

# Sing A Song for Home: How Displaced Iranian Song-Writers in LA Conceive of Home and Homeland

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**Abstract:** We ask how being apart from home impacts the very definition of home. We conducted a content analysis of songs produced by Iranians who have left their first “home” in Iran and resettled in Los Angeles. Our findings suggest that distance from one’s home expands the definition and image of home from a structure where one dwells and calls home, to an imagined community at the personal (home family), local (hometown), and regional (homeland) levels. The 1979 revolution in Iran caused many people, including singers and songwriters, to immigrate. Many of them moved to Europe and North America. We analyzed songs from 1979 to 1999, produced in Los Angeles, as the heart of Iranian pop music after the revolution, focusing on the concept of “home.” Four main themes emerged: the “body of the home,” which includes windows, niches, and gardens; “homeland as home;” “home and family;” “home as a heaven to remember and a haven for return,” which involves home as a place for making memories and recalling them and home as a retreat. We explain how these themes are related to Iran’s situation post-revolution, the image of the Iranian home, and the singers’ situation in Los Angeles after the revolution. The most significant finding is the relationship between home and homeland. Songs use home as a metaphor for the homeland, even when describing the body of the home. The sadness about the destroyed home, hope to return to home, and the tendency to come back to their mother (or motherland) point to the singers’ emotions about their homeland. The distance from home has changed the conceptualization of “home.” The borders of home are not around the songwriters’ houses or intimate families anymore, but they are around the homeland.

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I close my eyes and listen to the sounds of home. Some of the music I listen to is from Iran, some are songs written about Iran by those who also close their eyes and dream of home. But what is home for a migrant? It is neither a static concept nor easy to define.

We ask how time and distance from “home” change the concept of home. Nostalgia impinges on memories to varying degrees. Family locations shift and change. We ask how being apart from home impacts the very definition of home. We conducted a content analysis of songs produced by Iranians who have left their first “home” in Iran and resettled in Los Angeles. Our findings suggest that distance from one’s home expands the definition of home from a structure where one dwells and calls home to an imagined community at the personal (home family), local (hometown), and regional (homeland) levels.

The concept of “home” is fundamental in Iran. The home belongs to the family, and it is a place to pro-

duce, cultivate, and curate traditions and ways of life (Paymanfar and Zamani 2022), including language—even in the diaspora (Gharibi and Seals 2020). In addition to emphasizing characteristics of the home, such as warmth and coziness, and processual elements, such as the enactment of home through interaction, Minou Gharebaglou, Hamed Beyti, and Shole Rezaei (2022) discuss the sense of home in Iran along three indices: physical-spatial, collective-behavioral, and attitudinal-perceptual. Critical studies of home in Iran argue for the importance of semi-private, everyday places for women to build networks and community (Mokhles and Sunikka-Blank 2022). Scholars point to the importance of spatial layout in the experience of home (Gharebaglou et al. 2022; Mokhles and Sunikka-Blank 2022; Paymanfar and Zamani 2022), including the importance of dying at home (Portorani, Dehghan, and Mangolian Shahrababaki 2022). One excellent critical work stresses the importance of evaluating social-structural elements, such as economic sanctions, by looking at the home (Shahrokni 2023). Nazanin Shahrokni

(2023:295) defines the “shock-absorbing role of the household” and how this deepens patriarchal gender dimensions. Some critical work bemoans the loss of traditional ways of living with the influence of globalization and Westernization (Abdollahyan and Mohammadi 2020; Paymanfar and Zamani 2022), and their work is tinged with a similar nostalgia to North America’s nostalgia and romanticization of rural life. In short, scholars do find that a stronger *sense* of home has a positive impact in Iran, specifically. These studies, however, all focus on the home as the dwelling and the site of family in Iran. What of the sense of home for immigrants who have left Iran?

Studies focusing on a sense of home in the Iranian diaspora have findings that do indeed evoke the pang of longing for a past sense of home, but studies shift the attention to individual feelings about Iran-as-home (e.g., Ranjbar 2022; Didehvar and Wada 2023), rather than looking at the dwelling-level sense of home, as local Iranian studies do (with the notable exception of Mohammadi 2023). Marie Ranjbar (2022:723) argues that, due to political circumstances and ongoing policies, Iranians in the U.S. find themselves in a double-bind where “in situ displacement becomes a defining feature of life.” Mina Didehvar and Kaori Wada (2023) extend this focus on the individual experience of displacement. They point out that the literature over-pathologizes difficulties immigrants have in adjusting to new homes and argue that feelings of not-being-at-home are actually linked to the existential crises they face. Didehvar and Wada make a strong case that dismissing the feeling of not-being-at-home as simply an adjustment issue distracts from the real source of the problem. However, we still remain in the realm of individual troubles rather than social problems.

