |
| Figure 6.5 <i>Jujeh kebab</i> served at Lonsdale Kebab, North Vancouver (2013) | 313 |
| Figure 6.6 <i>Fesenjan</i> served at Hafez, Bayswater, London (2012)..... | 315 |
| Figure 6.7 <i>Zereshk polo</i> with chicken at Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver (2013) | 317 |
| Figure 6.8 Noosh food stall at Broadway Market, Hackney, London (2014) | 327 |
| Figure 6.9 Zardosht food stall at Broadway Market, Hackney, London (2014) | 329 |
| Figure 6.10 Persian dates sold at Zardosht food stall at Broadway Market, Hackney, London (2014) | 329 |
| Figure 6.11 <i>Kashk-e-bademjan</i> , Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013)..... | 340 |
| Figure 6.12 <i>Jujeh kebab</i> , Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013) | 340 |
| Figure 6.13 <i>Ash reshteh</i> , Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013) | 341 |
| Figure 6.14 Meyer lemon mousse, Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013)..... | 342 |
| Figure 6.15. Spice perfumed shoulder of lamb and <i>morassa polo</i> at the Persiana supper club, Sabrina Ghayour, London (2014)..... | 348 |
| Figure 6.16 Marinated feta salad (Sabrina Ghayour, 2013)..... | 349 |

Figure 6.17 Spiced carrot, pistachio and almond cake with rosewater cream, Sabrina Ghayour, Persiana supper club, London (2014)..... 351

GLOSSARY

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Abghoosht (Dizi) | Stew made of a lamb, beans, potato and tomato |
| Albaloo | Sour cherries |
| Ash reshteh | Herb, bean and noodle soup |
| Baghali polo | Rice with broad beans and dill |
| Bamieh | A sweet similar to a doughnut |
| Bastani | Ice cream with saffron, rose water and cream pieces |
| Chahar-Shanbe Suri | Wednesday Feast or Fire Festival which is part of Nowruz |
| Chai | Tea |
| Chelow | Plain steamed rice |
| Doogh | Carbonated yogurt drink |
| Faloodeh | Rice noodle sorbet flavoured with rosewater and lime |
| Fesenjan | Stew made with ground walnuts and pomegranate molasses |
| Gaz | Nougat |
| Ghaimeh | Split pea and meat stew, garnished with thinly sliced fried potatoes |
| Ghormeh sabzi | Herb based stew with beans, lamb and dried limes |
| Haft sin | Ceremonial table decorated during Nowruz |
| Jujeh kebab | Chicken kebab |
| Kashk | Whey |
| Kebab-e-barg | Kebab made with lamb filet |
| Kebab-e-chenjeh | Cubed lamb kebab |
| Kebab-e-koobideh | Kebab made with minced meat |
| Khoresh | Stew |
| Khoresh-e-bademjan | Aubergine, tomato and lamb stew |
| (Khoresh-e-) Ghaimeh | Split pea and meat stew, garnished with thinly sliced fried potatoes |
| (Khoresh-e-) Ghormeh sabzi | Herb based stew with beans, lamb and dried limes |
| Kookoo sabzi | Herb frittata |
| Lubia polo | Rice dish made with tomato, green beans and meat |
| Mast-o-mousir | Yogurt flavoured with garlic and chives |
| Mast-o-khair | Yogurt with shallots |
| Mehrgan | Persian Autumn festival |
| Mirza ghasemi | Smoked aubergine dip |
| Morasa polo | Rice with slivered orange peel, raisins, barberries, slivered carrots, slivered almonds and pistachios |

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| Naan | Bread |
| Nowruz | Persian New Year |
| Ta'arof | An Iranian social code of courtesy and hospitality |
| Taftoon | Flat bread |
| Sabzi polo | Rice with herbs |
| Salad olivieh | Salad made with eggs, potato, chicken, vegetables and mayonnaise |
| Salad shirazi | Salad made of finely diced cucumber, onion and tomato |
| Sangak | Bread baked on hot stones |
| Sofreh | Elaborate Persian table cloth |
| Sumac | Berry which has been dried and ground |
| Tachin | Baked layered chicken, rice and yogurt |
| Tahdig | Rice with a crispy base |
| Torshi | Pickled vegetables |
| Zereshk | Barberries |
| Zereshk polo | Rice with saffron and barberries |
| Zoolbia | Sweet fritters |

1: INTRODUCING DIASPORIC IRANIAN FOOD SPACES

For me, right now, one of the things I'm most enjoying about exploring Persian food, here, in the UK, is sharing it with my friends, with people who have never had it before, people like you, because I get to connect to Iran through something positive. And a simple thing, like having a cup of fragrant tea with a nice bit of saffron sugar, just reminds me of all the positive experiences one can have in Iran. (Yasmin. In Nigel Slater: Eating Together. BBC, 2015)

Food is a cultural commodity that makes people different, but at the same time brings them together. As food travels through space and time it establishes dynamic foodways and produces new foodscapes. Food, as a material culture, plays a central role as people migrate in (re)defining identities and producing a shared sense of collective identity among diasporic communities. For Yasmin, talking to well-known British chef Nigel Slater on one of his television programmes, food becomes a commodity that she can utilise to portray a positive image of Iran, contradicting the wider popular geopolitical imaginations of the country in the West. Consuming the “cup of fragrant tea with a nice bit of saffron sugar” in London allows Yasmin to connect both with her Iranian heritage and with others around her.

This thesis is a study on the representations of diasporic Iranian identities in commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver, principally shops and restaurants. In approaching this subject matter, like Yasmin I see food as bound up in wider representational formations of cultural identity and difference. Like

her, I approach food as an important part of diasporic experience. For diasporic Iranians, foods are mnemonics that provide points of connection to the 'homeland'. They are also important cultural products, providing opportunities for business development in the restaurant and food retail sectors. These shops and restaurants are not purely economic spaces; they are social and cultural too. In the diaspora, foods and food spaces become signifiers of cultural identity, material forms that objectify their 'Iranianness' in their places of settlement. Furthermore, reaching beyond diasporic communities, food and its public cultures are material forms that allow, and indeed have come to somewhat stereotypically represent, multicultural interaction within urban cultures of consumption. As Duruz and Khoo phrase it, diasporic food is an arena in which the politics of 'eating together-in-difference' are played out (2015, p.3). Commercial food spaces play a central role here.

Empirically, the thesis draws upon qualitative research on Iranian food shops and restaurants in London and Vancouver. Lasting just over a year, this empirical research progressed through three stages. The first stage of my data collection involved locating and documenting the various shops and restaurants selling Iranian foods and presenting themselves as diasporic Iranian spaces in both cities. 122 shops and restaurants were located (71 in London, 51 in Vancouver) and 93 of these were visited in person for initial documentation (51 in London, 42 in Vancouver). In the second stage of the empirical work I undertook further observational studies in these visited spaces, developed further my analysis of their media representations (including advertising, menus, social

media postings and so on), and approached the businesses about interviewing them for the study. The third stage of the work was to conduct those interviews. In total I conducted 46 semi-structured interviews with restaurant owners, shop owners and staff, key wholesale business owners, chefs and, where appropriate, restaurant designers. These interviews were normally recorded and transcribed.

The thesis positions the research at the intersection of scholarship on diaspora, diasporan interactions with food, and a more specific body of work on the Iranian diaspora in London and Vancouver. Broadly, it contributes to research agendas on diasporic cultural production as well as to the understanding of the Iranian diaspora. In this regard, the study extends past work that looks to frame diaspora scholarship less as documentation of a dispersed people (here, diasporic Iranians) and more as analysis of the processes through which diasporic identities are made. More specifically, I focus on some specific aspects of these processes of 'diasporization' (Butler, 2005).

First, I explore the role of commercial food providers in diasporic identity making. In studying the Iranian shops and restaurants of London and Vancouver, my focus is on the shop-keepers and restaurateurs more than the customers. Past studies have provided important insights on the role of commercial food spaces as sites of sociality and community for diasporan customers (for example, Mankekar, 2002) and as sites of cross-cultural social engagement (for example, Everts, 2010). This study looks to complement such work by foregrounding the role of restaurants and shops as *commercial* spaces. The focus is on how food providers have to negotiate and create representations of Iranianness as a

central part of their commercial activity (for a similar approach to Chinese restaurants see Barbas, 2003 and Davis, 2002). In general terms, this thesis is thus a work of 'cultural-economic' geography, viewing these businesses as sites of cultural production and exchange (for an outline of the field of cultural economy see Amin and Thrift, 2004).

Second, I am particularly concerned with how commercial food spaces *represent* diasporic Iranian identities. The emergence, and some might say growing hegemony, of 'non-representational theory' (or NRT) in Human Geography (Thrift, 2007) has cast a concern with representation in a somewhat unfashionable light. Whilst I do not look to contribute to, nor contest, the theoretical and philosophical project of NRT, it is perhaps worth signalling that I view such a consigning of representation to a passé 'cultural' approach as unhelpful. The cultural approach to representation is well set out by Stuart Hall (1997). For him, representation is a signifying practice that produces and circulates meanings, always bound up with relations of power and characterised by complex and contested ways of speaking, thinking and acting. Commercial food spaces, I suggest, can be seen as representational sites in so far as they are centrally concerned with the production of meanings. More broadly, a range of work has explored how contemporary capitalist economies are preoccupied with the production of 'commodity-signs' (Goldman and Papson, 1998). In the case of diasporan Iranian food spaces, their very existence is a representational practice in its reproduction of a meaningful designation of their identity (the designation of the Iranian diaspora, for example as Iranian or Persian, is highly

charged; this is further explained in Chapter 2). Like other businesses, much of their marketing involves positioning themselves within that representational field (Lien, 1997).

However, whilst emphasising meaning and signification, Hall does not view representation as a closed off, immaterial cultural realm. It is part of social practice. Hall's own preference seems to be for a Foucauldian discourse approach to bring together ways of speaking, thinking and acting. For myself, I resist the equation of representation with an immaterial world of signs, signifiers, texts and meanings by pursuing it as a facet of *material* culture. Developing Crang's argument that "diasporic identities and processes are forged through the production, circulation, and consumption of material things and spaces" (2010, p.139), the study pays particular attention to the materialities of food spaces. Iranian food shops and restaurants make and reproduce meanings and ideas through the materialities of food, product display, interior design, décor, ambiance and so on. In turn, the material nature of these commercial practices leads to a process of representation involving not only 'signs' to be read but also materials to experience, sense and be affected by (Chapter 5, in particular, develops this argument).

Fourth, in focusing on commercial food spaces, the thesis examines the intersections between processes of diasporization and the *commodification of cultural difference*. A number of commentators have highlighted the potentially problematic incorporation of ideas of cultural (and geographic) difference as a currency within commercial cultures. As part of her wider critique of a commodity-

sign dominated world, Naomi Klein mocks the 'market masala' and 'liquid identities' served up by corporate capitalism (Klein, 2000). In so doing, she builds on earlier accounts by the likes of bell hooks (2015; originally 1992) and Deborah Root (1996) who highlighted the acts of power performed in the marketing and consumption of racialized difference. In these accounts processes of commodification are characterised as a reductive process, in which difference and identity are simplified and constrained by the logics of the commodity form. Market exchange militates against meaningful cultural exchange, underpinned by values of respect and a desire for genuine understanding. Cultural difference becomes just a resource for product differentiation. In focusing on diasporic businesses, these concerns are not removed from my analysis. However, they are joined by other emphases, in particular on the agency of diasporic commerce within these processes of commodification and the potential for commerce to be a meaningful site for cultural reproduction and creativity (Dwyer and Crang, 2002). In other words, this thesis approaches the commodification of Iranian identity as a process in which diasporan businesses are invested in complex ways.

1.1 Introducing the Iranian Diaspora

In the case of the Iranian diaspora, these businesses are engaging in a representational field that is already somewhat 'over-determined'. Note how, in the conversation with which I began this Introduction, Yasmin emphasises the 'positive' qualities of Iran to Nigel Slater. She does this in a context where Euro-American media discussions of Iran and Iranians are cast in primarily negative

terms through the lens of popular geopolitics. Most (in)famously, Iran was cast by US President George W Bush as a prime coordinate on the 'axis of evil' threatening the USA and other 'Western' democracies (along with Iraq and North Korea). Something of this comes across in *Parts Unknown: Iran* (2014), a travel food documentary presented by American chef Anthony Bourdain and broadcast on the American news channel, CNN. *Parts Unknown* is a series that documents (presumed to be) lesser known cuisines and cultures across the world. Given its commissioning by CNN, it tends to combine a travelogue and food show format with some attention to political contexts. In the Iran episode Bourdain travels to Tehran and Isfahan. He visits restaurants and people's homes, sharing meals, and discussing the food and how contemporary Iranian political dynamics affect their daily lives. The show begins by Bourdain explaining his confusion over the way he and his crew are being treated in Iran. The American media often portrays Iranians to be hostile (Keshishian, 2010; Mobasher, 2006; Mobasher 2013; Naficy, 1998) whereas Bourdain has found them to be hospitable and friendly: "I am so confused. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Of all of the places, of all the countries, all the years of travelling, it's here in Iran that I am greeted most warmly by total strangers. The other stuff is there, the Iran we've read about, heard about, seen in the news. But this – this I wasn't prepared for" (Bourdain, CNN 2014). Bourdain's narrative centres on the conviviality of shared eating and an interest in the diversity, and deliciousness, of Iranian foods. Viewers see Bourdain consuming *chelow kebab* (rice and kebab), various stews (including *dizi*, also known as *abgoosht*, a lamb, beans, potato and tomato stew;

fesenjan, a walnut and pomegranate stew usually made with poultry; and *ghaimeh*, a split pea and meat stew, garnished with thinly sliced fried potatoes), and some less common and regional dishes (for example, Bourdain visits a shop in Isfahan that has been making *beryani*¹ or *beryooni* [Figure 1.1] for 100 years). Generally, matching the travel and exploration themes of the show, Bourdain is keen to emphasise that there is more to Iranian food than rice and kebabs, as well as that there is more to Iran than the tropes of American geopolitical discourse. These are just some of the representational dilemmas faced by diasporan Iranian food businesses.



Figure 1.1 Beryani (Biryani, n.d.)

The Iranian diaspora has a long history. The earliest migration of Iranians dates back to the eighth century AD, with the exile of Zoroastrians to India after

¹ The Iranian *beryani* should not be confused with the South Asian *biryani*, which is a rice dish. *Beryani* is also known as *beryooni* and is made with minced lamb shoulder, turmeric, onion, cinnamon, mint and saffron served on *naan*.

the Arab/Muslim conquest (Roy and Lahiri-Roy, 2011). More contemporary migration from Iran occurred in a number of 'waves' in the second half of the twentieth century: in the 1950s and 1960s with emigrants seeking opportunities through higher education in the west; around the Islamic Revolution of 1979, with many of those favoured by the overthrown Pahlavi dynasty choosing or having to flee abroad; and in the 1980s, with a wide range of social classes emigrating to avoid conscription during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and/or to seek refuge from deteriorating socio-economic conditions and religious persecution (Gholami, 2015; Raji, 2010; Spellman, 2004).

Diasporan Iranians have tended to settle in North American and European metropolitan areas, in "multiclaves" (Jencks, 1996) rather than singular enclaves (Naficy, 1993a). The largest concentration of diasporan Iranians is in Los Angeles, where there is a significant Iranian population in the Westwood area, which in turn features a large number of Iranian businesses catering to their needs. London and Vancouver are also significant cities for settlement. In London Iranian settlements have been widespread, but there are distinctive pockets of concentration including in the boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Knightsbridge, Richmond, Hampstead, Barnet and Westminster. In Vancouver the largest Iranian communities reside in the Districts of North Vancouver and West Vancouver. Hiebert (1999) argues that the concentration of Iranians in North Vancouver is indicative of chain-migration, with new migrants influenced in locational decisions by those who have already settled there. Generally, it has been argued that immigrants from Iran are more likely to settle in areas where

there are visible Iranian social networks and cultural institutions, including everyday spaces such as shops and financial services provided in Farsi (Figure 1.2) (Swanton, 2003).



Figure 1.2 Iranian services in North Vancouver (2013)

In the first stage of my empirical work, I produced maps of London (Figures 1.3 and 1.4) and Vancouver (Figures 1.5 and 1.6) showing the concentration of the identified Iranian shops and restaurants in each city. The maps show that there is a significant concentration in the City of North Vancouver, particularly along Lonsdale Avenue, where the majority of Iranian services are located. The second largest concentration is in the City of Vancouver, particularly around the West End neighbourhood. Location patterns are similar for London in that commercial food spaces are mostly located in

distinct pockets. The majority of them are located in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The second largest concentration is in the borough of Barnet.

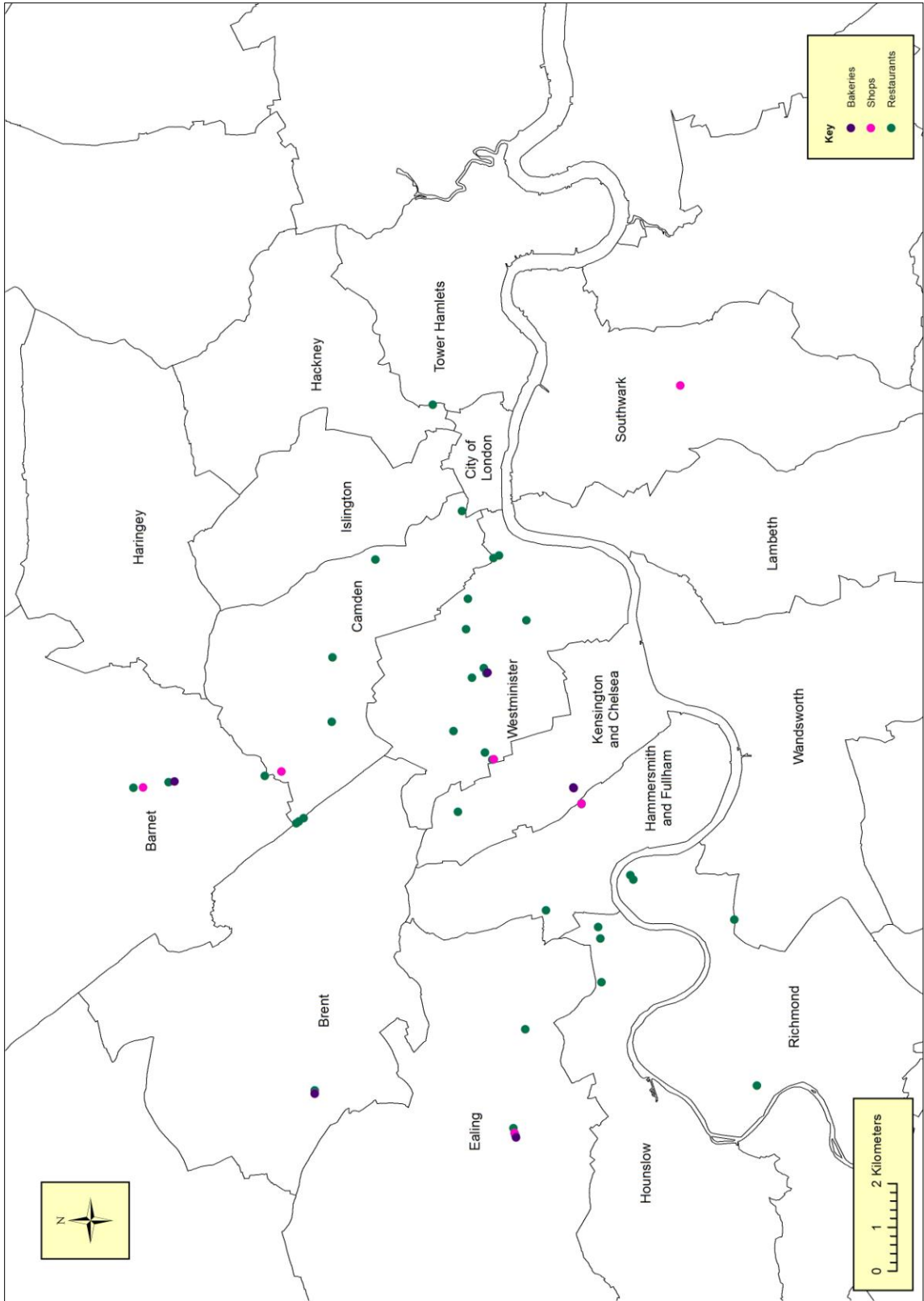


Figure 1.3 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in London (2015)

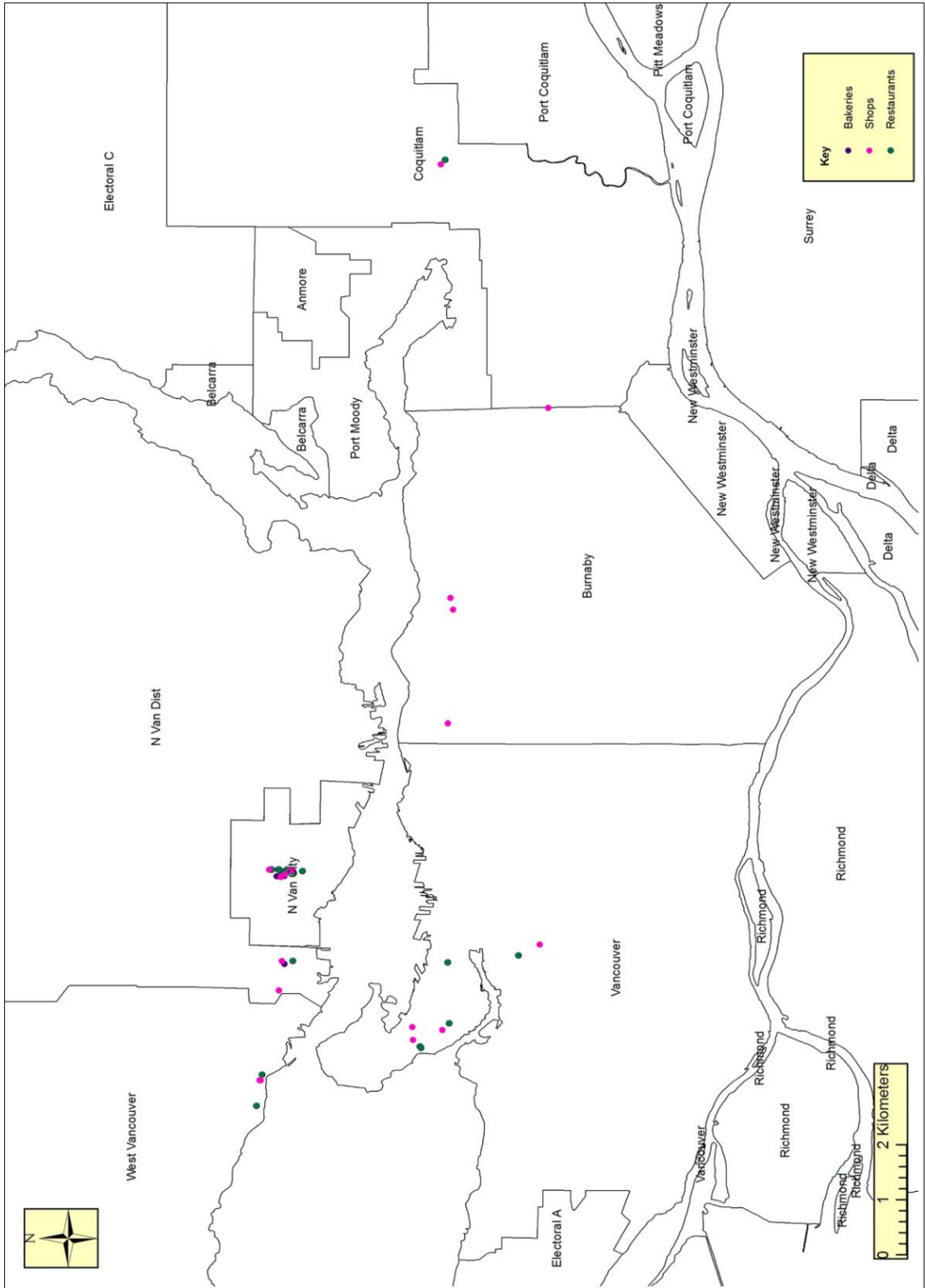


Figure 1.5 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in Vancouver



Figure 1.6 Distribution of Iranian commercial food spaces in the City of North Vancouver (2015)

Food has had a long-standing importance in Iranian culture, featuring strongly in poetry, paintings, film and song, which in turn provides historic accounts of Iranian culinary culture (Shaida, 1999). There are several foods that are commonly associated with Iranian cuisine, including rice, caviar, pistachios, rose water and saffron. Generally, Iranian cuisine emphasises that food should be desirable both visually and aromatically: rose water, for example, is a common ingredient because of its fragrance, as is saffron because of its colour. The aesthetic presentation of food is of importance; dishes are often decorated with nuts and herbs, and are laid out on a *sofra* (tablecloth) all at once (Chehabi, 2003).

Food plays a central role in Iranian festivals such as *Nowruz* (the New Year festival), *Yalda* (the winter solstice festival) and *Mehregan* (the Persian festival of autumn). *Nowruz* is the most widely celebrated festival among diasporan Iranians. Naraghi and Kingsbury's (2013) study on the celebration in Vancouver of *Nowruz* and *Chahar-Shanbe Suri* (Wednesday Feast or Fire Festival, which is a part of *Nowruz*) highlights the enjoyment of foods such as *ash reshteh* (noodle and herb soup), *ghormeh sabzi* (herb and bean stew) and *kookoo sabzi* (*herb soufflé*). All of these contain ingredients significant to the Persian New Year: for example, the eggs in the *kookoo sazi* represent fertility and the noodles in the *ash reshteh* are representative of the "unravelling of life's knotty problems" (Webster, 2007, unpaginated, para. 10).

In writing about the processes of identity formation of second-generation Iranian-Americans in Los Angeles, Alijenad (2013) refers to food places as part

of her analysis. She refers to Café Glacé, which is well known for its ‘Persian pizza’ (see Figure 1.7). A review of the foods served at Café Glacé in the Los Angeles Times praises this pushing of culinary boundaries and notes the diasporic nostalgia associated with them (as this type of pizza is consumed in Iranian cities). For example the *chips-o-panir* (Lays potato chips (crisps) with melted mozzarella) is described as a popular snack in Tehran, as well as being popular among the UCLA students who frequent Café Glacé. The LA Times review emphasises how this Persian Pizza reworks culinary cartographies in interesting ways, representing a distinctively diasporan American culture:

[T]his is an honest-to-God, full-blooded, American-style pizza, with bell peppers and melted cheese and everything. But this is also pizza freed of any obligations of authenticity. It’s not authentically New York, nor authentically Neapolitan, nor is it trying to be. It’s made by Iranians for Iranians, guided by a distinctive, charmingly un-Italian aesthetic. (Nguyen, 2011, unpaginated, para. 2)

Focusing on the commercial Iranian food spaces of London and Vancouver, this thesis likewise explores the diasporic identities represented in and through them. Specifically, it does this through an analysis of their marketing (Chapter 4), material design and curation (Chapter 5), and foods (Chapter 6). I will say more about each of these foci and chapters shortly; but first it may be helpful to codify the research aims that underpin this study.



Figure 1.7 Persian pizza from Cafe Glace, Westwood, Los Angeles (2013)

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this thesis is to investigate how diasporic Iranian identities are represented in commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver. I explore these representations through three foci, which in turn form the basis of the three substantive empirical chapters. First, I analyse how these spaces are marketed; second, how the spaces are materially curated and designed; and third, how Iranian diasporic identities are represented in the foods themselves. Thus, in order to accomplish the overall research aim, the thesis' more specific objectives are to:

1. Analyse how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces market their 'Iranianness' and/or any other geographical associations.
2. Assess how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces are materially designed, organised and decorated, and how these 'material geographies' represent and stage diasporic Iranian identities.
3. Determine how diasporic Iranian identities are represented through the foods sold in commercial food spaces.

1.3 Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, formed of this introduction, a literature review, an account of research methodology, three empirical chapters (each directed at one of the three research objectives), and a concluding chapter. Let me briefly introduce the chapters to come.

Chapter Two provides a contextual review, situating the research with regard to the broader bodies of scholarship that it draws from and to which it contributes. In outline, the chapter progresses through three main sections. First, it considers the existing scholarship on diaspora. Here, I argue for deploying the 'diaspora' term as more than a descriptive noun, identifying distinct populations marked by histories of migration and dispersal from a homeland (such as the Iranian diaspora). Rather, I suggest, diaspora scholarship has developed a body of theory that opens up how we think about identity and its geographies. In particular, I highlight conceptual thinking that approaches diaspora in terms of processes of identity performance and cultural production, and an emergent body of work focused on the relations between diaspora and the circulation of material and commodity cultures. I also attend to some key ideas in diaspora scholarship, such as hybridity and cosmopolitanism, which have a particular relevance to work on urban food multicultures. In the second part of the chapter, I provide some more information on the Iranian diaspora and, in particular, its presence in my two case study cities, London and Vancouver. In so doing I also identify some of the key substantive contributions of existing scholarship on the Iranian diaspora, which this thesis seeks to enhance. Thirdly, and finally, the chapter

turns to existing research on the role of food and culinary cultures within diaspora cultures. Here, I draw out some of the reasons for the importance of food as a material for diasporic cultural production and experience; pay particular attention to existing research on commercial food spaces such as restaurants and grocery stores; and provide some further contextual information on Iranian culinary culture.

Chapter Three describes the qualitative research design and the methods used to construct, collect and analyse the data. These methods include the surveying/documentation and mapping of commercial Iranian food spaces, semi-structured interviews and media analysis. I also provide justification as to why I chose to conduct the study in London and Vancouver, and how I engaged with the Iranian community in both cities. Towards the end of the chapter I reflect on research relationships and ethics.

The first empirical chapter, Chapter Four, examines how the diasporan commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver are marketed. In particular, it considers how commercial food spaces market their 'Iranianness'. Focusing on the advertising undertaken by these outlets, the analysis deploys and advances wider scholarship about the intersections between food marketing and representations of cultural and geographical difference. It explores how geographical designations, associations and 'entanglements' (Pike, 2009) are used to position and differentiate 'Iranian' food products. Specific foci include the toponymic naming of cuisines, businesses and food and drink items; and how the socialities, atmospheres and claims to authenticity promoted by these

businesses are implicated in claims about what kinds of places these shops and restaurants are. Within the analysis, I pay particular attention to cultural politics of marketing Iranian diasporic 'difference'. I draw out some of the reductive logics that can shape this process; but I also explore forms of diasporan agency, noting how even a familiar motif like authenticity was navigated in a variety of ways.

Chapter Five extends this analysis by focusing more directly on shops and restaurants as material spaces. I argue that these commercial food spaces are more than neutral containers that sell diasporan Iranian goods. The spaces themselves matter; and they matter in part through their material geographies. My particular focus is on the ways in which the studied shops and restaurants are designed, organised, 'curated' and decorated. Drawing on wider research literatures (most generally on architectural geographies, more specifically on retail spaces) the analysis attends to both the symbolic and affective qualities of these spaces. The chapter progresses through three main substantive sections. In the first, I take specific exemplary cases to illustrate how design, material organisation and decoration are important ways in which shops and restaurants represent and reproduce diasporic Iranian identities. In the second section I pull out some specific material forms – from the obviously symbolic, such as flags, to the more atmospheric, such as light or music – as a way of exploring these processes in further depth. In the third section I foreground the kinds of Iranian identities being represented, focusing in particular on issues of nostalgia and modernity.

Chapter Five, then, focuses on a range of materials in these shops and restaurants, whilst somewhat ignoring an absolutely key genre of material, namely the food itself. The final empirical chapter, Chapter Six, therefore focuses directly on the food (meals and food items) sold in the various commercial Iranian food spaces in London and Vancouver. In particular, the analysis concentrates on how diasporic Iranian food is both made to be 'traditional' and 'innovated' with in various ways. The chapter progresses through four main sections. It begins by examining the sale of 'traditional' foods in shops, tracing out how tradition operates as a currency in contemporary retail cultures. The growth of 'artisanal' foods is a particular theme here. Second, it considers how ideas of 'traditional' Iranian food can work in a rather different way, where 'traditional' becomes a synonym for 'conventional' and 'typical'. The chapter traces out the complicated genesis of 'traditional' items that feature on the menu in diasporic Iranian restaurants, looking in particular at kebabs and stews. The third part of the chapter analyses how Iranian cuisine is related to other geographically associated cuisines as a way to widen its market. This includes a discussion of the somewhat contentious geographies of hummus. Finally, in its fourth main section, Chapter Six addresses explicitly 'modern' approaches to Iranian food traditions. Working through two main examples – the Vancouver-based chef Hamid Saliman, and a contemporary cookbook and supper-club rendition of Iranian food in London by Sabrina Ghayour – it explores how an emphasis on innovation is matched to ideas of both tradition and authenticity.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the thesis, returning to the main objectives set out above to draw out the main findings. I look to summarise how the thesis contributes to geographical knowledge on diasporas, food and the Iranian diaspora; and I consider some future agendas for research that could build on the thesis' findings and approach.

2: DIASPORA, MATERIAL CULTURE AND FOOD: A CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I position my research at the intersection of scholarship on diaspora, the circulation of material cultures, and diasporan interactions with food, with specific context also provided about the Iranian diaspora. The chapter thus outlines how the thesis contributes to research agendas on diasporan cultural production, as well as to wider studies on the Iranian diaspora.

In outline, the chapter progresses through three main sections. First, it considers theorizations of diaspora. Here, I argue that diaspora scholarship deploys the term as more than a descriptive noun, identifying distinct populations marked by histories of migration and dispersal from a homeland (such as the Iranian diaspora). Rather, diaspora scholarship has developed a body of theory that opens up how we think about identity and its geographies. In particular, I highlight conceptual thinking that approaches diaspora in terms of processes of identity performance and cultural production, and an emergent body of work focused on the relations between diaspora and the circulation of material and commodity cultures. It is in the light of such work that this research developed its focus on the representation of diasporic Iranian identities through commercial food spaces. My argument is that these commercial diasporic food spaces (restaurants and food shops, for example) are not just instances of diaspora

entrepreneurship but also cultural interventions that play an important role in fashioning and representing diasporic identities. In the second section of the chapter I provide further information on the Iranian diaspora and, in particular, its presence in my two case study cities, London and Vancouver. In so doing I also identify some of the key substantive contributions of existing scholarship on the Iranian diaspora, which this thesis seeks to enhance. Thirdly, and finally, the chapter turns to existing research on the role of food and culinary cultures within diaspora cultures. Here, I draw out some of the reasons for the importance of food as a material for diasporic cultural production and experience, paying particular attention to existing research on commercial food spaces such as restaurants and grocery stores and providing further contextual information on Iranian culinary culture.

2.1.1 Where Are You From? No, Where Are You *Really* From? Concepts and Definitions of Diaspora

The title of this section – “Where are you from? No, where are you *really* from?” – comes from a question that many diasporic individuals are asked on a regular basis. The point of this question is to find out the origin of the individual’s homeland country, even if the individual was not born there. In many ways, the theorization of diaspora is a project that explains why there is no simple answer to this question, and indeed why the assumptions that underpin it are problematic. There is a wealth of literature that theorizes diaspora and develops a suite of diasporic concepts. In this section, I position the research within this scholarship on diaspora theory: more generally in relation to work contributing to

the areas of concern such as cosmopolitanism, identity and its performance; more specifically with respect to work on how these cosmopolitan practices and diasporic identities are performed through material commodity cultures.

2.1.2 Defining Diaspora

The last twenty-five years has seen a significant growth in, and evolution of, diasporan studies (Butler, 2001). Safran, writing in the early 1990s (1991, p. 83), acknowledges that there were few diaspora studies at the time, but that this was rapidly changing; indeed, Brubaker (2005, p.1) states that Safran recognized that this claim was no longer viable even by the time his article was in print. The classic definition of diaspora referred to, and was limited to, the Jewish diaspora and the Jewish experience of exile. From this, the concept was broadened in application to a range of peoples living outside their homeland; thus the term diaspora came to intersect with other descriptors for these groups, such as expatriates, refugees and immigrants (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 2008). Brubaker (2005) argues that the term 'diaspora' has become popularized to accommodate different agendas, thus becoming "'diaspora" diaspora' - a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual, and disciplinary space" (Brubaker, 2005, p.1). In response to this process of proliferation, Brubaker (2005, p.4) suggests that different strands of diasporan vocabulary can be identified. He states that diaspora can be used as a noun describing a *collectivity* (a diaspora), a *condition* (diasporicity or diasporism), a *process* (diasporization, de-diasporization, and re-diasporization) and a *field of inquiry* (diasporology or diasporistics).

Brubaker's attempt to log these various uses of the term can be linked to Butler's (2001) argument that it is inadequate to merely use diaspora as a label. For Butler, diaspora instead should be used as a framework of analysis, designating a critical approach. Butler (2001) acknowledges that there is a lack of consensus on the definition of diaspora; nonetheless, however varied the definition, the common attribute for each is that of multiple identities gained through the dispersal process. Due to the various identities that diasporas gain, Butler (2001, p.194, italics original) states that "*rather than being viewed as an ethnicity, diaspora may be alternatively considered as a framework for the study of a specific process of community formation*". This may be a more viable way of thinking about the definition of diaspora as a *process* of *how* diasporas function as opposed to merely describing a group of people that have been dispersed from their homeland. This would allow scholars to maintain the fluidity in their definition, rather than trying to categorize diaspora groups into different types (Cohen, 2008) or giving them defining characteristics (Safran, 1991), whilst simultaneously allowing for analysis and discussion of how various communities formed and their experiences in the host country.

For example, if we take Cohen's (2008) categorization of diasporas, the Iranian diaspora can be situated into his 'victim', 'imperial' and 'de-territorialized' categories. First, the victim diaspora label is applicable to the Iranian diaspora as many were refugees during the Iran-Iraq war. Second, the Iranian diaspora can be described as imperial, because of the various empires that Iran has been part of, such as the Achamedian Empire and Pahlavi dynasty (see Briant, 1996 for a

historical perspective on the Persian Empire and diaspora. The Pahlavi dynasty was the last imperial ruling empire in Iran and was overthrown by Islamic leaders to form an Islamic Republic). Third, the de-territorialized category is appropriate as the Parsis were originally from Iran and are part of the Zoroastrian community.

Cohen's (2008) classification of diasporas varies to that of Butler (2001). For Butler (2001) the main diaspora types are 'captivity'; 'state-eradication exile'; 'forced' and 'voluntary' exile; 'emigration'²; 'migration'³; and 'imperial'. Rather than explain all of Butler's diaspora types in detail, I will explain the ones that are relevant to the Iranian diaspora. 'State-eradication exile' refers to the ways in which colonialism and conquests result in the obliteration of nations or states, such that consequently the population becomes integrated into a new set of social rules. Although Butler (2001) uses the case of the Owu in Nigeria as an example, her account of state-eradication exile could be applied to Iranians in terms of the Arab conquest of Persia forcing the Baha'i and Zoroastrians to flee. Forced and voluntary exile is also highly applicable to the Iranian diaspora, in particular with respect to how many were forced into exile by the Islamic clerical style of government. Those who fled during the Revolution were *forced* into exile along with Shah Reza Pahlavi, as they would have been persecuted. On the other hand, those who left after the Revolution and at the time of the Iran-Iraq war were *voluntary* exiles, as many families left Iran because they did not want

² Butler (2001, p.201) defines emigration as "a permanent relocation to a single locale; diasporan studies focus specifically on emigration to multiple destinations from a single homeland. Emigration is typically the result of intolerable economic conditions".

³ For Butler (2001, p.202) migration diasporas are defined "in contrast to emigration diasporas, in which people relocate definitively, [as] some diasporas arise out of migratory patterns in which individuals may come and go but institutions and networks become established in hostlands".

their sons drafted into the war at as young an age as 13. The difference between state-eradication exile and forced and voluntary exile is that in the case of the latter the homeland is still in existence, making returning back to Iran a possibility. The notion of an 'imperial diaspora' is synonymous with the imposition of cultures on other states/territories; examples would include the Roman, Mughal and British Empires which saw the dispersion of their imperial culture and ideologies. This imperial dispersal is particularly relevant to the historic diasporic movement of Iranians as modern Iran and its cultures are largely shaped by its rich imperial histories. Iranians pride themselves on the rich culture of pre-Islamic Iran, such as poetry by Rumi and Hafez. Daryaei (2012, p. 11) acknowledges that

the Iranian identity, which was formed through a long historical process, also appears beyond the modern territory state of Iran. Not only do Tajiks and some Afghans may [sic] claim to be Iranians, but Iranians look at the Central Asian world as a place where Iranian culture and the Persian language formed and developed. Indeed, there is a sense of cultural unity that connects these people, regardless of the political and linguistic changes that have taken place in modern times.

From this brief review, it is evident that there is no one 'pure' category which a diaspora can be described or labelled as. As acknowledged by Cohen (2008, p.17), diasporas cannot be delineated into "prototypical ideal types". My suggestion, then, is that whilst seeing diaspora as a descriptor of a group or a collective experience can be useful to an extent it is also flawed, because if the "concept of diaspora is rooted in the group itself, it encourages reification of identity" (Butler, 2001, p.191). Such an approach is unviable as identities evolve constantly with and within various contexts. Cohen (1992) argues that multiple

diasporic identities exist within diasporas. This is applicable to the Iranian diaspora; as discussed above, the Iranian diaspora is complex in its social fabric. Therefore, diaspora as a concept needs to be able to accommodate for multiple identities and stages of diaspora over time (Butler, 2001). To this extent, Butler suggests that scholars need to be less traditionally ethnographic in their approach to researching diasporas: i.e. the study of diasporas should not be about documenting an identifiable group of people whose collective designation (e.g. Iranians) then becomes essentialized as an ethnic label; but instead explore the “dynamic social *process* of diasporization from which these groups are created” (Butler, 2005, p.193). From this rationale, Butler (2005) argues that the diaspora theory is a developing one, not a definitive one, which requires a comparative analysis of specific processes and patterns defined by diasporic experiences. This thesis responds to that approach, focusing on the diasporization processes involved in the commodity cultures of food provision.

The extension of diaspora as a concept has led to many ambiguities. Safran (2003) notes that anthropologists view diaspora as a subcultural label, whereas postmodernists such as James Clifford, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall view diaspora either as “a metaphor for collective identity, often enough an alienated one, developed as a consequence of imperialism, slavery, or some other tragic experience” (p.438) and/or to designate forms of cultural hybridity. Much of the literature on diasporas emphasizes the importance of the homeland. For Brah (1996), the attachment to a ‘homeland’ and a ‘homing desire’ differ in the sense that for some diasporas a ‘homeland’ does not exist. She argues that not all

diasporas have a desire to 'return', and that not all homing desires are about returning to the land of origin. Safran (2003), however, states that postmodern scholars are less concerned with processes of maintaining ties to the homeland, and are more concerned with how communities differentiate themselves from the surrounding social and cultural norms. This thesis spans these emphases. My concern is with identifiable diasporan identities, Iranian identities in London and Vancouver, but understood in terms of processes of cultural representation and transformation.

2.1.3 Diaspora as a Theoretical Framework

I have outlined above how Butler (2001) presents an argument that diaspora ought to be thought of as a framework of analysis, moving away from the essentializing of diaspora as an ethnic label. Continuing to use diaspora as a label leaves little room for meaningful analysis of the processes that occur within diasporas, such as the accumulation of identities the diaspora in question gain. In order to focus on these larger questions, Butler (2001, p.194) asks "how can we organize what we know about diasporas in a way that best enables us to design a framework for analysing the diasporan phenomenon by focusing on the features that make them distinct?" Her solution is to focus on the "shared and essential aspects of diasporas rather than on the idiosyncrasies of specific groups; such a framework would have the advantage of applicability to all diasporas" (p.194).

Butler (2001) thus turns to define the characteristics of any diaspora. In contrast, Clifford (1994) suggests that what constitutes a diaspora is, or should be, based on relational positioning. He writes:

Rather than locating essential features, we might focus on diaspora's borders, on what it defines itself against. And, we might ask, what kinds of articulations of identity are currently being replaced by diaspora claims? It is important to stress that the relational positioning at issue here is not a process of an absolute othering, but rather of entangled tension. Diasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous claims by "tribal" peoples⁴. (Clifford, 1994, p. 310)

On that basis, he also believes it is necessary to distinguish between all immigrants and those in diaspora, as they have different experiences. Clifford argues immigrants in nation states with assimilation policies, such as the United States, may experience nostalgia and loss only en route to their destination. In contrast, diaspora

involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this is different from exile, with its frequently individualistic focus). Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres (1987), forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with difference. (Clifford, 1994, p. 308)

Diaspora, then, is a reworking of cultural geographies so often framed through a national optic.

More recently, Lily Cho (2007) has taken forward the debate as to how we think about diaspora. Like Clifford (1994) and Butler (2001), Cho (2007) argues

⁴ Clifford claims indigenous cultures are not diasporas because their roots are connected to the land, which is what diasporic people have lost (p. 310).

that diasporas do not merely exist as an entity, as an object of analysis, but are a “*condition of subjectivity*” (italics original, p.11). She argues diasporas are more than a collection of people, scattered communities that are bound by a common history, race, or religion; rather, diasporas emerge from power relations. Her approach to definition and disciplinary scope is to resist rigidity and to emphasise how diaspora both engages and reworks established framings of identity. Cho emphasises a sense of collective experiences which are complex. She states: “diaspora brings together communities which are not quite nation, not quite race, not quite religion, not quite homesickness, yet they still have something to do with nation, race, religion, longings for home which may not exist” (2007, p.13). Though she acknowledges that attempts have been made to critically analyse diasporas in relation to socio-political moments (Clifford 1997; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 2004), nonetheless she emphasises questions that remain unsolved:

What is the relationship between diaspora and race? How does diaspora account for the multiplicity of displacements and dislocations? What, for instance, is the difference between an overseas Chinese community and a Chinese diasporic one? Do diasporas have to have a sense of being unhomed in order to be diasporic? Are diasporas necessarily transnational? What is the relationship between the transnational and the diasporic? Where does postcolonialism or globalization fit in the context of diaspora? (Cho, 2007, p.14)

It is not Cho’s intention to suggest that the current diaspora debates do not address these questions. However, she looks to broaden them from being matters of field definition and instead to focus on how they signal the complexity of diasporan social processes. For example, she argues that it is important to differentiate between transnationalism and diaspora, as the two terms are often

used interchangeably, but reflect different genealogies. Faist (2010, p.9) provides the following differentiation:

Although both terms refer to cross-border process, *diaspora* has been often used to denote religious or national groups living outside a (imagined) homeland, whereas *transnationalism* is often used both more narrowly - to refer to migrants' durable ties across countries – and, more widely, to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups, and organisations.

For Cho (2007), these differences between diasporic and transnational subjectivities are not just academic matters but part of the politics of identity. She echoes Naficy (1999) in highlighting how social class positions, both past and present, are implicated in rendering a person as transnational rather than diasporan (Naficy considers this with respect to Iranians in Los Angeles).

Cho's (2007) central argument is that "no one is born diasporic. Rather, one *becomes* diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence" (p.21). To interrogate diasporic identities fully is thus a task of complex contextualisation: "diasporic subjectivity requires both a lateral engagement across multiple diasporic communities and identities and vertically through long histories of dislocation. In lateral terms, diasporas do not emerge in isolation, but are defined through difference" (p.21). Cho's academic background is in English literature and interdisciplinary post-colonial studies, but her emphases are notably both cultural and geographical. She is interested in processes of identity formation as an integral part of diaspora studies and analysis, and emphasises the importance of both history and geography in shaping these. For Cho, a cultural analysis of diasporas needs to understand both the memories implicated

in everyday objects and gestures and the 'lateral' contexts in which these are performed. Conceptually, she emphasises how scholarship by cultural analysts engaging with diaspora studies, such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, is therefore crucial in understanding complex diasporic identities and identity formation. It is to such work that I now turn.

2.1.4 Roots and Routes: Shaping and Forming Diasporic Identities

The primary purpose of this thesis is to explore the representation of Iranian identities in London and Vancouver in relation to material cultures such as food. But first it is imperative to gain a nuanced understanding of the various processes of identity that intersect with understanding of diaspora. Like culture, identities are not fixed; they are constantly evolving (Mitchell, 1995). Discussions on diasporic identities offer varied accounts of these changes: some focus on how those in a diaspora, especially second and third generations, may experience an 'identity crisis'; others centre on accounts of the emergence of new identities through processes of creolization and hybridization; for some, diaspora is approached in terms of cosmopolitan identity formation. In this section I critically review these debates, as appropriate to the thesis's subject matter.

The notion of an 'identity crisis' is described by Cohen (2010). It uses the term coined by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1963) in describing the adolescent stages of development and identity formation, and applies it to others, such as those in diaspora, who are looking to define and redefine themselves. For Cohen, Erikson's theory is useful in helping to understand "old minorities that

had never fully integrated, and new immigrants who wanted to, or had been forced to, maintain their cultural and social ties to their countries of origin” (Cohen, 2010 p.70). It is also useful in understanding why the maintenance of ties to the homeland play such a strong role among diasporas.

Others highlight rather different identity dynamics. Indicated by a range of terms, with different genealogies and emphases – including hybridity, creolization and syncreticism – they emphasise encounters and interactions with the host society, or with other diasporic cultures and identities, and the resultant new cultures and identities that emerge (Solomos and Collins, 2010, p.497). Anthias argues that for Stuart Hall (1988) hybridity is linked to the formation of ‘new ethnicities’, attempting “to provide a non-static and non-essentialized approach to ethnic culture” (2001, p.626). Gilroy (1993), focusing on the case of Black diasporas, argues that trans-identities are forged, based on experience rather than origin, involving both those identifying as Black subjects and others, such as the ‘white’ youth counterparts forging new cultural forms in music, inter-racial friendship networks and movements.

Whilst avoiding the negative overtones of identity ‘crisis’, work on diaspora and hybridity is not simply affirmative. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1998) critique the use of the term hybridity, stating that it

implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic, and political impacts on both the colonized and colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating assimilationist policies by masking or ‘whitewashing’ cultural differences. (p.116)

For me, this recognition of power relations is vital, but context matters to how the politics of hybridization play out. If, for example, this argument is placed in a context where there is a “melting pot” attitude towards multiculturalism, like the USA, then it can be agreed that cultural differences are indeed masked or ‘whitewashed’. However, this is less true where there is a ‘mosaic’ attitude towards multiculturalism, like Canada, where the polity highlights and maintains cultural differences, albeit subject to adopting the fundamentals of Canadian values. Here, hybridity intervenes rather differently, both advancing the emphasis on cultural difference at the same time as troubling its framing through an imagined mosaic of multiple cultures. This coincides with Anthias’ (2001) argument, where she claims “hybridity is tied to the idea of cultural syncretism, rather than the cultural difference solidified by multiculturalism...” (p.621). It is important to note though, as Anthias points out, that often hybridity in the sense of interculturality exists “where individuals adopt host country traits but are marginalized and perceived as ‘strangers’” (p.622). This sentiment is echoed by Mobasher’s (2012) findings in analysing Iranian identities in Texas.

Ideas of hybridity engage with wider thinking on what Bhabha (1994, p.37) calls the “thirdspace of enunciation”, where cultural statements and systems, in particular identities, are created, and purity cannot be attained. Ashcroft et al. (1998) argue that, as a space that is in-between cultures, Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the thirdspace allows for an understanding of hybridity as a space where cultural differences occur:

it is significant that the productive capacities of this thirdspace have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend

into that alien territory... may open the way to conceptualizing *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of culture, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. (Bhabha, 1994, p.38)

Though Bhabha argues that purity is untenable, Back (2002) points out that a discussion of hybrid forms may paradoxically generate claims to purity and exclusivity "and can incorporate (and obscure) divisions on ethnicity, gender or sexuality" (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 504). In part the concern here is that in some formulations hybridity can be characterised as a process of culture mixture, where previously separate (and seemingly pure) cultures combine. Gilroy (1994, pp.54-55) writes extensively on black cultures in the UK and USA, and is wary of the idea of hybridity on these grounds: "who the fuck wants purity?... the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities... I think there isn't any purity... that's why I try not to use the word hybrid... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails" (1994, pp.54-55). In response to Gilroy's comment, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk (2005) claim that hybridity theorists have struggled in "theorizing... intermixture, fusion and syncretism without suggesting the existence of anterior "uncontaminated" purities" (Gilroy, 2000, p.250). This dilemma parallels the debate within diaspora studies about how Gilroy's interest in 'where you are at' relates to concerns with 'where you are from'; whilst Gilroy resists the possibility and desire for return to a homeland, that desire is not simply opposed to hybridity, but sometimes implicated in it.

Ethnicity is also related to these debates on cultural hybridity. In the same way that an emphasis on new forms of cultural hybridity has value in highlighting processes of diasporization but runs the danger of framing other cultural

productions as 'pure' antecedents, so an emphasis on diasporan identities can become equated with minoritized ethnicities that are contrasted to mainstream, hegemonic culture. In other words, discussions of diaspora bring questions of ethnicity to the fore, but have to careful not to limit this consideration to identified, diasporan ethnic communities. Ultimately, Anthias argues that all social groups possess an ethnicity: for instance "the English are an ethnic group whose 'culture' is most fully represented in the British State" (2001, p.629). As Avtar Brah (1996) argues through her concept of 'diaspora space', processes of diasporization have impacts and occur beyond bounded ethnically minoritized diaspora communities. Dimensions of the cultural power struggles that shape hybridity are evident as culturally dominant groups not only incorporate or co-opt cultural products of subaltern groups, but are also open to "transforming and abandoning some of their own central cultural symbols and practices of hegemony" (Anthias, 2001, p.630). These transformations and abandonments are becoming visible through everyday material cultures such as food and music. In turn, such processes are implicated in wider debates over multiculturalism: for some illustrating a powerful re-shaping of cultural cartographies; for others illustrating the need for critiques of multiculturalism, in that reification of cultural difference occurs and hegemonic culture becomes naturalised as the norm from which diasporan cultural products differ (hooks, 2015).

This takes us on to the question of how diasporan identities and cultural products sit within wider fields of cultural exchange and transformation. Here, concepts of the cosmopolitan have also been important. Within the diaspora

literature, cosmopolitanism is defined as “an orientation, a willingness to engage with others [...] an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences” (Hannerz, 1996, p.103). Cosmopolitanism is associated with mobility, the desire to immerse oneself and participate in other cultures, and an openness to adapting to other cultures. Due to globalization and socio-cultural interconnectedness, there is a global ecumene (Hannerz, 1996). Thus cosmopolitans integrate cultures of the Other with the local to form the ‘glocal’ (a merger of the global and local). Hannerz (1996) argues that the ties between local and cosmopolitan are strong; that one cannot survive without the other; and that this relationship is central to contemporary processes that reproduce cultural diversity (Cresswell, 2015). Hannerz (1990, p.249-50) points out

here, however, today’s cosmopolitans and locals have common interests in the survival of cultural diversity. For the latter, diversity itself, as a matter of personal access to varied cultures, may be of little intrinsic interest. It just so happens that it is the principle which allows all locals to stick to their respective cultures. For cosmopolitans, in contrast, there is value in diversity as such, but they are not likely to get it, in anything like the present form, unless other people are allowed to carve out special niches for their cultures, and keep them. Which is to say that there can be no cosmopolitans without locals.

Hannerz’s argument on this is applicable to the planning of ‘cosmopolitan cities’ (see Sandercock, 2004). Local planners and policy makers are encouraged to highlight and showcase cosmopolitan culture in terms of city branding and place promotion. Of specific relevance to this research, city and tourism officials will seize upon diasporan foods and food spaces that are locally well known and promote them as being unique and peculiar to that city and/or as ways to access diverse local cultures from across the world (Godwell, 2000). For

example, Vij's, the flagship restaurant of Vikram Vij and Meeru Dhalwala, is one of Vancouver's most popular restaurants. According to Vij's website (2011, para 1):

Our cuisine has stood out from others in that we do not serve what is typically expected from an Indian restaurant. We prefer to stay away from the tandoor oven since it's already being used by so many other restaurants. Our philosophy behind the food has always been to keep our spices and cooking techniques Indian – from all regions of India – while using meats, seafood, and produce that are locally available. To this effect, we change our menu seasonally.

The example of Vij's highlights how ideas of local and global come together in the marketing of cosmopolitan consumption. In this case, Vij's combination of Indian 'spices and cooking techniques' with 'locally available' ingredients and produce ensures its difference from other Indian restaurants and constitutes a hybridization of Indian and Canadian/Vancouver cuisines (e.g. by reinforcing the Canadian value of using seasonal and local produce where possible).

In everyday spaces like the market place cosmopolitanism becomes aestheticized. According to John Urry (1995) the notion of 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism', mainly associated with tourism, can be used as an indicator to measure the growth of cosmopolitanism more generally. It is not only the elite who have developed a taste for other cultures and 'the exotic'. Tourism is a mass industry that often draws upon and reproduces these desires. Cosmopolitan tourists search for varied experiences that offer something different. Moreover, ideas of the exotic and the foreign can be taken back home in the marketing of other products via a touristic frame. This can be achieved by exoticising the everyday mundane. Food is a common arena in which this occurs. For example,

the culinary scene in Vancouver is renowned for offering consumers a taste and twist of 'the exotic' in everyday food: to take just one case, JapaDog has started to offer consumers Japanese style hotdogs, such as the Terimayo hotdog consisting of teriyaki sauce, mayonnaise and seaweed. Similar dynamics in London, where the world is offered up 'on a plate', have been well documented (Cook and Crang, 1996). Hannerz (1990) argues that "whether cosmopolitans travel the world or stay at home and consume the exotic array of food, fashion and other cultural products that globalization makes available in their own neighbourhoods, they are characterized primarily by their openness to other cultures" (cited by Molz, 2011, p. 35).

As with Butler (2001) arguing that diaspora should be used as an analytical framework rather than a descriptive label, Rovisco and Nowicka (2011, p.2) argue "cosmopolitanism emerges more and more as a key analytical tool to study a variety of outlooks, processes, and ethno-political practices that are observable in a variety of social and political contexts". This connects with Beck and Sznaider's (2006) call for an epistemological, empirically grounded approach to studying cosmopolitanism, that they term 'methodological cosmopolitanism'. Beck (2003) refers to everyday cosmopolitanism as "banal cosmopolitanism", emphasising mundane daily activities such as shopping, eating and listening to music. Referring to food as an example, Beck writes:

If we are what we eat, none of us is national anymore... we are now all used to finding foodstuffs that used to be separated by continents and cultures freely available side-by-side as mass market commodities. This selection... is the basic ingredient of a culinary cosmopolitanism... World society is in some ways baking in the oven and broiling in the pan. (2003, p. 37)

This example illustrates how for Beck “banal cosmopolitanism” is intimately tied to practices of consumption. Cosmopolitanism in that sense has increased in capitalist economies, but this has not necessarily produced a cosmopolitan ethic.

Beck (2006, p.150-151) argues that

cosmopolitanism itself has become a commodity: the glitter of cultural difference fetched a good price. Images of an in-between world, of the black body, exotic beauty, exotic music, exotic food, and so on, are globally cannibalized, re-staged and consumed as products for mass markets.

According to Binnie, Holloway, Millington and Young (2006, p.250) this results in a “safe form of multiculturalism”, allowing the cosmopolitan consumer to interact with the Other from a distance without getting involved. Kalra et al. (2005) acknowledge that hybridity falls prey to commodification under the logic of capitalism, relegated to a kind of “benign multiculturalism” allowing the cosmopolitan to consume products from the diaspora, like film, literature, and music, yet remaining ignorant of the “places that are being bombed and crippled by the actions of imperialism” (p. 48). I think that here Kalra et al. overly simplify the politics of knowledge at stake: it is implausible to suggest that those in diaspora remain ignorant of the political wranglings in their homelands or that consuming ‘exotic foods’ excludes the capacity to develop cosmopolitan political ethics around that practice. Nonetheless, there are valuable critiques and concerns here. To suggest that commodities in the diaspora may take on new properties that either deplete or contain cultural difference points to what is described by Jones and Leshkovich (2003, as cited in Molz, 2011) as “homogenized heterogeneity”. Homogenized heterogeneity describes the “way

cultural differences are identified and appreciated, but are then appropriated in ways that diminish those differences or marginalize them in relation to global modernity” (Molz, 2011, p. 39). In this sense, what is being highlighted is the danger that the rough edges or differences are smoothed out so the commodified entity fits into the global culture, reducing diasporan dynamics of hybridity, cultural difference and cosmopolitanism to the “occasional experience of exotic commodities which can be repackaged to sustain the insatiable trade in new forms of cultural identity” (Papastergiadis, 2000, cited in Kalra et al., 2005, p.101). These debates in turn suggest how one key emergent concern of work on diaspora is the questioning and exploring of the relationships between diaspora and material objects/culture. It is to that issue that I now turn directly.

2.2 Diasporas and the Circulation of Material Culture

It is now widely recognised that a valuable approach to diaspora is to conceive of mobilities of not only people but also objects that displace our conventional ways of mapping cultural ‘mosaics’ (Cohen, 1997; Gilroy, 1993). It is also now widely held that accounts of such diasporic systems of cultural exchange need to be meshed with research on particular sites or ‘translocalities’ (Smith, 2000). Through such combined attention, scholars of diaspora and transnationality look to tease out the ‘triadic’ belongings of diasporic populations: to places of residence; to imagined homelands; to globally dispersed diasporas (Vertovec, 1999).

Crang (2010) argues that in part “diasporic identities and processes are forged through the production, circulation, and consumption of material things

and spaces” (p.139). Generally, material culture studies emphasize the roles of material objects in objectifying, mediating and shaping social identities and relations (Miller, 1987). Increasingly this perspective is being brought into dialogue with work on diaspora. Important too here is that tradition of material culture research that has focused on ‘the social lives of things’ (Appadurai, 1986). Objects tell a story, and as these objects travel through space and time they evolve and the object itself acquires new properties. Scholars have shown how, for example, the material culture of diasporan domestic space both constitutes multi-local senses of belonging and enables the narration of diasporan identities and narratives (Pahl, 2012; Tolia-Kelly, 2004).

