

School of Design and Art

**Diaspora and home: contextualizing the idea of home in Australian
contemporary art as visualised by selected Iranian artists**

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of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)- updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262). Approval Number HR37/2011.

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Abstract

This practice-led research investigates the ways in which Iranian artists living in Australia visualise the idea of home. This project illuminates how memories from the past and imagination can influence how home can be visualised based on experiences of migration and displacement. This studio research explores how home can be defined by personal experiences, social and cultural relationships, and attachments to particular places.

My PhD research is presented in the form of a written exegesis and a body of creative works, a selection of which was exhibited at John Curtin Gallery in August-September 2018. The exegesis includes four chapters, each focusing on separate visual examples and theoretical discussions in relation to displacement and the idea of home. Referencing works of authors and scholars Avtar Brah, Stéphane Dufoix, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, I explore the idea of home within the contexts of diaspora as a site for new opportunities.

This study also includes information gathered from my interviews about the idea of home with the Iranian-Australian artist Hossein Valamanesh and Iranian author Mammad Aidani in Australia in 2011.

I look at the physical and imaginary aspects of home associated with memory and imagination. To do this, I analyse the works of Valamanesh in order to discuss how he creates images of home in relation to his feelings for, and memories of, Iran and his experiences in Australia. At the same time, I explore how the definition of home is related to the experiences of displacement, whether home is physical or imaginary.

To develop my discussion, I explain my collaborative art project, *A long letter to home*, with Iranian people living in Iran, and analyse selected collaborators' responses to my questions about home and homeland. Referring to the visual information provided by Iranian collaborators, I suggest that the interpretations of home and homeland depend on the responses, social and cultural relationships, and attachments to a particular place in everyday life.

My studio research production is another source for expanding my discussion on home, reflecting my idea that it is influenced by emotional and physical experiences of displacement and living in diaspora. I discuss how my experience of

displacement and living in Australia has impacted on my distinctions between home and homeland. I explain how my feelings and memories of the past as well as my experiences of two places evoke the idea of homeland as a place of return, and a sense of nostalgia towards home.

I imagine, think and form my ideas in Persian but most of the time, I write in English instead of translating my thoughts from Persian into English, and this constantly reminds me that I am in diaspora. Yet, by saying that, and being an Iranian in Australia, my experience of displacement does not cause me to think of returning to my homeland in the future. Instead, being a migrant here evokes the idea of home, and brings my attention to my everyday life and how repetition in daily household tasks can bring the idea of home into practice.

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Introduction

Migration usually happens voluntarily or by force. However, for me, coming to Australia was neither my choice nor by force; it was my father's decision. For cultural and traditional reasons, I had no choice but to move to Australia with my family. I had no plan for my future and had no idea what I was going to do with my career when I arrived in Perth in late December 1999. Not realising where I was and how I could start my life left me with fear and uncertainty.

In *Home and identity* the author Madan Sarup claims,

A migrant is a person who has crossed the border. S/he seeks a place to make 'a new beginning', to start again, to make a better life. The newly arrived have to learn the new language and culture. They have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often with the resentments of a hostile population (Sarup 1994, 94).

Depending on the person, the reason for migration, and the migratory situation, the migrant may take different approaches to the new place, culture and society. Becoming a migrant involves social, cultural and even personal changes that can occur in the new place¹. One might seek freedom, refuge, or a new life, and one might find new paths towards goals in the new place. For me, learning the new language was a huge task; it emotionally impacted on my personality and ideas, and socially bounded my communications at the beginning of life in Australia. In this exegesis, I aim to speak of my life experiences in Australia, and by speaking of my understandings, feelings and emotions about migration, I aim to unpack my experience of diaspora and the impact of this displacement on my idea of home, as well as how I explore this through my creative practice.

The use of cultural symbols and elements such as Persian poetry and even lapis lazuli that I brought here from Iran is quite evident in my early works prior to beginning my PhD research. I had strong feeling of being a stranger in an unfamiliar place, and aimed to explore this feeling through my willingness to create a cultural dialogue with the new place in my early works. By making small works featuring Australian landscapes and handwriting a line of Persian poetry with lapis lazuli, I

¹ By using this term, I do not mean a newly built house of just a new country, rather I refer to a new place as Australia/ Perth that I have moved to and will reside in; somewhere other than my place of origin.

tried to express my interpretation of the effect migration had on myself, and reflect my search to make a cultural relationship. In his catalogue essay, editor and author Dean Chan suggests,

In my view, these visual forms refer to the complicated range of certainties and uncertainties that make up migrant self-identity. Rakhsha's artworks collectively represent the 'here and there' and 'here, not there' dynamic at the core of the diasporic condition (2006).

The combination of the landscape and lapis lazuli in my works did not offer me much information about the impact of displacement on my life here. Instead, those works evoked ambiguous feelings about being disconnected from Iran and yet not connected to here, about who I am in Australia and from where I can start my life here. I felt the lack of something significant that, in turn, constantly caused me to think of home and equally led me to unpack the changes to my life, location and my understanding of the new beginning. Reflecting upon my previous work, artist Greg Pryor remarked, "Layli Rakhsha unpeels the layers of these images to locate sites for poetry and sites for love. This is not love that is directed towards an object or person. This is love that is related to being and to becoming" (2007). I used the Australian landscape as a site for exploring my ideas, for echoing my emotional response to migration, displacement and my experiences as an Iranian in Australia. Using the landscape in my works helped me reflect my determination in making traces of my culture where I live now; traces that not only refer to my personality, but also echo my emotional attachment to this new place.

Every time I go to the bush these days, I have a sense of freedom. I go to the bush to release my tensions from everyday, ordinary household routines. I do not see myself as being emotional while I am walking in the bush nor do I purposely put emphasis on the idea of home. Rather, I find myself free of everyday routines, self-discipline and obsession, and focus on how I can embed my emotions or even expose and hide my interpretation of home in my art.

My very early PhD studio research and investigation into diaspora and the impact of displacement on my everyday life started when I saw three influential artworks by artists whose works investigate themes of displacement in both local and global contexts. One of these inspiring artworks was *Proyecto para un memorial*

(2007) by Colombian artist Oscar Munzo, which I saw at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts for the first time in 2009. *Proyecto para un memorial* shows five separate videos of drawings of faces being traced with a brush and then fading away. While this work refers to the political and social issues in Colombia, *Proyecto para un memorial* also stimulated my ideas about my own migration and displacement; to consider what was disappearing in my life, what I might achieve in this new place, and whether my memories of the past would disappear after living in diaspora². The relationship and association between the images (drawings of faces) and time in Munzo's work visually guided me think of what a migrant would be left with after experiencing displacement and settling in the new place, and what the physical and emotional impacts of displacement might be.

Another influential artwork was *When faith moves mountains* (2002) by Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs. Every time I watch the video of this work, I become more interested in the way Alÿs represents the theme of displacement poetically and conceptually. In this work, Alÿs recruits "500 volunteers in Peru to move a sand dune a few inches by shovel" (Potts 2012, para. 5). By shifting a sand dune from its original position to another, the artist reflects the idea of the process of moving and displacing, deconstructing and reconstructing, as well as his faith in losing something or moving to gain something new, and his concerns about social and global changes. According to Alÿs, "*When faith moves mountains* evokes the idea that a memory will be built up of an event that only last a day but will live on for who knows how long?" (Alÿs 2002, n.p.).

The other artwork is the installation *Sunflower seeds* (2010) by Ai Weiwei, which features 100 million sunflower seeds handcrafted in porcelain covering the gallery floor at the Tate Modern. In addition to the representation of mass production and the metaphorical message of 'made in China', this installation invites the audience to share their stories and experiences while walking in the gallery. *Sunflower seeds* reflects the artist's memories of his childhood, and evokes my own nostalgic memories of the past in Iran. I remember my childhood in Iran when the women in my family gathered together, eating sunflower seeds, laughing and sharing their secrets; the old times when all my female relatives used to gather in summer to make pickles or dry herbs to store for winter days.

² Following the example of Elahi and Karim (2011), I prefer to use the term 'living in diaspora' rather than 'living in the diaspora'. I will explain this term further in chapter 1.

These three artworks reveal the relationship between the artists' communities and society. Whether displacement occurs in a fading drawing or moving a sand dune, or by placing thousands of individual memories and stories in another place, all resonate with the role of migration, displacement as well as both individual and group experiences in contemporary art. These three inspiring artworks made me think further about displacement and migration, and raised many questions about diaspora and home. The questions led me to conduct further research and study the relationship between diaspora and the search for home, and how it is visualised by Iranian diaspora artists in Australia.

This practice-led research investigates the ways in which Iranian artists living in Australia visualise the idea of home, and explains the role of Persian culture in reflecting the idea of home in the new place. This project illuminates how memories from the past and imagination can influence how home can be visualised based on experiences of migration and displacement. This studio research explores how home can be defined by personal experiences, social and cultural relationships, and attachments to particular places.

The research is presented in the form of exegetical writing and a body of artworks, a selection of which were exhibited at John Curtin Gallery in August-September 2018. The exegesis includes four chapters, and each chapter focuses on different visual examples and theoretical discussions in relation to displacement and the idea of home.

I use theories on diaspora and home by Avtar Brah, Stéphane Dufoix, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling. This study also includes information gathered from my interviews with the Iranian-Australian artist Hossein Valamanesh in his studio in Adelaide and Iranian author Mammad Aidani in his office in the University of Melbourne in 2011³. I provided my interviewees with a list of questions prior to the interview, and my discussion on the idea of home as physical home and imaginary home relies on their responses to my questions about migration, displacement and home. By analysing works of selected Iranian artists in Australia, I examine how home can be visualised based on personal experiences of migration and displacement, and emotional attachment to a particular place.

³ These two interviews were done and conducted under Curtin University ethics clearance. All data including recorded conversations, consent forms, photographs and list of questions are stored in accordance with WAUSDA and Curtin University Policy. This study was approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR37/2011).

To develop my discussion, I also explain my collaborative art project, *A long letter to home*, with Iranian people living in Iran, and analyse selected collaborators' responses to my questions about home and homeland. Referring to the visual information provided by Iranian collaborators, I suggest that the interpretations of home and homeland depend on personal and emotional responses, social and cultural relationships, and attachments to a particular place in everyday life.

My studio research production is another source for expanding my discussion on home, reflecting my idea that it is influenced by emotional and physical experiences of displacement and living in diaspora. I discuss how living in diaspora and my social and cultural experiences here have brought my attention to exploring the concept of home in private and domestic places. It has brought my attention to ordinary objects and my engagement with household routines to reflect my understanding of home in my practice. By analysing my artworks I discuss how my experience of displacement and living in Australia has impacted on my distinctions between home and homeland. I explain how my feelings and memories of the past as well as my experiences of two places evoke the idea of homeland as a place with possibility of return, and a sense of nostalgia towards home.

Chapter one of this exegesis focuses on diaspora and a visual analysis of works of selected Iranian artists in Australia. I consider the concepts of diaspora discussed by Stéphane Dufoix and Avtar Brah in relation to displacement and migration. It is important to acknowledge diaspora in its historical context. Author Stéphane Dufoix has noted that diaspora figures within premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity (Dufoix 2007, 311). In my exegesis, I discuss diaspora within a contemporary context. Based on my own experience of migration and displacement, I often refer to diaspora as both a new site and a group of people living outside their homeland. Therefore, in this chapter, my discussion is based on the concept of diaspora as a site for not only making a new life, but also for exploring personal and cultural experiences in the new society. The last part of this chapter is related to the impact of migration and my understanding of diaspora on my studio practice.

In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Brah speaks of diaspora, the interrelationship between diaspora and desire for home that is different to the idea of returning to homeland. Brah explains that the concept of diaspora is associated with 'home' and 'dispersion' (1996, 190).

While Brah considers diaspora as a site for a new start, Stéphane Dufoix discusses diaspora as a group of people. In his book *Diasporas*, Dufoix discusses diaspora in relation to migration, home and homeland. Dufoix considers diaspora as a group of people dispersed from their homeland. He claims,

A diaspora must have a number of factors involving the origin of the (voluntary or forced) migration; settlement in one or several countries; maintenance of identity to organize activities aimed at preserving that identity; and finally, relations between leaving state, the host state, and the diaspora itself, the last of which may become a link between the two (2003, 21).

The concept of diaspora is associated with migration and the process of settling, adjusting, and building a new life, and social and cultural relationships in the new place. This aligns with the concept of displacement suggested by author Oliver Bakewell: “displacement can be understood as a process which brings about changes in both people’s physical locations and as a result transform social relationships” (2011, 19). Thus, displacement also brings social and cultural changes to the new place. Depending on the reason for displacement, such changes can in turn have different social and cultural impacts on the migrant.

For people in diaspora, preserving identity and practicing their culture and tradition may help them feel close to the homeland and express their feelings of being in diaspora. By giving examples of Iranian migrants in Australia, I will explain that cultural symbols and Persian poetry work to both express their feelings of displacement and preserve their Iranian identity.

Through the use of visual examples, I will consider the relationship between diaspora and art, and the impact of displacement on creativity. I examine the artworks of Iranian artists Abbas Mehran and Hossein Valamanesh in order to suggest how their works reflect a cultural dialogue or an expression of a new life in diaspora⁴. I also analyse selected works of mine to support my discussion on art historian Kobena Mercer’s description of diasporic art as a dialogue and form of self-expression (2008, 124).

⁴ There are many Iranian artists that I considered including in this exegesis, including female artists, however in narrowing the scope I specifically choose these Iranian artists as their work was most relevant to my discussions on the idea of home and diasporic art. I found their works very inspiring in my practice.

Chapter two focuses on home. In their book *Home*, authors Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling suggest that “Home provides shelter, and also provides a setting in which people feel secure and centred. People’s sense of self is also expressed through home” (2006, 9). They claim, “Home is an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings. These may be feelings of belonging, desire, and intimacy. Home is a place, a set of feelings and cultural meanings, and the relations between the two” (2006, 2). Whether it is an idea or an imaginary place, home is associated with feelings, memories, and personal and social experiences.

This chapter also reflects my investigation into visualising home in Australia in the artworks of Iranian-Australian artist Hossein Valamanesh. By analysing selected artworks of Valamanesh, I will look at the physical and imaginary aspects of home associated with memory and imagination. I discuss how the artist’s feelings, memories of Iran, and his experience of displacement influence and reflect his idea of home in diaspora.

Chapter three focuses on differences in the ideas of home and homeland in relation to particular places as well as personal and social experiences of those places. I discuss how home and homeland can be described in terms of personal and emotional attachments to certain places. To do this, I will analyse my project *A long letter to home* (2015), which is a collaborative project between myself and a group of people living in Iran who responded to my two questions about home and homeland. The questions were: what do you imagine when you hear the word *khaneh* (home); and what do you imagine when you hear the word *vatan* (homeland)? The key reason for initiating this collaboration was to find the distinction between home and homeland, and how these ideas are related to personal, social and cultural experiences of places as well as emotional attachments and relationships to them. Based on the collaborators’ responses, I explain in this chapter how home can be a place that is personalised and private, and discuss how home as a place not only refers to a location which contains domestic objects, but how it can also be a place that provides shelter, a sense of security and privacy.

At the end of this third chapter, I analyse Valamanesh’s responses to my questions in *A long letter to home*, in order to highlight the idea of homeland as related to where we culturally come from. In addition, I speak of my distinctions between home and homeland. I consider how my feelings and memories of the past as well as my experiences of two places evoke the idea of homeland as a place of return

and a sense of nostalgia towards home, and how this collaborative project and my experience of displacement and living in Australia simultaneously lead me to explore the idea of home in my domestic house.

In the final chapter of this exegesis, I describe my studio research and how I developed my artworks in relation to my experience of migration and my idea of home. I refer to the use of handwriting and screen-printing in my artworks to reflect my idea of the physical impact of displacement on my ideas and personality. Through analysing my artworks, I explain that my engagement with the process of screen-printing and handwriting reminds me of the early days of settling into life in Australia and learning English, and how these two expressive tools brought my attention to something still, a personal silence, determination and satisfaction in exploring and finding my ideas. My physical engagement with the process of screen-printing has become a significant part of my work; it evokes my memories of displacement and leaves traces of my thoughts and feelings in my works. Both handwriting and screen-printing have led me to consider how the repetition in handwriting a single word *khaneh* (home) and screen-printing can unpack my feelings and everyday engagement with household tasks.

I describe my visual investigation on nostalgia as the emotional impact of displacement on my ideas and artistic practice. I refer to nostalgia as a response to an experience such as displacement in terms of its association with both memories of homeland and a desire for home. I focus on Svetlana Boym's theory in order to describe my interpretation of nostalgia, which is related to my personal feelings, and experiences of two different places rather than being only related to my memories of Iran. I take nostalgia as an evocation of my memories of the past and an emotional response to my experience of displacement as well as an influential motif in visualising home in my practice. In analysing my works *At 7:30 pm* (2015), *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* (2015) and *Everyday* (2016), I suggest that my personal nostalgia has unfolded a new approach to visualising home in Australia. Rather than going to the landscape and exploring the idea of home in an unfamiliar cultural and historical site, I discover the idea in relation to my engagement and attachment to domestic places such as my kitchen and its ordinary objects, as well as in my everyday household works. These three works explore how stillness and a sense of personal nostalgia that exists in my physical engagement with the domestic house can evoke feelings of home as living in the everyday.

Chapter 1

Diaspora: tracing Iranian diaspora and diasporic art in Australia

In this chapter, I consider the concepts of diaspora, Iranian diasporic art in Australia, and the impact of these two issues on my studio research and practice. I focus on the works of Stéphane Dufoix and Avtar Brah in relation to displacement, migration and diaspora. While Dufoix defines diaspora as a group of people dispersed from their homeland, and considers the relationship between diaspora and maintaining identity in the new place, Brah discusses the concept of diaspora as a site and explores it in relation to home. I support and extend my discussion on Iranian diasporic art in Australia using visual examples. I analyse the works of two Iranian artists in order to consider the influences of displacement and the new place on their artistic practices in Australia.