Being at home and having a place to call home play a crucial role in Iranian life. By studying songs of Iranian immigrants in LA, we look to the social processes of (re)presenting and (re)constructing home from afar. Songs embody particularly important data as oral language is particularly salient in the Iranian diaspora as a link to culture and identity (Gharibi and Seals 2020).

The 1979 revolution caused many people, including singers and songwriters, to immigrate. They had to leave their home and homeland to continue their art, primarily moving to Europe and North America. Many of these musicians settled in Los Angeles and, as a result, it became the heart of Iranian popular music outside of Iran. In the first years after the revolution, as new migrants to the U.S., they had to work to slowly establish a musical scene. After a short time, music production companies started producing their works professionally, such as Taraneh Records, Caltex Records, and Avang Music. Singers and songwriters came back to their art again. In addition to love songs, a standard topic for Iranian music, they also produced many songs about their home and homeland. In this paper, we argue that the elements of home in their songs describe how they conceive of home and how migration influences that understanding. This is in tension with how the metaphor of “home” in the narrative in Iran is a mechanism to deploy narratives of “reform and nation” (de Groot 2015:801). We analyze songs from 1979 to 1999 and ask: Which elements are essential to the concept of “home” for Iranian songwriters? How does being distant from home impinge on the definition and imagery of home?

Let us first discuss the extant literature on home, beyond Iran, collective memory and collective for-

getting, and how music production and diaspora are interrelated. As we review the literature, we will pay particular attention to what non-Western, and particularly Iranian scholars, have to say in relation to their Western counterparts.

## What Is Home?

In this section, we explore the various sides of the concept of “home.” While a home begins with the basic necessity of shelter, reducing the meaning of home to protection or a building prevents us from understanding the concept of home—its social meaning, home-making practices, and the sense of home all impact lived experience. Peter Saunders and Peter Williams (1988) state that home is something more than bricks and mortar, and certainly most people have experienced a yearning for something we call “home,” but that is somehow more than shelter. Home is a context for particular social relations and activities that revolve around its social meaning. To illustrate this, the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa distinguishes between home and house (Shirazi 2012), adopting a phenomenological approach to the experience of home. The first author has called this difference “home’s spirit” (Morshedi 2015). Home is an interactional process (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020), which is emergent from our social actions and the meanings we ascribe to those actions. It is also an ideal toward which we strive (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020).

A sense of home emerges when people who live in a house engage in communication with both the place and the people therein. Home is related to family members, their way of life, their memories, and their sense of belonging to the place. As Robert Ginsberg (1999) states, human beings are

homemakers. People need to live in a dwelling to make it home. We can extrapolate that residences are where people live, and their home is how they are, how they live, and how they conceptualize belonging and place. Margarethe Kusenbach and Krista Paulsen (2019) explain that you may not even own a place legally, but due to your interactions, time-in-place, and experiences, you may have a sense of home there. Gharebaglou, Beyti, and Rezaei (2022) demonstrate that a sense of home can be created for older people in residential homes by ensuring they each have enough privacy, interaction, and physical cues of belonging (such as personal memorabilia). Certainly, Jennifer Cross (2015) emphasizes time, place, and cultural experience in her framework of how we develop place attachment.

Of course, the size of a home is not equal to the house’s size. A home can be as small as a garden or as big as a country:

House is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present, and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. [Bachelard 1969:28]

Therefore, we cannot restrict the concept of home to a building structure. As Pallasmaa states, home is a view of personality, family, and unique patterns of their lives, and concludes that the essence of the home is closer to life than an artificial phenomenon (Shirazi 2012). Architects, as artists, create artwork that can be a house. However, home is something more than that artwork because it is a place to “live.” Since home is an idea, even

an idealized goal, we work toward home as an achievement. Home, then, becomes a set of ideas that guide our home-making practices—practices that cannot always realize the goal of home or feeling at home. However, we strive to *perform* home interactionally as we move through our everyday landscapes.

Tim Cresswell (1996) argues about being in place or out of place. To illustrate the discussion of being out of place, he states that sometimes home is not the traditionally idealized image of home, with spouse, children, and family of various kinds. The concept of home can also include home-as-homeland—England, in Cresswell’s example. We are particularly interested in this relationship between home and homeland. When does the concept of home expand to include country? How does the relationship between home and homeland emerge in Iranian immigrant songs?

Persian uses the same word for both home and house—*khaane*.<sup>1</sup> Houses, in the Iranian context, have a destiny: becoming home. The “home’s spirit” changes a house into a home. This relates to the idea of home as a process (Bocagni and Kusenbach 2020). Home plays a crucial role in a person’s identity because home indicates that a person belongs to a place. Therefore, home is not only a place to dwell but is also the basis for community members’ identities (Relph 1976). When living “at home,” whatever that may mean for each person, people perform home and work toward aligning their experience with their vision of home. However, we argue that when migrants must leave their *khaane*, their sense of home, a sense of pre-

vious identity and belonging expands to include their homeland. The concept of home separates from *khaane* and expands to include nostalgia. How can one work toward achieving home when home has been left behind? Home expands, in this experience, to include neighborhoods, regions, and home nations. It is, therefore, no surprise that home is a significant and recurring theme in the songs of immigrants.