The circulation of material cultures can thus contribute to the ways in which spaces and places are ‘diasporized’, at the same time as involving the remaking of those materials in relation to local contexts (Harney, 2002). Jackson (1999) builds upon this, by arguing that the meanings of globally circulated goods are actively shaped in local settings, where ‘geographical knowledges’ are exchanged (Cook and Crang, 1996). These commodities therefore become displaced and distanced (Crang, 1996). These spaces, and the everyday consumption that occurs within them, become politicised (Hartwick, 2000; Mackay, 1997); differences become commodified (May, 1996); notions of cultural authenticity are staged (MacCannell, 1989). This has become particularly apparent through food.

Over the past decade the globalisation of food has received wide attention, as acknowledged in literature on the history of food (Gupta, 2012).

There is also a wider public awareness of, and interest in, where foods originate from, as well as in defetishizing food commodities (Cook, 2004). As noted above, this globalisation of food has come to shape the multicultural urban landscape and has been an important component of wider everyday cosmopolitanisms. In the UK, immigrants have had a significant impact on the British catering trade, which Panayi (2008) discusses in his book *Spicing up Britain*. In their aptly titled paper *World on a Plate*, Ian Cook and Philip Crang (1996) propose that globally extensive flows of food, people and knowledge are mediated locally, creating “geographical knowledges” and encounters with other cultures that prompt people to think who they are in relation to others (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993). Such commercial cultures are not simply subsidiary to other cultural fields. They are arenas in which culture is made; in which, more specifically, processes of diasporization occur. Thus, Crang and Dwyer (2002) suggest that the commodification of ethnicities is not something that is “done to” pre-existing ethnicities and ethnic subjects, but is a process by which ethnicities emerge and are reproduced. They also suggest that commodity cultures are not superficial, but can be meaningful sites of cultural creativity and transformation (something Jeffrey Pilcher (1998; 2012) discusses further in relation to Mexican cuisine).

The argument I have been developing, then, is that focusing on material cultures, and in particular their commodified forms, helps to provide a nuanced understanding centred on diasporic identity formation, diasporic space and processes of diasporization. It offers a way into exploring the politics of

cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in particular sites and for particular subjects. Local spaces become reconfigured as people and commodities circulate and settle in these spaces, and where the space becomes used in a transformative way. Cross-cultural connections may be made, but equally differences may become fetishised and marketed as 'exotic'. The field of commercial culture, and especially commercial food culture, opens up debates on how diaspora and diaspora space can be understood as a process of negotiation between immigrants and local context. The case of the Iranian diaspora and its commercial food spaces are developed in thesis to speak to such debates.

2.3 The Iranian Diaspora and Processes of Diaspora Identity Formation

This second section of the literature review now turns from work on diaspora as an analytical lens to position the research with respect to its contributions to the more specific scholarship on the Iranian diaspora. This section is also intended to offer the reader valuable contextual knowledge, through an overview of historical Iranian migration patterns and insight into the Iranian Revolution, which triggered the biggest migration of Iranians to the West. It also considers key existing work on Iranian diasporic communities and locales; here, I combine attention to existing work on the sites of my own research, London and Vancouver, with selected studies from other contexts in North America and Europe, in particular Los Angeles and Sweden.

2.3.1 Existing Iranian Diaspora Scholarship

As the Iranian diaspora has grown, so too has the number of studies seeking to understand the experiences of diasporan Iranians. The majority of the existing scholarship on the Iranian diaspora has been published in either thematic journals such as *Diaspora* or in area studies journals such as *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* and *Iranian Studies*. Geographers, however have yet to investigate the complex relationships between diasporic Iranian identities and material cultures.

There are more specific demographic connections at play in the emergence of research on the Iranian diaspora. According to Askari, Cummings and Izbudak (1977), the majority of Iranians studying overseas graduated in engineering before the Revolution, but after the Revolution more began to move into the humanities and social sciences, partly to come to terms with the political and social happenings back in Iran. As it was unfeasible for most to return 'home' to conduct fieldwork, many opted to study Iranian exiles and immigrants, especially in places of growing settlement such as Los Angeles (Bozorgmehr, 1998).

The journal *Iranian Studies* (volume 46, issue 1) dedicated a special section to focusing on the Iranian diaspora. Commenting on existing Iranian studies, Karim (2013) notes that there are a number of associated political and academic challenges which include, but are not limited to, access to documents, archival resources, and travelling to Iran. Karim acknowledges that studies of the Iranian diaspora are mainly conducted by current or recent PhD graduates:

We should read these young scholars and consider how their approach and research adds to the expansive notion that Iranianness is no longer based on a singular national concept, but one that is being refined through the process of migration, return and, now, internet mediation – all of which influence how we grapple with questions about who Iranians are *becoming*, both in and outside that nation. (2013, p. 52)

The majority of the scholarship on the Iranian diaspora is concentrated on the Iranian diaspora in the USA or Sweden (Kelley, 1993; Graham and Khosravi, 1997; Naficy, 1991, 1993a, 1999). However, there has also been work on Canada and the UK (Harbottle, 1999; McAuliffe, 2005; Spellman, 2004; Swanton, 2003). Of particular value to this thesis is the work of: Harbottle's sociological and anthropological analysis of the consumption practices of British Iranians (1997; 1999; 2000); McAuliffe on the identity negotiation of second generation Iranians in London, Vancouver and Sydney (2005; 2007); Spellman on Iranian religious practices in London (2004); and Swanton on Iranian identities in Vancouver (2003; 2005).

2.3.2 An Overview of Iranian Migration

Iranians have been migrating for centuries and for a variety of reasons which include, but are not limited to, escaping religious persecution, escaping political oppression and seeking economic opportunity. Amanat (1993), Raji (2010) and Roy and Lahiri-Roy (2011) note that the earliest migrations of Iranians date back to the eighth century, with the exile to India of Zoroastrians (who thereafter became commonly known as Parsis) after the Arab/Muslim conquest (refer to Hinnells, 2005 for an extensive review of the Zoroastrian diaspora). This migration movement is noted to be one of the most significant in

Iranian history, together with the mass migration that took place during the Revolution of 1978-1979 (Mobasher, 2012).

Spellman (2004) and Raji (2010) describe more contemporary emigration from Iran occurring in three phases. The first was during the 1960s and 1970s when many of the educated elite left for the West in pursuit of higher education and in the hope of improving matters 'back home'. This migration intensified and became more diasporan in character around the Iranian Revolution. Due to the political and social unrest during, and in the years following, the Iranian Revolution, millions began to leave the country. By 1977 all classes had begun to emigrate for higher education; popular destinations included the USA, Germany, France, Austria and UK, thus creating a 'brain drain' in Iran. Just prior to and during the Revolution many families who had benefited from the political and socio-economic developments of the Pahlavi era looked to leave Iran, building on experiences of living abroad for higher education, frequent fluency in English and familiarity with western lifestyles (Haines, 1996; Spellman, 2004).

The second recent population movement occurred at the time of the Iran-Iraq war (1980 – 1988). This period saw the migration of the less affluent too. The Iran-Iraq war was a significant factor in Iran's diaspora history. It is described by Swearingen (1988, p. 405) as "the bloodiest and most destructive military conflict since World War II". Estimated numbers evidencing this include over one million total casualties, 200,000 Iranian civilians and troops dead, and over a million refugees (Swearingen, 1988; Hiro, 1991, p. 250). Many who left Iran during the 1980s did so due to conscription threats, looking to leave before their

sons were 'moved to the front'; they are classified as *emigrant Iranian refugees* (Graham and Khosravi, 1997, p. 118; McAuliffe, 2005).

The final movement in the 1980s saw the migration of the urban working classes and religious minorities seeking refuge from deteriorating socio-economic conditions and religious persecution. These movements of migration were often intended to be temporary until the political unrest in Iran had calmed down and return was possible, but in most cases this did not happen. There was though some further migration at play. For instance, for many of those who resided first in Britain their stays in the UK were temporary, as they waited for visas to migrate to the USA (Spellman, 2004). North America, especially Los Angeles, has been a popular destination for many Iranians (Kelley, 1993).

2.3.3 The Revolution as a Cause of Migration

The Iranian Revolution is an iconic event not only in the recent dynamics of the Iranian diaspora but also in the wider contemporary geopolitical discourse that the Iranian diaspora inhabits (Sayyid, 1997; Swanton, 2003). For that reason, I want now to outline the Revolution's role in Iranian diasporic dynamics in a little more depth.

The Revolution emerged from a demand for social, economic and religious changes from the ruling Reza Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty (1924-1979). The Pahlavi dynasty was heavily influenced by, and dependent on, the West; Reza Shah saw his leadership as concerned with modernising Iran's image and society. Kashani-Sebat (1999) notes that the national name of Persia

was changed to Iran in 1935 as part of the construction of a modern, progressive national identity associated with the Aryan race⁵. In 1941 Reza Shah was overthrown, and his son Mohammad Reza Shah came to rule until he was overthrown in 1979. American influences began to become more prominent with Mohammad Reza Shah after the 1953 *coup d'état* saw the removal of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq (1951-1953) by the CIA and British intelligence forces. This led the Shah to expand his security apparatus and to establish the *Sâzmân-e E'telâ ât va Amniyat-e Keshvar* (SAVIK), the secret police, on whom the Shah became increasingly dependent to control opposition movements.

Iran's economy began to soar due to the nationalisation of the oil industry (1951); causing Anglo-American and Iranian conflict, and eventually leading to the 1953 *coup d'état* (Ansari, 2014). In 1963 Mohammad Reza Shah implemented western style policies, known as the White Revolution (Spellman, 2004). Though this saw the standard of living for affluent urban areas flourish, yet at the same time meant that for many the quality of life deteriorated; for instance, 'shanty towns' became more prominent. The wealth gap also became apparent, as it was mainly private entrepreneurs and the wealthy that benefited from the Shah's regime. The Shah's government similarly favoured the middle class, because the majority worked the bazaars, controlling over two-thirds of the retail trade (Abrahamian, 1980). More so, the role of the bazaar merchants is of importance as they served as a crucial link between the clergy, middle classes and intellectuals during the time of the Revolution. The regime was careful not to

⁵ Iran is a Farsi term translating as "land of Aryans".

provoke the bazaars, but took precautions with the religious establishment, supporting clerics favouring the regime and exiling opposition clerics (such as Ayatollah Khomeini, who was exiled in 1964 to Iraq).

Religious opposition heightened during the 1960s, as did social disparities, partly due to growing rural-urban migration. As a consequence of the lack of housing and adequate social services, rates of crime, delinquency, prostitution, alcoholism and suicide rose. Mullahs were shocked by what they were witnessing, and argued that social morals had become too relaxed, corrupting society. Enforcing traditional and religious values would mend a disintegrating society, they argued (Abrahamian, 1980). Abrahamian (1980, p. 26) writes:

According to Ahamad Khomeini [son of Ayatollah Khomeini], what had led these clerics to break their silence was not the realization that the Shah was destroying the country and selling Iran to Western imperialism, but rather the shock of seeing 'moral decadence' flaunted into the streets and the double shock of finding that the authorities were unwilling, if not incapable, of cleaning up the social filth.

This concern combined with claims that the Shah was lavish in his spending, wasting money on grand parties, and solid gold bathtubs and such; failed to expand a socio-political structure; and thus failed to win over the proletariat.

The Shah was overthrown and exiled in 1979, coinciding with the return of Ayatollah Khomeini and the proclamation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A new national identity was constructed dominated by Islamic ideology and law. This led to a number of Iranians from a range of religious backgrounds such as Baha'is, Christian converts, Jews and Zoroastrians to flee due to the fear of religious

persecution. They were joined by those who had ties to the Shah and the royal family and many others who felt that they were negatively affected by Khomeini's attempts to reform Iran. Mobasher's (2012) work on the Iranian diaspora in Texas further highlights that the geopolitical events that were taking place in Iran impacted on the lives and settlement experiences of diasporan Iranians in this region, in particular impacting on how Iranians presented their Iranian identities in their new places of settlement.

2.3.4 Patterns of Settlement

North America and Europe, in particular Sweden, France, Germany, Austria and Britain, have been popular destinations for Iranian immigrants. According to a study of Iranian migration patterns in America by Modarres (1998), Iranians who moved to America between 1975 and 1993 chose predominantly to live in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, New York and Washington, DC. His analysis on the Los Angeles County region shows Iranians tended to congregate in affluent areas such as Glendale, Santa Monica, Beverley Hills and West Los Angeles. Modarres (1998) further states that Iranians have a tendency to congregate in urban areas as many of them are from cities in Iran, and view urbanization as a positive process.

Naficy (1993a) argues that, unlike many immigrant communities, Iranians tend to be scattered over a city, hence why there is no Iranian ethnic enclave like "Irantown" or a "Little Persia" in Los Angeles. However, the example of 'Tehrangeles' (it is sometimes also given the portmanteau 'Irangeles') as it is commonly known, would show that there is something of an Iranian ethnic

enclave in Los Angeles. In March 2010 the area was named Persian Square by Los Angeles city council, and this nomenclature was given recognition by Google Maps in July 2012 (Tsubakihara, 2013). Persian Square is a common focus point of many Los Angeles-based studies concerned with the identity formation of Iranian-Americans (e.g. Alinejad, 2013; Naraghi, 2014). Though my research does not directly focus on Los Angeles, the way that Iranian identities are mediated and embodied in this area is of relevance. On a superficial level it appears that Persian Square is an Iranian enclave; however, a deeper analysis shows that it is a “multiclave” (Jencks, 1996). The Westwood neighbourhood is inhabited by University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) students and residents of mixed ethnicities, a pattern further evidenced by the varied businesses in the area. Tsubakihara (2013) argues that Persian Square is therefore primarily a symbolic Iranian space, a place representing a hyperreal diasporan Iranian identity, which has emerged through the processes of migration (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1 Persian Square signage in a shop window front, Westwood, Los Angeles (2013)

This settlement pattern is also reflected in London and Vancouver. Spellman (2004) writes that many British Iranians live in the London metropolitan area, mainly in the affluent areas of Kensington and Chelsea, Knightsbridge, Richmond, Hampstead, Swiss Cottage and Westminster. McAuliffe's (2005) findings show that more established, higher socio-economic communities are based in Kensington and Knightsbridge. His interview data shows that there are "socio-economic disparities between classes, as expressed through the high costs of real estate in areas like Kensington and Knightsbridge, and even the high costs of socialising in certain arenas, [which] kept the undesirable 'lower class' to some degree physically apart" (McAuliffe, 2005, p. 304). Gholami (2015) notes less affluent Iranians began to settle in areas such as Greenford and West Ealing. 2011 census data on country of birth shows that the majority of Iranians

live in the boroughs of Barnet (7,242), Ealing (3,440), Westminster (2,920), Kensington and Chelsea (2,229) and Brent (2,085)⁶. Like Iranians in Los Angeles, the Iranian diaspora in London is widely dispersed; there is not an Iranian enclave but a number of pockets of concentration. Graham and Khosravi (1997) note that Iranians make an effort to integrate into the host country society in which they live. These sites of concentration are not necessarily enclaves or in the case of Vancouver 'ethnoburbs' as described as Li (2009). They are perhaps better described as multiclaves (Jencks, 1996), where village-sized fragments exist in a metropolitan area, and where heterogeneous identities are shaped and formed.

In order to learn about the orientation of London based Iranians Spellman (2004) asked participants to map-out various groupings, illustrating:

How individuals conceived the fragmentation of Iranians in London and where they placed themselves on the map. It was interesting because the vast majority of mappings were identical: linking the Monarchists to Knightsbridge and Kensington; the Professionals scattered throughout London; the Mujahedin living in the Hendon area; the Leftists scattered throughout, although many living in Ealing; and the Intellectuals, writers, and poets scattered throughout the London area with many living in north-west London. (Spellman, 2004, p. 39)

Such an exercise proved to be useful as it allowed participants to describe the locations of Iranians in London, and they enjoyed explaining to an outsider about their background, circumstances and experiences.

As outlined earlier, the first group of Iranian migrants to arrive in London were part of a larger movement of migrants who wanted to attend European

⁶ Data from 2011 UK Census (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

universities, who were wealthy, and who had reaped the benefits of the Pahlavi era. These immigrants were already familiar with English and the London lifestyle. As they enjoyed the wealthy lifestyle in Iran they chose to live in the wealthier neighbourhoods of London, as previously mentioned. The next set of migrants that arrived in the 1980s were mostly asylum seekers; they were from weaker socio-economic backgrounds compared to their predecessors. The political and socio-economic fragmentation of the Iranian diaspora led to the formation of political and sectarian affiliations, in addition to Iranian community centres. According to Spellman (2004, p. 40), this fragmentation meant that there was a significant amount of suspicion and mistrust between various Iranian groups, and finding good schools and jobs took a higher priority compared to preserving Iranian identity.

Spellman (2004) identified three pivotal historic moments that have been crucial in shaping and reshaping life not only for Iranians in London, but also for the Iranian diaspora as a whole: the Revolution (1978-1979); Khomeini's death (1989); and Khatami's presidency (1997-2005). These events have been important for both the religious practices in which she was primarily interested and for wider social, economic and political processes of everyday life for Iranians in London⁷. From the preliminary research conducted by Spellman (2004), two key themes surfaced from the first few years following the Revolution. First, the Iranians that had moved to Britain were engrossed in the political and social happenings in Iran, living out of their suitcases and anxious

⁷ This is particularly relevant for Iranians who may not have an Iranian passport, but a British one as the London Consulate no longer issues visas to Iran.

for unrest to settle so they could return home. Second, some had a desire to immerse themselves fully into western culture and society, downplaying their Iranian, and in some cases Muslim, identities to distance themselves from negative perceptions of Iran and Islam. Iranians were intent on “fitting into” British society (p. 41), by taking measures such as marrying Europeans, speaking with the “correct” (most probably generic) English accent, securing a prestigious job or place in university. Some went as far as avoiding fellow Iranians all together.

During the 1990s Iranians in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, such as Sweden, faced hostility from Iranians back home. These migrants who had moved to the West were variously cast as ‘traitors’ to the regime, as “Westoxicated” Iranians, members of the opposition, and cowards who had fled the country during the Iran-Iraq war. Although the political and socio-economic situations in Iran had improved, many diasporans did not feel comfortable returning on a permanent basis, though some did visit. Spellman’s (2004) research shows that there was a cultural conflict among Iranians in the years immediately following the Revolution. Earlier she states that “there was little effort made to maintain an Iranian cultural identity in the British context in the years following the revolution” (p.40). However, later she goes on to say: “although many Iranians have become absorbed within their new milieu, many also realised that they did not wish to give up their sense of being Iranian and made great efforts in maintaining Iranian cultural forms and the Persian language” (p.43). These factors led to the increase in facilities catering for Iranian social and religious events, thus placing less of an emphasis on political issues. The 1990s

saw a proliferation of diasporic Iranian media and organisations. Shops and restaurants stocked a number of free weekly and monthly magazines and newspapers like *Persian weekly*, *Ava-ye Landan*, *No Bahar weekly*, *Persian Herald*, *Barg-e-Sabz* and *Bazaar-e Hafteh*, advertising Iranian businesses, events and services, in addition to including horoscopes, jokes, world news and stories. Non-political, socially and religiously affiliated community organizations such as The Harrow Iranian Community Association (*Anjoman*), Iranian Heritage Foundation, Iranian Association and The Library for Iranian Studies were also established, providing cultural, education, social and legal services. These associations focus on creating community ties and cultural events, and are often responsible for hosting events for *Nowruz* (Persian New Year). Over time there has been an increase in the attendance of cultural celebrations, specifically *Nowruz*, poetry readings, music concerts and film screenings, in addition to the increasing number of restaurants, grocery stores, hair and beauty salons and many other business venues that represent Iranian culture in London.

The Iranian migration to Canada follows similar migration patterns and timings to that of Britain. Again it can be characterised as happening in three waves. According to Khagheli (2011) the first wave occurred between 1961 and 1970 when 620 Iranians migrated to Canada, citing personal safety and financial security as reasons for immigration. The second wave occurred between 1971 and 1980 when 3,455 migrated to Canada during the years of the Revolution. This wave saw the migration of professionals and those seeking to pursue higher levels of education, leading to a brain drain and a diaspora of highly educated

immigrants. The third wave occurred between 1980 and 1988 when 40,000 Iranians migrated to Canada during the years of the Iran-Iraq war for personal safety. Though earlier immigration to Canada occurred for political reasons, after 1990 this changed to economic reasons. According to Garousi (2005, p. 9) “in 2002, more than 200,000 educated Iranian professionals emigrated mainly to Canada, Australia, United Arab Emirates and Eastern Europe”. Statistics Canada’s 2006 census data estimated there were 121,510 Iranians living in Canada, 29,265 of them residing in British Columbia. In 2011 Statistics Canada reported 163,290 Iranians in Canada, 39,285 of them living in British Columbia.

Hiebert (1999) acknowledges Vancouver’s Iranian population (along with its Vietnamese population) as being “smaller visible-minority groups liv[ing] in more clustered patterns but in very different contexts” (p.76). The largest Iranian communities in Vancouver reside in the Districts of North Vancouver and West Vancouver. However, due to the rising cost of real estate in West and North Vancouver, many now also reside in Burnaby and the Tri-cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody). However, a map produced by a group of real estate agents using data from the National Household Survey shows that the majority of Iranians live in North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Yaletown (a neighbourhood of downtown Vancouver), Coal Harbour (a neighbourhood of downtown Vancouver) and Central downtown Vancouver (EstateBlock, 2015).

Others identify other factors at work in settlement patterns. According to Dinshaw (2007), Iranians chose to adopt Vancouver as their new home as the

mountainous landscape reminded them of the Alborz Mountains, north of Tehran.

This point was reiterated in interview by the owner of Kozmik Zoo, who stated:

So the majority of Iranians live in North Van⁸ and West Van. The majority of Iranians who live in Canada, especially Vancouver are well off families who had to move out of the country and are from Tehran. How Tehran is built pretty much looks like Vancouver, but take out the ocean... In Tehran itself, the most luxurious houses, the best weather, the nicest places, the safest places, the fancier ones are closer to the mountain... so the closer you get to the mountain it means that you're doing better in life so usually it's a cultural thing... so when they arrived in Vancouver they looked around, it's like mountains, going up there. I think it's a cultural thing just go up there because it's the mountains; it's the same mentality once they go out there everybody goes out there. Okay North Tehran, North Vancouver amazing. (Personal interview, Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver, May 2013)

Here, then, it is suggested that memory and nostalgia play a role in settlement patterns, in addition to conspicuous consumption.

Swanton's (2003) unpublished Master's thesis investigates Iranian identities and how the Iranian migrant experience is narrated in Vancouver through the triangulated analysis of media data, official statistics and semi-structured interviews. His findings show that 15.1% of immigrant Iranians entered through the business immigration program as principal applicant or dependant. Swanton's interview data seem to suggest that business Iranian immigrants did not come Vancouver to make money, but for family aspirations (2005).

Hiebert (1999) contends that the concentration of Iranians in North Vancouver is indicative of chain-migration, where new migrants are influenced by those who have already settled there. The current Iranian infrastructures and

⁸ The districts of North Vancouver and West Vancouver are locally abbreviated to North Van and West Van.

socio-cultural networks provide a sense of familiarity and comfort. However, statistical data suggests that “8.15% of Iranian-born immigrants were documented as intending to settle in North Vancouver at the time of entry into Canada, compared with 78.9% who were recorded as being destined for the City of Vancouver” (Swanton, 2003, p.51). Swanton (2003) suggests that the question was misinterpreted or that many relocated to North Vancouver after arriving. Those born in Iran were more likely to settle in North Vancouver and West Vancouver, which led to the reinforced visibility of Iranian social networks and cultural institutions, including everyday spaces such as shops (Swanton, 2003). Iranian community organisations also began to form, such as The Canadian-Iranian Foundation and Iranian-Canadian Congress of British Columbia, catering towards the needs of Iranian immigrants. During my visit to Vancouver I saw that some non-Iranian organisations, such as Scotia Bank on Lonsdale Avenue in North Vancouver, offer services in Farsi, catering to the needs of the Iranian immigrant population in that neighbourhood. Diasporan Iranian magazines and newspapers also established, usually circulated at Iranian shops and restaurants, including *Daneshmand Magazine*, *Dan Magazine*, *Paivand* and *Goonagoon*.

2.3.5 Negotiating and Performing Iranianness⁹

Given the complex geopolitical ideologies dominating Iran over time, the idea of an Iranian identity has become conflicted between a Persian cultural identity and an Iranian national identity. Before moving on to discuss how an Iranian rhetoric is performed and negotiated in the diaspora, it is perhaps useful

⁹ Spelling varies in the literature as ‘Iranianess’, ‘Iranian-ness’ and ‘Iranianness’.

to gain an understanding of how Iranian is constructed back in modern Iran. Writing on the construction and discourse of Iran's national identity, in the context of the 2009 Green movement, Siavoshi (2014, p.255) states "the ruling elites of both the Islamic Republic and monarchist groups insist that their construction of Iranian identity is the authentic one". The Islamic Republic emphasises the religious (Shia), whereas the monarchists emphasise the ethnic Persian one. The monarchist discourse pays homage to a pre-Islamic heritage; exiled monarchists "believe that Persian identity has been historically suppressed by forces of alien (Arab) cultures and religion..." (Siavoshi, 2014, p.255). For Siavoshi, both the Islamic and Persian identities are static, not reflecting "the diversity of all Iranians, and one that allows for the inclusion of more and more people as equal members of the nation" (p. 269), despite claiming to be inclusive and universal. These conflicting ideologies are then translated into the diaspora.

There are also some specific dynamics with regard to diasporan identity in the Iranian case. For a start, generally the Iranian case complicates established emphases on promoting the visibility of different identities, raising issues about how diasporic populations negotiate widespread negative imaginations of their homeland. This in turn relates to how Iranian diasporans engage with Persian cultural heritage. Despite various past invasions such as the Arab invasion, Iran has still strongly retained its Persian culture, and pre-Islamic culture and arts also remain strong in the diaspora. The Iranian diaspora is not homogeneous, divided based upon religion and ethnicity, but it is bound by a larger Persian identity.

According to Bozorgmehr (1998, p.17), burgeoning studies on Iranians led to a new sociological concept, 'internal ethnicity', referring to ethnic groups within a diaspora: "distinctions within the Iranian communities are not readily apparent to outsider, and some subgroups would be completely overlooked if we were to base our image of Iranians on a stroll along Westwood Boulevard (Los Angeles)" (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian 1993, p.59). Ethnicity and religious identity are complex issues for many immigrants, causing a 'tricultural conflict', where immigrants endeavour to strike a balance between their religion, homeland identity, and host country identity. In some cases there may be an emphasis on the cultural Iranian identity rather than the religious one.

The lexical paradoxes of the Iranian diaspora, particularly the Persian/Iranian divide, are thus intrinsic to the designation of the diaspora and to its representation. Naraghi and Kingsbury (2013, p.182) argue: "The Persian/Iranian divide is more than a mere shift in signifiers; it is representative of definitive splits in Persian/Iranian history such as tradition/modern, secular/religion, nostalgia/modernity, and monarchy/theocracy". For Naraghi and Kingsbury, the Iranian identity is bound by the state, whereas the Persian identity is not tied to a single nation-state or religion. To come to terms with the messy political wrangling of Iran and the negative sentiments towards Iranians in many parts of the West, there is a tendency to promote the glorified images of a pre-revolutionary and pre-Islamic Persia. Naficy (1993a) terms this a process of "syncretic re-archaization", "attempt[ing] to invoke the period in one's history before "contamination" by the other, a period of putative purity, authenticity and

antiquity” (p.21). This is reflected in Malek’s (2011) analysis of the New York Persian Day Parade as part of the *Nowruz* (Persian New Year) festivities. Her findings show that an ancient Persian culture, mobilized by the Pahlavis to consolidate a sense of national unity in Iran, is still being mobilized by Iranian Americans to break away from images of the current regime and the contemporary histories of Iran. She sees this as presenting a romanticized image of Iran and its people. Given the religious and political fragmentations of the Iranian diaspora, these affiliations are rejected; “safer” cultural associations are used as a means of unification (Debord, 1967; Harvey, 1989; Harris, 2001).

What is of interest here is not just the paradoxes of the Iranian/Persian lexicon, but also attempts to maintain a sense of pride and distinction among the wider Middle Eastern diaspora. Writing about the Iranian diaspora in Sweden, Graham and Khosravi (1996) argue that there are some public spaces where Iranian identities are “performed”. They suggest that Iranians will tend to stress their Persian heritage and present themselves as Persian, alienating themselves from both Arab diasporans and Islamic fundamentalists. As the Swedes did not know much about Iranians, they were perceived by many as being Muslims or Arabs, and in turn associated with pejorative stereotypes such as being backwards and intolerant. This lack of knowledge meant that Iranians constantly had to explain basic facts, and even answer banal questions like if they had cake in Iran. Another response to this ignorance, which further complicates diasporan Iranian identity dynamics, is when the identity becomes ‘veiled’ or hidden. This is discussed extensively in the diasporic Iranian literature. Both Spellman’s study

(2004) and Graham and Khosravi's study (1997) show many Iranians would change or anglicise their name in order to get jobs. For example, Ali becomes Al and Bahram becomes Barry. Some would even go as far as concealing their ethnicity by disguising themselves as Italian or Greek (Harbottle, 1999; Spellman, 2004). Harbottle's (1999) findings show that this disguise was used as a means of identity protection due to the hostile attitude towards Iranians. Writing on the Muslim-Iranian diaspora in London, Gholami (2015) notes he met Iranians of a Muslim background who changed their names to western ones or pre-Islamic Persian ones associated with kings and mythic heroes such as Baabak and Arash. Whilst there is a common acknowledgment within the literature that some Iranians changed their names to distance themselves from associations with Islam and terrorism, Gholami found that the most common reason was that individuals felt more Persian than Muslim. Mobasher (2012) acknowledges that ethnic switching and identity veiling is still common practice among Iranians in America. The practice is often a topic for diasporan Iranian comedians such as Maz Jobrani.

The Iranian diaspora is thus far from an easily defined migrant population characterised by a shared diasporic identity. Internally heterogeneous, the Iranian diaspora is characterised by complex histories and geographies that shape and re-shape diverse identities in practice. Moreover, the heavy semiotic coding of Iranian identity that accompanies its diasporic histories, particularly in relation to the Islamic Revolution and on-going geopolitical discourses about Iran's relationship to the 'Western world', adds an external force to these internal

politics. Diasporic Iranian identity is subject to on-going construction and contestation. It carries a strong representational charge. The Iranian diaspora thus provides a particularly interesting lens through which to explore processes of diasporization and their operation through the field of commercial culture.

2.4 Diasporic Food Consumption

Let me now turn to the third and final section of Chapter 2's contextual review. Here, I outline key insights of past scholarship on food consumption in the diaspora; more specifically, I present an overview of the place of food in Iranian culture and the existing, albeit small, body of research into the role of food in the Iranian diaspora. Having contextualised my approach to diaspora in the first part of this chapter, and having then shown how this approach might engage productively with (and be engaged by) particular characteristics of the Iranian diaspora process in the second part of the chapter, I now foreground previous literature on diasporic food, in order to contextualise my own focus on commercial food spaces. Broadly, I discuss how and why food has featured strongly in a number of studies of diaspora culture; then look more specifically at work on commercial food spaces such as restaurants and grocery stores; show how diaspora food studies have been particularly pre-occupied with issues of cultural and culinary authenticity; and finally give the reader some context on Iranian diasporic cuisine.

2.4.1 Food in the Diaspora Space

Shanahan (2002, p.7) argues that “food is inherently geographic. Food comes *from somewhere*. Different foods are associated with different groups of people. And such cultural identities are *place based*”. These dynamics are central in diasporan interactions with food: first where food comes from, and second, the culinary rituals and everyday practices that are associated with a common sense of cultural identity (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002; Giradelli, 2004). A focus on food in diasporan settings yields insight not only to the signifiers that are considered essential in maintaining identity but also to processes of identity (re)production and cultural consumption in different geographic settings (Gabbacia, 2009).

Foods can be thought of as being attached to particular ideological formations, such as places and ethnicities. These ties can be explored through a diasporan focus: as food travels over time and space, new meanings accumulate, thereby establishing dynamic foodways and giving rise to new foodscapes. Food production in transnational spaces often leads to the reshaping of ingredients and cooking methods, subsequently reshaping diasporic food cultures such that dishes sometimes bear little resemblance to the ‘original’ version. The movement of food and people has subsequently led to both a questioning of authenticity and a striving to produce ‘authentic’ food. These foods are often found in sites of consumption, spaces such as restaurants, with disparate representations of ‘the Other’ and ‘the exotic’ reconfiguring food and identities.

Gupta (2012) acknowledges that immigrants have actively reshaped foods in host countries, giving way to new “national dishes”. Panayi (2008) traces out the long history of such processes in British culinary history. Alison James (1997) further develops this point, in particular questioning the Britishness of British food, and examining how food preferences have changed since the 1990s, when an interest in foreign food began to burgeon. Thus, for Ahmed (2008, p.62), a dish such as chicken tikka masala is “a metaphor for the BrAsian experience”. Likewise, discussing chicken tikka masala in relation to multiculturalism, Jackson (2002) states that the dish became a symbol of multicultural Britain for New Labour, and then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook. Soon after this governmental adoption, London based restaurateur and founding editor of *Tandoori* magazine Iqbal Wahaab (2001) made a rebuttal, explaining his amusement that such a fabricated, clichéd dish had come to be a symbol of British multiculturalism. Chicken tikka masala thus symbolises a distinctive ‘diaspora space’ (Brah, 1996), occupied by both diasporic and host subjects, and characterised by contested politics of identity. It is indicative of how food can both reinforce and reconfigure identities framed in national optics, forming a space in which identity politics play out (Cook, Crang and Thorpe, 1999).

As the case of chicken tikka masala illustrates, foods and cuisines undergo processes of creolisation in the diaspora. In the Canadian context this creolisation is seen with butter chicken, which suits the Canadian palate. It is therefore not uncommon to see dishes such as butter chicken poutine, or Vancouver/West Coast style sushi, which do not speak to any particular ethnicity

and where authenticity is not the point. More generally, foods become adapted in a diasporan setting, both because of the availability of different ingredients and in response to different consumer tastes. During my fieldwork in Vancouver, as Dr. Lenore Newman (a Geography Professor at the University of the Fraser Valley, BC) and I sat down for lunch at Rangoli restaurant in Vancouver, we began discussing why so many Canadian chefs were mixing local ingredients into the recipes of another culture. In this context, we asked the co-owner of Vij's and Rangoli restaurants, Meeru Dhalwala, about the creation of the blueberry lassi that was available at Vij's Railway Express food truck. Meeru noted that the blueberry was very much from Vancouver, and in India

it wouldn't be blueberry it would probably be lychee or mango, maybe papaya. (Personal interview, Meeru Dhalwala, Vancouver, August 2014)

In this context, a new foodscape is created which re-imagines traditional foods and recipes.

The role of immigrants in how the British foodscape has evolved recently became a topic of conversation for the well-known British 'celebrity' chef Nigel Slater. Writing for *The Guardian* newspaper (2015), Slater looks at "how immigration made British food great" through a series of stories by five young chefs on the cultural influences in their cooking. He notes that the British high street is occupied by numerous restaurants offering foods from tacos to Korean fried chicken. Some of these spaces are owned by global chains, but most are run independently by immigrant families. He notes that this eagerness to

consume “the other” is also translated into the home, where ingredients like pomegranate molasses and cardamom are readily available in supermarkets. For Slater, the willingness to adapt recipes supersedes authenticity, suiting “non-pedants who just want something good to eat” (unpaginated; para. 6). Going back to the high street, Slater unpacks the international quality that it holds, by using the example of the dumpling. The dumpling could be Italian ravioli, Japanese gyoza or Polish perogi, all essentially the same thing: a filling enclosed in dough. Here the point is to celebrate the foods that have found their way into British kitchens. As noted by Paul Gilroy (1991), “it ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at”.

2.4.2 Restaurants as Diasporic Spaces of Consumption

London and Vancouver boast several thousand eateries, which have come to represent the symbolic economy of these cities (Zukin, 1995), contributing to place making and city branding (Bell, 2002). Zukin (1995) states that eateries are part of the entertainment economy; “they are places of creation and transformation” (p.8) where culture is re-presented, allowing for multicultural interaction to occur in urban spaces. For Zukin, restaurants function as a *production of space*, embodying financial investment and cultural meanings, and a *production of symbols*, operating as a space of commercial exchange and social identity. In other words, restaurants are sites of cultural production where ethnicities become commodified and constructed in various ways.

In his examination of ethnic restaurants in Montreal, Nash (2009) demonstrates the complexity of their ‘ethnicity’, arguing that it is a symbolic entity

(drawing on Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990). According to Nash, the ethnicity of an 'ethnic restaurant' can be measured through "criteria such as décor, architecture, name, food or cuisine" (2009, p.9). However, Nash's indicators are limited as they do not account for people. Here there are interesting relations between personal identities and the ethnic coding of restaurants; this can be exemplified through sushi restaurants in Vancouver. Despite its wide availability and popularity, sushi is still perceived as being an exotic food, which is why many Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese immigrants operate sushi restaurateurs because of the prestige associated with it. According to Bestor (2000), they believe that the majority of customers cannot distinguish between the various Asian ethnicities. This was also noted by Vancouver based Japanese chef Hidekazu Tojo:

93% of sushi restaurants are run by non-Japanese people. They are run by the Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and even Canadian [read: white Canadian]. They even serve it at hotels, the Fairmont, Four Seasons; even the Cactus Club serves sushi. It's become a main North American food now. (Personal interview, Hidekazu Tojo, Vancouver, August 2014)

So-called 'Indian' restaurants in the UK have also been looked at as a case of these issues. Highmore (2009) examines Indian restaurants found on the British high street. These restaurants have a long-standing presence in British culture, first emerging during the imperial era and then extending reach across most cities and towns during the period of South Asian migrations from the 1950s to the 1980s. According to Highmore (2009), the first Indian restaurant in Britain, the Hindostanee Coffee House which opened in 1810, catered to Anglo-Indians wanting to experience a nostalgic image of India. Also intrinsic to the dining

experience is the aesthetics of the restaurant. Thus, a famous early Indian restaurant, Veeraswamy's on Regent Street, London conjured up a neo-colonial image of Imperial opulence: with walls decorated with tiger skins; menus inspired from the Mughal Empire and Raj; and waiting staff "dressed in traditional clothes, worn with imperial flare, just right to receive and serve their old masters" (Choudhury, 1995, p. 65). Though it has undergone changes, the neo-colonial image still exists through the décor and the staffing of a *darwan* (doorman) dressed in Indian attire with a turban.

Although Indian restaurants have become part of the urban and rural landscape, menus across the board are similar and have become standardized. For Highmore, high street Indian restaurants cater towards an Anglo-Celtic culture, but are also established with a role as being social centres, for members of the diasporic community. He makes the comment that the Indian restaurant serves a dual purpose: it provides a social space for the diasporic community, but also addresses western culture and expectations through the cuisine served and décor. As material cultures travel through space and time they take on new properties and change. According to Highmore (2009, p.185), diasporic culture is frequently subject to being dubbed as artificial or improvised, "a cultural form that out of necessity has had to adapt a diasporic food culture to a specific non-diasporic audience and context". In the case of the Indian restaurant in the UK, all restaurants, including those that were owned and run by British Bangladeshis and British Pakistanis, were initially branded as "Indian". This constitutes a form of inauthenticity, as there was no presence for Bangladeshi identity in these

restaurants. However, this picture has changed somewhat; for example, many of the Bangladeshi restaurants located on Brick Lane in London explicitly now state that they are Bangladeshi.

Davis (2002), paralleling the argument made by Highmore (2009), argues that Chinese foodways in the US have become altered, reflecting both Chinese and Chinese-American culture. The initial purpose of many Chinese restaurants was to provide immigrant bachelors with cheap meals and occasionally banquets for wealthy clients. Later on they became popular among non-Chinese people, what Imogene Lim and John Eng-Wong (1993, cited in Davis 2002) refer to as “cultural outposts”, providing exposure to an altered Chinese culture through cuisine and a styled material landscape. In order to accommodate a non-Chinese clientele, the food produced by Chinese and Chinese-American restaurants becomes negotiated and transformed which is “both ‘unauthentic’ fabrication and the product of an ‘authentic’ cultural adaptation” (Davis, 2002, p.70). Thus diasporic foodways are symbolically loaded, carrying connotations of ethnicity, otherness, authenticity, identity and obfuscation.

Altered foodways shape ethnic identities to the ideals of the host country. They represent a commercialisation of ethnic material culture. Wang and Lo (2007a; 2007b), Mudu (2007), Cho (2010) and Everts (2010) recognise that ethnically coded (through people, practices and objects) restaurants, cater to both the ‘mainstream’ market and the ‘Other’. For Brown and Mussell (1985), commercialised diasporic restaurants convey relatively static and stereotypical images in terms of interior design. Barbas (2003) builds on this through her

argument on Chinese restaurants as agents of culinary and cultural change. In her discussion on Chinatowns in America, she notes that the 1990s campaign to clean up Chinatowns in order to attract more tourists led to restaurants being transformed in order to cater for the non-Chinese clientele. They were adorned with “gaudy lanterns, colourful wall decorations, and bright red façades, to match stereotypical white fantasies of “Oriental” décor...” (Barbas, 2003, p.674). The representation of what Chinese culture is becomes staged for an external audience.

This staging is implicated in an ambivalent cultural politics. Davis (2002) states that the diasporan restaurant acts as a space of both inclusion and exclusion: inclusion, in so far as the dominant culture consumes the modified product; but also exclusion, as it is a setting within which the ethnicised “other” does not share their “real” food and real selves. In the restaurants Barbas (2003) describes new dishes were created such as pineapple chicken, stuffed chicken wings and chop suey. Chop suey was ridiculed for its inauthenticity, described by Crow (1973, p.425) as “a culinary joke at the expense of the foreigner”, but became one of the most popular Chinese American dishes. Chinese food had become popular among Jewish communities in New York (Miller, 2006), thus illustrating that one diasporic community can cater for another diasporic community through food.

My general argument, then, is that diasporic food spaces such as restaurants are reflective of multicultural landscapes, multicultural consumption, and everyday cosmopolitanism. In what Ulrich Beck (2003) refers to as “banal

cosmopolitanism” mundane daily activities such as eating become fetishized; re-staged and consumed as products for mass markets. David Bell (2002, p. 17) refers to the ‘multiculti cosmo-metro life’ where ethnic cultures are constructed as forms of difference to be consumed, rather than as differences that are expected to assimilate to a singular national identity. These spaces act as complex spaces of belonging for diasporic communities. They perform complex representations of diasporan identities.

2.4.3 Grocery Stores as Diasporic Spaces of Consumption

Like restaurants, shops have also come to represent the symbolic economy of cities, in the sense that they are places where commodities and identities are exchanged. Recent work has explored the nature of such exchanges, casting shops as social spaces of ‘encounter’. Shops are also diasporic food spaces, ones that not only engage so-called ‘mainstream’ public cultures of consumption but that can also act as complex spaces of belonging for diasporic communities. Let me elaborate on both these emphases.

As part of a larger ethnographic study, Purnima Mankekar (2002) examines how text, images and commodities are circulated in a transnational market between India and the USA in grocery stores in the San Francisco Bay Area. In what she refers to as “India shopping”, Mankekar’s findings show that these spaces produce a constructed and contested representation of India, where cultures and objects are jointly circulated. More generally, it has been recognised that diasporic objects accumulate different values as they circulate, as for example when brand named products evoke nostalgia and antagonism.

Naficy (1991, p.290) argues that commodities act as “cultural mnemonics”, evoking a narrative of nostalgia. Naficy (1991, p. 285) argues that “nostalgia becomes a major cultural practice and representational practice among the exiles”, an ideological nostalgia producing an “imaginary geography” through a series of objects. Writing on Iranian nostalgia in diasporic Iranian homes, Naficy (1991, p. 290) argues “the Persian art and crafts that decorate the exiles’ homes do not so much *reproduce* Iran as *produce* a world made up of signs...The meaning that is produced involves establishing both cultural and ethnic differentiation (from the host society) and cultural and ethnic continuity (with an idealised past and the homeland)...”. Similarly, beyond the home, the objects and foods available in shops and restaurants (re)produce and validate Iranian culture and Iranian identities in the diaspora.

For Mankekar (2002) the diasporic grocery shop also functions as a complex social space for diasporic and host communities. For diasporic communities such shops provide a space where people gather and exchange information about community events, in her empirical case of Bay Area Indian stores displayed in the form of posters on window fronts. They become gendered spaces, where women would meet regularly and talk about their homes and families. For Mankekar such shops are reminiscent of bazaars in India, where music would be blaring, people talking loudly, and trying to haggle. Rather differently, for ‘host communities’ they operate as spaces where exotic goods can be purchased and where such diasporan community life becomes part of the affective atmosphere of Otherness to be consumed.

Everts (2010) further develops the analysis of the social interaction taking place in grocery stores, through the study of the social practices in immigrant Turkish run grocery stores in Germany. He argues that the meanings of these spaces are not produced solely from the design of the shop, the nationality of the shopkeeper or the products sold, “but are constituted through practice” (p.848), and in particular through the interactions between customers and shopkeepers. His findings show that the shared practices between immigrant Turkish shopkeepers and German customers produce nuanced understandings of multiculturalism as well as a “fetishisation of ethnicity” (p.860). He concludes that on the one hand some spaces are ethnically coded as ‘Turkish’, stocking specialist goods, but on the other, the social relationships that develop between the shopkeepers and regular customers leads such fetishisation being replaced with a shared mundane ‘everyday’.

Everts analyses his data through the themes of belonging, remembering and socialising. A sense of belonging allows the immigrant shopkeepers to integrate socially and economically into the local community. For the host community a sense of belonging is created through the care that the shopkeepers have for the community and their customers. They become seen as acquaintances. The spaces and products become assemblages of memories, partly shared but also distinct. Thus, for non-Turkish German customers, the presence of fresh foods remind them of the traditional shopping experience as opposed to the modern urban pre-packaged one. The shop speaks to their own personal and cultural histories. For Everts’ participating shop-keeper, such fresh

foods may have other memories. For example, he imitates the way the fruit is displayed in North African and Middle Eastern countries, where they are cut in half and placed on top of boxes to show what they look like, because he thinks it looks nice. The fruit, in this case an orange, holds a special meaning in the store, but at home is an ordinary orange. Socialising in these stores is based on trust between the shopkeeper and the customer. Personal contact is made not just through the selling of goods, but the personal exchanges made between the shopkeeper and customers. These can be through asking such questions as how to store and cook the foods, but also include long lasting relationships being formed with shopkeepers and regular customers.

These social relations between shop-keepers and customers are also central to Mobasher's (2007) discussion of the Iranian ethnic economy in the USA. Mobasher's particular concern is with how links are forged between the Iranian ethnic economy and the Iranian diasporan community. Elaborating on the arguments presented by Mankekar and Everts on the complex social interactions between immigrant business owners and the community, Mobasher argues that the Iranian ethnic economy is an integral part of the Iranian community, crucial in reinforcing and maintaining relationships amongst the diaspora. He states that these relationships are maintained and reinforced by Iranian business owners (of grocery stores and restaurants) participating in and sponsoring community events such as *Nowruz* celebrations. Participation and co-sponsorship illustrates "the owners of ethnic restaurants and grocery stores strive to gain reputation and creditability as concerned, decent, generous, and well thought-of members of the

community” (Mobasher, 2007, p. 240). Co-sponsorship and participation in this context thus also acts as a form of marketing.

According to Mobasher, marketing more generally allows Iranian businesses to maintain community links. Businesses will regularly place extensive advertisements in print media, such as Iranian magazines. The Iranian-American community also have access to an Iranian Yellow Pages, which only lists Iranian services (Figure 2.2).

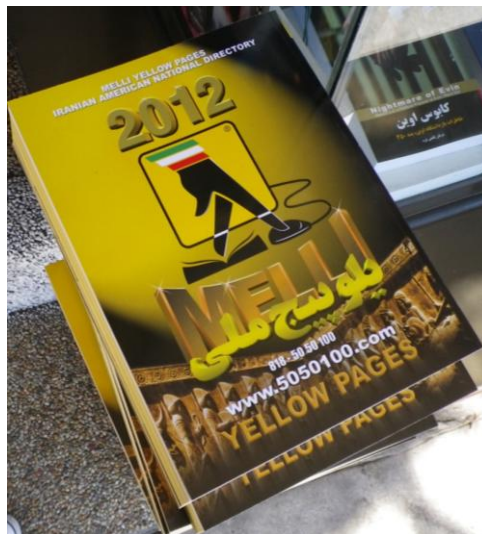


Figure 2.2 Iranian Yellow Pages at Westwood, Los Angeles (2013)

In addition to emphasising low prices and high quality products, the advertisements place emphasis on the cultural values of *rastee* (honesty), *dostee* (friendliness), *samemeeat* (cordiality/sincerity), and *safa* (pleasantness). In so doing, the marketing both taps into, and helps to produce, a nostalgia for the pleasant atmospheres of past shopping in Iran. Mobasher concludes that these advertisements use “such words as Iran, Iranian, Persian, Iranian community,

Iranian compatriots, Iranian nationality and Iranian culture” (Mobasher, 2010, p. 241) to further crystallise the links between the Iranian ethnic economy and the Iranian community and the diasporic Iranian identity.

In my own research I attended to both shops and restaurants. In part this was a response to how past scholarship suggests that they might function in slightly different ways as spaces of diasporic cultural production and consumption. For example, we have seen above how restaurants often operate as sites where there is an emphasis on authenticity being produced through food and décor. On the other hand, in shops the authenticity is perhaps navigated differently, producing an authenticity based on nostalgia and of everyday interaction (Duruz, Luckman and Bishop, 2011). Both shops and restaurants, however, mark the cultural connection between diasporic and host communities, and in some cases become local neighbourhood institutions (Zukin, 1995).

2.4.4 Questioning Authenticity

The literatures outlined above illustrate how authenticity is a complex concept in which food is evaluated and given legitimacy. In this section I want to turn to the question of authenticity more directly, given how central it is to many diasporic commercial economies and cultures of food. In setting out the approach I will develop during the substantive chapters of the thesis, I argue that authenticity is a socially constructed quality that people strive to produce. It is a term that has become overly fetishised and problematic, not allowing food to be judged on its own merit. For Appadurai (1986, p.25), “authenticity measures the degree to which something is more or less what it *ought* to be. It is thus a norm of

some sort". He then questions who is the authoritative voice in deciding what is authentic and what is not.

In my perspective, authenticity is not a cultural quality asking for arbitration, but a cultural construction requiring analysis of how, why and for whom it is made. Johnston and Bauman (2010) argue that authenticity is a complex socially constructed term; it is not inherent. Its use in culinary matters is relational to other foods, which are then made inauthentic. Johnston and Bauman (2010) unpack the notion of authenticity in a social context, and argue that (paradoxically) it is a modern term (Appadurai, 1986; Cohen, 1988; Fine, 2003). Drawing on Taylor (1992), Johnston and Bauman state that over time authenticity "has been corrupted through a narcissistic focus – understanding authenticity exclusively as being true to one's self" and suggest "that authenticity must be reconnected to a larger social context" (2010, p.70). They argue that people strive to seek authenticity because it matters to others, thus supporting the logic if it is authentic, then it must be good.

Authenticity is a term that is used in connection to diasporic and ethnic foods, allowing consumers to connect with the exotic Other. Johnston and Bauman (2010) conducted participant interviews on what authenticity meant to different people. For the participants, authenticity meant cooking and preparing foods with the ingredients that are used in their place of origin and are not modified to suit the host country's tastes. However, this is not always possible to achieve, for a variety of reasons. Food blogger Mijune Pak (2013a, unpaginated, para. 6) argues that "once ethnic food is made outside of its natural context it is

almost inauthentic by default”, simply because the ingredients are not available, and flavours are impossible to replicate. Like Johnston and Bauman (2010), Pak (2013a) argues that often people do not know what authentic is, may not even like it, or may not appreciate it. She argues that working towards authenticity is futile, especially in a restaurant setting where recipes are adapted due to resource availability and tastes.

In her book *Exotic Appetites*, Lisa Heldke (2003) critiques culinary tourism and its quest for the exotic. She dispels the notion that ‘food adventurers’ know what is meant by the term authentic. She states:

For the most part, we just know what we mean by the word authentic. I don’t believe this anymore. I’ve come to think that the very idea of authenticity is both confused and confusing. Food adventurers’ over-enthusiasm for it marks yet another way in which we participate in the appropriation and exploitation of food and dominated cultures (2003, p.24).

For Heldke, it seems the word ‘authenticity’ is overused as a synonym for “good”; she argues for a wider range of ways to judge food on its own merits.

A common way to understand authenticity is through replication, where authenticity is achieved by using the same ingredients and same cooking methods, and only substituting when absolutely necessary and not so much that the substitute radically alters the original. However, authenticity is not always possible to achieve in this sense, as cuisines become adapted over time and space. Authenticity is also dependent on context in terms of for whom and why is it created. Illustratively, Heldke (2003) draws upon Keith Floyd’s *Far Flung Floyd* travel cookbook on Southeast Asia, in particular a passage where he

states that satay is not Malaysian, as its origin is Arabic. She goes on to argue that for Floyd food's authenticity seems to be defined by whether its origin lays within a specific locale. However, to use origin as a measure for authenticity does not work, ignoring long histories of cultural encounter and the trading of ingredients and foods.

To illustrate the complex nature of using authenticity as a descriptor Heldke turns to the story of the curry, which is simultaneously authentic and inauthentic: "if curry were a person, it would be the sort of person your mother told you to avoid as a child; untrustworthy and slippery. A big phony" (2003, p. 34). First, is the origin of the word, for which there are several possibilities: 1) the Tamil word "*kari*" meaning sauce; 2) the North Indian dish "*karhi*", a buttermilk curry; 3) the "*kahari*" metal wok like vessel in which the curry is cooked; and 4) the word is a British invention and that no such word was used to describe such a dish in South Asia. By providing a historical background into curry, Heldke acknowledges that the Indian meal has been Anglicized: by the way that it is cooked (in particular, through the use of curry powder; no such thing exists in India and it is not used by diasporic Indians); and the way in which it is served, in terms of European-style courses. Heldke argues that furthermore, like the dal puri, there is a "curry diaspora", where the word "curry" is featured in other ethnic restaurant menus such as Thai, Jamaican and Japanese.

Drawing upon the work of the National Restaurant Association, Heldke reports that consumers, particularly culture-oriented ones, seek out restaurants based on authenticity rather than taste: "I like to go to restaurants where natives

of the that cuisine eat” (National Restaurant Association, 1995, p.50). Jon May (1996) echoes this in his study on the imaginative geographies framing the consumption of ‘exotic’ foods. He proposes that “the authentically exotic is that which is bought in places where only the ‘original’ consumers of these foods come to eat or shop, lending the food itself an added degree of ‘authenticity’” (May, 1996, p.61). May also points out that this practice is promoted by cultural intermediaries, who guide consumers on what and where to consume/eat. Thus in London *Time Out* magazine advised “increasingly, restaurant-goers have taken to passing up High-Street versions of ethnic food and making trips to sample the real thing. To do so, it’s best to head for the area where that community has settled, and where you’ll find the restaurants used by the local population (Stacey, 1995, p.35). He labels this as a ‘continua of exotic’, accounting for the food itself and the context of its purchase.

Heldke makes the compelling argument that

in search of authenticity, we find our attention drawn by novelty...We are not terribly interested in doing the work of coming to understand another cuisine; what we want is a quick fix meal that will give us an authentic relationship to an authentic tradition immediately – without any mundane, laborious effort (2003, p.28).

In the endnotes to her book, Heldke further goes on to state that thinking of authenticity as novelty implies that authenticity can be purchased as a good, hence authenticity is captured in the commodity. In other words, far from comprising a simple adherence to an original state, authenticity marks a fundamental cultural transformation, a focus on novelty and the commodity form.

Jackson (2013) states that academics treat the term authenticity with scepticism because it is overused to describe food products by food producers in marketing materials. He suggests there are a number of concepts which can add critical nuance. The concept of “staged authenticity”, for example, is predominant in tourism studies, in particular with Dean MacCannell’s (1976) account of how tourists search for an authentic experience. In order to avoid any disbelief, places will often stage an authenticity for pleasure and entertainment. Chi and Jackson (2011) explore this issue in their work on Thai restaurants in Taiwan, with a particular focus on décor, signage and the food itself. They “suggest that a variety of authenticating strategies are used by different kinds of restaurant, drawing on a range of culinary imaginaries to appeal to different market segments, from Thai migrant workers to tourists and business people with cosmopolitan tastes” (p.28). Chi and Jackson conclude that “the language of authenticity” is used predominantly by “upscale” restaurants, whereas others portray authenticity through food and rarely feel the need to advertise authenticity explicitly.

In general, then, existing research on culinary culture has both recognised the cultural power of authenticity whilst, at the same time, highlighted its constructed and complex character. Taking this forward, my own research views authenticity as a key, contested and sometimes flexible quality implicated in the representations of identity staged in spaces such as Iranian restaurants and food stores.

2.4.5 Bodily Engagements with Food and Foodscapes

The literatures outlined above show that food is a material object which emulates cultural and social interactions. For Forrest and Murphy (2013), culture is encountered through the experiences of tasting, smelling, touching, seeing and hearing, allowing individuals to be part of a collective group. They argue

that paying attention to food from the perspective of the senses allows us to place individual experience within cultural and social context, and to examine how social and cultural context shapes individual sensory experience. Sensory studies of food are positioned to do both because food is such a relentlessly material subject, even as tasting it is also a rich abstract field for the cultural imagination. (p.353)

Given that encounters with food are an individual experience, this section teases out the conceptual significance of food's "affective" resonances, the aesthetics of food, including texture, aroma and gustatory taste. It also builds an argument that bodily engagements of food contribute to the notions of nostalgia and belonging. Though I primarily focus on the visual in my empirical chapters, a wider discussion on gustatory taste is necessary for understanding what is consumed, where, how and why.

2.4.5.1 Engaging with the Senses

Adopting an analytical framework based on aesthetics helps to provide a nuanced understanding on the sensory and bodily engagements with food. Naraghi and Kingsbury (2013) broadly define aesthetics as embodied feelings, sensory evaluations and judgements of taste. They argue that the analyses of aesthetics "are key yet under-researched social factors that help reproduce spaces of race, immigration and multiculturalism", thus aesthetics "actively

defines people's relations to space and society" (p.177). In the concluding chapter to *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food and South Asia* (2012) edited by Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, Ravindra S. Khare argues that culinary aesthetics are interrelated to the wider Indian concept of *rasa* aesthetics. *Rasa* is fundamental to Indian performing arts such as the Indian classical dance of *Bharatnatyam* as it displays emotions openly (Goswamy, 2005). According to Richard Schechner (2007, p.13)

...*rasa* is sensuous, proximate, experimental. *Rasa* is aromatic. *Rasa* fills space, joining the inside to the outside to the inside. Food is actively in the body, becomes part of the body, works from the inside. What was outside is transformed into what is inside. An aesthetic found on the *rasa* is fundamentally different than the one founded on the 'theatron', the rationally ordered, analytically distanced panoptic... Theory is cognate with 'theorem', 'theatre', 'theorist', and such, all from the Greek *thea*, 'a sight.'... This binding of 'knowing' to 'seeing' is the root metaphor/master narrative of Western thought.

For Ray (2012, 2016) and Khare (1992) the adoption of *rasa* aesthetics allows for a holistic analysis of taste, where all the senses are synthesised, and is often related to memory. The *rasa* approach seems to be appropriate for framing the aesthetics of the senses for Iranian food, as Dana-Haeri and Ghorashian (2011, p.1) argue "Persian cuisine is quite distinct from other 'Middle Eastern' styles of cooking in the way it emphasises presentation, colour and fragrance. It combines herbs and spices with the main ingredients to create intriguing layers of flavour and aroma, none of which overwhelm the others."

For Sutton, the senses (taste, smell, sound, sight and touch) are connected, which he describes as "synthesia"- a union of the senses. The

senses evoke memories of everyday experiences. Sutton believes all the senses should be considered equal, rather than one being superior over the other, as illustrated by the “hierarchies of the senses”, which elevate the visual and aural, and the rest redundant (Classen, 1997; Howes, 2003; Jütte, 2005; Ferguson, 2011). Referring to Smith (2008), Forrest and Murphy (2013) argue visual and aural senses are elevated as they are encountered more objectively and are easily shared. Historically taste is deemed to be lower ranked because it is deeply subjective and changes when encountered, specifically during mastication (Ferguson, 2011). According to Forrest and Murphy (2013) there are two major trends in terms of the analysis of taste: “those that treat the taste of food as commodity, and those that treat the taste of food as aesthetic” (p. 356). The taste of food as a commodity examines the role of food which can shape and transform national and international markets, such as sugar, which is explored in detail by Sidney Mintz (1986) in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. On the other hand, taste can be analysed as a sensory experience and as a social construction in a Bourdieuan sense: “food and the sense intimately embody aesthetic taste and regurgitate philosophies and desires, and one makes distinctions because eating and experiencing the sensorial is part of being alive (a necessity) but it is also part of an intellectual pursuit (luxury) (Bourdieu, 1984; Rozin and Siegal, 2003; Fleissner, 2008)” (Forrest and Murphy, 2013, p. 359). Thus, taste is integrated into practice rather than separated (Gheradi, 2009).

Forrest and Murphy (2013, p. 354) state that “the charge of sensory studies of food and taste is to trace out this cycle that creates and is created by physical, individual and communal experiences; and that does so in ways that are both immediate and historic”. It allows the consumer to express participation in culture and reaffirm their place in society (Forrest and Murphy, 2013). Here food symbolises social bonds and divisions, but also allows for participation through creation and recreation (Sutton, 2001).