The concept of diaspora is associated with displacement and migration. In their book *Key concepts in migration*, the authors David Bartram, Maritsa Poros and Pierre Monforte suggest “migration is the recollection of individuals to some distant place, i.e., at least beyond one’s own city or town” (Bartram, Poros and Monforte 2014, 4). Migration refers to either permanent or temporary displacement from homeland, and the idea of finding or having another place to live. Besides the movement from one country to another, migration can also mean making cultural relationships; as Virinder S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk suggest, “migration can be seen not as a one-off event with one-way consequences, but rather as an ongoing process of building relationships at the cultural level” (2005, 15). A migrant can explore and experience many social, cultural and personal relationships in the new country. When migration occurs, a process of cultural relationships and changes that can be shaped through everyday life can occur too. Depending on the cultural background and social, political and personal experiences in their homelands, the migrant may have different approaches to the new situations and cultural changes that can impact on their cultural relationships in the new place. Making cultural relationships also depends on the knowledge and understanding of the language and the new place. If I consider migration as an ongoing process, I can say that the impact of my intentions for making cultural relationships and attempting to understand the differences between the two cultures has led me to see myself in diaspora.

The definition of diaspora can be related to both migration and a new place. To develop and explain my understanding of diaspora, I first look at the concept of diaspora as a group of people.

In his book *Diasporas*, Stéphane Dufoix discusses the concept of diaspora by describing the situation of groups of people who have left their homelands. According to Dufoix, “for a long time, diaspora referred only to physically scattered religious groups living as minorities among other people and another faiths” (2003, 1). Dufoix explains that diaspora is a Greek word that means scattering, and it is used for any group of people who move from their homeland and settle in another country. At the same time, he sees diaspora as a conceptual tool in migration studies, and relates the concept of diaspora to the idea of displacement. He claims, “Diaspora means nothing more than the idea of displacement and the maintenance of a connection with a real or imagined homeland” (2003, 2). Diaspora means a group of people who move or disperse from their homeland and seek settlement in another place.

My understanding of Dufoix’s definition of diaspora is that diaspora is about the displacement of a group of people who try to keep their connections with the homeland in the new place. This aligns with authors Babak Elahi and Persis M. Karim’s phrase “people in diaspora” (Elahi and Karim 2011). People in diaspora are those who live outside their homeland, yet they might consider their homeland as a possible place to return to. In addition, the author James Clifford defines diaspora as “a group of people that are dispersed from homeland or original centre and maintain a memory or myth about their homeland or a place, and see homeland as a place of eventual return” (Clifford 1997, 284). People in diaspora are part of compatriot communities outside the homeland. For example, the idea of Iranian diaspora relates to Iranians in diaspora and the Iranian community in which they share their Iranian culture and identity in another country. Taking diaspora as a group of people, I suggest that as an Iranian migrant in Australia, I am in diaspora and I constantly try to build cultural relationships and make a dialogue about cultural changes.

In her book *Identity, language and culture in diaspora: a study of Iranian female migrants to Australia*, the researcher and author Maryam Jamarani discusses Iranian migrants in Australia. She suggests, “Iranian immigration to Australia is relatively recent, and, for the most part, comprises immigration after the Islamic revolution of 1976” (2012, xii). Jamarani considers the presence of Iranian migrants

in Australia in three different periods. The first period is before the Iranian revolution⁵ when Iranians migrated to Australia for work in the mining and oil industries. The second period is after the revolution. Many students and skilled migrants did not return to their country of origin due to the Islamic rules and concern about harsh authorities. Also, the majority of Iranians who left Iran in this period were religious and ethnic minorities such as Bahaiis, Armenians, Jews and Assyrians who had little social and human rights in Iran. The third period is during the Iran-Iraq war⁶ when the number of Iranians settling in Australia also grew. “The recent movement of Iranian migration to Australia, in the past 10 years, includes young individuals or couples who come to Australia under skilled migration visa or with student visa” (Jamarani 2012, xiii). Based on the 2011 Census, “the estimated resident population of Iran-born people in Australia is 34 453” (“The Iran-Born Community” 2015).

In his book *Welcoming the stranger: narratives of identity and belonging in an Iranian diaspora*, Mammad Aidani discusses the impact of displacement on Iranian migrants and refugees, and how they express their feelings and experiences of living in Australia. He also considers the strong bond between Iranian diasporas and their interest in Persian poetry and storytelling. Aidani explains that Iranians in diaspora use cultural symbols and poetics to express and represent their emotional experiences of displacement and living in diaspora, specifically through the use of Persian poetry and other cultural symbols that are deeply rooted in Iranian culture (2010, 9). Cultural symbols and Persian poetry not only work to express Iranians’ experiences of displacement, but also to manage their nostalgic feelings of being far away from their homeland. The cultural elements and symbols can also allow them to feel close to their homeland despite being away from it. In addition, such elements help them maintain their Iranian identity. For Iranians in diaspora, Persian poetry may work as a way to either express their personal feelings or to find comfort. Aidani’s interviews with Iranian migrants and refugees who tell stories about their displacement and experiences explain how Iranians in Australia try to express their feelings and desires for making cultural connections with Australia as well as making a new home in this place. One of the Iranian participants in his interviews says:

⁵ The Iranian revolution or Islamic revolution refers to the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and its replacement with the Islamic Republic under the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

⁶ Iran-Iraq war was the armed conflict between Iran and Iraq for 8 years (1980-1988). It is believed that about half a million Iraqis and Iranians died during this war.

When I read poetry or listen to our classic music I feel lighter. They, of course, initially remind me of some difficult times but after a while I feel fresher and calmer and for some strange reason I feel that I come out of this feeling of being a stranger. Yes, maybe they take me back deeper to my past and make my present clearer (cited in Aidani 2010, 23).

This participant refers to poetry as a remedy for his discomfort in Australia and as a way to expand his memories of Iran. This participant tells a story that explains his feelings as a migrant or refugee in Australia but at the same time expresses his attachment to Iran. By using cultural motifs, elements, symbols, myths, language and poetry, one can represent emotional responses to displacement as well as cultural attachments to homeland.

Thus, all these theorists discussed so far note that diaspora relates to both the act of dispersal from homeland and being part of a particular ethnic group in the new country. Furthermore, this definition of diaspora links homeland as an original place. People in diaspora may search for their own cultural communities in the new country in order to stay connected to their cultures and keep practicing their languages and traditions. People in diaspora face a new culture and society in the new place that may cause them to feel separated from both the new society and their original homelands. In this situation, these people continue preserving their identities in the new country and reconnecting to their homelands.

Another definition that I consider is Avtar Brah's definition of diaspora as a site. In her book *Cartographies of diaspora*, Brah suggests:

The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings (1996, 5).

Diaspora may refer to traumas, and social and personal experiences of displacement. The experience of displacement can evoke the idea of cultural gaps or separation, but considering the idea of diaspora as the site of a new start can offer new life and new opportunities. Following Brah, I agree that diaspora can be considered as a site for another chance, hope for the future, and the beginning of something new. Diaspora can be then connected to the idea of a place for settlement and a new start; it is a place for migrants, refugees or asylum seekers to build cultural relationships. Although a

migrant can be faced with some difficulties, such as the lack of cultural information and familiarity with the language of the new place, the new country can be a site for exploring new ideas, opportunities and discovering something different. It can open doors to new knowledge, meanings and understandings.

My understanding of diaspora is that it is both a place for a new start, and a place for exploring the experience of displacement. How to explore it depends on where the migrant comes from culturally, and what cultural elements or symbols can assist the migrant in understanding the new place and the new changes. I suggest that speaking of diaspora can evoke the idea of cultural differences, such as the differences that I personally see between Iranian culture and Australian culture. That said, I do not aim to analyse the differences between these two cultures. Rather, I look at the impact of recognising or feeling the differences between these two cultures on my everyday life and art practice.

In her book *Diaspora, memory, and identity: a search for home*, author Vijay Agnew considers the emotional aspects of cultural differences. She claims, “cultural differences, or the sense of being an outsider or a foreigner, can make the individual feel alienated and heighten feeling of sadness, nostalgia, and create a longing for home” (2005, 42). The emotional impact, on the migrant or the individual, of cultural differences such as feeling strange and isolated or nostalgic can cause personal and emotional concerns in the new country. The sense of being an outsider, a stranger or a foreigner might never leave the migrant and her/his life in diaspora. The differences between the culture that one comes from and the culture based on the new society can have a significant emotional impact on the migrant, which might in turn cause the migrant get more isolated or nostalgic. The more isolated or nostalgic the migrant feels, the more s/he might uphold practicing the original culture.

For me, speaking Persian or holding on to specific cultural practices and ethics in everyday life mean preserving my identity and maintaining my life in Australia. These ways of upholding identity and culture highlight to me the differences between the two cultures, which consequently evoke my emotions and feelings about my cultural relationships in Australia. Yet, finding a way to make cultural communication and relationships in the new place is related to how we appreciate and use our cultural backgrounds. In other words, the way we grasp the new life and opportunities in the new place relies on appreciating and practicing our cultures in the new place. This reminds me of a quote by American poet Sylva Gaboudikian who says “diaspora is a

place where homeland spills its blessed fruit to nourish foreign soils” (cited in Levy and Weingrod 2005, 5).

In considering the relationship between diaspora and art, I look at artworks that are based on a dialogue between two different cultures or representations of personal perceptions and experiences of displacement. I look at the idea of diasporic art that Sieglinde Lemke considers as a “dialogue and as a form of self-expression” or expression of feelings, thoughts and ideas in relation to the new life and experience of displacement (2008, 124).

According to Lemke, “diasporic art depicts the act or consequences of either forced or voluntary dispersal, and sometimes it expresses a longing for a home” (2008, 123). Diasporic art uncovers the consequences of dispersal and migration, and perhaps a desire or longing for a home. Diasporic art is infused with diasporic experiences, and can have a narrative style that tells stories about personal life, or social and cultural experiences, or an understanding of the new culture. It can even have layers of meanings and messages about the artist’s identity and cultural background, or even cultural differences. At the same time, diasporic art can be an exploration of mixing cultures, or multicultural relationships between different cultures.

Experiences such as migration and exile can shape the dialogue with the new culture, and evoke feelings of the new place which might lead the artists to explore their expressions of such experiences. As the artist Greg Leong in his paper “Remembering Chinese” states, “Diaspora, for most immigrant artists, is necessarily a site of hybridity because there is a constant dialogue between what we might consider the ‘original homeland’ and the ‘adopted homeland’” (2000, 60). I think that migrant artists explore a dialogue that can reflect the artist’s interpretation of cultural relationships or exchange, and the personal and emotional approach to the new changes or understanding of the new country. Thus, diasporic art can be a dialogue between two different cultures; a dialogue about the experiences in the new country and memories of the original homeland. It reflects the social and personal experiences and can reveal a cultural dialogue that speaks of a symbolic process of cultural exchange.

In relation to the idea of diasporic art as a form of expressing feelings, thoughts and ideas, Lemke suggests that “diasporic art tends to be figurative. Even in

its most obscure renderings, there is a visible interest in such topics as exile, memory, migration and the psycho-social conditions of diasporic life” (Lemke 2008, 140). Diasporic art can reflect the personal feelings and expressions of life in diaspora. In other words, diasporic art as a form of self-expression can speak of the emotional impacts of diaspora. What is represented in diasporic art is neither related to the original homeland nor the new place, rather it can be an expression of personal conditions and feelings of the new life in diaspora.

The works of Iranian artists Abbas Mehran and Hossein Valamanesh consider the relationship between place, Iranian identity and personal experiences of living in Australia. Both artists visualise a place that has personal and cultural meanings. In his works, Mehran represents images of a place that has two different cultural elements and symbols, while Valamanesh explores the relationship between identity and personal experiences in the new country.

Mehran, who migrated to Australia in 1993, has created two works that echo ideas about mixing cultures and multicultural relationships between differing cultural symbols and elements. He tells stories of what multicultural land could look like but what he depicts is a mythical or imaginary place rather than an existing place.

Landscape 2 (2002) (figure 1.1) and *On guard* (2003) (figure 1.2) both show a Persian carpet filled with Australian animals and flora. In the traditional design of Persian carpets, elements and symbols are repeated symmetrically around what is depicted in the centre. And, like Persian carpets, what is in the centre of Mehran’s paintings is the fundamental concept of his story. In the centre of his paintings is the image of a garden or a paradise around which Mehran paints the animals and flora symmetrically, in order to complete his image of a Persian carpet. The world or the garden in *Landscape 2* does not exist in reality. *On guard* shows how the artist attempts to represent his Iranian identity by taking some cultural symbols and elements and adopting a new identity in diaspora. This work can also reflect the artist’s ideas about adaptation and multiculturalism. The artist explores such ideas to help himself understand where he is and how he can settle in the new place. Mehran’s works reflect his viewpoint of a place that has multiple layers of information and images, and his understanding of the new place. His artworks can depict either a perfect land of multiculturalism, or a land of the artist’s imagination associated with history and culture of both Iran and Australia.



Figure 1.1. Abbas Mehran, 2002,
Landscape 2, 105 x 148 cm.



Figure 1.2. Abbas Mehran, 2003, *On guard*,
142 x 102 cm

Iranian artist Hossein Valamanesh created two works called *Watch your step* (1987) (figure 1.3) and *Recent arrival* (1988) (figure 1.4) after he migrated to Australia in 1973. In *Watch your step*, the artist represents part of a building or a house with stairs. There is no element nor sign of what and where this selected part of a place is, nor is there any human presence. The stairs are lit and there is a black wall or a big black hole at the end of where the steps finish or where perhaps something starts. *Watch your step* is a simple drawing but it can echo the artist's personal approaches to the new place and his negotiation and transformation of its challenges. I interpret this work as the artist's representation of a new start, a new beginning in the new place with a sense of either hesitation or curiosity.

In Valamanesh's work, the stairs may symbolically refer to connecting two places. Reading the title that sounds like a warning and looking at the work, I can imagine a person is standing and observing the stairs as well as thinking how to approach them. Only the shadow of a person appears in *Recent arrival*, which also has an image of stairs and an entrance to a dark place. The concentrated light shows the shadow starting to go up the stairs. The relationships between the title, the shadow and the stairs in *Recent arrival* all work together to reflect the complexities between the new arrival's identity and the new place. The shadow and stairs represent the idea of stepping forward to discover the new place. By showing the stairs and the shadow, Valamanesh symbolises both metaphorical and physical journeys in his works. These

two works can be interpreted as visual representations of the artist's feelings of his journey and new life in Australia, as well as expressions of his approach to the new changes in his life.



Figure 1.3. Hossein Valamanesh, 1987,
Watch your step, 76 x 56.5 cm.



Figure 1.4. Hossein Valamanesh, 1988,
Recent arrival, 1988, 76.4 x 56.8 cm.

My understanding of diaspora relates to my life in Australia. After 19 years living here, I still feel uncertainty about how long I will live in Australia. For this reason, I often see myself as a traveller and I am not sure about my destination. A common definition of a traveller is that s/he knows the journey starts from A and ends in B, and travelling means moving or going from A to B, from one place to another. The traveller plans to travel on a journey, and also has in the mind that s/he will return within a certain period of time. By contrast, the migrant departs from A and arrives in B not knowing the length of stay in B or the time before returning to A.

In 2012, I made the work *Of what sort is this traveller* (figure 1.5) in order to explore the relationship between life in diaspora and my experiences. The title of this work comes from Mahmoud Shabestari's book called *The secret rose garden*, "a book of poems written in response to seventeen queries concerning Sufi metaphysics posed to the Sufi literati of Tabriz by Rukh Al Din Amir Husayn Harawi (d. 1318)"

(Mahmoud Shabestari 2018, para. 1). In this work, I chose one of Harawi's questions about the traveller, journey and wayfarer and handwrote *mosafer chon bovad rahro kodam ast* (who is traveller and who is wayfarer), using one single blue colour. As I reached the end of the question, the colour faded, and I restarted the same text.

My aim of using this poetic question was to explore the idea of traveller and journey in relation to my experience as a migrant. By concentrating on my writing, reciting the words, and repeating the question, I aimed to visually explore my feelings and experiences, and question whether my life in Australia related to either idea of temporality or continuity. During the making of this work, I asked myself whether I see myself in Australia for a short time. If so, there would be another place to go or to return to. In this case, I could be a traveller who thinks of possibilities for finding another place or returning to my homeland. However, if I see the constancy of my life here, there would be ongoing explorations and challenges that can be cultural, social and personal. This reflects the idea of discovering of my personal journey through my everyday life.



Figure 1.5. Layli Rakhsha, *Of what sort is this traveller*, 2012, 77 x 64 cm.

Mosafer, salek, khaneh (figure 1.6) is an ongoing project that I started in 2012. This work is divided into three parts and consists of handwriting a single word with ink on paper. I start with writing *Mosafer* (traveller), then *Salek* (wayfarer) and finally *Khaneh* (home). I also start writing from the centre. This orderly constructed writing is continually repeated. This work is a symbol of my journey in diaspora and how I visualise the emotional and physical impacts of my experience of migration and displacement on my everyday life. The feelings that I have while working on this project in my studio give me some confidence, encouragement, imaginative desire for home, and aspiration and passion for the future.

I occasionally feel that I am in Australia temporarily or for a specific period of time, which causes me to think of return. Thinking of return becomes a desire for home. This desire can, in turn, create a symbolic or metaphorical journey. There are no boundaries or borders in this journey. At the same time, thinking of return may develop the idea of temporarily being in the new place, searching for a continuity in terms of home and having a sense of being a stranger in diaspora. In this case, living in diaspora can become more highlighted in my migrant's life. Life in diaspora is neither temporary nor permanent; it seems to offer possibilities and opportunities, or endless doors and windows that get opened one after each other.