Thomas Gieryn (2000) sees the place as a space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations. Artistic representations play crucial roles in the process of place-making. These representations are both influenced by the collective memory and take part in shaping the collective memory, particularly when that collective memory engages with nostalgia. In this research, we examine the collective memory of home for migrant Iranians, some of whom have been exiled, and the representation of home in their songs. These contemporary representations of a past home, which includes homeland, may shape and change the collective memory of Iranians abroad about home.

## Music, Diaspora, and Exile

One of the main push factors for Iranian immigrants is social and political change that forces people to leave their homeland and find another place to live (Naghdi 2010; Atashi 2018; Mohammadi 2023). Wars, revolutions, coup d’états, civil wars, and genocides are some of these big changes that spread people all over the world. The twentieth century was a century of revolutions. Revolutions took place in Iran, Cuba, Russia, and China, among other places. These revolutions caused tremendous amounts of movement, changing the

<sup>1</sup> In Persian (Farsi): خانه



global ethnoscape (Appadurai 1990), with each displaced community forming its idioculture (Fine 1979). These immigrants may not be able to carry all their material assets, but they bring their culture to the new place. They still have their stories to tell, their song to sing, and their way of life to live. They also produce new cultural objects, such as songs, in the new place.

Joseph Kotarba, Jennifer Fackler, and Kathryn Nowotny (2009) studied musical scenes in several different settings. They emphasize two findings relevant to our work here. First, they build on John Irwin's (1977) work on "scene." They demonstrate that scenes comprise complex and comprehensive social worlds, deeply meaningful in the everyday lives of many groups, with implications for identity (Shank 1994) and a sense of belonging (Kotarba, Fackler, and Nowotny 2009). Through music, we find our place—literally and figuratively. Hence, Kotarba and colleagues (2009:310) also emphasize how music scenes help to create spaces where migrants can "anchor the self in reference to country of origin, present music communities, or possible symbolic locations." In this sense, L.A., for many Iranians, becomes the place in which to dream of Iran as home. Iranian singers have established L.A., through the music scene, as *the* place for conceptualizing home as larger than a house—as a home country. This echoes Sara Cohen's (1995) focus on the role of music-making in place-making.

This process is intertwined with the political situation of migrants, of course. Horacio Sierra (2018) has worked on nostalgia and identity in the music of three famous Cuban-American singers. He states that the singers describe Cuba before the

revolution as an Edenic past and hope to have a future based on that history. In the case of Iran's 1979 revolution, Los Angeles became the center of Iranian immigration and, consequently, of Iranian pop music. The social and political reasons behind their immigration mean that most singers and songwriters are positioned against the revolution and its consequences. This amplifies the sense of nostalgia as they strive to remember a time-before, as well as a place-far-away—not just Iran, but pre-revolution Iran, as their homeland.

The effect of the songwriters' and singers' artworks may not be restricted to outside of their homeland. James Roberson (2010) states that the songs that have been made outside Okinawa, Japan, about returning to this city not only play a role in the diaspora space but are also a part of the homeland's cultural memory. Therefore, the content of immigrant artists' works is quite relevant materials inside the homeland's culture. Here, however, we are concerned with the theme of home in these musician's works as we are specifically interested in how home is performed, remade, and reimagined post-migration.

## Methodology

To answer research questions about song, home, and migration, we analyze the lyrics of songs produced in Los Angeles by Iranian immigrants after the 1979 revolution. We adopt the Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) approach because of its inductive nature (Altheide and Schneider 2013). Reducing data, being systematic, and being flexible are the main characteristics of this method (Schreier 2013). Since there is a huge amount of lyrics coming from different points of view, qual-

itative content analysis characteristics let us manage these data to be able to read for themes and subthemes. The two main procedures of qualitative content analysis are inductive category development and inductive category application (Mayring 2000). In this paper, we used inductive category development so that we would not be constrained in our findings to our imaginations and categories suggested by the literature. Rather than formulating the categories before the analysis, they emerged inductively during our analysis.

At the beginning of this research, we decided to select songs that were published from 1979 to 1989 to specifically be able to capture the connection to home for those who had been exiled during and after the 1979 revolution. During the data collection, we realized that singers had not produced many songs in the first few years after the revolution. First and foremost, singers had immigrated recently and needed time to adapt to a new country and build resources to start producing their artistic works. Second was the Iran-Iraq war, during the early and mid-1980s, which influenced all Iranian artistic activities, even outside Iran, especially during the first years of that war. Consequently, we decided to extend the period of the study until 1999. The reform era in Iran started in 1997. It brought many cultural and political changes to Iranian society, which affected Iranians inside and outside of Iran. We decided on 1999 as our endpoint because it captures many changes that did not come immediately after the political change (i.e., the reform era that began in 1997). This provided enough material to analyze, and also capture, the initial outputs of Iranian musicians in the first years in their newly-settled homes.