2.4.5.2 A Sense of Smell

The importance of smell is often under rated in modern western societies (Fox, 2009). For Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994, p.9) “it might be argued that by focusing on smell to the exclusion of the other senses we have been guilty of sensory bias, and that the role of smell in culture can be only understood within a multisensory context”. However, this has not always been the case, as exemplified in the cultural history literature. Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994) argue that smell is often difficult to describe. This is can be exemplified through the durian, which is known for having a pungent smell, is often compared to the smell of rotting garbage. Yet smell evokes “strong emotional responses” (p.2) that are both good and bad, such as the smell of bread being baked in the home (Erndinç, 2001). This then becomes capitalised upon in commercial spaces, such as supermarkets that may pipe out aromas of the bakery into the store to entice and engage with shoppers (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Smell embodies various social codes as it “is enlisted not only to create and enforce class boundaries, but also ethnic and gender boundaries” (Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994, p.8).

Writing about urban smellscapes and international foods in Doncaster, Henshaw (2014) describes that some of her study participants perceived the smells of international food outlets, such as Indian and Chinese takeaways as being malodorous, therefore viewing the foods in a negative manner.

These smells/scents/aromas usually come from the use of spices and aromatics in cooking. Examining food from a historical perspective Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994), show that the ancient Romans were fond of strong flavoured and smelling foods, like garlic. Often “a perfume might well add a pleasant flavour to food, as in the case of attar of roses. Yet, if it were bitter in flavour, as myrrh, for example, was, it could instead detract from the taste of the dish” (Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994, p.23). In Renaissance European cooking herbs and spices like pepper, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg were used not only to flavour meat, but also to mask smells of decay. Floral flavours and scents were used in the form of waters, such as rosewater or flower petals to add sweetness to sweet dishes. Here the senses become synthesised as aromatics produce a pleasant aroma and add flavour.

In their discussion on Arabic foods Classen, Howes and Synnott (1994, p.105) state taste and smells “serve as an important means of cultural differentiation” as “it is said that this culinary use of aromatics ‘beautifies the food’” (p.128). Aroma is highly prized in the Arab world, impacting on the cooking methods, where foods are covered to preserve their aromas, and are served hot for their appreciation. Like the Ancient Romans and Renaissance Europeans, aromatics are used to add depths of flavour. Aromatic “spices, such as pepper,

anise, cinnamon, clove, ginger and garlic, along with dried limes, are used to add flavour to salty dishes. Saffron, cardamom and rosewater serve this role with sweet dishes” (p.127). Beverages are also fragrant. For example, saffron may be added to tea, giving the tea a semi-sweet flavour and producing a fragrant aroma. This is also evident in Iranian cooking as outlined in Chapter Six.

2.4.5.3 The Importance of Texture

Together with taste, aroma and sight, the texture of food is also significant, and is often described in relation with taste. An appropriate example here would be ice cream. Ice cream made with liquid nitrogen produces smaller crystals giving the ice cream a smoother and creamier texture. Texture is deciphered by feeling with the hands or through the act of mastication, and we sense this from an early age through to old age by engaging with food through the mouth. Texture plays on the two main categories of taste: pleasure and disgust. Generally over cooked foods are perceived to be disgusting as they can either have a rubbery (e.g. over cooked fish) or slimy (e.g. okra) texture. This is where the cooking process becomes scientific, rather than artistic practice in order to achieve the desired texture. Let me illustrate this through the example of the okra. For example when making okra curry it is vital that the okra is completely dry and cooked on a low flame minimizing a sticky and slimy texture. Foods with a “crispy” texture are more favoured, producing a sense of pleasure and enjoyment. Devasahayam (2003) recognises that “crispy” foods among the Tamil community in Malaysia are considered playful and not classed as “real” food. She shows that crispy foods are either consumed as a snack or as an

accompaniment (e.g. *appalam* (popadum) to larger vegetarian meals, producing a “textural contrast” (Brennan 1992: 242) to the softer foods like rice. Textural contrast is also prominent in Iranian foods. For example thinly cut potato sticks are used as a garnish to *khoresh t ghaymeh* adding crunchiness/crispiness to a softer stew.

2.4.5.4 The Evolution of Taste

As cuisines become adapted over time and space, cultural tastes also evolve within and between generations (Forero and Smith, 2011). In this context foodways become altered and reproduced in the diaspora. Perhaps a useful way to think about this is through the distinctions of endogenous (‘endo-cuisine’) and exogenous (‘exo-cuisine’). For Lévi-Strauss (1965) ‘endo-cuisine’ involves the consumption of foods in a private setting, implying a sense of everyday domestic consumption. On the other hand, ‘exo-cuisine’ involves the consumption of foods in public spaces, such as restaurants, implying a sense of speciality. This argument is evident in Iranian food spaces, where there are clear traditional distinctions between ‘endo-cuisine’ and ‘exo-cuisine’, but these have become merged in the diaspora, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

This resonates with the work of Roth (2001) and Kleinfelder (2004) in thinking about how ‘foreign’ cuisines are introduced. They argue that new and exotic dishes are first encountered as an ‘exo-cuisine’ and in the long term become adopted into the ‘endo-cuisine’ which is followed by adaption and performance which are made to suit ‘local’ tastes. The adoption and adaption of Indian cuisine, in particularly curry is illustrative of this (see Highmore, 2009). As

Korsmeyer (1999, p.2) points out “we cannot fully understand the character and importance of the sense of taste unless we also consider what is tasted and the circumstances that surround the exercise of this sense”. This is supported by Syliva Gheradi (2009) who argues that taste is integrated into practice rather than separated.

2.4.5.5 An Argument for Third Taste

In her work on food in South East Asia, Jean Duruz (Duruz and Khoo, 2015) presents an argument for third taste. She draws upon the consumption of Indian and Malaysian foods in Singapore, where neither Indian nor Malaysian foods are fully consumed, but a hybrid of the two are. Duruz proposes the framework of third taste or tasting hybridity is created in a zone of connection and dynamic tension of the self and other, where culinary boundaries are crossed; creating zones of connection and facilitating eat foods from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Third taste or tasting hybridity speaks to notions of negotiating third space and the everydayness of transnational belonging. Here is it plausible to draw upon postcolonial theories and practices, particularly in reference to the politics of representation and cultural belonging (Jazeel, 2012). Writing on the Sri-Lankan Women’s Association in London, Jazeel (2006) illustrates for Sri Lankans in London, Sri-Lankanness is performed through the consumption of Sri-Lankan foods, such as *String-hoppers* (beds of thin rice noodles woven into a pancake). He argues that “food traditions are common diasporic traits for fixing place, for producing nostalgic longings for a secure world with secure positionings in it”

(2006, p.23). The idea of third taste contradicts Jazeel's argument, to an extent, in that there may be a lack of secure positionings as third taste is neither here nor there. I do not understand this to be what may be termed as fusion food, but rather a creole of some sort where commonalities are thoughtfully marked and marketed upon. Thus a common sense of belonging between two diasporas is produced through taste.

2.4.5.6 **Food and Memory**

Food and foodscapes serve as a vehicle for memory and the construction of identities. We often remember places for the food we ate, where we ate it, whom we ate with, how it tasted, and possibly even having a longing for it. This has been stressed by Goddard (1996, p. 213):

If identity is constructed through memory, the memories of time and place linked to food, eating and nurturing play a key part of retrieving significant memories. Food could be seen as a sensory point of entry into a web of sentiments, memories and fantasies which largely constitute a sense of identity...

In writing about the memories of Thessalonian Jews and their memories of food, Kravva (2000, p.136) "suggest[s] that food functions as mnemonic device, as a basic ingredient in the process of creating sameness and solidifying the sense of belonging to a group". Here symbolic discourses and narratives relating to nostalgia are produced. Kravva highlights that for Jews residing in Thessaloniki memories of cooking and eating were often related to family life and commensality, through taste. The most renowned literature on food and memory comes from David Sutton's earlier work on food, memory and culture in the Greek island of Kalymnos in *Remembrance of Repasts* (2001).

Sutton demonstrates that Kalymnians ate in order to create memories as well as bringing people together. He argues that eating is an embodied practice, where “food’s memory power derives in part from *synthesia*” (Sutton, 2001, p.17) where there is a synthesis of different the senses, thus providing a nuanced understanding of the significance that food has in maintaining diasporic identities. Moreover, Sutton (p. 53) argues that “food exchange provides a metonym for the community values that many people feel are under threat from the forces of modernisation”. This argument can be applied to foods being produced and consumed in the diaspora, where tradition and authenticity are sought after. It may also speak to debates on commensality and sharing food with others, as food “is memorable as a sensory as well as social experience” (p. 73). He suggests that sensory engagement gives new meanings to objects that have been displaced in a new context, becoming symbolic on a range of geographical scales. Hence smell and taste are not fixed to specific places but can take on multiple levels of identity, to reconstruct and reconfigure memories of eating.

On one hand, Sutton discusses foods that are actively consumed in Greece, whereas Seremetakis (2005) reminisces about a peach, (*o masós tis Afrodhitis*) “the breast of Aphrodite” that is longer grown in Greece. The peach has merely become a memory. I now turn to tastes that only exist in memory. Seremetakis shows that food serves as a vehicle for memory and nostalgia, where one may seek out the foods that have the same, if not similar taste. In this case the peach. However, for Seremetakis “nothing tastes as good as the past”. Acknowledging generational differences, nostalgic experiences of consumption

are often recited through narrative. For example, my family often talk about foods that they used to eat in Uganda, which becomes translated via memory and language. Here “the senses are entangled with history, memory, forgetfulness, narrative and silence” (Seremetakis, 2005, p.298). Though new fruits replaced the Aphrodite peach, they acted as surrogates trying to simulate the flavours and aromas, however did not produce the same emotions of pleasure as the Aphrodite peach. The point here is that taste cannot be replicated, leading to question claims of authenticity.

Perhaps a more renowned example is of Proust’s (2005) account of the madeleine unlocking memories in his novel *Remembrance of Things Past*

I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure invaded my senses. (p.294)

The taste of the madeleine becomes a magical moment for Proust, in the same way the peach does for Sermetakis (2005). This then speaks to the work of Deborah Lupton (2005), who further analyses memory and taste, showing that eating forms subjective and social identities, and are literally embodied experiences. As taste is subjective, the memories associated with eating are therefore also subjective.

Debates on bodily engagements and their relation to food can validate claims of pleasure, authenticity and exoticism. If we take away the visual aspect of food, it can be argued as Korsmeyer (1999) does; food is not art, contracting the claims made by Sharon Zukin (2011), that food is art. On one hand, for Zukin

food is art, as tastes are created in a creative urban environment. On the other for Korsmeyer food is representative, where food and tastes carry symbolic meanings, making them aesthetically relevant. For her food is based on sensory pleasure, rather than an aesthetic one. In an age where the visualisation of food is dominant due to the documentation of food on social media sites, to an extent I have to disagree with Korsmeyer. For me, to achieve this, a possible option would be to “take away” the sense of sight, as is done in *Dans Le Noir*, in the Clerkenwell area of London, where diners dine in the dark, allowing for the other senses to be heightened.

2.5 Conclusion

The concept and the ways in which diaspora is thought about are no longer limited to a logic of labelling and tracing, in which, a diaspora is identified as a population present in cities like London and Vancouver but with a homeland elsewhere. Rather, diaspora studies increasingly focus on processes of ‘diasporization’ (Butler, 2005), in which ideas of culture and identity are mobilised and reproduced through specific contexts and places. In this context cultures become reworked, new cultural forms are created, becoming a part of the cosmopolitan city. In turn, everyday mundane activities such as eating become fetishized; re-staged and consumed as products for mass markets, in what Ulrich Beck (2003) refers to as “banal cosmopolitanism”. The global circulation of material goods are actively shaped in local settings, and ‘geographical knowledges’ are exchanged (Cook and Crang, 1996), with themes of authenticity and nostalgia prevalent. These ‘geographical knowledges’ are produced and

reproduced in commercial food spaces, like shops and restaurants. These commercial spaces function as sites of cultural production and symbolism of the sort recognised by Sharon Zukin (1996), where identities are staged, curated and re-produced in various ways. The shops and restaurants become sites of a staged authenticity where familiar and typical symbols proliferate. The problematic notion of authenticity becomes negotiated and teased out in numerous ways, as illustrated in the empirical chapters that follow.

The case of the Iranian diaspora has particular interest for these wider arguments. If diasporan identities are not so much states of being as complex and contested becomings, then it is notable that Iranian diasporan identity is filled with paradoxes, to the extent that even its designation (most simply, Iranian or Persian) is a creative and political intervention. In the Iranian diaspora, the politics and poetics of representation are particularly notable. As such, Iranian food spaces have a particular value as a case study of how commercial culture operates as a space of diasporan identity production. It is to those processes that much of this thesis devotes itself, as I consider the marketing, design and culinary creativity of diasporic Iranian commercial first spaces. But before turning to those issues, Chapter 3 sets out for the reader the empirical research upon which these analyses are based.

3: RESEARCHING IRANIAN FOOD SPACES IN LONDON AND VANCOUVER

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out how the empirical data was collected, constructed and analysed in order to answer the aims and objectives of the research. I outline the research process, and justify the decisions that I made, and reflect on the challenges, limitations and ethics of the research I undertook on commercial Iranian food spaces in London and Vancouver. Primarily qualitative methods were employed in constructing the empirical materials. These methods include the surveying/documentation and mapping of commercial Iranian food spaces, semi-structured interviews, and media analysis. Forms of qualitative data analysis were central to the interpretations and understandings developed from this data. I also provide justification as to why I chose to conduct the study in London and Vancouver, and how I engaged with the Iranian community in both cities. In terms of this chapter's structure, I begin with those questions of site selection; then turn to the methods used within different strands of the data construction and analysis; and towards the end of the chapter reflect on research relationships and ethics.

3.2 Site Selection: Establishing London and Vancouver as Research Sites

I chose London and Vancouver as my empirical research sites for a number of reasons. Within the Iranian diaspora, both have a significant Iranian population that is diverse in terms of ethnicity, nationality, religion and socio-economic status. London has a long-standing importance within the diaspora: it was, according to McAuliffe (2005, p. 78), “an important city prior to the revolution as a centre of European contact for the Shah’s outward-looking gaze”. Vancouver’s Iranian diaspora is more recent, primarily formed in the post-Revolutionary period (Swanton, 2003). Both cities pride themselves in being multicultural, which is reflected through their urban landscapes (e.g. Anderson, 1987; Eade, 2001; Mitchell, 1993). Both are gateway cities in terms of immigration (Ley and Murphy, 2001). The focus on Vancouver and London also addresses gaps in the wider scholarship on the Iranian diaspora, which hitherto has mainly addressed the Iranian diaspora in Los Angeles and in other European nations such as Sweden.

In turn, a focus on London and Vancouver extends existing work on diasporas in the two cities, via the relatively little studied case of the Iranian diaspora. For example, the case study focus on the Iranian presence in Vancouver ensures a contribution to the Canadian geographical scholarship on Pacific Coast diasporas, as much more to date has been written about Vancouver’s cultural landscape in relation to the Chinese diaspora (Ley, 2004, 2005, 2011; Ley and Waters, 2004; Pottie-Sherman and Hiebert, 2015; Waters, 2002, 2003) and, to a lesser degree, South Asian diaspora (Walton-Roberts,

2004). London has clearly had much research on its character as a 'diaspora city', with perhaps a particular focus on its South Asian communities (see Kim, 2014; McLoughlin, Gould and Kabir, 2014; Raman, 2011).

There is a small amount of existing work on the Iranian diaspora in both cities (Gholami, 2015; McAuliffe, 2005; Spellman, 2005; Swanton, 2003). Gholami's (2015) study focuses on secularism and identity among the Muslim Iranian diaspora in London. Swanton (2003) examines Iranian identities in Vancouver via a critical engagement with official statistics and media representations. McAuliffe (2005) investigates multiculturalism and national identity in Sydney, London and Vancouver through empirical case studies of Iranian communities in these cities. Spellman (2005) explores how Muslim Iranians in London maintain, negotiate and reject religious practices in the diaspora as part of their identity. My research updates and extends this past work in both cities, and offers a distinctive focus through its attention to the material cultures of food.

In terms of overall research design, my aim is not to compare and contrast the two cities in which I worked. Instead, in the analyses that follow I look at them in tandem, recognising the value of having more than one study site in order to study diaspora processes and their localizations. Drawing on both cases highlights the differences in the ways in which the Iranian diaspora is represented and represents itself in each city, given local and national contexts, and the varying history of Iranian immigration to each city. My reasons for choosing Vancouver and London were personal as well as academic. London was an

obvious choice study site as this is where I reside. I chose Vancouver as my second study site as it is a city with which I am familiar as I lived there for three years during the course of my Masters degree. I began to take an interest in the Iranian diaspora after going to a *Nowruz* (Persian New Year) event with a friend in Vancouver, and from her PhD research on the Iranian diaspora in Los Angeles.

My approach to this study is different to that of Brightwell (2012), Tanaka (2008) and Matus Ruiz (2012), all of whom conducted similar research on diasporic Brazilian food, diasporic Japanese food and diasporic Mexican food, respectively. My approach differs in that I am an outsider to the Iranian community, whereas Brightwell is Brazilian, Tanaka is Japanese and Ruiz is Mexican. This may therefore have an impact into the kind of responses that I have received (Ganga and Scott, 2006). I am not Iranian nor do I have any Iranian heritage. This confused many of the Iranians and non-Iranians alike that I spoke to, who thought that because I was researching Iranian culture therefore I must be an Iranian. I was met with questions of curiosity as to why I was interested in Iranian culture. When conducting the interviews I would ask my participants if they had any questions for me; many were curious as to why I was conducting this research given my own background. My mother was born and raised in Uganda, and was exiled to UK during the 1970s along with my grandparents, uncles and aunts. My father migrated to the UK from India and I was born in the UK. Many of my participants also thought that I was Iranian because of my physical appearance and name; I was told many times that there

is an Iranian name, Pariya which sounds like Priya. In attempting to facilitate connections, they would often also refer back to similarities between Iranian and Indian culture when talking about food.

These insider-outsider dichotomies are widely discussed in the qualitative methods literature. The literature generally argues that one is never simply an insider or an outsider, as “we have overlapping racial, socio-economic, gender, ethnic and other characteristics” (Hay, 2005, p.26; Rose, 1997). These insider-outsider relationships are also complex because the status of being an insider or outsider is not fixed (Mullings, 1999); over time the outsider can become an insider. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) expand on this further, arguing that insider versus outside dichotomies are more complex than they appear. Rather than placing emphasis on one or the other, they argue that relationships are fluid and multilayered; hence the hyphen conjoining the binaries acts as a third space, “a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction” (p.60). They draw upon Hall (1990) who states “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within” (p. 222); some experiences can be shared, whereas others cannot. For Dwyer and Buckle (2009) the insider-outsider relationship places emphasis on acceptance, which automatically leads to trust and openness. It is about a commonality, where “participants might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel ‘you are one of us’ and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don’t understand)” (p.58). This

mutual understanding and acceptance can allow for access and a common basis for research. On the other hand, however, one can also make a case for how an 'outsider' status can foster productive research relationships, for example by allowing the researcher to be seen as disinterested in relation to competing 'insider' interests, or by positioning the researcher as a supplicant and ingénue, requiring tacit knowledge to be explained to them, and thus able to ask 'obvious' questions and interrogate what may seem like common-sense understandings and practices.

My own research practice showed a complex and dynamic positioning in relation to the insider-outsider debates. For example, I was positioned as an outsider to the Iranian diaspora and Iranian culture, but as an insider in terms of personal understanding of issues on diaspora, given my own background. The topic of food acted as a bridge between my participants and me, as they would often compare the Iranian foods to Indian ones, using phrases like "you have" and "we have". My positionality was different in London and Vancouver. In the latter I was a 'double outsider', neither Iranian nor Canadian. As it turned out, I found this to be an advantage when seeking to gain research participants, with recruitment to the research process proving easier in Vancouver than it had in the first stage of the research in London. My sense was that in Vancouver people were keen to help and be hospitable to a 'foreigner'. Of course, the different experiences of access negotiations at this stage of the research also reflected my own learning and growing experience. When I returned from Vancouver, I found myself better able to present myself and my interests to London-based

participants too. More generally, as the research progressed I was better able to understand how the Iranian diaspora was represented, and the complexities that underpin these representations. I gained knowledge and networks that allowed me to bridge across the 'outsider-insider' duality. During the early stages of my research I found there were polarities in ways in which the Iranian diaspora is portrayed by the media. On one hand Iranians (particularly in Iran) are portrayed as being fundamentalists, while on the other hand diasporic Iranians (particularly in Los Angeles) are portrayed as being opulent and hedonistic, each one representing a somewhat distorted reality. In order to gain further insight and trust and acceptance I immersed myself into the Iranian culture by attending a range of social events, and dining in restaurants and visiting shops on a regular basis. In so doing I gained knowledge; showed a commitment to understanding; and gained contacts. Research is not simply a matter of being inside or outside of one's subject matter, but of establishing respectful, trusting and reciprocal relationships that acknowledge the different positionalities of researcher and researched. Over time I was increasingly able to establish such relationships in both Vancouver and London.

3.3 Surveying the Spaces: Mapping, Observations, and Photographic Documentation

The first phase of the empirical data collection involved finding out where the various shops and restaurants were and, broadly, the nature of the 'Iranian product' that they provided. To this end I first conducted an internet search of Iranian shops and restaurants in each city, in addition to talking to people

(community contacts, other researchers) about which Iranian restaurants and shops I should visit. After I compiled a list, I went to visit as many of the shops and restaurants as I could. My database comprised of 122 shops and restaurants (71 in London, 51 in Vancouver). This process was iterative: visits also led to further suggestions for businesses that I should know about. In total I visited 93 restaurants and shops selling Iranian foods in London and Vancouver. In London I visited a total number of 51 establishments: 2 of these were food stalls, 2 were 'pop-ups', 33 were restaurants and 14 were shops. In Vancouver I visited a total of 42 establishments: 4 of these were non-Iranian shops and restaurants selling Iranian foods, 17 were restaurants, 20 were shops and 1 was a 'food truck' (see Appendix A for a full list of places visited and interviewed).

My aim in the initial visits was to develop an understanding of what these restaurants and shops looked like in terms of size and décor; where they were located; and the kinds of foods that they sold. In some cases this meant talking with staff in the outlets for a while; time spent in the shops and restaurants observing and sampling products; and a request for permission to undertake initial documentation (e.g. photography; notes on the foods sold in shops; a copy of a menu from a restaurant). This initial work was also designed to give me more information in advance of approaching outlets for more in-depth work, including interviewing (see below for further details).

I started my initial field visits in London (initially December 2012 – March 2013, and then again September 2013 – December 2013 following a period of fieldwork in Vancouver). I would often take the tube and bus to reach my

destination. On the bus or in walking to places that I had on my initial list I would often see Iranian shops and restaurants that I had not come across on my internet search. When this occurred I would visit these spaces too and add them to my database. At times, restaurants and shops with a web presence had either closed down or changed name. Again, I amended my database on the basis of this further information. The same process was repeated in Vancouver (March 2013 – September 2013). In both cases, I visited the vast majority of all shops and restaurants that were logged on my database, though in a very few cases (particularly in London, where distances to travel and expense were greater concerns) some outlets were not approached. 20 of the outlets in London were not approached; 8 of the outlets had closed down and some were also difficult to get to by public transport. I had also found that I had reached a point of saturation, as many of the outlets in London began to look similar after a certain point. 10 of the outlets in Vancouver were not approached: 2 of the outlets were permanently closed and 2 of the outlets (Ayoub's Dried Fruit and Nuts and Persia Foods) had multiple locations which sold the same goods and aesthetically looked the same.

At these initial site visits I undertook photographic documentation of the retail spaces, focusing on both exterior signage and street presence and on the internal visual appearance and material design of the spaces. I also drew sketch maps of shops illustrating where products were placed and how the space was assembled. Where possible, I had short conversations with owners or staff, both to check their willingness for me to photograph and to gain more information

about the restaurant or shop. I also collected various materials – menus, flyers, newspapers as well as packing materials such as bags as a part of this initial documentation process. I then created two GIS maps for each city showing the location of the shops and restaurants, both those that I had visited and the few that I did not visit.

As part of the surveying and documentation phase of the research, and as a prelude/process targeted at developing rapport and opening up connections for later interviews, I also conducted observational work. I do not consider this part of the research as 'ethnographic'; my intention was not to look at a certain number of spaces in detail nor to emphasise matters of practice and performance, though some of my observations were helpful in the latter regard. Rather, my intention was to deepen my sense of some outlets in order to 'bridge' from the initial survey to the phase of work based on semi-structured interviews. In terms of this observational phase, I would often dine at the restaurants, patisseries and food stalls, taking notes on the site's attributes and social interactions. On some of these visits I would have a dining partner, but the majority of the time I would dine alone. My observations included a focus on décor, place setting, music, staff, food and other diners. I did not take in-depth field notes at all the places: it was inappropriate in some settings, as many of the establishments did not have many single diners, and it would seem out of place for one who was looking around and then inscribing notes. In fact, at one site visit I was asked if I was a journalist by a member of staff. Most people would focus their attention on eating or shopping, but they were using mobile devices. On that

basis, in order to remember key observations I would type notes out in my phone and then I would write up these 'scratch notes' and other observations as soon as I got home. At this stage I chose not to disclose my position as a researcher to owners and staff as I did not want to differentiate myself from other diners. Instead, I introduced myself and my research at the end of my visit/meal, as part of the process of discussion designed to gain an interview.

A large portion of my data collection at the survey stage involved photographic documentation. This was developed further around the interviewing process. In total I took 2,464 photographs of the studied spaces. I would take photographs of what can be considered mundane objects like furniture, flooring, table cloths, and so forth, because this also served as a means of observational 'note-taking' and enhanced the notes that I had written down. I took photographs of foods, other various objects sold in shops, flyers that were displayed, the décor, the exterior of the building, and the location of the space in relation to its wider setting. In one case, the restaurant Behesht (in the Harlseden area of London), the level of decoration was such that I took short video recordings too, which also allowed me to capture the sounds of the space.

Photographic documentation or photographic inventory is part of a wider qualitative methodology using an array of image based research methods such as film, video and photographs (Dwyer and Davies, 2010; Prosser, 2008). The use of photographic documentation here is designed to highlight the complexities of place representation, in relation to the wider debates based on the complexities of diasporic identity representation (Coles, 2014). Collier and Collier

(1986) write extensively about the use of photographic inventory as a means of cultural analysis. Collier and Collier themselves use photographic inventory to analyse how homes are organized as a space; recording domestic objects, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to the space that they occupy in terms of placement and organization. Thus “an inventory not only deals with material content, it also records the arrangement and the use of space” (Collier and Collier, 1986, p.47). In my work, the photographic documentation, together with the sketch maps were particularly used as methods to show how commercial shops and restaurants are materially assembled, in terms of how products are organized and placed and how these commercial food spaces are designed and decorated. This is a subject matter that comes to fore in Chapter 5 in particular.

3.4 Interviewing

The third phase of my empirical data collection – after initial survey and then observation in some of the spaces – involved in-depth research on restaurants and food shops in each city. Limitations of time and funding (for travel), as well as some refusals to participate, made it impossible to conduct interviews at all 93 places on my database. Instead, I opted to conduct interviews at a smaller sub-set of commercial outlets. In total I did interview work for 23 outlets in Vancouver and 23 outlets in London (46 of 93 in total). I interviewed owners for the most part, and where appropriate and possible, restaurant designers too. In selecting which outlets to undertake interview work with, I chose spaces which were different in terms of décor, like Hafez (Bayswater, London),

and different in terms of menu, like Kateh (Maida Vale, London), in addition to ones which could be classified as typical Iranian restaurants. In Vancouver I developed my choices on the same basis, but I also factored in the presence of some non-Iranian spaces selling Iranian foods and included these in my sample. Overall, then, my sampling was governed by principles of both representativeness (aiming for a coverage of the different 'types' of space identified through the previous survey stage) and theoretical development (aiming for a coverage that allowed key emergent theoretical issues to be explored). In other words, I employed a purposive sampling approach to my data collection, as my research is "informed by an existing body of social theory" (Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn, 2000, p.1001). This approach is non-random in that particular categories which provide a unique or different perspective are covered (Mason, 2002; Trost, 1986). According to Robinson (2013), my approach could be described as having elements of stratified sampling, as I aimed to ensure that different 'types' of spaces were covered.

As discussed above, often in order to gain access to my key informant interviews, I would approach outlets via further observation. In the case of restaurants, I would dine at the restaurant and make field notes on the ambiance, the people, and the food, and then approach owners at the end of that observation, when I was able to articulate not only the aims of my work but my interest in their establishment. In the shops, I would look around for a period of time, before asking about ownership and seeking to approach the owner for an interview. As mentioned above, in Vancouver I also gained interviews in places

that sold Iranian food products but were not Iranian owned or run or designated, due to a significant presence of Iranian foods being sold in non-Iranian spaces in the city. I also gained interviews with two prominent Iranian chefs in London and Vancouver. In addition to the interviews with establishment owners, I was fortunate to gain interviews with the owner of a Vancouver based Iranian dairy company, the owner of a London based Iranian beer company, the designer of Hafez and Molana restaurants in London and the designer of Zeitoon restaurant in Vancouver via email.

Negotiating access to interviews was challenging, partly as this was the first time I had done interview-based research, partly because owners were busy with their businesses and sometimes wary of what any such interview would entail. I started my interviews in London. Initially, I would call the restaurants asking to speak to the owners, and then asking if it was possible to come and talk to them about their restaurant. A good number of my requests were declined and progress in moving beyond the survey stage was slow. I then moved to Vancouver to undertake research there, where I met with scholars and students who were also researching food spaces in Vancouver who advised me that the best and possibly the only way to gain interviews would be to dine at the restaurants. I took their advice and ate at the restaurants, often taking friends too. In other words, I began to develop the 'bridging' stage of observation discussed above. I would normally go at lunch-time when it was less busy, and this way I could also keep costs low. I would take photographs of the food and sometimes take notes. I would then talk to the manager or owner, praise the food

and restaurant, and explain what I was doing and ask if it was possible to come by sometime and talk about the restaurant. I purposely chose not to call it an interview as it sounded formal and some found the word interview to be quite intimidating. Instead, I would often ask if it was possible to come to over to the restaurant whenever was convenient for them for a 'chat' about their restaurant. This tactic proved to be successful. I then implemented the same approach when I returned to London. This changed approach, along with enhanced confidence, allowed me to gain the interviews I needed in London too. Although I chose to describe it as a 'chat' with my participants, it was still a semi-structured interview where they were asked to sign a consent form. The consent form informed participants of data confidentiality measures and that I would use pseudonyms for my participants' names, but that I would not change the name of the commercial spaces. However, the use of pseudonyms for the chefs I interviewed would not be appropriate for this research as I specifically look at the dishes that they create. This was discussed with them at the interview agreement stage.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a schedule of topics for discussion being used as a guide. In restaurants, they were usually conducted late morning, prior to opening, or early evening around 5pm, before dinner-time. They were undertaken on-site. A semi-structured interview format allowed for participants to elaborate and give detailed answers (Cook, 2008). In some cases, where I found that more detail was needed or the first meeting was cut short due to work demands on the interviewee, I undertook two interviews, returning for a second visit later. The interviews lasted for between 30 and 90 minutes. I tried to

ensure that the questions were clearly and simply phrased, partly to avoid academic jargon making interviewees uncomfortable, partly as English was a second language to many of my participants. All the interviews were conducted in English, thus a translator was not required. However, there were some words and phrases that were spoken in Farsi, which could not be easily substituted into English. I was able to understand most of them but would ask if I was not. All interviews started with an introductory question about the diasporan biographies of the interviewees: asking where my participants and/or their families had come from and when they had arrived in Vancouver or London, and why those migrating chose to come to these cities. I also asked biographical questions about their experiences in the restaurant industry. I then moved on to questions more directly focused on the restaurant or shop in question. During the course of this data collection phase I changed some of these questions. Initially I had some broader questions, focused on issues like authenticity. Here, I found respondents found it hard to move beyond familiar answers (e.g. that their restaurants or foods were indeed authentic). Instead, I increasingly tailored questions to the individual places we were discussing. This allowed more nuanced responses to emerge. At the end of the interviews I would allow my participants to ask me questions and we would have an informal conversation. The majority were curious as to why I was interested in Iranian culture. They would also ask if I could cook Iranian food, what my favourite dishes were, and if I could speak any Farsi. I would joke with them, saying that I could not speak much Farsi but was fluent in food Farsi, so if I ever went to Iran I would not starve! Overall, I tried to

present myself, honestly I think, as an outsider to the Iranian diaspora with a strong appreciation of Iranian cultures and with an academic and personal interest in their experiences of diasporan commerce and life. I was sometimes met with suspicion as to my occupation and motivation. At one restaurant in London somebody asked if I was a journalist; and at one restaurant in Vancouver I was told that I could be a spy! However, I was able to address such concerns. In case it was needed, I took with me a letter written by my doctoral supervisor explaining who I was and what I was doing. I also acquired university business cards, which added to my legitimacy.

All the interviews conducted at restaurants, bar one, were audio recorded with the permission of the participant. A consent form was given stating that their name would not be mentioned when the results were disseminated, but that the name of the restaurant or shop would be. For the one interview that was not recorded, notes were taken and written up more fully afterwards. The recorded interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe, a software program that allowed me to control the volume and speed of playback. This was a challenging process in some cases, due to background noise, but all recordings were successfully transcribed. I transcribed the interviews verbatim, minus any hesitations, but for presentation in the thesis I edited the final transcripts for fluency of expression. As English was a second language to some of my participants, and words in English are pronounced slightly differently, I wanted to avoid a 'quotational voice' that would diminish their testimony. For example, Kensington may be pronounced as *Kensingtone*, and Starbucks as *EhStarbucks*,

but I presented these words in normal English spelling. Overall, I judged that this slight editing would best respect my participants' words, in the context of academic publication.

My approach to the interview data collection at the shops often varied to that developed in the restaurants. At first I took the same approach as I did with the restaurants for interviews, but I found this was only partially successful. I would look around and buy things, and ask questions about the foods and how to cook and eat them. I would make my purchase and explain to the person serving what I was doing and if it was possible have a short chat about the shop. Often this would then mean that I would go back when the shop and the workers were less busy, usually mid-afternoon. I would also find that when I went to record the interviews, shop owners were uncomfortable. In part this reflected a rather different context to the restaurants, where we often moved to an office, or sat alone at a table. In the shops, the interviews often would be conducted while the person was (potentially) serving customers. It was much harder to gain dedicated interview time, so interviews in the shops tended to be conversations conducted around shop work. Time constraints meant that interviews at shops were, whilst often taking as long or longer to conduct, shorter in terms of transcribed materials in comparison to the ones at the restaurants.

Two of the interviews were conducted through email, which allowed the participant to answer the questions at their convenience. The benefit of this type of interview is that transcribing is not required. However, a 'cost' is that often a more limited amount of detail is provided, as it is socially awkward to reply asking

for further information too often after the initial response. Egan (2008) writes that email interviews are a fairly recent concept emerging in the 1990s as an online qualitative method. Egan (2008) and James (2006) amongst others argue that email interviews allow for a richer quality of data to be produced. However, I did not find that this was the case. For one of my interviews although I followed up with further questions, I did not receive a reply.

As well as semi-structured interviews I had a number of other kinds of conversations that provided data for the research. Other styles of informal interviews included the short conversations that I had with restaurant owners and other Iranians when talking to them about food spaces in Vancouver and London. These were not transcribed, but written as ethnographic notes. I also took notes in the public lectures that I attended in both cities addressing a range of themes on Iran, Iranians, Zoroastrianism and Iranian food. I also made field notes when I visited the Westwood area in Los Angeles when I was in the city for an academic conference. These various ethnographic notes were then filed under the appropriate 'coded' heading, and are used to inform the argument in the relevant sections of this thesis.

3.5 Media Analysis

Media analysis plays a significant role in this research, specifically in terms of interpreting how Iranian shops and restaurants in London and Vancouver are marketed. It also plays a role in understanding the wider perception of Iranian food in general, as Iranian food has garnered much media attention in both cities over the past two years. The types of media analysed

included company websites, other company media such as blogs, review sites and social media. I also used documentary films, such as Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown Iran* (2014) to gain a better understanding into food practices in Iran. I also found the use of social media such as Twitter useful for this, as well as the *The Guardian's* Tehran Bureau/Iran Blog.

I looked at company websites in terms of content and discourse. I analysed the kind of language used to describe the shop or restaurant. I looked at how they presented Iranian food culture not only in terms of their own offerings but also more generally. If their websites contained other forms of text than written language – most commonly photographs but also sometimes videos and music – then I analysed these too. In addition, where relevant, I also analysed other company media beyond their immediate websites, such as print and other advertisements, blogs and books. In undertaking these analyses I deployed established good practice on discourse and content analysis.

I use content analysis here as a qualitative method, analysing the explicit messages and interpretations of the text (Graneheim and Lundman, 2003). This type of content analysis is also known as latent content analysis (Silverman and Patterson, 2015). An inductive approach was used to code the text, as codes were established based upon the existing debates in food studies, such as authenticity and opulence, which are sought after as evidence in interview transcripts, images and other texts such as marketing materials (Ayres, 2008; Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Images can be analysed as non-written text, where objects and other symbolic evidence can be discerned. Hsieh and

Shannon (2005) state that codes can be determined representing a new category or subcategory, which can be used alongside the priori codes. For example, “religion” was a predetermined code, but during the analysis process this was further expanded to include “Zoroastrianism” and “Islam” as subcategories, which was used in identifying religious symbols present in commercial food spaces. The codes contribute to the narrative in addressing how diasporic Iranian identities are represented in commercial food spaces (Benaquisto, 2008).

Discourse analysis was also employed complimenting the content analysis. Gee (2014) argues that there are two types of discourse analysis: descriptive and critical. I use a critical discourse analysis where a deeper analysis occurs, as language speaks to social and political situations. Van Dijk (2003) links critical discourse analysis to media analysis, where the language deployed by the media is often presents a partisan world view, an us versus them image. Furthermore, Van Dijk draws upon Hall et al. (1980) who frame discourse analysis in cultural studies. Barker and Galasiński (2001) expand on this, arguing that discourse constructs and constitutes cultural identities, through text and semiotics (Eco, 1979).

I also chose to analyse review sites in order to gain a sense of how Iranian food and restaurants are perceived by food media and consumers. Online reviews of restaurants have become popular over the past few years, allowing consumers to share their experiences (Gottlieb, 2015; Jeong and Jang, 2011). These online review sites have allowed for diners to become the critic, though the forms of criticism prevalent need careful consideration. Rousseau (2012)

makes the distinction between a review and a critique: where a review will state what was eaten and if the diner had a nice time, a critique presents knowledge, involves a range of dishes being consumed for comparison, and a high level of scrutiny. This has led to debates on the relations between professional food critics as opposed to amateur reviews. In a rather negative verdict, Rousseau (2012, p.60) casts many amateur reviews and comments as mean spirited, labelling these reviewers as “foochebags” (a combination of the words foodie and douche bag!). Rousseau’s (2012) wider point is to illustrate how the internet has changed the ways in which food is thought about. Anderson and Magruder (2012) expand on Rousseau’s argument, by proposing that consumer reviews can complement those of professional critics, as they appear in a wide range of spaces. They also show that consumer reviews left on consumer review platforms such as Yelp.com are not completely trustworthy as restaurants can leave fake reviews. Zhang, Ye, Law and Li (2010) compare editor and consumer reviews investigating the different influences they have on online users. Their findings show that consumers rate restaurants on quality of service, quality of food and environment, functioning as an electronic form of word-of-mouth. I chose to look at UrbanSpoon.com and Yelp.com as key review sites, because they allow consumers to make comments rather than just click on a “like” button, thus providing more qualitative and detailed responses.

Social media is also used by food providers as a means of promotion, and in particular for allowing restaurants (and the occasional shop) to interact with their patrons. In Vancouver 10 of the 23 food providers interviewed had a social

media presence, whereas in London numbers were lower with 6 of the 23 interviewed having a social media presence. I was a little sceptical of using social media, especially Twitter, for academic research purposes. However, I found it to be a useful platform in connecting with other people who write about Iranian food as chefs and food bloggers. It also allowed me to keep updated on the larger debates in food studies. These networks were more a general context than a specific research resource, though; I began to forge links with food bloggers who are mostly US-based, developing discussions that I found of value in developing my analysis of my own materials. The use of social media as an analytical tool is a relatively new development within qualitative research methodology. I argue that social media can be a useful tool in understanding and adding to in-depth qualitative research but, as Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) argue, should not be used as a substitute. I used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to analyse how people perceive Iranian food, how Iranian food providers interact with consumers, and as a means of communication with those with an in-depth knowledge of Iranian food.

3.6 Data Analysis, Textualisation and Presentation

I have discussed how I analysed media data using content analysis and discourse analysis. I now move on to discuss the analysis processes in further detail, focusing on coding, qualitative data analysis and how I present my field data.

The interviews were uploaded into NVIVO where they were then coded for certain themes and words such as authenticity, opulence, and modern/traditional.

This system of coding was chosen because as I was conducting interviews I noticed that certain themes were emerging inductively. Initially a list of 20 codes was developed, these codes were then rearranged and reorganised systematically and further integrated to form a narrative during the analysis process (Ayres, 2008; Benaquisto, 2008). These codes represent meanings that are inferred in the data (Charmaz, 2011). Yin (2015) states that there are two levels of coding. Level 1 describes an open code (Hahn, 2008), which remains close to the data or even extract of data, and often deploys the exact words used in the original data. Level 2 describes category codes which interpret the data at a higher conceptual level, codes which then emerge into themes. As well as analysing interview and other linguistic data, I also undertook image analysis. Here I chose to employ a qualitative textual analysis, which involves both content and semiotics analysis (Lockyer, 2008). As I have already discussed content analysis in terms of linguistic analysis, here I discuss semiotic analysis further. *The American Journal of Semiotics* describes semiotics as the study of signs and sign systems, where communication and culture are experienced through cultural and social codes, messages and practices. The use of semiotic analysis speaks directly to issues to representation, which “is concerned with the *how* of representation, with how language produces meaning – what has been called poetics” (Hall, 1997, p.6). Writing about tourism, Franklin and Crang (2001) claim that tourism studies pay attention to the role of images, symbols and the processes of representations, citing Jonathan Culler (1981), who acknowledged the parallels between tourism and semiotics. Similarly, the ‘touristic’ qualities of

commerce that commodifies cultural difference means that commercial Iranian food spaces also have a semiotic quality.

Note and memo writing also had a significant part in the data analysis process. The field notes were divided in two sections: observations and speculative personal reflections (Brodsky, 2008). The speculative personal reflections included notes and short memos from meetings that I had with people who helped shape this research, as well as notes from conferences, seminars and workshops that I attended. I also kept the feedback notes from conference presentations as it helped address questions that I had not thought of. Field notes are not necessarily systematic and can consist of random thoughts, ideas and reflections on the fieldwork process (Clifford, 1990). Muhall (2002) argues that whilst realists might interpret 'the field' as being a natural entity which is described through observation, it might better be thought of as something that is constructed "through the practical transactions and activities of data collection and through the literary activities of writing field notes, analytic memoranda and the like" (Aktinson, 1992, p.5). The latter approach is to understand ethnography in a more constructionist and reflexive frame, rather through the lens of realist naturalism. Certainly, field notes can be reflexive (Waterman, 1998). According to Van Maanen (1988), in terms of written style there are three types of ethnographies: realist, confessional and impressionist. Realist fieldwork accounts are impersonal; confessional accounts incorporate reflexive notes that are kept separate to the field notes; and impressionist accounts leave the researcher to interpret the story themselves, recognising the incompleteness of field notes. My

approach to fieldnotes combined Van Maanen's realist and confessional modes. My observational field notes were recorded either on site or later in the evening, with additional reflective comments added in too. I took both observational notes of the field that strove to represent a scene and drafted more reflective comments on the research process and my experiences of it. In the final thesis text, the tone I have sought is not an impersonal realism but nor a self-preoccupied confessional. Rather, I aim to keep the focus on my subject matter – the representation of identities in diasporic Iranian food spaces – whilst also recognising that my account is shaped by own positionality and research process.

3.7 Engaging with the Iranian Community

Engaging with Iranian diasporan community events and discourse was important to the research process, given my 'outsider' relationship to the community. Generally, this work provided some cultural awareness and common ground; more specifically, it facilitated openings to those in the Iranian food industry. In order to connect better with my participants, I learnt to speak some basic Farsi and I learnt to cook some Iranian food. I would also watch Iranian films with English subtitles like *A Separation*, Hollywood movies focusing on Iran like *Argo* and *Rosewater* and watch diasporic Iranian comedians such as Omid Djalili and Maz Jobrani on YouTube. I found that watching these comedians was useful in so far as their acts are based on daily experiences and Iranian customs. For example, there is an Iranian custom called *ta'arof* which is "an Iranian social

code of courtesy and hospitality” (Maghbouleh, 2013). Bahrapour (2007, p.1) describes *ta’arof* as an

enactment of ‘hyper-politeness’ [which] involves both parties insisting they are not worthy of each other and is in constant play in Iranian society - people refuse to walk through doors first, cabdrivers refuse to accept payment as passengers beg them to, hosts must offer pastries even if guests don’t want them, and guests say they don’t want them even if they do.

Omid Djilili bases one of his acts on *ta’arof*:

Ta’arof means you must never ever accept anything unless it’s offered *three times*, okay because it shows, especially when it comes to food, that you’re not some peasant, you’re not some villager who’s starving. If you go out for dinner you keep quiet, it shows dignity and restraint. “Please let’s have food. Food is ready”. You have to say “No. No thank you. I am not hungry. Thank you.” Your stomach [is making noises]. “But the food is getting cold. Please come on help yourselves”. “No thank you. I had a little something before I came. I had a little bit of Rivita with cheese. I am not hungry at all”. “Please come and help yourself”. “Was that three times now? Okay let’s go [eats greedily and makes pig like noises], come on get stuck in! Let’s go”! It shows dignity and restraint. (BBC Worldwide, 2008)

The point here is that “comedy is a diverse, vibrant, and multifaceted phenomenon”; it is a “complex and pervasive form of expression that permeates everyday life and mediated discourses” (Lockyer, Mills and Peacock, 2011, p.99). Djilili’s acts, much like Jobrani’s, play on stereotypes, which allow him, as argued by Weaver (2010), to form a humour around a complex rhetoric, “support[ing] and encourage[ing] anti-racism and reverse discourse” (p.156). Here stereotypes are appropriated and subverted intentionally by the comedian (Lockyer and Pickering, 2009; Weaver, 2010).

I also attended Iranian events in my case study cities, like the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Night of Nowruz* (2012), and other various *Nowruz* events in Vancouver, which allowed me to interact with the Iranian community in each city. I attended public lectures at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the British Institute of Iranian Studies on Iran and Zoroastrianism, which also provided a more nuanced understanding of Iranian identities. I attended other public lectures on Iranian food, including that hosted by the Iranian Association in Hammersmith, *Persian Food: A Cultural Treasure* (March 2013), and the Iranian Heritage Foundation, *Food for Thought: A Conversation about Persian Culinary Arts* (December 2014), which allowed me to interact with those involved in the Iranian food industry. The issues raised in these events broadened my understanding of Iranian food and its diasporan dynamics. Although not a part of my research per se, in terms of empirical site selection, I also visited the Westwood area of Los Angeles, otherwise known as Tehrangeles, out of curiosity. I discuss my experience of Tehrangeles in further detail in Chapter Two.

Carling, Erdal and Ezzati (2013, p.47) argue that "cultural competence can be a subtle but powerful marker of positioning". It provides outsiders with insider qualities allowing the researcher to relate better to the informants. These cultural competences alongside language and sustained commitment, allows the researcher to acquire honorary insider status (Halter, 1993). The broader research and experiences that I undertook beyond my specific subject matter was directed to this end.

3.8 Challenges, Limitations and Ethics

There are many challenges and limitations associated with fieldwork, as it is entangled by power relations, social interactions and individual positionalities. Here I reflect upon my positionality and some of the challenges and limitations that I faced. In so doing I pick up on earlier discussions about site selection, my positioning with regard to 'outsider-insider' status, and the research process.

As a researcher I found the interviewing process to be quite daunting, as this was the first time that I had conducted interviews. It was certainly a learning curve. My confidence grew as I started to do more, and in due course this became one of the most enjoyable parts of the empirical data collection. Prior to conducting the interviews I recognised that I was an outsider to the Iranian diaspora. This both helped and hindered the interview process. Initially, it may have been a hindrance in gaining access in London, as I am not Iranian and struggled to develop networks of contacts. It certainly made the fieldwork slower than I had hoped, as I had to invest time in developing contacts with intended interviewees (via the 'bridging' stage of observation and participation discussed above). However, although I was worried given I had a fixed period of time in the field away from my home in London, this did not prove to be an issue in Vancouver. In Vancouver, I was met with questions of curiosity as to why as a non-Iranian I had chosen to take an interest in Iranian culture, and as a British citizen why I had chosen Vancouver; but this 'double' outsider status seemed to pique respondents' interest in me and elicited some sympathy and a willingness to help. Overall, despite the initially slower than hoped for progress in London, I

would judge that my ethnicity may have helped in the long run. For example, my being 'non-Iranian' made it easier for some forms of self-critique to emerge, as I was not seen as connected to any interest group within the diaspora; thus, some restaurant owners were perhaps more open when describing how they did not like to hire Iranian serving staff due to their poor work ethic. Many research participants were also pleased that a non-Iranian had taken interest in their culture and their businesses. More generally I did not want my relationships with my participants to be entirely instrumental and to end after my data collection. I felt that it was important to maintain ties with research participants and contacts when possible. Thus I still visit many of the establishments I went to in London, stay in contact with people in Vancouver through social media, and keep them updated on my findings.

In terms of ethics, Huynh (2012) raises the issues of "buying data" as part of her study on Vietnamese restaurants in Toronto. In exchange for the interview Huynh was expected to promote the restaurant to family and friends. At times I was expected to do the same. I did not mind doing this, and also in exchange I would also provide them with a summary of my results. In keeping with Iranian customs and as an expression of my gratitude I would give my participants a small bag of chocolates, as many would give me a drink or even at times food during or after the interview.

The politics and concept of self-presentation is prevalent in the qualitative methods literature. Self-presentation addresses issues such as clothing style, occupation, physical appearance and language use. Let me therefore provide

some further detail on how self-presentation impacted on my research and relationships with my participants. Initially when scouting participants for interviews I would state that I was a PhD student; I found that people were often reluctant to talk on that basis. I then omitted the fact that I was a student, and chose to present myself as a researcher, which led to a more positive reception. Carling et al., (2013, p.44) argue that an emphasis or de-emphasis on the academic status can “balance humility and authority in the encounter with informants”. Language was also a barrier. I do not speak fluent Farsi, though I learnt some basics with the aid of a self-teaching podcast, book and CD package. Learning these basics allowed me to connect with participants, giving me insider qualities, even though I am not (Carling et al. 2013). The interviews, however, were conducted in English. Language has also been an issue in terms of translating written text into English; here I have made my own translations, checking them with participants when necessary (Gawlewicz, 2014; Müller, 2007; Srivastava, 2006). Spellman (2005) also expressed a sense of frustration of not being able to speak fluent Farsi when conducting interviews with Iranians in London.

There are other issues of self-presentation that had to be navigated, such as how to dress. Hennick, Hunter and Bailey (2011) emphasise on dressing “appropriately for the socio-cultural situation of the research, so that the interviewee does not find you threatening or offensive” (p.122). Schweber (2007) highlights how dress can impact on negotiating access in conducting research in an orthodox Jewish school. She describes how she is unsure if she is

underdressed or if she is obviously an outsider, as she dons a hat, rather than a wig. She believes that if she wore a wig navigating access to the school would have perhaps been easier; despite being from a traditionally orthodox Jewish family, she is not herself an adherent to orthodox practices. In my own case, I found that smart casual dress was most suitable for this research, as it established my position as a researcher as opposed to a student. Dress was not an issue for me as it was for Spellman (2005) who was required to cover her head, as she was conducting research on religion.

Gender, race and age also impact on research, especially when “appropriating the voice of “others” (England, 1994, p.247; Crang, 2002; Kusek and Simley, 2014). Drawing upon Hastrup (1992), England (1994) states “a researcher is positioned by her/his gender, age, ‘race’/ethnicity, sexual identity, and so on, as well as by her/his biography, all of which may inhabit or enable certain research method insights in the field” (p.249). Thus research is personal as well as professional. During the fieldwork stages of this research I did not feel that gender and age was an issue (Carling et al., 2013), however reflecting upon my fieldwork experience age may have been a factor in navigating access.

There were a number of specific issues of data construction, interpretation and presentation that were not easy to navigate. For example, although the photographic data documenting food spaces is voluminous I faced challenges in how to present the photographs and which ones to present in this thesis. One option would have been to present the photographs as a photo-essay, where a series of individual photographs are organised allowing a narrative to emerge

(Coles, 2013). However, this did not seem suitable as common themes were visible; however a critical narrative was not. A second option was to present the photographs in the form of vignettes situated in between chapters written in the style of blogs which would not be written as web-based musings, but as vignettes for further, nuanced, critical analysis produced in a rhetorical style complimenting the overall arguments presented in this thesis. These vignettes would have been based as case studies focusing on specific food spaces in detail. After attempting one vignette I found that this was unsuitable as it was more descriptive, than critically analytical and did not contribute to the thesis in a substantial way. As a result, I chose to incorporate the photographs throughout the thesis, allowing the reader to visually see what is being described. Specific spaces were discussed in further detail where appropriate.

In terms of fieldwork, it would have been beneficial to visit the restaurants on multiple occasions, throughout different times of the day, to grasp a better understanding on ambiance, as many of the restaurants provided live entertainment. Being able to do this would have produced an understanding on the kinds of people who attend such events and why. Consequently, this would have expanded my interview data on consumer experience, addressing both Iranian and non-Iranian consumers. More generally, the research focuses on diasporan food providers and is not directly concerned with food consumers. I judged this to be a sensible limit to draw, so that the processes of food provision could be focused on. I did attempt to gain a contextual understanding of consumers as 'markets' though, through the use of social media and consumer

reviews. On balance, especially as meaningfully researching diverse consumers in two cities would have been logistically demanding, I think the focus on food providers was sensible.

Finally, there is one other particular issue of 'field delimitation' that I should perhaps address directly, as a deliberate limit to the research. When disseminating research results at various conferences I would often be asked why I was not conducting research in Iran and how diasporan commercial food spaces compare to those in Iran. The first part of that question would, I must confess, irritate me slightly. To be clear, this research is concerned with diasporic Iranian food spaces. As discussed within Chapter Two, it is situated within a wider body of work on diaspora, one that seeks to avoid reducing all diasporic experiences and cultural productions to some empirical comparison with an 'authentic' homeland. More practically, clearly in working across two diasporic sites (London and Vancouver) my research was already empirically ambitious. Gender relations and language issues would also have meant that I would have limited access to people, even if I had been able to spend fieldwork time in Iran. On that basis, I judged it most sensible to exclude an Iranian city (and clearly, different Iranian cities would have been different in their commercial food cultures) from my fieldwork. Instead, I sought to understand Iranian food dynamics in Iran, both past and present, as one context (among many) that was relevant to diasporan food providers. As discussed above, the Iranian context was researched through media forms, including films – for this I relied on

Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown Iran* (2014) – and material from *The Guardian's* Tehran Bureau.

3.9 Conclusions

This chapter has outlined how a range of qualitative research methods were used in this research to address how diasporic Iranian identities are represented in Iranian commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver. Such methods were selected as they are appropriate for the issues and debates raised in the contextual review on diasporas, identities and material culture; in general, the task of exploring how “people negotiate and perform their identities in an ongoing, reflective, and complex manner, albeit with certain economic, cultural, and political constraints. Identities are always influenced by cultural, territorial, and psychological factors...suggest[ing] that cultural identities are always incomplete, open to translation, and capable of negotiation and change” (Sherry, 2008, p. 653; Bhabha, 1991). Framing the study around material cultures, in this case food spaces, allows for me to investigate representations of the Iranian identity in the diaspora. A focus on London and Vancouver in tandem allows for me to investigate how these identities are represented and negotiated in relation to diverse local contexts.

The collection and construction of data provided many rewards, challenges and limitations. Adopting a range of qualitative methods has allowed me to produce a rich dataset, to investigate wider representations of diasporic Iranian identities in commercial food spaces, and also to focus on specific spaces in considerable depth and detail. The photographic documentation allowed me to

produce an inventory showing how materials are curated to represent diasporic Iranian identities, supporting the interview data and field notes. The empirical and theoretical data are triangulated to address the wider objectives of this study, forming the basis of the three empirical chapters that now follow, focusing on how diasporic Iranian identities are represented in commercial food spaces through marketing, how they are curated and designed, and the food itself as a material cultural practice.

4: MARKETING THE IRANIAN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter, the first of three to interpret the substantive materials generated by the research in London and Vancouver, considers how commercial food spaces market their 'Iranianness'. Focusing in particular on the advertising undertaken by these outlets, the interpretation deploys and advances wider scholarship about the intersections between food marketing and representations of cultural and geographical difference.

In Chapter Two I outlined how the circulation of material goods and cultures, and in particular foods and cuisines, have become an emergent topic for studies of diasporization processes (Crang 2010). To recapulate, one prominent strand of this work examines how the meanings of globally circulated goods are actively shaped in local settings (Jackson, 1999) and frames commerce as an arena where 'geographical knowledges' are exchanged (Cook and Crang, 1996). These processes of localization, translation and exchange are part of a wider cultural politics in which ideas of difference and diasporic identity are (re)produced. Differences become commodified through culinary cultures and spaces (May, 1996).

Advertising and marketing are key practices through which this commodification is undertaken. Jackson and Taylor's (1996) article on *Geography and cultural politics of advertising* noted that at the time little attention

had been paid to the relationship between geography and advertising. Since then, there has been an increased focus on these relationships (Cornish, 1995), particularly in the field of retail geographies, with a specific reference to luxury brands (Crewe, 2015; Potvin, 2013). It has been shown how the images and discourses used in advertising are shaped by social, economic and cultural concerns, reflective of wider imaginative geographies. Culture as a commodity is circulated and operates in an interlinked circuit, in which processes of representation are central (du Gay et al., 1997; Hall, 1997). Jackson and Taylor (1996, p. 357) argue that “besides its specific role in ‘selling places’, advertising more generally uses place images to convey meaning by ‘placing’ a particular product in an appropriate social context” (see also Sack, 1988; 1993). In other words, if advertising can be understood as a process of social and commercial communication that transforms commodities into ‘commodity-signs’ (Goldman, 1992; Goldman and Papson, 1998), then the relationships established between commodity and place are often an important part of this representational process and of commodity-sign making.

Food is a telling example, often marketed in relation to national, regional and local geographies. A particularly interesting exploration of these relationships is provided by the Norwegian Anthropologist Marianne Lien (Lien, 1997; 2000). Focusing on the frozen pizza marketing and advertising campaigns of a company she calls Viking Foods, Lien looks at how their pizza brands are given distinctive qualities through different national associations. Viking market ‘Italian’, ‘American’ and ‘Norwegian’ pizza brands, thereby positioned as more ‘authentic’,

more 'modern' and 'youthful', and as the 'folkepizzaen' ('people's pizza') respectively. Lien's account offers three more general insights upon which I have drawn. First, she casts marketing as a strategic process of product 'positioning' and market 'territorialisation', in relation to a mapping of both other products and potential consumers (i.e. 'the market'). In other words, she develops a spatialised understanding of marketing and advertising. Second, she shows how this spatialisation is not just metaphorical, nor contained within the abstract spaces developed by marketing professionals; rather, it connects with the wider spatialities and territorialisations of our worlds. In particular, she demonstrates that product differentiation draws upon the existing and wider terrain of cultural and geographical difference; in her case, Viking Foods' pizza brands are differently positioned in the market through associations with different national toponymy and iconography. Third, Lien's research is ethnographic in character. She views marketing and advertising as messy practical endeavours, rather than as solely manifestations of capitalist logics of commodification or textual forms for analysis. This chapter's analysis of Iranian food marketing in London and Vancouver draws on these broad insights. It focuses on how the marketing of restaurants and shops involves a 'market positioning'; on how this commercial practice is implicated in geographical designations and associations; and on how diasporic Iranian entrepreneurs undertake this positioning and geographical differentiation through mundane market research and advertising practice.

Also relevant here is Pike's work on the geography of branding (Pike, 2009; 2011). Pike draws on wider brand theory (e.g. Goldman and Papson,

1998) to argue that marketing increasingly looks to do more than sell a particular product, and instead is concerned with establishing brand identities and the values with which they are associated. Like Lien, he too argues that this process often involves an association with geographically constituted forms of difference, a process he terms 'geographical entanglement' (Pike, 2009). Taking examples such as Newcastle Brown Ale beer, Pike (2011) shows how brands are made through imaginative territorialisation at the same time as their material economies of consumption, and often production, involve mobility and de-territorialisation.

Whereas Lien's focus is on how national Norwegian culture is commercially reproduced (in particular in the making of Viking Foods' Norwegian 'folkepizzaen'), and Pike's empirical interest is in regionalised and placed brand identities, my concern is with culinary marketing as a form of diasporization. In consequence, this chapter begins to analyse how diasporic identity politics intersect with the cultural politics of commodification (a theme that runs through Chapters Five and Six too). My interest is in how ideas of diasporic identity and difference become commodified through culinary cultures and spaces (May, 1996).

