The Festival of Nowruz and Consumer Identity Politics: An Ethnographic Case Study of Persian Consumers in the UK

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Management Studies

Essex Business School

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Date of submission for examination (March 2023)

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisory team, Professor Philip Hancock (University of Essex), Dr Louise Nash (University of Essex), and Dr Stephen Murphy (Trinity College Dublin) for their ongoing support and valuable guidance, thoughtful critique and feedback throughout the completion of this thesis. I would like specifically to thank Stephen for all his kindness, care and mentorship during the first two years of this journey as my initial supervisor.

I would like to thank my internal and external examiners, Dr Marina Michalski (University of Essex) and Dr Timothy Hill (University of Bath) for their thoughtful questions and constructive suggestions.

I am grateful to the University of Essex for the doctoral scholarship that I received. I could not do my postgraduate study in the UK without this financial support.

This research could not have been done without the generous help and support of the Iranian community in the UK, especially those participants who trusted me and participated in this study through sharing their time and stories during the stressful time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am heartfully grateful to my parents, Akbar and Farzaneh, and the Khaleghi family for your love, patience and support during my study. I am heartbroken for the great loss of my father-in-law during this journey and that we did not have the chance to say goodbye.

Finally, to my beloved wife and friend, Narges, and my loved son, Kourosh, I wish to offer my sincere thanks for your love, sacrifice and resilience throughout this long and tough journey.

To the memory of a beautiful mind, *Dr Hossein Sajjadi*, who inspired me in many ways.

Abstract

This ethnographic case study aimed to address a lacuna in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) research investigating the nexus of seasonal festivals, ritualistic consumption, and the politics of consumer identity. While there is much research on experiential consumption and identity in CCT, there is little about how immigrant consumers deploy festivals and ritualistic consumption to work on their identities. To address this lacuna, this thesis draws upon CCT research and the theories of ritual and festivals to shed light on how Iranian émigrés negotiate their identity through mobilising elements of Persian culture, especially Nowruz (the Persian New Year). To this end, I adopted a qualitative research approach and undertook 20 semi-structured interviews, mainly over Zoom, analysed manually by using a hermeneutic method of thematic analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that Iranians in the UK suffer from and, in turn, perpetuate internal exclusion and conflicts, resulting in a fragmented diasporic community. However, this study demonstrates the potential capacity of Nowruz as a pertinent temporal and spatial context in which to alleviate communal fragmentation and identity work. Specifically, this study reveals a redemptive form of identity politics in the context of Nowruz that responds to expatriates' ideological tensions and their desire for authenticity and to reclaim recognition. Finally, the findings demonstrate that Nowruz has become increasingly commercialised in a Western culture. This means that the marketplace allows UK-based Iranian consumers to deploy consumption resources and a marketised mode of communality (e.g., ticketed Nowruz parties) to pursue pleasure and project a secular Persian identity. This identity is attractive and meaningful for expatriates in resolving their ideological tensions as they seek to challenge and transform social, cultural and political stigma underpinned by their religiosity and nationality as Muslim Iranians in the UK.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Background: Community, Festivals and Identity Politics

The recent rise in transnational mobility has triggered changes and tensions in the socio-cultural dynamics of societies, particularly regarding communities and how they engage with and within the host society (Mobasher, 2006). Immigration is a life-changing experience in which migrants endure various hardships and traumas in their journey to settle in a new home. It is argued, however, that rituals, festivals and their associated consumption practices are unique opportunities that can help immigrants to alleviate tensions, negotiate their boundaries and claim their equal cultural rights within a society (Fortier, 2000; Gordon-Lennox, 2017; Rabikowska, 2010; Werbner, 1996). This study focuses on Iranian émigrés in the UK and is concerned with the possible ways in which members of this community use their rituals and festivals, such as Nowruz (the Persian New Year), in negotiating their identity as part of a diaspora.

Consumer researchers have become concerned with immigrant experiences and the dynamics of integration into the host society. Specifically, they have tended to focus on the role consumption plays as an acculturative force in that process (Askegaard et al., 2005; Luedicke et al., 2010; Peñaloza, 1994). This line of research is mainly associated with the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) tradition of consumer research, which typically explores the dynamics of "consumer action, marketplace, and cultural meanings" in the consumption process (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 868). CCT research views consumption from a socio-cultural perspective and focuses on the "hedonic, aesthetic, and ritualistic dimensions" of consumption practices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 871). Drawing from CCT, I focus on the cluster of the research in this field that investigates the mediating role of consumption and other capitalist forces in relation to

consumer identity, labelled *consumer identity projects* (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; for a review, see section 2.3.1).

CCT research on consumer identity also focuses on experiential consumption and aims to develop a phenomenological approach to understanding consumer subjectivity and lived experiences that is attentive to socio-cultural dynamics (e.g., Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Mehta and Belk, 1991). However, my reviews of most of this research showed that it tends towards emphasising a micro-level of analysis at the cost of exploring the social aspects of consumer subjectivity (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al., 2009). Specifically, it shows that although prior research emphasised the importance of understanding the lived experiences of consumers within their social environment, they did not directly consider the possible impact of structural forces (e.g., ideologies and cultural and historical backgrounds), along with consumers' social interactions, in shaping their experiences and subjectivity. In redressing this gap in the consumer research and exploring consumer identity through intersubjective relationships within the socio-cultural and political contexts, I followed the ideas of Askegaard and Linnet (2011) and the principles of social phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) in conceptualising the interactive and ongoing process of immigrant consumers' identity construction in its socio-cultural and geopolitical context.

Conceptualising consumer identity within the dialectic between structure and agency, or what Askegaard and Linnet (2011, p. 396) refer to as "the context of contexts", I build on an emerging strand of CCT research on consumer identity that is concerned with the dichotomy of agency/structure in terms of the politics of identity work (Thompson, 2014). This research argues that consumer identity work can become a mode of identity politics whereby consumers utilise consumption practices to challenge socio-cultural discriminations together with those limitations

that stem from so-called ascribed categories of identity (Thompson, 2014). A review of this line of CCT research illustrates how consumers engage in identity politics as a tool to negotiate recognition in the broader society, change marketplace structures, and strategically mobilise marketplace resources to alleviate a stigmatised identity (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Sandikci and Ger; 2010) or resist state and religious institutions (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Karababa and Ger, 2011).

Previous CCT research also illustrated how identity politics are often intertwined with festival and ritual consumption practices (Belk and Costa, 1998; Bradford and Sherry, 2015; Goulding and Saran, 2004, 2009; Kates and Belk, 2001; Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). This line of research shows how consumers use rituals and festivals as a prominent source of mythmaking and collective identity (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998; Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Kates and Belk, 2001; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). In building on this line of research, however, my review shows that further study is still needed to address how migrant consumers originally from a non-Western consumer culture use the context of a festival and its associated consumption rituals as a collectively shared interpretive resource in conjunction with other socio-cultural forces to negotiate their collective identities politically. To address this paucity and to contextualise my study, I chose the festival of Nowruz as the setting in which to study the rituals of consumption and identity work of Iranian expatriates in the UK.

Existing studies on the Iranian diaspora reveal that even though Iranians might be regarded as a bound community, they are a heterogeneous diaspora(s) that encapsulates both intragroup and intergroup tensions. Prior research on this group of immigrants in the US and Canada documented that Iranian communities are not as strong or cohesive as other communities (Malek, 2015; Mostofi, 2003; Nasrullah, 2019) and suffer from ideological divergence, political differences, and a lack of trust (Nasrullah, 2019). These tensions have resulted in stigmatic feelings among Iranian

immigrants that are captured through an identity crisis (Jafari and Goulding, 2008), as well as experiencing discrimination and a lack of recognition in the geopolitical relationship between the Islamic Republic and the West (Sadeghi, 2016).

Despite these tensions being experienced among Iranian immigrants, particularly those due to religious and political sources of friction, it is argued that members of this community often attempt to negotiate their individual and collective identities in the diaspora by constructing a transnational identity by focusing on their Persian cultural heritage (Ghorashi, 2004). Previous research has shown that Iranians in diaspora selectively reject religious and political affiliations to the Islamic government of Iran and create distance and make a boundary between diaspora and homeland through an imaginary act of accentuating and reclaiming an ancient, pre-Islamic Persian culture (Malek, 2011; Mostofi, 2003; Rushdie, 2012). In this process, they specifically reclaim festivals and rituals with Zoroastrian roots. As a result, it is suggested that the festivals and rituals of Persian culture play a critical role in alleviating identity issues among groups of Iranian immigrants, making it a salient context in which to study the Iranian community and its dynamics in diaspora.

In this thesis, I argue that Nowruz is an example of a festival that has, in many respects, become one that not only involves consumption, but can also be an object of consumption itself. I also argue that this conversion of a cultural, celebratory tradition into a consumable and political object can itself be understood, and will be considered here, as a therapeutic way of negotiating ethnic boundaries and authenticity through presenting cultural differences and identifying confusion in order to establish a sense of collective identity (e.g., Arnould and Price, 2003; Askegaard et al., 2005; Mehta and Belk, 1991). As Fitchett et al. (2014) contend, however, this conversion process can also be considered a consequence of the marketisation of cultures and the

neoliberal underpinnings of contemporary consumer society, whereby everyday life is interwoven with the market and individuality is defined through acts of consumption. To address this observation, this study investigates the contemporary consumption patterns relating to Nowruz among Iranian immigrants in the UK. Doing so can offer a more "context-attentive" dimension to my research (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011, p. 394), particularly when it comes to understanding the identity work and consumption experiences of Nowruz among Iranians in the diaspora.

Finally, studies of Iranian émigré populations have also demonstrated how this community often participates in Western consumer culture as a way of practising their freedom from what they consider to be theocratic restrictions in their country of origin, redefining their social and economic positions in a host society, and adapting to a new home after immigration (Fazeli, 2007; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Soleiman, 2017). This resonates with the notion that, among other aspects, consumption in Western consumer cultures possesses an emancipatory potential, whereby consumers have apparently endless choice and are able to mobilise their agency, albeit against the hegemonic power of the marketplace or other ideological forces (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

Such freedom is not, as mentioned, accessible for Iranians in their homeland as the state, for ideological and religious reasons, actively restricts the consumption of Western-related products. This tension can, however, lead to some ambiguities for Iranian immigrants regarding utilising their Nowruz festival and its ritualistic consumption practices as a potential resource for their identity work and perception of the self, specifically after immigration and encountering ostensibly free and secular Western consumer culture. Therefore, to investigate possible identity tensions among UK-based Iranian immigrant consumers, I build on CCT studies of consumer identity that focus on ritualistic consumption practices and identity politics among the Iranian diaspora in the UK (e.g., Jafari and Goulding, 2008) and critically examine the dilemmas that the

members of this community face when confronted with a complex set of clashes between restricting political/institutional dynamics and the supposed emancipatory forces of Western consumption. In this respect, I argue that the celebration of Nowruz, and the socio-historical tensions that surround it, can provide an ideal setting through which to gain insight into the consumption practices and rituals that facilitate the negotiation of individual and collective identity work among members of the Iranian community in the UK.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

As stated, this study adopts a CCT perspective to address the paucity of research taking a phenomenological approach to studying consumer identity in the context of festivals. The study achieves this by considering the possible impact of structural forces (e.g., ideologies and cultural and historical backgrounds), alongside consumers' social interactions, in shaping the experiences and subjectivity of consumers in respect of such events. Moreover, this study responds to Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call to go beyond micro-level theoretical concerns and consider societal class divisions, historical processes, and cultural values and norms to situate consumption beyond the isolated subjectivity of the agent and to better understand the underlying ideological forces moulding the subject. Against this backdrop, and by conceptualising the interactive and ongoing process of consumers' identity construction in its socio-cultural and geopolitical context, this study sheds light on the communal context of Iranians in the UK and the setting of Nowruz. Specifically, I aim to understand how Iranians in the UK engage in processes of identity work in the setting of the festival of Nowruz. I focus on the lived experience of Iranian émigrés and investigates the ways in which this population of expatriates signal and define who they are after immigration, and how they maintain, manage and re-project themselves in social interactions by utilising Nowruz as an integral aspect of Persian culture and its rituals of consumption.

Having been concerned with this context of consumption and consumers' ritualistic behaviours, I set out on my research with initial questions, such as what is Nowruz all about? What does it represent for Iranian consumers in general and those who live in the UK? And what does its contemporary celebration in a Western context tells us about UK-based Iranian consumer behaviours? Hence, with these initial questions in mind, the primary aim of this thesis is to use a social phenomenological approach to understand how Iranians use the context of Nowruz and its associated rituals as an intersubjectively shared interpretive resource in conjunction with other socio-cultural forces to negotiate their collective identities in the UK. To meet this aim, and following a review of the literature on experiential consumption and the politics of consumer identity, as well as the integral role that rituals and festivals play in identity work and alleviating communal issues, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

(I)   What identity-related goals, if any, do UK-based Iranians express through the medium of the festival of Nowruz and its associated rituals?

(II) Is Nowruz experienced as a commercialised festival in the UK?

(III) Whether and how do UK-based Iranians utilise Nowruz ritualised consumption objects and activities to manage their identity project?

1.3 Prospective Contributions of the Thesis

By focusing on Iranian émigrés in the UK and their identity construction in the context of the festival of Nowruz and its consumption rituals, this thesis makes a contribution to CCT research as follows. Although prior research on this émigré population has focused geographically on Iranians in the United States (Malek, 2011; Mobasher, 2006), Canada (Khayambashi, 2019; Malek, 2015), and some European countries, such as Sweden (Graham and Khosravi, 2002; Khosravi, 2018;

Malek, 2015), France (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020) and Germany (Moghaddari, 2020), research on the Iranian diaspora in the UK is limited (Gholami, 2016; Soleiman, 2017; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016). This is specifically the case for this group of immigrants in the field of consumer research (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). For this reason, the current study sheds light on the Iranian community in the UK and aims to fill this gap.

The case of the consumer culture of Iranian émigrés is interesting because although they come from a Muslim country which is governed by a fundamentalist ideological state that controls and has politicised all aspects of Iranian life, it is argued that most Iranian expatriates practise a secular lifestyle (Gholami, 2016; Mobasher, 2006). Although most Iranians actively look to Western modes of consumption to express themselves, they face some doubts and internal tensions in a Western consumer culture (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). The current study sheds light on this tension and argues that Persian culture and its traditions, festivals and rituals can be a pertinent context in which to present and explore this identity tension.

Earlier CCT research established consumer behaviour and ritualistic dimensions of consumption in annual festivals, such as Thanksgiving (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), Black Friday shopping (Thomas and Peters, 2011), Christmas (Belk, 1989; Belk and Bryce, 1993; Hirschman and LaBarbera, 1989; Weinberger, 2015), Halloween (Belk, 1990; McKechnie and Tynan 2008) and Valentine's Day (Minowa et al., 2011). Although these studies contribute to our understanding of the consumer experience in the context of festivals and rituals and demonstrate how collective consumption helps consumers to construct their individual and collective identities, they attend less to non-Western rituals and festivals. Thus, this study redresses this gap in the CCT research by exploring a non-Western cultural context and the consumption setting of ancient festivals, such as Nowruz. It argues that the annual celebration of Nowruz offers an ideal

opportunity to study Iranians' collective consumption practices and their identity construction in an alienated context of a diaspora as embedded in their cultural values, norms and traditions. Moreover, investigating consumer identity from the perspective of non-Western cultures contributes to the call for "the context of context" (e.g., political, social and cultural contexts) in consumer research (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011).

The prospective findings of this study will extend the previous CCT research programme of consumer identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Stüner and Holt, 2007; Weinberger and Crockett 2018), specifically in the field of experiential and collective consumption rituals (Belk and Costa, 1998; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). Moreover, it offers a contribution to CCT research on identity politics (Thompson, 2014) in respect of the alleviation of stigmatised identity (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Karababa and Ger, 2011; Sandikci and Ger, 2010), social recognition and boundary work (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Üstüner and Holt, 2007), and reclaiming authenticity through rituals and festivals (Arnould and Price, 2003; Belk and Costa, 1998; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Thompson and Kumar, 2022).

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised in six chapters. Following this introduction chapter, both Chapter Two and Chapter Three present a literature review and set a theoretical background for this study. Specifically, the second chapter introduces the theoretical background of this study concerning the concepts of identity and consumption. It aims to review relevant literature on the use of consumption in identity projects, particularly from the perspective of CCT and in the context of a diaspora. The chapter also reviews pertinent studies on experiential consumption and its role in

consumer identity. It then presents the rationale for adopting Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) ideas that draw on the social phenomenology of Schutz (1967) in order to study festivals and ritualised consumption practices as sites for understanding the complexity of immigrant identity politics against the backstage of other contexts.

In Chapter Three, I establish my argument concerning the role of festivals and their associated consumption rituals in framing immigrant collective identity. In doing so, and to develop part of my theoretical background, the third chapter first builds on a body of research into rituals and festivals and reviews established approaches and arguments relevant to theories of festivals and holiday celebrations, primarily from anthropological and sociological perspectives (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]; Etzioni, 2004; Falassi, 1987; Miller, 1993; Turner, 1982). Next, to ground and weave the thread of my argument from festivals to consumption studies in CCT, the chapter narrows the review of experiential consumption by exploring the consumer research literature on ritualistic or ritual-related consumption. This review includes the ritual dimensions of collective consumption in the context of festivals and holiday celebrations, and the pertinent role of ritualistic consumption in the construction of a collective identity as it is investigated in CCT. Chapter Three finishes by outlining the aim and questions of this study in exploring ritualistic consumption experiences and immigrant consumer collective identity in diaspora.

Chapter Four details the methodology employed in this study and presents my approach to collecting and analysing empirical data. It begins with an exploration of the philosophical and theoretical principles underpinning this study. It makes the case for a qualitative research approach: one grounded in social phenomenology and a broadly interpretive research paradigm which is aligned with a CCT approach to the study of consumer behaviour within its socio-cultural and political context. It then addresses my adopted research method (i.e., ethnographic case study) and

its techniques of data sampling, collection and analysis. Finally, it presents a profile of the informants and discusses the context of the study: Nowruz.

Chapter Five presents the findings from my interviews and complementary data (photos) by offering four themes in three sections. In the first section, the theme of *fragmentation* is introduced as integral to understanding the political and socio-cultural make-up of the Iranian diaspora in the UK. The second part of this chapter introduces two themes: *Nowruz as Persian roots* and *hope for rebirth*, which capture the significance and potential function of Nowruz in collective identity work and as a temporal therapeutic condition for communal unity. Lastly, the theme of the *exhibition of Nowruz* is presented to illuminate how the consumption activities of Nowruz evolved in such a way that the forms the celebration takes in a communal space have been increasingly commercialised.

Finally, Chapter Six offers a summary of the findings of this study and reflects on the empirical findings in more depth to address the questions posed in the thesis. Moreover, it discusses the contributions and implications of the study both theoretically and empirically. The chapter finishes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two: Identity and Consumption

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in my introduction chapter, this thesis investigates UK-based Iranian consumers' identity work through ritualistic consumption practices during the festival of Nowruz. This first of two literature review chapters introduces the theoretical background of this study and concerns the concepts of identity and consumption. The chapter then aims to review relevant literature on the use of consumption in identity projects, particularly from the perspective of CCT. It begins by defining the concept of identity and discusses the various approaches to studying identity in the social sciences. As this thesis is concerned with the collective level of immigrant identity, I briefly discuss the concept of cultural identity (Hall, 1990) in this chapter and then discuss its different representations (e.g., rituals and festivals) and collective identity in the next.

After articulating the theoretical context of the notion of identity, this chapter concentrates on the concept of consumption, particularly through the lens of CCT. In so doing, this opens space in which to set the context of experiential consumption for investigating consumer identity projects. After reviewing the literature on consumer identity work, I follow Larsen and Patterson (2018) and take up consideration of the nature of consumer identity work as an internal-external dialectic process (Jenkins, 2014). I adopted the view of identity that consumer identity is socially constructed, collectively shared and conditioned by structural forces (Larsen and Patterson, 2018). Then I discuss the emancipatory potential of consumer identity work to show how consumers actively utilise different resources and consumption practices to challenge socio-cultural discrimination and negotiate their identity politically. Against this backdrop, the chapter follows the argument of the context of context in CCT (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). This was a call for consumer researchers to explore the influence of structural forces – which people may not readily

recognise in their daily life practices – in the investigation of patterns of consumption and consumer identity work. It also provides the rationale for adopting social phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) to study the identity work of immigrant consumers. That means that social phenomenology helps us to study identity not merely in an isolated and agentic way, but in an *intersubjective* mode that is based on the We-relationship, shared knowledge and collective memory (ibid.). To begin to establish the argument of this thesis concerning the role of festivals in identity construction, this chapter concludes by synthesising and connecting key findings from CCT research on ritualised consumption in the context of festivals and consumer identity projects.

2.2 Identity

Identity has been theorised across the social sciences based on the different philosophical traditions (Brown, 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). Identity is not just about sameness and difference; it is about the relationships, interests and attachments that matter and seem meaningful in a person's life. It is a way that individuals utilise to speak about or refer to their personal or group values and attachment to an ethnic or religious community (Coulmas, 2019). Nevertheless, it is argued that in modern social life the traditional sources of values and meaning – such as nation, religion, and gender categories – have become less appealing in identity construction. For this reason, some argue that identity has been changed from an unquestioned fact into a dilemma/problem (Gabriel and Lang, 2006). As Giddens (1991) argued, individuals have become empowered to construct the self by drawing on new sources of meanings and the different experiences available to them in contemporary societies.