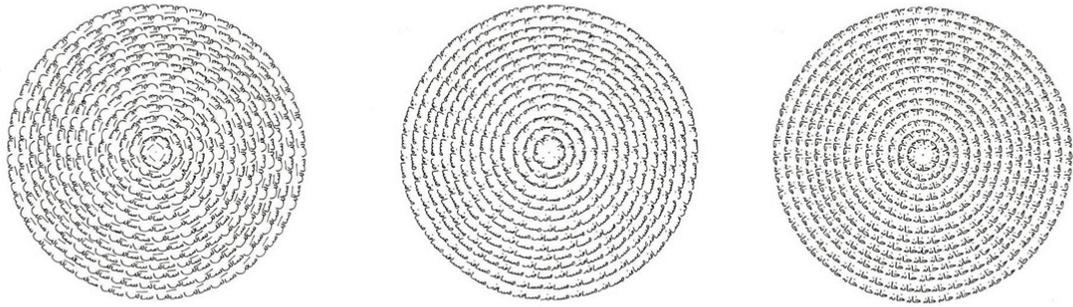


Figure 1.6. Layli Rakhsha, since 2012, ongoing project, *Mosafer, salek, khaneh* (traveller, wayfarer, home), 21 x 13.3 cm each.

Chapter 2⁷

A journey toward home

نشانی

"خانه دوست کجاست؟" در فلق بود که پرسید سوار.
آسمان مکثی کرد.
رهگذر شاخه نوری که به لب داشت به تاریکی شن‌ها بخشید
و به انگشت نشان داد سپیداری و گفت:

"نرسیده به درخت،
کوچه باغی است که از خواب خدا سبزتر است
و در آن عشق به اندازه پرهایی صداقت آبی است
می‌روی تا ته آن کوچه که از پشت بلوغ، سر به در می‌آرد،
پس به سمت گل تنهایی می‌پیچی،
دو قدم مانده به گل،
پای فواره جاوید اساطیر زمین می‌مانی
و تو را ترسی شفاف فرا می‌گیرد.
در صمیمیت سیال فضا، خش‌خشی می‌شنوی:
کودکی می‌بینی
رفته از کاج بلندی بالا، جوجه بردارد از لانه نور
و از او می‌پرسی
خانه دوست کجاست."

(Sepehri 2004)

Address

"Where is the friend's house?" asked the horseman just at dawn.

The Heavens paused.

A wayfarer took the bright branch from his lips,

conferred it on the darkness of the sands,

pointed with his finger to a poplar tree and said,

"Just before that tree

there is a garden path greener than God's dreams.

In it there is love as wide as the blue wings of true friendship.

⁷ Parts of this chapter were published in Layli Rakhsha, "Nostalgia: memories of the past, longing for the future", *Indian Ocean futures: communities, sustainability and security*, edited by Thor Kerr and John Stephens, 34-49, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

You go on to the end of the path that takes up again
just beyond maturity,
then turn toward the flower of loneliness.
Two steps before the flower,
stop at the eternal fountain of earthly myth.
There a transparent terror will seize you,
and in the sincerity of the streaming heavens
you will hear a rustling.
High up in a pine tree,
you will see a child
who will lift a chick out of a nest of light.
Ask him,
‘Where is the friend's house?’”

(Translated by Jerome W. Clinton)

My aim here is not to analyse Sohrab Sepehri’s poem but rather to explore how the idea of home is shaped in relation to the experience of migration and living in diaspora, and how home can be visualised in diaspora. In this chapter, my primary emphasis and analysis are on the representations of home in the artworks of Hossein Valamanesh, an Iranian artist living and working in Australia since 1973. By analysing particular works – *Longing belonging* (1997), *Homa* (2000), *Dwelling* (1980) and *Shade of green* (2010) – I focus my discussion on aspects of home, specifically the physical home and imaginary home, associated with memory and imagination. In so doing, I argue that as an Iranian-Australian artist Valamanesh creates images of home that are shaped by his emotional responses to memories of his homeland and his experiences of living in Australia.

As part of my PhD research, I interviewed Hossein Valamanesh in his studio in 2011. Valamanesh was born in Iran in 1949 and migrated to Australia in 1973. His art

is about the relationship between his Persian culture and identity and his experiences of a new place. Valamanesh is interested in Persian poetry, which informs his artwork and appears as both subject and title in most of his works. Since his arrival in Australia, Valamanesh has made his connection with the place, and found Australian Aboriginal culture as a rich and inspiring source for developing his artistic ideas. In some of his early works, the influence of Aboriginal art and culture is apparent. My aim in interviewing Valamanesh was to discuss what his idea of home is, how he visualises home in Australia, and whether he has represented the image of home in his works since he migrated to this country. I looked at numerous works in his house and studio and I saw that each work related to a personal story, a memory of the past, or an experience linked to his homeland. Single words such as *aazadi* (freedom), *heech* (nothing) or *eshg* (love), or simply a line of a Persian poem or idiom that has been used as a response to an emotion, are visual and cultural sources for Valamanesh. In his works, Valamanesh often employs or includes objects such as a hat, a walking stick, or a pair of shoes that have symbolic meanings in Persian culture and within Sufism. These objects enable him to explore the themes of personal identity, travel, journey and displacement.

After visiting Valamanesh in Adelaide, my second trip was to Melbourne to meet and interview Mammad Aidani. Aidani was born in Iran and he lives and works as an Iranian-Australian author, researcher, poet and playwright in Melbourne. He left Iran for Italy at the age of 20 and decided not to go back to Iran when the Iran-Iraq war started in 1980. After three years living in Italy, Aidani migrated to Australia to continue his studies. I found him very much attached to his memories of Iran. When he left Iran, writing became more important for him, and he started focusing on writing in the early 1990s.

I do not aim to analyse the works of Mammad Aidani in this chapter. Rather, I use parts of our conversations about home and his experience of displacement in order to develop and extend my discussions on the idea and image of home. Therefore, I will often refer to his suggestions and statements on home and migration when discussing aspects of home, specifically the physical home and imaginary home.

In their book, *Home*, the authors Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling consider the physical home as a place where we live and our everyday practices and productions

occur. They discuss home as a house that offers us shelter, but also it is a place that speaks of our emotions and feelings. As Blunt and Dowling claim, “home is a place that contains ‘material objects’; and home is ‘material dwelling’ but at the same time, home is a place where personal and social meaning are grounded” (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 22). Physical home is attached to an architectural structure; it is a physical place that describes both dwelling and construction. Physical home means a place where domestic work and household jobs occur. It is where we live, cook and clean, and look after our everyday household. Physical home is related to what we require for both everyday practices and social relations. Besides providing comfort, care and shelter, physical home is defined through our feelings, what we create and make through everyday practices. It can be defined by everyday life experiences and feelings.

In his book *The principles of art*, the philosopher and historian Robert George Collingwood refers to feeling as two kinds of experience. He suggests, “Feeling that is related to sensation; we say hot and cold, hard and soft. Secondly, we speak of feeling pleasure or pain, anger, fear, and so forth that are not about sensation. Any of these feelings speak of emotion” (1938, 160). Feeling means both sensate and emotional responses to general or special activities and experiences. Emotion can be defined as an impact of something that we feel, experience, or have experienced. The feelings that speak of our emotions and lived experiences can stay with us longer and may have longer influence than sensational feelings. The author Kate Gordon also suggests, “Feeling is the experience of being *for* something or *against* something. Sometimes these experiences are called states of pleasantness and unpleasantness with reference to objects” (Gordon 2010, 122, original italics). According to Gordon, feelings explain how the emotional conditions of certain experiences are shaped. Thus, feelings can subjectively describe the experiences which may produce changes in our lives.

In the relationship between home, feelings and experiences, home is not only about a dwelling or a building, but also it is a place where we speak of our experiences and we express our personalities and feelings. This alludes to what the Blunt and Dowling suggest, namely, home is “both a place and set of feelings, ... and it is imbued with feelings” (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 22).

In relation to feelings, home and migration, Aidani suggests:

In the Iranians' search for a home, Persian music, poetry and literature functions as cultural anchors, not only in the romantic nostalgia of lived emotions and experiences but also in memory and collective experience. It is through this poetry, music and literature that they can be 'at home' (2010, 22).

In addition to our need for a physical home, we want to have a place to feel at home and to make a home. Making home means finding a place in which everyday activities and experiences are shaped by an individual's engagement with her or his dwelling and social, emotional and cultural relationships.

Many Iranian migrants rely on Persian poetry, literature and even Persian music to provide comfort and emotional support. Particular Persian music and poetry evoke collective experiences and memories of the past that may help them to feel at home outside Iran. Feeling at home depends on our personalities and our life stories and experiences. However, some cultural elements such as poetry and music may help Iranian migrants stay connected to their own culture and make the new place meaningful. Feeling at home relates to our emotions towards our personal and social experiences. It relates to how we ground our feelings and desires in a particular place, but also it means searching for something that is missing or lost. In considering Blunt and Dowling's discussions of home and through my own experience, I have come to understand a particular kind of loss in relation to home that is perhaps particular to Iranian culture. For example, in my discussions with Valamanesh he mentioned he felt something missing when he arrived, and Aidani still feels he has lost something. I felt same way and I still feel there is something missing in my life here.

Responding to my question about his feelings about Iran and making home in Australia, Valamanesh said, "I felt missing something when I arrived in Australia. I felt nostalgic about the time and the past. That was the time I wanted to make a home" (Valamanesh, personal communication, September 24, 2011). Valamanesh started looking at nature near Adelaide where he has lived and worked since 1974-75. He wanted to get close to nature and be inspired by the land and what it offers him. Going to the desert, seeing its vastness and feeling a sense of freedom allowed him to explore his feelings as well as make social and cultural relationships in the new place.

I asked Valamanesh how he describes a physical home and what physical home means to him. He said, "my image of a physical home is the kind of house with big courtyard and a little blue pool in the middle of courtyard in Iran" (Valamanesh, personal communication, September 24, 2011). Valamanesh refers to his culture and

traditional houses in Iran in order to reflect his feelings and attachments to some of the places in Iran. The Persian garden is a place with a particular design and architecture with an emphasis on either structure or nature, and attempts to connect the indoors with the outdoors. I could see the influence of Persian gardens in Valamanesh's garden that separates as well as connects the studio and residential parts of his house in Adelaide. The artist believes that "physicality of being somewhere feels connected to the place but some people might not feel like that. I feel comfortable in Australia, because of not only my house and physical place where I am, but also anywhere I feel the earth, I can be at home. The important thing for migrant people is to feel comfortable, otherwise they will be restless" (Valamanesh, personal communication, September 24, 2011).

For Valamanesh, physical home is the house he lives in, where he is happy and comfortable. However, he considers "this physical home is secondary and we need an other home, which is something personal and private. It is more related to mental and emotional needs than a physical place. Other home is shaped by personal experiences of everyday life and learning about who we are. It can be about the individual's hope to achieve something more meaningful in one's life" (Valamanesh, personal communication, September 24, 2011). Considering the idea of other home as something personal and private alludes to the idea of personal and philosophical achievement in the understanding of self. The artist says, "other home is within you and finding yourself. Sometimes it is distressing or uncomfortable in journeying towards this home. It throws out certain feelings that you realise you are going home and you need to let go all the homes, all the attachments you have in life" (Valamanesh, personal communication, September 24, 2011). Valamanesh's definition of other home also resonates as a metaphysical aspect of life, although he simply refers to other home as discovering and understanding who we are, and as achieving an understanding that gives us a kind of freedom and comfort. Other home is not about a physical place, materials and belongings; it can be described as a journey toward finding ourselves. Other home exists in the individual and it can be related to an individual's personal and emotional experiences of life. It is connected to an inner space rather than a specific place. Valamanesh's other home reflects his personal life, feelings and hopes. His physical home, on the other hand, defines his relation to materials, settings and belongings in terms of where he lives.

Like Valamanesh, for Mammad Aidani a physical home is a house and

moreover an actual one that he lost in Khorramshahr – the city where he was born and which was one of the primary frontlines during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

Aidani's experience of war contributes to his sense of home. He clarifies that he has two pains. One is that he is homeless because the war took his home and all his belongings. His other pain is that he has lost his place where he could see friends, trees, river, streets and his childhood (Aidani, personal communication, September 26, 2011). According to Aidani, home is a lost home and his search for home is shaped by memories of his childhood. For him, home means his emotional attachments to his homeland. He describes his feelings about home as loss of both physical home and feeling at home. Aidani feels homeless because of losing his childhood house during the war. Consequently, he has a desire for a home because he has lost his social and emotional connections and experiences.

My experience and memory of the war are different to Aidani's experience. I was a child and enjoying my days of childhood without considering the impact of war in my life. Living in Tehran, my family and I were in a better situation than other people in cities like Khorramshahr during the war. It may not be fair and rational to say this but life during the war was great for me as a child and left me with joyful memories. The schools were closed most of the time, and what I remember from the period of the war are the days of living and playing with the rest of the family and close relatives in my grandmother's house as a way to emotionally support and give comfort to each other. We were eating together, living together, listening to Persian music, playing with the kids of relatives, and listening to the elders' stories. Those days at my grandmother's house have left me with good memories from the period of war. While I do not have any pain or bad memories from that time, I agree with Aidani that as Iranian migrants in Australia, we share social and cultural relations, language, literature, and Persian music to speak about our memories and our ideas and feelings of/for a home.

Everything Aidani says about his idea of home relates to his memories of Iran. Memories and stories of Khorramshahr reflect a sense of home for Aidani. Yet, he has never gone back to Iran. Aidani's memories of Iran play a significant role in shaping his ideas and the process of discovering himself in Australia. Aidani says that he experienced racism when he arrived in Australia, and that was the time that he questioned himself (Aidani, personal communication, September 26, 2011). The unpleasant experience of racism raised questions for him about his identity and

whether he could socially stop being a stranger and feel comfortable in the new place. Remembering and speaking of his past and his experiences in Australia have helped Aidani heal his soul.

For some migrants like Aidani, remembering the past can be like giving self-comfort in order to survive and manage the hard times and situations as a new arrival in the new place. Recalling one's childhood may not only help keep the migrant mentally and emotionally connected to homeland, but also give one pleasant feelings in the new place. Remembering the past and childhood experiences can help the migrant to re-discover herself/ himself in a new life in the new place. The American author and social activist bell hooks speaks of her connection to Kentucky where she was born, and describes seeing Kentucky as her home and remembering her early childhood as finding herself. hooks suggests:

Like many writers, who have stayed away from their native place, the condition of feeling split was damaging, caused a breaking down of the spirit. Healing the spirit was like remembering me, taking the bits and pieces of my life and putting them together again. In remembering my childhood and writing about my early life I was mapping the territory, discovering myself and finding homeplace – seeing clearly that Kentucky was my fate (2009, 52)

bell hooks refers to mostly migrant writers and her personal experiences of leaving her native place and migrating in order to suggest finding the self is like finding a home and discovering one's future in the new place. The imagination links a physical home in the new place with the past or childhood memories from the native place.

My definition of imaginary home is related to both imagination and memory. It can be also defined in relation to the image and idea of a place that is away from where the migrants now live. Imaginary home is neither home nor homeland; it can be the image of an emotional response to memories of homeland, as well as reflect what we imagine and what we desire. While it only exists in the mind, this home is shaped by images and memories of a particular place.

Our ideas and what we think about things are shaped by what we imagine about things that are unapproachable. In her book *Imagination*, Mary Warnock describes the philosopher David Hume's definition of imagination. She explains, "Hume regards imagination as playing a crucial role in our thinking, and imagination creates ideas and ability to think about things in their absence" (1976, 15). According to Warnock,

Hume “distinguishes between memory and imagination in relation to ideas. Ideas presented by memory are much more lively than those presented by imagination” (Warnock 1976, 15). Although Hume differentiates imagination and memory, both imagination and memory shape and represent our ideas. Ideas presented in relation to imagination can merely be about something that does not exist or something that is absent, whereas ideas presented in relation to memory seem to be more energetic, more present and personal. In addition, Warnock suggests, “Imagination is characterized as ‘shaping’, and has two functions which go together; to shape by means of an *inner* power, and to allow us to feel” (1976, 78, original italics). Imagination shapes an inner power that lets us connect to things and then feel. Inner power shapes what we see into something else, into what we think, feel and know about things.

Images shaped by imagination are related to both what we have seen and experienced and what we have not seen or experienced before. In his book *Art and imagination: a study in the philosophy of mind*, the philosopher Roger Scruton claims

Imagination may involve imagery, and imagery is not *just* a kind of thought. Imagery relates to two kinds of images. One kind is about images that relates to what has been seen (imagery as memory), and the other kind is about images that reflect images of something that has never been experienced (imagery as part of imagination) (1974, 104, original italics).

Imagination is the process of shaping images. It creates images that can be expressions of our thoughts, memories, and even hopes. According to the philosopher Richard Eldridge, imagination “can be used to describe a process, ... in which an image is shaped; it is a ‘creative process’ that creativity and ‘expression’ occur” (2003b, 122). My imagination about ideas of home nourishes my creativity. Thus, my imagination can be a process of creating an image, which reflects my thoughts, ideas, and feelings. The image that I create is an impression of something remembered, something from inside, or a thought, or an idea. This image also relates to my knowledge and perception, to my understanding and memories of something. In other words, imagination makes images that associate thoughts, feelings, experiences and memories. There can be a conceptual and even subjective relationship between memory and imagination that is reflected in ideas. My ideas of home, how I visualise

a home, and where I search for a home in Australia has been shaped by my memories of the past, my experiences in the present and my imagination about the future.

Memory is about personal history and life stories, and speaks of ideas and experiences that regard the past. In her book *Memory*, the author Anne Whitehead claims, “Memory is bound to identity and memory alludes to the past as well as reviving the past” (2009, 7). Memories are individually formed by what happened in the past and what is brought to the present. Whitehead also talks about the relationship between memory and imagination: “Both memory and imagination deal with the absent” (2009, 18). Memory and imagination not only deal with ideas, they also rely on feelings and emotions in the process of creativity and making ideas.

Similar to Whitehead’s idea that memory revives the past, the curator and editor Christine Clark suggests, “Memory is normally understood as a recollection of the past” (2005, 5). We continually recall our memories of the past in order to speak of how our ideas and personalities have been shaped and what we imagine in the present. Memory links to both the past and the present. Memory and imagination are companions in shaping ideas and creativity.