As touched upon in Chapter Two, there are existing debates about the cultural politics of commodities upon which my analysis draws. For some, processes of commodification are characterised as a reductive process, in which difference and identity are simplified and constrained by the logics of the commodity form. Thus, bell hooks (2015; originally 1992) famously views the commodification of Black American culture and its marketing to American

consumers as a decidedly mixed blessing. On the one hand, the contemporary wide popularity of Black American cultural forms and cultural producers, including among non-Black and especially White American consumers, marks some sort of progress from past racist denigration of Afro-American culture. On the other hand, for hooks this is a deeply problematic sort of progress, constrained by its commodified forms. Commodity relations, she suggests, place consumers in the position of cultural 'cannibals', 'eating the Other' as a way to 'liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' (see also Root 1996). The commodity form, and market exchange, mitigates against meaningful cultural exchanges, underpinned by values of respect and a desire for genuine understanding. Instead, difference, in her case Afro-American difference, becomes a spice to season up commodity culture, likely to be reified into digestible forms that can provide commerce with signifiers that sell. Reflecting more broadly on how contemporary capitalism approaches difference, Naomi Klein (2000) calls this a 'market masala', produced by capital's desire to appropriate and capitalise upon alternative and different cultures. In a Debordian sense (Debord, 1967), cultural differences become part of a wider spectacle, a society saturated by the image making of commercial industries.

Other writers place more emphasis on the agency of 'Others' in these processes of commodification and marketing. Jane M. Jacobs, for example, considers the forms of 'strategic essentialism' that shape Aboriginal Australian participations in the markets of cultural tourism (Jacobs, 1995). In narrating the work of British Asian fashion designer Liaquat al Rasul, and his development of

the Ghulam Sakina fashion brand, Crang and Dwyer (2002) argue that commodity cultures not only constrain identity dynamics but can be meaningful sites of cultural creativity and transformation. The food historian, Jeffrey Pilcher, develops similar thoughts in relation to Mexican cuisine and its development in the United States (Pilcher, 1998; 2012); and Maximus Matus Ruiz (2012) examines the complex passions invested in their commercial businesses by diasporic Mexican restaurateurs. In all these cases, then, the limits of the commodity form are not ignored but more emphasis is placed on how these are negotiated. With respect to my own interpretation, the suggestion upon which I build is that commodification is not something that is solely done to diasporan actors; diasporan businesses are themselves invested in that process in complex ways.

This chapter thus looks at how Iranian commercial food spaces are marketed in London and Vancouver. Compositionally, it progresses through seven main sections. First, I start with a brief descriptive overview of the forms of advertising undertaken by these commercial food spaces. I then turn to the geographical positionings and associations made through this marketing. In the second section I focus on the designation of the cuisine and foods being sold, exploring the rationales behind designations of Iranian, Persian and other (e.g. Middle Eastern) foods and spaces; in the third section I examine other food naming practices (e.g. of restaurants, of particular dishes and drinks) and draw out the wider geographical associations that they seek to establish. Sections four, five and six explore marketing as a representation of the kinds of places that

these commercial food spaces are. Focusing especially on restaurants, these sections respectively consider these representations in relation to their socialities, their atmospheres and their authenticity. The seventh and final substantive section of the chapter looks at how marketing practice can overlap with forms of education and knowledge provision, reflecting both on the role of new and social media in this regard, and more mainstream food coverage.

4.2 Advertising Forms

There are various types of advertising ranging from press to online advertising (see Smit, 1999 for a more extensive review of types of advertising). For the purpose of this study I focus on press advertising; online advertising, in the form of websites and social media advertising; outdoor advertising; and packaging materials that act in part as advertisements (food packaging in shops, menus in restaurants).

In total I collected 120 (64 for London and 56 for Vancouver) press advertisements, from various Iranian newspapers and magazines, until reaching a point of saturation when advertisements consistently repeated. Notes were made on the following attributes (see Appendix B): which newspapers and magazines businesses are advertising in; and a content analysis of the advertisement itself. For London based media, the following newspapers and magazines were key sites for advertisements: *Nobahar*; *Bazar-e-Hafteh*; *Persian Weekly*; and *Deevan Magazine*. For Vancouver based media, the following magazines and newspapers were key: *Dan Magazine*; *Daneshmand Magazine*; *Goonagoon*; *Payam*; *Shahrvand*; *Farhangema*; and *Paivand*. I also kept some of

the food packaging, as it has information which can be considered a form of marketing. I made a point to collect wider media data during *Nowruz* (Persian New Year) to see what the various food spaces were doing for *Nowruz* and how this was marketed.

Due to increased competition and consumer access to the internet, having an online presence is an integral marketing strategy for many of the Iranian food businesses that I studied, in particular the restaurants. Having a website allows for restaurateurs to be expansive in terms of marketing, reaching out to a wider audience, in terms of demographics as well as geography. It allows restaurateurs to give additional details that would not be able to fit into a print advertisement; and it gives additional media through which to construct an image of the Iranian in their advertising. For the most part the websites are extremely detailed, showing photos of the food available, the interior décor of the restaurant, and a detailed menu. Often a narrative is constructed which represents 'Iranianness', and that looks to entice the potential customer to go to the restaurant.

Restaurateurs are also using social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, to promote their restaurants, to educate the wider public about Iranian food culture, and to promote Iranian and other events happening in the local area. Social media also allows them to interact with their patrons. Food blogs and restaurant search engines allow consumers to write about their experiences. For the purpose of this study, I chose to focus on Yelp.com and Urbanspoon.com for each city as they are similar in structure and content. Both websites also allow reviewers to rate their overall experience; Yelp using a star based system and

Urbanspoon using a like/dislike verdict. In looking through the reviews of the restaurants, it is apparent that service, taste and price were commented upon the most. I use these reviews and, if applicable, comments on the businesses' websites as a way to access consumer responses¹⁰.

An occasionally used form of advertising was directed into urban public space. The literature on outdoor advertising focuses on advertising spaces such as billboards or advertisements on buses as mobile spaces of advertising (Cronin, 2008a; 2008b). Cronin (2008a, p.113) makes the argument that

the outdoor advertising industry takes part in *performing* that space by retroductively incorporating market research understandings of mobility into the form and content of advertising, which in turn impact upon how people experience their mobility in urban space and how they come to know the city.

For Iranian food spaces, this placement of advertising within the city's everyday mobilities most often comes about through satellite operations. In particular, outdoor advertising in the form of food trucks in Vancouver and food stalls in London is apparent. Some restaurateurs¹¹ are choosing to open up a food truck elsewhere in the city from their restaurant, making their food available to a wider audience. The food trucks usually gather around the downtown core and have a specific location, but are able to move around if necessary. A famous example, promoting a Vancouver based 'Indian' food business, is Vij's food truck, Vij's Railway Express. This is part of a larger portfolio which consists of the flagship restaurant Vij's, and other restaurants Rangoli, Vij's Sutra and My Shanti. The

¹⁰ These are responses from reviews on the website, and are not my own.

¹¹ It should be noted that the majority of food trucks in Vancouver are independently owned, and are not linked to restaurants.

truck itself plays a role a marketing role, presenting the corporate logo and the Viji name in downtown areas of the city, at the same time as taking Indian street food to the streets of Vancouver.

With respect to Iranian food, one Iranian food truck in Vancouver is part of the Cazba restaurant business. Cazba's food truck is normally located in downtown Vancouver at Robson Street and Howe Street (as of 08/06/13). When asked why they decided to open a food truck, the owner stated that it would cost them the same amount to put a billboard campaign in the city as it would to have a food truck, so it made more sense financially to have a food truck, allowing city workers and tourists to try the kebabs at the truck and then go to the restaurants:

Basically I just opened up the food truck for an advertising tool. In order to even have a billboard there it's the same amount for the rent as a food cart, and we're also making some money out of it. (Personal interview, Cazba, Vancouver, April 2013)

In this case, then, it seemed to make financial sense to open a food truck as a form of advertising. The truck has the same logo as the restaurant, providing a sense of familiarity and association with the restaurant. The truck is named Cazba Express, suggesting a fast service. The decoration with a 'cartoon-looking' kebab adds a sense of playfulness, further emphasising that the truck is the "fun part" of the Cazba business portfolio. It appears that the truck pays homage to the Iranian flag through the placement of the red, white and green stripes at the bottom of the truck, further crystallising the Iranian identity. The food truck was also present at the North Vancouver *Nowruz* Bazaar (March 10th 2013), promoting the business to the Iranian community (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Cazba's food truck, Cazba Express at the Nowruz Bazaar in North Vancouver (2013)

In summary, then, advertising is undertaken by these food businesses through a range of media. This advertising provides factual information on business name, location and products/menu but also seeks to attract customers with some simple branding operations. These look to associate the restaurant or shop with certain experiential qualities, something to which more interactive media – whether online media, social media or the outdoor advertising of a food truck – are particularly suited.

4.3 Diaspora Designation

One of the central marketing decisions taken by diasporan Iranian food businesses in the two cities is how to frame and name the cuisine that they offer. In the case of Iranian food spaces this ‘positioning’ intersects with the wider lexical paradoxes and the negotiation of representation that recurs is designation of the Iranian diaspora itself. As discussed in Chapter Two, this includes a powerful duality of the Iranian and the Persian, and these are the most common designations adopted. In terms of foodscapes, Persian as a signifier has a number of potential connotations. It tends to associate the food with ideas of tradition, but it also implies a rich cultural heritage, a sophistication, an opulence, and an exoticism: a distant, appealing otherness. The Iranian more often connotes a contemporary diasporic presence. In some cases, food spaces also adopt designations beyond this pair: broadening the designated geography to ‘Middle Eastern’, for example; or indeed re-locating it to a territorialisation such as ‘Mediterranean’.

One key issue I was interested in, then, was why owners chose to describe or label the restaurant or shop as Persian or Iranian and what this means. In some cases the terms Persian and Iranian were seen as synonymous. Nevertheless in others they were quite distinctive, where the Persian is associated with a longer, richer history:

There is a clear cut between Persian culture and in terms of food and Iranian food. I think it's totally wrong to call it Iranian food. If you call it Iranian food it's going to be limited to a few dishes. When you talk about Persian, it goes back to a Persian culture of what it was. The food has travelled over the years, this cuisine has got traces of Turkish cuisine, Arabic, Russian, even some Indian, and over the years they have changed many things, so to adapt it in terms of the flavour...We use herbs, saffron for colouring and flavour, and also we use a hell of a lot basmati rice, that's part of every dish that comes with Persian cuisine, that's how we call it Persian. We don't call it Iranian... because it has evolved over the years and food travels by new wars between the countries, the nations and all that, and that you cannot just specifically say that this food belonged to this region. It doesn't work like that. (Personal interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)

The owner of Sufi acknowledges the longer Persian history, which has shaped the cuisine over time and space. Moreover, he casts this longer Persian history as profoundly diasporic, in contrast to his nationalised, territorialised understanding of the Iranian. He also notes that rice is a focal point of Persian cuisine, distinguishing it from other cuisines, an argument supported by Zubaida (1994) who writes extensively on the importance of rice in the culinary culture of Iran. Similar points were made by the owner of Kozmik Zoo in Vancouver, who also argued that the association of 'Persian' with a longer history made it more familiar to non-Iranian consumers and de-coupled the food from the contemporary media knowledges that might frame the 'Iranian':

It's just more common to call it Persian cuisine, rather than Iranian cuisine, and that was the main reason really when I have to explain it. It's like this is the Persian cuisine, most of the ingredients are from Iran. It is Iranian culture that's ongoing and will always go on...the last 5% of our history we've been called Iran, it's naturally easier to say Persian culture. There's no difference but as long as the one who receives it knows what part of the world we're talking about. It's also more in Europe people have a better understanding of geography, North America it's non-existent. (Personal interview, Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver, May 2013)

Here the Persian refers to a traditional culture whereas the Iranian is contemporary. Therefore given these explanations and the supporting literature on Iranian cuisine, I too often choose to describe the food as being Persian and the establishments and people as Iranian, a distinction commonly made by the businesses themselves. The owner of Kozmik Zoo also raises the issue of wider Canadian ignorance of Persian/Iranian geography, which was also shared by the owner of Simurgh in London:

...because of society, the shallowness of society. We've been bombarded for the last 30 years...I don't mind to educate people, but people who have just been fed by media... I do raise awareness of it [Persian/Iranian] but do it slowly, not radically. I don't want people to say Iranian because honestly not everybody is well educated, not everybody is tolerant of others... (Personal interview, Simurgh, London, November 2012)

This quotation raises a theme present in many interviews, namely issues about how businesses navigate the mainstream media portrayal of Iran and Iranians, and the impact that it is having on the Iranian diaspora, especially since the events of 9/11. For Bijan, the owner of Simurgh, the term Iranian carries negative connotations, which he does not want associated with his restaurant.

Classification and 'naming' is also an obvious issue in restaurant review websites, in so far as they seek to tell the viewer what kind of restaurant the review concerns. Some websites allow for multiple categories. For example, Iranian restaurants on Urbanspoon, London (on 22/4/15) are categorised under Persian/Iranian and Middle Eastern. 40 were categorised under Persian/Iranian. However, Simurgh, located in the Covent Garden area of London is classified as being Turkish. In the case of Urbanspoon Vancouver (on 22/4/15) restaurants are classified under Persian/Iranian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean. 27 were categorised under Persian/Iranian. The classifications of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean broaden the geographies used to designate the commercial food spaces of the Iranian diaspora. In terms of marketing, this allows restaurant owners to market to a wider clientele, as it shows that Persian food is similar to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food. Some Iranian restaurants located on or adjacent to Edgware Road in London, which is largely an Arabic area, are labelled as *Ajam*, meaning non-Arab and Persian in Arabic.

Rasoul and I talked about the concealing of Persian and Iranian identities. For me this was interesting as it would provide insight into the Iranian/Persian divide. Rasoul explained how many corner stores and restaurants tried to hide the Persian factor by labelling the spaces Mediterranean, and in some cases nothing or even Eastern European. He believed that maybe this had something to do with post 9/11 or current geopolitics in Iran... maybe how subtlety is more appreciated in Vancouver. (Ethnographic notes, March 2013)

Here, then, both the Iranian and Persian designations are seen as potentially 'over-determined' by the geopolitical discourses of news media. However, Gholami contradicts this, noting (2015, p. 162)

it seems that everything in the Iranian diaspora in London has to have the 'Persian' factor these days: restaurants now offer 'Persian' cuisine; people listen to 'Persian' pop music; there are 'Persian' clubs and cabarets; there was a great buzz and sense of pride about the film *Prince of Persia*; and there is even a recently-opened Hair and Beauty salon in Hanwell (West London) by the name *Persia X Factor*.

Here, then, the Persian is celebrated as a way to re-code the Iranian in a diasporan setting.

The deployment of other designations than either Iranian or Persian sits within a wider diasporic history of culinary-culture 'visibility' and 'hiding'. As part of her study on Iranian domestic food practices in the North West of England, Yorkshire and the Midlands, Harbottle (2000) writes about the experiences of Iranian migrants working within the food industry. Her findings show that these migrants seek to disguise their Iranian identities by working with non-Iranian foods. She discusses how many Iranians open Italian restaurants, especially fast food pizza restaurants, and in the process hide or "veil" their identities through 'being Italian'. Spellman (2004), McAuliffe (2005) and Mobasher (2012) note Iranians use the Italian identity as a surrogate in part because their similar physical appearances allow this cultural performance to be accepted. There are also issues here about business opportunities and assessments of market dynamics. During my interview with the owner of Persepolis restaurant, located on Lonsdale Avenue in North Vancouver, he told me that after a few days the

restaurant would no longer be Iranian and would be converted to an Italian restaurant:

...we're closing this coming Monday for remodelling to an Italian restaurant...we don't, I don't personally appreciate the Persian customers... [they are] high demanding, low paying. It's just hard to deal with. Another problem, there is too much competition around here; in the next 5 blocks you can find 10 Persian restaurants... Because of the tough competition prices are coming down. We just [need to] get out, simple as that. (Personal interview, Persepolis, Vancouver, August 2013)

It is apparent that the owner of Persepolis was not happy serving an Iranian clientele as he found them difficult to deal with. He later goes on to state that he did not have Iranian employees as he found them difficult to deal with too. The increased competition has also meant that the prices have had to decrease; therefore profit margins may not be high enough to justify keeping the restaurant open. The banner subsequently adopted for the restaurant (see Figure 4.2) indicates a stereotypical Italian representation through the naming and the use of a male chef with a moustache and the use of the colours of the Italian flag. They perpetuate a common image of Italianicity, erasing any doubt of the restaurant not being authentically Italian in terms of ownership (more generally, see Highmore, 2009 on authenticity and ownership of Indian restaurants on the British high street).



Figure 4.2 Banner at Persepolis restaurant indicating it will change from Iranian to Italian, North Vancouver (2013)

Whilst the veiling of the Persian/Iranian identity has been noted by scholars studying the Iranian diaspora such as Mobasher (2012), McAuliffe (2005), and Harbottle (1999), my own research suggested that there may also be a counter-trend in process. This is associated with the rise of “foodie”¹² culture, where consumers are eager to consume the unknown and exotic (Heldke, 2003). A process of “veiling”, I suggest, is being replaced by a process of what I term “bridging”, a process through which food items and flavours are connected to those that are already familiar. This marketing strategy is successfully seen in Vancouver through the example of the Mediterranean Grill, located in the West End neighbourhood (see Figure 4.3). This establishment is Iranian owned but serves both Iranian and Greek food, which became apparent during the interview with the owner of the Kozmik Zoo in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood of Vancouver:

The Mediterranean Persian place, that's been there on Denman Street forever. That one's there and a block away there's a Persian restaurant on the corner, it has changed hands but it has

¹² The term is widely contested. Some use it as a synonym for someone who loves food or is a food gourmet. The term is often associated with elitism and snobbery. Johnston and Baumann (2010) deconstruct the term and try to arrive at a definition.

still stayed Persian. In my experience in cities or areas where people are not familiar with Persian dishes, and are not willing to necessarily try something they are not familiar with, Persians will usually use Greek cuisine as a bridge to Persian because they're very similar. They like meat, a lot of kebabs and salads are very familiar, with the feta cheese and in Iran there is no other cheese except for feta cheese... they usually go with Mediterranean Greeks slash Persian. The one on Denman [Street] is the oldest one. I guess that they wanted to build that bridge between Iranian / Persian and Greek. (Personal interview, Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver May 2013)

As the interview progressed he talked further about people's experiences with Iranian food:

...most of the Persian dishes that people have tried and they know are what I call the crossovers that are common between different languages like tatzki. They call it tatzki in Greek. We have *maast-o-khair*, which is the same but has bigger chunks of cucumbers, or like we have *mirza ghaesmi*, it's some sort of *baba ghanoush*. (Personal interview, Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver, May 2013)

Wider issues are illustrated here. First, that food as a material culture is mobile and has acquired new properties as it has moved (Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1987). Second, geographical knowledges are created through food. More specifically, in this case Greek and Levantine cuisines become windows for exploring Iranian food as diasporan businesses use histories of culinary exchange to frame cuisines in ways that facilitate transactions and translations in the present. In particular, it is in the grouping of Levantine dishes, such as hummus, where the geographical origin of foods become blurry, sometimes contested, but also thus open to marketing practices of 'bridging' (I discuss the case of hummus further in Chapter 6).



Figure 4.3 The Mediterranean Grill, Vancouver (2013)

This bridging process is not only characterised by Iranian businesses looking to connect with other markets. It happens in the other direction, too. Thus, not all the advertisements placed in diasporic Iranian media are for Iranian restaurants and shops; other designations are apparent, from mixed Middle Eastern to something more specific such as Turkish. For example, LeVant Grill, a Turkish restaurant in Barnet, London, placed an advertisement in *Bazar-e-Hafteh* in London highlighting the similarities between Turkish and Iranian foods by showing photographs of kebabs on skewers (see Figure 4.4). The written text states that LeVant has the best Turkish food, along with a ‘professional’ Turkish chef. This shows that the restaurant is trustworthy, and that the food has been prepared and made with care by someone who knows what they are doing. The advert also presents how LeVant caters to the Iranian clientele by stating that *ash reshteh* (herb, noodle and legume soup) and *abghoost* (lamb and chickpea stew, also referred to as *dizi*) are served on Friday and Saturday, and fresh sheep heart and liver daily. The *ash reshteh* and *abghoost* are distinctively Persian dishes, and the heart and liver are presented here as a delicacy.

LEVANT GRILL

بهترین غذاهای ترکی
با آشپز مجرب ترکی

Levant Special (To share for 2-3 people)
Lamb & Chicken Doner, Lamb & Chicken Shish, Adana Kebab,
Chicken Wings, Lamb Ribs Served With Rice or Chips & Salad
Only £21.50

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باسرو آشی رشته و آب گوشت
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info@levantgrill.com / www.levantgrill.com

Figure 4.4 : Advertisement for LeVant Grill, Barnet, London (Bahar-e-Hafteh, 2013)

There are similar cases in the Vancouver based Iranian diaspora print media advertisements. An example here is an advert for Saloniki, a Greek restaurant located in the Grandview-Woodland neighbourhood of Vancouver. There is a possibility that Saloniki is an Iranian owned Greek restaurant, but also could be Greek owned and advertising in an Iranian magazine. The Farsi text on the advert (see Figure 4.5) translates as follows: “Saloniki restaurant has the best and most delicious Greek food. It is a very nice, peaceful, and warm place that is ready to host you. Invite your friends and family [knowing that] for sure the quality is high. 24 hours parking is available for your convenience. For your birthday party reservations please contact us now. You can use our catering services for your celebrations. Every Saturday night there is live music.” The advertisement portrays the ambiance to be welcoming and that it is open to hosting large parties. The majority of the advertisements for non-Iranian restaurants in the Iranian media were marketed in this way, showing what the Iranian clientele expects, and how restaurants have to cater for them.



Figure 4.5 Advertisement for Saloniki, Vancouver (Payam, 2013)

In summary, then, one crucial element of commercial food space marketing is the designation applied to the foods sold. This is often a toponym. In the Iranian case, one crucial aspect of this designation is a positioning with regard to the very naming of the diaspora, in terms of Iranian and Persian. Here, the 'Persian', rather than the 'Iranian', is often used to convey associations with a pre-revolution Persian identity, rather than the contemporary post-revolution Iranian identity. This has nostalgic connotations too, entangling foods with ideas of long histories, past empires and so forth. The Persian becomes a loosely imagined and romanticised geographical representation, though its deployment

has much more current motivations, including an attempt to convey social and political messages that can change the ways in which non-Iranian people think about Iranian people and Iranian/Persian culture (Cashman, 2002; Silk, 2004). In addition, my findings also pointed to how the toponymical designations used in marketing can involve both the 'veiling' and 'bridging' of identities. The hiding or veiling of diasporan Iranian identities, through the marketing of other cuisines in particular Italian, has been commented on in earlier studies. My own work found also apparent were processes of 'bridging', where geographical designations are adopted that seek to connect Iranian food businesses to non-Iranian markets, including the process of (implicitly and explicitly) adopting regional toponyms that emphasise long histories of cultural exchange and mobility (e.g. Middle Eastern; Mediterranean; Levantine).

4.4 Other Naming Practices and their Geographical Associations

The geographical descriptions used in these food spaces are not limited to the designation of the cuisine and diaspora. The representation of diasporic identities can also be conveyed through outlet and product naming.

One instance of this in Vancouver is how a Canadian sense of pride and belonging is often reflected through the names of food spaces. 'Canadianness' is a quality that is quite common in Canadian food and beverage marketing. Notable examples include the beer company, Molson Canadian, and the coffee and doughnut chain, Tim Hortons (Cormack, 2008, 2012; Penfold, 2008; Seiler, 2002). In the case of Molson Canadian, its commodity-sign is constructed

through the imagery of Canadian stereotypes, such as the country's vast landmass covered in ice, the love of (ice) hockey and so on. The diasporan food businesses that I studied also often looked explicitly to market themselves as Canadian. One example is Afra bakery and market in North Vancouver. Afra is a Persian girl's name meaning maple leaf; since the maple leaf is Canada's national symbol, the name comes to represent a diasporic conjunction of nationalities. A sense of national belonging for Urban Gate (located in the Coquitlam area of Vancouver) is marketed by the screening of the Vancouver Canucks ice hockey games, with a large banner advertising this:

PRIYA: I noticed that you show hockey games here.

URBAN GATE: After a while living in Vancouver, Canada for a while, you basically come across things that are habits in this culture. I myself am a big supporter of the Canucks. It's just a feeling that you get when you live here. (Personal interview, Urban Gate, Vancouver, July 2013)

Urban Gate's adoption of hockey as central to its entertainment offering is part of a wider process that has seen this traditional form of Canadian popular culture engaged with Canada's diasporan populations. For example, CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company) has begun hosting Hockey Night in Canada in Punjabi, catering towards Canada's Punjabi audience and reflecting Canada's multicultural population (terms that are used in hockey were adapted in Punjabi; for example 'slap shot' which became *chaperr shot*, with the word *chaperr* meaning a slap to the face) (Conway, 2011; Cormack and Cosgrave, 2013). The recognition of the local landscape also becomes a marketing strategy, demonstrating that the Iranian immigrant community is part of the larger

Vancouver community. The names of many establishments in Vancouver reflect their urban and neighbourhood location. For example, The Heights Deli and Meat shop is named after the Burnaby Heights area in Burnaby; Lonsdale Kebab is named after its location on Lonsdale Avenue in North Vancouver; and Urban Gate is named so after part of Coquitlam's urban area. For others, the naming process reflects a more metaphorical rendering of the local area or national culture. Golestan, located in North Vancouver, means 'a garden of flowers', which the owner related to the multicultural nature of the city and Canada:

... it represents Canada, it's multicultural. People came from all over the world and you know it's very peaceful. I think all people are like flowers. All of the flowers are different colours pink, yellow, blue, red, you know. I said ok, *Golestan*. It means a garden of flowers. If you went to the garden, all the flowers are different colours. All are red... hmmm... good, but if you put all the colours in one garden, yellow, blue you know, it's quite nice. (Personal interview, Golestan, Vancouver, May 2013)

Of course, it is not only a sense of belonging and location in Canada that name choices reflect. Typically many of the names chosen are associated with places in Iran, Iranian food items, or Persian myths. Some names are chosen, it seems, for their ability for cross-cultural 'translation'. Zeitoon in North Vancouver is a good example of this. The word *zeitoon*, meaning olive, is used in Farsi, Arabic, Turkish and some dialects of Spanish. It is Iranian, then, but in a way that flows across rather than bounds cultures. Olives are also represented in the food and décor of Zeitoon: each dish comes with two olives as decoration and the walls are painted olive green. The olive in turn positions Iranian food within a broader notion of Mediterranean food.

Myths are an important theme as they suggest the appeal of looser imaginative geographies separated from geopolitical realities, thus creating a sense of exoticism (Monrreal, 2008). For example, Simurgh, located in the Covent Garden area of London, is named after a creature that features in Persian mythology. The owner decided to call the restaurant Simurgh because his grandfather used to tell him the story of the *Simurgh* when he was a child. Here, then, personal memory plays a role in the reasoning behind the name, and by sharing the story of the Simurgh on the website the name allows the owner to share these memories with a wider audience. Associations with memory, myth and narrative are found too in the naming of particular menu items. Cocktails are a good example of this, given the opportunity they give to both invent new recipes and new names. In the case of Cazba restaurant located in the West End area of Vancouver, and Simurgh restaurant in Covent Garden in London, though the ingredients in the cocktails are not necessarily Persian, the names of the cocktails are Persian inspired. At Cazba some of the names of the cocktails include *One Night in Tehran*, *Caspian Sea* and *Persian Gulf*. In the case of Simurgh the names of are more closely related to Persian myth, thus giving an added sense of exoticism:

... If you look, here are some cocktails that I have like *Silk Road*. *Noosh-Daro* is based on the story of one of the Persian heroes who killed his son with his own hands, but he did not know that. The king knew that he could treat his son with *Noosh-Daro*, an eternity drink. They are all Persian related: *500BC*, *1001 Nights*, *Essence of Simurgh*, *Caspian Breeze*, *Warriors Punch*, *Three Wise Men*, you associate them with the Persian culture, so that's why I put all these names. (Personal interview, Simurgh, London, November 2012)

The names are key here; these drinks do not contain obviously “Iranian ingredients” but combinations that are prevalent in cocktail bars across the US (see Ocejo, 2010; Pardilla, 2015). However, Doost Persian Grill and Vodka Bar in the Vauxhall area of London does feature two cocktails on its drinks menu that distinctively use pomegranates: the *Pomedriver Shooter* (made with vodka, fresh pomegranate juice and seeds) and the *Fountain of Health* (made with vodka, fresh pomegranate juice and ginger) (Doost-London, 2013).

For some, the name of a product is associated with an explicit narrative. Kakh beer, billed as ‘Persian Saffron Beer’ and based in London, created a fictional story to accompany the product. This can be found on the label on the beer bottle, as well as the company’s online marketing platforms (email interview, October 2013) (see Figure 4.6). Here is that mythical story:

Legend has it that many years ago in ancient Persia there lived a great King, King Blash VI. It was rumoured that King Blash produced what some described as the "8th wonder of the world", an enchanting beer produced in the confinements of the Palace. He was famed for giving these sacred barrels away to his soldiers before they went to war. King Blash was never defeated and many people believed this was because of the magical ingredients of the beer itself. When the King’s son; Blash VII, took over his fathers [sic] throne, the secret recipe was passed down to him and he called the beer Kakh which means Palace in Persian. The beer was so good that Kings throughout the world would exchange the beer for gold, making King Blash VII one of the richest and most powerful men in the world. The secret of the recipe is its simplicity, using only the finest Persian Saffron, barley malt, hops, yeast and water, to create this captivating drink. This recipe has been unchanged throughout the centuries giving Kakh its unique regal flavour that we can all enjoy today.



Figure 4.6 Story of Kakh beer on the label (2013)

Explicitly cast as ‘based on a fictional story’, this narrative draws upon the importance of storytelling in Iranian culture, romanticising and exoticising the beer, casting it as ‘enchanting’, ‘magical’ and ‘captivating’. The use of royalty within the narrative also presents the beer appear as a high end product made with the finest of ingredients; and generally, whilst this is fictional story it strives to associate this new, diasporan product with ideas of Iranian history and tradition.

The use of narrative or story telling is not new in advertising. In Canada, Tim Hortons utilises a ‘true stories’ campaign as a marketing strategy designed to link the brand to notions of belonging and Canadian national identity (Cormack, 2008, 2012; Penfold, 2008; Naraghi and Kingsbury, 2013). These stories seek to resonate with reality, associating the brand with real lives and real people, making it part of everyday ‘Canadianness’. In the diasporan businesses that I looked at, there is an element of this realism in the use of Iranian place-names, such as Alborz in Kensington, London, which link the business back to a

'real' place in the Iranian homeland. However, whilst this naming is part of a more documentary, realist aesthetic it is not immune to myth making, as the diasporan dynamics imbue the homeland with nostalgic qualities. In Alborz, for example, this place name and documentary photos are used to represent a nostalgia for pre-revolutionary times. Alborz is part of a documentary, but nostalgic branding as Alborz is a mountain range in northern Iran, for diasporan Iranians it could evoke memories of family holidays taken to Alborz. On the other hand, in the case of Vancouver based Iranians it could evoke memories related to landscape, as the Vancouver landscape and northern Iranian landscape is similar, with the mountains to the north and the city to the south.

Generally, then, I have been suggesting that 'naming' is an important facet of the marketing process and of how it associates diasporan products with places. These associations can be to places in the diaspora (in this study, Vancouver/Canada and London/United Kingdom). The associations can also be to places in the Iranian 'homeland'. The former tend to position products as part of the diasporic, multicultural 'here and now'; the latter tend to position products as in some sense 'other worldly', as mythical, as introducing something from another place and time to the contemporary consumer landscape.

4.5 Marketing Socialities

Having outlined how practices of naming position these food spaces in relation to broader imaginative geographies, I now turn to how the various socialities of these food spaces are represented. Here, then, marketing focuses more directly on the experiences that these spaces provide. Associations with

both local places and 'elsewheres' continue to be central to this marketing practice.

One key aspect of how restaurants in particular are presented as a social space in London is through the provision of *shisha* or *narghile*. The restaurants in Vancouver do not have *shisha*, due to federal and provincial smoking laws, though instead this experience is offered in specialist shisha cafes. The *shisha* bar is an attraction not just for Iranians but for Arabs too, and is something that could be expected at Middle Eastern restaurants. Schreter (2006, p.161) states *shisha* consumption was associated with lower class coffeehouses; "nevertheless, the recent trend is more associated with a fashion of the middle and upper strata, and their renewed quest for authenticity". This authenticity dates back to an association of *shisha* with a traditional lifestyle (see Schechter, 2006 for a detailed account).

In writing about multicultures and cities, Färber and Gdaniec (2006) argue that representations of the city are shaped through cultural objects and everyday practices. They examine the *shisha* as both an "Oriental consumable [and as a] symbolic appropriation of space", arguing that "the popularity of this Oriental accessory reflects the impact of the material culture within urban space situated at the intersection of global cultural flows and local appropriation" (Färber and Gdaniec, 2006, p.114). The *shisha* in the context of Iranian commercial food spaces works in different ways for different markets. It presents as an exotic object for the non-Iranian customer, not so much framed as Iranian as part of a wider Middle Eastern or indeed 'Arabic' culture (thus wrongly associating Iranian

and Arab cultures). The popular imagination of the cafes and restaurants in the Edgware Road area of London is exemplary of this elision. On the other hand, shisha consumption in commercial spaces also offers an experience away from the mundane everyday, and connected to cultural heritage, for the Iranian diasporan. As noted above, due to the City of Vancouver's smoking bylaws, the *shisha* comes to represent a private diasporan space in the city, as it is only available in special *shisha* cafes. These spaces are represented as being distinctively Persian. Figure 4.7 of The Persian Tea House in Vancouver shows the display of the Persian flag of the Sun and Lion draped around a table, and what appears to be a painting of Persepolis and the columns with the bull heads towards the back of the photograph. The claim to being Iranian is further driven by the fact that the owner is Iranian.

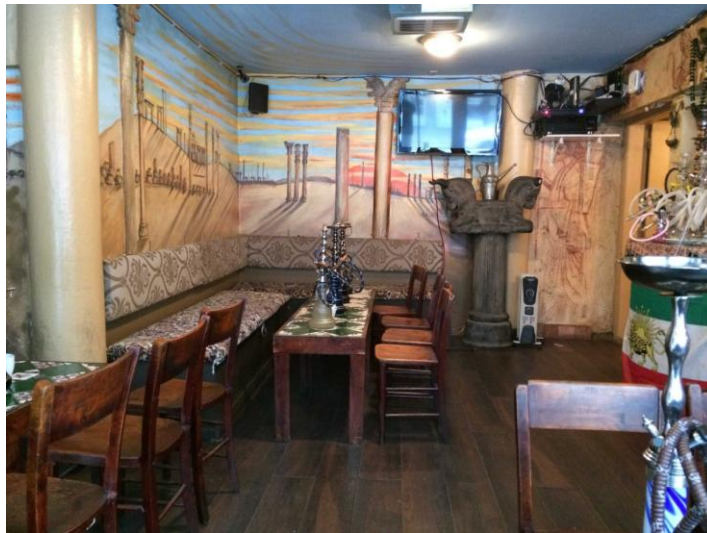


Figure 4.7 The Persian Tea House, Vancouver (FourSquare, 2014)

According to McAuliffe (2005), *shisha cafes* provide a social space for Iranians who do not frequent bars because of the presence of alcohol. However,

my empirical data suggests that alcohol is also often present in these spaces, with many Iranian restaurants being licensed to sell it. Alcohol sales in part reflect the role of alcoholic drinks in forging socialities within the restaurant space. Thus at the Orkideh restaurant in the Golders Green area of London, alcohol sale coincides with the live entertainment provided on Friday and Saturday nights:

We've got live music Friday and Saturday and people ask for alcohol. Yes we do serve alcohol. (Personal interview, Orkideh, London, October 2013)

The majority of diasporic Iranian restaurants do serve alcohol, though some do not for reasons of religious observance (e.g. Behesht in the Harlesden area of London). The ones that do serve alcohol do so in part to attract a wider clientele:

... because there are a lot of customers who are not Iranian. They like to drink something, so they have it. There is a licence and to be able to sell to people who are not Muslim and they want to be able to drink. So...because they are catering to all kind of people. (Personal interview, Apadana, Vancouver, May 2013)

In the case of Cazba restaurants in Vancouver, the serving of alcohol in their West End location reflects its location and market, whilst its absence in their North Vancouver location reflects its focus on a family oriented market:

We actually just got our licence last week. We don't have one in North Van. That's very family oriented there. But here, being downtown prime location it's kind of a demand we have to fill. There's lot of profit in it too, so that's a plus. (Personal interview, Cazba, Vancouver, March 2013)

For others, though, alcohol was not simply about accommodating non-Iranian customers. It also played a role in differentiating Iranian identity from Islamic identity, emphasising that the two are not synonymous. There was, for

example, a frequent acknowledgement of wine as having Iranian gastronomic heritage:

Wines [yes], and we've got sprits, as much as we can. I love wine, and Persian (sic) Iran has never been an Islamic country until recently. So it's only recently that hypocrisy has thrown its weight on Iran and now everyone drinks indoors, rather than enjoying it out with friends, and the drinking has actually increased the consumption of alcohol in Iran under this regime. So this hypocrisy to me is just hypocrisy. I choose beautiful wines which I think will complement our food. The sale of them justifies my action. They sell really well, and I'm a non-Islamic Iranian believer. Over 3000 years we had wine with everything, now for 30 years... which one would you choose? (Personal interview, Kateh, London, November 2013)

For Kateh the presence of wine can be interpreted as a political statement against the Islamic regime, representing the freedom to choose whether they, Iranians, drink or not (Gholami, 2015). Whilst the presence of alcohol attracts some customers, on the other hand it can put off others:

...a lot of religious Iranians won't come here because we sell alcohol or maybe religious Pakistani people, they won't come here because we sell alcohol. This is for the public; they can choose to come if they want to, I can choose what to sell. (Personal interview, Lavaash, London, October 2013)

Writing on the Iranian diaspora and Islam, Gholami (2015, p.32) states "in these Iranian gatherings and events, and in the broader context of non-Islamiosity¹³, the refusal to drink alcohol is equated with 'being Islamic', regardless of the actual reason". Furthermore, Gholami goes to on argue that the open consumption of alcohol in the diaspora represents an idealised freedom, an "act of non-Islamious consumption" (p.170).

¹³ A discourse or practice eradicating or distancing 'the Islamic', by Iranian migrants (Gholami, 2015).

Dance and music are also important forms of sociality that are used to market these spaces, in particular to diasporan Iranians. Many Iranian restaurants have a dance floor and present weekly Iranian floor shows and live musicians playing traditional and modern Iranian music, crystallising the affiliation between Iranian people, Iranian music and Iranian dance in the diaspora (see Naficy, 1998 on the production of diasporic Iranian music videos). Here the restaurant becomes transformed into a dual space: a restaurant and club catering specifically for the Iranian diaspora. The advertisement for Chateau Nega, in the downtown area of Vancouver, shown in Figure 4.8 focuses on the restaurant as a social space, by advertising itself as a cabaret restaurant. In particular, the advertisement focuses on the restaurant being a gendered social space, for women only on these occasions:

We have one night during the month, the last Friday of each month; it's just for the ladies. The ladies night in Persian culture is different than in western culture...Some people cover their head; if there are no men they can take it off and they're dancing, they're singing and they have a nice time together. (Personal interview, Chateau Nega, Vancouver, April 2013)



Figure 4.8 Advertisement for 'Ladies Night' at Chateau Nega, Vancouver (Daneshmand Magazine, 2013)

The advertisement states that the event is for women only, where they will have an unforgettable night with Arabic dancing and a perfect dinner. The targeted clientele here is Muslim women, where a safe space is provided for them to enjoy themselves. This raises wider issues on the politics on women-only gatherings, how Iranian Muslim women should live outside Iran, and how gender relations are contested and negotiated in the diaspora (Spellman, 2004).

More generally, the restaurant as a social space becomes a space where Iranians negotiate between various identities and representations. In the Caspian Express (located North Vancouver) advertisement (see Figure 4.9), this is an issue about locating the sociality on offer as both Iranian and Arabic. Arabic music along with Iranian music is presented in these restaurant spaces. The advertisement states (as translated)

Caspian restaurant has three branches to serve you. The third branch of Caspian transforms into a cabaret restaurant every Friday and Saturday, with music provided by a DJ and Arabic dance, with a varied menu of the highest quality, cheapest price and the best quality food.

McAuliffe (2005) argues that the similarities between Iranian and Arabic music lead to the consumption of a wider 'Middle Eastern' tradition. Belly dancing is also presented in many restaurants as a syncretic addition, but again thus presents multiple geographical associations with Arabic, Turkish and Iranian cultures.



Figure 4.9 Caspian Express represents Iranian and Arabic identities, North Vancouver (Daneshmand Magazine, 2013)

In other instances, the social events connect restaurants to other local cultures. For example, in the research I observed Cazba's involvement in the Annual 2013 LGBT Vancouver Pride Parade on Davie Street (see Figure 4.10). This branch of Cazba is located in the west end of Vancouver, which is an area

well known among Vancouverites as being Vancouver's gay village. Some local businesses take part in the annual pride parade, and Cazba got involved, as noted in my ethnographic diary notes:

Davie Street is being prepared for the Pride parade and Cazba has even got involved. A large rainbow flag hangs next to the large Canadian one, and smaller rainbow flags adorn the railings. The staff are wearing pink and purple t-shirts with ROCK THE CAZBA on the front and PRIDE 2013 on the back. Some of the male staff are wearing bright pink and purple tank tops. Kayvan tells me that he thought it would be funny to have some of the guys in tight and bright tank tops rather than t-shirts, whilst he is wearing a purple t-shirt. (Ethnographic notes, August 2013)

I was curious as to why Cazba decided to partake in the activities, in particular given that homosexuality is illegal in Iran and punishable by death. Kayvan (the owner) responded that the involvement was a statement about being part of the social life of their neighbourhood:

We just kept hearing from other restaurants that this is the biggest week of the year; you guys should overstock, over staff, and we didn't really know what to expect so I just listened to them. I over staffed, I just went with the flow like made the guys wear really nice stuff. We are on Davie [and] it is a gay location. That weekend was something else. I don't think we'll ever see another weekend like that until next year... I didn't hear anything myself [from Iranians opposing to Cazba's involvement]. Personally, just being here in this location you've got to respect them because this is their place. They welcomed us in the neighbourhood and this is their place so we're just trying to be as friendly as we can to them, and they showed us great feedback. Whatever other people think it's their opinion, and we are in the western world where it's not like that same mentality back home, there's a lot more freedom

here. We just went with it. We didn't know what to expect and we had a great thing. (Personal interview, Cazba, July 2013)

It appears that community participation was of importance to Kayvan, and taking part in the Pride Parade shows the appreciation for freedom of expression that Canada allows. This chimes with Cazba's wider marketing. Cazba's slogan choice of "ROCK THA CAZBA" is intriguing, playing on The Clash's (1982) song, *Rock the Casbah*, written around the time that Ayotollah Khomeini had banned 'rock n roll music' in Iran and protesting against that restriction (DeMott, 2011).



Figure 4.10 The Pride flag hangs off a fixture outside Cazba restaurant in the West End Vancouver (2013)

In summary, marketing often emphasises the sociality staged within commercial food spaces, especially restaurants. This sociality is both used to mark Iranian food spaces as 'different' and to 'connect' them into the wider social life of potential customers.

4.6 Marketing Atmospheres: From Opulence to Simplicity

In this section I extend the prior analysis of naming and sociality by focusing on how food spaces are marketed in terms of their 'atmospheres' and sensory qualities (more generally, see Anderson, 2009). These issues will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6. For now, my particular focus is on how marketing materials and advertising represent food spaces in terms of descriptions of the kinds of places that they are and the kinds of sensory experiences that they offer. My focus is again primarily on restaurants rather than shops.

Opulence is a recurring theme in marketing materials, especially in the London based restaurants. A prime example is Anar Persian Kitchen in Notting Hill, London. Its marketing materials (see Figure 4.11) display the opulence of the restaurant not only by showing the décor of the restaurant but also by displaying the graphics like photographs in gold frames. The black background and gold frames match the restaurant theme colour of black and gold, producing a particular sense of opulence and sophistication. The restaurant also has its own logo, in Farsi, picturing the branch of the *anar* (pomegranate) tree with a bird, most probably a nightingale. According to Diba (2001) the rose and nightingale, or *gol o bolbol*, is a popular Iranian literary and decorative motif, especially during the Safavid and Qajar eras. The image of the rose and nightingale is said to symbolize "elegance, refinement, and idealized beauty" (unpaginated, para. 6). The rose, *gol*, serves as a literary symbol of beauty and of the beloved, and the nightingale, *bolbol*, represents the lover or poet. Diba (2001, unpaginated, para.

2) states “*gol o bolbol* designs were used to beautify all manners of objects...The literary theme enjoyed great popularity due to its universal appeal and the range of both earthly and divine meanings which it conveyed; as a decorative tradition, the continued vitality of the *gol o bolbol* design may be attributed to its stylistic and formal versatility”. Neis (2013) states that the motifs of the rose and pomegranate used in this advertising campaign are representative of femininity. The use of gold resonates with many Iranians’ love of gold and is seen as a marker of class and extravagance (McAuliffe, 2005).



Figure 4.11 Opulence displayed at Anar Persian Kitchen in Notting Hill, London (top menu, bottom left exterior and bottom right interior) (2012)

Behesht (meaning 'Paradise') restaurant in Harlesden, London, directs a similar emphasis on opulence to a broader market positioning as a place of a somewhat mystical Persian culture. Behesht has devoted considerable attention to its website, so I especially focus on this aspect of its marketing. The website states that:

Behesht offers a feast reminiscent of a "Deriverish" fairy tale. Genuine antiques, old Persian copper lamps, fountains and warm wood columns create a reflection of Iran's romanticism when it was known as Persia. Behesht restaurant, in keeping with tradition, is hand-painted in rich red-maroon, turquoise blue and sun gold. Greeted by an impressive waiting room, guests enter the main dining area of the restaurant, filled with the Iranian antiques and rugs and carpets. (Behesht, 2014a)

The description implies that Behesht is creating an environment that stages a romanticised and nostalgic image of Persia, rather than a modern day or post-revolution Iran. It also implies elements of mysticism and fantasy, especially when it comes to describing the objects like the lamps and carpets. The description of the use of the colours – "rich red-maroon, turquoise blue and sun gold" – connects the environment to the physical landscape of the sea, sky, and desert. The description of the terrace area gives a further sense of the atmospherics being promoted:

Enveloped by a beautiful wooden floor, tall columns and a light-blue, sculpted ceiling, the room provides a serene and intimate atmosphere. High, Gothic-style arcades create the breathtaking appearance of the terrace area. Night only enhances the effect, when chandelier and wall lights project a myriad of light shards. (Behesht, 2014a)

Behesht is well known for its décor, which is further emphasised through the gallery tab on the website. It allows the viewer to explore different areas of the restaurant through a controlled panoramic visual. The gallery tab shows that the

restaurant has sections which are themed after the Persian poets Hafez, Ferdowsi, Khaayam and Saadi, connecting the restaurant to traditions of Persian culture (see Figure 4.11). I will say more about restaurant design in Chapter 5; but for our purposes here the key point is that Behesht exemplifies how marketing brings together emphases on the sensual and affective ('a serene and intimate atmosphere', 'breathtaking appearance') and on Persian culture and tradition (the Persian poets, the traditional colour scheme) in order to present a 'romantic' and somewhat 'mystical' product ('a feast reminiscent of a Derverish fairy tale').

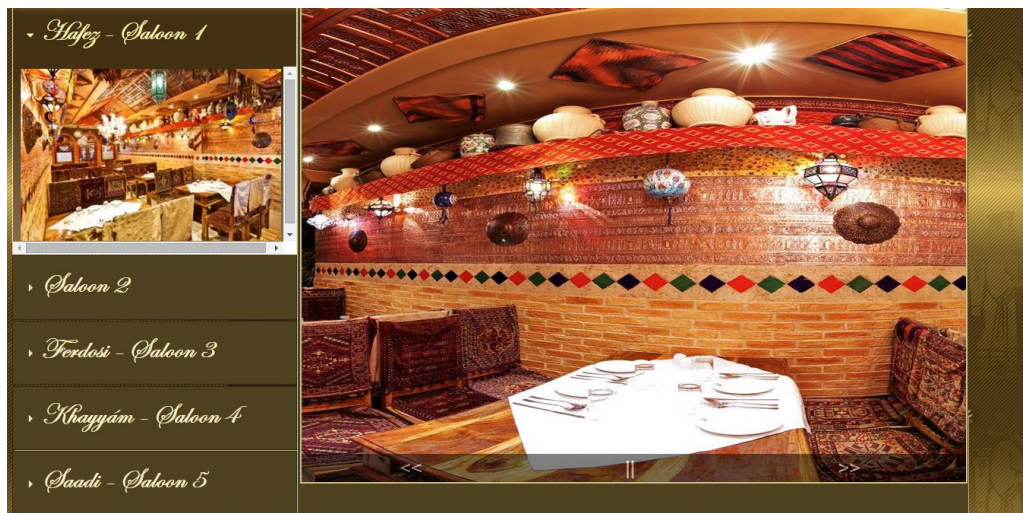


Figure 4.12 A snapshot of the 'Hafez room' at Behesht restaurant (Behesht, 2014b)

The qualities emphasised in marketing materials both recur and differ. There is a range of ways in which Iranian restaurants position themselves as distinctive. There are repeating motifs – for example tradition, Persia – but these are deployed differently by the businesses. So, we have seen how Anar Persian

Kitchen focuses on a traditional Persian culture of opulence, and Behesht on a Persian culture imbued with enchanting, somewhat magical experiences. In contrast, Alounak in Bayswater, London emphasises a Persian tradition of rustic simplicity (see Figure 4.12). Like Behesht, its marketing materials do this by focusing on the restaurant décor. The photos presented show that the restaurant has a rustic look, with bare brick walls and dark wood furniture, though with some elements of opulence, through the brightly coloured lamp shades and wall lamps and the stain glassed window doors. A closer look at the top photograph (see Figure 4.13) shows a painting hanging on the wall, portraying a man walking into a home where pots are stacked on shelves and on the floor. The image denotes a home in an Iranian village; the look of the restaurant more generally connotes a romanticised, historicised, and simple Persia (far from the opulence of Anar Persian Kitchen).

Alounak
Restaurants

10 Russell Garden, W14 8EZ
Tel. 020 7603 1130

رستوران الونک با دکوراسیون جدید و مدیریت
سر آشپز قدیمی خود محمود
شما را به محیطی دلنشین و سنتی دعوت می کند



The advertisement for Alounak Restaurants is presented on a menu card with a textured, stone-like background. At the top, the restaurant's name 'Alounak' is written in a large, elegant, black cursive font, with 'Restaurants' in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the name is a stylized logo in Arabic calligraphy. Below the name, the address '10 Russell Garden, W14 8EZ' and the telephone number 'Tel. 020 7603 1130' are printed in a clean, black font. A block of Persian text follows, inviting customers to the restaurant, highlighting its new decor and the experience of a traditional chef. The lower half of the card features three photographs: a large central one showing a dining room with brick walls, wooden tables, and colorful lanterns; and two smaller ones at the bottom showing the restaurant's entrance and a hallway with colorful stained-glass windows.

Figure 4.13 Advertisement for Alounak restaurant (Deevan Magazine, 2012)



Figure 4.14 Closer look at village painting from Figure 4.13 (Zagat, 2015)

Milad Restaurant in Cricklewood, London seeks a similar atmosphere of simple Persian tradition (see Figure 4.14). Visually, its marketing materials such as the menu feature the décor much less, instead focusing on the food with photos of *baghali polo* (herb and broad bean rice), *zereshk polo* (rice with barberries) and *faloodeh* (frozen noodle dessert) in an ornate bowl. However, the combination of décor, food, and restaurant experience is emphasised in the text, which introduces the ambiance of the restaurant:

Milad Restaurant is beautiful intimate restaurant, providing a charming and cheerful Persian dining experience. The perfectly soft and warm shades of brick designs transport you straight to traditional Persian settings in ancient Persia. It is rare to find such a place which truly embodies the character and nature of Persian culture. Famous for its gorgeous artworks, carpets, and pottery, the culture is magnificently represented through Milad's décor.

Again, we see a combination of ideas of Persian difference and tradition with an affective atmosphere (in this case described as “charming”, “cheerful”, and “warm”). The use of the word “transport” is also worth noting; words related to mobility (such as ‘travel’, ‘explore’, ‘transport’) are more widely used to describe the flows of culture in diasporic spaces. Milad is both a place characterised by

particular cultural traditions and sensorium and a form of mobility that takes the customer from 'here' to 'there' in that place of elsewhereeness.

Milad Restaurant رستوران میلاد

Persian Cuisine
آماده پذیرایی از مجالس و مهمانی‌های شما عزیزان

The perfectly soft and warm shades of brick designs transport you straight to traditional Persian settings in ancient Persia. It is rare to find such a place which truly embodies the character and nature of Persian culture. Famous for its gorgeous artwork, carpets, and pottery, the culture is magnificently represented through Milad's decor.

This finest Persian cuisine offers a tasteful array of traditional starters including the Persian signature dish 'Panir-o-Sabzi': delicious fresh tarragon, mint, walnut, feta cheese and a hot nan. Roll up the herbs, cheese and walnuts and enjoy! Their selection of luscious seafood, succulent meat grills and vegetarian dishes combine authentic flavours, suited to every taste.

Free Delivery up to 4 miles Minimum order apply

We would Appreciate an early booking for Christmas Dinner at Weddings and Functions during the christmas period.

چلو قیله رستوران میلاد
زبان زد خاص و عام است

67 Cricklewood Broadway London NW2 3JR

Complete your dining experience with a gorgeous Persian dessert – traditional saffron icecream, refreshing sorbet, or authentic Persian sweets made with fresh milk, egg, butter, cinnamon and semolina.

Figure 4.15 Advertisement for Milad restaurant, Cricklewood, London (Deevan Magazine, 2012)

For some, this elsewhereeness is somewhat mystically framed (e.g. Behesht, as discussed above), but it need not be. This elsewhere can also be humble and homely. For instance, rather than focusing on opulence or mystical enchantment Galleria in Marylebone, London chooses to focus upon home and family. On its website's homepage (<http://www.galleriarestaurant.co.uk/>), the advertising text states: "Specialising in Persian Cuisine & Catering this family restaurant is loved by locals, and families for its unique flavours of traditional

home made Iranian cooking” (Galleria, n.d, a). The theme of tradition is further crystallized on its website page that explains the history of Galleria and Persian food through statements like “the cognoscenti around Marylebone High Street know Galleria Restaurant well for its unique taste and homemade traditional dishes” and “their main specialties are in Home Made Traditional Stews and various rice dishes”. Gender, particularly the role of women, is highlighted, placing further emphasis on the home and home cooking as the place of traditional Persian food: “Women have always been regarded as the best Chefs in Persia and therefore the ‘homemade’ aspect is strong” (Galleria, n.d, b). This emphasis on the traditional vernacular of the home or “homemade” is played off against stereotypes of the ‘exotic’: “When you think of Persia – now Iran – You probably think of rugs and magic carpets!! What is surprising is that their culinary expertise was renowned long before Aladdin or 1001 nights hit the headlines!” Later they add a tone of sarcasm: “...Oh, and you’ll have to supply your own carpet if you’re thinking of flying home!!”(Galleria, n.d, b). The emphasis on home fare, then, is opposed to the use of stereotypes that are fantastical, fanciful and not at all ‘real’ (Stockdale, 2009). Galleria looks to distance itself from common popular culture motifs of Orientalism applied to Persia (Said, 1978), instead characterising the Persian in terms of a real, authentic and homely tradition.

4.7 Promoting Authenticity

My argument, then, has been that: marketing is a process of product positioning and differentiation which, to that end, often makes ‘geographical entanglements’ (Pike, 2009, 2011); these entanglements or associations are

seen in the naming practices or toponymy of food spaces; and they are further seen in how the spaces themselves are presented as places, environments marked both by cultural meanings and affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009). I now want to turn directly to what has been a reoccurring theme throughout these discussions: the marketing of authenticity. Its frequent presence and promotion in the marketing materials of these Iranian commercial food spaces chimes with past work on diasporan food more generally. As discussed in Chapter 2, drawing on such work I generally approach authenticity not as a (culinary) cultural quality asking for arbitration, but as cultural construction requiring analysis for how, why and for whom it is made. In this chapter, my interest is more specific, namely: how the notion of authenticity is deployed in the studied food spaces' marketing materials; and what this deployment tells us about how authenticity works as a geographically entangled 'positioning' and 'differentiation' tool.

The first point to make is that claims to authenticity are ubiquitous in the marketing discourses of my studied food spaces. One response to this ubiquity would be to suggest that authenticity has lost all meaning and any power to differentiate products. There is an element of truth to this, but I suggest that it is better to see in authenticity's ubiquity an access point into many taken for granted assumptions about the culinary cultural geographies of diasporan food. A useful starting point is Anar, in London, whose strapline is "an authentic taste of Persian cuisine, for those of you who can't travel to it!!". In this one phrase we can see two key assumptions in the discourse of authenticity.

First, the connection made between the authentic and the Persian positions authenticity in the past and in relation to tradition. This is seen in other cases too, such as Milad (located in Cricklewood, London), where the two terms are used as interchangeable synonyms:

This finest Persian cuisine offers a tasteful array of traditional starters including the Persian signature dish '*panir-o-sabzi*': delicious fresh tarragon, mint, walnut, feta cheese and a hot *nan* [sic]. Roll up the herbs, cheese and walnuts and enjoy! Their selection of luscious seafood, succulent meat grills and vegetarian dishes combine authentic flavours, suited to every taste. Complete your dining experience with a gorgeous Persian desert – traditional saffron icecream [sic], refreshing sorbet, or authentic Persian sweets made with milk, eggs, butter, cinnamon and semolina. (From advertisement placed in Deevan Magazine, 2012. See Figure 4.14)

Second, authenticity is framed in terms of a distinctive dual geography. It is both 'located' – cast as a territorialised quality, associated with another time and place – and also 'mobilised' – cast as something that commercial culture delivers to you, something that can travel (if you can't 'travel to it'). This dual geography creates an ambivalence and paradox: the authentic is not here, it is elsewhere; but through commerce it can be brought to you! This paradox is negotiated through various claims that can establish trust and explain how the mobilisation of authenticity takes place. Marketing authenticity often involves a transparency to the making of foods. So, in Milad's marketing copy, the listing of ingredients works to explain how these constituent parts are what keeps the foods authentic. Also vital is some transparency on how the foods are cooked. For example, Little Persia (located in Bayswater, London), states "we bake our bread", and many Iranian restaurants in London have a visible *tanoor* (an oven, rather like a *tandoor*) as a symbol of authenticity (see Figure 4.15). Often placed near the

front of restaurants, these ovens are exemplars of how authenticity involves constructing a then and there in the here and now (the traditional oven making bread in the same way as far away, but in this very restaurant this very day). Authenticity, here, is about a geographical mobility that supposedly leaves things the same (more generally, see Heldke, 2003).



Figure 4.16 Advertisement for Little Persia, Bayswater, London (Nobahar, 2013)

Hafez, in the Bayswater area of west London, describes itself as “the authentic taste of Persia”, where the “cuisine is a fusion of ancient Persian and Modern Iranian techniques”. Here, then, authenticity is not just about bringing the Persian past unchanged to the present; it is also about being authentic to the ‘Modern Iranian’ and bringing it to London. Authenticity means being both Persian and Iranian. In this context, one might suggest that modern Iran takes shape from the nineteenth century when the west started to interact with Iran

(Ansari, 2007). Thus modern Iranian cuisine can also incorporate ingredients such as coconut sugar or maple syrup which may not have been traditionally used in Persian cuisine, or more simply is able to use substitutes for ingredients that may not be available in diasporan contexts (Batmanglij, 1992, 2007; Shafia, 2013). Dana-Haeri and Ghorashian (2011) argue that the designation 'modern' refers to the change in ingredients in Persian kitchens, such as the use of vegetable oils over animal fats. They also state that there is more of an emphasis on healthy eating where baking and grilling is favoured over frying. In Hafez, as well as other restaurants, authenticity involves a conjunction between tradition and modernity.

One final aspect of the authenticity marketed in these spaces to which I want to attend is the role of the employees, in particular 'front of house' service staff. Restaurant workers play a critical role in constructing and negotiating authenticity (Crang, 1994; Lu and Fine, 1995). At times, this means that the ethnicity of the staff becomes part of the marketing of the restaurant. This was discussed in my interview with Lavash, located in the Golders Green area of London:

All of them [waiting staff] are Persian...yeah because the food is so specialised and they can explain the food better. In the past we had different nationalities and it takes time to train them, and they are not familiar with the taste, familiar with the explanation, with the ingredients. It's like Indian food, it's like Chinese food; you go to Chinese food you see Chinese, you go to Indian you see mostly Indian because they know the food they know the culture so I think that [is] what it is. (Personal interview, Lavash, London, January, 2013)

The hiring of an all-Iranian floor staff adds to the authenticity value of the restaurant, as they are able to sell the Iranian convincingly, especially to the Persian food novice, as they have the relevant knowledge (Kivela, Inbakaran and Reece, 2000).