Identity has been associated with terms such as character, personality, individuality, self-concept, self-perception, self-representation and subjectivity – among others (Ahuvia, 2005;

Baumgartner, 2002; Holt, 1998). This chapter is not concerned with a psychological approach to identity, which pertains to the analysis of individuals' traits, character and personality. By contrast, the chapter focuses on identity as it is addressed from a sociological perspective, and is concerned with identity in a *relational* sense that one defines the self intersubjectively in a net of belonging to "other" people, groups and objects (Epp and Price, 2008).

According to Gabriel and Lang (2006), identity is defined based on two perspectives, namely ascribed identity and achieved or worked identity. The former perspective, which is an essentialist position, views identity as an already accomplished and authentic fact. Based on an essentialist view of identity, a person is born with predefined personal characteristics and social positions in the world (e.g., girl, white, rich, Jewish) and presents similarities and differences. In this approach, identity is perceived as an unquestioned, fixed, context-independent and stable definition of the self during passages of life. This is to say that individuals perform a process of classification to reify their individuality and differences from others, and simultaneously associate the self with significant others in respect of a group, culture, nationality, race and ethnicity.

The second approach, that of an achieved or worked identity, however, conceptualises identity as a person's achievement through the life course. This approach, which is in line with a sociological perspective of modernity (Jenkins, 2014), conceptualises identity by employing a concept of *identity work*; that is, "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow and Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). In this approach, moreover, identity is a subjective project in that one can create the self (Slater, 1997) reflexively (Giddens, 1991) by choosing mass-produced consumer goods and experiences (Zukin and Maguire, 2004). In this way, identity is a capacity to

define the self in the world and anchor the self in relations with other people and things. It is, therefore, a *conceptual bridge* between a person and society (Snow and Anderson, 1987).

Identity forms a basis for the individual and for the collective. Identity is, therefore, negotiated socially (Larsen and Patterson, 2018). As Jenkins (2014) argued, the development of individual identity and the determination of collective social identity are inseparable, so there is an internal-external dialectic to identification. That means the self is shaped, ongoingly, as a synthesis of individual self-definition (individuality) and external social relationships (as a source of similarity between us and gaining validity). Central to this perspective is that identity is subjective and coherent, but is, however, continuously revised. This way of understanding the self is articulated by Giddens (1991, p. 5):

> In the post-traditional order of modernity, …, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. ... In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical play of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options.

In addition, identity can be perceived through positions in a social context towards which a person projects herself – i.e., ideal images – through the "strategic configuration [of her available] objects, symbols, scripts, and practices" (Schau, 2018, p. 19). In other words, by being in the world, a person presents the self in different social situations through different identity projects. These identity performances are connected to particular social and material settings in which people are often striving for coherence and social acceptance (O'Leary and Murphy, 2019). As such, identity is goal-oriented; a project that individuals choose to enact or perform in each social situation to

achieve particular ends. Consumers' self-performances are inherently social in the sense that they are shaped in relations with others (O'Leary and Murphy, 2019).

Zahavi (2022) highlights the discursive nature of identity by reminding us of its narrative construction. That means that the self is not given; it evolves as people find ways of narrating and making sense of life experiences. Identity is formed through the process of imagination, which is limited by one's interpretation of experiences. Extending Giddens' (1991) idea of identity as a narrative of memorable and key episodes in a person's life, Gabriel and Lang (2006) contend that identity is not merely the story of who we are, but also a *fantasy* that is imagined of what we wish to be like.

To summarise, in considering the conceptions of identity reviewed above, I adopt a notion of identity for this thesis that is grounded in a social constructionist perspective (Jenkins, 2014). That is, identity is a project of self-representation or performance that individuals work on and reflect on the self, their thoughts, possessions and activities, by considering others (i.e., the image of the self). Thus, following a theoretical perspective that assumes identity as a core subject which is socially, culturally, and historically constructed, I adopt a notion of identity that is a matter of culture and is forged by concerning other social forces and objects in a temporal way (Jenkins, 2014). Hence, identity is fluid but coherent and conditioned by situations and, as a result, individuals can have relational and multiple identities. This conceptualisation of identity is also in line with CCT research that sees identity in terms of "the coconstitutive, coproductive ways in which consumers, working with marketer-generated materials, forge a coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 871).

In the next section, I first discuss identity and culture and, by introducing consumption as a source of modern consumer culture, I then review key papers from the CCT tradition of consumer research to demonstrate how consumption features in the construction of identities within consumer culture. Synthesising across these key findings enables me to position my study of immigrant consumer identity projects within CCT.

2.2.1 Identity and Culture

Culture is considered to be one of the prime sources of identity work. It offers "a 'toolkit' of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). In consumer research, culture is conceptualised as "a bounded system of collectively shared meanings, values, norms, ideals, and conventions" (Arnould and Thompson, 2015, p. 6). Culture is fluid and has a distributed quality, but it accounts for continuities in action, specifically for immigrants in new circumstances (Swidler, 1986). As Arnould and Thompson (2015) note, (consumer) culture is a network of fragmented, although often interlinked, subsystems, such as subcultures of consumption, consumer tribes, and consumption communities, that offer consumers an array of resources for constructing their identities.

It is argued that culture is mobilised differently in settled periods in comparison to unsettled times, such as after immigration and displacement, or after experiencing a natural disaster (Swidler, 1986; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). In unsettled times, individuals can be more reflective of their culture and, as Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012) point out, ultimately become ideological, articulate their behaviour and meaning systems, and seek political ideological goals (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004; Sandikci and Ger, 2010), especially by mobilising their national and cultural identity. This is especially the case for immigrants, as they rely on homeland cultural resources as

a salient source for identity projects (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994; Üstüner and Holt, 2007).

Cultural identity, as Hall (1990) argued, is not an imaginative rediscovery or a searching for an authentic past; rather, it is a *production* process, and is about *becoming*. In this sense, cultural identity is engaged in a "retelling of the past", not only to illustrate the similarities, but also to signify the many differences and discontinuities that constitute a unique culture (ibid., p. 225). Thus, cultural identity is not merely a matter of a past that is waiting to be rediscovered, but is also about a present that is oriented towards the future through a continuous play of history, culture, and power. Therefore, the notion of (cultural) identity relates to constant negotiation within the discourses of culture and history and is a matter of *politics* – i.e., there is no fixed and essential position to which to anchor the self. As Hall (1990, p. 225-26) states:

> Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. Our relationship with these positions, however, is through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position.

These constructed positions of cultural identity are, as Hall (1990) observed, framed through a dialogic relationship between a continuous sense of the past and differences that individuals experience through their being. That means that although individuals ground some aspects of the self in their shared past, they experience life differently, so they frame their identity in this complex negotiation between continuity and difference in different time-place situations.

2.3 Consumption: A Consumer Culture Theory Approach

As a subdiscipline of consumer research, CCT draws from heterogeneous theoretical perspectives in the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology, critical theories, and feminist theories) to focus on the historical, socio-cultural, and experiential dimensions of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). CCT research typically explores the dynamics of "consumer action, marketplace, and cultural meanings" in the consumption process (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 868). The CCT tradition of consumer research also examines how consumption experiences are constructed under capitalism and how market-related goods, symbols, and activities are interpreted and mobilised in a consumer's personal and social life (Arnould and Thompson, 2018; Arnould et al., 2019; Joy and Li, 2012). Specifically, research associated with CCT can be traced back to the 1980s and 1990s, when a group of US-based consumer researchers initiated a context-centred research project utilising a predominantly interpretive approach to consumer research (Belk, 2017; Belk et al., 1989; Holbrook, 1987; Peñaloza, 1994, 1998). In doing so, they moved beyond the dominant rational and cognitive paradigm underpinning consumer behaviour at the time and focused on understanding the lived experiences of consumers and the cultural and symbolic meanings they ascribed to acts of consumption and the commodities consumed (Belk et al., 1989; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; McCracken, 1986; Thompson et al., 1989).

CCT research views consumption from a socio-cultural perspective and focuses on the "hedonic, aesthetic, and ritualistic dimensions" of consumption practices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 871). That means that consumption, in addition to its materialistic aspects, is also a social and cultural phenomenon that encompasses "symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and aesthetic criteria" (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 132). That is to say that consumers acquire, consume,

or even recycle goods not merely for utilitarian reasons, but also to employ and (re)produce the cultural meanings of commodified objects to communicate their interests, and define, maintain, and demarcate themselves in a social life (Belk, 1988, 2005; Elliott, 2004; McCracken, 1986; Wattanasuwan, 2005). In a consumer culture, consumption – in its varied and complex forms – is a "communicative act" that plays a significant role in the construction of the self and both ongoing and subsequent social interactions (Ger and Belk, 1996, p. 295). This conceptualisation of consumption is also theorised through the notion of *sign value* (Baudrillard, 1981); that is, commodities are consumed mainly because of the attached values that are socially constructed in a capitalist economic system. Thus, consumption is a means to access signs valued by consumers, rather than merely responding to needs and wants.

Having discussed the concept of consumption from a CCT perspective and introduced the festival of Nowruz as the chosen consumption context of this thesis, I move in the next subsection to a brief discussion of the four research programmes of CCT. I then focus on consumer identity and review some of the main CCT research streams of consumer identity work.

2.3.1 Overview of CCT Research Programmes

Arnould and Thompson (2005) reflected upon 20 years of interpretive consumer research (the 1980s–2000) and provided a thematic framework for this culturally oriented research paradigm. In doing so, they identified four interrelated clusters of research: *consumer identity projects*; *marketplace cultures*; *mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies*; and *the socio-historic patterning of consumption.*

Consumer Identity Projects

This research cluster investigates the mediating role of consumption and the marketplace in relation to consumer identity (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Belk (1988) developed the concept of the extended self in consumer research to explore the role of possessions in consumer identity. Specifically, Belk (1988, p. 141) suggested that consumer identity constitutes both the "core self" (i.e., body, internal processes, ideas, and experiences) and the extended self (i.e., affiliated persons, places, and things). The concept of the extended self, which is regarded as interchangeable with a person's accumulated valued possessions, refers to the idea that in addition to body and mind, consumption objects can also play a significant role in consumer identity and in helping individuals and groups differentiate themselves from others by utilising the meaningful objects around them. Belk (1988, p. 149) also contended that part of our identity is "a sense of our past" which is preserved through possessions. In his view, possessions can connect identity to the past, present, and future. Self-possessions and those which are associated with valued others have the capability to convey memories and feelings regarding the past. Consumer goods can fulfil an individual's desire to remember the past and connect the self to different passages of life (Belk, 1991; Curasi et al., 2004). Some consider Belk's (1988) work to be a reductionist perspective in so far as it reduces consumption to possessions – objects – and purely to their symbolic or signifying qualities and ignores other forms of consumption, including services, rituals, and events and occasions that involve performance (e.g., Deighton, 1992).

In other work, Schouten (1991) investigated cosmetic surgery as a mode of extraordinary, aesthetic consumption in identity reconstruction. Schouten (1991, p. 423) elaborated on the significance of symbolic consumption activities on improving self-congruency, particularly in *liminal* situations (Turner, 1969). The study revealed that aesthetic plastic surgery not only

improved incongruent body image and perception of personal attributes (e.g., voice), but also raised the self-esteem of consumers in transitional situations (Schouten, 1991). This study contributes to consumer research by illuminating how transitional situations are perceived as a time that consumers can experience new identities and reconstruct or maintain their possible selves by consuming highly symbolic, self-expressive goods.

The seminal pieces above, which focus on consumption and issues of identity, highlight the role capitalist forces play in the organisation of everyday life in consumer culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2007). In this setting, individuals are conceived primarily as consumers. They are both "identity seekers and makers" and are perceived as "goal-driven" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 871) in their pursuit of successful self-presentations (Schau and Gilly, 2003). For example, Sandikci and Ger (2010) illustrate the way in which some middle/upper-class Turkish women use consumption not only to resist and escape from a modern Westernised over-sexualised female identity, but also to negotiate their hybrid modern and moral Islamic identity.

CCT recognises the market as the primary resource for objects and experiences that can be used in the service of consumers' identity projects. This is one of the structuring roles that the marketplace can play in consumers' lives, in that the market can shape consumer preferences and identities by predisposing them to idealised consumer personas through commercialised cultural texts (e.g., advertisements and films). As such, a prevalent theme in CCT concerns "the malleability of crafting identity" (Joy and Li, 2012, p. 144), whereby identity is understood as a dynamic process in which consumers work on the self through an ongoing negotiation, aiming to 'become' (Giddens, 1991; Shankar et al., 2009). In this process, consumers (re)construct identities through purposeful acts of consumption, while resisting or rejecting other types of consumption that are not in line with their identity goals (Larsen and Patterson, 2018; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Shankar et al., 2009).

Thus, CCT research on consumer identity aims to develop an understanding of consumer subjectivity that is attentive to socio-cultural dynamics (e.g., Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Mehta and Belk, 1991).

This research programme also shows that consumer identity work is embedded in the dynamics of social interactions, and is, as such, always oriented to the 'Other' and social approval (Goulding et al., 2002; Shankar et al., 2009). For example, Epp and Price (2008, p. 60) illuminate the interplay of identity bundles and the "multiplicity of collectivises" in managing family identity. They provide a *relational* framework of identity that elucidates how identities are co-constructed in action through the interplay among a household's bundle of identities, including the individual, relational identities of a family's dyad units (e.g., a couple and father and son), a family's collective identity, and even the interaction of a family with other families. They also suggested that family identity is enacted through different communication forms (e.g., family rituals, narratives, and everyday interactions) which are embedded within marketplace resources (e.g., brands, objects, and activities).

Considering the pertinence of this CCT research programme for the current study, I will return to the research programme of consumer identity projects in section 2.4 and continue my review of its relevant streams.

Marketplace Cultures

This cluster moves beyond the individualistic aspect of consumption to highlight the collective and social context of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In shifting from the individual to the social level as the primary focus of analysis, it emphasises the formation of local meaning systems in communities around the marketplace and consumption – e.g., brand communities,

consumer neo-tribes, and subcultures (Arnould et al., 2019; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). CCT research demonstrates emerging forms of social solidarity or boundaries which are a result of marketplace cultures and consumers' shared regimes of taste (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Arsel and Bean, 2013). For example, Kozinets' (2002, p. 34) study of the Burning Man festival suggests that some consumption communities emerge as an emancipatory reaction by consumers to marketplace rationales of "weakening social ties and reducing or homogenising self-expression". Hence, according to studies of neotribalism, although forms and understanding of sociality continually emphasise individuality and individualism, there remains a strong thread of collective experiences or tribal forms of consumption running through the market (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This means that subgroups construct their temporary, heterogeneous but collective identity under the shared interests, values, and norms related to everyday consumption practices in their group – e.g., root-like forms of solidarity in Napster (Giesler, 2006). Therefore, solidarity in these circumstances is fundamentally based on the "localized cultural capital" which members share and present in their consumption communities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 874).

Mass-mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies

The third cluster of CCT research focuses on the role that mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies play in shaping contemporary consumer culture. This includes ideology – i.e., "systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions in such a way as to defend dominant interests in society" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 874) – and its role in configuring the meaning systems deployed by consumers in the market. Furthermore, consumers are "interpretative agents" that are provided in a range of agentic positions. That is, some groups of consumers react passively towards the market or media ideological messages and employ market-mediated ideals and lifestyles in their identity work.

Other groups of consumers resist marketplace ideologies, and, in response, react politically by shaping creative and even counter-ideologic activities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk and Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Üstüner and Holt, 2007).

Accordingly, from this perspective, consumption is conceptualised as a potentially "empowering exercise" whereby consumers can creatively appropriate consumer objects and signs to create meanings (Roux and Izberk-Bilgin, 2018, p. 299). Moreover, consumers do not necessarily react negatively in terms of "activism" towards ideological resources, such as advertisements (e.g., resisting through boycotting or refusing a brand or product) or being under pressure to buy the promoted product (ibid.). Rather, they can actively employ market signs and messages in a different intention/direction, such as standing against a political or religious ideology (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Sandikci and Ger, 2010). Thus, this research stream suggests the emancipatory potential of consumption in Western consumer culture, whereby consumers apparently have different choices and can mobilise their agency against the hegemonic power of the marketplace or other ideological forces (Belk and Costa, 1998; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets, 2002).

The Socio-historic Patterning of Consumption

Finally, the fourth cluster of CCT research focuses on the socio-historic patterning of consumption, which is concerned with the interrelation between structural forces – e.g., class, gender, family, community, race, and ethnicity – and the consumer's consumption experiences (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 874). Specifically, this aspect of CCT seeks to understand the "consumer society", and the negotiation, construction, and continuity of social categories through consumption practices, as well as the ways consumption experiences and consumer behaviours are conditioned or shaped by social institutions and vice versa (ibid.). For example, gender and its

related social roles are considered to shape many consumption practices (e.g., Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015; Üstüner and Holt, 2007). Social class is also shaped and conditioned by consumption practices, i.e., differential consumer access to social and cultural capital within and across social classes together with their socialisation are regarded as influencing consumer practices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holt, 1998; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Üstüner and Holt, 2007).

Similarly, ethnicity, identity transitions, and acculturation are considered to be critical forces that shape consumption patterns and consumer identity (Askegaard et al., 2005; Luedicke, 2011; Peñaloza, 1994; Üstüner and Holt, 2007). For instance, post-assimilationist consumer research has argued that immigrant consumers utilise the consuming of objects in order to move between cultural identities (Askegaard et al., 2005; Oswald, 1999). It has also demonstrated how immigrant consumers often consume their home culture as a commodified cultural object (e.g., food, ritual, artefacts, and music) to try and anchor their post-immigration identity within their host society (Askegaard et al., 2005; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994). This brief overview demonstrates how consumers can be conditioned as consumption, class, gender, and ethnicity intertwine.

In summary, CCT is an umbrella term for an approach to consumer research that focuses on the sociological and cultural aspects of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). By gathering theoretical and empirical studies into the four research programmes identified above, this approach provides "an orienting device" or "conversational vernacular" for consumer researchers (ibid., p. 6). Furthermore, CCT has helped pave the way for an interdisciplinary conversation about the subjective and experiential aspects of consumption in a range of settings including celebratory gatherings and festivals (e.g., Belk, 1990; Belk and Bryce, 1993; Bradford and Sherry, 2015;

McKechnie and Tynan, 2006; Sandikci and Omeraki, 2007; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012), family traditions and rituals (Curasi et al., 2004, p. 260), extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002), and community and diaspora (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012).

In this regard, as stated, festival-related or ritualised consumption is a salient context in which to investigate identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). To explore ritualised consumption and identity negotiation as it is experienced and worked by Iranian expatriates in the UK, I position this project within CCT, adhering to a general interpretive approach to consumer research. Specifically, I situate my study in relation to CCT work on consumer identity and the socio-historical patterning of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This decision does not limit my theoretical perspective to these research programmes; however, as emphasised by CCT theorists, the four research clusters outlined above are interrelated and research can draw on CCT as a holistic research tradition (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

In the following sections of this chapter, I review relevant CCT research and streams on consumer identity. Specifically, I first review the literature on the role of objects and symbolic meanings in consumer identity work. I then explore the experiential stream of consumer research and review consumer identity work within the strand of extraordinary experiential consumption. Finally, I review a line of CCT research on consumer identity that casts light on dialectical tensions between consumer agency and the power of structural forces, and end the section by reviewing the stream of identity politics in consumer identity project.

2.4 Identity in CCT

2.4.1 Selves in Transition

Studies in this stream of consumer research have suggested that valued consumption objects (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988) and practices are especially salient both to consumers who are undergoing difficult, involuntary identity transitions (Hill, 1991) and those in voluntary identity transitional situations (Schouten, 1991). They also illustrate that despite recognition of the impact of the role of contemporary social forces in creating multiple and fragmented identities of consumers in contemporary Western societies (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), consumers still desire to construct a coherent identity narrative (Ahuvia, 2005; Murry, 2002).

Ahuvia (2005) built on the metaphor of the extended self (Belk, 1988) and demonstrated that consumers use high involvement consumption of loved products and activities to manage tensions and conflicts in their identity narratives. Specifically, he identifies that loved objects (i.e., objects that are the outcome of a labour of love through the investment of time and energy) can help consumers to resolve tensions in an identity narrative and construct a coherent identity by using three strategies, namely (1) *demarcating* – i.e., a symbolic act of endorsing one identity and rejecting another; (2) *compromising* – i.e., reaching an identity solution that is grounded between two identities; and (3) *synthesising* – i.e., combining the best of both aspects of opposing identities to form a coherent sense of self. Ahuvia's (2005) study shows that contemporary consumers do not necessarily choose consumption to liberate themselves from the ideal of a unified self. Conversely, consumers can use some forms of consumption to overcome the contemporary challenge of a fragmented self and construct a coherent identity narrative.

Cultural possessions, as favourite possessions, idealise cultural origin and help immigrant consumers to secure and reconstruct their collective sense of national identity (Askegaard et al., 2005; Firat, 1995; Mehta and Belk, 1991). For example, Mehta and Belk (1991) focused on the meanings of favourite possessions and the way these consumption objects are utilised in identity transition, as well as the cultural adaptation process, among Indian immigrants to the United States. Specifically, Mehta and Belk (1991) compared the importance of material culture and possessions in anchoring identity between two groups of Indians in the homeland and the United States and illustrated the pattern of "hyperidentification" with homeland among Indian immigrants. This indicates that immigrants, in some respects (e.g., displaying Indian artefacts and souvenirs), engaged more with home culture and its material possessions after immigration as commodified objects. By consuming their cultural artefacts and rituals, these immigrant consumers experienced a "sense of security" that represents and maintains a "cultural identity" (Mehta and Belk, 1991, p. 407).