Returning to the idea of imaginary home and its relation to imagination and memory, I take imaginary home as an image of my emotional response to displacement and migration in diaspora. In her book *Diaspora, memory and identity: a search for home*, Vijay Agnew considers that memories connect the past and the present. As she suggests, “the individual living in diaspora experiences a dynamic tension everyday between living ‘here’ and remembering ‘there’, between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home” (2005, 4). Thus, the experience of diaspora has both physical and emotional impacts on the individual. Moreover, this experience of diaspora stretches memories and imaginations between ‘here’ and ‘there’. As Agnew claims, “memories ignite our imaginations and enable us to create our recollections of home as a heaven filled with nostalgia, longing and desire” (2005, 10). Memories of ‘there’ and imaginations of ‘here’ make the migrant emotional and nostalgic for something that is absent. Imaginary home is an image of longing and love of something in the past. It is an image of a place that is nourished and provoked by memories. Imaginary home is indirectly related to a place that can be defined based

on physical, mental and emotional experiences such as displacement, longing, pleasure, nostalgia, or by a sound, a view, or even a smell.

For me, as a migrant, imaginary home can be shaped by the remembrance of homeland. A hot, sunny and quiet afternoon in my house in Perth reminds me of a quiet and hot day in my house in Tehran while my mum and grandmother were having an afternoon nap, and I was reading a book or drawing. The memory of the silence of that afternoon in Tehran exists in my present. It is becoming a cultural motif or symbol for my creativity, manifesting as a visualisation of my imaginary home in Australia. My personal experiences of migration and living here suggest to me that my idea of home relates to both my memories of Iran and my imagination of something in the future in Australia. Imaginary home is a compound of both memory and imagination. It reflects images that have an aura of a physical home that provokes emotions. An imaginary home is an impression of a desired place; it is a place that I may find at the end of a path; a place that I may find in a photograph of my grandmother and myself when I was a child.

Longing belonging (1997) (figures 2.1 and 2.2), which is an image of a fire burning on a Persian carpet, is a good visual example of Valamanesh's idea of a physical home. In this work, Valamanesh puts a Persian carpet in the Australian bush in an open and clear space surrounded by eucalyptus trees. The artist sets a fire in the middle of the carpet. Fire and carpet are two elements that imply dwelling, making a place comfortable and private. The fire as a source of light is a symbol of purity and life. Here, the carpet references Persian culture and history, and refers to temporary settlement and travelling associated with Persian nomadic tribes. As the author Mary Knights and Ian North in *Hossein Valamanesh: out of nothingness* states, "*Longing belonging* is a key artwork in Valamanesh's oeuvre which is formed by his Iranian heritage, Australian landscape and culture, relationships and journeys" (Knights and North 2011, 76). Valamanesh not only represents and acknowledges Persian culture and tradition in this work, he also expresses and explores his desire for a symbolic relationship between his Iranian culture and tradition and the Australian landscape. Rather than burning the carpet or destroying his belongings, the artist is depicting his search for new relationships. He considers himself as a new arrival who carries a carpet as one of his belongings for making a home in the new place. This work alludes to displacement, distinctive identity, cultural exchange, and settling into the

new place. As Knights and North propose, “*Longing belonging* refers to notions of home as a place of refuge and comfort rather than a permanent dwelling or physical space, it hints that belonging is an evolving psychological and emotional state” (2011, 78). This work represents feelings such as nostalgia, love, a passion for life, and desire for making a home. It can be also said that *Longing belonging* reflects nostalgia and symbolises a longing for home, for a sense of intimacy with not only home but also with the new place; for the past and the future.

Longing belonging also represents a symbolic image of cultural connection and the artist’s poetic dialogue between two cultures. Curator Rachel Kent states, “it would be wrong to suggest that Valamanesh’s art is shadowed by nostalgia for the past, or shaped by the desire to reconstitute his previous life in a new country. Rather, it brings together the qualities and experiences of each place, establishing reconciliation between them” (2002, n.p.). *Longing belonging* reveals Valamanesh’s deep feeling and desire for narrating stories about his longing for a metaphysical home as a place of refuge and comfort. By placing the Persian carpet in a clear part of the Australian bush, Valamanesh represents the idea of adapting the new place as home and taking it as a place for creating new forms of attachment. The rapprochement between two places, accompanied by Valamanesh’s stories, speaks of his passion and love, his “individual time and journey” and attachment to certain memories and experiences that mostly happened to him in Iran (Boym 2001, xv). While each work is related to Valamanesh’s story, memory of the past, or experience linked to his homeland, nostalgia for Iran is not the subject matter of his work. Yet, when he speaks about the work and the specific memories or experiences in the past, his stories and feelings towards the past generate and reflect nostalgia as well as his longing for the future. *Longing belonging* is an image of the future. It is an expression of solidarity and exchange in the new society, and the artist’s symbolic and ideal home on the earth.

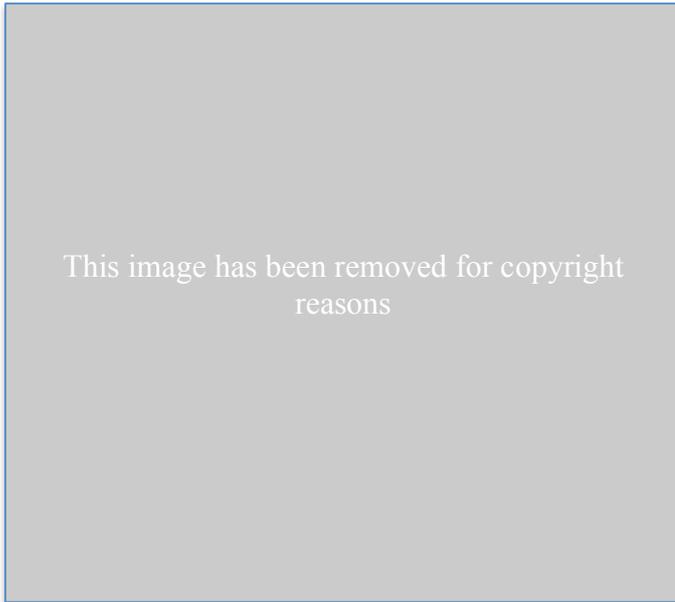


Figure 2.1. Hossein Valamanesh, 1997, *Longing belonging*, 215 x 305 cm

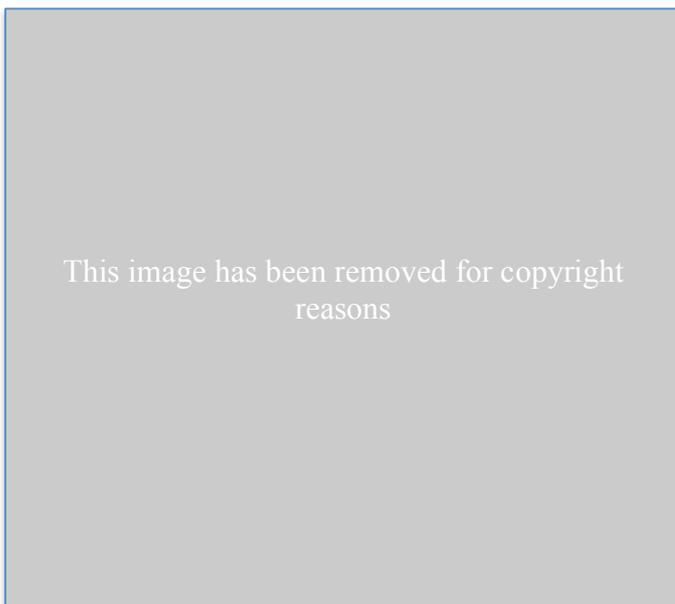


Figure 2.2. Hossein Valamanesh, 1997, *Longing belonging*, 215 x 305 cm.

Home of mad butterflies (1996) (figure 2.3) is an example of the connection between Valamanesh's idea of 'other home', his personality and his culture. In this work, Valamanesh uses two ladders, one taller than the other, leaning against the wall. His own traditional handmade Persian shoes are pointed towards the wall and lines of Rumi's poetry are handwritten horizontally on the wall next to the ladders. The shoes suggest a human presence, and perhaps imply that the person has already climbed up the ladders, moving beyond and out of reach. Valamanesh uses particular lines of

Rumi's poetry, which refer to a search for the philosophy of life, our present, and the acknowledgment of the self. The combination of the ladder, with the shoes and the poems, which are about metaphysical existence, alludes to the artist's search for his other home. Valamanesh's definition of other home is related to getting close to yourself, and can be explored through discovering life and self. Shoes and ladders are objects that incite and narrate the artist's expression of discovering and exploring other home, which resonate with Susan Stewart's idea that objects "remain behind and before the experience of other home" (1993, 23). This work is Valamanesh's expression of the possibility of moving onward and finding the home in which he feels comfortable.

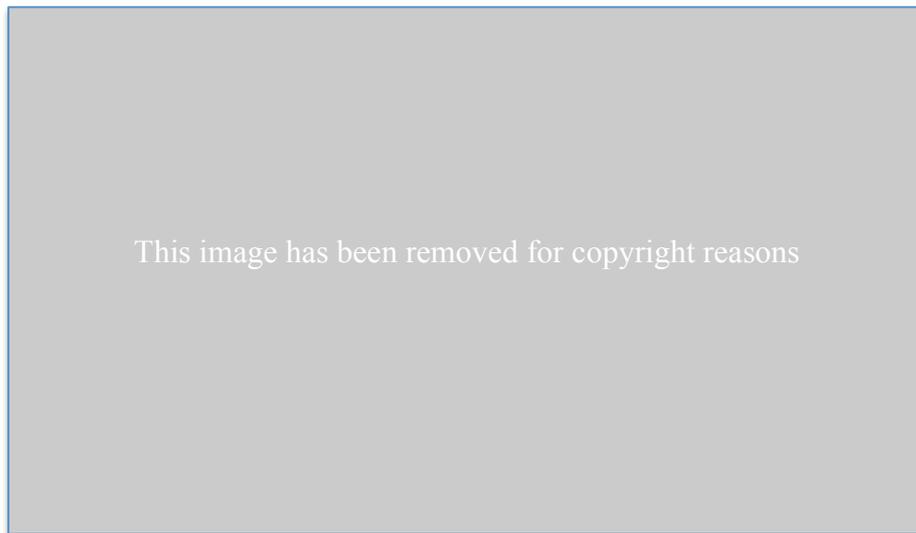


Figure 2.3. Hossein Valamanesh, 1996, *Home of mad butterflies*, dimensions variable.

Big love (2009a) (figure 2.4) is the manifestation of both feeling at home and the idea of home, that is an image of imaginary home. It is a representation of personal experience and home as well as a celebration of a special memory of the homeland. The aura of home is felt in this work whereby Valamanesh uses saffron to write the word *eshg* (love) in Farsi several times. This work represents feelings such as love and a passion for life associated with the homeland. The work *Big love* reminds me of glorious memories and experiences that I had before I came to Australia. As an Iranian looking at this work, I can feel and smell home, and visualise every single step walking in places where I experienced love and had pleasant

moments in Iran. *Big love* provokes my imagination and emotion so much so that it allows me to explore my personal and emotional attachments to homeland.



Figure 2.4. Hossein Valamanesh, 2009, *Big love*, 150 x 150 cm.

Similar to the artwork *Big love*, *Homa* (Valamanesh 2000) (figure 2.5) does not directly speak of imaginary home but it is an example of the relationship between imagination and memory, and how an imaginary home can be an image of emotional responses to memories of homeland. *Homa* not only speaks of the artist's memory, but also it reflects something imaginary and mythical. In this artwork, I see an image of Valamanesh's memory, which in turn takes my imagination flying. In Persian literature and Iranian legends, Homa is a female name which refers to a mythical bird that is said to never stop flying. The Homa bird is a conceptual motif in some Sufi poetry. The Homa bird lives its life flying high above the earth, never landing on the ground. Hearing and reading the word 'Homa' strongly evokes in my imagination a lively absence and an ongoing energetic movement in the present. *Homa* is a visualisation of memory and imagination; it poetically speaks of an absence and the presence of memory. The conceptual and poetic connections between the title of the work, the photograph and the braided palm leaf all work together to narrate cultural and personal stories of both homeland and the new place.

Homa represents a poetic image of memory; it speaks of unfolding personal memories and visualising these memories in the present. It also narrates Valamanesh's identity, his memories of his grandmother and his childhood in Iran. This work reflects his nostalgia for the past, even the separation from his homeland. Valamanesh imagines his grandmother, and remembers her plaiting her hair. He uses

a photo of his grandmother whose name was Homa, and a plaited palm leaf as a symbol of her braided hair. The braided hair completes the photograph. At the same time it tells the artist's story of watching his grandmother plaiting her hair.

Looking at this work, I can imagine my own childhood. I can imagine my grandmother's house where I used to play and feel loved. My childhood memories remind me of physical places in which my experiences and memories were shaped in Iran in the past.



Figure 2.5. Hossein Valamanesh, 2000, *Homa*, 180 x 82.3 cm.

Dwelling (Valamanesh 1980) (figure 2.6) is one of the early works Valamanesh made in Australia. In this work, the artist designed a small house in an Adelaide park. He built this house with handmade mud walls and a fretwork window which allows breezes into the small house. The style of Valamanesh's house in *Dwelling* is similar to the traditional style of mud-brick houses in Khash (a small city in Sistan and Baluchestan Province) in Iran. The artist also uses a wooden ladder that leads up to the roof. With these very simple materials and this structure, the artist speaks of a home that is friendly. *Dwelling* is an image of home for Valamanesh who thinks of villages in Iran where it's like the houses are growing from the earth because of the materials used in making those houses. They look earthy and humble houses (Valamanesh, personal communication, September 24, 2011). Building a temporary, small earthy and humble house in a park in Adelaide alludes to an imaginary place that can offer refuge to a migrant, a new arrival or even a stranger. As Jessica

Marshallsay says, “*Dwelling* signifies a place for hospitality, and while affirming Valamanesh’s cultural heritage, evokes a sense of dislocation” (Marshallsay 2011, 81). *Dwelling* not only symbolically shows Valamanesh’s inspiration and attachments to his cultural heritage, but also this work is an image of his imaginary home.



Figure 2.6. Hossein Valamanesh, 1980, *Dwelling*, 700 x 500 x 500 cm.

Shade of green (Valamanesh 2009b) (figure 2.7) was made by Valamanesh as an emotional and sympathetic response to the Iranian presidential election in 2009. In this election, people did not like the large irregularities in the results between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the opposition leader and the leader of the Green Movement Mir Hossein Mousavi. Millions of Iranian people across every city in Iran and around the world protested and asked for their uncounted votes to be considered in this election. Many young people were arrested and killed during this protest.

Shade of green refers to recent political events in Iran. The artist says:

I recall seeing news footage of a large group of women protesting outside the gates of Evin prison in Tehran where many political prisoners were being kept. These women were the mothers of prisoners and they were demanding to visit their children and seeking justice and freedom for them. It is difficult for me to imagine their sorrow and anger. ... *Shade of Green*, is my expression of support and sympathy for the aspirations of the Iranian people (Valamanesh 2010).

Shade of green manifests what home means to Valamanesh when significant issues and stories of the homeland come to his attention and concern in Australia. The artist

feels at home when he speaks about his thoughts of Iran which in turn become sources of ideas for his creativity. What happens in his homeland becomes the influential source and theme for expressing and representing his artistic motifs and his life in Australia. Valamanesh does not represent political issues, nor express a political message in this work. The artist speaks of a poetic silence in his empathy and compassion for the mothers of the prisoners. By creating this work, Valmanaesh feels as though he is in Iran, standing outside the prison and being with the mothers. He visualises desire for freedom, peace, partnership, all coming together in *Shade of green*.

The work is made up of thousands tiny green squares of cotton fabric collaged onto a very large canvas. Valamanesh explains, “in Iran the colour of green has recently come to symbolise an expression of the desire for freedom and democracy. As there are many shades of green there are different ways of expressing this desire” (cited in Knights and North 2011, 91). Each square reflects a story, and all the small squares make a bigger story about the artist’s visual expression of freedom. Valamanesh cunningly uses the green colours as a symbol of unity. It is an expression of hope for those asking for their votes to be included in the 2009 election in Iran, as well as being symbolic of one of the national colours of Australia. He manifests his poetic and artistic responses to both a sorrowful experience and his idea of sharing cultural sources. Looking at *Shade of green*, I can imagine a silent echo of *aazadi* (freedom) in the middle of a eucalypt forest in Australia.

When I look at Valamanesh’s artworks, I feel that I also personally face social and cultural changes in Australia, but the new place is equally a site for exploring and discovering something new and different. The act of remembering Iran and the desire for a home often occur as solutions and remedies for dealing with and facing new social and cultural changes. Memories of Iran create an eternal image of home for me in Australia. This eternal image of home and remembrances of Iran provoked my idea of making a project called *A long letter to home* that I will discuss in the next chapter.

What I have learned from Valamanesh’s artwork is that more than maintaining aspects of the original culture and mixing them with the culture of Australia, the artist speaks of a process of making new meanings; a process of taking new paths and opening doors to a place to be called home, or toward ‘other home’ in the future. In order to think about where my home is located in Australia, I continue reading Sohrab

Sepehri's poem *Neshani* (Address) until I meet a wayfarer who is able to tell me where my home is.



Figure 2.7. Hossein Valamanesh, 2009, *Shade of green*, 192 x 270 cm.

Chapter 3

A long letter to home

In my previous chapters, I focused on the idea of home in relation to diaspora, migration and the experience of displacement. I analysed the artworks of Hossein Valamanesh in order to discuss how the artist reflects his ideas of home in his works. Within the visual analysis, I discovered that Valamanesh's works reflect and represent images of home based on his feelings for and his memories of Iran, as well as his experiences in Australia.