Nevertheless, there were exceptions when it came to employing Iranians, such as Kateh in Maida Vale London, Persepolis in Vancouver and Dishoom in Covent Garden/the West End of London. In these cases, the owners argued that other factors, such as willingness to do as instructed and more general hospitality skills, outweighed diasporan affiliation:

No, the floor staff is not Iranian at all, because Iranians unfortunately in restaurant business are not very professional. Colleagues of mine from Italy, who worked with me before, they're experts in restaurants, so the cuisine makes no difference. You can do Chinese or Indian, they will be just as good, it's a matter of learning Chinese and Indian that's it. In the kitchen we only have one Iranian the rest are non-Iranian. Our head chef is Indian. We have Italians because they do not have any bad habits. I train them to cook Iranian food without any habits at all so what they learn is proper. There is no short cut, there is no compromise, there is no temptation of precooking and taking the easy way out. So I wish I could get more Iranians; the more I interview the more disappointed I become. It's not rocket science, it's just food... (Personal interview, Kateh, London, December 2013)

...I did not find Persian people give good service... So when I took over I fired all the Iranians and I hired all other cultures. I have Russian working for me, I have a Filipino working for me, I have English lady working for me, I have Turkish people, Afghanistan people working for me right now; they do better service than the Iranian...one of my chefs is Afghani and the other is Turkish...We had Iranians, we got tired of it. They're hard to deal with; my servers weren't doing what they were supposed to do, so I let them go. (Personal interview, Persepolis, Vancouver, August 2013)

For front of house we aim to get someone who is different, quirky. We encourage that. We encourage them to be a little bit strange, and so when they do a trial shift, as opposed to seeing how they wait a table, or seeing how they make drink, we'll give silly random tasks: like what size shoe somebody wears or who Nikhil is, how long he has worked here, and what he likes the most about working at Dishoom. Thus basically forcing them into conversations with different team members and seeing how their personality is and how they mesh with the team. We hire on personality; we can teach them everything else but personality is very important to us. They're all different unique people; they all bring their own sparkle or flare to the service. Sometimes it's a little bit difficult to manage, but it's totally worth it because when the team are here, and they're on form and they're having a good time, it's such a fun place to work. (Personal interview, Dishoom, London, December 2012)

In most cases, then, restaurant owners viewed having Iranian staff as a way to ensure the knowledge required to make Iranian foods and (to a lesser degree) to represent them to customers. They were part of a material production of authenticity, which in turn could be presented to clientele. In a minority of cases, though, there was some questioning about this relationship between people, food knowledge and the production of authentic Iranian food. In the case of Kateh, the menu is different from other commercial Iranian restaurants in London; it is focused on a 'regional Iranian cuisine' which is seasonal in terms of its ingredients; and, on that basis, it is more important that staff follow instructions, because otherwise there is a danger that they simply deploy practices they are familiar with via other Iranian restaurants, compromising the 'difference' Kateh looks to create. For Dishoom, the overall ambience of fun and quirkiness outweighs concerns with authenticity in an ordinary sense; they look for an authentic relationship between staff personality and service style (more

generally, see Kivela et al., 2000). Staffing is, then, part of how 'different differences' and 'different authenticities' are made.

The relationships between service style, hospitality and authenticity are complex. There is a difference in marketing to diasporic Iranians and 'the mainstream'¹⁴. Rather than placing emphasis on authorized authenticity or 'real Iranian', which may be reserved for 'the mainstream', for fellow diasporans authenticity becomes reinterpreted to sentiment and memory, where there is a longing and desire "for something that define the bounds of historicism – a collective gustatory desire...as a route to an alternative history" (Cho, 2010, p.154). In terms of service style this is found in an emphasis on tradition and the tradition of hospitality, usually stated by the phrases (originally in Farsi) such as "is ready to host you" and "our purpose is your satisfaction". This reinforces the practice of *ta'arof*, an Iranian social code of humility and hospitality (Maghbouleh, 2013; Vivier-Muresan, 2006). At other times, cultural codes of hospitality may be hard to translate. Many of the online customer reviews analysed during the research characterised the service style of Iranian restaurants somewhat negatively (I have anonymised the restaurants concerned):

Customer service is a hit or miss here - depending upon which waitress you get. One waitress we had kicked up a stink for not leaving a good tip for her - even though her service was very slow and her attitude needed an adjustment. The food is ok (hence the additional star) - but because of the unpredictable customer service we won't return. I'm still looking for my *koobideh* [(ground beef kebab)] fix from a Persian restaurant with good, reliable customer service!!! (Yelp review, 26/05/2013).

¹⁴ Mainstream in this context refers to non-Iranian and non-Middle Eastern.

The service seems typical of London Persian restaurants – it could never be described as friendly but is generally efficient. (Urbanspoon posted 29/12/2012).

This may reflect contrasting understandings of what good service is; in the mind of the servers, it could mean being efficient and prompt, and not too overtly friendly (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006; Liu and Jang, 2009; Kivela, Inbakaran, and Reece, 1999).

4.8 Food and Pedagogy

Cook and Crang (1996) argue that culinary geographies are characterised by globally extensive flows of food, people, and ideas which are implicated in the creation and circulation of “geographical knowledges”. In this section of the chapter I want to foreground this idea of knowledge to respond to a frequent emphasis from my interviewees: namely that diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces serve a secondary role as pedagogic spaces, where especially ‘the wider public’ is educated about Iran and the Iranian diaspora.

This role has commercial elements. It resonates with claims to authenticity; it develops relationships with customers; it can be a form of marketing. But this pedagogic role is important to vendors for personal reasons too, above all giving them an opportunity to counter the representations of Iran and Iranians in the wider media (Hall, 1981; Van Dijk, 1987). The representations of identity by mainstream media to ‘mainstream audiences’ cause diasporan identities to be negotiated in particular ways (Mahtani, 2001), which respond directly or indirectly to the media representation of what the Iranian is. McAuliffe (2005, p.116) notes, as a result, “‘Iranians’ construct meaning from

representations, which subsequently informs how they construct a self-image for (re)presentation to others (be they 'Iranian' or not)". The use of online social networking and social media has allowed for Iranians, and in some cases non-Iranians, to be reflexive in how the Iranian is (re)presented. In marketing their businesses, these diasporic Iranians also look to shift some of the dominant terms in which their identities enter public discourse.

Karen is non-Iranian and is the co-owner, with her Iranian husband, of the Iranian food store, Persepolis, in Peckham in London. Karen is well known for her Persian inspired cookbooks, and is acknowledged by many in the Persian food industry for pushing the Persian food boundaries, as the majority of her recipes cater for vegetarians. During our interview it was apparent that Karen is passionate about teaching people about Persian culture:

PRIYA: So, do you feel that you and the shop play a role in teaching others about Iran and the rich cultures that it has to offer, rather than the gloom and doom, and stereotypical stuff that they [non-Iranians] see on TV?

KAREN: Yes. I'm sure we do. Teaching is a big word for a little shop and shop-keeper, but if we can disabuse anyone of the various things that they see on telly then that would be great. You know, Iran is a fun nation. It's a mixed nation. Like any other country, there's good and bad. Iran is are very fun and down to earth and quite a lot of them are friendly people... You know that's quite important. The food and the culture is quite different from its Arabic and Turkish neighbours. It's its own man. Persian is Persian...if you say you Arabs and so on they'll [Iranians] get very insulted, and so it's quite fun to say Persia is a different country. It's not Iraq, it's not Afghanistan, it's Iran and a lot of people aren't really aware about the Middle East. The Middle East and it [Iran] gets tarnished with the same brush, and it's quite fun to say well actually, no, there's quite a lot going on over there... (Personal interview, Persepolis in Peckham, London, November 2012)

Persepolis in Peckham thus takes a pedagogic approach, albeit in the deliberately light hearted and quirky tone that characterises the shop's website and blog:

... a lot of shops are too serious, so I decided to take completely the opposite route. I started blogging after I finished my first book because there was such a vacuum and I wanted to keep writing. But nowadays without an online presence, unless you're Harrods, it's quite difficult to survive, and so this draws people in. I think it hooks them in whether it's to shop online or to come into the shop, it doesn't really matter as long as they're engaged with what we do and it helps spread the word about Persian cuisine and Persian culture and disabuse people of a lot of the strange notions that they might have got from the press or watching television or whatever... (Personal interview, Persepolis in Peckham, London, November 2012)

The website features a section called Persopaedia (a word play on Wikipedia), described as "Useless information... A glorified glossary of all things Persepolitan". (see Figure 4.16). Its tone is echoed in Karen's blog., which offers helpful tips on how to use ingredients in relatively easy ways (e.g. adding *za'atar*, a Middle Eastern spice and herb mix, to mayonnaise to make a dip) (see Figure 4.17).

Persopaedia

Useless information. Holds the fabric of the universe together. We've heard that little bits of it can even be used to mend holes in the space time continuum.

Well, you'll find plenty of it here. A glorified glossary of all things Persepolitan. And lots of stuff which we didn't know where else to shove.

OK, so I've just bought a Persian rice cooker. Now what?

First thing to do is to pat yourself on the back: this culinary gewgaw will change your (rice-eating) life. In Iran rice cookers are often given as a wedding present – this brand is famous for the longevity of its appliances, and it is not uncommon for them still to be working ten, twenty, thirty years on.




Figure 4.17 Persopaedia from Persepolis in Peckham which provides information on Iranian foods and culture (Persepolis, 2014a)

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Eight Things To Do with that Whacking Great Bag of Za'atar You've Just Bought




Figure 4.18 Post from Persopedia on Eight things to do with a whacking great bag of za'atar (Persepolis, 2014b)

More generally, the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook among restaurateurs as a marketing and pedagogic tool has become increasingly popular. It is also popular among chefs, home cooks, and Persian food bloggers, allowing them to share knowledge and to form a remote network, where ideas can be shared. In October 2014 food bloggers from the UK, Canada and USA came together promoting themselves, the food, and culture of Iran under the hashtag #Mehrgan2014, celebrating the Persian autumn festival of *Mehrgan*. Each of the bloggers wrote a short paragraph explaining what *Mehragan* is and what it means to them. They then shared a recipe and, at the end of the post, provided a list of other bloggers who were contributing to the project. Some of the recipes shared were traditional, such as The Unmanly Chef's *baghali polo mahicheh* (herbed rice and lamb shanks), whereas others, such as Bottom of the Pan's broccoli *kookoo* (like a herb frittata), were not. The broccoli *kookoo* takes the traditional recipe of the *kookoo sabzi* but has ground broccoli added to it. The use of social media allows for interaction to occur, but needs to be frequent in order to reach out to a wider audience.

Although many of the restaurants do have a Twitter and Facebook presence they are not very active in terms of updating current activities. Some restaurants, such as Cazba (Vancouver) and Dishoom (London) have marketing managers who regularly "tweet" about current promotions and the events that are taking place in the restaurant. Cazba restaurant uses Twitter and Facebook to promote their special offers and to interact with their customers as shown in Figure 4.18.




 Cazba Restaurant ابزاک ناروتسر

This was always my Canadian friends' favourite dish... not just because of how delicious it is, but because of its name! Who knows what this dish is called? (Sadly, we don't serve it!)

John*

Dude, why r u posting dishes u don't serve?? [sic]

 Cazba Restaurant ابزاک ناروتسر

We don't mean to leave your mouth watering with nowhere to go John. We like to engage with our friends on Facebook in many ways, not just by talking about what we serve, but also educating and just having fun over common interests. Have you ever tried *Kookoo Sabzi*?

Edited conversation thread.

Figure 4.19 Cazba asking about *kookoo sabzi*. (From Cazba's Facebook page August 28th 2013)

This example shows that restaurateurs want to engage with their customers in different ways, educating their customers that Persian dishes go beyond the *chelo kebab* (rice and kebab). Marketing is not only about direct sales but a wider cultural representation that eventually is seen as being commercially beneficial. This was not explicitly spoken about at Cazba; however, a wider analysis of Cazba's Twitter feed illustrates this, where a theme emerges about the relationships between commercial marketing and 'ethnic'/cultural representation.

In these tweets there is a focus on food, as illustrated in Figure 4.18; but wider cultural representation is picked up on as well. Some such tweets seem to look for memes or themes can engage the diasporan community: tweets such as “sometimes when I hear the word “*dampayee*”, I panic...” (posted 9th July 2013), followed up a month later with “did you ever have an encounter with a “*dampayee*” as a child? #Persian” (posted 20th August 2013). *Dampayee* is the Farsi word for sandal and is often used as a means of discipline by both South Asian and Iranian mothers (Figure 4.19). In my own response to the tweet, a cross cultural connection between Indian and Iranian cultures was commented on, in a humorous way.



Figure 4.20 Edited Twitter conversation on Iranian culture with Cazba restaurant (August 21, 2013)

The use of social media can also be detrimental to restaurants. Social media has allowed for diners to become the critic; however this is not to say that

the diner as a critic warrants any merit. Rousseau (2012) makes the distinction between a review and a critique: where a review will state what was eaten and if the diner had a nice time; whereas a critique requires knowledge, involves a high level of scrutiny and often means a range of dishes being consumed for comparison. This has led to debates on distinguishing between professional critics and amateur reviewers. Restaurant review sites like Yelp and Urbanspoon allow members of the public to write reviews of a restaurant which are fairly basic, mostly providing a simple account of the service, hygiene, and taste of the food. Many of the negative entries come across as being hostile, and do not really provide any constructive criticism. The use of social media was a topic of conversation as Lenore Newman and I spoke with Meeru, co-owner of the Vij's portfolio of restaurants in our shared investigation on Canadian culinary trends. Meeru did not like how (unconstructive) criticism was given across the internet:

...we opened up when there was no Facebook, there was no Twitter, no Yelp, and not every fucking person thought they were a food critic...with the internet with every god damn person who comes in thinks that they've got the power of their fingers on the internet, and they type away, and they don't realise that you know what when you type away you're not just hurting the ego of the restaurateur. What you're doing is, you're actually putting in jeopardy the lives of dish washers, prep people, servers... see my problem with Yelp is it's not just always about the food, but if you offend somebody now at some weird personal level they can take it to the internet... (Personal interview, Vij's, Vancouver, August 2013)

In terms of mainstream media, Iranian food has garnered growing attention in the UK and Canada in recent years. Illustrative is celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's visit to an Iranian restaurant in Leeds named Darvish, in the second episode of the Channel 4 series "*Jamie's Great Britain*" (2011). In the segment

viewers can see Oliver interacting with the kitchen staff while they are making *mirza ghasemi* (aubergine dip) and then sitting with the owner and his family having a meal consisting of *borani* (spinach and yogurt dip), *mirza ghasemi* (smoked aubergine dip), *abgoosht* (lamb, tomato, potato and chickpea stew), *ghormeh sabzi* (herb and lamb stew), *baghali polo* (rice with fava beans) and *zereshk polo* (rice with barberries). At the beginning of the clip Oliver mentions how there is a buzz amongst chefs about the flavours and ideas of Iranian cuisine and goes on to explain that many of the flavours and foods such as saffron, pomegranates and quinces that people in Britain are familiar with originate from Iran. It is assumed that Oliver is talking to a white middle class British audience from this context. During the course of the dinner, Oliver states: “It’s so different, so delicious but there’s enough about it that’s familiar... [that] you can fall in love straight away. Bloody delicious!” At the end of the clip Oliver reflects on his experience:

This food is amazing. It’s not heavy slap around the face spicy ‘Woo hoo! Yeah! Give me another beer!’ It’s quite elegant. It’s perfumed. Those stews are some of the most interesting stews I’ve ever had, actually, and I think Persian restaurants are going to start popping up more and more, so, and maybe in 10 or 20 years time you know some of those dishes will be as well-known as hummus or you know chicken tikka masala or maybe one day as fish and chips.

Oliver’s account illustrates a wider dynamic in which Iranian food in London and Vancouver is implicated, the on-going seeking out of different foods and new exotic Others (Heldke, 2003). In that search, there is a recurrent ambivalence, characterised as it is both by a desire for new knowledge and understanding and a logic for a reductive fashioning of difference in similar forms. In Jamie Oliver’s

accounts, the subtle flavours of Iranian stews navigate this tension, making the food both accessible and distinctive.

4.9 Conclusion

4.9.1 Summary

At the outset of this chapter, I outlined two broader debates that the analysis would both draw upon and looked to advance. The first of these concerned the cultural-economic practice of marketing, and in particular its use of geographical designations, associations and 'entanglements' as means to position and differentiate products. Here, I have shown how this approach, developed in relation to corporate marketing and branding practice, offers insight to diasporic commercial cultures. I explored how the naming of cuisines, businesses and food and drink items by Iranian commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver often had a toponymic quality. I also showed how the socialities, atmospheres and claims to authenticity promoted by these businesses were implicated in claims about the kinds of places that they are. The focus on diasporan businesses in turn highlighted the complicated and contested character of the geographies with which businesses look to associate themselves. Even the geographical naming of the kind of foods that these businesses sell (Iranian, Persian, Middle Eastern, Levantine, and so on) is politically charged as well as commercially significant. Diasporan business is an arena in which diasporan cultural politics is done. In this chapter, that link was explored in relation to marketing practice.

The second broader debate signalled at the start of this chapter concerned the cultural politics of commodifying difference. On the one hand, the analysis drew out some of the reductive logics that can shape this process. It would be very easy to read the recurrent appeals, in the marketing discourses analysed, to 'authenticity', 'tradition' and various sorts of exotic 'enchantment' as overly familiar motifs that fix Iranian identities in predictable ways (more generally, for a parallel argument on music, diaspora and the culture industry see Hutnyk, 2000). However, working through the materials in more detail, I suggest, offered a more nuanced account. Even a familiar motif like authenticity offered a range of positions to be navigated. Restaurateurs and shop-keepers made these navigations with complex motivations and investments too. As noted in the final substantive section, marketing concerns with sales and customer reach oftentimes sat alongside questions of cultural pride and a desire to educate publics about Iranian diaspora identities.

4.9.2 Main Argument

The diasporic Iranian identities that these spaces seek to represent are layered with complexities that reflect the fragmented politics of the Iranian diaspora. This is evidential in how the spaces position themselves, intersecting with the wider lexical paradoxes and the negotiation of representation as being Persian, Iranian, Middle Eastern or Mediterranean. These designations imply a sense of tradition, a contemporary presence, or a broader geographical territorialisation allowing for a cultural ethnic identity to be formed and represented that goes beyond nation state identity, reflecting a sense of

commonality. Here cultural identities bind rather than divide, allowing for the spaces to reach out to a wider audience. They denominate common cultural traits that can be commodified and commercialised. However this does not mean that the syncretised representations of the Iranian diaspora, become simpler, but in fact become more complicated given the geopolitical wrangling between the perceptions and long political histories between Iran and the west, and Iran and Arabic countries. There is a need to have a wider appeal, whilst simultaneously maintaining a sense of distinction between cultures that often get amalgamated and essentialised, much like the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi cultural identities that Highmore discusses on Indian restaurants on the British high street. My findings have shown that the majority of restaurant owners preferred to label their restaurants as Persian over Iranian, as it connotes images of a rich and glorious heritage, mostly and perhaps in the west more importantly it distances itself from the Iranian-Islamic identity (Gholami, 2015). The Persian re-codifies the Iranian in a diaspora setting.

The designation of the diaspora speaks out to debates on visibility and veiling of Iranian identities as outlined by Harbottle (1999). By designating the space as either Middle Eastern or further still, Mediterranean can be seen as hiding the Persian or Iranian factor, but I have proposed that they bridge across cultural commonalities, allowing to reach a wider audience who by commodifying familiarity. These relationships are explored by Lien, where “imagined cuisines” represent considerable diversity embodying multiple identities and diversity. Here we can conceptualise Harvey’s argument on distinguishing between

representation and reality, where the dichotomies of foreignness and familiarity are played upon, to create a desire for the Other. It is these designations which complicate the hybrid or trans-local identities, where it is not just about negotiating between Iranian and British or Iranian and Canadian identities, but also encapsulates wider Mediterranean and Middle Eastern identities. Here the works of Homi Bhabha can be employed to analyse the representations and (re)production of Iranianness in the diaspora.

For Bhabha (1994, p. 32) the “thirdspace of enunciation” where cultural statements and cultural identities are created, and purity is difficult to achieve. Drawing upon Fanon, Bhabha proposes that the ideas of image and fantasy evoke the colonial condition producing a utopian identity. Thus we can refer directly to Frantz Fanon’s work on difference in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) where there is a doubling of identity, where there is a difference between personal identity and imitation of reality. In the case of diasporic Iranian identities these utopian identities are reproduced in terms of marketing atmospheres as being part of the Persian identity, which draws on fantasy and mysticism, which present a romanticised representation of Iranianness.

I have argued that foodscapes are marked by cultural meanings and affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009), which is discussed further in Chapter 5. However, this chapter has highlighted that the marketing of authenticity which shape the ways in which Iranianness is represented through its material forms in terms of how these restaurants are designed and curated through the circulation of material cultures. I have generally approached authenticity not as a cultural

quality asking for arbitration, but as a cultural construction requiring analysis for how, why and for whom it is made. Claims to authenticity are marked in three ways: first through the food as being authentic, second through construction of food, and third through the people. These three work together in the sense that there is a preconceived notion or argument that in order for an ethnic restaurant to be authentic everything must be reflective of the that ethnicity; the décor, the food and the people working there. However I want to challenge this and argue whether this should matter in a cosmopolitan city like London or Vancouver, where chain restaurants such as Jamie's Italian, a chain of Italian restaurants owned by British chef Jamie Oliver exist and if the authenticity of these restaurants is questioned in the same way.

Of course I have defined marketing in quite circumscribed ways in this chapter, focusing especially on advertising materials and practices. Necessarily, at points the discussion above broadened to look at advertising media in a wider sense – for example, in terms of front of house staff and service style, in terms of restaurant design and ambiance, and in terms of the relationships made to consumers by specific food stuffs – and it to those terrains that I now turn more directly. Most immediately, in Chapter 5 I build on the discussion above of 'marketing atmospheres' to pursue an analysis of how diasporan Iranian identities are represented through the curation and design of commercial food spaces.

5: CURATING AND DESIGNING IRANIAN IDENTITIES IN DIASPORIC COMMERCIAL FOOD SPACES

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I explored the representation of Iranian identities in commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver in terms of marketing practice. I argued that marketing is a process of product 'positioning' and 'differentiation' that oftentimes draws upon wider discourses of cultural and geographical difference. I showed how this was true for shops and restaurants selling Iranian foods and how, in consequence, those commercial food spaces were involved in processes of 'diasporization'. Now, in Chapter 5, I want to extend this analysis by focusing more directly on shops and restaurants as material spaces. I argue that these commercial food spaces are more than neutral containers that sell diasporan Iranian goods (foodstuffs, meals and so on). The spaces themselves matter; and they matter in part through their material geographies. These restaurants and shops function as sites of cultural production and symbolism (Zukin, 1996) through the ways in which they are designed, organised and decorated. In taking this focus, my interpretation chimes with, and contributes to, three existing currents within wider research literatures: on architectural geographies; on retail spaces; and on diaspora food spaces more specifically. In this introductory section I will recapitulate on these literatures, before briefly setting out the narrative structure of my own analysis.

Most generally, then, the last decade has seen a renewal of Cultural Geography's long-standing interests in 'architectural geographies' and the design of buildings (for an overview see Kraftl, 2010). Sauerian Cultural Geography, of course, viewed buildings as vital material evidence for the spatial distributions of cultural groups and cultural influences and 'diffusions' (see, for example, Kniffen, 1936, 1965). The so-called 'New Cultural Geography' that emerged in the UK and USA in the 1980s argued that buildings and their aesthetics were better viewed as symbolic materials woven into wider webs of meaning, cultural politics and identity formation. Notable examples include Mona Domosh's scholarship on New York's skyscrapers (Domosh, 1988, 1989, 1992); Jim and Nancy Duncan's work on the elite residential landscapes of both New York state in the USA (Duncan and Duncan, 2004) and Shaughnessy Heights in Vancouver, Canada (Duncan 1992); and Maoz Azaryahu's account of the symbolic and political significance of utilitarian, functional architectural forms (his case study is of Zionist spatial politics and water towers) (Azaryahu, 2001). In such work, buildings are understood in terms of wider processes of cultural representation, identity construction, and the politics of cultural distinction and differentiation. Diasporan identities and spaces were in turn studied in these terms (for a notable example, see Ley, 1995, who builds on Jim Duncan's work to present Shaughnessy Heights, Vancouver as a contested diaspora space).

More recently, these architectural geographies have been influenced by wider turns promoting less 'textual' and 'more-than-representational' approaches. These influences have also seen a shift in focus away from viewing buildings

from the 'outside' and towards studies of the 'internal' experiences and design of built forms. Thus, in her account of Vancouver's new public library, Loretta Lees called on Cultural Geographers to adopt more ethnographic methods in order to supplement semiotic readings of buildings with understandings of how they are used in practice (Lees, 2001). Peter Kraftl and Peter Adey (2008) drew on wider literatures on 'affective materialism' (Anderson and Wylie, 2009), and their own empirical work on schools and airports respectively, to reflect on how buildings are inhabited and experienced. For them, architecture is a practice of 'affective engineering', a designing of spaces that will foster particular kinds of practices and feelings. This kind of approach has proliferated into a wider concern with how places relate to 'ambiance' and 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009; Bissell, 2010; McCormack, 2008).

Anderson (2009, p.78) defines affective atmospheres as "a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of the subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions. As such, atmospheres are the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge". Essentially, then, affective atmospheres centre on the relationship between bodies and their environment. Adey et al. (2013) draw upon the Francophone notion of ambiance prominent in French architecture and urban studies to argue that ambiance "surrounds the body and qualifies the milieu of social life. ... an ambiance forms a kind of climate or atmospheric mood" (2013, p.4). Ambiance therefore is a product comprised of individuals who share a collective sentiment over the

physical and material characteristics of a space, thus restoring *feeling* in a space (Thibaud, 2002). Adey et al. note that the ambiance plays on the senses and is controlled and engineered through multisensory entities such as lighting, acoustics, signs, artefacts, interior design, spatial layout, service and temperature. Here, their argument echoes previous work on commercial space design, including shops and restaurants (Baker, 1987; Binter, 1992; Liu and Jang, 2009; Ryu and Han, 2011; Zukin and Kosta, 2004; Zukin, Trujillo, Frase, Jackson, Recuber and Walker 2009).

My own approach to these issues is similar to that of Gillian Rose, Monica Degen and Begum Basdas (2010), in their analysis of a Milton Keynes shopping centre. In my reading, Rose et al.'s most valuable argument is that the 'New Cultural Geography's' concerns with issues of meaning, judgement and aesthetic taste should not be simply opposed to, or replaced by, 'Non-Representational Theory's' preoccupations with affect and ambiance. Explorations of the feelings 'of' and 'in' a space, they suggest, need to be combined with an understanding of the feelings 'about' that space. My own analysis of diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces, their design and decoration therefore combines a concern with both symbolism and affect, with both meaning and embodied response.

As illustrated by Rose et al.'s (2010) selection of case study site, an interest in the architectural design of spaces has also been developed through work more specifically focused on the geographies of retail space. This is the second body of scholarship to which Chapter 5 contributes. This is not the place to outline this large body of work in full; instead I will briefly draw out key areas of

relevance for my own research. First, Cultural and Economic Geographers have argued that retail spaces are not neutral or purely functional channels for the distribution of goods. Rather, in an economy of commodity-signs (Goldman and Papsen, 1998), retailing space plays a central role in processes of marketing and branding and in creating the meanings with which goods are invested. Thus, Jon Goss (1993) deployed his expertise in architectural geographies to interpret how shopping malls are organised and designed according to the logics of commodity fetishism. In a subsequent analysis of the Mall of America, he drew out how mall space and its experiences embody a wider political ambivalence to the magical, mythical imaginations bound up in the commodity fetish (Goss, 1999). More recently, Jacob Miller (2014) enhances such work by using the theoretical lens of non-representational theory to foreground the affective engineering and embodied inhabitation of mall space. Goss's work in particular has close links to other research that frames retail space as a form of marketing, namely that focused on 'themed environments' (see also Goss, 2005). Especially associated with the writings of urban semiotician Mark Gottdiener (2001), research on themed environments examines how overarching themes are used in the design of consumer spaces, as part of the making of 'commodity-signs' (Goldman and Papsen, 1998). The spaces focused on include: theme parks and the wider growth of consumer spaces based on the (Disney-pioneered) practices of 'imagineering' (Bryman, 1995); brand identities and their extension into architectural 'brandsapes' such as ESPN Zone and Niketown (Klingmann, 2007; Kozinets, Sherry, DeBerry-Spence, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit and Storm, 2002);

and those with an explicitly geographical association, such as Irish and Australian themed pubs and bars (Brown and Patterson, 2000; Munoz, Wood and Solomon, 2006; West, 2006). These themes are seen as a form of marketing that differentiates products through a focus on the placed production and consumption of commodified experiences; part, then, of an 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Svabo, Larsen, Haldrup and Baerenholdt, 2013).

In this kind of work on malls and themed environments, the emphasis is on the capital intensive and top-down design and engineering of retail spaces. Diasporic commercial food spaces offer an important counterpoint. Here, spatial design and decoration may be undertaken using professional design input but often involve a more 'ad-hoc' design practice (on ad hoc design more generally, see Jencks and Silver, 2013). Shops in particular are not so much designed as assembled and arranged. In the title to this chapter I use the notion of 'curation' as a way of expressing this rather different relationship between these diasporan commercial actors and the materialities of their retail spaces (see Joosse and Hracs, 2015 for food-related curation). Without claiming for them the professional expertise of those who curate collections and galleries, one can, I think, take seriously the etymological links between museums' 'keepers' of collections and 'shop-keepers' and the material culture of their stores (see Hunt, 2015). Retail practice involves the collection, storage, classification and material display of objects. In diasporan food spaces, such practices are central to marketing practice and the representation of diasporic identity.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is an established body of work on both diasporan food shops and restaurants. I will not repeat my outline of those literatures here. However, I think one further piece of work offers a particularly useful distinction for the analysis that follows, and for understanding the curatorial and design practice done in these spaces. This work is Lily Cho's (2010) study of Chinese restaurants in small-town Canada. Cho argues that spaces of culinary consumption are both 'institutions' and 'installations'. She introduces this distinction between institution and installation in describing Karen Tam's The Gold Mountain Restaurant, which operates as both a restaurant and gallery. However, I think we can usefully extend her account to draw out a broader argument. My suggestion is that in thinking of The Gold Mountain restaurant as an 'institution', Cho frames it as a site that reproduces familiar, typical, fetishized cultural representations. However, in thinking of it as a place for artistic 'installations' she sees it too as a space that can offer more creative possibilities for innovative material cultural expression and experience. More generally, then, the notion of 'institution' highlights how commercial spaces tend to be sedimented into economic and cultural landscapes through the reproduction of familiar, typical cultural symbols; reifications of identity that work in commercial terms through reproductions of dominant ideas. 'Installation', however, highlights how there can also be a tendency for commercial spaces to recreate identity in creative and sometimes idiosyncratic ways, fashioned by less predictable passions from both producers and consumers (see also Matus Ruiz, 2012). Cho argues that the Chinese restaurant in Canada ultimately constitutes a

'diasporic counter-public', where the space is not merely about mimicry but transformation, "distinguishing itself from the dominant public culture" (2010, p.112).

In this chapter I mobilise Cho's account by placing an emphasis on two overlapping, but not synonymous, issues. First, I take her dual emphasis on how diasporan commercial spaces both look to fit in and to be different. Rather than only viewing these as discrete options – i.e. where some spaces conform to expected tropes, whilst others contest them – I prefer to tease out the ongoing tensions between these dynamics in most spaces. Second, I relate her account to the kinds of diasporan imaginations that Iranian commercial food spaces stage. In particular, I consider how the material design and curation of shops and restaurants works through the associations with authenticity, tradition and modernity discussed in Chapter 4. I seek to explore how these qualities are materialised spatially through design and decoration and ambiance; and to consider the degrees to which they enforce institutionalised tropes or enable creative explorations of diasporan Iranian identity.

In summary, then, Chapter 5 continues my analysis of the relations between commercial food spaces and processes of Iranian diasporization and cultural (re)production. It extends Chapter 4's account of marketing and its geographical associations into an interpretation of the material design and 'curation' of these retail spaces. The chapter progresses through three main substantive sections. In the first, I take specific examples to illustrate how design, material organisation and decoration are important ways in which shops and

restaurants represent and reproduce diasporic Iranian identities. In the second section I pull out some specific material forms – from the obviously symbolic, such as flags, to the more atmospheric, such as light or music – as a way of exploring these processes in further depth. In the third section I foreground the kinds of Iranian identities being represented, focusing in particular on issues of nostalgia and modernity.

5.2 Displaying Iranianness

In reviewing the display and arrangement of objects in the stores K.G. Louie Co. and Fong's in Los Angeles' Chinatown, Kim (1999) argues that these storekeepers curate “a version of Chinese and Chinese American culture” (p.132). Tracing changes over the twentieth century, she argues that over the period there was “a reframing of the temporal and geographic referents of the material environments of the store” (p.132). An earlier focus on presenting ‘exotic’ novelties to non-Chinese American tourists – with stores designed “to project the image of a foreign and ancient country” (p.137) – shifted to catering for a diasporan market – with materials curated to represent a “temporally distant but geographically immediate and familiar Chinatown” (p.137). Exotica became memory objects. Herself now a curator at the Smithsonian Museum, Kim views the generations of Chinatown shopkeepers in these two stores as responsible for exhibitions of diasporic identities.

Similarly, Iranian commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver represent versions of Iranian culture to diverse markets, often looking to negotiate appeals to a range of different customers. At Super Mazandaran in the

Ealing area of London, clientele are both Iranian and other neighbourhood shoppers. The shop designates itself as 'Iranian and Continental'; the external shop sign is in Farsi with English underneath (see Figure 5.1). The use of the word "Continental", common for many shops in London, explicitly signals how the products stocked are not just for Iranians, or only for Persian dishes, but applicable to a range of non-British cuisines (the 'continent' in question is notably vague, pointing to ingredients for Middle Eastern, Asian and Mediterranean culinary cultures).



Figure 5.1 Super Mazandaran labels itself as a continental shop, Ealing, London (2013)

The display of goods also presents their 'foreign', 'continental' qualities. Loose nuts and dried fruits are displayed in wicker baskets on the floor, as are jars of pickles and packaged nuts by the pastry counter (see Figure 5.2). What might be an unremarkable mode of display gains significance in contrast to the packaged

character of British supermarket goods and the predominance of metals and plastics in their display infrastructure. Wicker baskets suggest some sort of 'alternative provision', both foreign/'continental' and artisanal.



Figure 5.2 Baskets of dried products displayed in baskets at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)

Other objects such as *dafs* (Persian drum) and tea sets are displayed at the front of the shop behind the pastry counter, serving a dual purpose of being objects for sale and a decorative display of Persian culture (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3 Tea sets displayed behind the pastry counter at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)

A mild sense of opulence is created by the chandelier and the dark wooden panels on the ceiling (see Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4 Opulence is formed by the chandelier and dark wood panels on the ceiling at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)

More generally, though, these 'Oriental' elements are combined with an aesthetic of tightly organized space (Nava, 2012). There is a powerful sense of product categorisation and order as clear sections and lines are created (see Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5 Various Iranian confectionery are displayed at the front of the store near the pastry counter at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)

This is apparent too in the external displays of produce (Figure 5.6), where the window display is similar to that of many of the other Iranian grocery stores visited. The fresh fruits and vegetables are set up in boxes outside and foods such as cakes and Persian pastries are displayed inside the window as part of the overall display.



Figure 5.6 Window display at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)

The sketch map below shows how Super Mazandaran is organised spatially (Figure 5.7). In this layout, a foreign quality is accompanied by rational clarity, suggestive of contemporary commerce and standards of produce. This is a difference, we are shown, that still accords with standards of modern, hygienic, regulated food retailing.

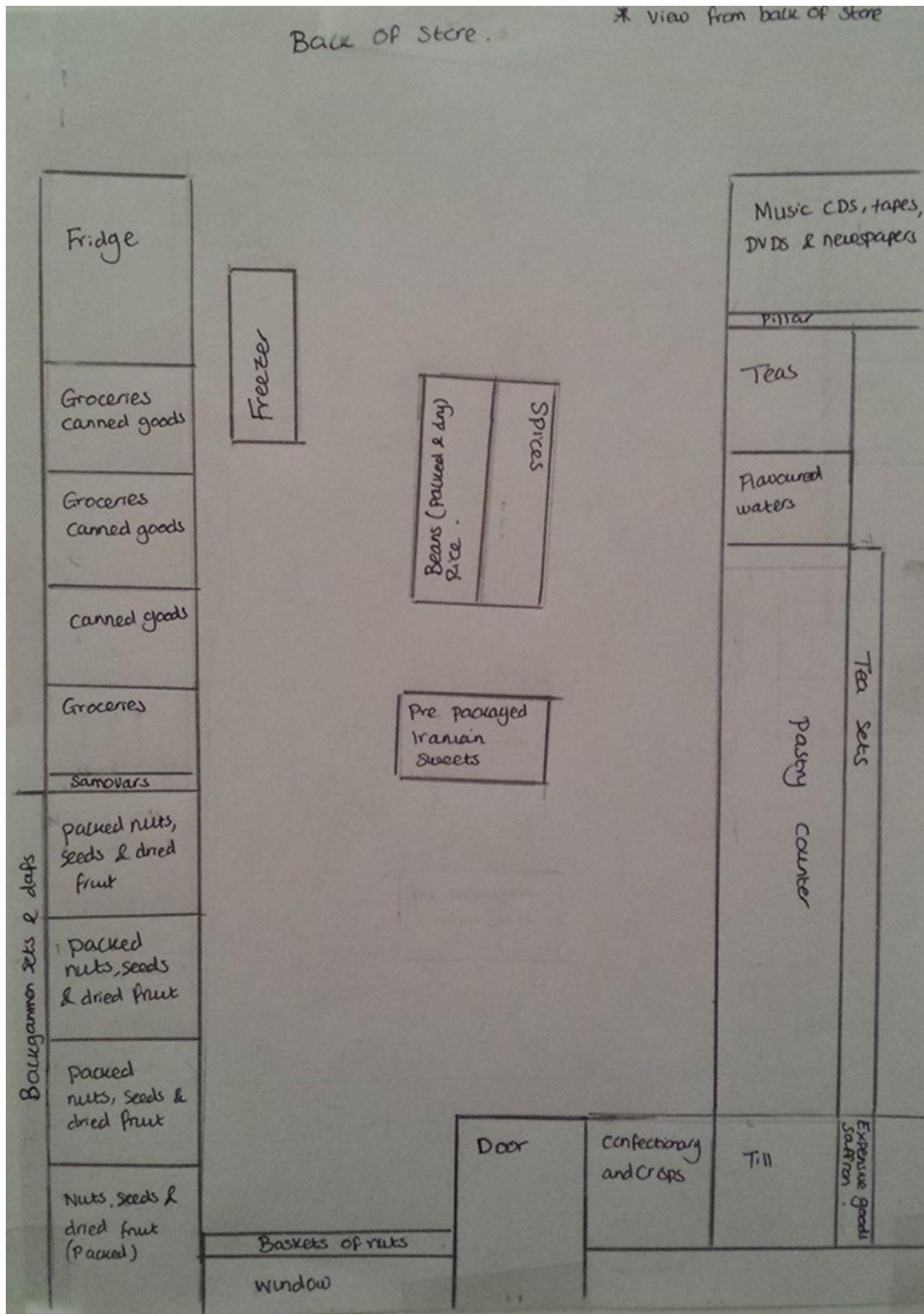


Figure 5.7 Sketch map of Super Mazandaran (2013)

In her study of Indian grocery stores in the San Francisco Bay Area, Mankekar (2002) notes that there are flyers and posters of upcoming films and concerts displayed on the walls near the entrance, as a means of community communication and diasporan public space making. The same occurs in the Iranian grocery stores. At Super Mazandaran there is a large selection of CDs and audiotapes of Persian music, ranging from classical Persian to contemporary Persian pop produced both in Iran and in the diaspora. The pillar adjacent to the music collection is adorned with music concert posters – for artists such as Andy, Googoosh and Ehsan Khaje Amiri – and for movies (see Figure 5.8). Amongst the latter, a notable inclusion is a poster for the Disney film *The Prince of Persia*, an adaptation of the video game of the same name (see Figure 5.9). I asked a shop assistant why this poster was displayed. I was told that the shop's owner liked the movie and more generally that London Iranians were proud that a large Hollywood film was representing Persia. Writing on the Iranian diaspora in London, Gholami (2015) notes too that *The Prince of Persia* became significant to the Iranian diaspora in terms of how Iranians are depicted by the western media, especially Hollywood. Gholami states: "An earlier film, *300* shows 'Persians' as monstrous and barbaric beings. Many Iranians were extremely angry about that. Prince of Persia was seen as a vastly improved representation, showing the positive sides of the Persian Empire, people and culture" (2015, p.162). In this one display of posters, the shop 'keepers' of Super Mazandaran speak both to fellow diasporans and to the wider communication of Iranian identities.



Figure 5.8 Concert posters displayed at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)



Figure 5.9 Poster for the film *Prince of Persia* displayed at Super Mazandaran, Ealing, London (2013)

Persepolis is a corner shop located in the London borough of Peckham. It is co-owned by Karen and her Iranian husband Hormoz. You may remember that in Chapter 4 I noted how the shop is also characterised by Karen's quirky

personality. Persepolis is carefully curated as an Iranian cultural space. Its website provides information on many things 'Persian'; it sells not only foods but also Iranian books and music. On the other hand, the shop is keen not to limit its market, so also broadens its purview to the 'Middle Eastern', featuring transnational food products such as *za'atar*. As Karen comments:

...probably half our stock is Iranian and the other half I buy here because we sell lots of unusual Middle Eastern ingredients – Arabic, Turkish, Greek as well as the Iranian stuff. I'd like to think we're the one stop Middle Eastern shop, at least for the south of London. (Interview, Persepolis in Peckham, London, February 2013)

Karen's personality is reflected through the yellow notes that are displayed throughout the store (see Figure 5.10). These present products with more personalised messages and recommendations, strengthening the sense of the shop-keeper's curatorial work and creating a way of connecting products with customers through the mode of display. Karen also sees this as part of the character of the shop and the kind of experience it offers:

... I think most shops are too serious, and I like to share the silly thoughts that occur to me. Running a shop is great fun. You get the strangest people, sad people, happy people, clowns; all sorts and it's something to celebrate and so I really like to share the joyous bits... most people get it, some people just think I'm off the wall. But yeah, I probably am, but it just means that people are shopping on several levels they're enjoying the shopping experience... (Interview, Persepolis in Peckham, London, February 2013)



Figure 5.10 Quirky note displayed by biscuits at Persepolis in Peckham, Peckham, London (2012)

One of the most striking shops that I visited during the course of the research was Ayoub's Dried Fruits and Nuts in Vancouver (hereafter referred to as Ayoub's). I use this case to look at some of these issues on product display and store atmosphere in more depth. In design terms, one might 'read' Ayoub's as exhibiting a 'staged authenticity', echoing the shops to be found in the bazaars of Iran but with careful design for the Vancouver context. Ayoub's is a local chain of shops in Vancouver owned by Ayoub Beitashour and selling dried fruits and nuts as well as other Persian confectionary. There are five stores located on Lonsdale Avenue in North Vancouver (opened in 2009), on Denman Street in Vancouver (opened in 2011), on West 4th Avenue in Kitsilano (opened in 2012), on Glen Drive in Coquitlam (opened in 2013) and on Hastings Street in Burnaby

(opened in 2013). In addition to the stores in Vancouver, Ayoub also has a store in Tehran, Iran, which was opened in the 1980s and upon which the stores in Vancouver are supposedly modelled (Ayoub's Dried Fruits and Nuts, 2015). The Canadian stores are uniform in their look, in terms of layout, window displays and the means through which products are presented. The one major difference is the people who work in the stores and the customers who patronise them. For example, the North Vancouver store mostly has an Iranian clientele and is staffed by Iranians, as some customers may prefer to speak in Farsi; whereas the downtown Denman Street store has a mixed clientele, often tourists (as the store is located within walking distance from the English Bay beach), and the staff are non-Iranian, with the exception of the roasters (these are all Iranian across the Ayoub's 'chain').

The stores' décor is worth some more detailed consideration. Let me start with the containers in which the unpackaged fruits and nuts are presented. These are freestanding on the floor of the shop and combine ornate, striking stands with bowls that have plastic covers (see Figure 5.11). This arrangement is designed to speak of the stores' Iranian lineage – i.e. to transport the customer back to the Iranian 'homeland' – but does so through being different from the actual displays to be found in Ayoub's store in Tehran.

I would say the stores are so traditional like in Iran. Our store has been a little bit modernised, because those containers here they are absolutely beautiful, they are unique and different. But back there [in Tehran] it is something that you have seen before. They do have the containers [in Iran] but they're trying to modernise the stores a little bit so it's quite different. (Personal interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)

The stores in Vancouver are 'modernised' in the sense that the containers are placed in the middle of the store, and customers can take the products themselves as opposed to being served as they would be in the Tehran shop:

So instead of having them this way in the middle, they have them by the side and they have a representative associate stand behind every container to serve people to speed up the process.... And the display shelves are not as authentic as the ones here. They're simpler; they're going for a simpler look. I guess it's just simpler than here. But here, I think it's more a bit more traditional. (Interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)



Figure 5.11 Layout of Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)

So, here the Ayoub's interviewee explains how the Vancouver stores look to stage authenticity; how this authenticity is constituted through an ornate infrastructure of display, that is less 'simple' than that in Tehran and that is both more traditional and newer and 'more modern'; and thus how, in fact, the Vancouver stores are more authentic than the store in Tehran. The complexities of the narrative presented here – Vancouver located Iranian stores more

authentic than the Tehran store; those Vancouver stores both more traditional and more modern than the Tehran store – would seem illogical if authenticity was understood as some original state, to which diasporic culture either returns or dilutes. But, in my analysis (see Chapter 2), authenticity is not an original cultural state but an on-going cultural production and judgement. On that basis, it is to be expected that in speaking of these displays of fruits and nuts as more authentic one gets this melange of qualities. More substantively, without having seen the Ayoub's store in Tehran (and I have not), I cannot empirically verify the comparison that the interviewee makes between the aesthetics in Vancouver and Tehran. An internet search on fruit and nut stores in the Tehran Grand Bazaar shows that the products are mostly displayed in large bags and wooden boxes. However, Figure 5. 12, again sourced from the internet, shows the products in a shop in Tehran (not Ayoub's) are displayed in a similar manner to Ayoub's in Vancouver, albeit with ceramic display bowls/stands. What this seems to suggest is that in its Vancouver stores, Ayoub's uses these display bowls to present a particular form of Iranian retail display, which also carries connotations of a more up-market presentation than that actually present in Ayoub's own store in Tehran.



Figure 5.12 Ceramic containers used display nuts in a shop in Tehran (Corrias, 2011)

In terms of the display bowls in the Vancouver stores, these are extremely detailed in their design and have been brought in from Isfahan, Iran where they are made. This type of metalwork and traditional craftsmanship is renowned in Isfahan (Borjan and Elr, 2007). More generally, the Ayoub's stores place great emphasis on the display infrastructure, to the extent that parts of it can also become products for sale. Fruits and nuts become associated with a wider retailing of Iranian cultural heritage:

... the containers are a huge representation of one part of Iran, including the story about the poems, this is why he picked those ones. I don't know if you noticed the blue dishes [see Figure 5.13]. We bought them to the store mostly for decoration. Every single time he brings something new from Iran to display in the stores and he actually let's people buy them, so they're kind of part of our own collection. But we share them with other people. We let them have it if they want it, but every single one of them are made by different artists and they're from different parts of Iran. For example the frames you see are also from Isfahan but they have this art work and it's very specific to them. Every single one of them have been... like... placed; it's not a painting it's like tile work. He bought a whole collection of these from Iran and he set them up in the stores. So yeah I find those interesting. Like I said,

everything in the store has a purpose. (Personal interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)



Figure 5.13 Blue dishes brought from Iran displayed at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)

Ayoub's becomes a 'curated installation', in the sense that the objects displayed have a purpose and contribute to the narrative Ayoub's tells about Iran in a diasporic setting. The narrative portrayed is one that emphasises Persian heritage and culture. Thus, for example, most of the designs on the display bowls imported from Isfahan (see Figures 5. 14 and 5.15) are representations of Persian poetry by Hafez, Rumi, Ferdowsi and such:

Mostly it's from Hafez because he has more love stories and scenes in his poems, but it really depends on the person who's crafting it and who they want to show and what scenes they like to do. (Interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)



Figure 5.14 A closer look at one of the display containers at Ayoub's Denman Street Store, Vancouver (2013)



Figure 5.15 A closer look at one of the scenes from Persian poetry carved out on the display bowls at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)

One of the designs on one of the bowls in the downtown store presents a different diasporic scene. A diasporic Iranian-Canadian identity is reflected by featuring the Canadian flag and a moose among the Persian carvings (see Figure 5.16):

In Denman, one of our containers has the Canadian flag and this is very very interesting... when you walk in because you see it and it's very beautiful but if you go close enough you honestly see the difference. I think at the front but I think they moved it, but one of them, they have it. It's so funny some people notice that it is a Canadian flag, and I'm like 'yes!' So that's another little thing that is hidden in our work place which I think is nice; it's something unique. (Personal interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)



Figure 5.16 The Canadian flag and moose carved on one of the diasplay bowls at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)

On this one display bowl, scenes Hafez's poems have become part of the iconification of Iranian identity building; whilst the moose and flag represent a Canadian identity.

Other aspects of the display infrastructure in Ayoub's Vancouver shops also look to craft a diasporic presence and to bring Persian culture to British Columbia. In reproducing Persian cultural motifs, these displays do more than simply present goods for sale; they act as "mnemonic devices" (Ruhl, 2008). For example, the shelving that presents the non-loose food items, as well as the craft objects for sale, are deliberately designed to be reminiscent of the columns in Persepolis in Iran (see Figure 5.17):

So the cabinets, they are...I don't know if you noticed... do you know Persepolis? It's Iranian, and I think it's in the middle of Iran. So, the columns there, they're kind of similar to our cabinets, but our cabinets are more simplified, more structured... But they are if you compare them put them sideways besides each other you can see the similarities between them... I remember him [Ayoub] telling me that every single thing in the store should have a story, it shouldn't just be placed. I know the cabinets... the reason we chose them was because they remind him of Persepolis back home and that's one [a story] about the cabinets. (Personal interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)



Figure 5.17 Cabinets at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver which are reminiscent of the columns at Persepolis (2013)

Persepolis is situated northeast of Shiraz in the Fars province of Iran and was the capital of the Achaemind Empire founded by Darius the Great in 518 BC. Persepolis consisted of a complex of palaces, including Apadana, which were later destroyed by Alexander the Great in 330 BC. It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. Many artefacts from the ruins from Persepolis are displayed in museums across the world, including the British Museum and Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (UNESCO, 2015; Oriental Institute, 2014). Images of these artefacts are often displayed in diasporic commercial Iranian foodspaces, evoking a Persian nostalgia, referring to a glorious past ruled by kings such as Darius the Great and Cyrus the Great. Persepolis has come to be representative of a pure, historical Persian culture associated with Zoroastrianism prior to the Arab invasion. Here, even humble display cabinets are connected to that narrative.

All the Ayoub's stores, with the exception of the North Vancouver branch, have a window where the customer can see into the roasting room (see Figure 5.18). The door to the room is also left open at times. More generally, a number of writers on commodity and consumer cultures have noted how displaying aspects of production to consumers can be a marketing practice, especially in food commerce (Binkley, 2008; Coles and Crang, 2010; Domosh, 2003; Hollander, 2003; Marchand, 1998). Sam Binkley (2008) talks of this as a fetish for de-fetishization, for revealing something of where our food comes from; or as Jon Goss (1999, p.55) puts it, "the process of fetishization itself may be an attraction, and 'kinky' consumers, can for a price see 'behind the scenes'". In

Vancouver, health conscious food consumption is widespread and thus so is the consumption of presentations of food production. In the British Columbian diasporan context, Ayoub's display of Canadian-Iranian roasters at work also has echoes of the displays of craft workers at imperial exhibitions and world fairs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (for an exemplary study see Mathur, 2007). For Ayoub's, the introduction of such a display element to the roasting work in most of its Vancouver stores was thus a way to tap into wider cultural discourses and tastes – for knowledge of food production as part of contemporary food tastes; for a viewing of 'foreign' crafts people at work as a way of engaging with their products and culture – at the same time as engaging customers on a sensory level – with the smells and aromas of the roasting. This combination was a way to connect with consumers:

Here [in Vancouver] we are more connected to people. Each store has its own character, its own roaster; we do it in front of people, so we don't feel that there is space between us and the people. But back there [in Iran] they care about the result, not so much how we get there. But they do care that we do it daily, so when they come into the stores they can smell the dry fruit and nuts and the shop is known for freshness back there. So they rely on him [Ayoub] more than themselves watching the nuts being roasted, because people know the honesty in his work and he does everything to what the customer wants. Back there they trust him and they know what he does and they can taste the difference. (Personal interview, Ayoub's, Vancouver, July 2013)

From this it is implied that consumers in Iran do not need to physically see the nuts being roasted, but trust Ayoub to provide them with fresh, high calibre products. In Vancouver, a display of the roasting is part of establishing a relationship, in which trust works across distance and difference.



Figure 5.18 Roasting area at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)

Ayoub's has received some local press attention; this coverage is interesting in presenting the overall impressions and feelings generated by Ayoub's design and curation. Noa Glouberman (2012) writes an extensive article on Ayoub's as a family business for *Canadian Immigrant*, and Vanessa Choot (2012) writes a promotional article about the Kitsilano store for e-magazine, *Modernmix Vancouver*. In reference to the décor, Glouberman (2012, para 7) writes:

Indeed, the traditional Persian architecture, including the warm wooden cabinetry, elegant columns and gleaming crystal chandeliers that make up Ayoub's interior are eye-catching and inviting, as are the large silver and copper bowls that proudly display Ayoub's delicious products. The ambiance works so well that, when the Hosseinis opened a second location on bustling Denman Street in downtown Vancouver just one year later in 2010 and a third in the city's Kitsilano neighbourhood after that, similar styling was applied.

Glouberman describes the overall effect as a sense of Persian authenticity: "the shop itself offers an atmosphere that felt authentic..." (Glouberman, 2012,

unpaginated, para. 5). Authenticity here is not only experienced through the décor and foods sold, but through the ambiance, which is further crystallised through various media and senses: taste as customers sample products; the smell of the freshly roasted nuts; the eye-catching and distinctive visual power of the shops' objects for product display; and the soft Persian music, transporting the customer somewhere else through sound. It is a combination of factors that articulate an experience. Choot (2012, unpaginated, para. 6) quotes Payam Beitashour on Ayoub's approach to retailing:

We strongly believe in our products and their associated benefits for our customers. But we aren't stopping here. My aim is to shift retailing to a new level, using and combining elements of art, culture, craftsmanship and emotion, in harmony with authenticity.

In the case of Ayoub's, its staged authenticity is both a material construction and an emotional experience (see also Pine and Gilmore, 2007). Drawing upon wider ideas of emotional geographies in relation to tourism studies, Kundsén and Waade (2010, p.5) argue:

If authenticity is no longer seen as objective qualities in objects or places, but rather something experienced through the body, through performance, management, and media, authenticity becomes a feeling you can achieve. In tourism authenticity is a feeling you can experience in relation to place.

Ayoub's is indicative of how this feeling of authenticity is materially produced in diasporan Iranian commercial food spaces.

5.3 Materialising Iranianness

In this second main section of the chapter I develop my interpretation by focusing on some specific materials and their presence with diasporan Iranian

shops and restaurants. In line with wider recent thinking on material culture (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Ingold, 2007), these illustrative examples include material objects but also the less ‘thing-ified’ material interactions that we sometimes think of as being ‘immaterial’ (e.g. light; sound). They also range from the obviously symbolic, such as flags, to the evidently affective, such as lighting. In selecting this range, my aim is to develop my argument about how the material geographies of these shops and restaurants present diasporan Iranianness in both representational and ‘more than representational’ ways. I should also remind the reader that one key set of materials is pushed to the background in these discussions: the foods themselves. They are the primary focus of Chapter 6.

5.3.1 Iranian Things

Perhaps an expected material form representing Iranian identities is the ‘Persian carpet’. Persian carpets are indeed present in many of the restaurants visited in London, but how they are displayed varies. At Orkideh (Golders Green, London) they are placed on the floor (Figure 5.19); at Pardis (Marble Arch, London) they are placed on the benches outside where customers can smoke *shisha* (Figure 5.20); in Behesht (Harlesden, London) they are placed on the walls and ceilings (Figure 5.21); whilst at Sufi (Shepherd’s Bush, London) they are on the walls (Figure 5.22). Though still popular among some older restaurants in London, the fashion for Persian carpets has declined somewhat. Interviewees said this reflected in part pragmatic reasons, in particular the high purchasing and maintenance costs. In part, it may also have reflected a desire to

present this form in different ways that mark out one's own restaurant as distinctive. One alternative adopted at Lavash (Golders Green, London) was to keep the symbolic and decorative qualities of the carpet whilst changing its material form, into paintings of patterns from Persian carpets (see Figure 5.23):

The paintings come from Persian carpets. There are many different patterns, some are simple and some are complicated with flower patterns. They are very expensive. These are a copy of carpets and they all come from different parts of Iran. For example this one is from Baluchistan [red with black]... One of the reasons we do it, is it has to be welcoming for everybody. The carpet especially when on the wall collects a lot of dust and creates asthma. You come in a restaurant and you can smell it. The carpets need to be cleaned all the time, so we decided to show our carpets by painting them. A lot of people come in and out of a restaurant and so the carpets get filthy and dirty. Every house in Iran is full of carpets and once a year they go for a wash, and they beat them to get the dust out. But here we don't have the facilities to do it. (Personal interview, Lavash, London, October 2013)



Figure 5.19 Persian carpet displayed on the floor at Orkideh restaurant, Golders Green London (2013)



Figure 5.20 Persian carpets displayed on benches outside at Pardis restaurant, Marble Arch, London (2012)



Figure 5.21 Persian carpets displayed on the ceiling at Behest restaurant in Harlesden, London (2012)



Figure 5.22 Persian carpets displayed on the walls at Sufi restaurant in Shepherd's Bush, London (2012)



Figure 5.23 Persian carpets are depicted as paintings at Laavash restaurant in Golders Green, London (2013)

The consumption of tea is an important component of Iranian food culture and guests are offered tea during any visit (it is considered rude not to do so).

The tea is served and consumed without milk in small glasses. This culture of tea drinking is displayed in commercial food spaces in various material forms. In shops, tea pots and glasses are sold for purchase, whereas in restaurants they are used for serving. The tea pot, tea pot warmer, sugar pot and glasses (*kamar baareek*) are often decorated with ornate patterns and may have pictures on them (e.g. of Shah Abbas) (see Figure 5.24). Tea is usually made in a samovar, which again is found in the majority of Iranian restaurants. For Orkideh restaurant, in the Finchley area of London, the tea pots and sugar pots were understood to symbolise Iranianness:

...people love to see a hint of Iran; otherwise it doesn't look like Persian cuisine. You have to have some hint. Like these things. Like sugar holder or tea pot holder, these kinds of things. (Interview, Orkideh, London, October 2013)



Figure 5.24 Tea sets at Orkideh, Golders Green, London (2013)

In Molana, in the Ealing area of London, and Hafez, in the Bayswater area of London, the tea sets have even been utilised as a form of lighting (about which I will say more below).

Other prominent and common objects include the *tanoor*, an oven used to bake flatbreads. The *tanoor* has become a key feature of restaurants in London, but is less present in Vancouver, with the exception of Yaas Grill House (as far as I could determine, this related to interlinked reasons of space and culinary offering). Unlike the Indian *tandoor*, the *tanoor* is often found at the front of the restaurant adjacent to the window. The *tanoor* was placed at the front of many restaurants in Iran as it was also used as a source of heat. The *tanoor* is still situated at the front of the restaurant in London as it allows Iranian consumers to see that the restaurant offers fresh bread, and also acts as an object of curiosity for non-Iranian consumers. Given this role of *tanoor* as a point of visual attraction, some of them are decorated with metallic tiles, but for the most part they are plain, making cleaning easier. For Sufi, in London, having a *tanoor* was understood as an indication of both freshness and tradition (see also Figure 5.25):

... freshness is important to us and the *tanoor* in front is interesting for people to see that the bread individually, as they order the bread, [it] is made by somebody and served on the table and hot, hot, hot. And we do use that as a traditional way of cooking it, although we use gas. Still in Iran in villages and some places they do buy wood but because of the fire safety and all that, and you do have to go by regulations and that is fire safety. But [as] best as we could, we keep it close to the traditional way of preparing the bread. We put it in this place so that people can see but I am sure that many people are watching and are inquisitive and say 'what are they doing with that round thing?', and now my

locals they know me after all these years and they love it.
(Interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)



Figure 5.25 *Tanour* at Sufi, Shepherd's Bush, London (2012)

Through the *tanour*, Sufi see themselves as combining the immediate and present – embodied in the freshness of the bread – and heritage and tradition – in the technology and practice of baking. In addition, as a distinctive object placed in a visible location, the *tanour* highlights a difference about the restaurant. It is not just a static object either; the *tanour* is performative, with its placement at the front of the restaurant allowing both customers and passers-by to see the bread being rolled out and slapped into it. In these ways, then, the *tanour* both performs and symbolises the difference that the restaurant seeks to market. In Sufi, this symbolic role is amplified through other aspects of the decoration, in particular through the display of a black and white photograph of bread being baked (Figure 5.26):

That picture, the black and white one, this was in somebody's house and I took it with his permission. I just scanned it and put it

up. The picture is 60 to 70 years old. It's how they used to prepare the bread there [in Iran] and to be honest with you not much has changed with the way they were doing it. They tried to mechanise or automatise [sic] or whatever you call it back home, but it does not have the same taste. For example, that particular bread is called *sangak*. The stones are so hot; the actual stones are baking the bread... When people would take the bread out they would stick it to the little pin and the stones would drop off and that was part of the fun of having the bread, it's part of it. But now it's different...these instruments are part of the old traditional culture'. (Interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)



Figure 5.26 Black and white photograph showing *sangak* being baked displayed at Sufi, Shepherd's Bush, London (2012)

5.3.2 Iranian and Persian Symbols:

I now turn to examine specific symbolic objects that produce a representation of Iranian identity in these spaces. Given their symbolic character, these objects have a more or less explicit relationship to the distinctions between

Iranian and Persian identity discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. To briefly reiterate, the Iranian/Persian divide is a powerful thematic within many representations of the Iranian identity in the diaspora. In what follows I examine two sets of objects in which the divide is crucial: firstly, the flags that are displayed in diasporic commercial food spaces; and secondly, the religious objects presented within them, including in celebrations of the Persian New Year or *Nowruz*.