In addition to possessions, Mehta and Belk (1991) also highlighted consumption patterns and their relation to cultural adaptation among the immigrant population they considered. The findings revealed a dual pattern of consumption among this group of immigrants, which was the consumption of both US and Indian goods (e.g., foods and clothes). The study also reported that Indian immigrants "felt pressure" from their host culture and participated both in Western holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, as well as Indian holidays (e.g., Diwali). Moreover, they tended to preserve their Indian rituals, while disregarding their homeland's religious values in North America. This pattern of consumption among Indian immigrants implied a mode of integration both through "adapting" to the host culture and seeking to preserve their Indian heritage (Mehta and Belk, 1991). Askegaard et al. (2005) also showed that Greenlandic consumers idealised

their cultural origin and formed a hyperculture, specifically on festive occasions in the host culture – Denmark – through consuming cultural possessions of their country. As the authors noted, this form of identity reflected a romantic current of a nationalist ideology that is achieved through market-mediated consumption in the host country (Askegaard et al., 2005). This brief review of the earlier literature on consumer identity in a transitional situation highlights some of the ways ethnic heritage, rituals, and cultural artefacts are consumed by immigrant consumers to secure their collective sense of national identity.

2.4.2 Experiential Consumption and Identity

CCT research also focuses on experiential consumption as a cultural resource that consumers can use to negotiate their identities (Belk and Costa, 1998; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Moreover, the experiential research in CCT tends to utilise a phenomenological approach to research that seeks to achieve a contextualised, first-person description and understanding of consumers' lived experiences concerning different life-world phenomena (Holt, 1995; Thompson, 1997; Thompson et al., 1989). Consumer researchers have investigated consumption experiences whereby consumers engage in leisure, fantasy, and emancipatory activities to *escape* from the boredom of everyday life (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998; Celsi et al., 1993; Kozinets, 2002; Tumbat and Belk, 2011). The experiential approach traces a continuum from mundane everyday consumption experiences to unforgettable, extraordinary leisure experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993). At one end of this continuum, extraordinary consumption practices also include dangerous, high-risk activities (Celsi et al., 1993; Murphy et al., 2019), and, more recently, painful leisure adventures, such as Tough Mudder obstacle racing (Scott et al., 2017), pilgrimages and long trails (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019), mountain climbing (Tumbat and Belk, 2011), and tattooing (Roux and Belk, 2019).

A recurrent theme in the literature on experiential consumption revolves around the notion of self-transformation through escape from the mundane (Cova, 2021; Cova et al., 2018; Kozinets, 2002). Escape is also used to explain how and why consumers change from one identity to another. For example, CCT research has illuminated this concept in examining escaping to nature and temporal communities around river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), gatherings of modern mountain men (Belk and Costa, 1998), and surfing ocean waves (Canniford and Shankar, 2013). Extraordinary experiences can be transformational to the extent that consumers can have the potential to refashion or reconnect with the self during the escape (Cova, 2021, p. 60). For example, Arnould and Price (1993) investigated consumers' extraordinary experiences of consumption in the setting of white-water river rafting in the United States. They found that river rafting as a recreational form of consumption renders consumers able to experience "personal growth and self-renewal, communitas", or connection to others, as well as communion and "harmony with nature" (Arnould and Price, 1993, p. 24). Belk and Costa (1998) focused on the experiences of modern US consumers who passionately search for self-transformation by consuming the mythic authentic image of early 19th-century fur-trade rendezvous in the Rocky Mountain of the American West. They demonstrated the Modern Man rendezvous community as a "fantastic consumption enclave" with an invented tradition and rituals drawn from a nostalgic and mythical past that implies continuity with the "authenticity" associated with a "good", primitive, non-materialistic Native American lifestyle that was in harmony with the environment (Belk and Costa, 1998, p. 222). Consumers can negotiate new identities through experiencing the fantasy of living in the primitive time of Native Americans, as well as a less materialistic, and more self-sufficient, community (Belk and Costa, 1998). These two works and other parallel studies of nature and its associated experiential activities show how some consumers consume experiences in different therapeutic landscapes (Gesler, 2003; Higgins and Hamilton, 2019) to escape the monotony of everyday life

and "transform" the self. These renewal experiences can be collectively reproduced through ritualised performances (Higgins and Hamilton, 2019).

2.4.3 Critique of the Experiential Approach

Although Thompson et al. (1989, p. 144) developed a well-established phenomenological approach to studying consumption experience and consumer identity, most of the reviewed research on consumer identity tends towards emphasising a micro level of analysis at the cost of exploring the social aspects of consumer subjectivity (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al., 2009). More specifically, although Thompson et al. (1989) emphasised the importance of understanding the lived experiences of consumers within their surrounding social environment, they did not directly consider the possible impact of structural forces (e.g., ideologies and cultural and historical backgrounds) alongside consumers' social interactions in shaping the experiences and subjectivity of those consumers. This paucity, as Giesler and Fischer (2017, p. 4) pointed out, "reduces macro-cultural, historical and market-level structures and forces to mere contextual variables in favour of more specific micro-level theoretical questions and concerns". Askegaard and Linnet (2011, p. 396) contend that although the consumer culture approach has brought a socio-cultural context to consumer research, the discipline needs to go further and provide accounts of the "context of contexts" – societal class divisions, historical and global processes, and cultural values and norms – to situate consumption beyond the subjectivity of the agent and to better understand the underlying ideological and mythological forces producing such subjectivities. The need for a context-attentive approach becomes especially critical when we focus on diasporic communities and immigrant consumer identity work that are highly responsive to cultural norms, values, rituals, and socio-political structuring forces.

Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) argument concerning the limitations of Thompson et al.'s (1989) existential phenomenology and their proposed social phenomenology and its capacity to address these limitations appeal to the present study. In particular, Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) provide a means of addressing how immigrant consumer identities and consumption experiences are embedded in a complex setting of both host and home socio-cultural institutions, cultural and historical backgrounds, valued objects, and social interactions. More specifically, identity is negotiated as the outcome of a dialectical relation between individuals' intentional acts of agency (agentic force), social interactions, and their stocks of knowledge, which are, as I have intimated throughout this chapter, embedded within socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts.

In addressing the aforementioned limitations in consumer research and exploring consumer identity through intersubjective relationships within the socio-cultural and political contexts, I seek, therefore, to follow the ideas of Askegaard and Linnet (2011) and the principles of social phenomenology (Schutz, 1967). I seek to study immigrant consumer identity not merely in an isolated and agentic way, but in an intersubjective mode that is based on a We-relationship, shared knowledge, and collective memory (see the Methodology chapter, section 4.2.3.1). This also informs my approach to conceptualising the interactive and ongoing process of consumers' identity construction in its socio-cultural and geopolitical context. While identity work may feel intentional to consumers (Belk, 1988, 2013), sociological research shows that this is not the full picture (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986; Goffman, 1959; Jenkins, 2014); they are subject to socio-cultural influences that people may not readily recognise as shaping their identity work (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Weinberger and Crockett, 2018).

Therefore, the current study contributes to a line of CCT consumer research that interrogates the co-constitutive relationships between micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis

(Giesler and Fischer, 2017; Siebert and Giesler, 2012). In doing so, moreover, prior research drew on heterogeneous theories to redress that paucity, such as Latourian actor-network theory (Epp and Price, 2010; Giesler, 2012), assemblage theory (Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Chalmers Thomas et al., 2013; Parmentier and Fischer, 2015), political sociology (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014) and historical approaches (Karababa and Ger, 2011; Sandikci and Ger, 2010). To contribute theoretically to this line of research, the current study draws on social phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) and ritual perspective to unpack consumer identity projects within the constellation of immigrant consumers and marketplace, social, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

In what follows, I review more recent CCT research concerned with the theme of consumer identity in terms of the dialectic between structure and agency, or what Askegaard and Linnet (2011, p. 396) refer to as "the context of contexts". This review raises issues concerning the politics of consumer identity.

2.4.4 Identity Politics

Recent CCT research (e.g., Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Weinberger and Crockett, 2018) on consumer identity casts light on the dialectical tensions between consumer agency and the power of structural forces that can dominate and condition the patterns of consumption and forge consumer tastes. This line of research explores the extent to which consumer identity work is based on one's own will or conditioned by the marketplace and other power relations (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Larsen and Patterson, 2018). As previously demonstrated, early consumer research primarily conceptualised consumer identity projects as reflexive goal-driven work. More recently, researchers have been drawing attention to institutional and structural influences (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Üstüner and Holt, 2007; Weinberger and Crockett, 2018). Moreover, it is argued that marketplace discourses enable or condition consumers' ability to create identity through

consumption (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Peñaloza, 2001). Although consumers may have some agency power, they must simultaneously negotiate the power dynamics (Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Üstüner and Holt, 2007) that are embedded in the social structures of marketplace systems.

The enchantment of having *choice* in contemporary consumer culture is commonly considered a route to consumer empowerment and emancipation by consumer researchers (Firat and Dholakia, 2016). Similarly, choice is the agentic capacity that consumers exhibit when forging their own identities. This emancipatory view of consumer identity work suggests that the traditional social and cultural categories – such as race, ethnicity, and religion – can be overcome (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Consequently, an individual may not necessarily enact her commitment to traditional sources of identity in order to construct the self. According to this reasoning, contemporary consumers are, arguably, free to choose their own identity.

The emancipatory view of consumer identity work has been criticised on the basis that the prevalent recourse to freedom of choice overlooks the complexity of social behaviours, structural forces, and access to resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Üstüner and Holt, 2007). Larsen and Patterson (2018, p. 202) highlighted this paucity – i.e., the assumption of consumers' full and unfettered freedom of choice – and concluded that "[The consumer] identity projects, are at least in part structured in and through the market". On the other hand, as Zukin and Maguire (2004) pointed out, social theorists have critiqued consumers' freedom of choice by arguing that consumption is presented not as an option, but as a duty of the consumer-citizen (Baudrillard, 1998; Bourdieu, 1986).

In response, some consumer researchers have acknowledged the dual role of agency/structure in consumer identity projects (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Larsen and Patterson,

2018). An emerging strand of CCT research on consumer identity is concerned with the dichotomy of agency/structure in terms of the politics of identity work (Thompson, 2014). This area of research argues that consumer identity work can become a mode of identity politics because consumers have access to different marketplace resources and utilise consumption practices to challenge socio-cultural discriminations, together with those limitations that stem from so-called ascribed categories of identity (Thompson, 2014). This strand of research is concerned with the intersections among consumer identity projects, identity politics, and broader structural forces, such as social, cultural, and marketplace structures (ibid.).

CCT research illustrates identity politics as a tool to negotiate *recognition* and boundary work in broader society (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Weinberger, 2015). That is, consumers anchor their collective identity to their societal or ethnic differences and use these differences through consumption objects and other symbolic resources to pursue social recognition (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Thompson, 2014; Üstüner and Holt, 2007; Üstüner and Thompson, 2012). This strand of CCT research has also documented ways in which consumers can change marketplace structure and strategically mobilise marketplace resources to alleviate their stigmatised identity (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Sandikci and Ger, 2010) or to resist state and religious institutions (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Karababa and Ger, 2011). For example, Jafari and Goulding (2008) found that UK-based Iranian youths were confronted by the endless liberatory possibilities offered by the marketplace while simultaneously contending with the internal turmoil that arises from transgressing deeply held cultural values and ideologies. They contend that the confrontation between marketised individuality and ideological indoctrination leads to a "torn self" that is characterised by inner tension, cultural confusion, guilt, and self-doubt (Jafari and Goulding, 2008).

In another study, Sandikci and Ger (2010) investigated how a population of middle-class Turkish women drew on multiple discourses to reconfigure power dynamics, influence the marketplace, and facilitate their identity project. Specifically, this study moved beyond the individualistic level of analysis of consumers' resistance against stigmatisation and focused on the social process of the adoption and transformation of stigmatisation associated with a subculture, that of a marginalised group of Muslim consumers. This study traced historically the changes in veiling consumption in Turkey and mapped out the relationships that contributed to this seemingly undesirable practice becoming an attractive consumption choice, as well as the transformation in its status from a stigmatised practice to a fashionable and more ordinary consumption choice.

Sandikci and Ger (2010) demonstrated that religion, like other social categories (e.g., gender, class, and ethnicity), influences consumption choices and simultaneously provides individuals with another set of resources and ideals for identity construction. In this way, however, consumers and market agents co-operate to normalise collective consumption of a new, fashionable form of veiling, namely, *tesettür*, and nurture a new Islamic social class associated with the Muslim modern middle/upper-class. This study also indicates that consumption can be firmly embedded within a socio-political movement that seeks social change not by being against Western consumer culture and market structure, but by mobilising both market and consumption together with a religious discourse of Islam as key resources in a social movement (i.e., the negotiation of belonging to a modern Muslim social class position) and forming a collective identity.

In their work, Karababa and Ger (2011) investigated socio-historical and political dynamics of the construction of active and self-defining consumer subjects through the analysis of historical trajectories of leisure consumption in Ottoman Empire coffeehouse consumer culture. They found that consumption played an important role in alleviating identity tensions. This suggests that to

legitimise and democratise leisure consumer culture, both consumers and market actors resisted the restrictions of the state and Islamic religious institutional forces. They further illustrated that consumers and coffeehouse owners utilised alternative discourses apart from Orthodox Islam — namely, pleasure, Sufi Islam, and health discourse — to legitimise their transgressive consumption practices in that leisure space and justify their new identity as a consumer of leisure (Karababa and Ger, 2011).

The work of Karababa and Ger (2011) contributes to the strand of consumer identity politics by demonstrating the ways in which consumers gained and mobilised a certain level of freedom of choice in leisure consumption and their act of resistance, not against the marketplace, but other institutions. Furthermore, this work contributed to the call for considering *the context of context* by considering the role of historical and social forces in the construction of consumer identity and consumer culture through "a nexus of a growing public sphere, multiplicity of discourses, mutual resistances of the consumer and the market, and flexible political and religious institutions" (Karababa and Ger, 2011, p. 754).

CCT research has also illustrated how identity politics are often intertwined with festival and ritual consumption practices (Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). For example, Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012) focused on intracommunity gift-giving rituals and conducted case study research on collective gift rituals related to the Mardi Gras festival in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans. They demonstrate how a festival and its carnivalesque practices helped a community to form and negotiate a resilient collective identity and a sense of rebirth and collective hope after the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005.

Parallel studies also indicate that consumers use various and even conflicting moralistic discourses to differentiate and manifest their communal identities, such as tension between brand communities relating to Apple Mac and Microsoft (Muniz and Schau, 2005), local coffee shop advocates against Starbucks as a corporate brand (Thompson et al., 2006), and consumers' moralistic tension between Orthodox Islam and Sufi ethics in Ottoman Empire coffeehouses (Karababa and Ger, 2011). These studies also reveal that consumers use their moral protagonist myth to link their consumption practices and identities to a shared moral project. In this way, as Luedicke et al. (2010, p. 1029) pointed out, consumers collectively save themselves from "the threats of anomie, reflexive doubt, social alienation, and existential insecurity posed by the fluid and perpetually contingent conditions of postmodern society".

2.5 Summary and Emerging Issues

In this chapter, I reviewed seminal research in CCT in order to develop a context and background within which to undertake my own study of consumer identity. The review cast light on the primary role of consumption "at the junction of changing social structures and cultural practices" (Zukin and Maguire, 2004, p. 192). The studies reviewed in this chapter also indicate that consumers can experience and interpret consumption differently in their everyday life. They show that consumers co-constitute their multifaceted forms of identity in complex and dynamic relationships within a constellation of other constituting forces, such as religion, the market, state, gender, and social class. For this reason, I take up ideas in Askegaard and Linnet (2011) that draw on the social phenomenology of Schutz (1967) in order to study the role of consumer collective and ritualistic consumption practices in identity work as it is negotiated through intersubjective relations within their socio-cultural, historical, economic and political contexts (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004; Fitchett et al., 2014; Karababa and Ger, 2011; Veresiu and Giesler, 2018).

In addition, the reviewed literature on consumer research, particularly in experiential consumption research (see section 2.4.2), indicates that consumers use myth and its associated rituals and symbols to manage and resolve their ideological tensions (Belk and Costa, 1998; Crockett and Davis, 2016). I have reviewed research that shows that rituals and festivals are prominent sources of mythmaking and collective identity (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998; Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). Nevertheless, further research is still needed to address how migrant consumers use the context of festivals and their associated rituals as sources of mythmaking and ideology – or as a collectively shared interpretive resource – in conjunction with other socio-cultural forces to negotiate their collective identities politically. Thus, festivals and ritualised consumption practices seem particularly fitting sites for observing and understanding the complexity of immigrant identity work.

This approach is also in response to a call in CCT to consider rituals and traditions as one of the key experiential consumption contexts for consumers in their identity negotiation process (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Duffy and Mair, 2018). Festivals and rituals as authoritative performances are cultural displays (Arnould and Price, 2003) that have a significant function in transferring and (re)producing cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986) and an explicit collective sense of identity and communal membership. Similarly, festivals, as a context of the reproduction and enactment of rituals, are sites in which the sacred and profane overlap. A festival can, therefore, be regarded as a context in which the relationship between spirituality, nostalgic fantasies, identity formation, and consumption can be explored (Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019). As such, these events, as Duffy and Mair (2018, p. 4) suggested, can be regarded as a pertinent medium for investigating

consumer identity negotiation, both at the individual and collective levels, as they enable notions of place, community, memory, and identity (Davis, 2017; Epp and Price, 2008).

Festivals, specifically those that are seasonal, are one of the contexts of extraordinary experiences, whereby consumers can experience emotional intensity and self-transformation. As discussed in section 2.4.2, the experiential approach of consumer research has been concerned with the ways in which consumption has become a vehicle for experiencing the sacred and "transcendence" in contemporary society (Belk et al., 1989). Thus, rituals and festivals can themselves reflect social and cultural changes, particularly for those cultural festivals that are not global; rather, they are idiosyncratic and culture-bond.

Finally, given my empirical focus on the Persian New Year as a site for exploring ritualised consumption and identity negotiation among Iranian émigrés in the UK, the following chapter focuses on the rituals, festivals, ritualistic consumption, and issues of immigrant consumers' collective identity. Specifically, I first review the theories of rituals and festivals from a sociological perspective. I then explore experiential consumption in the context of festivals and review the theme of ritualistic consumption in the CCT tradition of consumer research. I next discuss the concepts of diaspora and briefly review the relevant literature on immigrants' collective identities. Finally, I summarise the literature review chapters and outline the research questions.

Chapter Three: Festivals, Ritualistic Consumption and Collective Identity

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, festivals can be seen as an important site of consumption practices and provide a platform for escapism, imaginative hedonism, and identity construction. In this chapter, I establish my argument concerning the role of festivals and their associated consumption rituals in framing immigrant collective identity. To do so, I first build on a body of research into rituals and festivals to develop part of my theoretical background, discussing ritualistic behaviours, festivals, holidays, and carnivals. I then review established approaches and arguments relevant to theories of festivals and holiday celebrations, primarily from anthropological and sociological perspectives (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]; Etzioni, 2004; Falassi, 1987; Miller, 1993; Turner, 1982).

Having presented how I adopted CCT to approach and explore experiential consumption (see section 2.3) and consumer identity in the context of festivals, I now narrow my review by exploring the consumer research literature on ritualistic consumption. This review includes the ritual dimensions of consumption in the context of communal gatherings, festivals, and holiday celebrations, and the pertinent role of ritualistic consumption in the construction of collective identity as it is investigated in CCT. I finish this chapter by outlining my study aim and research questions in relation to exploring ritualistic consumption experiences and immigrant consumer collective identity in a diaspora.

3.2 Rituals, Festivals and Holiday Celebrations

The terms ritual, festival, celebration and holiday are associated with each other and are applied interchangeably in the literature to express a variety of public performances and recurring

ceremonial occasions (Etzioni, 2004; Santino, 2011; Sharaby, 2008). There are shared qualities among these terms and, as such, they overlap; there is no fixed boundary between them (Pleck, 2000; Santino, 2017). For example, the relation between the terms ritual and festival seems nebulous, and it is argued that the separation of these two terms evolved as a consequence of changes in the position of religious systems; specifically, the declining influence of official religions in contemporary societies (Stoeltje, 1992).

The notion of festival is disassociated from ritual as a religious event, and it has become a more or less secular event with ancient and religious roots (e.g., Christmas, Easter, and the New Year). As a result, a festival is a recreational occasion on which participants can explore and experiment with meanings associated with diverse cultures and contemporary subcultures. While I am concentrating on festivals in this study and apply this term to a broad array of public gatherings and occasions (religious and secular), such as cultural and seasonal festivals, holiday celebrations, and commemoration events, nevertheless the concept of ritual remains important to understanding them. Ritual refers to "a type of behaviour that is expressive, symbolic, dramatic, episodic, and repeated over time" (Rook, 1985, p. 252). Some rituals are public and consist of certain elements (e.g., artefacts, predefined sequence of actions, roles) which are collectively performed, having certain functions in societies. Understanding rituals is significant because it offers insights into how group behaviours are ordered and regulated in a culture. Moreover, as Santino (2011, p. 62) suggests, festivals have, to some extent, both embedded carnivalesque and ritualesque or sacred dimensions. The ritualesque aspect of a festival refers to the performative use of symbols, images, movements, and materials that aim to (re)produce social order, albeit symbolically (ibid.). Considering the central position of the concepts of festival and ritual in this study, I now continue

my review on ritual and ritualised actions and draw on anthropological and sociological perspectives to elucidate these concepts.