The next step was choosing the songs. We used theoretical sampling to address the research questions. In the first wave, we selected the songs that had the word “home” in their titles. ECA requires constant comparison between data and concepts, leading researchers to reflect on their sampling and analysis. This led us to our second wave of sampling. Next, we included songs that had the word “Iran” or synonyms for “homeland” in their titles. We hoped they might have mentioned home in these songs, too, which they most often did. In the third wave, we explored the songs of fifteen famous Iranian singers who had relocated outside Iran. In the end, we had 35 songs to analyze. We coded broadly according to the research questions, allowing surprising things to emerge inductively as they related to home, homeland, and related topics. This generated 11 primary categories (Table 1).

**Table 1. Primary categories**

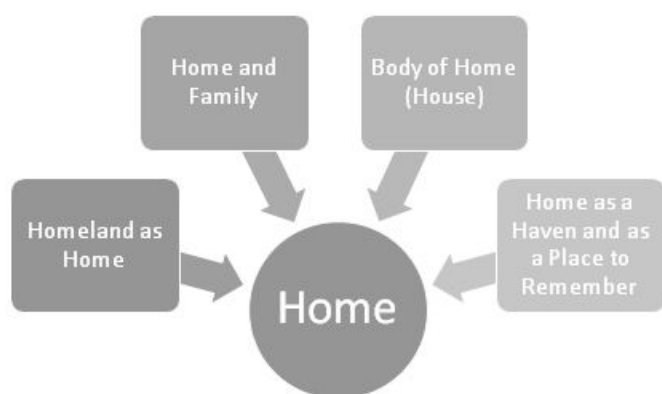
Primary Categories		
Home as a haven	Home and mother	Homeland as home
Belonging to home	Home as a place of memory	Home and windows
Destroyed home	Home and father	Home and niche
Home as a place to return	Home and garden	

*Source: Self-elaboration.*

The next step was organizing the primary categories into related category groups while at the

same time expanding the coding of the (now) sub-categories to include fine details. So, some of the primary categories became the subcategories of bigger ones. We wound up with four main categories (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Main categories**



Source: *Self-elaboration.*

We now turn to a discussion of the main themes and findings, and illustrate the concept of home in the context of Iran and Iranian pop music. Please note that the first author translated the songs, and we present the translated English for our readership. These data demonstrate the main finding of this article—how the concept of home expands to include hometown and homeland when people find themselves located in a country other than their homeland.

## Findings

In this section, we illustrate each of the main categories that emerged—the body of home, homeland

as home, home and family, home as a heaven to remember and a haven for return. We will explain how these categories relate to Iran's situation after the 1979 revolution and elaborate on the concept of Iranian home and singers' situation in Los Angeles after migrating. First, we start with the body of the home, which is a tangible aspect of a home.

### The Body of the Home

This theme is directly related to a house as a home. In this section, we discuss the spaces and elements that are mentioned in songs as spaces of a home. Courtyards, gardens, rooms, niches, windows, water fountains, and other spaces of a house are examples of physical components of a home that feature in Iranian-LA songs. We discuss the spaces that occur most often and also work as symbols for the homeland's situation, a love relationship, or a person's mood. Gardens, windows, and niches were among the most common and also served as symbols that embody, in the home, broader emotions. Let us start by discussing the role of gardens.

Songwriters have pointed out the garden as a specifically meaningful space in a home. This is evident in songs that directly and indirectly refer to the house. An Iranian garden hosts plants, flowers, and trees and is an important and substantial part of a traditional Iranian home. These gardens show the vitality of the home and the people who live there. Songwriters depict the flowers and trees of a home's garden as being in a bad situation when they want to portray a bad situation about themselves or Iran. For instance, in the below love song, the songwriters demonstrate her sadness by describing the illness of flowers in the garden.



Home is suffering from the silence; oh I missed you  
I see the flowers in the garden are colorless; oh,  
I missed you.<sup>2</sup>

In another song, the songwriter illustrates the relationship between himself and his beloved one by describing the flowers in the flower pot.

The dried flowers in the flowerpot tell us about the pain  
It informs us about the separation and the cold life.<sup>3</sup>

Flowers, plants, and even trees stood out as living things that replaced people in these lyrics. They echo the emotions of interactions, sadness, happiness, hope, and the lack of hope among people. Because of the central nature of gardens as part of an Iranian home (Paymanfar and Zamani 2022), wilting flowers in the garden are a powerful element of storytelling. The health of a home's participants is reflected in the health of a garden.