In this chapter, I extend my discussion and suggest that home is defined in relation to a place and, more significantly, it is described in terms of personal experiences, and emotional attachments to a particular place. To develop my idea of home, I discuss *A long letter to home*, a project that incorporates responses to questions about home and homeland through a collaboration with people living in Iran. One of the purposes for making this project was to find out what home means to Iranians who live there and what it means to me to live in Australia, and how my experience of living in Australia has impacted on my idea of home. In other words, I searched for a symbolic clarification and confirmation on the impact of the culture on ideas of home and homeland. The other purpose was to clarify how I could interpret home in relation to my culture and experiences in Australia. I do not consider *A long letter to home* to be a survey, rather this project is a form of visual research that takes into consideration the role of personal and emotional experiences in describing home and homeland.

After collecting and analysing all the responses to my questions, I discovered there were three common aspects and feelings associated with the idea of home. One is describing home in relation to a certain place and location, while the second is expressing the idea of home in terms of emotional attachments to a place. The last one is explaining home as a personal place. Further to this, I discuss in this chapter how my experience of displacement, my separation from Iran and search for a home in Australia have led me to distinguish the idea of home from homeland. I explain how *A long letter to home* affected my understanding of home and provided me with more questions about diaspora, as well as how this project led me to explore the idea of home in a domestic place.

A long letter to home represents my investigation on the idea of home, what home means in relation to a place, and how emotions and experiences distinguish home from homeland. This project was based on a collaboration with Iranian people living in Iran. In 2015, I made 100 envelopes out of printed images of maps of Western Australia and Tehran (figure 3.1). I left a small blank card in each envelope and sent them to my sister and brother in Tehran. I asked them to distribute the envelopes to friends and acquaintances with an invitation to collaborate in the project by replying to two questions: What do you imagine when you hear the word *khaneh* (home); and what do you imagine when you hear the word *vatan* (homeland)? Since my sister and brother both practice art in Tehran, most of their friends who participated in this project came from academic and artistic backgrounds. Along with the 84 Iranian collaborators in this project living and working in Tehran, the Australian-based artist Hossein Valamanesh enthusiastically contributed his responses to this project from Adelaide, Australia. Valamanesh's contribution was very much related to his personal interests in contributing a poetic response to an aura from Iran and sharing his ideas in this project. Before discussing *A long letter to home* further, it is important to contextualise this project within the existing literature related to place and home.



Figure 3.1. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home*.

In this chapter, I use aspects of the theories of place to discuss how the idea of home can be described and defined in relation to both physical and emotional attachments to a particular place. Place can reflect a sense of belonging as the editors Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine suggest in their book *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, "... places are seen as fundamental in expressing a sense of belonging for those who live in them, and are seen as providing a locus for identity" (2004, 5). Place has a physical aspect. The physical aspect of place can refer to its geographical location or cultural environment, as well as the way we describe it. For example, if I describe Tehran as a place, I would say Tehran is mountainside city located in the plateau region of Iran, and describe how far it is from the sea, and what the weather is like. I could also refer to Iranian culture, tradition, religion, and even population while talking about the physical aspects of Tehran. The physical aspects of place provides information about both the people and the place. In addition, it offers us a site to reflect our identities and cultures, and to explore our emotional attachment to it.

As Edward S. Casey suggests, "To be somewhere is to be in place and therefore to be subject to its power, to be part of its action, acting on its scene" (1993, 23). He also talks about the power of place that makes us engaged with it. Casey suggests that "the power of place such as a mere room possesses determines not only *where* I am in the limited sense of cartographic location but *how* I am together with others and even *who* we shall become together" (1993, 23, original italics). Place has a power that not only confirms where we are, but also allows us to discover our relationships to others. At the same time, I think that the power of place might suggest where we are and makes us become part of that place but not necessarily connects us together emotionally. Speaking of a particular place and our emotional and physical connections to it reflects who we are and how we make our experiences and relationships in our everyday lives.

The editors Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine suggest that "place does not have any particular scale associated with it, but is created and maintained through the fields of care that result from people's emotional attachment" (2004, 5). The way we feel about a place and maintain our relationships and attachments to it can make a place meaningful and special to us. "Place has history and meaning" because of the individual experiences and relationships shaped by the place, and due to the individual's feelings and emotional attachments to it (Tuan 1979, 387).

In their book *Place Attachment*, Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low discuss the concept of place attachment in relation to human interactions with and experiences of a place. They state that “the word ‘attachment’ emphasizes affect; the word ‘place’ focuses on the environmental settings to which people are emotionally and culturally attached” (1992, 5). Our attachment to a place occurs when we physically and emotionally experience something in it and interact with it. The importance of a place does not depend on its scale or location, but rather on our experiences of it and how we describe our relationships to it.

Furthermore, in relation to the connection between place and home, urban researcher Hazel Easthope explains in her article “A Place Called Home” that the concept of home is very much related to the individual. She suggests:

A person’s home is not the physical structure of a house, nor it is the natural and built environment of a neighbourhood or region that is understood to make a home. Homes are ‘places’ that hold considerable social, psychological and emotive meaning for individuals and groups (2004, 135).

Additionally, she claims that “one’s home, then, can be understood as a particularly significant kind of place with which, and within which, we experience strong social, psychological and motive attachments” (Easthope 2004, 136). According to these explanations, the idea of home is imbued with personal meanings and understandings of a place. Home is a place not only for social interactions, but also it is a place that is intimate and personalised. Alongside the physicality of home and its role as a place for maintaining social relationships and communications, home is a place of personality, privacy and closeness.

To summarise all these theories on place, I understand that place relates to both the physical aspects and the way we refer to our personal and emotional attachments to place. We make places special and meaningful for ourselves. By describing a particular place, we not only refer to where the place is or where it is located, but also we reflect our connections and attachments to it. In other words, the physical aspect of place offers us a site or a house or a particular environment to live in and shape our experiences and social and cultural relationships.

Figure 3.2 shows one of the collaborators’ responses to the question about the word *khaneh*, and is an example of both home and location. The collaborator unfolded the envelope and selected two locations on the map of Tehran. The locations mark the

distance from work to home. The anonymous collaborator writes on the map that “*khaneh* (home) is a location; it is a distance between my home where I live and the place where I work. Home means what I imagine in this trip.” What is intriguing about this message is that the collaborator explains home in relation to a location, a trip between two places, and in terms of imagination as well. According to the note on the envelope, I suggest that the collaborator presents home as an imaginary place that only exists in the journey between where s/he lives and work. Also, the collaborator refers to an imaginary home that is shaped by personal experiences of and relationships with two places. At the same time, the act of pointing on the map of Tehran in order to refer to *khaneh* (home) suggests it is a place with specific physical forms and geographical location.

Figure 3.3 is another example from another collaborator who describes home as a locale; a place with certain arrangement and setting. The written text is translated (by myself) as follows:

Home is the most important place in the world.

Home can be everywhere.

Home has direction and locale.

It has meaning.

It has a wardrobe,

a refrigerator,

a bed,

a toilet,

and a shower.

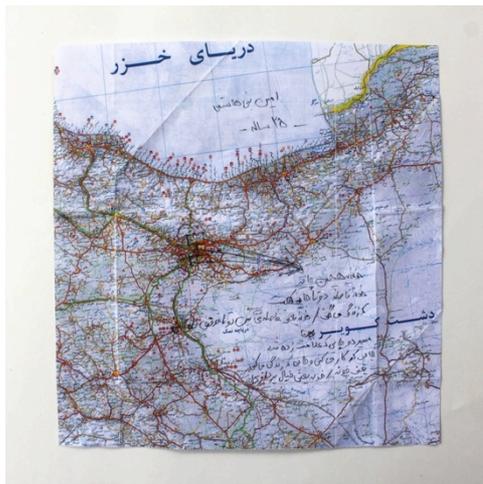
While the collaborator describes a home, s/he also expresses an abstract image of home that can be anywhere in the world. Considering home as both location and locale alludes to human geographer Tim Cresswell’s definition of “places as a way of understanding” (2004, 11). In his book *Place: a short introduction*, Cresswell states that the geographer John Agnew “has outlined three fundamental aspects of place as a meaningful location. They are location, locale and sense of place” (2004, 7). Location speaks of the direction and address; location tells us how to reach to a certain place and where that certain place is.

The definition of locale is also connected to personality and an individual's needs in relation to a place. Cresswell explains that "by 'locale' Agnew means the material setting for social relations – the actual shape of place within which people conduct their lives as individuals" (2004, 7). Locale means a site where we set up and arrange our objects and materials in order to make our social relationships and communications.

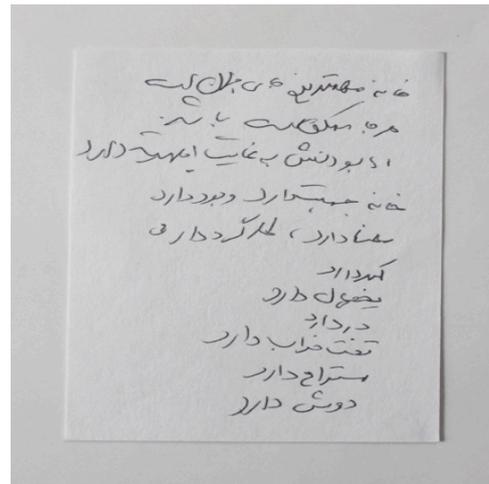
Sense of place is about our emotional attachments to a place, and explains our mental, emotional and intimate connections to a particular place whether we live in that place or we are far away from it. As Cresswell suggests, "Novels and films (at least successful ones) often evoke a sense of place – a feeling that we the reader/viewer know what is like to be there. We often have a sense of place about where we live, or where we lived when we were children" (2004, 8). Sense of place is an evocation of a feeling regarding what is familiar to us. For me, reading Persian books and watching Persian movies is like refreshing my feelings for Iran and keeping my mental and emotional attachments to that place.

Reading the collaborator's response, I feel that s/he is suggesting that home as a place is a setting for the necessary household objects that we all need in our everyday lives. How we describe a home underscores the way we understand it as both location and locale.

Considering home as a place conveys more meaning than location; it can be a place of memories, imaginations and desires. For me, home in relation to locale is a specific place that reflects my personality, and allows me to make my experiences and gives me a sense of comfort. My kitchen or my studio where I spend most of my time are places in which I feel at home. They are places that can offer me intimacy and personal moments to focus on my feelings and ideas.



Left: Figure 3.2. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 1/home)*, 20 x 20 cm.



Right: Figure 3.3. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 2/home)*, 13 x 8 cm.

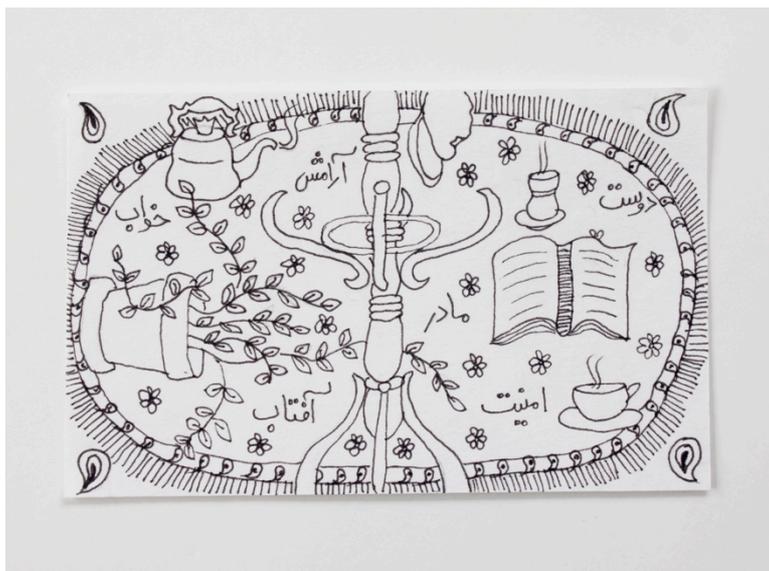


Figure 3.4. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 3/home)*, 8 x 13 cm.

Author Sara Ahmed considers the impact of emotions on attachment to a place in her essay “Collective feelings: or, the impressions left by others.” She studies the implications and associations of emotion in the relationship between movement and attachment. She suggests,

The word ‘emotion’ comes from Latin, *emovere*, referring to ‘to move, to move out’. So emotions are what move us. But emotions are also *about*

attachments, about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place (2004, 27, original italics).

Because of emotions, connections and attachments to places can happen. Our emotions can help us to feel and find our connections to a place. An attachment to a place holds emotions, and because of the relationship between emotions and connections, places become meaningful. The relationship between emotions and attachments shapes our understanding of place. Emotions do not only create attachments to places; emotions also make our feelings towards places.

Figure 3.4 is a good example of how one of the collaborators envisaged the relationship between emotions and attachment to a place. The collaborator shows a different response to the question about home. The collaborator draws a rug or carpet. Inside the carpet are words written in Persian: *khaab* (sleep), *maadar* (mother), *aaftab* (sunshine), *doost* (friend), *aaraamesh* (peace) and *amniyat* (safety or security). There are also some objects such as an open book, cups of tea with steam indicating they have just been poured and are still hot, a table lamp, and a kettle also with steam. The collaborator visually describes that home is about settings of meaningful things that make a personal and social relationship, by selecting materials or objects and words that convey a sense of comfort. The collaborator shows how home can be personalised, and at the same time be a place for sharing and socialising. In so doing, the collaborator draws what Agnew calls “locale” (Cresswell 2004, 7). Home is not only a place for privacy and intimacy, but it is also a locale for making certain meaningful attachments to the place.

One of the interesting depictions or expressions that most Iranian collaborators used as a response is drawing or writing about a cup of tea to symbolise home and hospitality. Hospitality has a significant role in Persian culture and social relationships, and Iranian people are well known as great hosts for their visitors, no matter if the visitors are friends, relatives or non-Iranians. After his first visit to Iran, the author Nathaniel Smith referred to Iran as “Surprising Iran, land of hospitality” (Smith 2014). A cup of tea is the first thing that the host offers to the visitor in her/his house. Many of the collaborators wrote that home is a place that has a cup of tea to offer. A cup of tea gives a sense of home.

Another example of using a cup of tea to express an idea of home, daily routine, everyday life and experiences is the artwork titled *Chai, as close as I could get* (1998) (figure 3.5) by Hossein Valamanesh. In this work, the artist puts a small glass cup of tea in a glass bowl of water that is lit from below. The glass cup of tea is floating in the water. *Chai*, which means tea in the Persian language, is both a motif and a symbol of hospitality in Persian culture. It also gives a sense of individuality and solitude but, at the same time, it offers the prospect of dialogues and pleasant social relations in everyday life.

The title of Valamanesh's work *Chai, as close as I could get* can allusively reflect both hospitality and intimacy. This work makes me think of a place that not only offers me a cup of tea, but also gives me a moment of comfort, and pleasure. Sometimes, in my solitude, while having a cup of tea in a quiet corner of my room in Perth, my memories of the past start to float into the present. Having a cup of tea in silence takes me to my home in Tehran where I used to have a cup of tea and ordinary conversation with my grandmother every evening.

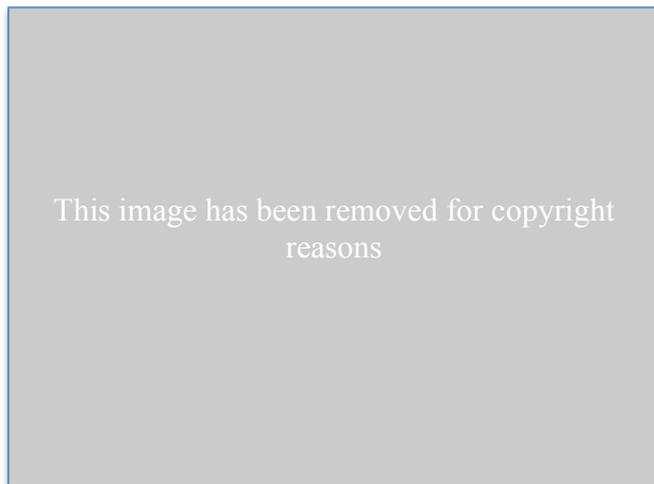
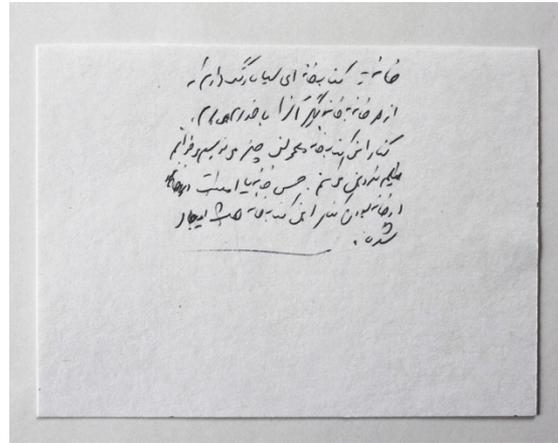
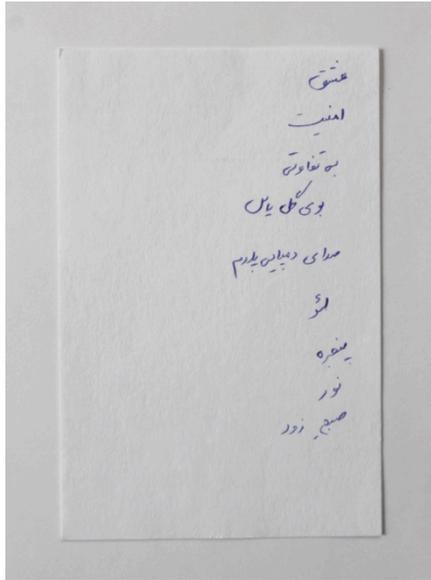


Figure 3.5. Hossein Valamanesh, 1998, *Chai, as close as I could get*.



Left: Figure 3.6. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 4/home)*, 8 x 13 cm.

Right: Figure 3.7. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 5/home)*, 13 x 8 cm.