3.2.1 Ritual and Ritualised Actions

Ritual is viewed as one of the building blocks of human society that can invoke the sacred aspects of social life; that is, the experience of deep and ineffable meanings. Historically, the concept of ritual has been applied in anthropology as "rules of conduct" to describe religious practices (Durkheim, 1995 [1912], p. 38), and alludes to the ways in which symbols carry and protect cosmological and magical orders (Lévi-Straus, 1978; Malinowski, 1954), mystical and sacred or holy structures, behaviours, and objects that are charged with having supernatural power (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]; Turner, 1982). The notion of ritual, as Curasi et al. (2004) noted, does not have a single definition because rituals are performed in numerous ways. Rituals do, however, have "structural and content similarities which appear in their artifactual content, behavioural roles and scripting and relevant audience" (Rook, 2004, p. 318).

Ritual is conceptualised as the *performance* of activities and utterances or silences that are repetitive and patterned to a greater or lesser extent, and are specifically related to religious and ceremonial worship to transcend the spirit of individuals or groups (Rappaport, 1992; Tambiah, 1979). This transformation or transcendence is performed (i.e., it is realised) through participation in and conformity to the ritual. This public and formal performance of ritual is called *celebration* (Turner, 1982, p. 201). Conformity means accepting the order and encoded message of a ritual that is understandable by other performers in a culture. Thus, as Rappaport (1992, p. 254) suggests,

"ritual embodies social contract" and is a fundamental social activity that helps shape human society.

Moreover, ritual is processual and has a specific order that can be replicated by putting together similar elements and actions (Turner, 1967). One of the notable features of ritual is its invariance and, as such, unquestionability and implicit divine meaning (Rappaport, 1992). A ritual event or occasion has direction; that means it has a start, a middle, and an end. As Handelman (2006) notes, having direction suggests that *intentionality* is built into the event to do something, and this necessarily connects the event to the wider world. Ritual is symbolic, which means it "is a representation of something outside itself" (e.g., social order) and is composed of symbols that are temporarily related to each other to represent an unusual or extraordinary event (ibid., p. 39).

Rituals are diverse in their subjects and the level of engagement. There are macro-level rituals that draw on shared cultural values (e.g., holidays), micro-level rituals associated with life events that involve individuals, dyads, and families, such as birthdays and weddings, as well as rituals that regulate social interactions and individual emotions (e.g., greeting and grooming rituals) (Rook, 1985). Ritual is also understood as a complex means of human communication that enables other forms of social communications through the process of signification and communicating symbolic meaning (Gainer, 1995; Rappaport, 1992; Rook and Levy, 1983). For example, the ritual of gift-giving is performed in different ways to communicate ineffable feelings and thoughts to signify, affirm, and ascend social relationships (Belk and Coon, 1993; Mauss, 2002; Sherry et al., 1992; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). In this communication, words, acts, objects, and bodily movements are employed to bring into being an intimate and "effervescent" social condition. Collective effervescence was coined by Durkheim (1995 [1912]) to describe a quality of emotional

intensity and vivacity that is realised as a result of individuals' shared experiences through participation in collective ritualistic ceremonies with shared purposes and values.

As mentioned above, rituals have some similar features, such as formality, fixity, and repetition (Bell, 1992). Through the symbolic process of ritualisation, individuals experience a change that necessarily transforms their intentions and actions. This means that participants enter into a serious play and performance that transforms their action into a ritualised action. As Bell (1992) argues, ritualisation is a way of differentiating one activity from others within a particular culture that can establish that way of acting as privileged or as having more status (e.g., a family gathering and dinner on New Year's Eve in comparison with the night before or after). The ritualised action appears fully formed, object-like, apart from the ritualised actor. That is to say, the actor is no longer the author of his or her actions per se. Thus, an investigation of ritualised action enables us to understand those culture repertoires that individuals utilise in order to behave at a particular time or occasion in a way that is based on predefined meaning systems and archetypes.

Rituals, particularly those that are associated with the life cycle – e.g., seasonal celebrations – have a transformative purpose or force and promote social order (Handelman, 2006). In this vein, van Gennep (1960) theorised the concept of transformation in the context of ritual through a three-fold schema of the rites of passage. Van Gennep's (1960) theory of rites of passage was extended and applied by Turner (1982), who added the concept of liminality to investigate rituals of transition. Van Gennep's (1960) three phases of rites of passage include separation (pre-liminal), margin (liminal), and reaggregation (post-liminal). Separation (pre-liminal) is defined as involving those symbolic activities that mean detachment from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or cultural conditions; liminal refers to a ritualistic process between the orders of the past and the

new order of those future conditions that portray turnabouts of normal social status (Turner, 1982, p. 203); and finally, reaggregation (post-liminal) is the returning to social order and an everyday life structure (ibid., pp. 203–206).

The liminal phase, as Turner (1982) theorised, encompasses three components: (1) communication of the sacra and the transformation of a human through reciting mythical narratives, symbolic objects, and dramatic activities; (2) ludic or playful recombination; and (3) a transient condition of communitas (i.e., being bound emotionally with others beyond obligatory and formal social orders in a temporary way). These concepts are relevant to this study, as they provide a means of analysing and understanding the liminal context of Nowruz and if this festival can generate a condition of communitas and new possibilities of social organisation and identity work among the members of the community of Iranians in the UK.

3.2.1.1 Ritual, Myth and Collective Memory

Ritual is related to the concept of myth in such a way that myths are considered as resources of meaning for the organising of the perception of realities that are enacted through rituals and their associated activities (Turner, 1969). As Malinowski (1963, pp. 249–250), observed:

> [The myth] is a story which is told in order to establish a belief, to serve as a precedent in ceremony or ritual, or to rank as a pattern of moral or religious conduct. Mythology, therefore, or the sacred tradition of a society, is a body of narratives woven into their culture, dictating their belief, defining their ritual, acting as the chart of their social order and the pattern of their moral behaviour.

Rituals and celebrations have mythical narratives and participants in a ritualistic event reproduce meanings and behaviours based on those myths. Myths enable members of a society to connect the present to the past.

Myth is one of the primary constructive elements of collective identity and is an essential source of meaning for societies. It also plays a pivotal role in unifying members of a population and helping them to reconstruct an identity but also perceive continuity from the past. Moreover, myths and rituals are one of the constituting parts of collective memory and have important roles in reproducing memories through repetitive and disciplined celebratory performance (Coopmans et al., 2017; Edensor, 2002). Steinbock (2012, p. 7) describes social or collective memory as "the shared remembrances of group experience" and refers to it as:

> a powerful force in every community, since it creates collective identity by giving individuals a shared image of their past, providing them with an explanation of the present and a vision of the future.

Rituals function to "inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 1). As such, the (ideological) ideas of a "glorious past", "golden age", and "national perfection" are essential elements that are required to (re)construct a modern phenomenon of nation and nationalism. The notion of a "golden age", as Smith (1991, p. 66) contended, serves as a vehicle for historical and archaeological reconstructions, as it could be used to dramatise the 'atmosphere' and picturesque uniqueness of a people's past, and of the events and personages that composed it.

Having discussed the concept of ritual, and briefly reviewed relevant concepts of myth and collective memory, I discuss the concepts of festivals and holiday celebrations in the following sections.

3.2.2 Festivals: Definitions, Structures and Functions

Festivals are collective rituals and sites of cultural practice that occur at calendrically regulated intervals (Abraham, 1982; Turner, 1982). The term festival comes from the Latin words *festum* and *feira* (Falassi, 1987), the former meaning public happiness, joy, and a playful time, and the latter referring to time off from work to honour the Gods (ibid.). A festival is described as

> a periodically recurrent social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, all members of a given community participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview (Falassi, 1987, p. 2).

This definition highlights the point that festivals are a ritual celebrated by people – in public or private spaces – and function as a medium of social integration.

Some festivals are a part of the "intangible cultural heritage" that is recognised by communities, groups, and individuals who belong to a given culture (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2003). As such, festivals are social performances that crystalise "social peak experiences" for a culture (Turner, 1982, p. 14) and manifest conflict and power statements. These celebrations are linked to the development of human culture and have been developed arguably from "the culture and religion of primitive tribes" – e.g., African and Australian (Cudny, 2016, p. 11). However, following the Industrial Revolution and social modernisation, people's income and spare time, especially among middle-class urban citizens,

increased. Thus, members of contemporary societies were looking for leisure and new experiences, encouraging the (re)emergence and (re)popularisation of festivals with different themes, forms, and genres, leading such festivities to flourish gradually across those societies (Cudny, 2016).

Another significant characteristic of festivals is their theme or purpose. Festivals have long had wide-ranging purposes that can be associated with religion, seasonal change, cultural and historical heritage, and social and economic success. More contemporary festivals are also organised around themes relating to art (e.g., music and performance) and carnivals (Getz, 2001; Goulding and Saren, 2009; Kates and Belk, 2001). Some festivals are categorised as a holiday, whereby they take the form of "days on which custom or the law dictates a suspension of general business activity in order to commemorate or celebrate a particular event" (Etzioni, 2000, p. 44). Such festival holidays are often considered to be, as Manning (1983) coined it, a "time out of time", and a break from established or normal patterns of activity. Holiday celebrations, as Turner (1982) noted, can be associated with the season of the year, religious beliefs, community values, and national celebrations. These festivals evolved within a ritual framework and are enacted to protect "the sacred from the profane", and are the transcendental efforts of a society to protect its individuality and spirit of humanity from commercial dependencies (Etzioni, 2004, p. 4). This idea is based upon Durkheim's (1995 [1912], p. 47) view of the separation of the domains of the sacred – i.e., things that are holy – from the profane, or elements that are conceived as secular and belonging to mundane everyday life. Holidays, feasts, and festivals are, therefore, the time to return to purportedly sacred values, such as family and kinship, worship, and community gatherings.

Individuals may have different motivations to participate in a festival. These motivations can be based on their religious commitment, the gaining of social prestige, political sentiments, the display of special skills, social interaction, and a negotiation of diverse kinds of relationships (e.g.,

business networking). Festivals can also be a medium of social resistance, reversion, and play, having carnivalesque characteristics. The term carnivalesque applies both to carnivals and the revolutionary practices related to the mass celebrations which can be traced back to the Middle Ages (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 217). Specifically, the word carnival originally stems from the Latin, *carne levale*, which means "taking away meat" (Walter, 2014), and refers to Lent, a period of abstinence from pleasure prior to Easter. Carnival came to be defined as "a period of celebration of the body, of physical abandon where licentiousness hedonism and sexual excess are expressed to music, dancing, masquerading, and feasting" (Nurse, 1999, p. 664).

Carnivals are different from festivals but can be perceived as an aspect of some festivals. Furthermore, whereas carnivals can be regarded as an effective means of managing tensions in a society (Etzioni, 2004), as Turner (1969) observes, they are widely viewed as a potentially disruptive force as they are inclined to challenge dominant social orders and norms. Through the symbolic process of *inversion*, for example, the established social order (e.g., social class and hierarchy and gender roles) in society is often reversed, with some groups or special characters featuring in such events deliberately being positioned against established social norms. Therefore, festivals become a potential space for individual and communal innovation and creativity within a cultural frame (Turner, 1982).

Festivals more generally are recognised and organised through multiple activities and elements (Stoeltje, 1992). Some of the main organisational elements of a festival are a designated time, an opening ceremony, rituals, a dominating theme, certain foods and drinks, dance, music, and concluding events (Stoeltje, 1992; Turner, 1982). Other scholars use the term *stage* as a broad element to include the condition for setting up a holiday celebration through the elements of design, furniture, masks, body painting, and icons of illumination and decoration (Turner, 1982, p. 12).

However, as Duffy and Waitt (2011) pointed out, festivals are more than a sum of their organisational elements and have complex functions that can even be experienced by their participants as paradoxical. For example,

> Festival events function as a form of social integration and cohesion, while simultaneously they are sites of subversion, protest or exclusion and alienation. It is precisely this paradoxical nature that creates the festival's socio-spatial and political significance for notions of community and belonging (Duffy and Waitt, 2011, p. 55).

One of the established categories of festivals and holiday celebrations is the New Year festival. As Nowruz is a festival that symbolises the celebration of nature's rebirth and new beginnings, I now continue my review of the concept of festival by concentrating on New Year festivals in the next subsection.

3.2.2.1 New Year Festivals

> No events come closer to the heart of the spirit of celebration than the festivities which emerge from the passage of the year. These are the times when participants dress up for the sake of feeling new, revived, and whole (at least for the moment) (Abraham, 1982, p. 167).

As mentioned above, a festival is considered a symbolic process that encompasses temporal reality and marks transformation (Stoeltje, 1992). Having the character of periodicity, some festivals mark the annual repetition of the seasons and occur on a specific date or duration of time each year. This cyclic pattern of time and its association with nature may provide the justification for these festivals (e.g., Lunar New Year, Nowruz, and Yalda, which marks the winter solstice) and an embedded rhythm that shapes the experience of the participants. That is to say, annual festivals can be viewed

as a cyclic force that links a social group to its cosmos, ideologies, and cultural values. Another aspect of the temporality of annual festivals is the expression of traditions and the experience of change that happens in the present and is oriented towards the past or the future.

It is argued that calendarial festivals possess a language that is attuned to the tone of nature and is contended for continuity and harmony (Abraham, 1982). This means that these festivals occur "on the plateaus of the year" and start with a *bang* that generates new energy for the sake of its festivity (Abraham, 1982, p. 167). This language also includes fun and is often recognised by maintaining and magnifying "the cycle of natural increase" and signs of earth fertility through "the surplus of signifiers" and the extravagance of festive-related objects in the marketplace and individuals' private spaces (ibid., p. 163). Specifically, calendarial festivals are realised with "the language of extreme experiences through contrasts" – between the festive peak or extraordinary and ordinary times of the year – that can be observed through the swell in festival-associated materials, symbols, and engagement of the body (Abraham, 1982, p. 167). Put differently, festivals are a celebratory ensemble – i.e., a cluster made up of objects, actions, sounds, words, odours, and social relationships – that invades participants' experiences in an intensified mode to feel the "spirit of increase" and the celebration of a new beginning (ibid., p. 168).

The underscored objects associated with festivals, especially New Year festivals, are, as such, ordinary. People, along with other forces, such as the media and the marketplace, however, alter these objects and change their assigned meanings through diverse celebratory acts of *play* and *display* (Abraham, 1982, p. 168). As Turner (1982, p. 19) asserted, this creative process of celebration can conjure up a temporality so that "private space is thus socialized, enculturated; social space is correspondingly made private". Furthermore, calendarial festivals provide an occasion on which social and economic social ties are renewed and the spirit of community

becomes more important than social structure (Abraham, 1982). This means that participants can experience a fantasy of joyful liberation from everyday life routines and social structures during the festive celebration, and thus they can return to sacred values.

Having defined the concept of festival and introduced New Year celebrations as an important genre of festival for the current study, in the next section I discuss the functionalist view of festivals. This section helps me to establish part of my argument regarding the therapeutic function and capacity of Nowruz in alleviating communal fragmentation.

3.2.3 Festivals: A Functionalist View

> Festival events are much more than simply a source of financial gain; rather, the processes of festivals enable notions of place, community, identity and belonging to be to some extent actively negotiated, questioned and experienced (Duffy and Mair, 2018a, p. 4).

Festivals, as collective ritualistic performances, carry out certain functions in societies and between social groups and among individuals (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]; Etzioni, 2004; Miller, 2017). According to the structural-functionalist approach, festivals and holidays have varied social functions, which include achieving or accomplishing social integrity, social order, tension management, and group socialisation, and the expression and reinforcement of collective identity (Bell, 1997; Etzioni, 2000, 2004; Stoeltje, 1992; Turner, 1969). This functionalist perspective on ritual and festivals can be traced back to Durkheim's (1995 [1912]) theory of religion, as well as his accounts of the integrative function of rituals, and specifically religious beliefs and practices, in maintaining the totality and stability of a social system. In this view, as Durkheim (1995 [1912]) proposed, the realms of the "sacred" and "profane" in human societies are separated. Religions

(rituals) are enacted as a major mechanism for group solidarity (i.e., the bond between the members of a group), social integrity, and revivifying the collective consciousness.

Building on Durkheim's (1995 [1912]) functionalist perspective on rituals, Etzioni (2004, p. 10) developed a theory that illuminated how holidays perform as a channel to "reaffirm communal bonds" and integrate social entities in a society based upon shared beliefs and values. He contended that holidays have two general functions in society: "recommitment to moral values and principles and 'tension management'" (Etzioni, 2004, p. 16). Recommitment holidays directly reinforce shared beliefs through the celebration of dramatic rituals (e.g., Easter, Ramadan, and Thanksgiving). They play a significant role in social integration, and draw upon elements such as "narratives, drama and ceremonies" to gather individuals based on their commitment to ritualistic behaviours and shared beliefs (Etzioni, 2004, p. 11).

Tension management holidays, especially those that incorporate carnivalesque characteristics, have *cathartic* effects. That is, they permit individuals to behave temporarily against the norms and social beliefs in specific times and places, indirectly enhancing societal integration and socialisation by suspending some social norms and allowing individuals to let off steam, so to speak. However, as Etzioni (2004, p. 34) asserted, recommitment holidays may strengthen social integration more than tension management festivals because the latter can increase social division by promoting social practices that can be against accepted social norms (e.g., sexual practices during carnivals that conflict with family values).

As maintained above, festivals and celebrations can be understood as having a therapeutic effect by providing a temporary reconciliation between community members. In this regard, Turner (1982, p. 21) pointed out that a festival or celebration

[B]rings members of a society into a single socio-cultural space..., it also brings into close proximity persons and groups who may have endemic or transitory antagonisms. … Conflict is held in abeyance during the period of ritualised action.

This function of festivals, associated with social structure and anti-structure, is based upon a "perception of shared emotional states" that is conceptualised through the notion of *communitas* (Turner, 1982, p. 21). That is, the state of the "joyous shared flow or solemn communion released by passing into the liminal, 'betwixt-and-between' state intervening between the 'safe' but dull domains of routinized and classified life" (ibid., p. 29). However, as Etzioni (2004) notes, communitas does not reflect actual communal bonding, but can be observed from a shallow to a deep level through different modes of group interactions.

Holidays are also perceived as a reliable means of exploring social changes. In other words, studying a holiday or festival associated with culture will provide information about that festival per se, together with the socio-cultural characteristics of that society (Etzioni, 2000). A strand of studies of festivals in anthropology and sociology focuses on the dynamics of "festivals, social groups and collective identity" (Leal, 2016, p. 585). These studies have investigated the function of festivals in shaping collective identity (social cohesion) and managing authenticity and recognition among social groups and communities, especially immigrant groups (e.g., Leal, 2015, 2016; Nurse, 1999). For example, Leal (2016, p. 584) studied the link between festivals, social groups, and social identities in the context of the Holy Ghost festival among Azorean migrants in North America. His study shows the performative role of festivals as a social context in the continuous production of cultural distinctiveness and collective identities among this immigrant group. More specifically, by drawing on Brubaker's (2002) and Latour's (2005) critical views of Durkheim's functionalist approach to rituals, Leal (2016) proposed that the festival is not merely a

mirror of the social organisation or a means for reproducing the current order; rather, it can be viewed as an instrument for driving novel changes in society whereby fragmented and plural groups among these immigrants can form (based on the places of origin of the immigrants) an albeit fragile or ephemeral sense of community.

Festivals also function as a setting for intercultural relations (Leal, 2016). For instance, migrants may attempt to represent their rituals to others through the celebration of their festivals, in order to seek recognition of their cultural distinctiveness (Arnould and Price, 2003). For example, Nurse (1999) shows the significance of a festival as a way to introduce a culture to other cultures, and specifically the development of migrant festivals in a host culture. This indicates how festivals can be applied as a way to integrate in a society or negotiation of identity among migrants.

Further research has documented that festivals function to facilitate community building (Duffy and Mair, 2018b), the interaction between individuals from different localities (Duffy and Mair, 2018a), and a sense of safety and stability (Leal, 2016). For instance, festivals enable local communities, specifically marginal social groups (e.g., immigrant communities and LGBT groups) to negotiate their identities (Duffy and Mair, 2018b). "Festivalisation helps to shape communal notions of identity and belonging through the collective understanding of space, time and agency" (Duffy and Mair, 2021, p. 4). Festivals facilitate the idea of community building through the discourse of *imagined community* (Anderson, 1983). That is, a fragile sense of a unified community among a population that is based on a nationalistic, hegemonic ideology; however, it is imaginary because it does not represent the pluralities and differences among community members. Festivals can also facilitate interactions between individuals who may not otherwise meet – both those within a geographically local community and those within a broader community of interest. Moreover, as Duffy and Mair (2018a) point out, although a festival may itself only offer opportunities for brief

and temporal encounters, it can lead to broader and long-term network-building among individuals in different ways, such as the exchange of knowledge and business relations.