Windows are another common element in Iranian-LA songs. Windows provide a possibility to have visual communication with a yard, garden, or alley. Also, windows let sunlight go through the home. This communication is important in Iranian homes because the Iranian home gets its meaning through communication with the yard and neighborhood. Although this way of life is threatened in current Iran (Abdollahyan and Mohammadi 2020), traditional homes are alive and well in the nostalgia of immigrant songs. Windows are a tool to conduct the communication that embeds a house

<sup>2</sup> *Delam Tangeh (I Miss You)*, 1993, Singer: Mahasti, Songwriter: Jahanbakhsh Pazooki, Composer: Jahanbakhsh Pazooki.

<sup>3</sup> *Khooneh (Home)*, 1988, Singer: Moein, Songwriter: Jahanbakhsh Pazooki, Composer: Jahanbakhsh Pazooki.

in a community, key for a sense of home in traditional homes.

In the lyrics below, the songwriter mentions the existence of thousands of windows on the wall as a symbol of a good quality of life. This symbol is intertwined with nostalgia about a home that "existed," but does not exist anymore.

I won't forget those days  
The wall of the house was full of windows  
Our neighbors were the sea, the stars, and the landscape.<sup>4</sup>

This quote demonstrates the fundamental importance of windows as avenues for the sight of and communication with the surroundings, establishing an idyllic sense of nostalgia and home.

This relationship between window, home, and life is not restricted to the nostalgia and the home that songwriters left. It is also evident in songs that talk about the life of exiled songwriters in the new place. This songwriter talks about how he looks for a window to connect him to life.

I am looking for an empty room for days so we can leave here  
I look for an empty room where the scent of a dewy bush flower passes its window  
where the wail of a mournful reed passes its window  
I am looking for an empty room for days so we can leave here.<sup>5</sup>

Here, the value of a window is in its ability to create ties beyond the room. Gazing out of a window

<sup>4</sup> *Khooneh (Home)*, 1991, Singer: Dariush, Songwriter: Iraj Janatie Ataie, Composer: Babak Bayat.

<sup>5</sup> *Otaghe Khali (The Empty Room)*, 1997, Singer: Shahrokh, Songwriter: Masoud Fardmanesh, Composer: Masoud Fardmanesh.

at a flower or reed connects people with their surroundings, giving the space meaning as an interconnected space.

A surprising element of the house in Iranian-LA songs was the niche. They mention niches as places where they display the holy book (either the Qu'ran or books of poetry by Hafez or others), pictures, flower boxes, mirrors, and candlesticks. The niche is a place for things that are important, memorable, sacred, or related to the concept of family. Iranian homes have niches visible in the main spaces of the home. They are a specific feature of Iranian architecture, which makes them key elements of nostalgia in remembering the body and shape of the home. Songwriters, therefore, leverage their meaning to stress embodied memory in the home.

As an example, mirrors and candlesticks are things related to Iranian weddings that are often stored and displayed in a niche. These mirrors and candlesticks are valuable for couples.

The home has thousands of memories  
It reminds me of my childhood, money box, and gifts  
The flower box of Jasmin and violets in the garden  
Mother's mirror and candlestick on the niche.<sup>6</sup>

In these lyrics, the songwriter turns to the mirror and candlesticks in the niche to close a section of particularly strong nostalgia. Of course, these categories overlap and in this quote, you can also see how the home embodies memories and even childhood. The garden, which would have been visible through a window, and the niche work together in this lyric as the embodied home of the past.

<sup>6</sup> *Bahar Bahar (Spring! Spring!)*, 1991, Singer: Hayedeh, Songwriter: Mohammad Heydari, Composer: Mohammad Heydari.

In another lyric, the songwriter intertwines the process of returning home and putting old pictures on the niche.

It's time for someone to take me home  
To put my old pictures on the niche.<sup>7</sup>

Singing about the niche invokes a space to remember the past, placing the songwriter in their past home, engaging with the niche as embodied memory.

The body of a house, different spaces of a house, and the interrelationships of these different spaces speak, in song, to the situation of the exiled or displaced songwriter, their homeland (Iran), their romantic relationships, and even the process of homemaking. The body of the house embodies the nostalgia and memories of home. Putting pictures in the niche, taking care of plants, and communicating with the world through windows are examples of this homemaking process. There are other spaces, such as verandahs, that songwriters also mentioned in these lyrics, following a similar pattern of memory and embodiment. However, we now shift our discussion to the homeland as a home.