Figure 3.6 provides a visual portrayal of home as an intimate, personal and private place. Similar to the collaborator's response in figure 3.4, in this work the collaborator uses selected words in Persian to express her/his idea of home. *Eshgh* (love), *Amniyyat* (safety), *booye gole yas* (smell of the Jasmine flower), *sedaaye kafsh pedaram* (the sound of my father's sandals), *noor* (light) and *sobhe zood* (early in the morning) are all words that are expressions of particular experiences in a significant place like the home. These words explain the collaborator's "motive attachments" to home where s/he explores her/his social and even psychological experiences (Easthope 2004, 137). Motive attachment describes personality and what makes a place meaningful and significant for someone. Reading these words to speak of home gives me the impression that the collaborator has intentionally set or collected her/his emotions and feelings in line with what Cresswell calls "a sense of place" as home (2004, 8).

Similarly, another collaborator (figure 3.7) speaks of motive attachments and the idea of home in relation to an object such as her/his small library. The message can be translated as follows:

I have a small black library that I take with me when I must move from one house to another. I sit next to my small black library and read, write and edit films. Whenever I sit next to it, I feel at home.

The setting and arranging of selected or personal objects in a place not only creates a sense of attachment to that place, but also the personal and emotional attachments to those selected objects which can reflect a sense of home. Objects such as a rug or a small personal library do not explain what home means, but these kinds of objects do make a place meaningful and personalised.

In their book *Homelands and diasporas: holy lands and other places*, Andre Levy and Alex Weingrod discuss the relationship between ‘diaspora’ and ‘homeland’, and how they can influence each other. They ask, “Does ‘homeland’ always influence ‘diaspora’? What are the consequences of (as it were) living in two places at the same time, and what conditions or circumstances make doing so possible?” (2005, 5)

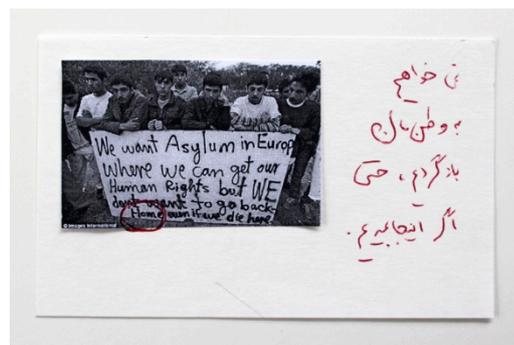
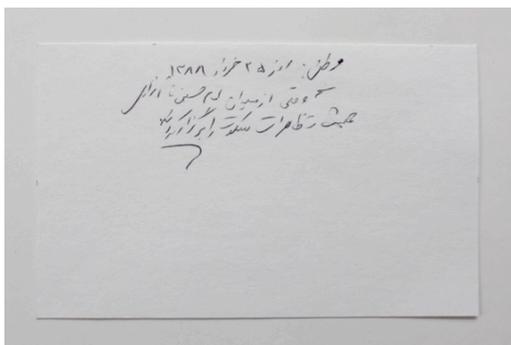
Considering diaspora as a place, it is filled with memories of homeland, and memories of homeland can nourish cultural and social experiences and everyday life in diaspora. Homeland and diaspora can continuously influence each other because of the migrant’s physical and emotional attachments to where s/he comes from and where s/he lives now. The relationship between homeland and diaspora depends on how the migrant continues to maintain her/his memories and attachments. In the case of migration and living in diaspora, Susan Pattie claims that homeland and diaspora “are continually in the process of construction, and they interact with each other” (Pattie 2005, 50). Depending upon the migrant’s circumstances in diaspora, what is constructed in the interaction between homeland and diaspora can be something personal and emotional, such as feeling either disconnected and rejected from the homeland, or always connected to the homeland with the idea of possible return.

As an Iranian migrant living in Australia for eighteen years, I have two places which I see myself part of. At the same time, I am part of neither of them. One is Tehran and the other is Perth. Rather than a physical attachment to them, I feel that I am emotionally attached to both. My attachment to Perth reflects different feelings and motives. Although I do not see myself culturally attached to Perth, it is the place where I live now, where I make my everyday life, my social relations and communications. It has been a place of opportunities for me.

My understanding and experiences of Perth tell me that it is a place of continuity. I feel there is something here in the present that keeps me going on a long

path and exploring my ideas of home in the future. For this reason, my feeling towards Perth is kind of positive. My emotional attachments to Perth are related to the times that I was emotionally and physically frustrated by learning and speaking English when I arrived in Australia, and are about my experiences of detachment and alienation as I endeavoured to attach myself to the new place. My attachments to this place are coloured by the difficult times of settling in and adjusting myself to the new place. However, I would not call Perth a home thus far, because I feel that I am not embedded in this place culturally. I am not rooted here.

My attachment to Tehran is related to my past personal, social and emotional experiences and memories that reflect my sentiments here in Perth. As I have shown in this chapter, memories are very much linked to places, and memories can reflect attachments to places. When I think of Tehran, I think of something in the past as well as the future; I also think about Persian culture and the language that I speak fluently. Memories of Tehran nourish my life in Perth, and continue to revolve around my homeland. The recollected memories and personal experiences of places in Tehran become rich and powerful cultural sources for my inspiration. These are my past memories from the homeland that make beautiful yet nostalgic images of home in Australia. I keep recalling my memories of Tehran in order to explore the idea of home in Australia.



Left: Figure 3.8. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 1/homeland)*, 8 x 13 cm.

Right: Figure 3.9. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 2/homeland)*, 8 x 13 cm.

Whilst the earlier examples were responses from collaborators to my question about *khaneh* (home), figures 3.8 and 3.9 are responses to my question about *vatan* (homeland). In figure 3.8, the collaborator refers to the protest about irregularities in the results between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and opposition leader Mir Hossein

Mousavi in the Iranian presidential election in 2009. The collaborator says, “homeland is the day when a silent protest against the election was taken from *Imam Hossein Square* to *Azadi Square* in Tehran.” Reading this short message as a response to homeland provokes my feelings and emotions towards Iran. I was not there to experience the silent protest but this message can evoke a sense of place as homeland whereby one feels for it, a place that one is part of and part of its culture and history.

According to the collaborator’s response, a national and historical event can be used as a symbol to express what *vatan* means. Additionally, the response in figure 3.8 can reflect the emotional impact of a collective experience on an individual in defining the meaning of homeland. Looking at figure 3.8, I recall a poem by a female Persian poet Simin Behbahani (1927-2014) who wrote a poem about homeland after Iran’s 2009 presidential election:

My homeland, I shall build you again
With bricks of my soul.
I shall raise your pillars again
With pieces of my bone again
(“Simin Behbahani” 2014)

Homeland is a place that is symbolically built and cultivated with individuals’ souls, and cultural and historical memories and events. Homeland is an existing place that can reflect a sense of belonging and attachment. This connection between a person and their place of birth also resonates in a line of poem by a Kirgiz poet: “remember, even before your mother’s milk, you drank the milk of your homeland” (Cited in Cohen 2007, 5).

By contrast, figure 3.9 represents the rejection of homeland as a place of birth by having or making another one in diaspora. Figure 3.9 is an interesting visual response that shows a group of refugees seeking asylum and human rights in Europe. They protest against being sent back to their homes. The collaborator also writes the Persian translation of the banner and circles the word ‘home’ to speak of homeland; a physically existing place where they no longer have freedom and the feeling of security. This visual response suggests that homeland is where one can see freedom, where one sees her/his future, and where one can seek peace and security.

These two responses speak of both individual and collective experiences of homeland. The difference between these two responses is that the collaborator in figure 3.8 speaks of emotional and personal attachments to homeland, as well as responsibility towards protecting the national human rights and freedom inside the homeland. This collaborator expresses collective experiences and memories in a public place to define homeland. S/he also expresses “loyalty” and “solidarity” in a national and historical event to reflect homeland (Werbner 2005, 31).

The other collaborator (figure 3.9), in contrast, takes the concept of homeland into a global context, and looks at the idea of homeland as a desired place; a place where an individual’s dreams may come true, or a longing for a place of peace and freedom that may be found outside the place of birth, in diaspora.

Other responses to my question about homeland are more abstract through the use of objects to reflect or represent homeland. For example, a *Khar-mohreh* (figure 3.10), which is a blue-turquoise ceramic bead that has been used in ancient Iran for protection from bad luck, a used train ticket (figure 3.11) and a *Fall-E- Hafez* (Hafez fortune) (figure 3.12) that one can buy from women or young pedlars in the streets or in the train station, all speak of personal, emotional, cultural and collective attachments to Iran. The turquoise colour reminds me of the domes of mosques in Tehran, the train ticket suggests a journey from one place to another in Tehran, and the love poem of Hafez evokes my memories of buying a Hafez fortune on my way to university whenever I wanted to seek some poetic and symbolic advice or reassure myself about love and friendship. These selected objects symbolically represent Iran; they are the objects that not only culturally identify Iran, but also speak of people’s personal and collective attachments to homeland.

Looking at all the responses contributed by the collaborators, I suggest that their definitions of home and homeland rely on their Iranian identity and their personal and social experiences in both places. They used poetry, cultural symbols, and historical events to explain what these mean to them, and to express how their personal and social connections and attachments to home and homeland make these places meaningful and significant for them. According to some of their responses, home can be defined in terms of private and intimate relationship with a particular place, and homeland can be expressed through cultural and collective experiences. By referring to their emotions and memories, they have embedded their personalities and symbolic ideas of home and homeland in their responses.



Figure 3.10. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 3/homeland)*, 1.1 cm diameter.



Figure 3.11. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 4/homeland)*, 2 x 5 cm.

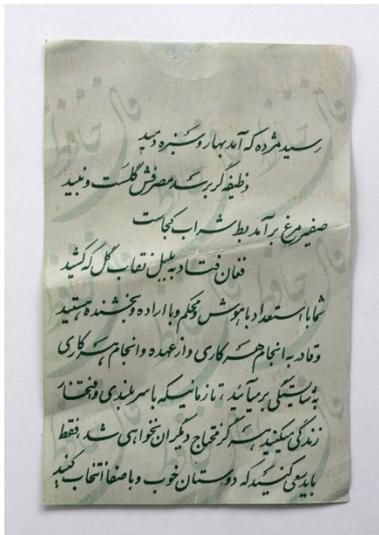


Figure 3.12. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home (response 5/homeland)*, 8 x 13 cm.



Figure 3.13. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home* (Valamanesh's response to home), 8 x 13 cm.

To conclude the discussion of *A long letter to home*, the artist Hossein Valamanesh's responses to my questions about home and homeland reflect many symbolic and poetic layers that offer insights into the ideas of home and homeland. Valamanesh unfolds and reverses the envelope in order to use and work on the side with the map of Iran and Persian text. He directly stamped his address, stuck on an Australian stamp and my postal address on the envelope. By reversing the envelope and using the side with map of Iran, the artist brings our attention to his Iranian identity, and source of inspiration. Valamanesh creates a visual dialogue about two significant places, where he lives now, and where he originally comes from. At the same time, the envelope represents his ideas of cultural inspirations and how places and languages play significant roles in his creativity.

Figure 3.14 represents Valamanesh's idea of home. The artist shreds or cuts the other envelope into strips and weaves them together to create small squares. By doing this, a square with a Persian letter or word sits next to another with an English one. The act of shredding and then weaving the shredded pieces alludes to the idea of remaking and rearranging in a way to makes something new that may speak of hopes and imaginings. Weaving the shredded maps of Tehran and Western Australia can

symbolically refer to the artist's life experiences and his awareness of his connections to both his place of birth and the country where he lives now.

Looking at his response, I also remember my past conversation with Valamanesh about the idea of home and his emphasis on seeking and discovering his desires for what he calls 'other home'. In this work, Valamanesh seems to show a new map; it is perhaps a map of his imaginary home or other home. This work can be interpreted as the image of a map that has hidden directions to his other home. The artist not only refers to searching for a place as his home, but also he reflects his physical and emotional relationships and attachments to both Iran and Australia.

Valamanesh similarly regards *khaneh* (home) as a poetic place; a place in which the artist marries his memories, experiences and ideas of two places in the past and the present in order to make a dialogue about home and the impact of migration and displacement on his art practice. At the same time, his art reflects his personal exploration of where a home could be in the future. The artist's emotional and personal experiences of migration and living in Australia are embedded in this work. In an interview, Valamanesh refers to part of a poem by Iranian poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī known as Rumi (1207-1273):

This poem is often in my head: Where do I come from? What is the purpose of my coming? Where am I going? Won't you show me my home?
It's a longing for a place. It's an understanding of your being, where you stand. It's not a map; it's not actually a country or a place. It's a place in the heart. I'm still trying to find home (Kha 2013).

If I were to take the work in figure 3.14 as a response to my question about *vatan* (homeland), I would consider that Valamanesh is responsive to his *vatan* (homeland) as a place where he culturally comes from. He knows where his homeland is located and where he lives now geographically. The artist simultaneously connects the ideas of home and homeland together in order to explore his personal desire for finding visual answers to the question, where do you come from? It is a question that Valamanesh often speaks of. In the same interview, Valamanesh says:

And sometimes you feel more at home somewhere other than where you live. I don't feel at home in Iran anymore, I feel very much at home in Australia. And of course it's where your family is, where your wife is, where your children are. It's those belongings that connect you to a place. Both my parents passed away now in Iran and I sort of lost that connection. Especially

when my mother passed away, I felt something severed, almost like umbilical cord (Kha 2013).

The idea of home for Valamanesh is related to understanding and finding himself rather than alluding to a particular physical place. His idea of home reflects images that symbolically represent his emotional and physical attachments and disconnections to both Iran and Australia.

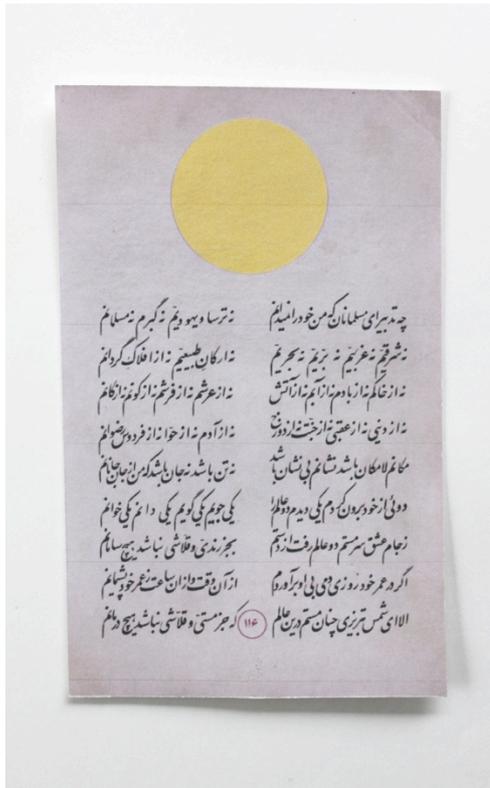


Figure 3.14. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *A long letter to home* (Valamanesh's response to homeland), 13 x 8 cm.

Figure 3.15 shows another of Valamanesh's responses to my questions about *khaneh* (home) and *vatan* (homeland). I take this work as a response to *vatan* (homeland). The significant role of language and poetry and their connections to identity and the idea of homeland are well defined in this response. Valamanesh uses a poem of Rumi and draws a yellow circle above the poem to represent his idea of homeland. I do not aim to analyse this selected poem of Rumi; instead, I consider the artist's reason for choosing this poem to refer to homeland. Valamanesh intentionally uses a Persian poem as a symbol of our shared Iranian culture to speak of *vatan* (homeland) with me.

Besides echoing Persian language and Persian culture, Valamanesh uses this specific poem to share the idea of longing for understanding where he comes from. Likewise, by selecting this specific poem by Rumi, he metaphorically speaks of a journey towards finding himself, who he is and where he can find his ultimate or desired place. The artist continues exploring and examining his ideas and desires for a place to call home in his artworks. Valamanesh's longing for a home is reflected in most of his artworks and makes him continue searching for it as well as exploring this idea in his artistic practice.

As a collaborative project, *A long letter to home* emotionally made me feel that the long distance between here and there was shorter, and it reflected common interpretations of home as both a personal place and a place of hospitality which echoes Iranian cultural and traditional practices. *A long letter to home* helped me clarify that individuals can define and describe home and homeland in relation to where they live, who they are, and what experiences and attachments make the places meaningful for them.

As a significant major project, *A long letter to home* allowed me to subsequently take my domestic place such as the kitchen as a place for exploring the idea of home in my practice. I cannot say that by making this project, I have found the right answers to my questions about diaspora and home. Nevertheless, I found that my cultural background and Iranian tradition can influence my idea of home in Australia. I realised that this project has shaped a nostalgic question about home that has, in turn, caused me to hold on to this question and keep it private, a nostalgic question that ultimately leads me to pay attention to my everyday life.

Looking at *A long letter to home* evokes my feelings of home and it works as a poetic and personal confirmation of my emotional attachments to my Persian culture and to Iran, which makes me feel nostalgic here. I notice that home can be explored in a domestic and private place, and I feel that I can take my domestic house in Perth as a place where I can find home in terms of the personal, the cultural and the small⁸. By this, I mean I can find home in something that is next to me, something I culturally engage in, practice and feel everyday. I can find home in an ordinary activity, in a household task, or in something that might seem insignificant or inconsiderable.

⁸ I do not know how this word came to my mind but what I mean by 'small' is something that seems inconsiderable; insignificant things we do or have in everyday life. I have become interested in finding and exploring home in very simple and ordinary activities, or in things that may not seem serious or significant in my life.

Home can be explored in silence, drinking a cup of tea, cooking, reading a poem or cleaning my kitchen everyday. I can find home in making sure my kettle is on and ready for offering a cup of tea before my guest arrives.

I want to conclude this chapter with the English version of the poem by Rumi that Valamanesh contributed as his response to my project *A long letter to home* in order to invite my readers to the next chapter. Ending this chapter with this poem leaves me with a feeling and an understanding that the more I live here, the more I am guided to explore and consider *khaneh* (home) in both my life and my artistic practice.