Having discussed the function of festivals in constructing social cohesion and collective identity, other studies can shed light on the political function of festivals. Specifically, in a large society with different ethno-cultural groups and communities, each community may celebrate its own holiday and can be indifferent or loyal towards other dominant holidays (Salonen, 2016; Weinberger, 2015). Thus, a festival can be viewed as a political act; that is, members or groups in a society participate in a festival to demonstrate their ideological divergence from the dominant or hegemonic ideological system (Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). Through this performance, they negotiate a group identity against a dominant identity or ideologies. Therefore, it is suggested that festivals and public holidays have political functions to play in managing intergroup or intracommunity relationships and controlling the possible tensions in a society (Etzioni, 2004; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012).

For instance, Estiri (2018, p. 121) drew on the concept of traditionalisation (Bauman, 2004; Hyme, 1975), which is the process by which practices of the past are recontextualised in order to adapt to emerging contemporary contexts, and observed that the festival of *Chaharshanbeh Suri* – the Iranian festival of fire, which is celebrated annually on the eve of the last Wednesday of winter – is traditionalised or reframed by intellectual or middle-class participants as a continuous tradition from Zoroastrianism. This is done in order to promote the nationalistic discourse of Zoroastrian-Ancient Iran or "the true Iranian identity" against that of the Islamic Republic that promotes a discourse of an Islamic Iran.

Estiri's (2018) study revealed that although the authentic meaning and performance of Chaharshanbeh Suri as a ritual related to Nowruz (e.g., the kindling of a fire on the rooftops for the last five nights before Nowruz to commemorate the spirits of the ancestors) had most likely completely changed after the Arab conquests of the region, and that many members of the society celebrate Chaharshanbeh Suri in *an imaginary way* to associate themselves with the Zoroastrian past and a modern Iranian nationalism (e.g., Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016). For this purpose, they have attached new meanings to this festival and utilised it in a largely decontextualised form as a political performance against the current Iranian regime's Islamic discourse. The festival itself, however, is rejected by the Zoroastrian community in Iran, as it is not considered genuine in its current form and content (Foltz, 2011). Thus, this evidence exemplifies the historical changes in the form and meanings of festivals and shows how a festival can function politically as the medium for promoting a suppressed or marginalised identity while rejecting a politically dominant one.

To summarise, previous research acknowledges the pivotal role festivals can play in building and reconstructing a sense of community (Duffy and Mair, 2018, 2021) and collective memory (Coopmans et al., 2017, p. 746; Edensor, 2002) and as a political mechanism to help shape social identity (Duffy and Mair, 2018a; Estiri, 2018). Another line of research builds on this argument, however, and focuses on the consumption practices associated with festivals and rituals and their role in consumer identity work. This line of research is pertinent to the study of festivals in consumer research and CCT and contributes to multidisciplinary studies of the festival experience (Kinnunen, 2018). In the next section, I review this line of research and unpack the ways in which ritualistic consumption and rituals of consumption are mobilised by consumers and the marketplace during festivals to help construct the consumer's individual and collective identity.

3.3 Festival and Ritualistic Consumption

Today, participation in a festival is often predominantly a consumption experience, whereby consumers with different motivations involve themselves in ritualised performances while spending time, money, and labour to enact myths and ideologies (Belk and Costa, 1998; Goulding and Saren, 2009; Kinnunen, 2018; Wallendorf and Arnold, 1991). As Long et al., (1990) have argued, festivals and holidays have evolved as a means of supporting the economy by increasing market demand for products and services, consumer expenditure, and tourism, as well as through creating seasonal jobs, locally and around the globe. For instance, Christmas, as Storey (2008, p. 20) has pointed out, is viewed "first and foremost as a commercial festival or event", which is almost universally celebrated through "conspicuous consumption" (see Miller, 2017 for aspects of the history of Christmas). Moreover, Christmas today makes a critical contribution to the economy and is often considered as a barometer of the health of an economy and consumer confidence (Hancock and Rehn, 2011).

Research has also shed light on the consumption and materialism aspects of festivals from a socio-anthropological perspective (Etzioni, 2004; Miller, 1993). In this research, it is argued that the romanticised notion of family and its related values, together with nostalgia, are at the centre of contemporary festivals (e.g., Christmas and Thanksgiving) and that values, the so-called spirit of Christmas, perform "alchemy in reverse" to transform goods into personalised possessions associated with the sense of commitment to family (Miller, 1993, p. 152). In this regard, for example, Miller (1993) shows how Christmas in Trinidad is interwoven with an intensive amount of consumer spending, cleaning, and homemade cooking, together with visiting family and friends during the festive season, which function to unify Trinidadians' heterogeneous society. This image of shopping and the commercialisation of a festival is often presented to criticise contemporary

Christmas as a materialistic event, which is considered a threat to its authenticity and nostalgic image as "a traditional family and religious festival" (Miller, 1993, p. 134). However, Miller (1993) contends that the materialism and consumption rituals of Christmas in the context of Trinidad (e.g., gift-giving, food and drink, and house decorating) are also understood as a moral act that encourages sociality and family solidarity and, therefore, "the result seems to be less celebration of materialism, than a sacralization of shopping" (p. 149).

In a parallel line of thought, research into experiential consumption in CCT has focused on exploring consumer experiences in the context of festivals and holiday celebrations and other activities embedded with extraordinary experiences (Belk, 1987, 1990; Chaney and Goulding, 2016; Griffin et al., 2018; Kozinets, 2002; McKechnie and Tynan, 2006; Mimura and Belk, 2005; Otnes et al., 2009; Wallendorf and Arnold, 1991). This stream of CCT research, moreover, casts light on ritual activities and their role in contemporary consumer culture, particularly in terms of celebratory occasions. CCT research also highlights the ritualistic aspect of such consumption and explores consumption practices as a constituting part of holiday celebrations and festivals and the symbolic values and meanings underpinning such activities (Rook, 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). To review this line of research, I now briefly explore how ritual is considered in consumer research and then review some of the pertinent CCT studies in the context of festivals and holiday celebrations.

3.3.1 Ritual and Consumer Research: Ritualistic Aspects of Consumption

The concept of ritual was introduced into consumer research in the 1980s, when consumer researchers explored the experiential, symbolic, and transcendental aspects of consumption and its meanings as embedded in various contexts (Belk, 1987; Belk et al., 1989; Hirschman and LaBarbera, 1989; McCracken, 1986, 1988; Rook, 1985). Specifically, researchers extended

Durkheim's (1995 [1912]) and Eliade's (1959) conceptualisation of the sacred and profane into the context of consumer research to understand the ways in which consumption is employed as a primary vehicle for experiencing the sacred or an extraordinary status – sacralisation (Belk et al., 1989).

In consumer research, rituals are characterised as an episodic and processual chain of actions which are traditionally fixed in terms of the content, sequence, and time of events. Thus, rituals are experienced habitually based on a prescribed order (a way of doing) with defined beginning, middle, and end activities, and are repeated in a specific sequence and episodes or phases over time (Holt, 1992; Rook, 1985). Drawing on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor, Rook (1985) elaborated on rituals as dramatic enactments and suggested four components or elements which shape ritualistic experience: *ritual artefacts*, *ritual script*, *ritual performance role(s)*, and *ritual audience*. These concepts are important for understanding the ways in which participation in a ritual and festival depends on the extent to which one is able or willing to consume ritual objects or artefacts, follow the norms and the sequence of a ritual (i.e., the ritual script), and, finally, perform the roles as acknowledged by others as the audience.

Consumer researchers have illustrated that consuming objects and experiences can be transformed symbolically from the economic sphere into a singularised and transcendental realm through consumption rituals (Belk et al., 1989; McCracken, 1986; Rook, 1985). In this regard, McCracken (1986, p. 71) shed light on the mobile quality of cultural meanings and suggested a "trajectory perspective" to the pattern of movement of such meanings. He argued that meanings are continuously derived from the intangible "culturally constituted world" and move to the tangible world of consumer goods through the mechanisms of advertising and the fashion system, and four personal consumption rituals – "possession; exchange; grooming; divestment" (ibid., p.

72). For McCracken (1986, p. 80), consumption/consumer rituals – as explained below – are symbolic actions that consumers practise in order to transfer cultural meanings from consumption objects to the self and (re)create a sense of belonging.

McCracken (1986) suggests four consuming rituals, as follows. (1) *Possession rituals*, defined as claiming some symbolic qualities of marketplace objects through activities, such as "cleaning, discussing, reflecting, comparing, photographing, and showing off the goods" that consumers move into their private space, and make efforts to personalise the goods from their own cultural world to the objects (McCracken, 1986, p. 79). Based on these rituals, consumers deploy the marketplace objects not merely for consumption, but as a way to communicate and represent their experiences and the self through cultural categories, such as gender, class, and lifestyle. (2) *The ritual of exchange* or gift-giving encompasses not only the exchange of goods, but also the transfer of symbolic meanings through the actions associated with giving and receiving. Consumers choose, purchase, and exchange gifts with others on different occasions (e.g., Christmas) to communicate with others as well as to influence each other (Mauss, 2002). Thus, gift-giving in consumer culture is an opportunity for transferring cultural meaning in a way that givers selectively choose some symbolic meanings and wish to transfer the meanings onto the recipient through goods. (3) *Grooming rituals*, which refer to the continual efforts of consumers to draw out and freshen "perishable meanings" from consuming goods to consumers (e.g., hairdressing, make-up, and house cleaning). It is the means by which consumers release or cultivate the most glamorous and heightened meaningful qualities from the goods and invest them in the self. (4) *Divestment rituals*, which are symbolic activities that consumers do to erase the meaning associated with possessions that belong to themselves (when consumers want to dispose of or sell their objects) and when they want to claim consumer goods as their possessions from the prior owner. A review

of McCracken (1986) and other similar studies shows the primary role of consumer rituals in rendering and sustaining a sacred status (social and cultural meaning) through consumption. McCracken's (1986) accounts have, however, faced some critiques (McKechnie and Tynan, 2006). For example, although they reflected on the role of socio-cultural context in shaping consumption meaning, they ignored other contexts, such as political and ideological forces.

Consumer researchers have explored ritualistic dimensions of consumptions associated with celebration through gatherings for shared meals and family mealtimes (Bradford and Sherry, 2015; Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Thompson and Arsel, 2004), and subcultures, such as goths (Goulding and Saren, 2009), gift-giving exchange rituals through the lens of moral and market economies (Bajde, 2009; Belk and Coon, 1993; Giesler, 2006; Lowrey and Otnes, 1994; Sherry, 1983; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012), formalised life passage ceremonies, such as weddings and marriage payment rituals (Otnes et al., 1997; Sandikci and İlhan, 2004), and death rituals (Bonsu and Belk, 2003). They have also extended the study of rituals to include raving or clubbing (Goulding and Shankar, 2011) and extraordinary experiences such as river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993) and attending the Burning Man Festival (Kozinets, 2002). These studies apply the terms ritualistic consumption, ritualised consumption, consumption rituals, and consumer rituals interchangeably. In this study, I focus on the term *ritualistic consumption* and apply this concept as meaning symbolic collective consumption which is "unforgettable and reconnects people" (Rook, 1985; Weinberger, 2015, p. 378). In what follows, I briefly review the pertinent CCT research on ritualistic consumption within the context of festivals and holiday celebrations. As my study has as its setting the festival of Persian New Year, I then narrow my review to the context of New Year festivals and their associated rituals in consumer research.

3.3.2 Ritualistic Consumption in the Setting of Calendrical Festivals

There has been increasing interest in festivals and holidays among consumer researchers, and a growing body of literature in CCT research that has investigated ritualistic consumption in such contexts. For example, the celebration of the culture of food abundance and family togetherness at Thanksgiving (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), Black Friday shopping (Thomas and Peters, 2011), Christmas (Belk, 1989; Belk and Bryce, 1993; Hirschman and LaBarbera, 1989; Weinberger, 2015), Halloween (Belk, 1990; McKechnie and Tynan, 2008), Japanese Christmas (Kimura and Belk, 2005) and Valentine's Day (Minowa et al., 2011), Ramadan and Christmas (Sandikci and Omeraki, 2007), and the Qurban ritual (Torlak et al., 2018).

Studies of annual festivals in consumer research have largely focused on the lived experience of consumer holiday celebrations, and the cultural meanings attached to festival-related artefacts and celebratory consumption objects and behaviours (McKechnie and Tynan, 2006; Therkelsen and Gram, 2008; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). These studies show that, during a festival, collective consumption rituals help make visible group cultural values and belief systems. This also plays a role in reproducing and reinforcing gender norms and power dynamics among the celebrators. For example, Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) focused on Thanksgiving Day – the collective rituals of the celebration of material surplus in the US – to elucidate the meanings associated with consumption activities in this annual celebration. They illustrated the ways in which ritual consumption is used to construct culture through various orchestrated ways that include the following: (1) *negotiation of abundance,* which is embedded in the amounts and types of food that are represented in the whole and filled turkey, as well as overeating; (2) *extensiveness of inclusion*, that is, the negotiation of family togetherness, an inclusion boundary, and roles through consumption; (3) *resolution of universalism and particularism*, which are the ways in

which broader social expectations and particular traditions are negotiated and reflect differences in social class and gender expectations; (4) *negotiation of [Puritan] values*, such as cleanliness, not wasting, and hard work; and (5) negotiation of the role of produce and branded food products vis-a-vis tradition and homemade foods (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991, p. 17). The main contribution of this study is to demonstrate how consumers reclaim branded food products from the marketplace and reassemble commodities into "little traditions" through enacting varying household actions (ibid., pp. 29–30). Through this gendered labour of transforming commodities into homemade foods, households co-opt with the marketplace to construct familial solidarity, define their productive power, and make visible the meaning and values of abundance.

When considering Christmas, a review of the previous research on the consumption rituals of the season similarly demonstrates how it is largely a commercialised event (Belk and Bryce, 1993; Hirschman and LaBarbera, 1989; McKechnie and Tynan, 2006), and represents family togetherness, sociability, and hedonic experiences (McKechnie and Tynan, 2006). Christmas is a time when individuals may engage in the act of overindulgence, breaking self-restrictions on consumption, especially when it comes to food and drink (Hirschman et al., 2011). However, such practices, while at first sight perhaps appearing to be simple acts of consumption, are also important in reinforcing social solidarities and identity. Take, for example, Edensor and Millington's (2009) study of the accumulation and display of Christmas lighting among working-class families in the UK. While often constituting a conspicuous act of consumption, the lights also generate festive pleasure and an atmosphere both for the households and the community, thereby reinforcing the sense of social identity and solidarity (Edensor and Millington, 2009).

Consumers also often feel that excessive expenditure during a festive time (lavishness) is not a waste. Rather, it energises "the economy of generosity" (Edensor and Millington, 2009, p.

114), generating pleasure, joy, conviviality, and friendship either for the family or community without having reciprocal expectation. Christmas, therefore, as with other annual festivals, is a site for meaning negotiation that reinforces intragroup relationships and promoting what Carrier (1995) refers to as family and neighbour cohesion and intimacy.

Certainly, the research regards the family as the main focal point in the exploration of ritualised consumption (Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Otnes et al., 2008). It regards ritual-related consumption as a robust means of recognising social ties (Lowrey and Otnes, 2004) that facilitate a dialogue between the past and the present (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991) and that construct, revise, and reinforce family identity (Epp and Price, 2008; Rook, 1985). For example, Xue et al. (2022) studied family identity construction in the context of the Lunar New Year in China. Xue et al. (2022) focused on the consumption rituals of the family dinner on Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve and show that young consumers construct and strengthen individual self-identity, relational identity, and family identity in various ways through practices of consumption during this celebration. Moreover, the study reveals how this festival embodies, communicates, and helps to signify "home" for Chinese consumers, although these meanings were extended to home-town restaurants and celebrating the occasion with more flexibility with non-relative friends for a contemporary celebration of this holiday. The meaning of home embedded in this Spring Festival is created through family reunions at parents' and grandparents' homes for New Year's Eve dinner to show love and respect (filial piety), engaging in gift-giving and playing games, and watching a national TV programme, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala, together as a ritualised activity (ibid.).

Another important theme in the literature on annual festivals is the concept of rebirth, which is at the heart of calendrical festivals (Abrahams, 1982; Dai et al., 2014, 2015; Hirschman et al., 2011; Price et al., 2018). This can be witnessed during New Year festivals, when individuals may

experience "a psychological disconnect between a person's current self and his or her past inferior self" (Dai et al., 2015, p. 1934). This desire can also be expressed in consumers' varied ritualistic consumption activities and experiences pertinent to the ideas of new beginnings and self-transformation. These ideas are categorised in transformative consumer research by using the conceptual metaphor of "the fresh start mindset", which is "a belief that people can make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life, regardless of their past or present circumstances" (Price et al., 2018, p. 21).

For example, Hirschman et al. (2011, p. 444) noted that religious-related annual festivals, such as Ramadan and Passover, provide a "social impulse" for individuals to engage in self-examination and use the holiday time for introspection and self-improvement. Through thinking about the self and participating in charity activities and altruistic behaviours, individuals can make positive and meaningful moments for the self. These activities can also be considered as a means of remodifying excessive consumption practices during holidays.

Annual festivals may, as liminal spaces, also provide hedonistic and chaotic experiences for consumers (Griffin et al., 2018), whereby they can escape from the responsibilities of normal life (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998) and enter more ephemeral contexts, such as during Halloween (McKechnie and Tynan, 2008), Mardi Gras (Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012) or certain subcultural gatherings, such as Star Trek or Harley-Davidson motorbike conventions (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Such leisure spaces allow consumers to experience fun and licensed freedom from certain restrictions associated with the everyday and the judgement of others. This freedom can be achieved through, for example, consuming transgressive products and activities (e.g., alcohol and illegal drugs), as well as by dressing up in unusual clothes

or costumes, especially for the trick-or-treating ritual during Halloween (McKechnie and Tynan, 2008).

A festival may also conjure up nostalgia or reconfirm the pride and ideological attachment a group has for its culture. In this regard, Holbrook and Schindler (2003) studied the concept of nostalgia in the context of consumption experience and shed light on the role of cultural events or festivals in facilitating the nostalgic bond between consumers' feelings and objects. This branch of research assumes that the past is also part of the subjectivity of consumers, and that they share the memories and nostalgia with other members of the community to negotiate and manage identity. In other words, consumers consume the representations of a memorable past through various forms of symbolic consumption, such as rituals, products, activities, poems, and photographs, to reconstruct and negotiate their collective identity together.

Studies on festivals and celebrations show that festivals can be a source of pride and *authenticity* for a community (Arnould and Price, 1993; Zammit, 2014). Pride is a concept that is associated with a collective identity – encompassing identities that need to be preserved or rediscovered in order to display the community (Zammit, 2014). In this regard, nationality or belonging to a culture can be considered as a source of pride, and specifically for local communities in diaspora. For example, Flinn and Turner (2014) studied the relationship between festival and communal cultural identity among Scottish immigrants in the US. They suggest that the relationship between festivals and the immigrants' identity is both complex and multifaceted. They observed that, as such, being Scottish becomes "a badge of pride, something to separate the migrants from other ethnic groups within their host community" (Flinn and Turner, 2014, p. 95). This group of immigrants also use their traditional Highland Games events both as an "ontological

anchor", rooting them collectively to their past, and to position themselves in their new North American community.

To summarise, festivals provide a context for consumption and production that provides opportunities for consumers to negotiate their identities through practices of ritualised consumption. Festivals and rituals have a significant function in transferring and (re)producing cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986). Similarly, as discussed in the previous sections, festivals as the context of the reproduction and enactment of rituals are sites in which the sacred and the profane overlap. Thus, festivals can be regarded as a context in which the relationship between spirituality, nostalgic fantasies, identity formation, and consumption can be explored (Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019). Essentially, rituals and festivals can, as performances of cultural representations, be mobilised as a site and resource for the construction of communal and cultural identity, specifically in the context of diasporic populations (Askegaard et al., 2005; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Oswald, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994). Festivals and their related events can, therefore, be a source of symbols and values that community members can draw on in order to construct, or reproduce, a sense of collective identity in diaspora. In other words, a festival enables immigrants simultaneously to *consume* their local culture and to produce imaginary positions in respect of a host culture in order to construct their identity. In the next section, I explain the concept of diaspora and discuss how festivals and ritualised consumption help immigrant consumers to construct their collective identity as part of a diaspora.

3.4 Festivals and Collective Identity in Diaspora

The term diaspora refers to the forced spreading and dispersing or scattering of a population from its original country to another place and is important in "signifying the oppression and moral

degradation implied by that dispersion" (Safran, 1991, p. 83). In this study, however, the terms 'diaspora' and 'diasporic community' are loosely used to describe and study a population of displaced people with historical roots outside the time/space of the host nation that encompass different categorisations – e.g., expatriates, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic minorities (Clifford, 1994).