### Homeland as Home

Many Iranian pop singers, songwriters, and composers had to immigrate after the 1979 revolution. The most important reason for immigration was that they could not continue their work in Iran anymore. The new regime, which consisted of several Islamic clerics with varying degrees of pow-

<sup>7</sup> *Khane'am (My Home)*, 1996, Singer: Hassan Shamaizadeh, Songwriter: Hassan Shamaizadeh, Composer: Hassan Shamaizadeh.

er, had a serious problem with music. From the regime's perspective, music should be forbidden in an Islamic country. However, the Islamic clerics grouped under the regime's broader umbrella had different interpretations of Islam's approach to music. Some genres of music, such as traditional music, were able to continue after the revolution as a consequence of the ongoing debate on prohibition/non-prohibition of music in Islam, while other genres, such as pop music, were restricted or forbidden. Pop music was an especially targeted genre by both sides of Islamic clerics because of its relationship to Western music and a perceived lack of spirituality. This started changing in the second decade of the Islamic Republic regime (1990s) and gradually led to some production of pop music inside Iran, especially during the reform era (1997) and beyond. The music we examine was composed outside of Iran, in LA, after the revolution, and before the reform era (1979-1997, plus two years where things were in limbo, so to 1999).

We categorize pre-revolution pop singers, songwriters, and composers into three groups. First are those who left the country before the revolution victory day (February 11, 1979) and did not actually experience living in Iran under the new regime governance. Second are those who tried to escape from the country in the early days of the new regime. Some were successful on their first escape attempt, and some were not. The ones who could not escape had to stay without any permission to work, record, or engage in music. Many of these musical artists were also captured and interrogated by the new regime. Third are those who chose to stay in Iran but mostly could not work for years (or at all). The first and second groups are the ones who left the homeland. However, the second group is the only one that experienced post-revolution Iran,

while the first group only heard about it from a distance.

Many songs describe images of pre-revolution and post-revolution times in Iran. This process happens in two ways. First, song lyrics may mention Iran, the idea of a lost or distant country, their hometowns, or their homeland directly. These songs poignantly address Iran as a homeland. Second, song lyrics may use the home as a metaphor for the homeland. By describing the home, particularly in nostalgic terms, they invoke Iran itself as a broader concept of home. In the latter, we can find Cresswell's (1996) argument about the relationship between home and homeland—that home can be broadened from the house to the homeland. We can also see how, as we argue, the distance from Iran increases the sense of homeland as a home beyond the scope of the place of the house.

In the following song, the songwriter points to their homeland directly, Iran, as home. The lyrics include both homeland and home, linking them to Iran to demonstrate the connection of home and country for those in LA.

The white and blue peace, the bright, beautiful umbrella  
 Will shadow on the sky of the homeland  
 The love with me again, the love with us again  
 The heartbroken people looking forward to peace  
 Oh, the lovers of Iran who are tired of this time  
 The bright, beautiful umbrella will be opened over the home.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Tanine Solh (Resonance of Peace)*, 1987, Singers: Moein, Morteza, Fataneh, Andy, and Kouros, Songwriter: Hadiéh (Leila Kasra), Composer: Farokh Ahi.

These direct ties overtly shape Iran as the home for those located away from Iran.

Now, we turn to an indirect example. Using the word “home” as a metaphor to talk about homeland is not a new use of the word. Songwriters have long done that, especially in political-social songs. Usually, destroying the home is a metaphor for destroying the homeland in the songs. Mentioning the destruction of the home in songs is a way to protest whatever activity caused perceived negative changes in the homeland. The 1979 revolution in Iran is exactly this kind of activity. Songwriters describe the changes as “horrible” and use words such as “destruction.” The lyrics below describe a ruined place where the songwriter cannot find his house-home anymore, as a metaphor for a lost homeland. This particular songwriter (Ardalan Sarfaraz) left Iran five years after the revolution and in the middle of the Iraq-Iran war. This generation of artists, who left Iran a few years after the revolution, witnessed the post-revolution events, which influenced the images they describe in their songs.

Do not ask me where my home is in those ruins  
My clanmate, what could I say? The clan is wandering.<sup>9</sup>

The singer mentions the homelessness of clanmates (countrymen/neighbors) because of the ruins, which is a metaphor for political misdeeds, the migration of refugees and emigrants after the revolution, and the long, liminal sense of time and uncertainty during the Iran-Iraq war.

<sup>9</sup> *Hankhooneh (Roommate)*, 1984, Singers: Vigen and Hayedeh, Songwriter: Ardalan Sarfaraz, Composer: Andranik.

While we discussed using the home as a metaphor for the homeland, it is necessary to mention that hometown has also been mentioned with home and homeland in the songs.

If only a bullet leaves in my gun  
With a voice in my heart to sing for the homeland  
I sing, I fight for you to go home  
My hometown, my hometown, I am far from you  
I sing my dearest song for you.<sup>10</sup>

Applying the word home to a house, a hometown, and a homeland shows how home gets bigger for an immigrant/exiled person when they are far from home.