Why think thus O men of piety
I have returned to sobriety
I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu
I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew

I am neither of the West nor the East
Not of the ocean, nor an earthly beast
I am neither a natural wonder
Nor from the stars yonder

Neither flesh of dust, nor wind inspire
Nor water in veins, nor made of fire
I am neither an earthly carpet, nor gems terrestrial
Nor am I confined to Creation, nor the Throne Celestial

Not of ancient promises, nor of future prophecy
Not of hellish anguish, nor of paradisiac ecstasy
Neither the progeny of Adam, nor Eve
Nor of the world of heavenly make-believe

My place is the no-place
My image is without face
Neither of body nor the soul
I am of the Divine Whole.

I eliminated duality with joyous laughter
Saw the unity of here and the hereafter
Unity is what I sing, unity is what I speak
Unity is what I know, unity is what I seek

Intoxicated from the chalice of Love
I have lost both worlds below and above
Sole destiny that comes to me
Licentious mendacity

In my whole life, even if once

Forgot His name even per chance
For that hour spent, for such moment
I'd give my life, and thus repent

Beloved Master, Shams-e Tabrizi
In this world with Love I'm so drunk
The path of Love isn't easy
I am shipwrecked and must be sunk

(Shahriari 1998)

Chapter 4⁹

Visualising home in Australia

“Home is where one starts from” (T. S. Eliot cited in Casey 1993, 274)

In the previous chapter, I differentiated between the definitions of home and homeland, and how the idea of home can be described in a different way to homeland by Iranian collaborators in my project *A long letter to home*. I also claimed that their responses to questions about home and homeland were shaped by their personal, emotional and physical experiences and attachments to a certain place.

I also clarified that Iran remains my homeland, as a place with the possibility of return. By contrast, home is defined very much in terms of personal experiences and emotional representations of a selected place. I explained that my experience of displacement influences my idea of home and my physical and emotional attachments to both Iran and Australia. For this reason, I see myself as emotional and nostalgic, and I explore these feelings in my art practice.

This chapter examines my studio research and visual investigations into both the physical and emotional impacts of displacement on my idea of home in Australia. By examining my works, I discuss how I take my experience of displacement and my engagement with the process of screen-printing as parallel to the process of discovering, finding and adjusting myself in the new place. I also talk about the nostalgia that I particularly noticed after the *A long letter to home* project as an emotional influence. I focus my discussion on nostalgia to explain how feeling nostalgic causes me to pay more attention to my physical attachment to a domestic place. I explain how my physical engagement with everyday routine and the household allows me explore the idea of home in my practice.

My PhD studio research is very much based in screen-printing my photographs of Australian landscapes and my kitchen. My early works are screen-prints of the landscape and handwriting the single word *khaneh* (home) on top of the printed image. However, my recent studio works are based on four-colour separation screen-printing and digital prints of my domestic house and ordinary objects.

⁹ Parts of this chapter were published in Layli Rakhsha, 2016, “Nostalgia: memories of the past, longing for the future,” in *Indian Ocean futures: communities, sustainability and security*, edited by Thor Kerr and John Stephens, 34-49, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

Although I separate the early works from the recent ones, there is a consistency in exploring my idea of how I can visualise home in diaspora. I also refer to early works to discuss my physical engagement with screen-printing and handwriting that can reflect the idea of being in a process that, for me, can be similar to the process of settling in Australia. I refer to my recent works to speak of nostalgia that helps me explore my feelings and search for home in my kitchen.

My engagement with the process of screen-printing and handwriting reminds me of my experience of migration, and the process of adjusting myself to the new place, which is evident in my early works. Through engaging physically and involving myself expressively with the process of screen-printing and handwriting, I feel silences and pauses that also remind me of the process of learning English, and settling in Australia. I often felt deep silences and hesitations during speaking and learning English in the early days of life here. It happened to me when I could not explain what I wanted, or when I wondered whether what I said could reflect what I wanted to say correctly. I had to constantly select the Farsi and English words and compare their meanings to find out which ones would work in my conversation or writing.

Screen-printing is a technique that allows me to conceptually explore the physical impact of diaspora on my art practice. I am not suggesting that I refer to screen-printing as a vehicle to define my life in diaspora. Rather, I suggest that this technique works as an expressive tool for me to reflect my ideas and experiences. The process of transferring my photographs and printing my work gives me opportunities to visualise and contextualise both my experience of diaspora and my quest for home.

Besides focusing on refining and developing screen-printing techniques and my determination in printing my work satisfactorily in my early studio research, I noticed that I could feel my own tenacity, tension and obsession in proving, completing or verifying something to myself during the process of printing. To release and unfold my feelings about the impact of my engagement with the process of printing, I decided to add another layer to my work and that was handwriting the word *khaneh* (home) on top of the printed image of the Australian landscape. By sitting in my studio and writing 'home', I could delve into my work and discover what is hidden or unsaid. I gradually discovered that while I am learning how to use screen-printing, I am constantly thinking of when I left Tehran for Perth and how I

tried to connect myself to the new place. Rather than just focusing on exploring my idea of home, I became determined to use each step of screen-printing as a way to let myself think of what steps I can take here to be able to feel connected to the new place. I felt that through the repetitive printing of one work, I could allow myself to symbolically explore my experience of displacement and my new life here. For example, *Fractured home 1* (figure 4.1) shows my engagement with the process of screen-printing, multiple layering and the use of images in a way that allows me to frame, or to raze or wipe out the limitations that come from my experience of migration and being in diaspora. In this work, I cut the printed image into pieces and try to reconstruct the pieces while considering the idea of home. The work not only represents vagueness that is related to the absence of something certain, but also manifests movement, displacement and a haziness in my memory of the past. The word *khaneh* (home) is still readable, although there is a shadow of it under the image of the Australian landscape – alluding to the significance of memory and the source of my inspiration. By contrast, as part of my desire for a place called home in *Fractured home 2* (figure 4.2), I am interested in breaking the old boundaries and reconstructing new frameworks for understanding. Hence, the word *khaneh* is placed upside down, or vertically to follow the lines of the image. Both these works represent my separation from a place, my longing for another place, and the ambiguity associated with my imagination. They symbolise the continuity of the process of building, settling, adopting, and making a relationship with the new place and culture.

Coloured land (2013) (figure 4.3) shows my engagement with the process of screen-printing, multiple layering and the use of images in a way that allows me to represent the limitations that come from my experience of migration and being in diaspora. I develop the idea of multiple layers by using screen-printing and handwriting together to display my poetic sensibility. In this work, I printed one image three times on top of each other. The first layer is a digital print while the second layer is an upside down silkscreen print of the same image in black ink, and the third layer is the same printing technique using white ink. The fourth and the last layer is my handwriting of the word *khaneh* (home) on top of the printed images. All these layers share the same space. The word *khaneh* and the printed images of the landscape intertwine and overlap each other in order to manifest an expression.

Coloured land represents a kind of visual material about a certain place, while the handwritten word *khaneh* seems to offer verbal information about another place.

The image and the word depend on each other to complete my representation of the idea of home in this work. The image of Australian landscape is not very clear or related to a particular place, and the word 'home' is in Farsi language, so the combination of these two speak of my determination to make a dialogue between two different places. Similar to *Fractured home 1*, *Coloured land* not only represents vagueness that is related to the absence of something certain, but also manifests movement, displacement and a haziness in my memory of the past. In this work, the word *khaneh* is still readable, although there is a shadow of it under the image of the Australian landscape, alluding to the significance of memory and the source of my inspiration.

As I keep calling for *khaneh* and looking at my printed images of the Australian landscape, I am searching for my attachment to perhaps more than one place. *Coloured land* characterises an abstract image that may provoke the idea of an imaginary place. The repetition of the word *khaneh* not only refers to documenting events, affective moments and desires, but also tells or hints at my search for a place that can be called home. This resonates with what curator Jasmin Stephens says: "Rakhsha's painstaking application of Farsi script built up a layered partition-like surface in which her gouache markings mingled with the shadow of landscape. This surface – with its shifting foreground and background and movement between detail and whole – proffered some insight into the tenor of identity" (2012, n.p.).

My physical engagement in the process of screen-printing, controlling the process to create the exact image, and producing multiple images and layers of my photographs as well as handwriting has not yet left me satisfied, and I question whether there is any final work. During my engagement with the technique, I feel stillness and a silence, yet I am in a process in which I continuously explore and determine my understanding of migration and diaspora, and consider how my thoughts and skills help me to achieve my aims.



Figure 4.1. Layli Rakhsha, 2013, *Fractured home 1*, 50 x 70 cm.

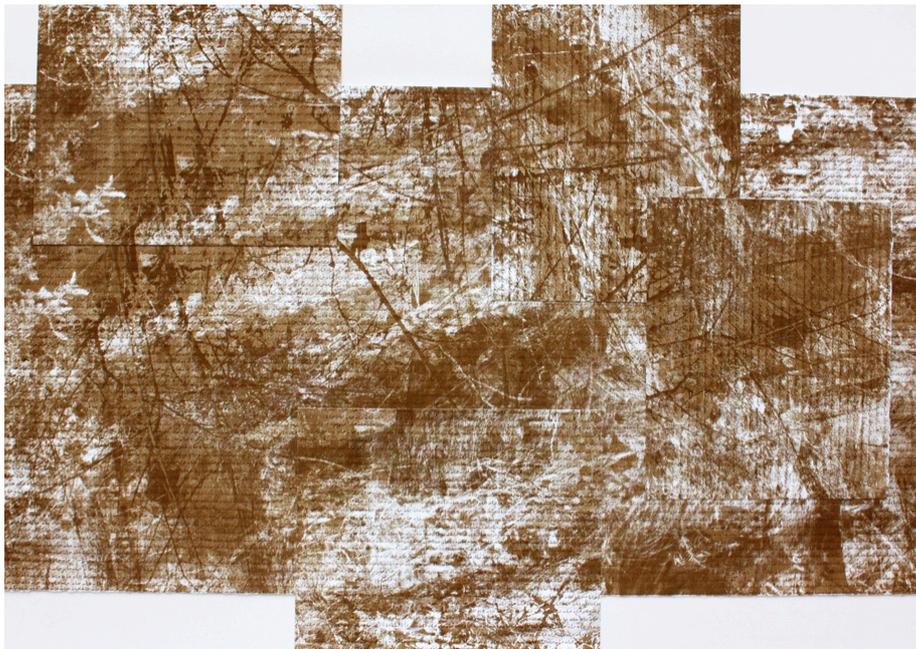


Figure 4.2. Layli Rakhsha, 2013, *Fractured home 2*, 50 x 70 cm.



Figure 4.3. Layli Rakhsha, 2013, *Coloured land*, 53 x 35 cm.

My experience of living here tells me that I am in an ongoing process of engaging, discovering, learning and adopting within certain boundaries and specific requirements, which are impacted by both my cultural background and my social and cultural relationships in Australia. In other words, I like to say that living in diaspora has offered me opportunities to learn English and study art as well as possibilities to experience living in a different culture and society. However, not knowing how my spoken English is heard or understood confines me in many ways, so I like to express myself and my emotions in my artwork. I am not able to describe or speak in English about where my feelings of silence or hesitation come from and how my experience

of living in diaspora evokes them. Neither does my fluency in Farsi alleviate my confidence in speaking about them. These limitations constantly provoke my doubt and cause hesitation, creating a silence and feelings of something unfinished, unsaid and unexpressed that unfolds into nostalgia. These responses have led me to explore and reflect on nostalgia in my works.

My consideration of nostalgia as an emotional impact of displacement appeared to me after my collaboration with Iranian people in Iran. Sharing and writing ideas about home and homeland within Persian culture brought an aura from Tehran to Perth, an aura that is gifted to me. This aura evokes my nostalgic feelings and lets me feel, smell and explore home here. My interpretation of nostalgia is connected to my personal experiences of two different places rather than being only related to my memories of Iran. Nostalgia arises, too, when I occasionally feel surrounded by emptiness and quietness in Australia. It evokes my positive and negative feelings towards my experience of displacement. I feel my personal nostalgia, which exists in my everyday life, often affects my social and cultural relationships and behaviours in Australia.

Nostalgia is a subject of ongoing debate, discussed by many scholars in relation to longing, home, memory and displacement. In her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym claims that “nostalgia is a feeling of displacement, and it is a longing for home that may have either existed in the past or will exist in the future” (2001, 7). One of the emotional impacts of displacement is nostalgia, which is associated with both memories of homeland and a desire for a home. Nostalgia is not only about a longing for returning to homeland, but also it reflects a desire for home that is nourished by memories of homeland and experiences of displacement. It can evoke a sense of yearning for a home that we have had in the past or a sense of desire for a home we would like to have in the future.

Nostalgia can also be related to memories of the past, and can be considered as an emotional manifestation of and a response to a significant memory. It occurs when the memories of the past and the feelings in the present marry together in particular circumstances. Based on my experience of displacement, nostalgia occurs to me when I remember Iran and what I emotionally experience in Australia, and that in turn evokes my longing and desire for a home. In relation to my experience of displacement, my idea of and desire for a home reflect the intertwined relationship

between my lived experiences and ideas. Desire for home comes from my experiences of places and refers to a chosen or preferred physical place in which needs, experiences and engagements with the place shape the present.

As Boym proposes, “there are two kinds of nostalgia that are associated with the past, longing and loss, collective memories, individual stories, home and dreams of other place and another time” (2001, 41). One is “restorative nostalgia,” which is about the social, cultural and historical past and present, and “gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture” (2001, 49). The other type is “reflective nostalgia,” which is about individual and cultural memory; “it is more oriented towards individual that savours details and memorial signs, and cherishes shattered fragments of memory” (Boym 2001, 49). Reflective nostalgia can be related to narratives of personal experiences, and memories can appear or begin after restorative nostalgia. For example, as discussed in the *A long letter to home* project, restorative nostalgia can be understood in the collaborators’ responses to the word homeland, and how national and historical events in Iran impact on their understandings and interpretations of homeland; while their responses to the word home can be described as reflective nostalgia, a personal interpretation of home related to memories and experiences.

Both types of nostalgia can have positive and negative effects on the idea of home and imagining home, and different impacts on an individual’s desire and imagination. I suggest that the positive force of both types of nostalgia can motivate and encourage creativity. When both restorative and reflective nostalgia overlap, imagination, which researcher Katherine Perdue defines as “a creative process of the mind used for thinking and remembering memory and creating or forming opinion,” is at work (Perdue 2003).

Boym states that “these two kinds of nostalgia are ways of giving shape and meaning to longing” (2001, 41). Nostalgia speaks of emotions, and it is closely associated with longing that can be a longing for home. Both reflective and restorative types of nostalgia are about personal and social responses to individual and group experiences.

Similar to Boym’s ideas about nostalgia, the researcher Christopher Marchegiani discusses nostalgia as an “emotional reaction” to an event or situation or perhaps something that has been lost (Marchegiani 2009, 4). Christopher Marchegiani and Ian Phau also contend “there are two types of nostalgia associated with emotions:

historical nostalgia which speaks of times that are now part of the culture and history, and personal nostalgia which is more related to personal experiences and memories” (Marchegiani and Phau 2013, n.p.). Historical nostalgia narrates the future when the idea of rebuilding a lost home becomes part of history. Simultaneously, historical nostalgia speaks of the impact of historical events on a culture, nation, society, or even an individual, and can be a shared experience related to the past, present, and even the future. In other words, historical nostalgia speaks of nostalgia for what happened before, what happens now and what will happen in the future.

Personal nostalgia reflects personal desires and memories as well as narrating stories of identity and individual experiences. What I suggest here is that personal nostalgia exists and occurs in the present; it is still, silent and steady, a kind of reaction or response to the present situation and the person’s life circumstances.

The similarities between Boym’s and the other researchers’ definitions of nostalgia allow me to understand restorative nostalgia and historical nostalgia as parallel interpretations, and I suggest that restorative nostalgia can be also considered as historical nostalgia. It is akin to reflective nostalgia and personal nostalgia, which I also interpret as parallel forms. For me, personal nostalgia is the one that echoes in most of my works, a type of nostalgia that exists in my everyday life.

The work called *In niz bozarad* (This will also pass) (2007) (figure 4.4) by Hossein Valamanesh is a sculpted line in Farsi saying this will also pass. The saying suggests the need to hold personal memories in the past and take the positive force of nostalgia to appreciate, cherish and celebrate recalling those memories again in the future. *In niz bogzarad* is a manifestation of reflective nostalgia; it is about traces of experiences and memories that will move from the present to the future. *In niz bogzarad* resonates with nostalgia and has a sense of hope for something assumedly better in the future. Reading and looking at *In niz bozarad*, I am reminded of the meaning of the phrase in Persian culture and whisper this line to give myself comfort and encouragement on hard days.



Figure 4.4. Hossein Valamanesh, 2007, *In niz bozarad* (This will also pass), 58 x 76 x 2 cm.

Haunted lotus (2012) (figure 4.5) by Khadim Ali also reflects restorative nostalgia. I suggest his work represents his concerns about what is happening culturally in Afghanistan. After the Taliban destroyed the Buddha statues in Bamiyan, Buddha has become a memory, an imaginary object, a symbol of the past and present, as well as a representation of metaphysical existence. A symbol of “the collective memory of a society that is wounded,” Buddha continues to exist in both the present and imagination rather than be forgotten (Ali 2011. 1).

From *The Haunted Lotus* series, *Haunted lotus* depicts a *div*¹⁰ (demon) lounging on the dead or “dying Buddha” with his fist under chin (Cited in Rakhsha 2016, 42). The demon looks like a vigorous leader who is satisfied and resting after ruining the heritage and culture of a nation. I suggest that Ali paints demons to represent the Taliban, who are reportedly aiming to vanquish the history and culture of Afghanistan. The demon and Buddha are painted in horizontal positions with their heads in different directions in order to imply life and death, absence and presence, the past and the future.