The concept of diaspora is characterised in many ways, but, as Butler (2001) contends, it is agreed that in a diaspora expatriates should have some relationship to the real or imagined homeland and "there must be self-awareness of the group's identity" (p. 192). Diasporan community members keep and continue a collective memory and myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements (Safran, 1991). As such, this actual or imagined relationship and this sense of continuity to a homeland provide the foundation from which a diasporan identity may develop (Butler, 2001). As Clifford (1994, p. 311) pointed out, "diaspora cultures thus mediate in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place". As Hall (1990) has argued, for the population of immigrants in a diaspora, identity, specifically cultural identity, is a matter of *politics* that immigrants continuously negotiate their identity in different ways, such as through cultural reclamation or reviving; that is, to recover a lost culture and endeavour to redeem it through narratives of the past, memory, fantasy, and myth in order to regain authenticity and restore collective identity. For Hall (1990, p. 235), diaspora identity

> Is not by essence or purity, but the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

Diasporic populations live moments of "loss and hope as a defining tension" (Clifford, 1994, p. 312) while they strive to survive and advance. As such, cultural practices and traditions related to homelands, such as artistic practices (Rosario-Ramos et al., 2017), rituals and festivals, can secure space to help members of diasporic communities in their efforts towards, at least temporarily, the alleviation of tension and loss (Gordon-Lennox, 2017). For instance, research on Polish and Italian communities in the UK shows that collective identity is expressed through food rituals and is "reproduced in the myths and ideologies of national discourse" (Fortier, 2000; Rabikowska, 2010, p. 378). Specifically, Rabikowska's (2010) study on food rituals among Polish immigrants in the UK shows that these immigrants deploy consumption rituals of food to negotiate their national identity in a diaspora. This identity negotiation was regarded as a political practice and performed in a heterogeneous way through consuming authentic polish and non-traditional foods and performing in a different, non-Polish way, during festivals of Christmas and Easter in the UK. In addition, performative strategies of using rituals of preparing and consuming "authentic Polish food" allowed Polish migrants to alleviate the tension of being "in-between" in the UK (Rabikowska, 2010, p. 395).

3.5 Conclusion

As reviewed in Chapters Two and Three, examining identity and boundary work through ritualised consumption in the setting of annual festivals can offer some nuanced insights into the experience of Iranians in celebrating their primary festival in diaspora: the festival of Nowruz. Nowruz and its related rituals (e.g., Chaharshanbeh Suri) are a context in which Iranians can negotiate historical-cultural tensions among each other, together with their governmental institutions or ideologies, while also providing a point of cultural and political recognition. Nowruz is an interesting phenomenon, therefore, in that it is a promising context for exploring the potential socio-historical

tensions among community members and for understanding the role of consumption practices and rituals in respect of how these tensions are negotiated.

The reviewed literature shows that, despite the rise of studies on festivals and ritualised consumption in the CCT tradition of consumer research, few have attempted to address the ways in which collective identity is experienced among immigrant consumers in the context of seasonal festivals and their associated rituals of consumption. Thus, in response to the call in CCT to focus on the context of context (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), this study builds on the reviewed literature on festivals and ritualistic consumption in CCT and aims to investigate the lived experiences of a group of immigrant consumers in relation to broader structural forces. To meet this aim, and following a review of the literature on experiential consumption and the politics of consumer identity, as well as the integral role that rituals and festivals play in identity work and alleviating communal issues, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

(I) What identity-related goals, if any, do UK-based Iranians express through the medium of the festival of Nowruz and its associated rituals?

(II) Is Nowruz experienced as a commercialised festival in the UK?

(III) Whether and how do UK-based Iranians utilise ritualised consumption objects and activities to manage their identity project?

The following chapter seeks to explain the methodology of this study and discusses the empirical setting of the research, including the dynamics pertinent to the community of Iranian émigrés in the UK. The methodology provides the means to understand the experiences and the embedded meanings of the celebration of Nowruz among the UK-based diasporic population of Iranians.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study seeks to answer the research questions that emerged from the literature reviewed in the previous two chapters. The research questions concern the ways in which members of the UK-based Iranian émigré population negotiate and anchor their individual and shared collective identities, in part, through acquisition and consumption practices and rituals associated with the cultural festival of Nowruz. By situating this study in CCT (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), I am also concerned with those socio-historical forces that mediate and help shape and align consumer identities within the context of a contested ethnic, national, and religious cultural landscape. I now focus on the methodology that presents my approach to collecting and analysing the empirical data that constitute the core of this work to address the aims and questions outlined at the end of the previous chapter.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the philosophical and theoretical principles that have provided a framework for how I have come to understand and conceptualise the objects of my research. In doing so, I adopted a qualitative research approach: one grounded in social phenomenology and an interpretive research paradigm which is aligned with a CCT approach to the study of consumers' lived experiences within a socio-cultural and political context. The next sections address and explain my approach of using ethnographic case study and the data sampling, collection, and analysis undertaken, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, I present a profile of the informants and discuss the context of my study, Nowruz. This is followed by a concluding summary of the chapter.

4.2 Interpretive Research Paradigm

My research was undertaken within an interpretive research paradigm in order to address the research aims and questions. It is argued that studies within consumer research are mainly undertaken within one of two research paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979): positivist or interpretive (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Each paradigmatic approach is based upon the philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and values shared among a community of researchers that consist of their worldview regarding the nature of social reality and how it should be studied (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Each approach is underpinned by particular philosophical assumptions regarding ontology and epistemology.

4.2.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to "the nature of reality and social beings" (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p. 509) and, therefore, the qualities of the object of one's research. Within the interpretive paradigm, social reality – the object of study – is viewed as relative and contingent on those collective human understandings and meanings projected onto it (Shankar and Patterson, 2001). That is to say, reality is not a concrete and tangible object "out there" waiting to be identified. Rather, it is socially constructed and individually experienced through social interactions (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Social reality for human beings is, therefore, subjective, perceived and brought into being through the meanings that individuals collectively ascribe to their actions or events in their everyday life.

Such meanings are, nonetheless, generated within a cultural context. More specifically, each person constructs *a* perception of a reality based on his or her subjectivity, which itself is also conditioned and framed by broader historical factors, such as socialisation, socio-cultural

conventions, norms, and the materiality of the life-world (i.e., our immediate everyday life that is taken for granted). For an interpretive social researcher, social reality is multiple and coexists in parallel with other realities that are perceived or interpreted in relation to their particular contexts.

Such an ontology requires that humans are neither considered fully free, nor entirely constrained by social structures, however. Although the nature of being is voluntaristic (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988), agency is both constrained and facilitated by virtue of already existing ideas and practices which are simultaneously either reproduced or modified by such agency (Giddens, 1986). This means that individuals actively participate in shaping and perceiving the world through reflection or the act of attaching meanings to their life experiences and their pre-existing social and material environment (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Schutz, 1967).

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to "ways of knowing the world" and how our knowledge of the social world can be justified (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p. 508). From an interpretivist perspective, to understand a social phenomenon, knowledge is a form of constructed subjectivity but within the context of a shared repertoire of meanings and understandings (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As such, the researcher participates in the co-construction of *a* reality through paying attention to symbolic meanings – including words, intonations, gestures, and the use of symbolic artefacts. The focus of research is a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon in a particular time and place. Knowledge is, therefore, ideographic (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988), as it is only valid within a specific context or system of meanings. This places epistemic limits on what can be claimed and does not, therefore, allow the researcher to generalise findings beyond context.

Epistemologically, the self-understanding of subjects regarding their social actions is accessible through the act of *verstehen*, which means grasping a shared understanding of the meanings and motivations of the subject (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). This knowledge is not, therefore, value-free but is bound and constrained by the interests and understandings of both the research subjects and the theoretical commitments and sympathies of the researcher (Shankar and Goulding, 2001).

Having outlined the two primary philosophical presuppositions of an interpretive paradigm, in the following section, I present the particular interpretive approach – social phenomenology – I will be taking. I take this approach in order to conceptualise and analyse both the nature and the context of meaningful human behaviour in the setting of interest: the celebration of Nowruz among the UK Iranian émigré population and the importance of ritualistic consumption as a medium of the negotiation of individual and collective identities.

4.2.3 Social Phenomenology

Consumer researchers working within an interpretive paradigm have adopted an array of approaches in order to generate knowledge and expand understanding of consumers and consumption (Goulding, 2005). In doing so, they traditionally adopted a phenomenological approach and attempted to give voice to consumers so that they could narrate and reflect upon their lived experiences and perceptions, specifically regarding their possessions (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988), symbolic consumption (Schouten, 1991), and the importance of consumer rituals and ritualistic consumption (Belk et al., 1989; Curasi et al., 2004; Goulding and Saren, 2009; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991).

Experiential view of consumption and consumer behaviour tends to utilise a phenomenological approach to research that seeks to achieve a contextualised, first-person description and understanding of consumers' lived experiences concerning different life-world phenomena (Holt, 1995; Thompson, 1997; Thompson et al., 1989). In this respect, for example, Thompson et al. (1989, p. 144) developed a theoretical framework and a research methodology based on what they termed existential phenomenology, in order to "put the consumer experience back into consumer research". As Thompson and his co-authors (1989, p. 133) outlined, existential phenomenology is:

> [A] paradigm that blends the philosophy of existentialism with the methods of phenomenology… [which provides] a contextually based, holistic psychology that views human beings in non-dualistic terms and seeks to attain a first-person description of experience.

Their approach has been criticised, however, for overemphasising the psychology of consumers and paying insufficient attention to the social aspects of consumer subjectivity (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al., 2009). In this respect, Askegaard and Linnet (2011, p. 387), citing the limitations of Thompson et al.'s (1987) approach, argue for a more "socially embedded epistemological agenda" that evaluates the impact of social institutions as both limiting and enabling human agency. Specifically, they argue that the social phenomenological approach of Schutz (1970), and his conceptualisations of *intersubjectivity* and the *We-relationship*, along with the application of a hermeneutical approach to interpretation, are pertinent to the study of consumer culture and can provide "context-attentive" (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011, pp. 394-395) insights into the relationship between consumers' individual subjectivities, the broader conditional contexts, and the materiality of social life.

In this thesis, I adopt a social phenomenological approach, as recommended in Askegaard and Linnet (2011). This enables me to address the extent to which the negotiation and reproduction of individual and collective identities among the UK Iranian émigré population take place against the diasporic backdrop of their life-world. I can also attempt to assess the relationship between individuals' sophisticated intentional acts of agency, social interactions, and their stocks of knowledge that are embedded within certain socio-cultural (e.g., social classes and cultural values and norms) and political and historical contexts.

4.2.3.1 Schutz's (1967) Social Phenomenology

Social phenomenology, as developed by Schutz (1967), is an interpretive approach to understanding individuals' lived experiences in relation to other social actors within the context of everyday life. From this perspective, the process of understanding social life emphasises the importance of *intersubjectivity* and *streams of consciousness* (Schutz, 1967). Specifically, it postulates that one's consciousness is an ongoing, gradual, and unbroken stream of both active (reflected) and passive (un-reflected) lived experiences of everyday life. The notion of lived experiences alludes to the presence of complex, potentially meaningful interwoven strata that are continuously sedimented or deposited in our ego (subject). The source of subjective meaning is, therefore, these strata which, through the act of reflection, understanding, or recognition (i.e., a moment in which a person returns to the inner self and attaches meanings to a lived experience), an individual can bring into consciousness and to which that person ascribes significance in relation to an associated spatial and temporal context. Thus, from a social phenomenological approach, understanding can be explained as the spontaneous act of an individual as he or she draws on deeper strata of consciousness when turning attention to a lived experience associated with an object or

phenomenon or by linking them to prior lived experiences often in a "reciprocal witnessing" situation by the other (Schutz, 1970, p. 32).

One of the main contributions of social phenomenology is the way in which it defines the organisation of social action. Schutz's (1967, p. 215) conceptualisation defines social action as: "(1) a lived experience that is (2) guided by a plan or project arising from the subject's spontaneous activity and (3) distinguished from all other lived experiences by a peculiar act of attention". That is to say that lived experience is not a meaningful, completed act per se; it is the sense-making subject intentionally reflecting on his or her lived experience and subsequently attaching meaning to it as a basis for social action. Action is itself goal-oriented, which means it is projected as if it is a completed action towards the future and can be considered as the "purpose-motive" or "in-order-to motive" (Schutz, 1967, p. 86) of action. This purpose-motive is subjectively constituted and can be traced back to the self, and/or it can be referred to others to understand or as a reaction to the actions of others (e.g., being observed by others).

Our action also entails another layer, which is concerned with an event or reason in the past that has motivated us to project an action, called a "because-motive" (Schutz, 1967, p. 91). This is an underlying motive for action that is oriented towards our past knowledge or experiences of others (or events) in our social life. Together, these two types of motives (*because* and *in-order-to*), along with the consideration of social action as an ongoing project that stems from the past, planned in the present, and projected towards the future, are methodologically important in order to allow me to capture the subjective experiences of the object of study (i.e., consumer identity as a project or oriented experience). This also leads me to consider the relevance of another key concept in social phenomenology – *intersubjectivity*, which is based on the *We-relationship*.

Schutz (1967, p. 219) defined the concept of the *We-relationship* as "a relationship within which you and I can grasp each other's living streams of consciousness simultaneously and in one undivided glance". This means, our sense of togetherness is based on a shared community of time and place with others, and our synchronised streams of consciousness or the experience of intersubjectivity. Together, these help us to feel empathy with and understand each other, and guess "what we are going through" (Pagis, 2010, p. 314). When someone interacts with another person in a face-to-face situation or indirectly with someone in a remote situation, they can temporarily perceive the meanings of their lived experiences through attuning their streams of consciousness, which, as a result, leads to an emergent sense of *We-ness*; that is, the shared lived experience of "living in our common streams of consciousness" when we live temporally through "a vivid present together" (Schutz, 1951, p. 96).

Such a sense of *We-ness* differs, of course, depending on the existing levels of intimacy and shared knowledge of each other. When one person does not share a temporal or spatial community with another, or has an anonymous or indirect relationship, they are in an *Other-relationship* mode of social interaction. Therefore, instead of using observation as a medium of their interaction, they merely communicate based on sign systems, and, in conjunction with that, rely on accessible typification, or "ideal types" (i.e., a pre-constituted interpretive scheme associated with a culture in our minds), in their consciousness and as part of a stock of knowledge, to grasp the meaning of their counterpart's action. In addition, ideal types can also be utilised to form a 'social collective' mode of understanding, whereby a person interprets meanings concerning the lived experiences associated with an anonymous group of people or community, such as, in this instance, UK-based Iranians or even a national culture such as the Persian culture.

The extent to which a person, group, or community appears anonymous to us often depends on the degree to which we are unfamiliar with their symbols and use ideal types to grasp their action. Conversely, as a person becomes closer or more intimate to us, we have a greater chance of grasping such meanings and will rely less on ideal types in our *We-relationships*. If the latter form of relationship is the case, our consciousness or understanding usually remains at the stage or level of the *taken-for-granted* social life and we use our *stock of knowledge* (i.e., the experiences and knowledge previously constructed and accumulated across a person's life) regarding the social norms and habits of our counterpart to grasp/guess "the project which the [person] must have had in mind" (Schutz, 1967, p. 127). Simultaneously, the other person interprets our words and reactions to see if his or her project is attuned with our projected interpretation or consciousness (ibid.).

At the same time, meanings that are arrived at through such a process are still, for us, understood as objective meanings (i.e., meanings which are accessible to all) pertaining to the other's realm of symbolic context because we do not have direct access to their purpose-motive. Thus, the essence of social interactions is that there are moments or spaces for uncertainty, ambiguity, and even misinterpretation (Schutz, 1967). This is because what we understand is merely based on our socio-historically located and subjective experiences of the perceived meanings of the symbolic systems or signifiers – such as body movement, words, and clothes – that the other uses, as well as our past knowledge of a person or the context of interaction.

Together, these interpretations and our stock of knowledge lead us to reconstruct what is an approximate, but not necessarily authentic, understanding of a person's intended meanings (i.e., that person's interpretation scheme). As Schutz (1967, p. 129) asserted, a person is never quite sure of their understanding of the other or how one "is being understood by others". Therefore, our

interpretive practices in everyday life are based on our *We-relationships*, a stock of socio-cultural expectations and knowledges, and an ongoing, intersubjective, and dialectic process that is embedded in a network of interpretive and established schemes that configure our everyday social lives.

4.3 Research Design

Drawing on Schutz's (1967) social phenomenology, and a concern with immigrants' identity formation as an ongoing dialectical project that is embedded in social and cultural contexts of everyday life and consumption, this thesis adopts two primary suppositions about the objects of study. The first is that, ontologically, as the subject matter of my research is the lived experience of immigrant consumers, the perceived meanings ascribed by my participants to the social world they inhabit should be understood as "objects of thought" (Schutz, 1967, p. 141). That is, these objects should be considered to be symbolic or subjective, and organised based on the interests and collective values displayed by them. These interests shape the meanings of consumer experiences and this "determines our standpoints" regarding our social relationships (i.e., the spatial world) (Schutz, 1967, p. xxiii). Therefore, such meanings are not universal, but particular, while also being embedded in their spatial and temporal contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Schutz, 1967).

The second is that, epistemologically, it becomes necessary to access those meanings that are the outcome of intersubjective processes of meaning-making, or jointed streams of consciousness, and our shared stocks of knowledge. This essentially hermeneutic process, whereby one must interpret the shared interpretations of others, requires an ability to develop an empathy with, and attune our consciousness to the consciousness of the other. As an Iranian who is currently living in the UK, I am not *the Stranger* (Schutz, 1976) in respect of the culture of Iranians. As such,

I will be able to allow my own experiential background regarding the festival of Nowruz, and my shared knowledge and ideal types of Iranian socio-historical and geo-political contexts, to inform an interpretive process. I foreground this hermeneutic approach as part of my data analysis in such a way that my lived experience helps organise and make sense of my participants' discursive accounts regarding their lived experiences and their underlying broader socio-cultural systems of thinking in respect of their cultural identities and consumption practices in respect of the festival of Nowruz.

The philosophical and theoretical approach outlined above requires a form of data organisation, collection, and analysis that is capable of collecting such insights. I therefore adopted a broadly ethnographic design suitable for the collection of qualitative data from both the accounts of consumers regarding their identity-related experiences and consumption practices, as well as context-related data associated with the social, historical, and cultural forces underpinning the festival of Nowruz. This fits my study as ethnographic case study is considered a pertinent approach to conducting research in the context of a festival to capture rich, phenomenological perceptions of the lived experiences and activities of individuals in their everyday social lives, as well as to understand the cultural frame, norms, and historical context of such activities (Belk et al., 1989; Duffy and Mair, 2018b; Frost, 2016; Goulding, 2005; Hill, 1991; Willis and Trondman, 2000).

Ethnography can be understood as a lens through which to capture a snapshot of the everyday life of a group in order to elucidate its culture and the shared ways of understanding, doing, and saying among the members of that group (O'Reilly, 2012). It is a methodological approach that is grounded in the interpretive tradition and aims to narrate a *thick description* (i.e., a detailed description of a phenomenon in its contexts) and conceptualise and make sense of everyday experiences among a specific group of people (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Ethnographic methods are used to investigate a phenomenon or behaviour within both its related socio-cultural context (natural setting) and from the first-hand views of participants' "feelings, thoughts, and experiences" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 3). The methods also allow the researcher to uncover "the structured patterns of action"; that is, the way a phenomenon or action is conditioned by social, cultural, and political forces (Arnould, 1998, p. 86; Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994).

Ethnography is also considered to be (and sometimes equated with) an observational approach that utilises observational methods and often immersive participation in a culture (Gray, 2009; Hammersley, 1983). The research for this study was mainly undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020–March 2021), which placed practical limitations on my ability to gain physical access to and participate in public events associated with the festive time of Nowruz (21st March). I was, therefore, forced to amend my research design to adapt it to a remote, less obtrusive, and limited ethnography. The pandemic led, moreover, to a halt in all public gatherings and events, specifically festivals, during my fieldwork, which, as a result, continued to have a direct impact on my work and required that I take a flexible and adaptive stance in respect of my activities.

Thus, in the circumstances of the pandemic, instead of using the common, immersed ethnographic method (Hammersley, 1983) that has been predominantly employed in CCT (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Belk et al., 1989; Goulding and Saren, 2009; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012), I undertook a shorter, remote, and online-based ethnographic study to collect qualitative data in order to investigate the identity work of UK-based Iranians in the consumption setting of the festival of Nowruz. However, this situation allowed me to collect ethnographic data by using multiple data collection approaches, including remote semi-structured interviews (Thompson et al., 1989), appropriate visual data (Croghan et al., 2008; Harper, 2002; Heisley and Levy, 1991), and archival searches for both offline and online secondary data, such as historical

documents, reports, images, and other social media content pertinent to the Nowruz celebration in the UK. This also allowed me to employ a form of triangulation – i.e., data collected using different methods, sources, types or at different times (Gray, 2009; Hammersley, 1983) – in order to develop a more reliable understanding of Iranian identity formation within the consumption setting of the festival of Nowruz.

4.3.1 Sampling

In line with my interpretive approach, this study aimed to generate subjective, dialogic, and co-constructed knowledge to address the research questions. I drew on qualitative-oriented sampling procedures, particularly purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and the technique of snowballing (Miles and Huberman, 1994), in order to recruit participants and acquire research material. Specifically, in line with my research aims, theoretical framework, and research approach, I collected data from prospective immigrant informants who had a lived experience of celebrating Nowruz both in Iran and in the UK. I initiated sampling with the projection of interviewing 16–24 members of this community as a suitable sample size to reach both coding and meaning saturation (Hennink et al., 2017). To do this, I drew on the purposive method and, following that, I recruited other participants through the technique of snowballing.

In line with the purposive sampling method, and by considering the flexibility of qualitative research, I was attentive to the themes emerging from my literature review and my initial pilot interviews in order to be guided towards potential informants who were associated with the emergent themes or theoretical concepts. Following this strategy provided a diverse group of participants from a variety of demographic backgrounds and a level of theoretical representation pertaining to the aims of the study. This then allowed me to extend my sample through a snowball

approach, whereby research participants were selected from those who were introduced to me through earlier informants and who had the predefined sampling criteria (Gobo, 2008).