The songs we discuss in this section not only show the relationship between home and homeland but also provide their narrative of what was happening after the revolution in Iran. In these songs, “music served as a way to take control of their narrative” (Alajaji 2015:2-3). While the regime in Iran, political opposition inside and outside of Iran, and foreign countries were sending their narratives of Iran to the whole world, musicians in exile expressed their narratives via the songs that they produced in Los Angeles. Their nostalgia, their political interests, and their social location influenced their narration.

### Home and Family

Seeing home as a process (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020:597) is not possible if we do not consider people who interact there, initiating and continuing the process of meaning-making and home-making.

<sup>10</sup> *Shahre Man (My Town)*, 1984, Singer: Morteza, Songwriter: Hoda, Composer: Folkloric Melody.

Family, as the core group of a home, has a crucial role in this process. Carol Silverman (2012:60), in her work on Balkan music in the diaspora, argues that musicians miss family rather than the place. We found that this relationship between family and home emerged in the songs we studied. Missing home is not only missing the sense of place, but it is also missing people who make a house a home. Musical artists often had to leave parents, siblings, and other close relatives behind. Parents usually are the ones who start and frame the process of home, particularly for their children. As these children grew and eventually left not only home but Iran, they may miss their parents both as parents and as components of home and homeland.

Of all the possible family members, mothers and fathers are the most common references in Iranian-LA songs. Mothers have more mentions than fathers and their idealized respective identities take form in different ways. "Mother" is portrayed as a person who is waiting to see her children and to cook for them. A mother is the person who keeps the spirit of the home alive. A mother manages the affairs at home and finally, she is the one who is waiting for her children at home, both in the house and in the homeland. Using the word "mother" as a metaphor for the homeland is not unusual in Persian literature, so it is not surprising that songwriters use this metaphor in their lyrics, too. Homeland may, for example, be framed as a mother who is waiting for her children to come back.

The lyrics below illustrate the process of waiting during the Iran-Iraq war and the political executions in Iran:

Oh, mother! Stay at your own silent home  
The disaster falls like rain from the sky on you

Do not open the door of your mourning house to anyone  
There is no guest except death at the door.<sup>11</sup>

The danger at home, for the mother, mimics the danger for the country, where death is at many doors where fathers did not come home from the war. Iran, far from Los Angeles, is silent inside, where turbulence waits on the threshold of the country's borders, as the metaphor of thresholds of the home demonstrates.

Sometimes the lyrics invoke both parents. A house becomes a home in the process of home-making by the people who interact around and within the place. Of all the people who are involved, parents play a crucial role. In traditional homes, extended living meant that this parental role was not limited to their children's childhoods. In the lyrics below, home is the mother's beloved and the father's soul. We see that the house is a home because they make it meaningful.

Home was my mother's beloved  
She planted Petunia in its garden  
Home was my father's soul  
He didn't love anything as much as home.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to note that the mother's role in the process of home is active, while the father is simply present. This reinforces the home as a realm of the mother, making sense of the homeland as a motherland rather than a fatherland.

Remembering, missing, and belonging to a home is intertwined with remembering, missing, and be-

<sup>11</sup> *Khooneh (Home)*, 1989, Singer: Dariush, Songwriter: Nader Naderpour, Composer: Babak Afshar.

<sup>12</sup> *Khooneh (Home)*, 1991, Singer: Dariush, Songwriter: Iraj Janatie Ataie, Composer: Babak Bayat.



longing to people who were/are living in the home. The father and mother frame the meaning of home, particularly as ones who are attached more to the concept than others. While extended living is part of nostalgia, today, children may leave home and continue their lives somewhere else, but the probability of parents staying at the same home is high. These musicians, as grown children, have established lives away from their parents. They long for their parents as the keepers and creators of meaning for the home.

As we discussed, mothers have more mentions than fathers in songs related to the concept of home. The role of “carer” is usually assigned to the mother, especially in a patriarchal system. Therefore, children look for care and emotional support from their mothers more than they do from their fathers. Because of these constructed gender roles, especially those assigned to women, we note this increase in the presence of mothers at home more than fathers. Additionally, where home is a process, so are imagined communities and the enactment of the homeland. The metaphorical connection of women and homeland draws out the connection of home and homeland, both as enacted and processual.

### **Home: A Heaven to Remember, A Haven for Return**

Home is one of the places where memories emerge. As Gaston Bachelard (1969) says, it is a place for memory, thoughts, and dreams to come together. This is an element of home as a process (Bocconi and Kusenbach 2020). Recalling home-made memories is a recurring theme in the songs. These home-related memories are good memories that produce a nostalgic narrative. It is not surprising

that, given the existential crisis in the face of feeling not-being-at-home (Didehvar and Wada 2023), nostalgia becomes prominent. Particularly poignant is the yearning to go home. Craving home as a haven makes sense in the context of nostalgia as a panacea for coping with loss, distance-from-home, and unsettled times.