The display of flags in diasporic commercial spaces reflects both nationality and a sense of pride for that nation state. However, given Iran's long and complex geopolitical history, the flags of Iran are more than a reflection of nationality; they are a reflection of political allegiance. Flag choice and display can therefore be perceived as a controversial issue among diasporic Iranians, something apparent in debates over flag display in the context of Iran playing in the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Journalistic and social media coverage showed Iranian fans waving three different kinds of flags in the stands. The first was the official flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rensmann and Abdolmohammadi (2014, unpaginated, para. 2) state "they [the fans displaying this flag] tend to be either ordinary supporters or close to the regime, if not part of the Revolutionary Guard (*Pasdaran*) or the regime's elite". The second flag carried bears the traditional emblem of the lion and sun (*parcham-e shir-o khorshid*). These fans, they suggest, oppose the current regime and call for democracy. It is a flag considered by the current Islamic regime to be symbolic of the monarchist regime of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, and any symbols associated with the monarchy

were destroyed by revolutionaries in 1979. The third flag choice is considered to be the “neutral” flag either bearing no symbols in the centre or having the word “Iran” written on it. Rensmann and Abdolmohammadi (2014, unpaginated, para. 1) argue that “even though this final group seeks to be less partial than the second one, it ultimately also takes side because it challenges the existing Islamic Republic and its symbols by avoiding the sign of Allah. In other words, most Iranian fandom is politicized”.

During the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Reza Patisserie, a shop in the Kensington area of London, displayed both the English and Iranian flags, and also had one specially made wishing both the Iranian and English teams luck. The Iranian flags that Reza Patisserie chose to display were the current national flag, with Islamic emblem, and a “neutral” flag with the word “Iran” written on it (see Figure 5. 27).



Figure 5.27 A range of Iranian flags displayed during the World Cup at Reza Patisserie, Kensington, London (Walby, 2014)

During the fieldwork phases of this project I did not ask questions that were too politically contentious, for fear of causing offence. Nonetheless, I was able to document and discuss such issues of material decoration. There were a few establishments that displayed the Iranian flag, more so in London than Vancouver. In London, during my shop visits, I saw that Persepolis in Peckham has the flag with the Islamic symbol; however, the flag is partially rolled up so the emblem is barely visible. Other shops, such as Hormouz in the Golders Green area of London, display the flag with the symbol of the sun and lion (Figure 5.28). The same flag was present at Pars International in North Vancouver by the front counter (Figure 5.29).



Figure 5.28 Sun and Lion flag displayed at Hormouz, Golders Green, London (2012)



Figure 5.29 Sun and Lion flags displayed on the counter at Pars, North Vancouver (2013)

The flag is fetishized in different forms. For example at Reza Patisserie there is a sign in the window front displaying Iranian caviar for sale, with the word “Iranian” written in the colours of the flag (see Figure 5.30). The logo for the Meat Shop and Deli in North Vancouver uses the symbol of the sun and lion (see Figure 5.31). And, at Cazba in the West End area of Vancouver, the lion takes form in a statue and is present in Cazba’s logo (see Figure 5.32):

It's just a lion. It's not trademarked; it's not anything. I've actually seen it in some other places the same exact lion. I guess if we go back in culture when you look up Persian designs this is one thing that comes up, and the lion it was on the flag at one time before the revolution. So it's symbolic in that sense. (Interview, Cazba, Vancouver, May 2013)



Figure 5.30 Shop front at Reza Patisserie, Kensington, London where the word "Iranian" is displayed in the form of the Iranian flag (2012)



Figure 5.31 The sun and lion symbol are used as the logo for Meat Shop and Deli, North Vancouver (2013)



Figure 5.32 Cazba's logo as seen on the sandwich board displayed at Davie Street, Vancouver (2013)

The lion and sun flag becomes a nostalgic symbol for diasporic Iranians. Writing on exile culture in Los Angeles, Hamid Naficy (1993a) states that during the Iran-Iraq war (c.1988) “the status of the flag became a major issue among exiles, with

each political faction attempting to monopolise or modify it in order to regulate its use for its own benefit” (p.133). On one hand, there were those carrying the flag with the lion and sun “supporting a return to the constitutional monarchy” (p.133), whilst on the other there were those opposing the monarchy carrying a flag without this symbol. The lion and sun symbol was removed from the flag by the clergy in 1979 along with other non-Islamic symbols (Mafinezam and Mehrabi, 2008). The lion and sun flag, however, is acknowledged by scholars such as Kelly, Friedlander and Colby (1993) who argue that it is not just a representation of the Shah’s regime, but as predating the Pahlavi dynasty, harkening to a glorious Iranian past. This it is not only a monarchist symbol; it has also become a representation of ‘Persianness’ and national unity (Gholami, 2015; Mafinezam and Mehrabi, 2008).

In his discussion on secularism and the Iranian diaspora in London, Gholami (2015) reports that some diasporic Iranians were purposefully removing any association with the current Islamic flag. First: “[a] respondent of mine, for example, refused to appear in a group photo because someone was holding Iran’s current (‘Islamic’) flag, having not been able to find a pre-revolution one to bring to the televised football match” (p.90). Second, he discusses how Abbas, a study participant, had a large Iranian flag (the current national flag) hanging on the wall, but had covered the Islamic emblem with a picture of the lion and sun emblem that he had found elsewhere, because he did not believe what the Islamic emblem represents. Abbas further went on to state that it was his interpretation of the flag.

Such uses of the flag to symbolise a pre-Revolutionary and ancient Persian identity resonate with the market positioning of many commercial food spaces. Yas restaurant, in the Kensington area of London, is an interesting example that clearly chooses to represent the Iranian identity in a pre-revolutionary form. The walls are adorned with framed pre-revolution drawings, maps and photographs of the royal family. On one wall, above a gold frame mirror, hang two photographs of the royal family: one of the Reza Pahlavi, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Reza Shah Pahlavi; the other of the owner of Yas, Arash with the former Empress Farah, the wife of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Between these photographs hangs a print of the lion and sun flag in an ornate gold frame (see Figure 5.33). During our interview conversation, Arash talked passionately about a pre-revolution Iran, together with how the restaurant décor shows his nostalgic longing for this past:

That is a pre-revolution flag. We had a revolution in 1979 and of course there's a picture of me and the ex-queen of Iran. I met her in Cairo because the ex-king is buried in Cairo, until one day hopefully his remains will be moved to Iran. (Interview, Yas, London, September 2013)



Figure 5.33 Photos of the Iranian Royal family and lion and sun flag displayed at Yas restaurant, Kensington, London (2013)

This was further emphasised by Arash's preference to describe the restaurant as Persian rather than Iranian:

I prefer the old name. People recognise it more than Iran, and so it reminds us of the glory of the past. (Interview, Yas, London, September 2013)

Arash's nostalgia for a pre-revolution Iran is not isolated. Recently an article about the fondness for a pre-revolution Iran even within Iran was published in the Tehran Bureau section of *The Guardian* (17th June 2015). The article discusses how nostalgia exists in Iran through material objects, such as Shah related memorabilia sold at Vakil Bazaar in Shiraz or Jomeh Bazaar in Tehran. Moreover, the article notes how the Shah has come to represent the opposite of everything the Islamic republic represents. Nostalgia for a pre-revolution Iran thus exists as a subversive political sentiment.

Another material genre through which pre-revolutionary culture is presented and celebrated are religious object and symbols. For example, during my field work I encountered the Zoroastrian symbol of the *Farvahar*, as well as other Zoroastrian symbols, in many commercial food spaces. The *Farvahar* is a winged human figure. Eduljee (2013) offers an interpretation of its representational place in Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is deeply rooted in Iranian identity; or, rather, “many Iranians assert that the original religion of Iran is Zoroastrianism and that much of Persian-Iranian culture (and Iran’s national identity) has its source there” (Beck, 2014, p. 287). In other words, the *Farvahar* has become a symbol synonymous with an authentic Iranian identity that is non-Islamic and cuts across contemporary political divisions between a Monarchist Persian and an Islamic Iranian identity (Beck, 2014; Fozi, 2015). It has become an iconic symbol for the Iranian diaspora, particularly after the revolution.

The *Farvahar*, and Zoroastrian identity more generally, is represented in many forms in the diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces of London. Interestingly, Zoroastrianism was represented in restaurants such as Dishoom in Shoreditch and Behesht, in the Harlesden area, which are respectively Hindu and Muslim owned, by displaying paintings of Zarathustra (the founder of Zoroastrianism) (see Figure 5.32).



Figure 5.34 Painting of Zarathura displayed at Dishoom, Shoreditch, London (2012)

Zoroastrianism was most obviously represented at Persian Palace, a restaurant in the Ealing area of London. Writing extensively on Persian Palace, Gholami (2015) notes that it is impossible to associate the restaurant with an Islamic Iran. An image of the sort of Achamedian imperial guard that would be found on the walls of Persepolis is placed either side of the restaurant name and on the door (Figure 5.35). Similar images are displayed inside the restaurant, where one of the walls is dominated by a large cast of a scene from Persepolis, and another with a large case of the *Farvahar*. These symbols are united on a silver plate that is displayed on the wall above the bar. The *Farvahar* can also be found on the servers' uniform (see Figures 5.36, 5.37, 5.38 and 5.39).



Figure 5.35 Exterior of Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013)



Figure 5.36 Scene of Persepolis displayed on a wall at Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013)



Figure 5.37 The *Farvahar* displayed on a wall at Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013)



Figure 5.38 The *Farvahar* displayed on the staff uniform at Persian Palace, Ealing, London (2013)

Gholami (2015) observes that the Islamic Iranian identity is absent in the restaurant, claiming: “it’s about giving the impression that this is what Iran is *really* like or at least what it should be like: un-Islamic and with a direct connection to ancient Persia” (p.169). Interestingly, Gholami’s research participant from the restaurant, Pedram, responds by saying: “Well, it makes sense, doesn’t it? I mean this place is called “Persian” because most Iranians here are sick and tired of Islamic Iran. So, they want to go to back to a time before any of this had happened; before Islam, when Iranians were more themselves” (p.169). For Pedram, the absence of an Islamic-Iranian identity signifies a common identity that all Iranians can respect and agree upon.

Reflecting on Pedram’s argument, Gholami states:

He [Pedram] had in fact pointed out that many Iranians walk around with the feeling that there is something wrong with their Iranian identity; that it no longer defines them in the way they wish to be defined; that it no longer gives them the sort of experiences they desire. (2015, p.170)

For Gholami and Pedram, restaurants become spaces that reflect a collective identity, meeting the desires of an Iranian community articulating wider ideologies of identity through the idea of Persia.

Zoroastrian and Islamic identities are also reflected in the décor of Simurgh restaurant in Covent Garden, London. The representations of the two religions are placed at the front and back of the restaurant. At the front of the restaurant, above the window, the three principal beliefs of Zoroastrianism – “good thoughts, good words and good deeds” – are displayed in Farsi on a tiled mosaic. At the back of the restaurant a *mihrab* (a semi-circular niche wall in a

mosque) has been appropriated as a wine rack, breaking with Islamic traditions of the consumption of alcohol (Figure 5.39).



Figure 5.39 The back wall of Simirugh (Covent Garden, London) reflects an Islamic identity (2012)

The most common representation of the Zoroastrian and Persian identity would be the celebration of *Nowruz* in the diaspora. *Nowruz* is the Persian New Year marking the beginning of spring, usually on March 21st. Malek (2011) argues that *Nowruz* is a cultural festival that serves a unifying purpose across what can be deemed an otherwise fragmented diaspora. Fazeli (2006), Soomekh (2012) and Ringer (2012) note that in spite of traditionally being a Zoroastrian holiday, the religious aspect of *Nowruz* has become de-emphasised, and different religions have adapted it accordingly. For example, Iranian Jews will often place the Torah, Muslims the Qur'an, and secular Muslims the Divan of Hafez (Soomekh, 2012). Daryaei (2012) provides an extensive history into *Nowruz* and the myths associated with it.

Food is important in this celebration and commercial foodscapes are transformed during this time of year. Certain dishes are consumed during the festivities and these dishes are also served by the restaurants. During the fieldwork stages of this research, I made a point of visiting restaurants and shops during *Nowruz* to see how the spaces had transformed. I also attended numerous *Nowruz* events in London and Vancouver to gain a better understanding of how it is celebrated in the diaspora.

Another important aspect of *Nowruz* is the arrangement of the ceremonial *sofreh-e haft sin* (*sofreh* is a ceremonial tablecloth), more commonly known as *haft sin*. The *haft sin* is an arrangement of seven symbolic objects displayed at *Nowruz*. The seven items usually (this can vary) include: *sabzeh* (green shooting springs of wheat), *sonbol* (hyacinth), *senjed* (dried jujube fruit), *serkeh* (vinegar), *sekkeh* (gold and silver coins), *seeb* (apple), *seer* (garlic) and *somagh* (sumac). Other items include (again variations are possible): a goldfish in a bowl of water; decorated eggs; a mirror; candles; a hyacinth; an orange; a flask of rosewater; and a holy book, although this is often replaced with *The Divan of Hafez* or Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Daryae, 2012; Soomekh, 2012). Each item has a meaning, linking nature to myth. Though largely a cultural rather than religious holiday, Soomekh (2012) notes that it is the placement of the religious text, be it the Torah, Avesta, or Qur'an that allows religion to be reflected. During *Nowruz*, the material presence of the *haft sin* becomes a marker of Iranianness for many of the spaces. In Iranian shops their presence showed that items for the *haft sin*

could be purchased at that shop, like at Assal Patisserie in the Marble Arch area of London (see Figure 5.40).



Figure 5.40 *Haft sin* display at Assal Patisserie, Marble Arch, London (2014)

My initial field site visits to Ayoub's Dried Fruit and Nuts stores in Vancouver took place during Nowruz (March 20th 2013), therefore many of the shop fronts had a *haft sin* display in the window. Ayoub's was no exception and alongside the *haft sin* displayed some of the produce available in smaller open display bowls consisting of dried okra, almonds, mixed nuts, mixed dried fruits and pistachios (see Figure 5.41).



Figure 5.41 *Haft sin* at Ayoub's Denman Street store, Vancouver (2013)

In non-Iranian shops, the presence of a sign wishing customers a happy *Nowruz* marks the acknowledgement of the presence of the Iranian community in non-Iranian food spaces such as Fresh St. Market, a local super market in West Vancouver (see Figures 5.42 and 5.43):



Figure 5.42 *Nowruz* foods display at Fresh St. Market, West Vancouver (2013)



Figure 5.43 *Sangak* displayed at Fresh St. Market, West Vancouver for *Nowruz* (2013)

Food itself plays an important role in *Nowruz* as certain dishes are eaten containing ingredients that are symbolic of the New Year. For example *ash*

reshteh (noodle and herb soup), *ghormeh sabzi* (herb and bean stew) and *kookoo sabzi* (*herb soufflé*) are commonly consumed. The eggs in the *kookoo sabzi* represent fertility and the noodles in the *ash reshteh* are representative of the “unravelling of life’s knotty problems” (Webster, 2007, unpaginated, para. 10). By performing the acts of making and eating these foods at the time of *Nowruz*, a sense of nostalgia is also experienced by diasporic Iranians. For the women, who do the majority of cooking at home (Harbottle, 2000), nostalgia is experienced through childhood experiences of what their mother made during this special time. For example, in Webster’s (2007) article about the Persian New Year, she interviews several women living in San Diego, one of whom, Fary Moini, talks about a pie made of a wheat crust, filled with dates, walnuts and cinnamon that her mother used to make for the holidays. Restaurants also offer these foods during *Nowruz*, in addition to *sabzi polo mahi* (herbed rice and fish) that is also traditionally consumed during *Nowruz*. Shops also sell foods such as *naan gerdooe* (walnut cookies), *shirin nargili* (coconut macaroons) and *toot* (mulberry marzipan sweet) that are usually only available during *Nowruz*. The re-performance of such food acts also allows diasporic Iranians to maintain a cultural identity outside the nation state, preserving the “Persian Thing” (Naraghi and Kingsbury, 2013).

5.3.3 Iranian Atmospheres

The material objects that decorate and make diasporan commercial food spaces are not only directly meaningful. They also help to make particular atmospheres and ambiances. I noted in Chapter 4 that ‘opulence’ is a common

theme marketed by many of the restaurants, especially in London. Representationally, opulence might be associated with a historic fantasy of Persian culture. Opulence is displayed in many material forms, but one of the most common forms of its display is the chandelier. Chandeliers were present in spaces such as Anar (in the Notting Hill area of London), Mahdi (in the Hammersmith area of London), Zeytoon (in the Cricklewood area of London), Zeitoon (in North Vancouver) and Yaas Grill House (also in North Vancouver). For the owner of Yaas Grill House, the chandelier reflected a diasporic Iranian taste for conspicuous consumption and helped to make the space feel Iranian:

I know a lot of Persian people, they love crystals. I don't know why but this wood and these crystals and this leather and fabric, somehow it matches. Somehow it has a nice warm feeling. I feel crystals go with everything. I love crystals. (Personal interview, Yaas Grill House, Vancouver, July 2013)

Of course, lights are both material objects (such as chandeliers) and affective technologies (creating light, which in turn is vital to the production of affective atmospheres and ambiances). As Bille and Sørensen (2007) argue in calling for a material culture approach to luminosity, lights are part of how wider 'lightscaapes' are produced. These lightscaapes are both felt through our senses and invested with social and cultural associations. Chandeliers are objects associated with opulence but also create certain sorts of light. Seeking perhaps a more intimate lightscape, many restaurants – such as Simurgh (in the Covent Garden area of London), Palms Palace (in the Marble Arch area of London) and Colbeh (in the Marble Arch area of London) – have smaller multi-coloured lamps installed. These lamps not only change the tonal qualities and brightness of the

light (what Anderson and Wylie (2009) calls its 'affective intensity'), they are also associated with regionalised environments for entertainment (they can also be found at many Turkish commercial food spaces and stalls).

More generally, lights and lighting are just one form of material infrastructure contributing to the overall ambiance of a commercial food space. Ambiance is created through a wide range of materialities. The example of Behesht restaurant in the Harlesden area of London illustrates how the materialities and acoustics of the restaurant contribute to representing an Iranian ambiance. The word *behesht* means paradise, and the design of the restaurant is reflective of its name. Behesht is heavily decorated with Iranian artefacts such as Persian carpets, guns, paintings, *dafs* and so on. It is the only restaurant that I came across where the name of the restaurant is written only in Farsi (others were written in English) and its exterior is highly decorated, making it stand out from the surrounding businesses on Harrow Road. During an initial visit to the restaurant I started off by taking photographs of the restaurant, but after a while found this to be inefficient as there was so much material to be documented. It was then I switched from photography to video. Filming this particular restaurant was more useful in that it allowed me to capture the acoustics of the restaurant, which photography does not allow for. The sounds captured included the staff talking to one another in Farsi, the instrumental Persian music playing in the background, the birds chirping and the water flowing from the waterfalls (Figure 5.42). These material objects represent Behesht's vision of an Iranian paradise,

which is in turn connected to Persian cultural heritage by theming each section of the restaurant after a celebrated Persian poet.



Figure 5.44 Fish in one the many water features at Behest, Harlesden, London (2013)

My ethnographic field notes from Kateh restaurant in the Maida Vale area of London also express something of this material production of a dining environment and ambiance:

Kateh is situated on Warwick Road next to a local pub and is a relatively small restaurant. The entrance and dining area are separated by a thick brown velvet curtain and glass panel. I sit by the entrance which allows me to see the whole restaurant. Small chandeliers hang from the ceiling on the left hand side of the restaurant, and small green and yellow coloured copper lamps are attached to the white walls on the right, which reflect the coloured light. The décor is minimal. One large mirror, a copper plate and a painting hang on the walls. The lighting is soft, which is further accentuated by the tea light candles that are placed on all the dark wood tables. Mellow jazz music

plays in the background. (Ethnographic notes, Kateh, London, November 2013)

Here, the dark wood furniture and flooring in the restaurant add warmth, alongside the brightly coloured lamps. The dark wood furniture gives a sense of sophistication, whilst the bright coloured lamps provide a sense of exoticism. Music was also important, as it was in many restaurants. For Kateh, mellow jazz helped to create an overall ambiance of stylish dining.

More generally, in terms of these 'soundscapes' (Saldanha, 2009; Smith, 1994), many places played instrumental traditional Persian music. Sufi, in London, softened the traditional sounds through modern arrangements, thus combining associations with both tradition and modern sophistication:

This is old Persian music. I do have very old Persian music with the guitars and traditional instruments, the old famous music that people know, but played on the piano. It's a different take on the same traditional music. (Personal interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)

On the other hand, other spaces, such as Yaas Grill House (a restaurant in North Vancouver), played modern Persian pop music, primarily made in the diaspora (especially Los Angeles), and giving a less formal ambiance:

I want Persian music. I think people expect us to have Persian music when they're having Persian food. Like, when you go to Italian restaurant you don't expect Arabic music, you expect Italian music. If I go to an Arabic restaurant, I like to hear Arabic music... Sometimes my brother comes and says this is not the cabaret or dancing place or discothèque, what kind of music is this [Persian pop]?! I guess when people come here they expect this kind of music; they enjoy it. (Personal interview, Yaas Grill House, Vancouver, July 2013)

The management of these soundscapes, specifically, and affective atmospheres more generally can be a complex process, and one over which restaurant managers rarely have full control (for a parallel argument on shopping malls, see Miller, 2014). For example, in Orkideh, London, the manager talked about the need to change the music depending on the customer mix, as they look to match clientele and ambiance in a dynamic process:

...people... they are coming and they want to be happy but it depends on the atmosphere. Sometimes we look at the atmosphere... people, they having wine and they want to have classical so we put on the classical... it depends on the atmosphere... we change the music. (Personal interview, Orkideh, London, November 2013)

Some of the restaurants also have live entertainment, such as belly dancing on Friday and Saturday nights, whilst others have a small dance floor where music is played by a local Iranian DJ. McAuliffe (2005, p. 286) notes that in Vancouver dancing to Persian music was associated with Persian restaurants; in London, however, the restaurants “created a ‘scene’ centred around club nights promoted along a Persian or (Middle Eastern) theme”. Whilst the majority of restaurant owners were happy to construct combined eating and entertainment spaces, it seemed problematic to the owner of Sufi, running counter to the ‘finer’ dining experience he was looking to engineer:

I think one has to draw a line with what a restaurant is. Because of the economy, some people have crossed a line and mixed everything together. There are some Iranian restaurants that do different things. They have music and all that. I think they should call it something else, not a restaurant because we are crossing the borders, mixing the restaurant, being a restaurant and disco and night club. I think one would lose the aim with what they started with. We started as a restaurant that provides Persian

food to people. I don't have anything against the others as to what they do, but it's just that... we know what we started here. We have kept to the same thing. (Interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)

In summary, then, in this second section of Chapter 5 I have examined how particular material objects and material technologies (like lighting and music) help to constitute the forms of Iranianness that commercial food spaces sell. I demonstrated that these materials included decorative objects, functional infrastructures and heavily coded symbolic material forms (from the national flags to religious and cultural symbols). I now turn directly, in the third and final part of the chapter, to consider the varying kinds of Iranianness thereby made.

5.4 Designing Different Diasporic Iranianness: Nostalgia and Modernity

We have already seen that diasporan commercial food spaces do not simply reproduce an original culinary culture from the homeland but intervene in a complex, dynamic and contested cultural and commercial field. In that context, they exhibit similarities but also differences. One common way to map out the differences within this sort of field of diasporan cultural production is in terms of a distinction between nostalgia (and a focus on the culture of the homeland) and modernity (and a focus on new innovations in diasporan settings). This distinction was used in the marketing of Iranian food spaces in London and Vancouver and recurred in the interview discussions. However, analysing this research's empirical materials suggested the complexity of how the distinction plays out in practice: how ideas of tradition and modernity can both be stereotypically reductionist or creatively inventive in practice; how each opens up a variety of

possibilities. In this final section of Chapter 5 I use a focus on the material design and curation of these commercial food spaces to address such issues. Complementing the focus on shops in the opening part of this Chapter, in this section I focus primarily on restaurants.

5.4.1 Designs on Nostalgia

In the diasporic context, a traditional aesthetic is often cast in terms of what life *was* like in the home country. I place emphasis on the past tense as traditions and cultures change in the homeland due to modernity. This lends such an aesthetic a nostalgic quality. For example, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, Persian traditions are strongly held on to by the diasporic Iranian community, in part to contrast their imagined homeland from the current geopolitical and cultural situation in Iran. As we saw, Persian cultural forms and motifs are deployed in shops and restaurants in ways that associate them with long, rich histories of cultural heritage. But the craft, literary and architectural heritages discussed so far, along with their opulent and rich qualities, are not the only sites of tradition that these commercial food spaces deploy. In particular, rural spaces are also often evoked, along with their aesthetics of rustic simplicity.

Fanoos, in the Richmond area of London, exemplifies a replication of authentic tradition through the idea of village life (see Figure 5.43). Materially, Fanoos is modelled to appear like an Iranian village building, with some of its walls constructed in a similar manner using clay and straw (see Figure 5.44). A similar aesthetic has also been applied in Persia Restaurant in the Cricklewood

area of London, and in parts of Sufi, in the Shepherd's Bush area of London. I was told by the owner of Sufi that this kind of wall is called *tagel*:

...the design of the room is different. That is what we call *tagel* [the wall at the back]. It's a very traditional way of making houses in hot climate. That is Bam; that is like [a] 2000 year old city that is made of this kind of material... (Personal interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)



Figure 5.45 Straw and clay walls at Fanoos, Richmond, London (2012)

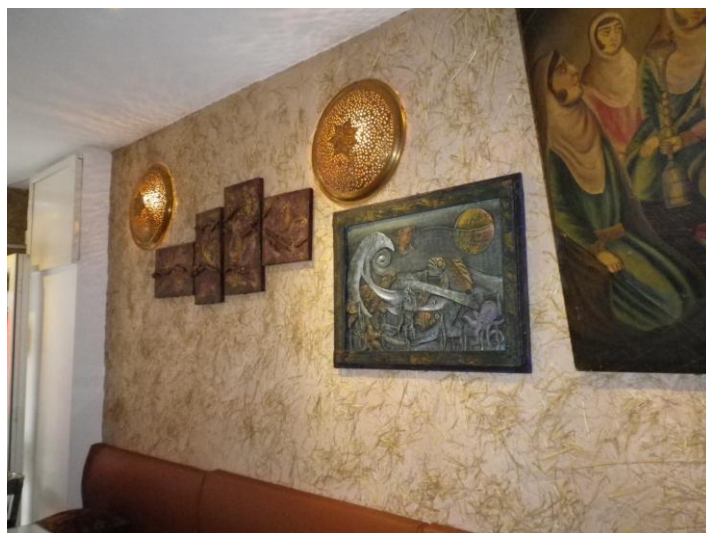


Figure 5.46 Straw and clay walls at Persia restaurant, Crickelwood, London (2012)

This village aesthetic creates a sense of both nostalgia and simplicity which in turn help to constitute a feeling of authenticity. Simplicity is associated with purity and a sense of humility, unlike the complexities and artifices that occur in city life: “city life is traditionally characterised as a place of alienation, of strangeness, and of inauthenticity. Rural life, on the other hand, is associated with simplicity and a purity of space...” (Hughes, 2013, p. 36). In culinary culture, appeals to the rural have a rich resonance, as epitomised by the Slow Food movement, indicating a sense of wholesomeness, honesty and sincerity (Parkins and Craig, 2006). Johnston and Baumann (2015, p.74) argue that simple “restaurant décor is cherished by many gourmet food writers, and is taken as evidence of a straightforward and honest food experience”. At Fanoos, the rurality is further emphasised through bare brick walls and the saddlebags displayed on them. At Sufi rural simplicity and authenticity is exemplified through a painting of Masuleh, a mountain village located in the Gilan province in Iran (see Figure 5.44):

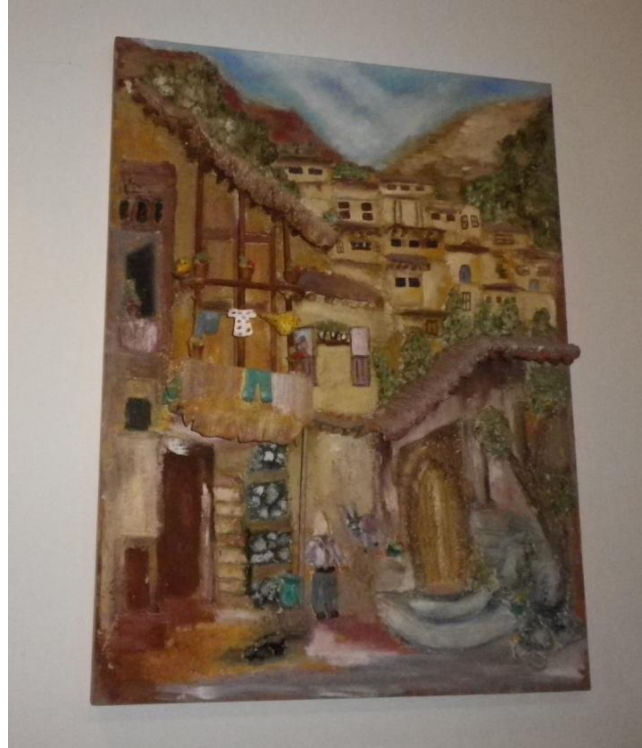


Figure 5.47 Painting of Masuleh, a mountain village located in the Gilan province in Iran displayed at Sufi, Shepherd's Bush, London (2012)

That picture on the wall there is Masuleh. It's a small village by the Caspian Sea. It is a fascinating village in terms of dishes that come from there, in terms of how the people live. It's very, very, very old and traditional'. (Interview, Sufi, London, November 2012)

The rural village is not the only site looked to nostalgically, however. Dishoom is a London based chain of restaurants modelled after the Bombay cafes in India. The Dishoom portfolio currently consists of three London restaurants: one in Covent Garden, one in Shoreditch and one in Kings Cross. The traditional Bombay cafes to which Dishoom pays homage have an Iranian heritage. They were opened up by Iranian Zoroastrian immigrants, known as Parsis and Iranis in Bombay/Mumbai (Waterhouse, 2006). Though popular in the 1950s, they have now become a rarity in Mumbai's urban landscape. However,

Dishoom rework them as a restaurant form in London, a new variant on the British Indian restaurant that can package colonial nostalgia in a new form.

Bombay cafes were known for their distinctive style and feel. Typical Irani cafés have high ceilings with ceiling fans, tiled floors, marble table tops and walls adorned with mirrors and portraits of Zoroaster. Little has been written about Bombay cafes (though see Conlon, 1995) but their history has been documented through film. In the documentary *Inheritance of Loss* (Shukla, 2009) editor in chief of Mumbai based Upper Crust Magazine, Farzana Contractor, describes the ambiance as being slightly dark. The most distinguishing feature of Irani cafés were the Scandinavian dark bentwood chairs, which were manufactured in Europe and yet were dubbed Irani chairs. These chairs had such a sense of romance attached to them that people wanted to acquire them for their homes. Walls were adorned with frescos, signs, and family photos. In the film, writer Anil Dhakar describes the ambiance as being casual and comfortable, providing a space to escape the mundane rush of the city.

Dishoom views its relationship to these traditional Irani cafes as a creative one. Dishoom's website states:

Creating a pastiche of an Irani café – perhaps an attempt at literal authenticity – would probably be a misguided errand. We're not in Bombay, we're not Irani immigrants and this isn't the 1930s. However, we can still pay loving homage to this rich period narrative in a modern space in London. The marble tables, bentwood chairs, ceiling fans, ageing mirrors and monochromatic palette are the backdrop which starts to tell the story. (Dishoom, 2011)

The owners have paid very close attention to detail and sought inspiration from the original designs, fixtures and fittings. Dishoom in Covent Garden takes features from various well known Irani cafés in Mumbai, like the Britannia café, by painting the walls in a similar shade of blue; the sign of rules by the door pays homage to Café Bastani, which closed down in 1990; vintage family portraits of the owners' families are framed on the walls (the display of family portraits was common practice in Bombay cafes). It is interesting to see the family photographs juxtaposed to vintage posters and advertisements on the walls; here, the specifics of family history are set within a wider nostalgia for this 'past' urban modernity.

It's inspiration from all of them really I suppose. The signature ones are Britannia, Leopold, and Bademiya. Leopold's has become quite streamlined. They've caught on with European dishes, unfortunately the worst part about that is that they have to. The Bombay cafes in the '60s were huge, there were hundreds of them. Now there's only 20 or 30, so with adapting culture they have to adapt with the times. As sad as it is they don't really have a choice; they might hate it but [have no choice]... (Personal interview, Dishoom, London, February 2013)

I am sat towards the back of the restaurant in Covent Garden sipping on my chai which comes in a glass like you would find in India. This reminds me of the time when I went to Rajasthan, and mum and I ordered ten glasses of chai between the two of us! This chai is addictive; there is no way that you can just have one glass. Old Bollywood songs play in the background. It is fairly quiet at the moment, so you can hear the chefs laughing in the background. Even though it is a restaurant it feels like home, which is friendly, welcoming, and cosy. The walls are adorned with vintage Indian advertisements and film posters, and

lights hang low from the ceiling. When you walk into the restaurant you see brightly painted bikes, and once inside the rules of the café and The Times of India hanging next to it [see Figure 5.46]. There are also unusual items on display like the gola machine on the bar. No matter how many times I come to Dishoom, here and Shoreditch, I always find it a fascinating place as everything has a story to tell. (Ethnographic Notes, Dishoom, Covent Garden, London, January 2013)



Figure 5.48 The "Rules of the cafe" displayed at Dishoom, Covent Garden, London (2012)

I meet with "Chatterwali" (marketing manager) of Dishoom restaurants, at Dishoom Godown [the Kings Cross branch; godown means warehouse], for my personal tour of the restaurant.... It is apparent that the Parsi identity is more visible here than the other two restaurants. For example, the Farvahar is displayed at the front of the restaurant; the principal beliefs of Zoroastrianism, "good thoughts, good words, good deeds" are painted on the top of the cabinet by the

front desk; and portraits of Parsi families such as that of the Tata family hang on the walls. Unlike the other restaurants, this one has quirky quotes dotted around in Gujarati. Iconic objects pay tribute to the Bombay cafes and other iconic establishments in Mumbai also adorn the restaurant, like the fornicator chairs which can be found at the Rippon Club and the chandelier that almost touches the table is reminiscent of the chandelier at Britannia café in Mumbai. The rules of the café, which I am told were created as people did not know how to eat in restaurants at the time, is also present here. The juice bar/kiosk is a replica of the kiosk at Victoria Station, Mumbai [see Figure, 5.47], and the stitching in the seats is reminiscent of the stitching in the seats at Eros cinema. (Ethnographic notes, Dishoom, Kings Cross, London, November 2014)



Figure 5.49 Juice kiosk at Dishoom, Kings Cross, London (Courtesy of Dishoom, Personal communication, 2015)

Dishoom in London pays homage to a past form rather than making claims to tradition and authenticity. These spaces create an ambiance which is playful and vibrant as well as nostalgic.

5.4.2 Modern Looks

As the design of Dishoom illustrates, diasporan food spaces, especially restaurants, have to navigate between the need to be recognisable (as geographically and culturally associated in some way) and the desire to be distinctive (so not just like every other Indian or Iranian restaurant, in Dishoom's case). Generally, across the interview materials, there was an evident desire, especially from younger restaurateurs, for providing 'something different' from the usual difference. Sometimes this was discussed in terms of moving away from the clichéd. Sometimes it arose in terms of appealing to a wider clientele by escaping a restrictive Persian or Iranian representation. Other times it was cast in terms of being distinctive for a diasporic clientele who do not only want something familiar but also something new. In all these cases, the commercial concern is not simply with making the restaurant different from the norm by making it Iranian or Persian, but also making it distinctively so.

In a restaurant like Cazba, in the West End area of Vancouver, a contemporary Canadian urban look is sought. Furniture and décor are like any number of other Vancouver eateries. Authenticity for Cazba is not about a nostalgia for a past Persian culture, the simplicities of Iranian village life, or a dying café form. In Cazba, food represented as Persian is consumed in the ambience of contemporary modern dining. Partly this presents a more authentic

connection to the diasporic here and now; this is a restaurant for Vancouver Iranians used to eating out the city. In part, the contemporary modern dining aesthetic represents an eschewing of narrow or fixed traditions in favour of a sense of cosmopolitanism.

This kind of look was common in Vancouver, rather less so in London, but the décor at Tandis restaurant, in the Belsize Park area of London, provides another interesting illustration:

We walk over to the restaurant which is situated on Haverstock Hill on the main street near a pub and other small local shops. From the outside it does not look like a "typical" Iranian restaurant. In fact there is nothing remotely Iranian about the place apart from the food, staff and sign in Farsi. The restaurant advertises that it has been recommended by newspapers in the window. There is some sort of artwork painted directly on the wall but none of it is obviously Iranian in design. Three chandeliers hang from a high ceiling and there is a huge coffee machine at the bar. One of the walls is left exposed, with a logo painted on it and a red "T" which is tilted on its side. The ambiance is cosy, with dark wood furniture and quite natural colours (browns and whites). As we sit at our table, I notice that the other patrons are mostly non-Iranian. The main kitchen is downstairs and there is possibly a downstairs dining area. Vera (my companion) points out that there is a separate entrance for deliveries. There is a patio seating area surrounded by small shrubs and flowers, with outdoor furniture, which is also black, and paving which looks like slabs, (it is dark outside, so it's a little difficult to tell). Our food comes and the dishes are

typically Iranian, but the plating is indicative of non-Iranian custom base as portions are smaller than what would be normal for an Iranian restaurant serving Iranians. The mast o khair is served in a small bowl and there wasn't much of it. The fesenjan comes with 2 pieces of chicken and the plate of rice is small. We later order dessert: the faloodeh comes in a slanting bowl and is cut into small cubes. (Ethnographic notes, Tandis, London, October 2013)

Other restaurants, such as Hafez in London, are decorated in ways that present Iranian culture, but in an explicitly contemporary way. The restaurant has been designed by a local Iranian artist named Ali who used to work at Hafez, and therefore has a good working relationship with the owner. Poems by Hafez, a notable Persian poet after whom the restaurant is named, are written in calligraphy and displayed throughout the restaurant. In many of Hafez's poems wine plays a significant role, thus connecting food to the poetry:

The poems are kind of printed over and over, and you can hardly read it unless you know about it. Maybe the owner does. That's my work. I also try to connect it to Iranian culture as much as I can... The writing is related to our calligraphy so at least Iranians can question it. Someone who is not Iranian is thinking 'oh, what is this about or what is he saying? (Interview, Ali, London, October 2013)



Figure 5.50 Art works and artefacts displayed on the walls at Hafez, Bayswater, London (2012)

The restaurant also displays a range of artefacts and art works hung on its white walls, in a look reminiscent of a gallery (see Figure 5.48). As Ali is a professional artist it is clear that a lot of thought has been put into the kind of objects that should be displayed. Ali's vision was to create a space that represents Iranian culture in a contemporary aesthetic:

I was thinking to create a new space, a warm welcoming place related to food. I wanted to produce a place that as Iranians we can be proud of, that was the main reason. I had the opportunity here because I know the owner and they knew this. I studied design so they asked me if I can do something and I said ok, I will. I started thinking about themes, what it should be, and how it should look. I know these things, then I went to different markets, second hand shops, charity shops... food well, it's all about this space making. I don't know as I said very warm, welcoming. I've been looking at different restaurants in London, Iranian ones and I thought maybe I should make something different. They [other Iranian restaurants] are similar, and I thought maybe I should go in a different direction. Create something different. So I came up with this idea and I started collecting objects and it took a long time, because you can't get all these things in one place. So I had to go to different places and thinking how to put it together, that's

another thing. Then in the end it seems it came out kind of acceptable and that was it. (Interview, Ali, London, October 2013)

Decorative objects are a common part of restaurant aesthetics. In Hafez, the objects are collected by Ali and then presented to the owners. As Ali has a close relationship with the owners he puts up new objects when he finds something interesting. In fact during the interview he put a new spoon on the wall which he had found at a market. The objects come from various places such as markets and exhibitions. For example, the tie which has a map of Persia printed on it was purchased from the British Museum shop (see Figure 5.49).



Figure 5.51 A map of the Persian Empire depicted on a tie displayed at Hafez restaurant, Bayswater, London (2013)

Everyday objects are curated in an artistic manner. For example, pages from Iranian cookbooks have been repurposed as lampshades (see Figure 5.50):

I'm sure that many people take notice of that because I remember once we had a different book and someone told the owner this book is about chemistry and I didn't know how they could see it and the owner told me a customer told me that this is about chemistry and I said yeah I know I didn't have proper book for it and then I changed it! (Interview, Ali, London, October 2013)



Figure 5.52 Cookbook repurposed as a lampshade at Hafez restaurant, Bayswater, London (2013)

Molana restaurant (London) was also designed by Ali. Molana, however is more themed towards the traditional, and pays tribute to the poet Rumi. It is similar to Hafez in that it is reflective of its name (Rumi is also referred to as *Molana*, meaning “our master”) and through the emphasis on decorative objects displayed throughout the restaurant in a gallery style.

As part of the interview I asked the owner of Molana, Roozbeh, about the name of the restaurant and the rationale behind it. He told me that Molana was a famous person -- in Farsi he was known as Molana and in English as Rumi -- who was a hero for many in Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. Roozbeh told me that it was important to him to have the right name for the restaurant and it took 1 to 2 months for him to find it. It was also important to him that the décor be reflective of the name, and be how Molana would have lived in those days [13th century]. (Interview notes, Molana, London, October, 2013)

A section of the restaurant is referred to as the Rumi corner, where pictures of Rumi and objects which feature in his poetry, such as the peacock, are

displayed. Shisha pipes, glassware and tea pots are used as lighting fixtures; again, Ali takes mundane objects and transforms them into something else as part of his modern aesthetic take on tradition (see Figure 5.51).



Figure 5.53 Rumi corner at Molana restaurant, Ealing, London (2013)

A contemporary cosmopolitan aesthetic is more commonly visible in Vancouver. The décor of Zeitoun in North Vancouver is reflective of a contemporary Iranian-Canadian identity:

As we are young, we thought we can mix traditional Iranian culture with the modern restaurant culture, and do something in between to have both sides. (Interview, Zeitoun, Vancouver, July 2013)

The restaurant was designed by a local Canadian interior designer. The modern restaurant culture is represented by the dark wood furniture and ornate patterns. The dark wood furniture produces a warm and welcoming ambiance. It also highlights some of the brighter colours like the olive green walls and gold patterns that are used in the restaurant (see Figure 5.52):

Basically I had to work with what was there and improve it as best as I could without doing any renovations. I had to have the existing chairs and booths re-covered. The colour was predominately black. So I had to incorporate the green and the white; I desperately needed to keep it somewhat bright. (Email interview, interior designer of Zeitoon, Vancouver, September 2013)



Figure 5.54 Interior of Zeitoon, North Vancouver (2013)

The Iranian aspect is reflected through the framed photographs of Tehran that are displayed in the restaurant (see Figure 5. 53):

I asked for photos that represented their country etc. and framed them... Also, that's a big bang for the budget. Budget had a lot to do with it... At this point I would recommend new tables and chairs. No table cloths to deal with.... I am sure would be nice. (Email interview, interior designer of Zeitoon, Vancouver, September 2013)

As with Ali's designs in London, a framing of older artefacts is used to present a materialisation of heritage in a modern, contemporary setting.



Figure 5.55 Photos of Tehran displayed at Zeitoun restaurant, North Vancouver (2013)

5.5 Conclusion

5.5.1 Summary

In summary, in this chapter I have focused on Iranian diasporic shops and restaurants as material spaces. I have argued that these commercial food spaces are more than neutral containers that sell Iranian foodstuffs and meals; rather, they are sites of cultural production and symbolism whose representational work is shaped by the ways in which they are designed, organised and decorated. Initially focusing on shops, I showed how the material objects used to display foodstuffs generate various associations (such as ‘authenticity’) and collectively help to create the overall senses of these retail spaces. Later, focusing on restaurants, I explored how the design and decoration of retail space create aesthetics that position and differentiate the ‘product’ on offer. Analytically, throughout I sought to combine attention to the meaningful, symbolic nature of these material spaces (as, for example, when considering the

display of national flags) with their affective agencies (as, for example, when interpreting the ambiances and atmospheres fostered by their 'lightscapes' and 'soundscapes'). In turn, having introduced Lily Cho's (2010) distinction of 'institutions' and 'installations' at the outset, I explored how material design and 'curation' involved both adherence to accepted norms and desires to fashion novel, creative representations of Iranianness.

5.5.2 Main Arguments

In this chapter I have argued that commercial spaces act as spaces of cultural production and symbolism whose work is shaped by the ways in which they are designed, organised and decorated. I have argued, as does Lily Cho (2009) that these spaces function as "institutions" and "installations". Here "institutions" reproduce familiar, typical, fetishised representations, where spaces become sedimented into the economic and cultural landscapes through reifications of identity through reproductions of dominant ideas. "Installations" on the other hand commercial spaces recreate identity in creative and idiosyncratic ways. It is about fitting in but also being different. These spaces tease, rather than contest expected tropes. Like food itself, foodspaces are grounded in sensorial consumption through sight, sound and aroma which are connected to the points of nostalgic experiences that work in the diaspora. It also explores "old world" and "new world" dichotomies, which identify with origin and how these spaces narrate their presentation as an Iranian theme and what this means in terms of production and consumption. I unpack these ideas in relation to the processes of and relationships between diasporisation and foodscapes, how they

syncretise and (re) produce Iranianness, and how foodscapes work representationally to 'diasporize' Iranianness.

The bodily engagements with foodscapes are equally important as the bodily engagement of food; as they are imperative in creating memories, as they impact on the ways in which people interact with food. For example, Crisinel, Jacquier, Deroy and Spence (2013) show that aromas were matched to sound. More recent studies have shown that sounds can also impact on the ways in which we taste. Here Sutton's concept of synesthesia, are applicable as the senses become unified taking environmental aesthetics into account. In this context, foodscapes are not only cultural sites but also sensual sites consisting of material objects, sounds and names, which serve as a reminder of home, producing episodic and symbolic memories. It also speaks to the concepts of *rasa* aesthetics, as *rasa* is fundamental to Indian performing arts such as the Indian classical dance of *Bharatnatyam*. The point I want to stress here is that diasporic identities are performed in diasporic commercial food spaces through art. For example, Iranianness is performed in a shop like Ayoub's in Vancouver through sight (e.g. the Iranian ornaments and decorated containers); sound (e.g. soft Persian music) and aroma (e.g. nuts being freshly roasted). These three senses then become synthesised producing a sense of nostalgia. Here performance works through display rather than theatrics, as these commercial spaces are designed to facilitate certain emotions and social bonding (Saldanha, 2009).

The design of the foodscapes therefore reflect the 'imagined communities' as described by Anderson, where idealized memories and cultural imaginations

are created in and through processes of diasporisation. The example of Dishoom illustrates this well as the décor and themes draw heavily upon a postcolonial India and in some cases (particularly the Kings Cross branch) an imaginary narrative reflecting the idealized representations of longer historical migrations of Iranians to India. Here the application of Said's Orientalism is useful in thinking through the representations of the geographical imaginations of colonial and postcolonial India (See Jazeel, 2012). A space such as Dishoom therefore "encourages us to consider the ways we think about distant and different elsewheres, the connections familiar from globalisation, immigration or cultural hybridity, and the western and imperial origins of the spaces and places we take for granted. Thinking postcolonially is to critically probe our own geographical imaginations" (Jazeel, 2012, p.6). Here Iranianness is represented through the various Zoroastrian symbols and photographs of well known Parsis and Iranis displayed on the walls in addition to some of the foods, which have longer Iranian histories. Overall it represents a series of binaries such as the Indian/Iranian, imaginary/real (in a Lacanian sense) and modern/traditional. The arguments are evident in the overall diasporic representations of Iranianness in the foodscapes looked at.

Binaries of the Iranian/British, Iranian/Canadian, Islamic/Zoroastrian and modernity/tradition are evidential through the foodscapes, which are syncetised to (re)produce Iranianness. These binaries reflect the fragmentation of politics connected to identity, which is reflected by the display of the pre and post revolution flags, where the pre revolutionary *parcham-e shir-o khorshid* (flag with

the lion and sun emblem) symbolises a pre-Islamic identity making it less problematic in terms of marketing. Furthermore it symbolises a disassociation with Islam and its geopolitical imaginations in the west, and a nostalgic longing for a pre-revolution Iran. The binary of the Islamic/Zoroastrian also reflects these contentious politics in the representations of the Persian/Iranian identities, which is perhaps more clearly displayed by the Zoroastrian symbol of the *Farvahar*, which has been transformed into a kitschy symbol of Persian pride in the diaspora.

The restaurants narrate their presentation as “Persian” theme rather than an “Iranian” theme, given that the majority of objects displayed play on and stress the “Persian” identity, such as the *Persian* carpets and displays of *Persepolis* (meaning “the Persian city”). Here the restaurant becomes an “institution” reproducing familiar and fetishised cultural representations. Restaurants which I presented as “installations” such as Hafez almost become a “third space”, a space of geographically cultural in-betweenness reflecting and appealing to both Iranian and non-Iranian tastes. They become embedded into the cosmopolitan urban fabric, reflecting cosmopolitan identities and translocalities. Indeed these everyday spaces, which Beck (2006) refers to aptly as “banal cosmopolitanism” have come to be “a commodity; the glitter of cultural difference fetched a good price. Images of an inbetween world, of the black body, exotic beauty, exotic music, exotic food, and so on, are globally cannibalized, re-staged and consumed as products for mass markets” (Beck, 2006, p. 150-151). Here materials become mobilised and circulated acquiring new properties and

becoming actively reworked in local settings, where 'geographical knowledges' are exchanged (Appadurai, 1986; Cook and Crang, 1996; Harney 2002; Jackson 1999). In a place like Hafez objects become reworked to produce something new and intriguing. For example, cookbooks become repurposed as lampshades. These spaces do not conform to notions of authenticity, yet do not challenge them, but rather seek to pay homage to reflect cosmopolitan diasporic identities.

"Ethnic" restaurants have to be a representation of the symbolic economy of cities, functioning as spaces of production and spaces of symbolism, where ethnicities become codified in various ways. In his examination of ethnic restaurants in Montreal Nash (2009, p. 9) develops a set of criteria to measure ethnicity, which include food, décor, architecture, naming and food. Highmore further develops this in his analysis of Indian restaurants on the British high street. His findings show that Indian restaurants have become part of the urban and rural landscape, with many conjuring up images of the British Raj. He argues that diasporic culture is frequently subjected to being dubbed as artificial or improvised, as was the case with Indian restaurants on the high street being owned and ran by British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, but branded as "Indian". Here diasporic culture to a point becomes embroiled and (re)presented through dominant stereotypes.

However, producers (shopkeepers and restaurant owners) curate their own versions of cultural representations, as argued by Kim (1999). These representations become embedded into local areas enabling immigrants to forge a sense of place and belonging, through active transnational consumption

(Ehrkamp, 2005). In her study of Turkish immigrants in Germany Ehrkamp (2005) argues that transnational ties and practices enable immigrants to squarely “place” their identities into the neighbourhood creating a sense of local belonging. Transnational identities move beyond bound notions of cultural representations, promoting hybridity and newly emerging identities, recognising the importance of local contexts.

These localities become what Steven Vertovec calls super-diverse spaces (2007), reflecting the city as a collective and symbolic space (Hall, 2015). Hall and Datta (2010) argue that streets and neighbourhoods become signscapes, where materials are circulated in the local economy, becoming embodied into everyday spaces, basing their analysis on shopfront displays. Whilst I have argued that diasporic identities become embedded into local contexts, Hall and Datta (2010) draw upon the works of Appadurai (1996, 2005) and Hannerz (1996) who “suggest the heightened movement and mobility produces a notion of deterritorialisation and disembeddedness from places. While pre-existing notions of transnationalism retain the nation and national territories as its predominant focus, they appear to suggest a disclocation from place” (Hall and Datta, 2010, p.71).

Hall and Datta (2010) argue that visual signscapes are forms of visual capital, which in turn attracts fiscal capital from the targeted clientele. They suggest that visual capital can be translated into social and economical capital in the context of mobility and exchange, as it is carefully negotiated. For example, in a city like Vancouver, a modern setting for restaurants such as Cazba,

authenticity is not about nostalgic longings but, about consuming Iranian foods in a space with a modern ambiance. This partly presents an authentic connection to the diasporic here and now, favouring a sense of cosmopolitanism. Of course, one crucial material involved in these shops and restaurants was left in the background, namely the Iranian food itself. Chapter Six therefore looks to bring this food to the fore.

6: IRANIAN ON THE MENU: TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE COMMERCIAL IRANIAN FOOD SPACES OF LONDON AND VANCOUVER

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the food (meals and food items) sold in the various commercial Iranian food spaces in London and Vancouver. Chiefly, as elsewhere in the thesis, my focus is on the food provided in restaurants and shops, but this chapter also attends to other spaces such as market food stalls and commercial supper clubs held at private homes. My concern once more is with how diasporan Iranian identities are made and represented through these spaces. However, whereas in Chapter 4 I focused on the marketing of Iranian food and in Chapter 5 on its staging and curation within material spaces, I now turn more directly to the foods themselves. This chapter therefore focuses on the character of the food sold by diasporic Iranian providers and on how its making intersects with the production of diasporic identities.

More specifically, the analysis concentrates on how diasporic Iranian food is both made to be 'traditional' and 'innovated' with in various ways. By way of introduction, let me briefly contextualise that emphasis within the overall progression of the thesis. Chapter 2 established the rationale for my general interest in food commerce as an arena characterised by processes of 'diasporization' (Butler, 2005), i.e. the production of diasporic identities, both individual and collective. It further set out how these diasporization processes

were characterised by: relations to both a past homeland and to the wider 'diaspora space' in which resident (Brah, 1996; Cho, 2007); power-laden processes of 'hybridization' that both create and 'mix-up' ideas of cultural difference (Anthias, 2001); and participation in processes of (material) cultural exchange and transformation that mobilise ideas of the global and local (Hannerz, 1990) and forge a 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2003). I suggested that in diasporan commercial food spaces, these processes play out in particular through discourses about 'authenticity'. Drawing from the likes of Johnston and Bauman (2010) and Appadurai (1986), this authenticity, I suggested, is best understood as a complex socially constructed quality; not innate, but with strongly normative elements (suggesting how foods measure up against a standard of what they 'should' be); and requiring analysis of how, why and for whom it is made. In other words, the diaspora scholarship considered in Chapter 2 indicates how ideas of 'tradition' and 'innovation' are central to diasporan commerce, and how these ideas often play out through divergent claims to authenticity. These are issues that I now want to explore in more depth.

In so doing, I also want to extend other aspects of my argument to date, in particular in relation to the commercial dynamics at play here. Chapter 4 established something of my approach. Extending ideas from the likes of Marianne Lien (1997; 2000) on the anthropology of marketing and Andy Pike on the geographies of brands and branding (Pike, 2009; 2011), my interpretation emphasised two central concerns for these food businesses. First, they seek to 'differentiate' their products through their diasporic association; but second, they

also have to 'position' their products in ways that 'connect' with 'the market' (potential customers). This combined requirement to differentiate and to connect shapes how these food businesses navigate questions of tradition and innovation. In Chapter 4, I explored this in relation to the advertising and naming of Iranian shops and restaurants in London and Vancouver. In Chapter 5, I extended the analysis into a consideration of these shops and restaurants as material productions of spaces, symbols and affects (Matus Ruiz, 2013; Zukin, 1995). In so doing, I focused on other materials than the foods that they sell. Now I want to turn more directly to those foods themselves.

The chapter progresses through four main sections. It begins by examining the sale of 'traditional' foods in shops, tracing out how tradition operates as a currency in contemporary retail cultures. Second, I then turn to how ideas of 'traditional' Iranian food can work in a rather different way, where 'traditional' becomes a synonym for 'conventional' and 'typical'. Focusing on restaurants, I investigate how there are 'traditional' expectations for what items might feature on the menu in an Iranian restaurant. In the third part of the chapter, I extend the discussion initiated in Chapter 4 on what I termed the marketing strategy of 'bridging', where Iranian cuisine is related to other geographically associated cuisines as a way to widen its market. In this case I focus on the role of particular foods, such as hummus, in bridging between Iranian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food cultures. Finally, in its fourth main section, the chapter addresses explicitly 'modern' approaches to Iranian food traditions. Working through two main examples – the Vancouver based chef

Hamid Saliman, and a contemporary cookbook and supper-club rendition of Persian food in London by Sabrina Ghayour – I explore how an emphasis on innovation is matched to ideas of both tradition and authenticity.

6.2 Tradition on the Shelves:

Gurrero et al. (2009) and Verbeke (2011, p. 287) suggest that there are four dimensions to traditional foods: locality, authenticity, availability over a long time period and gastronomic heritage. I understand 'tradition', and these four proposed aspects underpinning for it, not simply as facts but as cultural judgements and positionings. In other words, whilst 'traditional' Iranian foods are made and sold, this is an active process that seeks to locate, authenticate and represent histories. Whilst clearly there is much to be said more generally about how traditions are 'invented', in the sphere of diasporic commerce the emphasis is on reproducing traditions that have a presence in the Iranian homeland, and then translating these for new diasporic contexts. 'Traditional' foods, then, foster some kind of connection to Iran but also connect into contemporary consumer cultures in London and Vancouver. How these connections are made is variable.

One key way of making these connections to both 'homeland' and contemporary markets is an emphasis on 'artisanal' food. During my time in Vancouver I was fortunate enough to speak with the owners of Saman Bakery. Located in North Vancouver, Saman Bakery makes what they describe as artisan breads and pastries, which have "stayed true to the traditional preparation and baking methods of authentic Persia" (Saman Bakery, 2012) (note the use of 'Persia', as opposed to Iran). They are a wholesale bakery distributing baked

goods to both Iranian and non-Iranian stores across the Lower Mainland¹⁵, Vancouver Island, and other western provinces like Alberta and Manitoba. Saman Bakery started by distributing their products among Iranian businesses in the North Shore, before moving into the wider “mainstream” market and supplying to local chain and luxury supermarkets like Meinhart Fine Foods, located in the Shaughnessy neighbourhood of Vancouver, and British Columbian supermarket chain Urban Fare (located in various affluent neighbourhoods of Vancouver such as Yale Town and Coal Harbour). Saman Bakery classifies its products as artisan, and in Vancouver this also positions them as luxury food products:

Urban Fare, Whole Foods... luxury health-concerned, health-focused companies ... have our products; almost all of our customers are a little bit classier; they have higher end products... (Personal interview, Saman Bakery, Vancouver, June 2013)

In other words, the artisanal quality ascribed to Saman’s baked goods both connects them to a homeland (‘Persia’) and to contemporary consumer trends and markets in Western Canada (the growing, ‘higher end’ market for artisanal goods that are seen as ‘better’ in terms of both health and taste). The artisanal nature of Saman Bakery’s goods also links to their geographical association with the ‘local’:

...it’s a marketing tool for us to be local. If we were supplying somewhere in Toronto we wouldn’t be able to say it’s local. We would have to have products made by machine and long shelf life. We would lose our characteristics, the good things... there are products which are made in one place and shipped elsewhere;

¹⁵ The Lower Mainland refers to the southwest corner of British Columbia.

they lose their quality, they're not healthy anymore... (Personal interview, Saman Bakery, Vancouver, June 2013)

As noted above, Saman Bakery choose to describe their products as Persian rather than Iranian. They produce a number of 'traditional' baked goods such as *barbari* (a thick oval shaped bread) and *taftoon* (a thin, flaky and soft round flat bread) (Figure 6.1). They also produce what they described as contemporary goods, like coconut macaroons (though Cohen (2013) argues for a Persian heritage here too; suggesting that the macaroon has its origins in 7th century Sassanid Persia, and was taken to Sicily by the Arabs; hence the similarities in terms of ingredients, like ground nuts, between Sicilian and Arab-Persian confectionary). To appeal to a wider audience, the main lettering on the packaging gives the names of the products in English rather than Farsi.



Figure 6.1 Saman Bakery *taftoon* and other Saman Bakery goods sold at Afra Bakery, North Vancouver (2013)

Arvand Dairy is an artisan dairy producing a line of products primarily for the Vancouver Iranian market. It was started when owner Bobak saw that there was a niche market for Iranian dairy products. More recently it has expanded by

catering towards other ethnicities too, selling as an alternative to mainstream dairy products. Discussing their 'Iranian yoghurt', I was told:

Basically it's more authentic. No preservatives whatsoever. It's a little bit richer; it's not as sour as regular yogurt. They [Iranians] want something that's more delectable; not too tart, and then we realised other ethnicities wanted specialised yogurt that the mainstream cannot cater to. We started making yogurt for the Greek community, Greek yogurt ... (Personal interview Arvand, Vancouver, July 2013)

As at Saman Bakery, tradition and authenticity are strongly linked to production methods and ingredients. Again, this relates to a 'localism', in particular as the preservatives allowing long distance distribution and a longer shelf-life are eschewed. Generally, Arvand Dairy's products undergo minimal processing and the products are made in smaller batches:

Well, what I mean by authentic, means authentic or traditional as opposed to modern industrial authentic. What I mean by authentic is it doesn't have preservatives, is not entirely processed, it's authentic, it's basic, as it is. You don't want to tamper with the food too much: too much homogenization; too much processing; too much adding this and that for the sake of shelf life preservability and so on; which I distinguish as sort of modern production methods. We try to keep it as traditional and simple as possible, and it definitely yields better quality products, though you may not have as extensive a shelf life. So that's what I mean by that and then it's also, you know, to make high-end products. You have to spend more time, you have to make smaller batches and it's as much an art as a science ... you have to be good ... (Personal interview, Arvand, Vancouver, July 2013)

Here, then, the 'traditional' quality of Arvand's dairy products is based in material practices and attributes: the simple ingredients, the short shelf life of the foods and so on; and the craft-like nature of a skilled production process (more 'art' than 'science'). But, in turn, these materialities are also implicated in wider

imaginaries that speak to something other than ‘the modern’ or ‘modern-industrial’. Arvand Dairy’s market niche is characterised by producing something that is ‘basic’ and ‘simple’, notions that transcend a factual description of ingredients and methods and are invested with wider meanings about what characterises an authentic culture. Arvand Dairy’s differentiation of the market mobilises this wider distinction of traditional simplicity and modern-industrial artifice in order to construct an authenticity for its products. In turn, this differentiation is then related to a vertical mapping of market value. These are ‘high-end’ products, ‘better quality’, for ‘classier people’.