For Ali, nostalgia can be related to displacement, people whose hearts have been distressed, the home that is lost and his desire for rebuilding it. His nostalgia can also reflect his culture and tradition. Ali visualises and manifests the voices of his lost

¹⁰ *Shahnameh* is a poem written by Ferdowsi that reflects on the mythical and historical past of the Persian Empire and the Islamic Conquest of Persia. It is a work that recounts the history of Iran, and is understood to be one of the world’s longest poems. In *Shahnameh*, “div” is usually translated as demon, a mythical character with magical skills who mostly stands in the hero’s way (Shahnameh 2018, para. 1 and 2).

home, and his desire for something cultural and momentous that could be reconstructed in the future.

Ali's restorative nostalgia is more about reconstructing, and longing for the lost home and the past. In contrast, Valamanesh's reflective nostalgia is more about his memories, personal experiences and desire for a home.

Looking back at the examples of Valamanesh's works discussed previously and the Iranian collaborators' responses to *A long letter to home*, I suggest that there is a sense of nostalgia associated with Persian culture and perhaps its poetry in particular due to the experiences before and after the Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. I might be wrong but when I look at the expressions and explorations on the idea of home and homeland that I discussed in the previous chapters, I feel that personal or historical nostalgia is embedded in the idea of home for most Iranians.



Figure 4.5. Khadim Ali, 2012, *Haunted lotus*, 75 x 56 cm.



Figure 4.6. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *At 7:30 pm*, 56 x 76 cm.

At 7:30 pm (2015) (figure 4.6) is a four-colour separation screen-printed work of mine that represents the differences and relationships between time, physical home, and the individual in Perth and Beijing¹¹. At the same time, this work is my visual investigation of the impact of my feelings, specifically nostalgia and the idea of repetition in everyday life. In this work, I printed two photographs next to each other; one of my living room in Perth and another of a friend's lounge room in Beijing in order to explore the idea of 'here' and 'there', and what we do at certain times of the day in different places. Both photographs were taken at the same time (7:30 pm), and work together to generate a dialogue about cultural differences and when a particular or selected place becomes private and personal.

While the work *At 7:30 pm* evokes stillness or a calm moment, the image of my empty room simultaneously reflects the sense of absence and emptiness. These latter feelings, which are embedded in nostalgia, can also be considered as constitutive of the emotional impacts of displacement. Absence and emptiness echo the silence that editor Lynn Thiesmeyer defines as "the personal choice to hold meanings, expressions and secrets" (2003, 2). I do not aim to analyse the definitions of absence and emptiness, rather I speak of these feelings to consider my personal experience of nostalgia.

¹¹ *At 7:30 pm* was presented in the *One Place, And Another* exhibition at the Impact 9 conference in China in 2015.



Figure 4.7. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present*, 76 x 392 cm.



Figure 4.8. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* (detail), 76 x 56 cm.

*Study of home – nostalgia in the present*¹² (2015) (figure 4.7) is an example of how I take the meanings of personal and reflective nostalgia in order to explore their impact in my artwork. *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* shows a carefully selected corner of my house. Like *At 7:30 pm*, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* is an image of my personal and private moment, and shows a relationship with my physical home. At the same time, it represents how a domestic place and

¹² *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* was represented in a group exhibition called *Locale* at Heathcote Museum and Gallery in 2017.

very ordinary objects in my room or a corner of my kitchen become influential in my idea of a home. As the author Richard Eldridge states, “the office of art is rather to call our attention to ordinary life, real life, and how it is appropriate to feel about it” (2003, 72). My attention to and obsession with my role and ordinary activities in my physical home appear in the simple composition of *Study of home – nostalgia in the present*.

My obsession in my responsibilities as a mother, a female artist and a wife who mostly spend time in a domestic place or inside the house, cause me pay attention to my routine; things that I repeat every day, and to the objects that I use repeatedly. I sometime feel that I am quiet in this repetition, and often find myself hiding what I want to say or express or show. This kind of hiding self-expression is not irrelevant to the impact of displacement and being a female. However, within the repetition of my daily routine, I can be still, hide my voice and feelings, and let the objects carry my voice or unfold my feelings and ideas. By using the ordinary objects such as cooking pots or fruit, I refer to what I constantly need and use in my daily routine. However, the moment that I set up these everyday objects during a very quiet time in a long working day is the moment that I expose my physical exhaustion and the repetition in my daily household activities. It is the moment that I only think of myself, my artistic ideas, and imagine my hidden desires without thinking of another day or tomorrow. Changing the fruits in a fixed spot explores my idea of a metaphorical concept of displacement. I am not suggesting that *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* is the representation of migration and displacement. Rather, I make this work to investigate how the impact of my feelings and my physical engagements in selected domestic places can change or influence my idea of home.

Study of home – nostalgia in the present arose from my feelings of nostalgia; feelings which have become fixed or even settled inside me since I migrated to Australia. Nostalgia in this work does not expose my memories nor my longing for a home. It is a response to the present and the future; it is a visual manifestation of my feelings and thoughts about everyday life and my personality. *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* reveals my desires resonating in solitude, and my hidden emotions that are influenced by experiences of displacement.

The natural light, arranged composition and the taking of each photograph precisely at 7:30 pm in *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* all work together to reflect a sense of hesitation, absence and silence associated with the time when I

withdraw from speaking of my feelings. Like the previous work, *At 7:30 pm, Study of home – nostalgia in the present* shows set up objects or a selected part of my domestic place at 7:30 pm when that particular corner or place becomes intimate and private. This resonates what the author Clare Marcus calls “a place of self-expression” and a representation of the relationship between the individual and a physical home (Marcus 1995, 4).

In addition, the author Gaston Bachelard suggests, “In one’s corner one does not talk to oneself. When we recall hours we have spent in our corners, we remember above all silence, the silence of our thoughts” (1994, 136). The selected corner in a house is not only a place for making images of thoughts, but also it is a symbol of solitude. The images of the compact composition of fruits and a pot in a corner of the kitchen in *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* are about an impression of my inner silence. Images of my living room represent domestic places and corners in which I sit. Every single print reflects something hesitantly unsaid, but all seven images simultaneously work to manifest peace in my personal nostalgia. I feel that my nostalgia flows in the present, but at the same time, I feel it also echoes a stillness that evokes silence and absence.

In their book *Stillness in a Mobile World*, the editors David Bissell and Gillian Fuller discuss stillness in relation to movement and mobility. They suggest,

Stillness is not a gesture of refusal. Stillness punctuates the flow of all things: a queuer in line at the bank; a moment of focus; a passenger in the departure lounge; a suspension before a sneeze; a stability of material forms that assemble; a passport photo (2011, 3).

Stillness means a moment that breaks a process or an active action, and then makes and leaves an impact of that process. Stillness does not reflect emptiness. Rather it reveals silence and holds a moment in a movement or process, in order to transform it into another process, or to make the process go again. Likewise, the definition of being still refers to a fixed moment in the present; it creates a moment of silence in the present. Stillness can, then, be an echo of a hidden feeling, or desire, or emotion.

Study of home – nostalgia in the present (figures 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12) also shows my study of still life, a harmony between colour, natural light, and composition. Gail Davey considers still life in painting is “an attempt to capture a perfect, timeless moment within the effects and strivings of living” (1998, 1544).

Thus, still life reflects stillness; something that is not mobile but fixed. My aim in selecting fruits and everyday household objects such as cooking pots is to give new meanings to them.

By focusing on the ordinary objects and the study of still life, I attempt to symbolise my awareness of a new circumstance and everlasting changes in my life that have both physical and emotional impacts on my art practice and the understanding of myself. In other words, the more I think of the impact of displacement on my personality and my life in Australia, the more I hold on to and expose my feelings in my intimate and private domestic places.



Figure 4.9. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* (detail), 76 x 56 cm.



Figure 4.10. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* (detail), 76 x 56 cm.



Figure 4.11. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* (detail), 76 x 56 cm.



Figure 4.12. Layli Rakhsha, 2015, *Study of home – nostalgia in the present* (detail), 76 x 56 cm.

Study of home – nostalgia in the present was a big project for me. Using four-colour separation technique and printing over 100 prints to get 7 perfect works caused me to pay more attention to my personal nostalgia, stillness and my engagement with my works. *Study of home – nostalgia in the present*, the work and its production technique, have led me to consider my household works as part of the exploration of my idea of home and my feelings. Looking at this work, I feel that I could successfully weave my idea of exploring home, everyday routines and four-colour

separation screen-printing technique together in order to suggest that home is about the everyday and myself. The result of this idea is reflected in my final studio research work called *Everyday*.

Everyday (2016) (figure 4.13) is an example of my exploration of my emotional responses to my daily physical routine and the endless ordinary jobs in my life. In this project, I took 28 photographs of my kitchen sink every day at times when no one was in the house; times that allude to solitude and emptiness. I aimed to explore the overlapping time of finishing the cleaning, and the time that I could possibly devote to myself with no interruption. Every photograph refers to different times of the day depending on when I could find the right moment to let me sink into my feelings and myself. When I am standing by my kitchen sink, I feel empty, yet filled with the idea of home and the required household tasks to be done. The empty basin and full basin of my sink work together to expose and reflect my ideas of home, nostalgia and even my thoughts. I occasionally purposely slow down washing the dishes to give more time to myself and wait to get a kind of satisfactory feeling of my day. By digitally printing each photograph in the size of my sink (45 x 71 cm), every single work not only speaks of embracing home in my domestic place, but also each work shows how far and how repeatedly I can symbolically dig into my personality, feelings and thoughts to feel at home.

Everyday not only shows how I intended to symbolise my feelings, but also it reflects my emphasis on the idea of repetition in order to better understand how I can express myself through my attachment to and relationship with my house. Using my kitchen for multiple purposes makes me more conscious and aware of my cultural background and being a female artist. However, I do not aim to make images of my Persian culture, nor do I consider ideas about feminism and art. Rather, I suggest that each work of my kitchen sink holds philosophical and intellectual thoughts about my personality, my culture and tradition, and my rights for privacy. Unconsciously, the kitchen becomes a chosen place for my deep silence and attention to my concerns and myself, and has become a place that holds my emotions, unspoken desires, unfinished ideas, and still moments, for another day and another time.

Exploring my idea of home, and my past and present experiences in Australia will never end. I will remain a migrant, as part of the Iranian diaspora in Australia. It is where I started thinking of home; it is where I can hint at my feelings. Australia is

neither a place of home, nor is it my homeland. It is nonetheless where I continue to keep visualising and depicting home in my art practice.

In concluding this chapter, the process of reciting home is where I started from, and it is an act that reminds me of the time and day I left Iran for Australia. Whenever I remember that day, I take a deep breath and start thinking of home. If I rephrase T.S. Eliot's poem, I could say home is where one takes a deep breath.



Figure 4.13. Layli Rakhsha, 2016, *Everyday*, dimensions variable.



Figure 4.14. Layli Rakhsha, 2016, *Everyday* (detail), 45 x 71 cm.



Figure 4.15. Layli Rakhsha, 2016, *Everyday* (detail), 45 x 71 cm.

Conclusion

This PhD research has explored the impact of displacement on the idea of home in the new place. Using the concepts of diaspora and home, I have explained how home has been visualised by selected Iranian artists in Australian contemporary art, and how I explore the idea of home in my practice. I discussed how feelings, experiences of the new place, and memories of homeland can play significant roles in reflecting the idea of home in the works of selected Iranian artists who live and work in Australia.

I focused on the concept of diaspora and how it is associated with migration and the experience of displacement. I used Dufoix's definition of diaspora to explain how it is related to a group of people living outside their homelands; people who may aim to preserve and maintain their identity in the new place. Using Brah's definition of diaspora as a site, I discussed how the new country can be a site for beginning something new; a site for exploration and achieving goals. Diaspora may also evoke ongoing cultural and social negotiations through the contrasts between homeland and the new country. By considering these theories on diaspora, I aimed to explain that the experience of migration and living in diaspora raise questions about home and homeland, and can affect the way a migrant approaches the new place and the changes they face.

Living in diaspora can impact the way home is interpreted. For some migrants and refugees, home can be found and felt outside their homelands. They may have left their homelands in order to find peace or a better life. Relying on my interviews with Mammad Aidani and Hossein Valamanesh, I realised that home can be interpreted as a lost home, or a desire for a home in the future. For Aidani, home is a lost home; one that he lost during the Iran-Iraq war. For him, home refers to a place where he could see his friends, the familiar streets and trees. When Aidani speaks of physical home and imaginary home, he refers to his memories of Iran and his imagination in shaping his idea of home in Australia.

By contrast, for Valamanesh, home has physical aspects; it is not a lost home, instead it provides shelter and security, and it is a place in which he feels comfortable and intimate. Rather than speaking of home as existing in the imagination, he keeps referring to 'other home', which for him means a personal home or a home that is

within oneself and accessed through finding oneself. For the artist, other home is shaped by his emotions, personality, and his idea for the future.

Throughout my interview with Valamanesh, the artist spoke of his feelings and his memories and experiences of being in villages in Iran to express what other home means to him. Putting a Persian carpet in the middle of Australian bush, making an earthy and humble house in a parkland in Adelaide, and making a quilt out of collaging hundreds of green cotton squares for those mothers waiting outside the Evin prison in Iran, individually and together manifest his attachment to his culture and homeland. It is Valamanesh's memories, poetic imagination, and feelings that shape his idea of home as well as continually provoke the idea of other home. By looking at his works and thinking of home, I suggest that his art not only reflects where he originally comes from and what home means to him, but also they show his social and cultural observations as well as a dialogue between two different cultures; a dialogue that is visually embedded in many of his works.

During my study on diaspora and visual investigation into the idea of home and how the Iranian artists reflect the idea of home in Australia, I noticed that the selected artists explore their ideas in relation to the emotional attachments to homeland and experiences of living in Australia. This directed me to raise and examine two questions about home and homeland in my studio research, which developed as a collaborative art project called *A long letter to home*.

My project *A long letter to home* is an example of my visual study and investigation into the ideas of home and homeland. While analysing some of the collaborators' responses to my question about homeland, I noticed that when they speak of homeland, they refer to identity, collective memories, and cultural experiences of national, social and political events in Iran. Their definition of homeland can be related to social, cultural and ethical concerns and approaches to it. Based on the collaborators' responses, I contend that homeland is a place filled with emotional attachments for most of them. Homeland can be regarded as their birthplace, and if I take and define it as the birthplace, I would say homeland is where I cried for the first time.

By contrast, home is a place filled with emotional and personal attachments to it. Home is a place that is associated with warmth and security; it means a more private, personal and intimate place. Home is interpreted by individual relationship and attachment to a particular place. The definition of home depends on how we

interpret and describe our feelings and relationships to a specific place. We all define home individually but in doing this research I have found that what we share in defining home is a moment; that momentary pause before speaking of home, a moment where we may take a deep insight into ourselves. I feel that moment every evening when my domestic house is quiet and I am finished with all household chores. Even as I search for a corner, or think of home and where I am, there is a sense of emptiness that comes over me at 7:30 every evening that makes me feel nostalgic, and think of my ongoing personal journey towards discovering home, imagining it and exploring it in Australia.

A long letter to home is a significant studio research on how home can be interpreted which, accompanied with my experiences of migration and living in diaspora, has led me to consider my own domestic house as a place to explore and visualise home. I realised my physical engagement with the household routines could allow me to feel home everyday and visualise it through ordinary objects. My attention to my physical attachment to a domestic house has led me to think of my everyday life and specifically how repetition in daily household tasks can evoke my imagination and bring the idea of home into my practice.

We imagine our desires and the future no matter where we live and work. I suggest here that whatever we imagine is formed within and through our traditions, cultures, everyday experiences and even language. The way we imagine is related to our identities and the language that we speak fluently or the language that we have grown up with. Whatever I imagine is connected to my experiences of living in Iran as well as here in Australia, my cultural background, and the Persian language that I have confidence in using. In relation to my understanding of diaspora and my experience of migration, my imagination is not only constructed by my memories from Iran and experience of displacement, but also in terms of how the power and effects of the dominant culture in Australia impact them. This is quite evident in my current project that has built on the understanding gained from this PhD research. *Seven moments of the olive tree* is a forthcoming solo print exhibition at Impact 10 international conference in Santander, Spain, in September 2018. This project is a visual interpretation of Federico Garcia Lorca's poetry as well as my recollection of the past and my imagining of Granada, while in my home in Perth.

For the *Seven moments of the olive tree* project, I sat in my backyard and looked at a large olive tree in my neighbour's garden that overhangs my fence. I

photographed the olive tree at a specific time of the day for seven days. I felt that my neighbour's olive tree seemed to be watching over my garden, while my garden's fence protected my boundary and my privacy. This setting evoked my feelings and experiences of migration, as well as my hopes for harmony and peace in the present. Unexpectedly, I started reciting a Persian version of Lorca's poems and remembered a time when I also recited his poems in my hometown of Tehran.

The resulting seven individual works (figures 5.1 and 5.2) are drawn from my memories of reading Lorca in Tehran. At the same time, each work metaphorically reflects a new space where different cultures and languages are encountered. The combination of the olive tree and the Persian version of Lorca's poetry become influential motifs to visualise memories, inspirations and act as reminders of cultural encounters.

I recall images of Granada where Lorca lived and studied literature, and where he composed poems about a city with two flowing rivers surrounded by large olive trees. Here in my backyard in Perth, my neighbour's olive tree takes my mind to the memories of the past and my imagination to Granada. I imagine Granada as a sunny and bright city where Lorca lived and studied literature, and where he composed poems about a city with two flowing rivers surrounded by large olive trees. I imagine Granada has a long path shaded by large olive trees and flowing rivers, and as I walk along the path, I may find one particular olive tree that has hidden Lorca's grave in its roots. If I were to think of a poetic encounter between Perth, Tehran, and Granada, I would imagine a new Guadalquivir River, surrounded by green and black olive trees, that flows from Granada, passes through Perth and ends in Tehran¹³.

¹³ The above discussion is based on a paper "Olive trees: meditations on poetry and printmaking" that I will be presenting at Impact 10 international conference in Santander, Spain, in September 2018.



Figure 5.1. Layli Rakhsha, 2018, *Seven moments of the olive tree (test)*, 38 x 26 cm each.



Figure 5.2. Layli Rakhsha, 2018, *Seven moments of the olive tree (test)*, 38 x 26 cm each.

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