4.3.1.1 Profile of the Participants

In this study, I sampled and conducted 20 semi-structured interviews among UK-based Iranians. These participants were living in different cities in the UK, including London, Reading, Leicester, Colchester, Bath, and Manchester. Having participants from different areas was important, as previous research was limited to Iranians living in London (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Sreberny, 2000; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016) or another city, such as Newcastle (Soleiman, 2017). Table 4.1 shows an overview of the participants' demographic information. In line with my university's principle of ethical consideration in research, in the table and throughout this thesis I use pseudonyms instead of the real names of the participants.

The sample contained 13 females and seven males who were aged between 19 and 70 years old. Participants had lived in the UK for, on average, 27 years (i.e., between 2–48 years), and, except for Shima, who was born in the UK, and Zahra, who came during the Pahlavi era in 1970s, the other participants came to the UK after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Among the interviewees, 9 out of 20 had a postgraduate degree (6 masters; 3 PhDs) and three participants were undergraduate students. This indicates the importance of having a postgraduate qualification to a major group of UK-based Iranians (see Bozorgmehr, 1998; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016). The participants in my study had engaged in different occupational areas, such as universities and colleges, the retail sector (Lidl), airports, finance, and banking, as well as being self-employed and those working as freelance interpreters. This indicates that these Iranians were well integrated in their host society.

Table 4.1: Participants' demographic information

Name	Age	Gender	Marital status	Children	Length of time living in the UK (years)	Occupation	Immigration reason	Education level
Simin	50	F	Married	2	40	FT airport officer	Revolution and war	College (Business)
Abbas	60	M	Married	2	32	Self-employed	Education	MPhil (Engineering)
Monir	51	F	Married	2	27	Teaching assistant	Dependant	BA
Mitra	45	F	Married	2	10	Senior lecturer	Work	PhD
Hani	19	F	Single	-	11	Not working	Father's education	Undergraduate student
Ali	20	M	Single	-	10	FT student	Education	Undergraduate student
Shima	19	F	Single	-	19	Not working	(Born in the UK)	Undergraduate student
Mary	44	F	Married	0	13	Bank employee	Education	MBA
Jalal	58	M	Married	1	7	Self-employed	Iran's socio-cultural and political situation	BSc
Sara	47	F	Married	1	7	Self-employed	Iran's socio-cultural and political situation	MA

Name	Age	Gender	Marital status	Children	Length of time living in the UK (years)	Occupation	Immigration reason	Education level
Hawzhin	40	F	Married	1	13	Freelance interpreter	Marriage	MSc
Hadi	65	M	Married	1	40	Technician	Education	BA
Majid	47	M	Married	1	20	Self-employed	Work	College
Zahra	70	F	Married	3	48	Retired	Dependant	BA
Bahar	36	F	Engaged	0	13	Deputy manager, Lidl	Marriage	BA
Faranak	41	F	Married	0	2	Lecturer	Work	PhD
Mostafa	55	M	Married	2	9	Tutor	Business	MA
Forough	50	F	Married	2	9	Housewife	Dependant	BA
Hosein	70	M	Married	2	40	Freelance interpreter	Working at the Iranian Embassy in London	MA
Elnaz	52	F	Single		40	Chef	Father's PhD	PhD

Note: FT = full time

4.3.2 Negotiating Access to the Participants

For the interview component of the study, I intended to interview those Iranians who were first-generation migrants (i.e., born and raised in Iran), as well as second-generation immigrants (i.e., UK-born). After receiving ethical approval from the University of Essex Social Sciences Ethics Sub-Committee (Reference No. ETH1819-0218), a piloting process was initiated in November 2019 by selecting informants from among my own relatives and friends in the UK, and other UK-based Iranians with whom I had had initial contact. On reviewing the outcome of the pilot and in line with any feedback or observations, I then modified my interview schedule (see Appendix D) and sought to extend this initial sample. As well as utilising my initial contacts as gatekeepers, I then distributed a series of interview invitation emails (see Appendix E) across a range of UK-based Iranian institutions, including charities (e.g., The Iranian Medical Society and the Iranian Association) and research centres (e.g., Centre for Iranian Studies), asking them to publicise information and an interview invitation for my project among their Iranian colleagues, friends or family.

Another approach to gaining access I employed was to identify members of the Iranian community through social media platforms, including virtual groups on Telegram, Twitter, and Facebook. This approach was important in order to help address the challenges of undertaking research during the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, and particularly to find new participants outside my own limited social network. In doing so, I was able to post a research invitation on my Facebook public profile as well as sending it to the pages of specific Iranian groups based in the UK. Similarly, I sent direct messages to those Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram users who had provided information about their nationality and current country of residence, in order to invite them to participate in my research.

Finally, regarding the significant role of women in arranging and managing the consumption activities during festivals – from preparation to shopping both prior and during such events (Miller, 2017; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991) – I sought help from my wife as a gatekeeper in order to gain access to and invite UK-based Iranian women to participate in my research. For instance, my wife sent the interview invitation to a virtual group on a Telegram application with around 2k members, which is restricted to UK-based Iranian women, in order to approach female members to participate in my study. This approach also helped me to circumvent the initial difficulties of gaining access to Iranian women participants due to religious and cultural barriers.

4.3.3 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Having presented the sampling method and access procedures, I now provide details of the methods of data collection utilised in this study. My initial (and, as stated above, ongoing) data collection took the form of collecting and/or viewing relevant textual and visual representations concerned with the celebration of Nowruz among the UK-based Iranian émigré population, including those in historical reports, newspapers, local magazines, TV programmes, and online advertisements. Moreover, during my fieldwork, I collected a diverse range of online data (e.g., reports, conversations, images, captions, and tweets) as complementary material regarding the following: the ways members of the community celebrate Nowruz in public; what categories of products and services they consume; the decorations and designs associated with such public spaces, including relevant icons and signs or objects associated with the festival; and any issues directly pertaining to identities such as Persian culture, Iran, and nationality in diaspora.

My primary data collection instrument for this MPhil project was that of remote, semi-structured interviews. This mode of interview is an established method of data elicitation and collection in qualitative research (Englander, 2012), allowing access to first-person descriptions of

social phenomena as lived by the interviewees (Arsel, 2017; Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). The aim of these interviews was to generate detailed descriptive accounts from interviewees regarding their everyday experiences of the festival of Nowruz in the UK. In other words, this data collection method aimed to encourage participants to recall the past into the present "in a dialogic way", and to represent a "first-person description" of the experience of everyday life (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004, p. 149).

To conduct my interviews, I employed a participant information sheet (see Appendix B), a participant consent form (see Appendix C) providing my participants with information about the research and their rights as a participant, and an interview schedule (see Appendix D) containing broad provisional themes to guide the conversation (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). In practice, my interview schedule was designed to elicit discussions that addressed my research aims and questions while I was flexible and continuously moving between the interview schedule, emerging findings, theories, and my research design as an iterative process.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with the University of Essex ethical requirements, these interviews were mainly conducted over online platforms, such as Zoom and WhatsApp (see Lo Iacono et al., 2016). To choose an appropriate platform for the remote interviews, I considered various factors, including accessibility, security, ethical issues (e.g., privacy and confidentiality), and the convenience of the platform for both interviewee and interviewer. In this regard, and again following University of Essex ethical guidelines for conducting research during the pandemic, I had to amend my research design and obtain new ethical approval from my university's Ethics Committee (ERAMS reference No. ETH2021-0322).

During my fieldwork, I was aware of the potential limitations regarding an online or remote interview, such as distractions, technical issues, and limited control over or attention to the atmosphere or setting of the interview. I would argue, however, that remote interviews provided some advantages for my research. Specifically, this was the only possible form of interaction during the lockdowns, and was crucial in terms of time savings, financial efficiency, and increasing the possibility of gaining access to participants with diverse backgrounds who were living in geographically dispersed locations (Lo Iacono et al., 2016).

4.3.4 Data Analysis

In respect of the data analysis, my overriding approach was that of thematic analysis guided by categories derived from my aims, the research questions, and the overarching theoretical and thematic concerns. Analysis that is hermeneutic in character endeavours to uncover and articulate lived experience through the "medium of language" and conducting thematic analysis (Goulding, 2005; Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). Thematic analysis is defined as a form of qualitative data analysis that principally focuses on identifying, organising and interpreting themes across a textual dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2013; King and Brooks, 2018). Themes are referred to as repetitive patterns or something important and interesting within informants' descriptions regarding their lived experiences that is identified as pertinent to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In this study, I analysed the textual data manually in line with my interpretive approach through an iterative process of coding, categorising, and abstracting the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Specifically, after each interview, I first – if the participant preferred to speak Farsi – translated and transcribed the interview, verbatim, into English. Throughout, I also added my notes (memos) about the context of the interview to each transcript. Although this process was laborious and time consuming, it allowed me to become familiar with the data. I then managed the raw data

into a processed, intelligible file as a 'write up' step in the data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 51). The following paragraph sheds light on the way I analysed and interpreted my datasets to answer my research questions.

I started the coding process by reading the transcripts several times to become immersed in the dataset and arrange it based on interesting ideas and dominant points through initial labelling. I identified initial codes in an open coding style by reading each interview transcript line by line and highlighting any interesting keyword, sentence, or chunk of text (Goulding and Saren, 2010). During this process, I continuously referred to my research questions and theoretical background, as well as my interpretation of the significance of an interviewee's account (Spiggle, 1994). I next read the main descriptive codes and their related passage of text to combine similar and relevant codes together and create a higher-order code. I then reassembled relevant codes to recurring themes and then combined them in a coded category. Following that, I attempted to identify a relationship between the categories and then grouped overlapping categories to each other. This step involved abstraction, which combined pre-identified themes or categories of empirical data into more conceptual constructs. Thus, to analyse my datasets, I used both analysis and interpretation in tandem by "linking empirical data and conceptual domains" in a circular way (Spiggle, 1994, p. 491). I should emphasise that I proceeded with my data collection and analysis in an iterative way. That is, I performed my research by moving back and forth between the data collection and analysis stages.

4.4 Context of Study: The Festival of Nowruz among Iranian Émigrés in the UK

The Office for National Statistics has estimated that the population of UK-based Iranians was approximately 90,000 (ONS, 2020). Iranians are dispersed geographically in the UK and generally

settled in London (see Appendix F for a detailed discussion of the Iranian diaspora in the UK). Prior studies of the Iranian diaspora, however, show that Iranians are a heterogeneous or fragmented diaspora that encapsulates both intragroup tensions (e.g., ideological divergence, political differences, and lack of trust) and intergroup challenges, such as historical and political tensions with Arab Muslims (Amanat, 2012) and some Western countries, such as the US (Khosravi, 2018; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016).

However, despite the lack of cohesion and issues of distrust among Iranian immigrants, it is argued that members of this fractured community often attempt to renegotiate their individual and collective identities through marginalising or avoiding (*only*) Islam as it is branded or established by the Iranian regime. Specifically, they emphasise "being secular" and being "free" from Islam by presenting themselves in diaspora, not as Iranian, which has negative connotations of the Islamic regime as a terrorist state, but as *Persian*, which is regarded as a cohesive and continuous identity from ancient Persia (Gholami, 2016, pp. 4–27; Graham and Khosravi, 1997). Thus, it is argued that UK-based Iranians construct their identity through an imagined connection to their homeland and a nationalistic passion for Persia by accentuating ancient Iranian history and its pre-Islamic Persian culture (Gholami, 2014; Malek, 2011; Mostofi, 2003; Rushdie, 2012).

To investigate possible identity tensions among UK-based Iranian immigrant consumers, this study proposes that the celebration of Nowruz, and the socio-historical frictions that surround it, can provide an ideal setting in which to gain insight into ritualistic consumption activities and the construction of individual and collective identities among members of this diasporic community. Nowruz is the most observed dimension of Iranian cultural identity (Foltz, 2013). However, the celebration of Nowruz has been the subject of longstanding controversy since the advent of Islam to the present time in Iran (Ashraf, 2006), and, as Ansari (2012) contended, this

seminal event has been subjected to ideological tension in contemporary Iran, either as a prime symbol of modern Iran by secular intellectuals during the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), or as a negative symbol of secularism and anti-Islam by the Islamic Republic after the revolution in 1979.

4.4.1 The Festival of Nowruz

> The ancient Persians taught, ..., that the New Year begins not in the depth of winter when Nature herself is dead, but at the vernal equinox when she revives – and I think they were right (Eastwick, 1864, pp. 105–106).

Nowruz, or the Persian New Year, is the most important feast and celebration for Iranians of any belief. The term Nowruz literally means *New Day* and is celebrated at the exact moment of the vernal or spring equinox in the northern hemisphere, when the sun's light and warmth begin to overcome winter's darkness and cold (see Figure 4.1). Nowruz is a spring festival that signifies the rebirth of the Earth, hope, and a resurgence and growth in nature. It is one of the oldest cultural festivals, as it is rooted in the ancient monotheistic religion of Zoroastrianism – i.e., the religion of Iranians before the advent of Islam – and evangelises the victory of illumination and goodness. It is postulated, however, that Nowruz originated in Babylonia and ancient Persians first adopted this celebration when they migrated to the region of Mesopotamia (Boyce, 1996; Foltz, 2016).

The feast of Nowruz was originally an agricultural festival that related to the passing of the seasons and has been celebrated for over 3,000 years (Boyce, 2009; Foltz, 2013). Although it was occasionally part of the Zoroastrian tradition and holy feasts in ancient Persia (the seventh of the seven feasts) that were "reconsecrated by Zoroaster", and "it celebrates the creation of fire" (Boyce, 1983, pp. 797–798), it is now celebrated as a non-religious and secular festival (Elton and Mahdi, 2006). Nowruz is acknowledged by UNESCO as part of the "Intangible Cultural Heritage of

Humanity" and is also celebrated in other countries within the regions of Persian culture, such as Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, throughout Central Asia, the Caucasus, and as far west as the Balkans (Bolookbashi, 2001, 2013; Fazeli, 2007). Nowruz is commemorated internationally on 21st March each year as International Nowruz Day to enhance solidarity among human beings, families, and nationalities, as well as between humans and nature (UNESCO, 2010).

Figure 4.1: Engraved motif of a lion – as a sign of the sun – overcoming a bull (a symbol of darkness); the icon represents Nowruz at Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of ancient Persia (Sathe, 2012)

The history of Nowruz is wrapped in myth and is attributed to Jamshid, a mythical king of Iran (Bahar, 1997). In ancient Iran, it is thought that the annual New Year festival of Nowruz was established by Jamshid in Persepolis (near the city of Shiraz) – also known as the throne of Jamshid or *Takhte Jamshid* (Ansari, 2012). Based on Ferdowsi's epic book *Shahnameh*, Nowruz is a day on which King Jamshid would sit and people would come to receive gifts from him. Central to the myth of Nowruz is a god, or a king, who was martyred and whose rebirth five days later on Nowruz

is celebrated for 12 days by the public (Bahar, 1997). Moreover, during the Achaemenid Empire (550 -330 BC), Persepolis was a ceremonial site for Nowruz, as well as other religious celebrations, wherein representatives from every province of the Persian empire brought gifts to the king (see Figure 4.2; Foltz, 2016, p. 21). As Foltz (2016, p. 20) pointed out:

> Persepolis was the Persians' springtime capital, a special ceremonial centre used on the occasion of the Persian New Year [Nowruz], ... its roots can be seen in the myth of the goddess Ishtar and her son/lover Tammuzi, who is sacrificed each autumn and enters the underworld, mourned by Ishtar with tearful laments until he returns to life in the spring. (This resurrection myth later served as the precedent for yet another springtime celebration, the Christian Easter.)

Figure 4.2: Subjects bringing gifts to the Persian emperor in Persepolis (Foltz, 2016)

Moving beyond the mythical and historical roots of Nowruz, in modern Iran and based on its solar calendar, Nowruz is celebrated as a national New Year holiday. Iranians celebrate this

joyous time and enact its underpinning meanings in their social interactions through an array of symbolic and ritualistic behaviours. Modern Nowruz is characterised by elements of 'house shaking' (more below), New Year shopping, Chaharshanbeh Suri, street performances by a comical but controversial character known as Haji Firuz (see Appendix A), who has a red outfit, a tambourine, and a blackened face, and who cheers people for Nowruz beside Amu Nowruz (see Baghoolizadeh, 2021; Reyes, 2019), a *haft-seen* table (more details are given about this below), household visiting (i.e., obligatory Nowruz house visits that consist of younger family members visiting older relatives as well as friends), gift-giving or *eydi*, and *Sizdah be dar*, or the Nature Day holiday.

According to Bolookbashi (2013), Iranians follow three rituals to celebrate Nowruz. These begin with preparation rituals of cleaning – i.e., shaking the house – and getting rid of darkness, which symbolise saying goodbye and leaving the old year behind. Specifically, preparation rituals are initiated some weeks ahead of Nowruz, when Iranians deep-clean their homes and even public spaces. In an unwritten battle against dirt and dust, households meticulously wash carpets, rugs, and curtains. They wipe and dust all corners and surfaces, particularly the walls and windows, to make them spotless. Furniture should be moved and then the floors are cleaned. Wardrobes should be emptied and cleaned out. This thorough cleaning labour is done to bring into being the sense of spring and a fresh start.

Moreover, the rituals of preparation also include planting wheat or lentil sprouts for the *haft-seen* table by the women of the family about 10 days before Nowruz, closing financial accounts, and attending Chaharshanbeh Suri, which is the Iranian Fire Festival on the eve of the last Wednesday in winter and a few days before Nowruz. Many Iranians, despite the restrictions of the Islamic Republic, acknowledge this festival to keep their Zoroastrian heritage by performing

the ritual of fire building and jumping over it while chanting *Give me your rosy glow and take away my sickly pallor* (Estiri, 2018; Shaida, 2018).

One of the main preparation rituals of Nowruz is buying new clothes, especially for children, and furniture. Research shows that Nowruz shopping is a collective movement in Iran and is a way for consumers to mark the end of the old year and the dark days of the winter, bringing a sense of joy, freshness, and a new beginning (Shirkhodaie et al., 2019). Nowruz shopping enables consumer self-display by consuming new clothes and household objects during household visiting and reviving the nostalgic feeling of Nowruz shopping from childhood (ibid.).

The second group of rituals relating to this festival begins at the Nowruz countdown to the arrival of the New Year and after that over 12 days. This period is a liminal time for Iranians to become psychologically and socially prepared for transiting to a new year. For this part of Nowruz, the custom is to set a 'seven things table' (*sofreh haft-seen*), which is arranged on New Year's Eve by mothers and daughters (see Figure 4.3) and is a decorative display of seven items that begin with the letter "s" (pronounced *seen*). Other objects are also placed on a *termeh* – i.e., a Persian handmade silk and wool cloth – or any other specially selected fabric in as much opulence as possible and in a traditional manner. It is argued, however, that spreading a *haft-seen* is a new tradition that has been added to the festival of Nowruz and it reflects the seasonal celebration of agrarian society and its related agricultural commodities.

Haft-seen objects generally represent the ideal of rebirth and renewal and symbolise birth, life, health, happiness, prosperity, beauty and light (Shaida, 2018). The seven objects include: *sabzeh* (sprouts), symbolising rebirth and new life; *samanu* (wheat pudding) to symbolise affluence and fertility; *seeb* (apple), mainly red apples that symbolise health and beauty, love and friendship;

serkeh (vinegar), which refers to the patience and wisdom one gains through aging; *seer* (garlic), symbolising maintaining good health; *senjed* (dried oleaster), to express love; and *somaq*, or sumac (crushed sour red berries), as a symbol of sunrise and warmth for life.

Figure 4.3: Hossein Sheikh (1900–1991) painting of *Haft-seen 1935,* Iran Museum of Anthropology

Moreover, the spread typically includes other items, such as a copy of a spiritual and sacred book – e.g., the Qur'an – and Persian poetry books such as the *Hafez* and *Shahnameh*; a *sekkeh* (coin) to wish for future prosperity and *barkat*; a hyacinth plant and daffodils; a mirror; cooked coloured eggs to represent fertility and birth; a candle to symbolise light and joy; *esphand* (wild rue), to protect you from the evil eye and ensure you have good luck; bread; and a bowl of water containing live goldfish.

Figure 4.4: Elements of *haft-seen* and Nowruz foods presented in Iranian shops in London
(photo taken by the researcher, March 2020)

It is argued that *haft-seen* is based on a Zoroastrian cosmology that a household will host the guardian spirits or the soul of their ancestors – *faravashis* – who descend or return annually to bless (*barkat*) the household; therefore, the house should be clean and stocked with food and drinks (Bolookbashi, 2013; Koutlaki, 2010; Shirazi, 2005). It functions to strengthen family structure and unite members, especially for the countdown moments to the New Year. It also shows how a family respects its Persian culture and puts effort into this tradition. On the day of Nowruz, families sit together and count down excitedly to the moment of the equinox and then rush into each other's arms with hugs and kisses, and then compete to telephone or exchange text messages with each other to greet and welcome in the new year.

As part of the Nowruz Day ritual is *commensality* (eating together), the married members of households visit their parents' home to have the first meal of the New Year feast together

(Koutlaki, 2010). Nowruz Day is followed by four days of official holiday and a two-week school and university Nowruz holiday, during which people take a holiday or visit each other's houses in turn, specifically to pay their respects to their older relatives. It is a joyful time of year that, as with other similar festivals (e.g., Christmas and Thanksgiving), is marked with gift-giving (that is, mainly new banknotes that are given by elders to young guests), abundant food, sweets and drinks and other consumption objects.