This ‘up-market’ positioning, through artisanal production, allows Iranian food businesses to place their products within retailers selling more generally within the quality food market. The following is an ethnographic account from Fresh St. Market, a non-Iranian supermarket in West Vancouver:

I come across Fresh St. Market from walking along Marine Drive, so I decide to see what it is like. I walked in and see that it is very much like Whole Foods. I walk over to the bakery section and see that there is taftoon, barbari, and seeded crackers made by Saman Bakery stacked on the shelves. I am curious to see if there are any more Iranian foods sold here, so I keep walking around. Towards the middle of the store, at the front, there is a display stand displaying bags of rice, bottles of juice, boxes of tea, bottles of oil, a samovar and other Iranian food items. On top of the frame a sign on a chalk board says “Happy Persian New Year” and there is also a laminated sign among the food items reminding customers to celebrate the Persian New Year

on March 21st. I go over to see what other Iranian goods are sold, in the main section of the shop. The products are placed in the middle of the store in the ethnic foods section next to the Italian foods, are presented as a mixture of Iranian and Middle Eastern goods. Foods are organised by type, for example all the juices are placed together on the top shelf. The majority of the goods stocked are produced by Sadaf, an Iranian food distributor based in Los Angeles. I also notice that there are bottles of doogh produced by Arvand Dairy next to the juice. As I make my way out of the store I see a trolley reminding consumers to celebrate the Persian New Year with Fresh St. Market, which is piled with sangak from Afra Bakery in North Vancouver. Next to it is a cooler filled with tubs of yogurt produced by Arvand. (Ethnographic notes, Fresh St. Market, Vancouver, March 2013)

As mentioned in these field notes, during my time in Vancouver I came across a flat bread called *sangak*. *Sangak* is a long thin bread which is traditionally baked on hot stones. In London it is hard to find fresh *sangak* and it is usually sold in frozen form. After coming back from Vancouver, my London-based research participants and I would talk about *sangak* and some of the meanings it held for them. Here, for example, is my interviewee from Lavash restaurant:

When I go to Iran, every morning I get up and buy it. It has to be for breakfast. It's amazing when hot. When I go to see my mother, she wakes me up early to go and get *sangak* and everybody gets up and gets excited to have a bit of it. They have it with a special cream and cheese which my mother makes. My wife always says each time I go to Iran, I dream of *sangak* and the cheese your mother makes. The queue for the *sangak* goes quickly because

everyone wants it hot, they don't want to keep it cold. (Personal interview, Lavash, London, October 2013)

Here the *sangak* acts as a cultural mnemonic as it reminds Lavash's owner of his mother and Iranian culinary life. It speaks to Sutton's (2001) connection of memory and taste, as well as Khare (1997) and Ray's (2016) concept of *rasa* aesthetics, as the act of buying the *sangak* evokes a memory of an everyday experience. This involves getting woken up early to get the freshest and hottest *sangak* and sharing it which evokes a sense of pleasure and enjoyment (Sutton, 2001). Iranians in Vancouver also have the option of buying fresh hot *sangak*, as it is produced by Afra Bakery and Market and the Naan Hut, both bakeries located in North Vancouver. The *sangak* is baked in the same way as it would be in Iran, using hot stones which are then removed when the *sangak* is left to hang on a hook to rest (see Figure 6.2). The aroma of the *sangak* evokes "strong emotional responses" (Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994, p2), enticing the consumer. The process of cooking the *sangak* on hot stones recreates new diasporic memories in Vancouver, in addition to unlocking old ones (Proust, 2005). It is then packed into large clear bags for sale. The fresh, hot *sangak* in North Vancouver thus creates a very different diasporic foodscape than the frozen *sangak* of London; less marked by loss and longing, more by the lively continuation of tradition.



Figure 6.2 Sangak at Naan Hut, North Vancouver (2013)

This sense of living tradition, and of traditional foods being part of contemporary lifestyles, is to be found more generally. Often it involves adapting traditional materials and methods. Iranian bakeries in the diaspora often serve other food items such as dried fruits, nuts, ice cream and confectionary, in addition to Iranian breads. For example, Golestan in North Vancouver serves a range of Iranian confectionary (including nougat or *gaz*), most of which is made on site. Though Golestan produces what they describe as ‘authentic’ Persian sweets, in order to cater towards a wider and contemporary, health conscious clientele recipes have been adapted, in particular to reduce the fat content:

PRIYA: Do you think it takes away the flavour and the tradition of it?

NAVID: No. No, it’s the same thing because in my homeland we now use less sugar, and many years ago people didn’t know

about cholesterol, but now things are changing. I now use canola oil and non-hydrogen oil; they are very healthy but the taste and flavours all still the same. (Personal interview, Golestan, Vancouver, May 2013)

Navid, as one might expect, argues that a change in ingredients to suit health conscious consumers is not a loss of authenticity: partly because the taste does not change; partly because Iranian food production in the 'homeland' is also changing (a claim endorsed by Javidinejad and Ilkhanizadeh, 2011), so one cannot simply adjudicate the authenticity of diasporan products against 'homeland' production in the past. A parallel example would be the adaptation of foods to suit the dietary requirements of vegetarian and vegan consumers. Persepolis, in the Peckham area of London, has also opened a café within the shop, which serves a mixture of Iranian and other Middle Eastern foods. All the foods served at the café are vegetarian. Some dishes are of their own invention: such as the saffron banana split, made with banana, *akbar mashti* (saffron ice cream with frozen pieces of cream), dates, walnuts, cream, sesame halva, carob syrup and pistachio nibs (see Figure 6.3):

As I look through the menu at the Persepolis café, the saffron banana split and hot paklava meltdown catches my eye. As the menu does not elaborate on the ingredients, I ask Karen what is in each one, and finally decide to try the saffron banana split. I do not waste time in tucking in, and try to get small pieces of everything onto the spoon. It tastes sweet as one would expect, and a subtle saffron flavour comes through from the ice cream, but then there is a slightly salty flavour at the end from the halva. The walnuts and pistachio nibs give it a crunchy texture, and the dried dates a

slightly chewy one. It combines various textures which make eating it even more enjoyable. (Ethnographic notes, Persepolis in Peckham, Peckham, London, July 2015)



Figure 6.3 Saffron banana split at Persepolis in Peckham, Peckham, London (2015)

However, they also serve well-known traditional dishes such as *lubia polo* (a rice dish, usually made with tomato, green beans and meat) but with the meat removed.

There are other ways too in which ‘traditional’ foods are translated into modern retail cultures. A number of traditional Iranian dishes have even been repackaged as convenience meals, such as canned *ghormeh sabzi* (herb stew) or dried packets of *ash reshteh* (herb and noodle soup) (see Figure 6.4). These products are available in both Iranian and non-Iranian shops; they are mass

produced either in Iran or in the diaspora (especially Los Angeles). In market positioning, they stand at the opposite end of the spectrum to artisanal producers like Arvand Dairy, embracing the modern industrial rather than distanced from it. In both cases, though, the broader logic is the same: to fashion some sense of a traditional foodstuffs that can be positioned in contemporary retail markets and spaces.



Figure 6.4 *Ash reshteh* and barley soup sold in convenience form at Tavazo, Ealing, London (2013)

6.3 Tradition on the Menu:

Within shops, then, there are a number of ways in which ideas of tradition are materialised in Iranian foodstuffs in London and Vancouver. A growing form, related to wider retail trends for up-market products, has been the making of artisanal products (more generally, see Cope, 2014). One can also find this emphasis on highly skilled craft production in some restaurants too, of course. However, in what follows, rather than repeat this argument I want to use data from the studied restaurants to explore a different facet of how traditional foods

are served up in contemporary commercial food spaces. This involves focusing on the relations between ideas of 'tradition' and 'conventionality' and 'typicality' when it comes to menu items.

The 'typical' items on a diasporic Iranian restaurant menu show that there is quite a complex relationship between diasporan restaurant foods and ideas of tradition. More specifically, first I will show how what often might be seen as the most typical/traditional dishes in these restaurants (various sorts of kebabs) are actually traditional only in terms of restaurant culture (not domestic Iranian cuisine). In the second part of the section, I turn to another typical food type on restaurant menus, stews, which have a rather different lineage, and associate traditional food with the domestic and home-cooking. Here I argue that the movement of such foods into restaurant culture is a complex process, as they have no standard recipes.

There are, then, three main types of Persian dishes that are typically served in diasporan Iranian restaurants: *chelow kabob* (rice and grilled meat, considered the "national dish"); *khoresh chelow* (stew and rice); and *pulaos* (rice mixed with legumes, fruits, nuts, meat and vegetables) (Chehabi, 2003). Duruz (2000, p.299) calls these standard items "fortress cuisines". Bell (2002, p.11) sees such typical items as an attempt to "museumify and mummify" foods, making them fixed entities rather than living cultural forms. The majority of diasporan Iranian restaurants feature the same specific dishes, giving Iranian commercial food in the diaspora a degree of homogeneity, implying a "culinary cohesion" (Chehabi, 2003, p.43). Restaurant menus are typically structured in

the western manner of appetisers, main course, and dessert. These may then be further divided into hot and cold appetisers; and the main course into kebabs and stews. Whilst both kebabs and stews are standard items in diasporan Iranian restaurants, their relations to Iranian food traditions, and its spaces, are rather different. Kebabs are considered to be restaurant foods, whereas stews are considered to be more homely dishes, which have only become restaurant food more recently.

In the cookbook *The New Persian Kitchen*, Louisa Shafia (2013) writes:

...kebabs are not a typical Persian meal, but are generally considered restaurant food. The reason kebabs have come to represent Persian cooking to so many people, it's argued, is because women are masters of the more complex stews and rice dishes and kebabs are easy-to-make "dude-food"... In fact, most Iranians consider a home-cooked meal far superior to one that's cooked in a restaurant. (p.77)

According to Shaida (1991), kebabs became a popular restaurant food because meat preparation requires skill in terms of cutting the meat and then threading it on the skewers. The Iranian national dish, *chelow-kebab*, is a particularly popular restaurant food. According to Shaida (1991), *chelow-kebab* was an Azari dish which was then bought to Tehran by Naser al-Din Shah in 1848, who insisted on the establishment of a *chelow-kebab* restaurant (known as a *chelow-kebab*; the word *kebab* implies a kebab restaurant) near the palace, next to the Grand Bazaar. Later *chelow-kebabs* began to proliferate. Restaurants in Iran did not become widespread until the beginning of the 20th century (Shaida, 1991; Fragner, 1994). During the latter half of the 20th century *jujeh-kebabs* (chicken kebab restaurants) were established, providing consumers a lighter meal

consisting of grilled chicken. Shaida (1991, p.275) concludes by stating: “it [*chelow-kebab*] has become the national dish of Iran, and the first Iranian restaurants to be established abroad have always initially served only *chelow-kebab*. Eventually, they began to serve other Iranian dishes as well and offer a number of choices, broken down into courses (not a common practice in Iran) and printed in menus of considerable complexity”. These practices are still reflected in the majority of the diasporan restaurants I studied. Most offered more kebab dishes in comparison to stews and rice dishes. This was particularly evident in Vancouver. The climate in both London and Vancouver is not conducive to outdoor barbequing; hence the restaurants can offer these kebab dishes all year round. The *chelow-kebab* is served and consumed in similar ways across different restaurants (see Figure 6.5). The plate comes with rice or flat bread, kebab, grilled tomato and butter. The butter is mixed into the rice, and the kebab is seasoned by the consumer with sumac for sourness.



Figure 6.5 Jujeh kebab served at Lonsdale Kebab, North Vancouver (2013)

The stews (*khoresh*) that are also typically found on diasporan Iranian restaurants have a rather different history of tradition making. They are much less associated with the restaurant culture of Iran, and its masculine chef culture; instead, they are linked to the domestic and to women's food production. In terms of their material production, stews are time consuming to make, and for the chef and food writer Sabrina Ghayour they are "personal":

... they're [stews] so personal ... it's about how your mum makes them, or how your aunt makes them. Some people like *fesenjan* (a walnut and pomegranate stew) sour. I like it kind of sour and kind of sweet. My mum likes it sweeter, and some people don't put that much sugar in it at all ... some people like it with chicken and some people like it with duck, and some like it with meat balls. It's so personal. *Ghormeh sabzi* is probably the most popular for Iranians, it has a cult following. But whether you use borlotti-like brown beans, or black eyed peas, or kidney beans, or how acidic you have it or do you put spinach in it, it's really personal...
(Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

The complexity of flavours in stews is harder to replicate as a standard recipe; each one is different; and these differences are linked into their domestic origins as 'home-cooking'. For example, I found the *fesenjan* at Orkideh restaurant in Golders Green (London) to be sweeter than the more slightly sour one presented at Hafez restaurant in Bayswater (London) (Figure 6.5). The meat used in the *fesenjan* also varies among restaurants. At Lavash restaurant in Finchley (London) it is made with meat balls; at Kateh restaurant in Maida Vale (London) duck is used; however, more commonly, it is made with chicken. Some restaurants, such as Hafez in Bayswater (London), will also offer it without meat, turning it into a vegetarian dish.



Figure 6.6 *Fesenjan* served at Hafez, Bayswater, London (2012)

More generally, the lineage of home cooking produces a sense of gendered nostalgia (in Sabrina Ghayour's conversation with me, from which I quoted above, expressed as a relationship to how one's mother or aunt cooked). The concept of home cooking was particularly important to the menu at Kozmik Zoo (located in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood in Vancouver). It was reflected too in the gendered division of labour within the restaurant; the chefs were the owner's mother and sister. The owner explains that the emphasis on stews at Kozmik Zoo reflects its origins as a commercial extension of domestic knowledge, for a family with no prior restaurant experience:

...I got my family involved instead of going with regular pub food and bar food and whatever... we didn't have a background in the professional kitchen industry, and we didn't want to go with a commercial restaurant. The idea was to create a community centre with some... [pause]... with an opportunity for us to introduce the dishes. So instead of going with the commercial idea we decided to bring in the food that Persians would have at home. (Personal interview with Kozmik Zoo, May 2013)

As Kozmik Zoo was located in a neighbourhood with a low Iranian population, it allowed the owner to introduce non-Iranians to Iranian food. Kozmik Zoo initially functioned more as live music and entertainment venue, with a fully operating bar and kitchen adding to the attractions:

We don't have a Persian clientele. Most of our clientele are people either from here, or people in the music and art industry, and they experience the dishes that Persians would have at home... they [the dishes] are learned through parents. It's normal. It's fun. If you write down [the recipe] it's a page of ingredients and procedure. You put a few fancy names on it, and it looks and sounds like a complicated fine dining type of dish.... there are a lot of these herbs and spices that I do not even know in English. A lot of my friends come to my place and I cook and we eat, and they know it with the Persian names... but when you add those [spices from Iran] that's when you get the Persian taste, so that complexity of it. I compare it to Persian personality complexity; sometimes it just gets too crazy... (Personal interview with Kozmik Zoo, May 2013)

To an Iranian consumer the dishes presented at Kozmik Zoo would be everyday mundane dishes; however to the non-Iranian consumer they are something different. This difference is further emphasised through the emphasis on Iranian ingredients, the cooking methods and the Persian names of dishes. This is part of the translation of a domestic food culture into the commercial realm. Furthermore, having the owner's mother and sister doing the cooking personifies the home cooking qualities at Kozmik Zoo:

My mum and sister do all the cooking, and the first time they came a dish would take 40 minutes. I asked 'what are you doing?' She would cook the way she would cook at home. [She said]... 'I add a little bit of this and a little bit of that, then I add the chicken, then I add the sauce, then I add this spice, and this spice, and this herb'. I'm like... 'why don't you add all these spices together and just put it in there?'. [She says] 'I guess I could do that', but then again it's the traditional way that it's done, and that's how they learnt.. (Personal interview, Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver, May 2013)

The translation of domestic cooking to public culture is clearly not a simple one, in part just for logistical reasons that make it hard to replicate domestic cooking methods in the restaurant environment. In turn, this makes it hard too to replicate the depth and layers of flavours of a dish made through the slower domestic methods.



Figure 6.7 Zereeshk polo with chicken at Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver (2013)

Kebabs were not the only foods that were limited to public dining establishments in Iran. This was true for some particularly complex stews too. According to Shaida (1991) the bazaars had facilities that specialised in specific foods such as *dizi* (also known as *abgoosht*, a lamb, beans, potato and tomato stew), *haleem* (a stew made with wheat, lentils, meat and barley) and *kale pache* (a stew made of lamb eyes, brain, tongue and hooves). Echoing the traditionally special nature of these dishes, I found that they were often only available at restaurants on certain days. For example, Molana restaurant (Ealing, London) and Beheshte Barin (Finchley, London) only offer *dizi* on Friday, and Behesht

(Harlesden, London) and Zeytoon (Cricklewood, London) only offer it on Sunday. *Haleem* is served at Milad restaurant (Cricklewood, London) on Saturday, daily at Persian Nights restaurant (Ealing, London) and is available in some Indian restaurants like Dishoom (Covent Garden restaurant, London). Whilst *dizi* and *haleem* were more available, *kale pache* was rare, only available at Milad and Zeytoon restaurants in Cricklewood, London. *Kale pache* may not be as popular in the diaspora as it appears to be a dish for the more adventurous diner. According to Erdbrink (2009) the consumption of *kale pache* is declining in Iran because of its high cholesterol levels and because some young people find it unappealing. These specific dishes are offered at the restaurants where the majority of the clientele is likely to be Iranian or Middle Eastern. By offering these dishes, restaurants further emphasise that they provide a 'traditional' menu.

In summary, within the studied restaurants ideas of tradition were mobilised in various ways and through connections to varied sites. Reproductions of Iranian *kebabi* (kebab restaurant) menus, specialist dishes hard to make at home, and homely *khores*h (stews) typically featured on the menus. Together these formed into the elements of a conventional diasporan Iranian restaurant menu.

6.4 Bridging Foods and Widening Markets (or, the Contentious Geographies of Hummus):

In Chapter 4 I discussed how the studied restaurants and shops market themselves and the foods that they serve or sell. One part of that analysis focused on the potential for Iranian diasporan food spaces to be positioned as

something other than a 'nationalised' food space: in part through designation as Persian; but also through other potential geographical associations and descriptors framed more in terms of regions of cultural exchange (such as Middle Eastern or Mediterranean). I described the adoption of the last of these as a market strategy of 'bridging', using broader supra-national designation as a way to widen market position. I now want to return to that issue. I do so in two main ways. First, I focus on the presence of hummus in Iranian restaurants, interpreting its somewhat contentious place on many menus. Second, I explore how these 'hummus debates' relate to wider issues on the contemporary representation of Iranian food, using the "Food for Thought" discussion panel hosted by the Iranian Heritage Foundation in London (3rd December 2014) as a stimulus for my account.

Hummus is a food that has become synonymous with Middle Eastern cuisine. It is widely familiar in both London and Vancouver. Though hummus is not traditionally an Iranian food, it is however available in the majority of Iranian restaurants in the two cities. Hummus is a geopolitically contested dish, as widely acknowledged in both the academic literature (Grosalik, 2011a; Grosalik, 2011b; Hirsch, 2011; Hirsch and Tene, 2013) and in culinary accounts (see, for example, Yottam Ottalenghi and Sammi Tamimi's cookbook *Jerusalem*) (Ottalenghi and Tamimi, 2012). Ottalenghi and Tamimi (2012) dedicate two pages of their book to what they call the "hummus wars". In their account, they say it is generally agreed (though debatable) that hummus was first made by the Levantine or Egyptian Arabs. However, in a city like Jerusalem, hummus is now shaped by the

contemporary geopolitics of the region; in particular, both Palestinians and Israelis tend to claim ownership of it. Hirsch (2011) and Hirsch and Tene (2013) argue that Israelis have adopted an essentially Arab dish, 'gourmetizing' it and appropriating it as a part of their national cultural identity. Hirsch and Tene (2013) go on to show hummus operates as a global commodity and how, in that context, the Lebanese have attempted to claim original ownership of it. Overall, they trace out how hummus is widely presented as a 'Middle Eastern' dish and, in turn, implicated with the national geopolitics of the region. Iranian diasporan food spaces offer a further strand to this tale of hummus's contentious geographies.

For the owner of Hafez restaurant in the Bayswater area of London, who features the dish on his menu, hummus represents a wider, regional and interactive sense of Iranian food. It provides a sense of familiarity for non-Iranian customers and positions Iranian cuisine as related to other culinary cultures. When I asked why he served hummus, he commented:

...because there is a lot of demand for it. There are a lot of parts of Iran near Arab countries, most of them they do it. We have a lot of borders with other countries that use the same food, like chicken salad [*salad olivieh*], we have it here, and it's Russian, that's because they are next to each other... [Also] We have a lot of international customers. Some people they know those foods and are comfortable to order them. Once they get to know the food they come and ask and try new things. That's why we try to please everybody. (Personal interview, Hafez restaurant, London, November 2012)

The reasons for the slightly defensive tone apparent here will become clearer below; but in essence, at Hafez hummus is featured on the menu as a familiar food, that can draw in and serve the significant Arab and Greek populations of

the Bayswater area. Something similar was apparent at Orkideh, a restaurant in the Golders Green area of London, but here, in this famous Jewish neighbourhood of London, it was hummus' identity as an Israeli dish that was key:

As you know, we're living in the Jewish community and Jewish people like hummus as a starter. It's not Persian, but obviously where your business is you have to think about all the people around you, who are living in that community... Of course, if people come and ask 'do you have hummus for a starter?' I don't want to say no. (Personal interview, Orkideh restaurant, London, October 2013)

In these cases, then, hummus was framed as a non-Iranian food, but included on the menu as a way to connect with non-Iranian clientele. In Vancouver, a further connection was also apparent. In a city characterised by a large and growing vegetarian public food culture, hummus was a valuable menu item allowing Iranian eateries to serve this market. For example, my staff interviewee from Apadana, in West Vancouver, commented:

They're going to add more to the menu especially vegetarian dishes... the appetisers are all vegetarian so that's why they have hummus and different salads... (Personal interview, Apadana restaurant, Vancouver, May 2013)

However, not all Iranian restaurants serve hummus. Some expressed annoyance at its presence on others' menus and were keen to emphasise hummus' non-Iranian status by casting it as an Arabic dish. Here is the owner of Kateh, in London, on the issue:

... I like hummus, but it's not from us [Iranians]. A lot of people ask me to put hummus [on the menu]... Are you kidding me?! First of all, Tesco do a better hummus than we do; go to Tesco and buy a jar of hummus with a piece of bread. It's Arabic. It's nothing to do

with Iranian cooking. I did not even know hummus until I came to this country. If you show me one restaurant in Iran, authentic, that does hummus okay. I love Arabic food, but if I want hummus I go to a proper Lebanese or whatever restaurant that does hummus, not an Iranian restaurant. I'm tired of Iranian restaurants that put Arabic dishes purely to say that we have it, so come and eat it here. Not only hummus, they do a lot of Arabic dishes. (Personal interview, Kateh restaurant, London, November 2013)

The boundary lines being drawn here are strongly felt but complicated. In this case, Shahin, the owner of Kateh, was not wedded to a bounded, closed-off sense of Iranian culinary identity. His own upbringing had, for example, included Indian culinary influences. He was, however, sensitive about the subsumption of Iranian cuisine, and identity, within an Arabic designation. In discussing issues of authenticity in London's Iranian restaurants more generally, Shahin went on to say:

It [authenticity] means the foods that I am familiar with, and my mum is familiar with, and what she cooked for me when I was a child or my grandmother cooked it for me when I was growing up. As I said to you, we had Indian influences in cooking when I was growing up, but I never had hummus at home. Nobody cooked hummus at home or any other Arabic food. There is a general resentment about Arab cooking in our country anyway...maybe not a resentment... so we never attempted to try it. (Personal interview, Kateh restaurant, London, November 2013)

Shahin was happy to serve Indian foods at Kateh, such as tandoori chicken tikka and beef sirloin tikka, as he grew up eating them and because of what he saw as the close affinity between Iran and India:

Because of the close affinity that we have with India. Iranians went into India 700 years ago; Nadar Shah invaded part of northern India and people settled there. The Parsis, some of whom came back to Iran, brought back some recipes that were influenced by Indian cooking but which are not entirely the same. There is some difference: Iranian food is a bit more subtle than

Indian, we do not use so many spices, and I said why not use those, they are from our Indian-Iranian community which is also from Iran as well. So, I liked it and I said why not. If it pleases people and it originates from the Parsis, with the influence of a beautiful culinary country like India, why not?. (Personal interview, Kateh restaurant, London, November 2013)

Kateh's tandoori chicken tikka and beef sirloin tikka thus pay homage to the Indian-Iranian communities and acknowledge the longer histories of Iranian-Indian migrations. But, as an Arabic dish, hummus is something different.

I want to explore this 'resentment' of the Arabic further (albeit, that it was quickly retracted in the conversation transcribed above). There is a wider desire among Iranians to distinguish themselves from the Arabic diaspora. The contentious relationship between Iranians and Arabs is often dated back to the 7th century Arab invasion of Iran (Askari, 2013), which in turn has been narrated as translating into the different eating habits of Iranians and Arabs. Analysing Zoroastrian Middle Persian and Persian texts of the late antique period, Daryaei (2012) describes the use of food as a mode of identification and differentiation between Iranians, Arabs and Indians. Daryaei's findings show that the historic Persian texts depicted Arabs as having a poor diet, and accused them of eating snakes and lizards and other animals that were prohibited by Zoroastrian dietary law. Furthermore, Daryaei observes (2012, p.239):

Even in the cosmopolitan world of Baghdad, food was still a mode of distinction among Iranians and Arabs. While Persian food and manners of banqueting were adopted by the Caliphs, the Persians did not let the Arabs forget their past eating habits. In a sense, after fourteen centuries dietary preferences still carry moral significance in the Near East where all claim their foods as good, and assign bad ones to others.

The reasons for hummus not being present on the menu at Kozmik Zoo (in the Mount Pleasant area of Vancouver) are similar to that of Kateh (in London), in that there was a desire to present Iranian dishes as being different from Arabic ones:

We don't serve hummus. It's not Persian. I didn't know what it was until I moved to London, and then I went to this Moroccan restaurant and I had couscous and hummus, and was like this is awesome, but it's not Persian. I mean, then again the reason I was tempted to bring it, I didn't want to order it from a big company to bring me a pot of hummus to sell and I don't know how they made it, and if I make it I have to make it like 100 times and with fresh ingredients and see how it goes. So why should I risk making something when I don't know what it is. That was the main reason I didn't do it. (Personal interview, Kozmik Zoo, Vancouver, May 2013)

There is, of course, still a temptation noted here. The serving of hummus and other non-Iranian foods allows restaurants to broaden their menus and their appeal, by pleasing people who may not know what to order. In my interview with Sabrina Ghayour, she expressed her frustration that food spaces such as Dindin Kitchen (in the Farringdon area of London) market themselves as Iranian but serve non-Iranian foods such as *tabbouleh*:

... but if you're going to open as a Persian kitchen don't then serve tabbouleh, because then it just messes people's minds up, and they go "oh, I thought that was Lebanese. Oh, tabbouleh's Persian?" And I'm like: no, no, no... that frustrates me. When I do put tabbouleh on the menu, it's on my Arabesque menu, it's never on my Persian menu, because actually I think we have a duty to educate people and I find it frustrating. It's what I'm combating constantly, but I can understand that there aren't many Persian salads that would work and that would store well. But I just think if you're going to really open something on the crux that it's Persian ... [then you ought to] serve Persian food, take that risk. You've got to take that risk and do it properly. (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

On December 3rd 2014 the Iranian Heritage Foundation, a non-political organisation promoting Iranian cultural heritage based in the Marylebone area of London, hosted a discussion panel entitled *Food for Thought*. Chaired by Dr. Sussan Babaie (Courtauld Institute, London) the discussion focused on the panellists' relationship with Iranian food, its characteristics and its representations. The panellists included the owners and founders of Gitane (a cafe in Fitzrovia, London), the aforementioned Dindin Kitchen (a casual Iranian eatery in the Farringdon area, City of London) and Noosh (a family owned and run market food stall, usually located in Hackney, London). Some aspects of the discussion will be helpful to my analysis here. In particular, a strong emphasis was placed on the need to engage with non-diasporan Iranian markets, in part through menu and culinary innovation.

All three panellists stressed the commercial importance of introducing a relatively unknown cuisine to the London market. Various strategies were discussed. Noosh explained that as a food market stall they were able to entice customers by making their product a public performance; passers-by could see what was being made, sense the aromas of the food, and be engaged (see Figure 6.8). This is exemplified by the interaction between Noosh and a customer passing by the stall:

I am stood at the side of the stall eating my kookoo sabzi whilst talking to Arastoo. A woman and her friend walk and stop by the stall to look. She asks Arastoo what kind of food this was and what Persian food is. Arastoo's dad who is mixing up the special sauce for the sandwiches tell her it is from Iran. It is Persian. "Where

is that”? She asks. Next, she asks about the kookoo sabzi, and Arastoo explains that it is like a frittata with herbs, barberries and walnuts. She then enquires about the other items and says that she has never had Persian food before, and asks, “what it is like? Is it nice? Because I don’t like spicy food”. Arastoo tells her it is not spicy. She is still unsure if she wants to try it, and finally says no. (Ethnographic field notes, Noosh, Hackney, London, September 2014)

This conversation is insightful on three levels. First, it shows that the woman is unaware of Iran’s geographical location; second, Arastoo compares the *kookoo sabzi* to a frittata which is a food the customer would be familiar with; and third gustatory taste is of importance as it the flavours and tastes are unfamiliar, which is emphasised by asking “what is it like?”. Here the taste may be compared to Arabic or Mediterranean, which share similar traits to Iranian foods in terms of aromatics used (Classen, Howes and Synnott, 1994). A key item for Noosh is the Persian lamb burger, which is served in *barbari* bread with sumac, *salad shirazi* (cucumber, red onion and tomato salad), *mast-o-khayir* (yogurt with shallots), *khair shoor* (pickled cucumbers) and what they call “Dad’s special sauce”. The Persian lamb burger can be interpreted as a take on the kebab, in the way that it is served with bread, salad and condiments. The addition of “Dad’s special sauce” further emphasises the notion of home cooking and personal or secret family recipes.



Figure 6.8 Noosh food stall at Broadway Market, Hackney, London (2014)

Gitane presents Iranian food as being healthy, and does this by serving foods that are consumed in a domestic setting. For Gitane it is about introducing Iranian food to a British clientele that caters towards their needs, such as providing more vegetarian options for a health conscious market. For example, they offer a vegetarian *tachin* (normally baked layered chicken, rice and yogurt; here, with aubergine replacing the chicken). The emphasis of home cooking in this context implies a sense of comfort, care and nostalgia (Duruz, 2001; Barbas, 2002).

Dindin Kitchen reinterprets many of the standard dishes that are available at Iranian restaurants in London in order to cater for the lunches of those who work in the City of London. The foods are Iranian but Dindin Kitchen names them by their English translations (for example, *fesenjan* is listed as chicken, walnut and pomegranate stew). Portion sizes are also reduced to cater towards non-

Iranian consumers, allowing them to enjoy Iranian foods but without feeling heavy afterwards. Dishes also vary slightly to suit non-Iranian needs:

*I go into the newly opened Dindin Kitchen, and walk towards the counter where the menu is placed overhead and look at it. It throws me off for a few minutes as all names of the dishes are literally translated in English. For example, *jujeh kebab* is labelled as “chicken skewers marinated in yogurt and lime”. I choose to try this, with some herbed rice. About 15 minutes later, my meal comes in a white cardboard takeout box; it looks familiar and smells delicious. However, the portion is smaller than what I have become accustomed to in Iranian restaurants! The condiment seems a little odd and I cannot figure out what it is. It seems too creamy to be yogurt...A man sat on the table next to me asks if I like the food. He happens to be the owner’s father. I tell him that I like it, but cannot figure out what the condiment is. Turns out, neither can he! He calls his daughter (the owner) over and asks what it is. She tells us that it is saffron mayonnaise. I ask why they add this. She tells me that it adds moisture to the dry chicken and rice, and was created to satisfy the needs of the non-Iranian consumer. (Ethnographic notes, Dindin Kitchen, Farringdon, London, June 2012)*

Generally, spaces that do not primarily cater for diasporan Iranians emphasised more strongly their creativity and innovation. Zardosht, a food stall located in Broadway Market in Hackney, London produces similar foods to Noosh (see Figures 6.9 and 6.10). They sell contemporary interpretations of traditional foods – such as the spiced beetroot *kookoo* – and produce new dishes and products – such as the dates filled with orange blossom, mascarpone, and

burnt almond and pistachio, which are a new interpretation of *ranginak* (walnut filled dates). The addition of the orange blossom adds a subtle floral and citrus flavour and aroma to the dates, and the mascarpone gives them a smoother and creamier texture compared to the traditional flour and butter mixture.



Figure 6.9 Zardosht food stall at Broadway Market, Hackney, London (2014)



Figure 6.10 Persian dates sold at Zardosht food stall at Broadway Market, Hackney, London (2014)

It is notable that spaces such as food market stalls, pop-up supper clubs and kitchen residencies allow room for such innovation. Kitchen residencies allow for chefs who do not work in restaurant kitchens, but may run their own supper clubs, to run their own kitchen, usually in a pub, for a limited period of time. For example, between February 3rd and March 29th 2015 The King and Co pub, in Clapham, London, hosted BahBah Persian Kitchen, run by Stephen, whose mother is Iranian. Though the menu was traditional in terms of the named dishes served, the ingredients were adjusted, in particular to provide more vegetarian food. For example, the *sabzi polo*, a herbed rice usually served with fish, was served by Stephen with braised mushrooms as a vegetarian dish.

During my visit to The King & Co I spoke to Stephen, whilst he was washing and sorting the herbs for the night. During our conversation we talked about how the residency allows him room to be creative and play with ideas and techniques, and how he doesn't like the idea of being constricted. He spoke of how there is the potential for vegetarian and vegan alternatives to be made. James expressed that it is difficult to do strictly traditional Iranian food in London, because of people's dietary requirements. (Ethnographic notes, BahBah Persian Kitchen at The King & Co, London, March 2015)

The cases of Noosh, Gitane, Dindin Kitchen and Bahbah Persian Kitchen show that Iranian chefs innovate to promote a relatively unknown cuisine to a wider audience. As the cooks/chefs here have the freedom to make what they like, they are not constricted “by the straightjacket of authenticity” (Singh, Yaseen and Nagaraj, 2011, p. 6) to produce traditional and authentic foods.

6.5 Creativity and the Diasporan Innovation of Iranian Food

In this final (longer) section of the chapter, I want to open up a wider exploration of this resistance to a constrictive emphasis on tradition and authenticity. While the demand for ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ foods continues to exist, there is also a demand for something new from both consumers and producers (chefs). Thus, I now turn to examine how Iranian foods are being innovated within the diaspora. An important culinary context here is the 1970s emergence of ‘Nouvelle Cuisine’ (Chossat, 2008), where classic French cuisine was re-presented as something modern by French chefs. The principles of Nouvelle Cuisine are based on seasonality, taste and innovation (Chossat, 2008; Guthman, 2003). Something similar can be seen within some diasporic Iranian cuisines. In order to examine these innovations I begin by outlining a brief background to creative gastronomy and its relations to diasporan cuisines; then I draw on two case studies to illustrate how such creativity is being undertaken for different market segments and in different commercial food spaces. These are: the dishes created by Vancouver based chef, Hamid Salimian, when resident chef in two hotel ‘fine dining’ restaurants; and the supper clubs and cookbook (*Persiana*) of London based private chef Sabrina Ghayour.

6.5.1 The Appeals of Creative Gastronomy

First, then, I want to set out a broader context for thinking about the relations between creative gastronomy and Iranian cuisine in London and Vancouver. As already discussed, many writings on diasporan food cultures emphasise their adaptations in relation to non-diasporic markets. In Chapter 2 I

outlined how, for example, Ben Highmore (2009, p.185) interprets the British High Street 'curry house' or 'Indian restaurant' as "a cultural form that out of necessity has had to adapt a diasporic food culture to a specific non-diasporic audience and context". In Highmore's account, this adaptation tends to the development and reproduction of a clichéd form, both in design (red flock wallpaper, pictures of the Taj Mahal, and so on) and in menu (korma, madras, vindaloo etc.). However, such standardisation is paralleled by cultural and economic counter-currents. As Indian food became positioned as comparatively cheap everyday fare on the High Street, based on a number of familiar dishes and conventions, so there were incentives to re-create diasporic South Asian cuisine in the UK in new forms. To give just a few examples, 're-nationalised' designations became part of distinctive place makings (e.g. Bangladeshi restaurants emerging as part of a Banglatown commercial place-making in Whitechapel, London); regionalised foods allowed distinctive market positionings to consumers seeking authenticity and greater variety (e.g. Keralian and Southern Indian dosa houses); and 'up-market' 'modern' South Asian restaurants allowed a taste for Indian foods to be connected to fine dining (e.g. the Benares restaurant, a Michelin starred restaurant located in the Mayfair area of London; the Cinnamon Club restaurant, located in the Westminster area of London; and the offering of 'modern Indian cuisine' by the likes of Vij's and My Shanti in Vancouver). The last of these trends particularly interests me, not least because it very explicitly connects together ideas of the modern and the traditional in its fashioning of a diasporan food. A useful insight on the commercial and culinary

passions at play here is provided by the introduction to the cookbook *Cinnamon Club: Indian Cuisine Reinvented* (2011), written by Cinnamon Club chefs Vivek Singh, Abdul Yaseen¹⁶ and Hari Nagaraj.

As noted above, the Cinnamon Club is an 'Indian' restaurant located in the Westminster area of London, which opened in 2001 with a deliberate mission to modernise and move Indian food in the UK 'up market'. Since then the Cinnamon portfolio of restaurants has expanded to include the Cinnamon Kitchen (located in the Whitechapel area of London), the Cinnamon Soho (located in the Soho area of London), Joho Soho (a food truck) and Anise, a cocktail bar adjacent to the Cinnamon Kitchen. In explaining why he chose a modern approach to Indian cuisine, Head Chef of the Cinnamon Club, Vivek Singh, states that during the late 1990s "Indian cooking had gotten into a rut" (Singh et al., 2011, p. 6). Presenting "the standards" allowed businesses to play it safe, but did not allow much room for chefs to be creative. The emphasis on authenticity also restricted creativity:

I felt the straightjacket of authenticity was a double-edged sword that worked much to the disadvantage of my creativity as well as the cuisine. Needless to say, it was quite stifling and I'd often feel I needed just that little bit more 'elbow room' to be able to cook better... We felt we could cook much better if we could be more creative and use better ingredients as it is a simple fact the quality ingredients win half the battle in any kind of cooking (Singh et al., 2011, p. 6).

The aim of The Cinnamon Club was to "break away from the traditional norms while maintaining the basic essence of Indian food", coinciding with Singh's belief

¹⁶ Chef Abul Yaseen no longer works at the Cinnamon Kitchen.

of “innovation today forms the basis of tomorrow” (Singh et al., p.6). Singh poses the question, “So what is modern Indian food?” (Singh et al., p.8). For him it

reflects the lifestyle, tastes, and values of the young, modern and cosmopolitan India. It should recognize and incorporate our enhanced health needs, awareness, and appreciation of the world that we travel, work and live in. We, at The Cinnamon Club believe that food does not exist in a void and with more people travelling to different countries and cultures, there is exposure to various styles of cuisines. A city like London or Mumbai presents an incredible choice of cuisines to its residents and visitors alike. (Singh et al., p.8)

There is, for Singh, potential for a substantial crossover of cooking techniques across different cuisines. Cooking techniques like sautéing and stir frying, which are not necessarily indigenous to Indian cooking, are gaining popularity as they allow vegetables to maintain an al dente texture. For Singh, modern Indian cooking is about understanding ingredients and using the best cooking techniques to enhance their flavours. Quality is normally associated with seasonality, where produce is at its best and is more appreciated. Presentation of food is important too, as plating plays a role not only in the perception of a cuisine or dish but also affects flavours and textures. Singh argues that any cuisine needs to evolve in order to remain relevant. The methods, cooking processes (techniques and timings), and ingredients constantly need to be reassessed and analysed to produce something innovative. For Singh,

the secret is to have the flexibility and ability to deconstruct the cuisine, figure out what is not necessary or can be done away with, analyse that new influences can be brought in and then construct the elements back again to create a dish that’s truly evolved and in tune with the times. (Singh et al., p.9)

The parallels with Nouvelle Cuisine are clear: innovation linked to the use of seasonal ingredients and different cooking techniques to bring out different flavours and textures (Ferguson and Zukin, 1998). This is culinary deconstruction and reconstruction within a cosmopolitan context.

The Cinnamon Club deploys these culinary and cultural logics within a positioning in the fine dining market (with the correlate pricing) but the passions and logics presented here occur more widely. Economically, creative innovation is a means to differentiate one's product and potentially increase its value. Personally, it is a project that allows one to deploy culinary skills in a process of self-expression that brings together craft skills and creative imagination. Culturally, it challenges equations of diasporan cultures with familiar stereotypes and with the authorities of inherited tradition. Here, a diasporan food becomes an authentic engagement with present, imagined future, and the heritage of the past. Let me illustrate through two case studies.

6.5.2 Case Study One: Hamid Salimian and his 'New Persian' Cuisine

Chef Hamid Salimian was born in Tehran but spent a lot of his childhood in northern Iran. After the Revolution his father changed occupations from the coal mining industry to farming, and so Salimian spent most of his childhood on the farm. After relocating to Vancouver, Salimian enrolled in culinary arts at the Vancouver Community College, not to become a chef but to learn to cook.

Salimian is highly recognised by insiders working in the restaurant industry. In 2013 he was voted by the industry as "Best Chef in Vancouver" for

the 16th Annual Golden Plates awards by local entertainment newspaper *The Georgia Straight* (Thursday March 14, 2013). A part of his style of cooking is the molecular gastronomy promoted by Ferran Adrià, former chef-owner of El Bulli. Adrià merges science and gastronomy, creating new cooking techniques focused on taste, textures and techniques (Svejenova, Mazza and Planellas, 2007). As evidenced by countless cookery television shows, some of his new food forms, such as 'foam', have gained wide currency. Molecular gastronomy recreates familiar foods, altering textures but maintaining the taste. The point with this style of cooking is neither to achieve authenticity nor to be traditional, but to push out beyond these boundaries.

During Nowruz (the Persian New Year), Salimian created Persian tasting menus during his employment as head chef at Diva at the Metropolitan Hotel (hereafter referred to as Diva) in downtown Vancouver¹⁷ and The Apron at the Westin Hotel (hereafter referred to as The Apron) in Richmond, British Columbia. Reflecting on his work in these restaurants, he comments:

This is not my first time doing a Persian inspired menu. I know this time it has gotten a lot of hype, for sure, and it did help me winning an award for Vancouver; I was chosen among my peers as a top chef in Vancouver... About 3 years ago I was sitting down with a bunch of friends talking about how tasty Persian food is. It's really, like it's, you can sit there and eat for hours. But Persian food never looks good. So someone said "Hey, wouldn't it be great if someone could make Persian food that should taste like the dishes your mom made or even way better". But it depends on the finish, and I use a French style cooking so all dishes we're going to have tonight, it's all French style used to create every item that would be found at traditional Persian restaurant. So far I've done over 40 items, 40 Iranian dishes. We're known in this restaurant,

¹⁷ Salimian left his post at Diva in June 2013.

in this city, we're known for our tasting menu in Vancouver. One of the food critics [said that] we really defined what [the] tasting menu is in Vancouver, and we do many different types of cuisine from world... with French techniques... this time we just went all Persian. Usually on all my tasting menus I have 1 or 2 dishes which are Persian. That's my signature. No matter what I'm serving all year round there are always 1 or 2 dishes on every tasting menu which is a Persian dish, because it's important that we remember our history, not our history right now.... but history of past. We were a people of great culture, art, food, very nice people. We love to entertain our guests, and sometimes show them old ancient recipes and old cultures about what Persia was built on. (Personal interview, Chef Hamid Salimian, Vancouver, March 2013)

Like Vikram Vij and Hidekazu Tojo, who are chefs well known in the city for their creativity with Indian and Japanese cuisine respectively, Salimian is proud of his Persian heritage, but portrays its cuisine in a different way. Though the Persian tasting menu was not directly targeted towards an Iranian clientele, it was, I was told by one of the servers, popular among the 25-40 year old Iranians, who often brought their parents because it was so different to what they would have had before.

Local food blogger Mijune Pak (2013b; 2013c; 2013d) writes extensive entries on the Persian tasting menus at The Apron and at Diva in her blog, *Follow me Foodie*. I chose to use Pak's blog over others as she is a well respected blogger among chefs and food critics, due to her rigorous style of writing and reportage. Pak uses the following descriptors to describe the Persian tasting menu: innovative cuisine; modernist techniques; seasonal menu; Pacific Northwest with Persian inspiration; seasonal ingredients; and local and global ingredients (Pak, 2013b; 2013c; 2013d). Pak argues that the use of local and

seasonal produce, as well as global ingredients, reflects the values of Vancouverites towards food, and the cosmopolitan nature of the city. It is a diasporan rendering of West Coast nouvelle cuisine (Guthman, 2003; Hluchy, 2003; Hashimoto and Telfer, 2006). Pak's (2013b, unpaginated, para.9) account debates the best descriptor for Salimian's approach and menu:

The result is not "modern Persian cuisine", but New Persian cuisine which offers an upscale approach, more scientific and artistic than simply "modern". I don't like using the words "fusion" or "molecular gastronomy", but those are terms associated with the style, although too often misused and abused. Nonetheless the food is treated with respect, and the modern techniques are used professionally with practice, control and purpose.

Adopting her preferred term, this New Persian cuisine involves the innovative execution of established dishes.

As an overview, the Diva tasting menu is divided into snacks and main courses. The snacks consist of *jujeh kabab* (chicken kebab), *maghaz* (cerveau), *kashk-e-bademjan* (eggplant/aubergine caviar) and *sekanjabin kaho* (romaine granite; traditionally a honey, vinegar and mint drink; here served as a palate cleanser). The main courses consist of *zeytoon parvade* (cracked wheat, beef, sorrel and olive), *halva* (chilled foie gras, preserved fig and rasin), *ash-reshteh* (sour whey, mint, legumes and noodle), *koofteh* (saffron broth, onion and pork jowl), *koresht-e-nareng* (oxtail, Seville orange, carrot and rice) and *gheymeh* (lamb belly, lamb loin, potato and stone dry lime). Dessert consists of Meyer lemon mousse (cardamom lemon compote and chickpea crumble), *sholeh zard* (saffron rice, almond and persimmon sorbet) and lavashak (almond stuffed dates). I was fortunate enough to sample the Persian tasting menu twice. The

second time some of the items were different. The new items included: a green almond “soup”, *salad olivieh* (Maple Hill’s chicken, English peas and fingerling potato), *kookoo sabzi* (sable fish, dill, orange and sunchoke), *mirza ghasemi* (octopus, garlic, basil and eggplant/aubergine), *fesenjan* (Yarrow Meadows duck, pomegranate, walnuts, orange and black kale) and *bastani akbar mashti* (saffron, pistachio and honey). Though the foods are traditional items in terms of their names, it is the ways in which they are put together, and the ways in which the dishes are presented, which makes the cuisine new and creative. Let me illustrate with some examples.

Salimian’s *kash-e-badamjen* (Figure 6.11) looks like a macaroon. The eggplant/aubergine is made into caviar (this retains the slightly chunky texture of the original dish, where the roasted eggplants/aubergines are mashed) and puree (this alternates the texture making it smoother), and then sandwiched between the meringues made of *kashk* and buttermilk. Though the texture has changed (the *kashk* meringues produce a light, soft and slightly chewy texture as one would expect with a French macaroon), the tangy, smoky and garlicky flavours are subtly retained (Pak, 2013b). The way in which the *jujeh kebab* (Figure 6.12) is made and served is another indicative case. It is made of a chicken skin that looks more like a chip (crisp) due to its ultra-thin and crisp texture. However, the way in which it is marinated in saffron, lemon, onions and garlic remains the same, but the cooking process of brining, marinating, baking and grilling differs. It is served on a rock with a dollop of yogurt flavoured with garlic and chives (*mast-o-mousir*).



Figure 6.11 *Kashk-e-bademjan*, Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013)



Figure 6.12 *Jujeh kebab*, Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013)

The ways in which the foods are cooked also change their appearance. The *ash reshteh* (Figure 6.13) exemplifies this well. The *ash* is made using the traditional ingredients that one would find in *ash reshteh* – like chickpeas, lentils, navy beans, kidney beans, spinach, cilantro, parsley, dried dill, green onions and

reshteh – but unlike the *ash reshteh* that would be served in a typical Iranian restaurant, this one had a vibrant green colour because the herbs have not been sautéed and slow cooked, and the beans were slightly al dente. Pak (2013b) also notes that the noodles have been cut to suit the fine dining environment. In terms of plating, the dish is not deconstructed; it is served like a bowl of soup, topped with *kashk* and fried onions. The *kashk*, however, is presented in the form of capsules using reverse spherification.



Figure 6.13 *Ash reshteh*, Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013)

Though *Meyer lemon mousse* (Figure 6.14) is not a Iranian dessert, it plays upon Iranian characteristics, like the Iranian flavours, the quirkiness of the popularity of faux lemons in Iran, and the inspiration of French cooking techniques and pastries, which have been influential in Iranian cuisine. The *Meyer lemon mousse* looks like a real lemon in terms of the bumpy texture and the grey tip of where the lemon has been picked (Pak 2013d). It is served with a chickpea crumble and gelled pistachio marzipan leaves. It can be argued that

this dessert pays homage to various aspects of Iranian cuisine, through ingredients, textures and flavours: the Iranian flavours through the cardamom; the chickpea crumble echoing the Iranian chickpea flour cookie, *nan-e-nokhochi*; and the gelled pistachio marzipan leaves reflecting the heavy use of nuts in Iranian cuisine.



Figure 6.14 Meyer lemon mousse, Hamid Salimian, Persian tasting menu, Diva, Vancouver (2013)

Thus, Iranian dishes and flavours are translated into a contemporary fine dining environment and into the grammars of contemporary Euro-American gastronomy. Generally, rather than inventing entirely new dishes, Salimian takes the standard Iranian dishes that are typically presented at Iranian restaurants and reinvents them. In so doing, he takes Iranian food to a non-Iranian restaurant environment, partly for a non-Iranian audience, partly for diasporan Iranians who

might enjoy seeing 'Persian' food in a modern, fine dining context (e.g. those younger, well off Iranian-Canadians bringing their parents to the restaurants). Here taste can be understood as both a necessity and intellectual pursuit (luxury) in the Bourdieuan sense, as everyday mundane foods are transformed for a luxury market (Forrest and Murphy, 2013). This section also teases out elements of the concept of *rasa* aesthetics which conjoins aesthetic, emotion and a sensuous appreciation (Khare, 1996; Ray, 2016). The creation and production of the dishes remind Chef Salimian of the foods his mother used to make, and by using different cooking techniques which play on the senses allows for him to become creative with the aesthetics in the ways in which the foods are presented. The concept of *rasa* can also be applied to the consumer in that it allows them to enjoy something that is different evoking a sense of pleasure (Naraghi and Kingsbury, 2015).

6.5.3 Case Study Two: Sabrina Ghayour

My second example of creative innovation in Iranian diasporan cooking and food is London based private chef Sabrina Ghayour. I first contacted Sabrina because of the commercial supper clubs she hosted at her home but towards the end of the research she also published her cookbook, *Persiana: Recipes from the Middle East and Beyond* (2014) (hereafter referred to as *Persiana*). In discussing this case, I begin by providing some biographical information on Sabrina and how she got involved in the supper club scene; then I consider her supper clubs and the foods she serves at them; and finally I focus on *Persiana* (2014) and its recipes.

Sabrina Ghayour is well known for hosting a series of pop-up supper clubs at private venues. Her style of cooking is different to that of Salimian's; it is centred on home cooking rather than fine dining cuisine. Ghayour has gained much media attention since the release of her cookbook, *Persiana*, a collection of Iranian and Middle Eastern recipes, some of which are featured on Ghayour's supper club menu. Recipes from the book have appeared in *The Observer* (12/04/2012); Ghayour has had a six page spread in the *BBC Good Food Magazine*; she has appeared three times on BBC One's popular food and conversation television show *Saturday Kitchen* (17th May 2014, 18th October 2014, 29th November 2014); and she had a three week residency at *The Guardian* (21st November to 5th December 2014), in addition to appearing at other public events like Jamie Oliver's *The Big Festival* in 2013.

Sabrina and her family moved to London in 1979 at the time of the Revolution, when she was three. Her family had roots in London as her mother had studied in London and her grandmother had been living in London since the 1960s. She has been cooking since she was a child. In one of our conversations she recalled how she used to enjoy watching British television chefs such as Ken Hom and Madhur Jaffrey, as she felt more connected to them on a culinary cultural level:

I used to watch Ken Hom and Madhur Jaffrey on telly when I was a kid in the '80s and would just be glued in the way that people would be glued to watching Tom Cruise... There was nothing like them on telly and I loved Madhur Jaffrey, I loved Ken Hom. I could never identify with Delia [Smith] because our culture dictates that one pot cooking simple stuff is not how we eat. Even though the ingredients were different, I could totally identify with Madhur and

Ken's cooking of lots of different dishes... (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

Ghayour had not trained professionally as a chef, but had been doing private catering for about 12 years, and partook in Channel 4's *Come Dine with Me* (series 9, episode 3) where she cooked a range of westernised Middle Eastern and Iranian dishes:

There were two more [Iranians] after me and they did actual Persian food, and I remember that the funny thing is they kept going "ugh, Sabrina and her Persian food", and I kept going this is not Persian food; there is nothing Persian about the food,... then I was like "oh whatever", it was Arabic sort of style food, and yeah, I was just like "okay". I wanted to give them something different but slightly westernized as well, because I like that style of food, Middle Eastern flavours, western produce, it's my favourite stuff. I like using spices and stuff like that on rack of lamb, fresh produce. I did something that I was comfortable doing and it happened to play in my favour that I did it well, because I care about what I put onto a plate, and I don't know, maybe it's a cultural thing, maybe that you're not going to... [pause]... you've got guests and the guest is really important in my culture and you're not going to serve them shit because that's not what you do. So I cared a great deal about what I put and I put my heart into it, which is kind of how I am... (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

Ghayour later became well known for hosting the "French Laundrette" pop-up. The "French Laundrette" was a spoof of Thomas Keller's French Laundry pop-up at Harrods (10th October 2011) costing £250 per person. The French Laundry is a three Michelin starred restaurant located in the Napa Valley, California owned by Chef Thomas Keller, serving French food incorporating American influences. Keller partnered with Harrods to host a pop-up giving Londoners the opportunity to experience a recreation of French Laundry. Ghayour joked on Twitter saying that she should have her own pop-up for £2.50 and call it "French Laundrette".

The tweet went viral and was picked up by the media. Ghayour had 30 bookings within half an hour and was wondering how to host it in her flat, but within an hour restaurants offered her a space and farmers were offering meat and fresh produce. The proceedings (£4000) from the event were donated to Action Against Hunger. Due to this event's popularity, and her lack of income, Ghayour decided to explore the supper club scene working with chef and supper club host Simon Fernandez, and they did some Persian supper clubs together. Later, Ghayour hosted the supper clubs at a friend's house and then at her own home, where she does front of house too, allowing her to interact with the diners. The environment of Ghayour's supper club is difficult to describe. It feels like one has been invited over for dinner with strangers:

...I think when people come in you know immediately you're in my home... and people always say it's so lovely, it's like you've invited us to dinner around your house, but I'm charging you... and it's such an intimate environment that you can't really beat it...
(Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

The supper club setting, held in a private home, provides a contemporary 'pop-up' manifestation of the longer standing locating of Iranian food in terms of home cooking (see above for the discussion of restaurant stews). It provides non-Iranian consumers an experience of Iranian food in a domestic setting; in what most Iranians would consider the best place to experience Iranian food.

This is the second supper club that I have been to and I am looking forward to it. Sabrina greets me with a hug. I feel that we are now friends. I make my way over to the living room and meet her mother, and some other guests who are also there. The living room is small and

cosy; the walls are adorned with framed prints of Persian calligraphy and family photos. A few minutes later Sabrina offers me a cocktail made of vodka, mint and apple juice. I talk to the other guests; one is a Caribbean chef and the other two are friends of the chef. Later, more guests arrive. I remember one of them from the previous supper club I attended; this time she has brought her mother with her, who is a friend of Sabrina's mother. We all sit down at the table; funnily enough, unintentionally it becomes divided with Persians at one end and non-Persians at the other. Sabrina emerges from the kitchen with the meze of *naan-o-paneer* (feta cheese salad and bread), *mirza ghasemi* (smoked aubergine dip), *maast-o-khair* (yogurt and cucumber dip), *kofteli* (meatballs), and a salad of fennel, orange, and pomegranate. We are warned not to gorge ourselves. But nobody takes heed. Later the meze are taken away and the main course is served. The main course consists of spice perfumed shoulder of lamb, *morassa polo* (jewelled rice), *mahi shekampur* (stuffed fish), and roasted butternut squash. Again, we all stuff ourselves. After a while, we are served with the spiced carrot, pistachio and almond cake, served with rose water cream, and mint tea. The experience feels like having dinner at a friend's house where people are sat around a table eating delicious foods, having great conversations, and making new friends. (Ethnographic notes, Supper club at the home of Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014) (Figure 6.15)



Figure 6.15. Spice perfumed shoulder of lamb and *morassa polo* at the Persiana supper club, Sabrina Ghayour, London (2014)

The supper club menus consist of a mixture of modern and traditional dishes. Some of the dishes featured are traditionally Iranian, like the *mirza ghasemi* (smoked aubergine dip), whereas others like the roasted butternut squash are not. Some of the traditional dishes such as the *naan-o-paneer* (feta cheese salad) have been prepared and served to suit a western palate. This dish is served differently in restaurants to how Ghayour serves it. In restaurants herbs such as whole parsley, spring onions and radishes are served alongside feta cheese and walnuts, whereas Ghayour marinades the feta cheese, thinly sliced shallots, thinly sliced radishes and chopped herbs in olive oil and lemon. Both are served with *lavaash* (a type of flat bread) (Figure 6.16).



Figure 6.16 Marinated feta salad (Sabrina Ghayour, 2013)

The marinated feta salad was created in part out of the frustration of people not eating certain foods and a desire to promote unfashionable ingredients:

People don't eat radishes and raw spring onions, it's just unless they're finely sliced people don't eat them. So there were those dishes that got created, you know, and the frustration of people not eating certain things ... (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

These foods consumed in their raw form, especially onions may be perceived as being repulsive to the western palate, as they have a strong flavour and are odourous. However, shallots have a sweeter and milder flavour, making them a more suitable substitute to the salad. But more generally, Ghayour's suppers look to combine challenging novelties with accommodations to diners' expectations. This is apparent in some of the ingredient choices and balances:

...Persians particularly love sour, that doesn't particularly translate well to the western palate; so I've softened it. There's a stew

called *gheymeh* which is just like yellow split peas, tomato and meat, and you can have it with or without slices of aubergines and it has dried limes in it. At the beginning I switched it to preserved lemons; it was softer for people, more familiar for people. Quite frankly now I do it I switch it back to dried limes and I think 'oh well, if they don't like it', but I do put less dried limes and I control the acidity a little bit more. Often it's because what we like isn't what other people do. (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

Ghayour's supper club menu also involves a westernisation of Iranian food in terms of structure (a shift also found in most restaurants). Traditionally, in Iranian dining all the dishes are placed on the *sofreh* (table cloth) or table and eaten together. Dishes that are classed as starters in diasporic Iranian restaurants are more often consumed as side dishes in Iranian homes. Dinner is usually followed with *chai* (tea) and fruit, baklava, ice cream, or *zoolabi* (sweet fritters) and *bamieh* (a sweet similar to a doughnut) rather than a dessert:

...We don't eat it [dessert] because we eat like 20 dishes, like Chinese culture, Jewish culture, Greek cultures don't put one dish on the table; that's a really western thing to do. So quite frankly I don't really know that dessert is a dish that has a big emphasis in a lot of cultures generally. There aren't a lot of Jewish desserts. I don't really know any Greek desserts. Turks as well. We have rice pudding as well, it's not a dessert; it's a breakfast item. More often than not it's a breakfast item or an afternoon item... (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

In order to accommodate her diners, Ghayour created a spiced carrot, pistachio and almond cake with rosewater cream for dessert (Figure 6.17):

I just knew straight off if I didn't put dessert on the menu people would complain... I came up with a recipe that I thought would be authentic, in the sense that it mirrors the nut trade because we have a huge export trade of nuts. We're probably the biggest exporter of or maybe we were pre-sanctions of pistachios and nuts in general so I think America [has] that monopoly now and they're a much shittier quality of pistachios. But you know... so I

did that to represent the nut trade. Carrots is something we make jams out of and put in stews, so I thought okay carrot cake, but I'll do it using nuts so it's kind of authentic, and then with the pistachio and the rosewater makes it a little bit Persian. But who knew, I suck at baking and it became the most popular thing I did. But I've only ever done three versions of dessert in all the three years I've been doing supper clubs. I'm a little less creative because there simply are not many desserts there. But I do baklava as other versions of cakes. I do the Moroccan *M'Hencha* which is like a big... that kind of stuff and those are nice. We only eat fruit or baklava or a bit of ice cream; we don't really have dessert; it's a bit of a problem (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)



Figure 6.17 Spiced carrot, pistachio and almond cake with rosewater cream, Sabrina Ghayour, Persiana supper club, London (2014)

The creation of this cake, then, is a homage to Iranian cooking, but one directed at the invention of a new food. Its presentation as a dessert is also an accommodation to Londoners' expectations of a dessert course in a commercial meal. And the production of a cake is itself a shift in traditional Iranian domestic cooking: in the cookbook *In a Persian Kitchen* (1960), Maideh Meza states that

Iranian homes were inadequately equipped for baking which was done by commercial bakers.