The pattern that emerges from Iranian-LA songs emphasizes belonging to the home through the recollection of specific memories. Hence, the home became the place and a time of good memories in these songs. Destroying a home equates to destroying the potential for more good memories to be created and harms the sense of belonging to the home. This sense of lack-of-belonging evoked by the destroyed home speaks to the contemporary sense of the feeling of not-being-at-home. For example, in the song below, the songwriter states that he remembers thousands of memories, although the home is now in ruins. Even the ruined home evokes memories of belonging-at-home, while communicating a bleak view of the potential for feeling a sense of being-at-home again.

Home, this ruined home  
Reminds me of thousands of memories  
Home, this dark home  
Reminds me those days.<sup>13</sup>

These expressions of home go beyond an embodiment of good memories and a sense of home. They invoke a temporal dimension that elevates the past through nostalgia while it depletes the future of possible belonging.

<sup>13</sup> *Khooneh (Home)*, 1991, Singer: Dariush, Songwriter: Iraj Janatie Ataie, Composer: Babak Bayat.

In this paper, we use the word “haven” as a place where people go to shelter from what happens in the world. Using the home as a refuge or haven is not restricted to Iranian culture. We can follow it in Anglo-Saxon culture, too (Mallett 2004). While the privilege of home-as-haven is often only accorded to the middle class in the West (Jackson 1994), the ideal of home-as-haven operates as a meta-narrative across classes. In this sense, an inability to access home-as-haven results in symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1998).

In Iranian-LA songs, sometimes the songwriters mention that home is a haven directly, while other times they only describe a situation where home plays a role as a haven. In the latter, the father and mother have a crucial role in making the home a haven. The tendency to come back home is integrated with finding a haven, as in the example below.

I want to go home  
Where [it] belongs to me  
The reason to live is to be alive of love  
I want to go home  
Where [it] is a haven  
All the words are in the eyes [of the home].<sup>14</sup>

For migrants, returning home can carry feelings ranging from wistful hope to deep yearning. As Eva Rodríguez (2016) writes, concerning exile, return is the other side of the coin. The concept of “returning to home” is intertwined with going back to the heaven that home was, in nostalgic memory, and to a haven where the songwriter could take refuge from being an immigrant, a nobody, homesick, and

a stranger. In some of the songs, the songwriters want to go back home (to their homeland), even if the situation at home is dangerous. We found this theme in several songs. For example, in the aforementioned song:

Take me to my home, there is no love here  
Take me to my home, although home is not the home.

Again, we have a yearning for home as a haven and a place of love. However, the home is also placed out of an accessible space and time. Having the ideal sense of home as a place of retreat and being unable to access it deepens the sense of the symbolic violence migrants experience when they are faced with barriers to building a new home, including the barrier of the feeling of not-being-at-home and the well of nostalgia pulling them toward the past rather than the future. Additionally, we can see how the home, both as a locus of nostalgia and as a haven, expands to the homeland rather than staying narrowed in on the house or dwelling.

## Conclusion

The immigration of musicians from Iran to Los Angeles provided a context that offers new analyses of home through the lens of migrants. This interpretation leads us to emphasize the role that family members, social context, neighbors, and memories play in the construction and remembrance of “home.” The music scene is a rich venue to learn about a group’s symbolic locations and meaning-making around place and home (Kotarba, Fackler, and Nowotny 2009). As Bachelard (1969) states, home is a context in which memories, thoughts, and dreams come together. Here, we see empirical evidence of that.

<sup>14</sup> *Khooneh (Home)*, 1996, Singer: Ebi, Songwriter: Jacqueline Derderian, Composer: Farokh Ahi.

The most significant finding of the concept of home in Iranian, immigrant musicians' artworks is the relationship between home and homeland. Iranian-LA songs use home as a metaphor for the homeland, even those that describe the body of the home as embodied forms of the sense-of-home. Although they use some language around the meaning of home as a structure, ultimately the distance from Iran means that songwriters now construct the whole of Iran as "home." Going "home" would mean returning to Iran rather than a specific house. The sadness about the destroyed home, hope to return home, and the tendency to yearn to go back to the mother point out the singers' emotions about their homeland. The distance from home has changed the borders of what constitutes a home. The borders of home are not around the songwriter's house anymore but

they are around the homeland. Home is the house in which songwriters have lived, in addition to its surroundings.

The question that immigrants ask themselves is: Where is my home? Some find the new country their home, some believe their homeland is their home (or their house in their homeland, as a metaphor for the homeland), some explain that they have two or more homes, and some say they have no home (Mohammadi 2023). We argue that as long as the dream of return is alive and the immigrants are thinking about returning to their homeland, their home (or at least one of their homes) is their homeland. When there is no hope or intention for return, they experience their first home in the homeland as a loss, as located in the past, with tenuous or no ties to the future.

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