Ghayour's debut cookbook *Persiana* was published in 2014, containing recipes of the dishes featured at her supper clubs and beyond. For Appadurai (1988), cookbooks provide more than a collection or manual of recipes; they "tell unusual cultural tales" (p.3). He argues that cookbooks raise "a variety of interesting issues that are involved in understanding the process by which national cuisine is constructed under contemporary conditions" (1988, pp.3-4). Though Appadurai examines how Indian cookbooks in India are used to construct a national cuisine, a similar idea can be applied to cookbooks written in the diaspora (see Gvion, 2009 for cookbooks and ethnicity).

Writing on Iranian cookbooks, Bert Fragner (1994) states that there are three types of Iranian cookbooks: early Iranian cookbooks (16th century to 19th century), moderns Iranian cookbooks (20th century), and 'ethnographic' cookbooks. He describes 'ethnographic' cookbooks as being "recipe collections whose authors want to introduce and explain the character and the highlights of Iranian cuisine to westerners" (p.68). He claims that these books are ethnographic in nature, intertwined with nostalgic narratives, and are intended to portray a homogenous Iranian culture. He sees something similar in many modern Iranian cookbooks such as Najmeh Batmanglij's *New Food of Life* (1992), written in English, were aimed at a younger generation of diasporan Iranian-Americans allowing them to maintain cultural ties. For Fragner: "this cookbook conjures up an idealized, almost ahistorical Iranian cultural setting,

represented by a culinary refined community of eaters, creating the image of an unbroken continuity of Iranian civilization, practised as far away as Los Angeles or Vancouver” (p.68). In consequence, he argues, such cookbooks do not represent a culinary reality for Iranians or diasporic Iranians. Ghayour’s *Persiana* intervenes in this field, looking to produce something more real and alive than a mythologised tradition.

The recipes in *Persiana* are a mixture of Iranian and Middle Eastern. Sabrina sees this as reflective her own diasporan upbringing and culinary experiences:

I’m a Persian and Middle Eastern chef for the reason that I like the other foods that I grew up with, like Afghani food and some Pakistani food and Iraqi food and Lebanese food. I grew up with it, so you know I love it every bit as much... and I especially love Turkish cuisine. (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

Each recipe is complemented with a short description and where appropriate, a narrative. For instance, in the descriptor for the “Lacy saffron fritters with pistachio and dill sugar *zoolbia*”, Ghayour writes:

these lacy yogurt-based fritters are the perfect way to end a meal with some Persian black tea. Usually soaked in a heavy syrup, I prefer a lighter dill-and-pistachio sugar that makes them so much less sickly sweet and more addictive than anything. If dill is not your cup of tea, you can use basil or mint, but dill creates a subtle background flavour that works well in the crunchy sugar dusting. (Ghayour, 2014, p.213)

The sugar dusting also gives the *zoolbia* a crunchier texture, as well as allowing for greater control over sweetness. The descriptions more generally tend to explain what the traditional foods are like and how they have been modified in

Ghayour's own rendering. Throughout, Ghayour has sought to simplify recipes for contemporary home cooking.

Generally, the book had a positive reception. Looking at the article in *The Observer* – 'Brilliant recipes from Persiana, Sabrina Ghayour's debut cookbook' (12th April 2014) – readers' comments show that there are some interesting debates over the terms in which diasporan recipes should be received. As one might expect, there were many questions raised about authenticity. Two comments stated that none of the recipes are authentic or traditional per se. The responses to these comments were interesting. One commenter wrote: "There's [sic] plenty of traditional Iranian cookbooks out there already. This isn't one of them. Should modern English cookbooks be all just about lamb roast, fish & chips and bangers & mash?" (14th April 2014). Another wrote: "I couldn't care less whether these recipes are totally authentic: they look fantastic." (14th April 2014). Clearly, there is some resistance to a dominant framing in which so-called 'ethnic foods' are expected to be stuck in a time warp in order to be considered traditional and authentic, whereas modern English cookbooks can be more creative. For Ghayour, authenticity is not the point:

Quite frankly six of my dishes are authentic. Really authentic; unchanged, and then the rest of them aren't so much, but they may have been simplified, like the four hour technique of steaming rice. For like... my rice main course is impossible for a supper club, so I found a much quicker, much easier method because if something takes four hours are you likely to cook it? Once a year maybe? But if it's quick and easy and you know how to do plain rice, and you can quickly mix in nuts and stuff like that, then you're much likely much more likely to do it. I'm all behind authenticity. However, I'm more behind you enjoying those ingredients and you wanting to produce something, and if I can take out some of the

processes without compromising the dish then that's my happy balance of authenticity, combined with convenience ...You know authenticity has its place, it's not always achievable. (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

Persiana has been written to cater for a modern lifestyle and changing gender relations in home cooking:

... we're not housewives that have no work other than that. We're working people with jobs, kids, families, lives to juggle. We're not in Middle Eastern culture anymore where women's full time job is to run a household and raise kids, which is a full time job. It's not like that anymore. The expectations are greater, and it's not just a woman that cooks, men do it and maybe have a 30 minutes time slot, so you have to take that into account. We don't live in Iran and it's not the 1950s, it's London and it's the millennium. (Personal interview, Sabrina Ghayour, London, April 2014)

The book deliberately features recipes which can be made in a short amount of time, like the *ras el hainout chicken wraps*, as well as more indulgent dishes such as the *fesenjan* which can take up to three hours to make. *Persiana* looks to the present and future as well as the past. It seeks to introduce people to new flavours and foods, to inspire through a contemporary outlook on traditional foods rather than producing a diasporan cuisine directed at a static homeland.

6.6 Conclusion

6.6.1 Summary

In this chapter I have focused on diasporan Iranian foods and their making. Broadly, I have shown how this making is both a cultural and economic matter, characterised by multiple and complex investments by those doing the making. For instance, in the final part of chapter I focused on two chefs notable for their success in promoting Persian foods within the wider foodscapes and

mediascapes of Vancouver (Hamid Salimian) and London (Sabrina Ghayour). In both cases, the narration made clear the interweaving of: personal passions, desires and ambitions (for success; to express oneself; to develop and exhibit one's culinary skills; to make tastes that please yourself and others); economic thinking (of potential markets; of how to position one's product within the marketplace; of associations and meanings that can be developed that will attract and connect with consumers); and cultural identity (making food that represents personal and collective identities, in particular as a diasporan Iranian). Throughout the chapter, the interpretations developed sought to show how Iranian food commerce in London and Vancouver brings together broadly socio-cultural processes of diasporization, broadly economic processes of marketing, and (especially in the final part) personal desires for self-expression and creativity (see also Matus Ruiz, 2013).

More specifically, I examined how these different sorts of investments in food production and retailing work through the duality of tradition and innovation. This duality runs through much of the thinking about diasporan subjectivity and is also a standard distinction deployed within marketing discourse (see Lien, 1997). My intention was not to frame tradition—innovation as an oppositional choice, but rather to see how diasporan food commerce navigated this duality. Focusing initially on foods represented as 'traditional', I traced out how this representation was both materially produced and related to contemporary market dynamics in situ. An exemplary case is the success of some diasporan Iranian businesses emphasising the artisanal nature of their products. Here, the 'traditional' is very

much a contemporary 'trend', part of a wider turn to artisanal foods within 'higher-end' market segments. In the second part of the chapter I then turned to a different basis for claims to be 'traditional', namely the production of typical and conventional Iranian foods. Focusing on the restaurant sector, I showed how such typical menus had emerged through relations to at least two generic sites in which 'authenticity' was invested: the masculinised food production of the Iranian *kebab* restaurant; and the feminised home-cooking of stews/*khoresh*. I also showed how diasporan restaurants translated such sites into their market contexts, an issue I turned to more directly in the third part of the chapter through a focus on debates over the 'borders' of Iranian food. Taking the example of hummus, as well as wider discussions by food providers / restaurateurs over how to broaden and build 'bridges' from Iranian cuisine, I showed how the geographical definition of foods was a contentious matter. 'Pushing boundaries' was cast by some as a creative culinary and / or marketing practice, whilst by others as a diminution of diasporan Iranian identity and cuisine. Finally, in the fourth part of the chapter, I looked at food makers who foregrounded a concern with innovation and creativity in their work. In part, this allowed me to explore in some more depth the comings together of personal, economic and socio-cultural dynamics that I highlighted above. It also let me focus on how Iranian foods are translated into different culinary cultures in diasporan settings, from Vancouver's internationalist fine dining scene to London's 'pop-up' supper club market.

6.6.2 Main Arguments

In this chapter I have focused on the production of Iranian foods within the foodscapes of London and Vancouver. The two chef case studies show the importance of taste and teases out the issues discussed in section 2.4 on the bodily engagements with food and foodscapes. Salimian's creations embrace the notions of *rasa* aesthetics as it speaks to the sensuous, proximate and experimental properties encompassing *rasa* (Schechner, 2007). The foods created by Salimian are experimental creations of familiar foods, which play on the different senses through taste, sight, smell and feel. This is done through the way the foods are presented and eaten as they are small in size. For example, the *kashk-e-bademjan* plays on all the senses. It is presented as a macaroon, has a multitude of textures (chunky, chewy and smooth) which are felt in the mouth, and retains the smoky and garlicky flavours as would be found in a *kash-e-bademjan*. It embodies the aesthetic aspects of *rasa*, and the rhetoric of Iranian cuisine in emphasising presentation and using ingredients in a way that produces intriguing tastes (Dana-Haeri and Ghorashian, 2011). The intriguing textures and flavours that these foods produce demonstrate playfulness, an artistic aspect, if you like, to food. These identities are performed in and for a high-end market, where creativity is valued and emphasis is placed on the visual perhaps more so than the other senses, drawing upon Bourdieu's concept of taste and luxury foods.

However, the foods produced by Ghayour embody *rasa* through the domestic, as a sense of home is performed as the supper clubs took place at

Ghayour's home. It allows for non-Iranians to experience Iranian food in a home, which reflects upon the narrative of that the best Iranian food is consumed at an Iranian home, and further reinforces the domestic culture of Iranian cuisine. It is not experimental in the same way as Salimian's, but is done so via the creation of dishes such as the spiced carrot cake and the "Lacy saffron fritters with pistachio and dill sugar *zoolbia*" out of adaption to suit non-Iranian tastes and demands. This does not mean to say that authenticity becomes irrelevant, but instead becomes placed in context in terms of for whom, how and why it is made. Here it is not about replication, but rather about the use of traditional ingredients to create modern Iranian foods to suit its context. Therefore, the two very different foodscapes produces very different experiences and memories for the consumer, but they may be similar for the producers. It is apparent that both chefs cook in order to maintain their Iranian identities, but do not fear modernisation, but rather embrace it, to create commensality, sharing it with others in a manner which is more accessible.

Here food is both material and representational. It is representational in that it represents the processes of diasporization and the relationships between food and diasporas. This is particularly illustrated well through the example of the Persian lamb burger. The Persian lamb burger becomes representative of the wider issues as discussed in the literature on bodily engagements with food, which I will further explain in detail. First, the burger is represents hybridity, in that in its traditional form would most likely to have been *koobideh kebab*, but here is presented as a patty for the burger, which is more familiar and easier to

serve and eat in a market stall setting. The burger as a material culture is a food that is familiar to the non-Iranian consumer, and is a food that has a long association with street food alongside the hot dog. The burger also represents community building and commensality, as it allows the Iranian food stall owners to share their culture via food, which is often described as soft culture. The burger also becomes symbolic of third space, as it is a hybrid creation, neither purely Iranian nor purely western due to the condiments that are in it like the *mast-o-mousir* and is made with *barbari* bread, rather than a bun. The tastes of the burger therefore become equated with third taste as proposed by Jean Duruz (Duruz and Khoo, 2015). It is the components of the Persian lamb burger (meat patty sandwiched between bread with condiments and salad) which make it a burger, but its taste are symbolic of hybridity or third taste (the sourness from the sumac, the garlic from the *mast-o-khair* if used in place of the *mast-o-moosir* and the tang from the *khair shoor*). The burger plays on taste in terms of creating memories, as it is something different.

In this chapter I have also argued that foods act as bridges in bringing people, but the politics of representation become contentious, especially where hummus is concerned. Hummus has become the quintessential Middle Eastern food, which Iranian food is often placed under. The serving of hummus brings questions surrounding authenticity into the forefront. Here the hummus symbolises familiarity for the consumer, but for the producers it can create tension, in terms of both the geopolitics of food, specifically the long historical resentment of Arabic foods, and that it lacks authenticity as it is not a food that

was traditionally consumed in Iran. Here the hummus being served symbolises a bridging between cultures, reduces them to stereotypes, and not serving it presents a desire to be different from the Other, thus drawing upon the commodification of difference.

With these ideas in mind, I want to turn my focus on the processes of and relationships between diasporisation and food, how they syncretise and (re) produce Iranianness, and how food works representationally to 'diasporize' Iranianness. This chapter has highlighted the complex relationships between food and diaspora, which is reflected through how complex Iranian identities are performed and produced. On one hand, there is a desire to produce a modern diaporic Iranian identity which reflects both Iranian and British or Iranian and Canadian identities, but on the other, there is a desire to maintain tradition in order to maintain memories and a sense of nostalgia. If this is then the case, I argue that a longing and desire for nostalgia can be replicated through taste, rather than replication, which strives for authenticity which at some point becomes irrelevant and impossible to achieve. We are more likely to remember what something tasted like or smelt like rather than what it looked like, as Proust shows with his memory of the Madeline. Taking this argument further, the creation of memory then becomes situated in context of time and place, where "food [can] be seen as a sensory point of entry into a web of sentiments, memories and fantasies which largely constitute a sense of identity..."(Goddard, 1996, p. 213). In the Iranian case food becomes sentimental through the aromas and tastes of the food, fantasies are created through the processes of cooking

from preparation to presentation. For Ghayour, Salimian and Noosh, it becomes apparent that it is about creating new memories through the food itself, but reminiscing about old ones through taste. This then speaks to Cho's (2007, p.21) argument that "no one is born diasporic. Rather one *becomes* diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence". This process of diasporization, in turn creates hybrid identities, which are neither here nor there, but somewhere in between. An imaginary space if you will, which possibly allows for creativity to occur and authenticity to become redundant, and identity to become refashioned through the circulation of materials and geographical knowledges.

Here hybrid Iranian identities are created where local spaces become reconfigured and cultural boundaries are crossed, facilitating the sharing of different foods, creating dynamic tensions between the self and the Other. In the case of the diasporic Iranian, these tensions become more complicated as the Other is not only the British or Canadian, but also the Arab and Middle Eastern, where there have been long standing geopolitical tensions, which is also transpires through the food, particularly where authenticity in terms of origin and the consumption of Arabic foods in Iran are concerned. The example of the hummus demonstrates that ethnic foods have become commodified to the point that food has become detached from ethnic producers, thus producing multiculturalism without migrants. Thus as Ash Amin (2002) points out the micro politics of social life are encountered on an everyday basis. This speaks to debates on the imagined other vs the real other, where the real other become more problematic and less attractive to the market place, void of politics to the

everyday consumer who just wants to eat. In a sense these hybrid or third spaces, become imaginary spaces where imaginary identities and communities are created and stereotypes are produced.

Here Iranianness is (re)produced in a cosmopolitan setting where cultures and materials circulate, producing different layers of movement in the diaspora space. I propose that there are three stages: (1) the production of traditional foods on an artisanal scale and/or the consumption of foods in domestic spaces, (2) the movement of traditional domestic foods into commercial spaces, and (3) foods become modernised reflecting their hybrid identities which are reflective of cosmopolitanism (this does not mean to say nor does it imply that they are fusion foods). First, traditional foods, as argued by Jazeel allow for memories and nostalgic longings to be fixed, as tacit knowledge is required during production, which creates a symbolic manifestation of authenticity. These foods express and symbolise an attachment to the homeland, as there seemed to be a longing for the foods of Iran rather than a desire to return to Iran per se. It is the production of artisan goods, particularly in Vancouver, which speak to these debates. Traditional foods become equated with the domestic space, which later move on into the commercial space. Second, these foods become part of the wider local cultural economy in restaurant settings, where they become refined and modified to suit the needs of a wider clientele. Third, foods become embodied into the local transformative space as they become modernised, using different ingredients available (here the emphasis is on local and more so seasonal produce) and different cooking techniques the cook/chef has acquired. Here

novel tastes are created to cater to need of the cosmopolitan consumer and traditional foods that were and still consumed in the home and restaurants become transformed into haute cuisine.

In this chapter I focused on foods and food making, complementing the foci on marketing and advertising in Chapter 4 and the (other, non-food) materialities of food spaces in Chapter 5. In the Conclusion that now follows I look to bring these foci together and draw the thesis to a close with a sense of the further directions for research that it has suggested.

7: CONCLUSION: REPRESENTING IRANIANNES IN COMMERCIAL FOOD SPACES

This thesis has explored how Iranian identities are represented in diasporic commercial food spaces in London and Vancouver, with a particular focus on food shops and restaurants. As set out in Chapter 1, in the context of this overall research aim, the thesis had three main objectives: i) to analyse how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces market their 'Iranianness' and/or any other geographical associations; ii) to assess how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces are materially designed, organised and decorated, and how these 'material geographies' represent and stage diasporic Iranian identities; and iii) to determine how diasporic Iranian identities are represented through the foods made and sold in commercial food spaces. In concluding this thesis, I want to address these aims and objectives in turn, drawing out the contributions of the thesis with regard to both its approach and its substantive findings. I then turn to reflections on the limitations of the study and, perhaps more importantly, the future research agendas stemming from this project.

7.1 Research Outcomes

7.1.1 Summary

In Chapter 2, I situated this thesis in terms of its contributions to wider diaspora scholarship. In essence, I set out three main areas of contribution. First, this thesis adds to the (comparatively little) existing scholarship on the Iranian

diaspora. In focusing on London and Vancouver, it extends the notable work on diasporic Iranian experience focused on the USA and Sweden (for example, Kelley, 1993; Graham and Khosravi, 1997; Naficy, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1999). In the British and Canadian contexts, it adds to past work that was focused more generally on social and religious trends within Iranian communities (in particular, Gholami, 2015; Harbottle, 1997, 1999, 2000; McAuliffe, 2005, 2007; Spellman, 2004; Swanton, 2003, 2005). Through its focus on commercial food spaces, it examines a topic touched on as emblematic in these works but one that they do not specifically investigate in depth.

Second, the thesis has contributed to those parts of diaspora scholarship that emphasise 'diasporization' processes (Butler, 2005). I have used this term to capture the argument that the study of diasporas should not be about documenting an identifiable group of people whose collective designation then becomes essentialized as an ethnic label (e.g. 'the Iranians', 'Iranian culture'). Rather, much diaspora scholarship is directed at exploring the "dynamic... *process* of diasporization from which these groups are created" (Butler, 2005, p. 193). In other words, this thesis draws upon, and contributes to, a wider body of thought that argues we need to understand how the collective label of 'the Iranian' is produced, reproduced and contested diasporically. This thesis has focused in particular on diasporization as a 'cultural-economic' process of representation, attending to its role in both the making of 'commodity-signs' (Goldman and Papsen, 1998) and material cultures (Crang, 2010). Studies of diasporization have understandably been pursued through focusing on cultural

realms such as literature, the visual arts, music, and so forth. However, this thesis is part of a body of work that argues that mundane, vernacular commercial practices also need to be understood as sites of social and cultural diasporization. Food commerce has a particular visibility and import in this regard.

Third, in focusing on food commerce, the thesis also contributes to wider debates on the 'banal cosmopolitanism' of consumer cultures (Beck, 2003). It is now widely recognised that consumer cultures are shot through with ideas about, and claims to, cultural and geographic difference; a 'market masala', as Klein (2000) calls it. It has also been widely noted that the commercial activities of individuals self-identifying, or being identified as, diasporic form part of this terrain (e.g. Dwyer and Crang, 2001). Food is a particularly important example (Duruz and Khoo, 2015; Gabbacia, 2009; Panayi, 2008; Pilcher, 2012). This thesis adds particular to research that attends to how commercial practice and commercial/professional identities within the food sectors are caught up in wider cosmopolitan cultures of difference and conviviality (notable recent examples include: Duruz and Khoo, 2015, from the analytical lens of cosmopolitan public cultures; and Matus Ruiz, 2013, from the perspective of affective cultural-economies of passion).

In exploring this commercial practice, three more specific research objectives were foregrounded in turn through the three empirical chapters. In Chapter 4, I foregrounded the first research objective, namely: to analyse how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces market their 'Iranianness' and/or any

other geographical associations. In part, the thesis makes a contribution here in its general approach. Human Geography in general, and Economic Geography more specifically, has paid comparatively little attention to marketing practice. As discussed in Chapter 4, there has been some geographical work on advertisements and advertising (an agenda proposed by the likes of Jackson and Taylor, 1996; Sack, 1988, 1993); and more recently by Andy Pike on branding (Pike, 2009, 2011). However, this thesis has sought to extend such work by applying a spatialised framework to marketing practice, drawn from the anthropology of marketing developed by Marianne Lien (Lien, 1997, 2000). My approach emphasised three, interlinked 'spatial' tasks for marketing: i) the 'positioning' of a product in relation to the market place (i.e. in relation to both other products and a mapping of potential consumers); ii) the 'differentiation' of the product through 'geographical associations'; and iii) the 'connecting' of the product to consumers.

Substantively, the thesis documents how it is not only large corporate entities and brands that undertake these tasks. It showed, for example, how the studied restaurants and shops increasingly use social media and blogs, as well as innovative forms of 'outdoor advertising' such as food trucks, to establish connections with potential customers. It also showed how a diverse range of interests or investments are bound up in marketing. Chapter 4 included an account of the pedagogic and educational ambitions of some of these businesses. It also discussed the importance, for marketing addressed to the Iranian community, of showing specific forms of sociality (particularly, hospitality,

family orientation, and the capacity to host social events and to stage performances).

The principal focus of Chapter 4, however, was on the 'geographical associations' being made in the marketing materials analysed. Here, three main findings can be highlighted. First, Harbottle (1999) argued that most Iranian food commerce in the UK involved the 'hiding' of Iranian identities, such that many Italian restaurants were in fact owned and staffed by diasporan Iranians. In contrast, my own work identified a significant number of visibly Iranian food businesses in both cities. This, then, opens up the question of how Iranianness is represented in discursive contexts where the Iranian is often over-determined through negative popular geopolitical imaginations. In other words, this thesis is a case study of how differences and geographies that have negative as well as positive connotations are marketed (for a parallel study on tourism marketing, see Amujo and Otubanio, 2012). Second, it was found that many such businesses therefore represented their Iranianness through a designation as 'Persian'. The use of 'Persian' implies a positive nostalgia (Hage, 1997) for diasporic Iranians, many of whose emigration was linked to a desire to escape the Islamic Republic. It also implies a positive image for non-Iranians, a romanticised association with looser imaginative geographies separated from geopolitical realities (a pattern also found by Monrreal, 2008, in examining the advertising of Mexican foods in the USA). There is a desire to present a non-political identity, though of course this in itself is nonetheless still ideological (Naraghi and Kingsbury, 2013). Third, part of the power of the 'Persian' in this

context was its de-nationalised associations. These were further pursued by those marketing Iranianness in terms of other 'bridging' designations, such as Middle Eastern and Mediterranean foods. Here, spaces often combined such a wider association with some specifically Iranian aspects, thus using this breadth as a way to connect to a wider array of customers. This was an issue that I returned to in Chapter 6, for example when discussing the place of hummus on many restaurant menus.

In Chapter 5, the thesis extended the analysis of advertising materials to focus more directly on shops and restaurants as material spaces. The objective here was to assess how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces are materially designed, organised and decorated, and how these 'material geographies' represent and stage diasporic Iranian identities. In this regard, the thesis makes a contribution in developing an approach to commercial food spaces that draws from wider developments in architectural geographies (Kraftl, 2010; Rose et al., 2010) and retail space (Miller, 2014). The research findings showed the attention paid to material design, decoration and display by the studied shops and restaurants. They showed how such attention is not limited to intensively designed retail malls or brandscapes (Klingmann, 2007), but also includes the more ad-hoc managements of space and goods by restaurant owners and shopkeepers (which I framed as a vernacular form of 'curation'). They also demonstrated the range of the materialities that shape these spaces. Substantively, the analysis included: i) obviously symbolic materials such as Iranian flags, the *haft sin* display for *Nowruz* and the Zoroastrian *Farvahar*; ii)

seemingly functional or infrastructural objects such as labelling (think of the hand written notes on items for sale in Persepolis, London), display furnishings (as in Ayoub's fruit and nut bowls imported from Isfahan with specially commissioned designs) and lighting (as in use of chandeliers to represent opulence); and iii) the 'atmospheric', affective materialities of lightscapes and soundscapes that play such a central role in the formation of ambiance. Conceptually, addressing this range of materialities means that the thesis is illustrative of a wider argument about how the affects engineered within a place are implicated in, rather than entirely separate from, representational processes and cultural economies of taste and judgement (see Rose et al., 2010).

With respect to the character of the representations produced through these diverse materials of design, decoration, display and atmosphere, Chapter 5 developed two sets of findings in particular. First, developing Lily Cho's (2010) distinction between how restaurant spaces operate as both 'institutions' and 'installations', I explored how these food spaces are both sites that reproduce familiar, typical, fetishized cultural representations and spaces that can offer more creative possibilities for creative material cultural expression and experience. The research found that diasporic commercial food spaces are often sedimented into economic and cultural landscapes through the reproduction of familiar, typical cultural symbols; reifications of identity that work in commercial terms through the reproduction of dominant ideas. However, it is also found that there is a countervailing logic too, one governed by the marketing logic of creating a 'different difference', one that positions a product in distinction to other

diasporic products. In Cho's terms, here the materialities of shops and restaurants were more akin to an 'installation', providing space for creativity and innovation, sometimes idiosyncrasy, fashioned by less predictable passions from both producers and consumers. This is an issue I returned to in Chapter 6, but with a focus on innovation in the making of diasporic Iranian foods.

The second set of findings here focused on how shops and restaurants represent materially qualities such as 'tradition' and 'modernity'. With regard to the former, the research showed a range of aesthetics: from the opulent (e.g. Behesht restaurant in London and, to a lesser extent, Ayoub's Fruit and Nuts shop in Vancouver); to the rustic (e.g. Fanoos restaurant, London); to the playful, fond nostalgia for the Bombay Iranian café staged by Dishoom (London). In terms of the latter, such 'modern looks' included an adoption of the aesthetics of other contemporary food spaces (e.g. Cazba or Zeitoon in Vancouver) and a framing of traditional artefacts in a setting akin to the modern museum or gallery (e.g. Tandis or Hafez in London). This range of aesthetics speaks to the negotiated construction of authenticity (Lu and Fine, 1995). All these spaces construct some form of authenticity but do this in different ways for different markets.

In Chapter 6 I turned directly to the thesis' third objective: to determine how diasporic Iranian identities are represented through the foods made and sold in commercial food spaces. In so doing, I deepened the interpretation of some issues already addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 as well as introducing a stronger concern with the making and materialities of foods themselves. In terms of

general approach, then, the analysis presented here could be taken as a contribution to a wider agenda, namely to engage food production with an emergent concern for the 'geographies of making' (Carr and Gibson, 2015). More substantively, I returned to the duality of tradition and innovation. The findings suggested that this duality was not simply an oppositional choice (where businesses either decided to represent ideas of tradition through making traditional foods or qualities of modernity through culinary innovation). Rather, the 'traditional' needs to be understood as a contemporary consumption dynamic. This was explored, for example, in relation to the making of artisanal foods for 'higher-end' market segments. It was also considered as I drew out the emergence of typical menu items and structures on diasporan Iranian restaurant menus. The analysis also showed how culinary innovation was rarely a project of opposing culinary traditions and more one of translating them for new contexts, reinvigorating them in the process. This diasporic innovation is of particular interest given that Ikhanizadeh and Javidinejad (2011) argue there is a reluctance to undertake food innovation in Iran because of much more static notions of authenticity and tradition.

Otherwise, the findings of Chapter 6 also highlighted another issue that ran through the thesis more generally: namely, how the making and selling of diasporan Iranian foods is both a cultural and economic matter, characterised by multiple and complex investments by those doing the making. In particular, in the final part of Chapter 6 I focused on two chefs (Hamid Salimian in Vancouver and Sabrina Ghayour in London) to demonstrate the interweaving of personal

passions, desires and ambitions, economic rationalities, and cultural identity. Throughout the chapter, the interpretations developed sought to show how Iranian food commerce in London and Vancouver brings together broadly socio-cultural processes of diasporization, broadly economic processes of marketing, and personal desires for self-expression and creativity.

7.1.2 Main Arguments

This project positioned the research at the intersection of scholarship on diaspora and diasporan interaction with food, with a more specific body of work on the Iranian diaspora in London and Vancouver. In this study I have framed diaspora scholarship less as a documentation of diasporic Iranians, but more as analysis of the processes through which diasporic Iranian identities are made, in terms of diasporic cultural production.

First, I have argued that commercial food providers are involved in the production of diasporic Iranian identities. Studies have shown that commercial food spaces act as site of sociality and community for diasporan consumers (Mankekar, 2002) and as sites of cross-cultural social engagement (Everts, 2010). I have focused on how food providers have negotiated and created representations of Iranianness as a central part of their commercial activity. Thus I have argued that commercial spaces act as sites of cultural production within the broader cultural economy (Amin and Thrift, 2004). Food spaces therefore relate to identity not simply as expressions of established diasporic identities but as spaces in which processes of diasporization are developed. These processes include the production of both memories/origins and the

production of new innovations and forms of creativity. The processes of production include the production of authenticities and hybridities. In turn the processes of identity production are a terrain in which wider politics of inclusion and marginalization into national cultures are played out. Often these processes overlap, though there is potential for a more far reaching reworking of cultural cartographies and politics through food.

In Chapter Four I have focused on how diasporic Iranian commercial food spaces negotiate and create representations of Iranianness, vis a vis written and visual marketing texts and discourses. This is more apparent in how the spaces name and position themselves as being Persian, Iranian, Middle Eastern or Mediterranean – which in turn intersects with the wider lexical paradoxes and representational complexities of the Iranian diaspora (Mobasher, 2012; Naraghi and Kingsbury, 2013). All of these designations represent something other than the imaginaries of the Iranian nation-state, all of which are nonetheless ideological (Naraghi and Kingsbury, 2013). Iranianness becomes re-codified producing difference in forms that attract and sell to consumers. Diasporic identities are then connected cultural origins (here the Persian), the contemporary and recognition of settlement (here the diasporic Iranian), and/or hybrid identities (here the ‘meta-geographies’ of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean associations). These processes of diasporization then produce spaces of hybridity or third spaces, where cultures are both transnational and translocal (Bhabha, 1994). These processes of diasporization and the production of hybridity, then lead to questions surrounding notions of authenticity.

Throughout this project I have argued that authenticity is not a cultural quality asking for arbitration, but a cultural construction requiring analysis of how, why and for whom it is made. In other words, there is a cultural politics to the social construction of authenticity. My analysis on the marketing of Iranianness show that diasporic Iranian food businesses conform to associating themselves with authenticity, in order to attract and sell to consumers. However, I have also suggested that authenticity does not necessarily resist cultural innovation and creativity, rather can be constructed in multiple forms. I then extend the argument on the cultural politics of representation raised in Chapters Two and Four, and raised in Chapter Five by focusing more directly on commercial spaces as material spaces.

I have used Lily Cho's (2010) distinction of 'institutions' and 'installations' at the outset, to explore how material design and 'curation' of these spaces involved both adherence to accepted norms and desires to fashion novel, creative representations of Iranianness. Cho emphasises that diasporan commercial spaces both look to fit in and to be different. As 'institutions', diasporic commercial food spaces reproduce familiar, typical, fetishized representations; as 'installations', on the other hand, they recreate identity in creative and idiosyncratic ways, albeit teasing rather than contesting expected tropes. Spaces such as Zeitoon and Cazba in Vancouver seek a contemporary Canadian look, where Iranian food is consumed in a modern cosmopolitan setting. It is not about presenting a static diasporic identity which conform to

ideas of “staged authenticity” (MacCannell, 1989), but is more about negotiating how these authenticities can be reworked in an active diasporic setting.

These material representations become embedded into local settings enabling immigrants to forge on translocal sense of place and belonging, they foster both active transnational consumption and neighbourhood belonging (Ehrkamp, 2005). These translocalities were explicitly apparent in Vancouver, where shops are named to reflect local neighbourhoods, Iranian foods are paired with familiar Mediterranean foods, restaurants are designed to reflect local cosmopolitan tastes, and restaurants take part in local community events. These spaces then become representations of cosmopolitanism, which do not necessarily conform to essentialised ideas of authenticity, but instead “undo” and work them to represent more authentic connections to the diasporic here and now.

The foods themselves also play a role in the negotiation and creation of how Iranian-ness is represented, largely through the production of Iranian foods within the foodscapes of London and Vancouver. I have argued that diasporization processes are not simply shaped by a food’s presence or absence (whether there is or is not ‘Iranian’ food in London and Vancouver) but by that food’s material making and the material nature of its presence. I have argued that the consumption of traditional goods such as *sangak* evoke memories of every day experiences, from going out to buy it, to eating it at home, evoking a sense of pleasure and enjoyment (Sutton, 2001). In this context food acts as a “cultural mnemonic” evoking a narrative of nostalgia (Naficy, 1991, p. 290) as it engages

all the senses. The two chef case studies in section 6.2 shows that both Salimian and Ghayour cook in order to maintain their Iranian identities, yet do not fear innovation in part to create spaces of commensality in which Iranianness can be shared. Both chefs negotiate authenticity in different ways. For Salimian it is about creating new ways of presenting traditional foods, whilst retaining the original tastes and flavours, whereas for Ghayour authenticity is about inspiring through a contemporary outlook on traditional foods, and catering for a modern lifestyle.

Second, I have argued that commercial food spaces operate as spaces of diasporization through representing Iranian identities. This is, then, to argue, that representation is central to questions of diasporization. However, I also argue that this representation is not an immaterial realm of meaning, but made through the material geographies of commercial food spaces: the visual design; the affective power of things; atmospheres; the sensory qualities of food. As such I resist an opposition between the representational politics of diasporic identity and questions of affect, senses, materiality, arguing the latter are often produced within representational frames.

In Chapter Four I have argued that commercial food spaces represent Iranainness through the images and discourses used in advertising are shaped by social, economic and cultural concerns, reflective of wider imaginative geographies. The meanings of globally circulated goods are actively shaped in local settings (Jackson, 1999) and frames commerce as an arena where 'geographical knowledges' are exchanged (Cook and Crang, 1996). These

processes of localization, translation and exchange are part of a wider cultural politics in which ideas of difference and diasporic identity are (re)produced.

These commercial food spaces represent diasporic Iranian identities in placing emphasis on 'Otherness', be it Persian, Iranian, Middle Eastern and/or Mediterranean in order to attract and sell to consumers. The meta-geographic identities and designation to the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean are a product of diasporization from producers, allowing them to hide or veil the Iranian identity (Harbottle, 1999), which can be characterised by difference as emblematic, even symptomatic, of a wider multiculturalism. Diasporic commercial spaces do not simply express underlying diasporic cultures; they are spaces through which the diasporization of culture occurs. Moreover, that commercial process of diasporization involves a complexly mediated presence. But, more generally, what I have been arguing is perhaps better framed as an understanding of diasporic commercial marketing in relation to a "thirdspace of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 32), where uneven power relationships shape processes of cultural representation.

These spaces draw upon exoticised and fetishised images of Iranianness which are also a product of diasporization, where "the glitter of cultural difference [has] fetched a good price. Images of an inbetween world, of the black body, exotic beauty, exotic music, exotic food, and so on, are globally cannibalized, re-staged and consumed as products for mass markets" (Beck, 2006, p. 150-151). In this context diasporic commercial spaces and identities staged (MacCannell, 1989), neither reflecting the realities of homeland nor the diaspora. Specific

images are therefore chosen to reflect the desired representation. For example, the logo for Anar in Nottinghill, London is based on the image of the branch of the *anar* (pomegranate) tree with a bird, most probably a nightingale. This image then symbolises “elegance, refinement, and idealized beauty” (Diba (2001, unpaginated, para 6). This allows providers to present a romanticised image associated with looser imaginative geographies separated from geopolitical realities.

Diapsoric Iranian identities are represented through the material geographies of commercial spaces, where questions of affect, senses and materiality are often produced within representational frames of the material geographies of commercial food spaces. These spaces function as sites of cultural production (Zukin, 1996), through the ways in which they are designed and ‘curated’. Drawing on the scholarships on ‘architectural geographies’ I have shown that Iranianness is represented through design, décor and ambiance, thus commercial spaces operate as symbolic and affective spaces. I have argued that the material design and furnishings of commercial food spaces need to be critically analysed in terms of how they imagine and perform diasporic identities and geographies (Jazeel, 2012). In exploring the intersections of diasporic representation and the material geographies of foodscapes, I have emphasised a sensory engagement (predominantly visual) as well as an interpretive reading of the meanings produced. I have suggested that diasporic foodscapes are not only cultural sites but also sensual sites consisting of material objects, smells and sounds, which may evoke narratives of nostalgia (Naficy, 1991) or suggestions of

elsewheres, producing novelty and difference (Jazeel, 2012). Diasporic foodscapes therefore *produce*, rather than *reproduce* an 'imaginary geography' where "the meaning that is produced involves establishing both cultural and ethnic differentiation (from the host society) and cultural and ethnic continuity (with an idealised past and the homeland)..." (Naficy, 1991, p.290). Thus Iranianness is produced and performed in commercial spaces synthesise the senses of smell, sight and sound to evoke and create memories (Sutton, 2001). It can therefore be argued that these spaces are 'affectively engineered' to facilitate certain emotions (Saldanha, 2009).

I have also argued that foods themselves are created and presented as something new in the diaspora. Thus, diasporic food is both material and representational. Its material qualities are vital but contribute to, rather than negate, its representational capacities. This is particularly well illustrated through the example of the Persian lamb burger. First, the burger both performs and represents hybridity, in that in its traditional form it would most likely have been *koobideh kebab*, but here is presented as a patty for the burger. Second, this material form – patty rather than kebab -- also represents community building and commensality, as it allows the Iranian food stall owners to share their culture via a food form recognised as North American. In part this is a matter of practical, embodied engagement (non-Iranian British consumers are likely to find the material form of a burger both more familiar and easier to handle and manage when eating 'on the go'). In part, though, it is a matter of meaning and sentiment (the form of the burger communicates a desire to create a space of

commensality). The burger thus becomes symbolic of third space, as it is a hybrid creation, neither purely 'Iranian' (in form) nor purely 'western' (due to its ingredients and material elements, like the *mast-o-mousir*, the sourness from the sumac, the tang from the *khair shoor* and the use of *barbari* bread rather than a bun). The tastes of the burger match the idea of third taste, as proposed by Duruz and Khoo (2015), as food materialises hybridity.

Third, I have argued that whilst commercial food spaces are sites for diasporization they are also spaces of the commodification of cultural difference. Across the thesis, I have explored how these dynamics relate. Overall, I have developed two arguments: first, we should not romanticise/eulogise diasporic cultural agency, since it is undertaken within wider cultural - political fields that diasporic subjects do not entirely control (here, the 'markets' for Iranian food). Second, on the other hand, nor can we reduce such agency by commercial food actors to simple logics of commodification, or dismiss them as ersatz/false forms of difference, as within them there is diasporic agency, a real making of ideas and materials of diasporic Iranianness, and within that there is variety, room to make different differences.

Process of diasporization in turn creates hybrid identities, which are neither here nor there, inhabiting an imaginary space, if you will, which allows for creativity to occur and memory to operate. This speaks to Cho's (2007) argument that "no one is born diasporic. Rather, one *becomes* diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence... in lateral terms, diasporas do not emerge in isolation, but are defined through difference" (p.21). There is a value, I would

argue, in recognising food as diaspora space in this way. It is all too easy to encounter foods simply as products, differentiated and positioned for varying market tastes, serving up a multiculturalism without migrants (see Naomi Klein's arguments on the 'market masala' associated with contemporary branding dynamics; Klein, 2000). Recognising foods as diasporic reconnects products to the social and cultural dynamics of their making, and facilitates eating becoming a cultural connection and investment.

7.2 Future Research Agendas

This research was undertaken with inevitable limitations of time and resources and shaped by various decisions about what its objectives should be and what topics should therefore be placed within and beyond its bounds. In the final part of this conclusion I want to highlight some of those delimitations, but rather than framing them negatively I want to cast them in a more positive vein, as indicators of a range of potential future research directions. I will identify five such research agendas that are very much alive in my own thinking as I complete this doctoral project.

First, this project was undertaken in two different 'diaspora spaces' (Brah, 1996): London and Vancouver. The rationale for this was not to produce a direct comparison; rather, it was to be sensitive to how a diasporic cuisine is shaped by local contexts. Going forwards, there is a particular issue here that I believe deserves more attention: the relationships between diasporic food and food re-

localization. I touched on this in interpreting the growth of artisanal Iranian food production (especially in Vancouver), but the wider issue here is the intersection of diasporic food cultures with other food culture dynamics such as the use of seasonal and local produce (Vadi and Newman, in progress). Research on this topic could also be used to engage work on diasporic food with wider food policies and practices and debates over urban food systems. In terms of policy, it might see the consumption of locally produced foods encouraged among diasporic restaurants, and wider diasporic communities encouraged to participate in local urban food projects.

Second, under the rubric of ‘commercial food spaces’ this thesis focused primarily on food shops and restaurants. As discussed in Chapter 2, these are the sites to which most past studies have also attended. At points in my own research I got pulled into other spaces that struck me as particularly interesting. These included: food trucks, which were treated here as a form of ‘outdoor advertising’ (in Chapter 4) but which deserve fuller analysis for how they intervene in urban public spaces and everyday routines and mobilities; ‘pop-up’ spaces (such as the pub residency mentioned in Chapter 6), which raise fascinating questions about how diasporic food cultures might intersect with this wider culture of the urban temporary (Alfonso, 2012); and home based supper-clubs, that blur together commercial and domestic space in important and intriguing ways. Together, then, such spaces suggest an agenda for researching ‘alternative’ commercial food spaces beyond the grocery store and the restaurant.

Third, throughout this thesis I have illustrated that religion has a significant impact on the ways in which foods are consumed. Food consumption and religion are briefly addressed by Spellman (2004) in her research on Iranian religious networks. She looks at *sofreh* gatherings, where the 'table cloth' "becomes a part of a Shia Muslim women's ritual when it is spread with food offerings to holy figures and fairies [*pari*] who are invoked through prayers and stories, and asked to help with tasks, problems and crises" (Spellman, 2004, p.62). Different foods are served at different types of *sofreh* as the foods have different meanings, which Shirazi (2005) discusses in detail in her paper on the significance of food in religious rituals and ceremonies. Gholami (2015) also briefly discusses how Iranian restaurants cater towards Shia Muslims by clearly stating that they are Halal certified and do not serve alcohol. Partly because I was keen to differentiate my own research from influential past work that framed the Iranian diaspora in terms of religion (e.g. Spellman, 2004), and partly because I was wary of replicating the equation between Iranianness and theology, this was not an issue I explored in any depth. However, there is clearly an important issue here that needs further attention, maybe by framing a study explicitly around the role of food in the complexities of religious identity as opposed to a national diasporic identity (such as Iranianness) (Gholami, 2015, does undertake some of this work).

Fourth and fifth, the research presented here speaks to wider agendas that, in my view, need further development. Chapter 6, for example, highlighted how cooking can be part of a wider 'creative geography', where chefs are

understood as makers. Culinary work could be usefully understood as part of a broader concern with exploring ‘the geographies of making’ (Carr and Gibson, 2015), not least because of the strong associations between culinary culture and geography (Shanahan, 2002). According to Pedersen (2012) gastronomy is yet to be officially recognized as a creative industry. In that context, it is of particular value to recognize the creative crafts of cooking, including as part of diasporic cultures. A further broad agenda that this thesis suggests might be termed ‘the popular geopolitics of food’. ‘Popular geopolitics’ is that strand of critical geopolitics that focuses on the geopolitical imaginaries present within popular culture. Films, video games and children’s toys have been among its subjects of enquiry. Food is an arena worthy of more sustained attention. This thesis’ focus on Iranian food meant that relations between food marketing and such geopolitical discourses needed to be considered. Further, specific foodstuffs, such as hummus, were seen to have become geopolitically contentious (see Chapter 6). There is a range of potential foci on the geopolitical contentions surrounding food commodities. In the Iranian case, for example, there has been recent debate on the replica of American fast food chains in Iran, such as Burger House (Burger King), Kabookie Fried Chicken (KFC)¹⁸, Pizza Hat (Pizza Hut) and Mash Donald’s (McDonald’s) (Erdbrink, 2015).

In sum, then, a number of future research agendas have emerged from this project. As I come to the end of this thesis, I hope you, the reader, will feel this speaks to the fertile nature of the research aims and topic pursued within its

¹⁸ Six KFC restaurants were opened in Iran in 1973, but the name was changed to Kabookie Fried Chicken after the Revolution (Chehabi, 2003).

pages; and that you will look back on what I have discussed feeling informed and engaged about the cultural significance of diasporic commercial Iranian food spaces.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Iranian Food Outlets in London and Vancouver

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Perisan Gulf | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Zeitoun | Restaurant | W. End | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Zeitoun | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | July 2013 | | |
| Persepolis Restaurant & Lounge | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | Aug. 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Homa Market | Shop | W. End | ✓ | | | |
| Yaas Grill House | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | July. 2013 | | |
| Urban Gate | Restaurant | Coquitlam | ✓ | Aug. 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Urban Gate | Shop | Coquitlam | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Naan Hut Bakery Ltd | Shop | North Van | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Hakhamanesh | Restaurant | North Van | | | | |
| Cazba Restaurant | Restaurant | W. End | ✓ | March 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Cazba Restaurant | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | | | |
| Cazba Express | Food truck | Downtown | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Yaas Café | Restaurant | W. End | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Mediterranean Grill | Restaurant | W. End | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Apadana | Restaurant | West Van | ✓ | May 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Ayoub's Dried Fruits & Nuts | Shop | North Van | ✓ | July 2013 | | |
| Ayoub's Dried Fruits & Nuts | Shop | W. End | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Ayoub's Dried Fruits & Nuts | Shop | Kitsilano | | | | |
| Saman Bakery | Bakery | North Van | ✓ | June 2013 | | |
| Bella Gelataria | Shop | Coal Harbour | ✓ | June 2013 | | Non-Iranian |
| Laleh bakery | Bakery | North Van | ✓ | May 2013 | | Photographed |
| Middlegate Bakery | Bakery | Burnaby | ✓ | | | |
| Chateau Nega | Restaurant | Chinatown | ✓ | April 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Inn Cogneato | Restaurant | West Van | ✓ | Aug. 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Afra Bakery | Bakery | North Van | ✓ | | May 2013 | Photographed |
| Lonsdale Kebab | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Zaffran Place | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Vancouver European Deli | Shop | W. End | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| The Kozmik Zoo | Music venue | Mt. Pleasant | ✓ | May 2013 | | Photographed |
| Diana Market | Shop | Burnaby | ✓ | | | |
| Rex Bakery | Bakery | North Van | ✓ | | | |
| Kolbeh | Restaurant | North Van | ✓ | | | |
| Pars | Shop | North Van | ✓ | | June 2013 | Photographed |
| Golestan Bakery | Bakery | North Van | ✓ | May 2013 | | Photographed |
| Yek O Yek | Shop | Mt. Pleasant | ✓ | | July 2013 | Photographed |
| Nancy market | Shop | North Van | ✓ | | | |
| The Kebab House | Restaurant | Port Coquitlam | | | | |
| Crispy Poulet | Restaurant | North Van | | | | |
| Perisa foods | Shop | Burnaby | | | | |
| Persia foods | Shop | West Van | ✓ | | | |
| Persia foods | Shop | North Van | ✓ | | | |
| Persia foods | Shop | Kitsalano | | | | |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Persia foods | Shop | Commercial Drive | ✓ | | | |
| Aria Market | Shop | Downtown | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Darband Restaurant (closed) | Restaurant | Burnaby | | | | |
| Alborz Fine Food (closed) | Shop | West Van | | | | |
| Fresh St. Market | Supermarket | West Van | ✓ | March 2013 | | Non-Iranian. Photographed |
| Save on Foods | Supermarket | North Van | | March 2013 | | Non-Iranian. Photographed |
| Hamid Salimian | Chef | | ✓ | March 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Arvand | Dairy | Port Coquitlam | | July 2013 | | |
| Designer of Zeitoon restaurants | Designer | | | | Sept. 2013 | Interview via email |
| Anar | Restaurant | Portobello Road | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Apadana | Restaurant | Kensington | ✓ | Jan. 2014 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Assal Patisserie | Bakery | Edgeware Road | ✓ | Nov. 2012 | | Photographed |
| Zaman | Shop | Kensington | ✓ | Jan. 2014 | | Photographed |
| Bahar Patisserie | Bakery | Kensington | ✓ | Jan. 2014 | | Photographed |
| Hafez | Restaurant | Bayswater | ✓ | Nov. 2012 | | Photographed & menu obtained |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|---|
| Colbeh | Restaurant | Edgware Road | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Darius | Restaurant | Hammersmith | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Fanoos | Restaurant | Richmond | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Persepolis | Shop | Peckham | ✓ | Nov. 2012 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Sara Foods | Shop | Bayswater | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Reza Patisserie | Shop | Kensington | ✓ | Jan. 2014 | | Photographed |
| Tehran Market | Shop | Finchley | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Mahadi | Restaurant | Finchley | ✓ | | | |
| Hormuz | Shop | Golders Green | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Lavash | Restaurant | Golders Green | ✓ | Oct. 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Masoud | Restaurant | Hammersmith | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Milad | Restaurant | Cricklewood | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Palms Palace | Restaurant | Edgware Road | ✓ | | | Iranian/Iraqi. Photographed & menu obtained |
| Pardis | Restaurant | Edgware Road | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Persia | Restaurant | Cricklewood | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| SuperMasoud | Shop | Kensington | ✓ | | | Changed name to Olympia foods. Photographed |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|------------------|------------|-----------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|--|
| Saffron | Restaurant | Richmond | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Simurgh | Restaurant | Convent Garden | ✓ | Nov. 2012 | | Photographed |
| Sufi | Restaurant | Shepherd's Bush | ✓ | Nov. 2012 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Alborz | Restaurant | Kensington | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Tehran | Restaurant | Finchley | ✓ | | | Afghan/Persian. Photographed |
| Zeytoon | Restaurant | Cricklewood | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Rezvan | Restaurant | Ealing | ✓ | | | Afghan/Persian/Greek. Photographed & menu obtained |
| Persian Palace | Restaurant | Ealing | ✓ | | | |
| Yas | Restaurant | Kensington | ✓ | Sept. 2013 | | Photographed |
| Super Mazandaran | Shop | Ealing | ✓ | | Nov. 2013 | Photographed |
| Galleria | Restaurant | Marylebone | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Iran Restaurant | Restaurant | Mayfair | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Orkideh | Restaurant | Golders Green | ✓ | Oct. 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Behesht | Restaurant | Harlesden | ✓ | Jan. 2013 | | Photographed |
| Piano | Restaurant | Cheswick | ✓ | | | Photographed |
| Kateh | Restaurant | Maida Vale | ✓ | Nov. 2013 | | Photographed & menu obtained |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|--------------------|------------|---------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|---|
| Gitane | Restaurant | Fitzrovia | ✓ | April 14 | | |
| Noosh | Food Stall | Hackney | ✓ | | Sept. 2014 | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Zardosht | Food Stall | Hackney | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Dindin kitchen | Restaurant | Holborn | ✓ | | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Carmella | Bakery | Golders Green | ✓ | | Oct. 2013 | Photographed |
| Dishoom | Restaurant | Covent Garden | ✓ | Dec. 2012 | | Indian. Photographed & menu obtained |
| Dishoom | Restaurant | Shoreditch | ✓ | | | Indian. Photographed & menu obtained |
| Kandoo Restuarant | Restaurant | Edgeware Road | | | | |
| Dishoom | Restaurant | Kings Cross | ✓ | | | Indian. Photographed & menu obtained |
| Sabrina Ghayour | Chef | | ✓ | April 14 | | Photographed & menu obtained |
| Bah Bah | Chef | | ✓ | | March 15 | Kitchen residency at the King & Co Pub in Clapham. Menu obtained. |
| Esfehan Restaurant | Restaurant | Putney | | | | |
| Persian Nights | Restaurant | Ealing | | | | |
| Chella Restaurant | Restaurant | Cheswick | | | | |
| Rice | Restaurant | Cheswick | | | | |
| Shandis | Restaurant | Islington | | | | |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|---------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Kish Persian Resturant | Restaurant | Kilburn | | | | |
| Alounak Restaurant | Restaurant | Bayswater | | | | |
| Ghanadi Roshan (Now Assal) | Shop | Edgware Road | | | | |
| Patogh | Restaurant | Edgware Road | | | | |
| Royal Tehran | Restaurant | Kensington | | | | |
| Noor | Restaurant | Cricklwood | | | | Is Indian but serves Parsi dishes |
| Pamchal (Now Senator Restaurant) | Restaurant | Hendon | | | | |
| Old Delhi (Closed) | Restaurant | Edgware Road | | | | Indian but served Iranian food |
| Kandoo Restuarant | Restaurant | Edgware Road | | | | |
| Esfehan Restaurant | Restaurant | Putney | | | | |
| Persian Nights | Restaurant | Ealing | | | | |
| Chella Restaurant | Restaurant | Cheswick | | | | |
| Rice | Restaurant | Cheswick | | | | |
| Shandis | Restaurant | Islington | | | | |
| Kish Persian Resturant | Restaurant | Kilburn | | | | |

| Outlet | Type | Area | Visited | Recorded interview | Non recorded interview | Notes |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Alounak Restaurant | Restaurant | Bayswater | | | | |
| Royal Tehran | Restaurant | Kensington | | | | |
| Patogh | Restaurant | Edgware Road | | | | |
| Noor | Restaurant | Cricklwood | | | | Is Indian but serves Parsi dishes |
| Pamchal (Now Senator Restaurant) | Restaurant | Hendon | | | | |
| Vanak (Closed) | Restaurant | Finchley | | | | |
| Ghanadi Roshan (Now Assal) | Shop | Edgware Road | | | | |
| Khayam (Closed) | Shop | Marylebone | | | | |
| Bijan Quality Food (Closed) | Shop | Finchley | | | | |

Appendix B: Iranian Food Outlets Advertised in London and Vancouver

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------------|--------|
| Bazar-e-Hafteh | LeVant Grill | Restaurant | Turkish | 8.2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Anar | Restaurant | Iranian | 30.1.13 | English | London |
| Nobahar | Anjoman | Distributor | Iranian | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Royal Nut Foods | Distributor | Unspecified | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Manoush | Restaurant | Iranian | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Persian Nights | Restaurant | Iranian | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Little Persia | Restaurant | Iranian | 30.1.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Persian Terrace Restaurant & Takeaway | Restaurant | Iranian | 30.1.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Simurgh | Shop | Iranian | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Assal | Bakery | Iranian | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Azerbaijan Restaurant | Restaurant | Azerbaijani | 30.1.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Milad Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | English | London |
| Persian Weekly | Mahan Foods | Distributor | Iranian | 8.2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Orkideh Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Deevan Magazine | Emmanuel Patisserie | Bakery | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Anjoman | Distributor | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Dicle Interantional Food Centre | Shop | Middle Eastern | 2.13 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Rayners Food Centre | Shop | Middle Eastern | 2.13 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Nut Case | Shop | Iranian | 2.13 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Anjoman Rice | Distributor | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Alounak Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Super Mazandaran | Shop | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Mansour Patisserie and Confectionary | Bakery | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Orkideh Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Piano | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Sevill's Bakery | Bakery | Iranian | 2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Shahzad Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Piano | Restaurant | Iranian | 2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Anjoman Rice | Distributor | Iranian | 6.2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Manoush | Restaurant | Iranian | 6.2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Royal Nut Foods | Distributor | | 6.2.13 | Farsi | London |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------|-------------------|--------|
| Nobahar | Assal | Bakery | Iranian | 6.2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Little Persia | Restaurant | Iranian | 6.2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Persian Terrace Restaurant & Takeaway | Restaurant | Iranian | 6.2.13 | English and Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Simurgh | Shop | Iranian | 6.2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Nobahar | Persian Nights | Restaurant | Iranian | 6.2.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Persian Nights | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Rayners Food Centre | Shop | Middle Eastern | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Anjoman Rice | Distributor | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Dicle Interantional Food Centre | Shop | Middle Eastern | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Ariana Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Alounak Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Super Mazandaran | Shop | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Charcoal Bar | Restaurant | Turkish | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Orkideh Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | English and Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Milad Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Sevill's Bakery | Bakery | Iranian | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Emmanuel Patisserie | Bakery | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------|-------------------|-----------|
| Shahrvand | Dominos | Pizza fastfood | International | 4.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Meat Shop, Deli & Pastry | Shop | Iranian | 4.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Meat Shop, Deli & Pastry | Shop | Iranian | 4.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Vanak | Shop | Iranian | 4.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Cazba Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 4.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Paivand | Pars | Shop | Iranian | 26.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Paivand | Persian Super Market | Shop | Iranian | 26.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Persian Gulf Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 26.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Saloniki | Restaurant | Greek | 26.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Golestan Bakery | Shop | Iranian | 26.4.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Capilano Café | Restaurant | | 26.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yummy | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yaas Bazaar | Café | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yaas Grill House | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.4.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Caspian Express | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Refa Supermarket | Shop | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Chateau Nega | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Daneshmand Magazine | Nancy Market | Shop | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Zeitoon | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.4.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Pars | Shop | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Refa Supermarket | Shop | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Farhangema | Nancy Market | Shop | Iranian | 8.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Farhangema | Golestan Bakery | Bakery | Iranian | 8.3.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Goonagoon | Caspian Express | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Persia Food | Shop | Iranian | 12.4.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Deevan Magazine | Piano | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Dan Magazine | Zeitoon | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Dan Magazine | Yaas Grill House | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Dan Magazine | Afra Bakery | Shop | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Goonagoon | Ava Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 3.5.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yaas Grill House | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Persepolis | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yaas Bazaar | Café | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Caspian Express | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Gilaneh Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Daneshmand Magazine | Zeitoon | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yummy | Restaurant | Iranian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | T&T Supermarket | Shop | East Asian | 22.3.13 | English | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Parisian Market & Deli | Shop | Middle Eastern | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Crispy Pizza | Restaurant | Pizza/ Fast food | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Caspian Express | Restaurant | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yaas Bazaar | Café | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Yaas Grill House | Restaurant | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Chateau Nega | Restaurant | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Daneshmand Magazine | Zeitoon | Restaurant | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Goonagoon | Persepolis | Restaurant | Iranian | 3.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Goonagoon | Zeitoon | Restaurant | Iranian | 3.5.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Paivand | Meat Shop, Deli & Pastry | Shop | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Paivand | Parisian Market & Deli | Shop | Iranian | 3.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Paivand | Pars | Shop | Iranian | 3.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Vanak | Shop | Iranian | 3.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Shahrvand | Cazba Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 3.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Shahrvand | T&T Supermarket | Shop | East Asian | 22.3.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Golestan Bakery | Bakery | Iranian | 24.5.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Farhang | Tavazo Dried Fruit and Nuts | Distributor | Iranian | 24.5.13 | English and Farsi | Vancouver |
| Dan Magazine | List of top Persian grocery stores in Vancouver | | Iranian | 24.5.13 | English | Vancouver |
| Payam | Saloniki | Restaurant | Greek | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Persian Gulf Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | Vancouver |
| Payam | Capilano Café | Restaurant | Iranian | 24.5.13 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Orkideh Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Piano | Restaurant | Iranian | 12.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Divan | Restaurant | Turkish | 12.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Nut Case | Shop | | 12.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Anjoman | Distributor | Iranian | 12.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Dicle Interantional Food Centre | Shop | Middle Eastern | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Persian Nights | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Nut Case | Shop | | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Anjoman | Distributor | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |

| Name | Outlet | Outlet Type | Type | Date | Language | City |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Deevan Magazine | Rayners Food Centre | Shop | Middle Eastern | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Anjoman Rice | Distributor | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Ariana Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Emmanuel Patisserie | Bakery | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Super Mazandaran | Shop | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Sevill's Bakery | Bakery | Iranian | 11.12 | English and Farsi | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Milad Restaurant | Restaurant | Iranian | 11.12 | English | London |
| Deevan Magazine | Café Persia | Café | Iranian | 11.12 | Farsi | London |

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