During 12 days of reciprocal Nowruz visiting (*Did o Bazdid*), with its strict norms and obligations, Iranians offer their guests tea, fruits, fresh pastries and sweets – e.g., *Noon Berenji, Nokhodchi* – chocolates, mixes of freshly roasted nuts or *ajeel* (a mixture of pistachios, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, chickpeas, walnuts, roasted watermelon or pumpkin seeds, and dried figs, apricots and raisins). Foods associated with Nowruz have varied by region and ethnicity. The most observed contemporary food custom for the Nowruz meal is herbed rice with white fish (*sabzi polow mâhi*), herb omelette (*kuku sabzi*), and Persian rice with thin noodles (Shaida, 2018). This traditional meal contains herbs, which represent growth and renewal, rice for the bounty of the earth, fish, which symbolise freshness, and egg to represent birth and fertility (ibid.).

The third and last scene of Nowruz is Nature Day, or the *Sizdah Bedar* holiday, on the 13th day of *Farvardin* – the first month in the Iranian solar calendar, when it is believed that staying at home brings bad luck. This ritual is a reversion of social and home-oriented everyday life. Thus, Iranians within groups of close families go outdoors and spend the day in nature or in parks to picnic, play, dance, have a barbecue, etc. The passing of the old day is finally completed after the Nature Day holiday.

4.4.2 The Evolving Commercialisation of Nowruz in the UK

In contrast with a routine, extensive house visiting which is limited to traditional families and kinship networks in Iran, the celebration ritual in the UK is polarised into private and public events. That indicates that although some groups of Iranians invest in their cultural status and prefer to celebrate Nowruz in traditional style in their private space, other groups of this émigré population mark the occasion in public gatherings, so-called *ticket-based* Nowruz parties, or those gatherings that are arranged as a Nowruz Exhibition, such as *Bahar* Events and the Bahar-Banoo and Abrisham Rugs Norouz festivals (see Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7). These exhibitions or Nowruz markets represent the ways in which the marketplace and other communal institutions (e.g., Iranian schools and charities in the UK, such as Rostam and Kanoon Iranian London) support Iranian consumers to prepare for this festival and to have fun. For example, Bahar Banoo is a business that defines itself as an "organizer of Nowruz exhibitions in England" and arranges various business activities around the theme of Persian culture and rituals both via online platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and Etsy, see Figure 4.9 for another business: StudioMitra) and in-person market exhibitions.

Figure 4.5: Online advertisement for a Nowruz party at a club

Figure 4.6: Nowruz party advertisements at a club and restaurant (Volek.events, 2022; Deevan, 2022)

Figure 4.7: Nowruz Exhibitions (Bahar Banoo, 2022; Abrisham Rugs, 2022)

A Nowruz exhibition is a medium that not only gathers Farsi speakers across the UK to enact Persian culture and create celebratory interactive moments for visitors through the performances of Haji Firuz and dancing in ethnic clothes, but also a context to support women-based small businesses and sales of regional products from different subcultures and areas of Iran in the diaspora. These businesses represent the ethnic diversity of Iran, and present festival-related objects such as *haft-seen* items and other decorative objects imbued with Achaemenid and Pahlavi signs (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8), as well as general items and services, such as skin protection products and college recruitment services (see Figure 4.10). The organisers announce clearly that they are independent and are not related to any political or social parties.

Figure 4.8: Selling candles with Pahlavi and Zoroastrian signs – Faravahar- in a Bahar Banoo Exhibit, London 2022

Figure 4.9: *Haft-seen* set (eggs and coins) decoupaged with Achaemenid and Pahlavi signs, Etsy marketplace (2022)

Figure 4.10: Marketing skin protection and regional products in a Bahar Banoo Exhibit, London 2022

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter began with a brief review of the main issues discussed in the previous chapters. Next, I explained the philosophical principles and assumptions underpinning my work, making the case for a qualitative research approach that is grounded in social phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) and an interpretive research paradigm. As stated, this approach is aligned with a CCT approach to studying consumer behaviour and its socio-cultural and political context. In addition, I outlined my research design broadly as an ethnographic case study and then explained my approach to data sampling, collection and analysis, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, a total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, mainly over Zoom. The interviews were analysed manually by conducting thematic analysis, which was detailed above. The chapter concluded by discussing the context of the study and the evolving commercialisation

of Nowruz in the UK. In the next chapter, I present findings to objectify the ways my participants experience the festival of Nowruz in the UK and how they rely on this cultural festival and its associated consumption activities to construct their identity.

Chapter Five: Findings

"We Are What We Celebrate": The Festival of Nowruz and the Politics of Identity Among Iranians in the UK

> If I talk to [expatriate] Iranians and mention something about human rights, there is a chance that someone will say, "Stop talking about that! I've got to go to the consulate next week, and in two weeks I'll be travelling to Iran. Therefore, leave me alone with your human rights!" Well, if that's the case, we don't have much more in common than our language and Nowruz (Mohabbat-Kar, 2016, p. 161).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings in response to the research questions set out in the previous chapter. This chapter is structured in terms of the following sections. In the first section, I present findings regarding the four arenas of the political, socio-cultural, economic, and religious fragmentation that characterise the Iranian émigré community, providing a contextual backdrop to the study and in doing so identify the theme of *fragmentation* as integral to understanding the political and socio-cultural make-up of this diasporic population. This theme is further developed through the interrelated subthemes of *compatriot avoidance*, *lack of trust*, and *categorisation*. To explain the characteristics identified in this diasporic context, I draw on theoretical concepts, including the concept of escape (Cova et al., 2018), cultural identity and fragmentation (Hall, 1990; Ulusoy and Firat, 2018) and cultural reclamation (Hall, 1990), as well as the sociological concepts of classification, social interaction and judgement (Durkheim, 1995; Durkheim and Mauss, 1963; Schutz, 1967), and symbolic capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1986).

In the second part of this chapter, I present the themes that I refer to as *Nowruz as Persian roots*, and *hope for rebirth*. In the first part, by introducing the theme of Nowruz as Persian roots, I demonstrate how this festival is perceived fundamentally as a medium of recognition and boundary work that can be mobilised in order to differentiate the community from other ethnic groups and gather together Iranian expatriates in the UK, albeit temporarily. I also demonstrate the ways in which Nowruz is experienced and utilised among UK-based Iranian expatriates as an integral aspect of their identity work. To explain the themes identified in this section as being pertinent to the potential role of Nowruz in collective identity among these groups of consumers, I draw on theoretical concepts, such as collective memory, collective identity (Bell, 2003) and the politics of identity (Thompson, 2014).

In considering the second theme in this section, namely hope for rebirth, this refers to the meaning underpinning seasonal change in the way that Nowruz and its associated ritualistic activities can offer a unique moment for expatriates corresponding to a desire for rebirth as a community. In this part, I indicate two subthemes from the data, namely *luminosity* and *newness: from new materials to self-renewal*. These conceptualisations allow me to capture the meaning underpinning the celebration of Nowruz as a time to reconnect with the spiritual aspects of spring and the condition of self-examination associated with the season to reunite the Iranian community in a sense of communitas (Turner, 1982) and to experience the sense of re-starting and the ideal chance of rebirth in life.

Lastly, in the third section, I provide data and present my analysis regarding the ways in which the interviewees experience and perform the rituals of the festival of Nowruz and its associated practices of consumption as part of a diasporic and fragmented community. Specifically, I explore the theme I refer to as the *exhibition of Nowruz* to demonstrate that despite the possible

capacity of Nowruz to alleviate some of the communal tensions in this community, consumption activities have changed and the forms the celebration takes in the communal space have been increasingly commercialised.

5.2 A Contested Diaspora: Iranians in the UK

As discussed in the methodology chapter, this study places consumers' narratives into their broader context (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). That is, in line with my epistemological standpoint (i.e., social phenomenology), I analyse and interpret the participants' discursive accounts to shed light on the backdrop of this study – the experiences of diasporic groups of Iranians in the UK. In doing so, I present emergent themes and supporting narratives from the participants pertaining to their lived experiences in a communal setting in this country.

Iranian expatriates are the victims of prolonged political and economic instability and unpredictability in Iran (Ansari, 2019; Mahdi, 1999). Iranians left Iran because of economic instability, political oppression, and religious persecution and went in search of freedom, stability, and a better future in an international environment. As a result, Iran has, for example, been recorded as the top nationality to claim asylum in the UK since 2016 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021). Recent figures have stated that more than 80,000 Iranians live in the UK (ONS, 2021), leaving Iran in three main movements (Nassehi-Behnam, 2016; Spellman, 2004; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016).

In moving away from Iran and settling in a new socio-cultural setting, this population of émigrés has had to tackle different challenges and endeavour to find new positions in the UK's social and cultural life. In their new context, Iranian expatriates have nevertheless renegotiated the self by both deconstructing the conformist individuality prescribed by Iran's repressive Islamic

state (Jafari and Goulding, 2008) and continuously projected the self within the new settings of a Western liberal society – the UK. The Iranian community has gradually formed and developed in the UK since the 1980s (Nassehi-Behnam, 2016). After four decades of their continuous immigration to the UK, however, this community is characterised as a "disjointed" diaspora (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016, p. 9), or as heterogeneous and isolated islands (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020). In other words, it seems there is a conflict of interests among this diasporic population of Iranians towards Iran as a homeland (Cohen and Yefet, 2021), a secular desire to be recognised as Persian (Gholami, 2016), and their collective interactions with fellow compatriots in Britain (Mohabbat-Kar, 2016).

In light of this heterogeneity of interests and an ambiguous sense of belonging to what the regime has defined as good or bad ways of being Iranian (Jafari and Goulding, 2008), the findings of this study show that most UK-based Iranian social groups are fragmented based on their associated political, religious, social, economic, and ethnic networks. This sense of a dispersed or disunited community can be understood by recognising their social stratifications, internal exclusions, and the diversity of Iranians' religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in their homeland (Spellman Poots and Gholami, 2018). In order to unpack and understand the various aspects of the fragmentation associated with this community, in the following passages, I present my findings regarding the lived experiences of the participants that reveal the actual array of the fragmentation of this diaspora.

5.2.1 The Political Aspect of Fragmentation

One of the recurring findings in this study is the salient role of politics in the fabric of the Iranian diaspora in the UK. To understand the internal exclusion and divisions within the UK-based Iranian émigré community, it is important to consider a range of existing political tensions that, in part,

underpin the interactions and connections in this diaspora. This political divergence is mainly traced back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, which forced a population of Iranians to leave their country. Significant elements of this diaspora are political refugees who are in exile and had to flee from Iran, mostly in the early 1980s, due to internal repression and persecution. An analysis of participants' narratives illustrates the salient role of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the state – among other issues that I identify in the next paragraphs – in creating 'fractions' in this community. Take, for example, the words of Hadi, a 65-year-old Iranian man who has been living in London since his arrival in 1979, whose views regarding the differences in communal experiences before and after the revolution echo those of other participants:

> We had strong solidarity in our community. When we saw each other on a street we would hug each other and offer all kinds of help. But now, if you speak Farsi on a street and an Iranian notices you, he/she would change his direction to avoid facing you…. I think the revolution has a major effect because it has created fractions in Iran. You can easily see exactly the similar and even more extreme form of those fractions here between Iranians.

In this comment, Hadi makes the point that the intensive communal fragmentation and fractions among Iranians in the UK is essentially a reproduction of the state's revolutionist policies and hostilities towards the people of Iran. As a result, his experiences of a community and of solidarity have evolved into mutual avoidance and a lack of inclination to engage with fellow Iranians. As already implied, political instability and turmoil (e.g., Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979; the Green Movement protests in 2009) have divided a politically diverse population of Iranians in the UK, which includes royalists, anti-monarchists, Mujahedin, Nationalist-Religious activists, Fundamentalist or Pro-Islamic revolutionists, and secular Iranians. This political diversity within

the community is explained by Abbas, a 60-year-old male resident in London, who left Iran in the 1990s:

> Many Iranians escaped to the UK after the revolution for many reasons, such as protecting their capital, having engaged with the Royal Family, and political divergence. So, apart from the royalists who were not on the train of this Islamic revolution, other passengers gradually get off the train and escaped abroad, like the UK. … Therefore, unfortunately the majority of Iranians in the UK escape from each other… because you do not know about one's political background.

In this passage, Abbas explains that the Iranian émigré population has been dispersed mainly because of power divisions after the establishment of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and immigrants' political beliefs. He suggests that the gradual emergence of communal divisions among UK-based expatriates is a result of hegemonic political settlement of the ideological, post-revolutionary state in Iran. Thus, prolonged political instability gradually leads to a communal circumstance of compatriot escape. This means that Iranians in a communal space have developed suspicious feelings towards each other and have to be constantly tentative concerning the political backgrounds of their fellow Iranians.

Likewise, there is a strong sense of distrust and interpersonal fear, particularly within the émigré population of Iranians in European countries, such as Sweden (Graham and Khosravi, 1997; Khosravi, 2018) and the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2002). The analysis of my interview data illustrates a similar lack of trust among the UK population of Iranians. In respect of my question regarding the issue of trust among these expatriates, Mostafa (a 55-year-old married male based in London) confirmed the shadow of distrust that exists over Iranians' communal interactions, as follows:

> When my wife and I are commuting by bus and speaking together, as soon as we
> notice two Iranians sitting two seats away from us, we signal each other to speak
> quietly: they are Iranians. Why should we do in this way? It should be like when
> you are abroad and meet a compatriot you should be happy and welcome him.

Based on the comment above, Mostafa indicates how Iranians observe their public space and change their actions when they notice any Iranian around them. The practice of 'signalling' to his wife may also imply that this occasion has already been experienced and negotiated between them. In other words, they both already agree that they should be tentative regarding the presence of compatriots, as if it is not safe to be Iranian among Iranians. As Mostafa further noted:

> Unfortunately, I've lost my trust in the Iranian community. There has been formed
> a kind of distrust between us. … I have learned that here I should not have any
> expectation from others. If I need help, I should return to myself.

Expecting and receiving help from fellow compatriots when a person is in difficulty is a measure of an important factor in maintaining friendship among community members. In this regard, Mostafa's comment illustrates that he had gradually experienced a clear fragmentation and breakdown in his own community. Thus, instead of counting on a friendship network (as one might normally do in Iran), he has shifted his expectation inward. In other words, living abroad, and specifically within a Western culture and a fragmented diaspora, has required him to be a more individualistic person.

Having said this, it would appear that political issues are not as much of a concern for the second generation of UK-born Iranians (Eslami, 2016). Eslami (2016) sheds light on the issue of such a generation gap. He contends that the second generation of UK-based Iranians is not engaged in the political discourse of Iran, and its members do not have "the same political sensibilities" concerning the Islamic Republic (Eslami, 2016, p. 158). My findings, however, suggest that this

second generation of Iranians is also concerned with the political image of Iran in the West. This point is, for instance, supported by comments made by Hani (a 19-year-old female college student). In response to my question regarding the significance of Persian culture for her and the experience of being a UK-born Iranian in this diaspora, she stated:

> It [expressing my Iranianness] is actually something that I always think about and it's like I'm not quite sure if it's important; or if it's something I could even possibly be a little bit ashamed of it because of all the political stigmas.

Like Hani, Shima – who is, similarly, a second-generation Iranian in the UK – explicitly stated that at times she feels ashamed to be identified as Iranian because of the public image of the Islamic state. These participants shed light on the significance of the public image of a home country among immigrants that leads to experiencing a sense of political stigma. As a result, this stigma has an impact on their identity and forms a sense of the torn self (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). That means that this group of expatriates (younger Iranians) experiences the inner conflicts and tensions that result from resisting the political stigma of being identified as an Iranian in their everyday life. It also demonstrates a desire by the participants in my study to differentiate themselves from the fundamentalist image that is associated with the actions of a so-called theocratic state. In response, they appear to attempt to invest emotionally in a different and distinct cultural heritage, one that resonates more with a sense of Persianness, in order to define a distinctive identity for themselves in respect of their Persian heritage. In this regard, for example, Hani added:

> I think when I've narrowed it down and when it comes to music, culture, art, literature, all these beautiful things about my country, I'm very proud to be Persian. Because I genuinely think that when it comes to arts and culture, Iran has a lot to offer.

The findings presented in this section indicate the role of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in the emergence of communal fractions among Iranians in the UK. Moreover, the interviewees described the presence of a profound level of mutual avoidance, distrust, and fear among Iranian émigrés. Mutual avoidance among this group of immigrants is not, however, simply due to political divergence. My findings demonstrate that other socio-cultural motivations underpin this avoidance. Borrowing Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical concept of symbolic violence, mutual avoidance can be considered "a gentle, invisible form of violence", which is exercised when communal interactions are interlaced with relations of power (Thompson, 1984, p. 43). I continue this theme when presenting the socio-cultural aspects of mutual avoidance in the next section.

5.2.2 Social, Cultural and Economic Aspects of Fragmentation

Tensions and divisions between Iranian expatriates and those of other ethnicities are not just limited to "ideological tensions and political dynamics" (Jafari and Goulding, 2008, p. 76). Socio-cultural conditions also strongly affect both the individual and more communal identity projects among Iranians in the UK. As indicated in the previous chapter (see section 4.4, and Appendix F), Iranians, particularly the younger generation and middle-class Iranians, intentionally and calculatedly left Iran motivated by long-term individual projects. These motivations include higher education, emancipation from political and socio-cultural pressures, and the pursuit of individualised, private lifestyles (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Nassehi-Behnam, 2016). Thus, there is a desire to live independently and achieve personal goals among this émigré population (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020), which led them to eschew more collective goals. The first wave of Iranian immigrants to the UK differed from the more recent movements, however.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a population of secular Iranians, especially those among the upper and upper-middle classes, migrated to the West, including, but not limited to, the UK.

This formed the first major movement of what were well-educated and skilled Iranians to the UK (Bozorgmehr, 1998; Mahdi, 1999). Gradually, other groups of Iranians from other social classes also migrated to the UK. Consequently, this added to the complexity of compatriot avoidance among the members of this community through class distinctions. This issue is illustrated in the following comment from Majid (a 47-year-old man who had been living in the UK since 2000), who had a middle-class social background in Iran:

> I have a strange feeling when I am between them. Maybe it is a distance between generations. Iranians who came here 30–40 years ago are carrying their background of that time [before the revolution] with themselves. They did not change that. They used to listen to the music associated with that time. They are living in the mood of 40 years ago of Iran. Although they buy new and luxury cars and houses and try to be similar to the Britons by having a pet and going to a pub, they live in their past fantasies.

In this passage, Majid refers to the first movement of Iranian immigration to the UK, which mainly encompassed Iranians from the middle and upper social classes. These groups of Iranians are wealthy and have benefitted from various types of capital. He also argues that there is a gap between this group and other Iranians who arrived recently who are from more middle-class and working-class backgrounds. That is to say, those in the earlier group distinguish themselves through cultural consumption (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007; Larsen et al., 2010) and choosing a Westernised lifestyle, but along with a more nostalgia-oriented consumption associated with pre-revolution Iran. In doing so, they attempt to keep a distance between themselves and other Iranians. Majid, however, implies that they have stagnated in their fantasy of living in a secular, pre-revolution Iran during the era of the Shah. Nevertheless, this image of Iran is strange to these newcomers who were born and raised in an Islamatised, contemporary Iran.

This issue of communal incongruence can be viewed from Schutz's (1967, p. 219) concept of the We-relationship and its role in the intersubjective formation of the subject (for a definition, see section 4.2.3.1). As such, it seems there is a gap in a "shared community of time and place" between the various groups of Iranians arriving in the UK at different times. Consequently, in their social interactions, they may not feel empathy for each other (Pagis, 2010) and, therefore, their communal interactions can lead to an emergent sense of a lack of *We-ness* (Schutz, 1967, p. 167). As Schutz explains, face-to-face interaction is the place in which individuals share joint experiences and, when community members do not share a temporal or spatial community with compatriots, they enter the mode of an Other-relationship and utilise more abstract ideal types in their communal interactions. Therefore, the inaccessibility between compatriots is reproduced. Thus, it can be argued that in this community the lack of interaction between the different strata of UK-based Iranians and the absence of shared knowledge and experiences regarding post-revolution lifestyles in Iran may together lead to a profound divergence and lack of a We-relationship in this community. Hence, the lack of similarity among these groups of Iranians makes the condition for moulding unity and collective identity in diaspora more difficult.

As mentioned earlier, mutual avoidance is an emergent theme in this study that captures the fragmentation of the UK-based Iranian community. The following comment from Mary (a 44-year-old Iranian woman who lives in London) demonstrates the social aspect of compatriot avoidance that is transferred by the first generation of Iranian immigrants to new members of the community:

> When you arrive in the UK, if you have a family or friend, first they tell you to avoid Iranians. But why? We did not come with this attitude. Why should I ignore my compatriot? …There is a kind of bitterness between us.

Mary reflected on her mixed experiences of interacting with Iranians in the UK. She explained the manner in which she was socialised and introduced to a negative communal practice – compatriot ignorance – soon after arriving in the UK. One of the recurring findings in this study is the various antagonistic communal practices that are experienced by the interviewees. Based on the interviewees' narratives, the competitive nature of UK-based Iranians' communal interactions is characterised as "two-faced", "non-supportive", "egocentric", and as a "utilitarian friendship". These descriptions reflect their often hostile attitudes towards fellow compatriots. In this regard, Simin (a 50-year-old married woman who had lived in the UK since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s) described her experience of the community as follows:

> Yes, we have [community], but excuse me, we have groups of Iranians who behave negatively; they want to downgrade you. They cannot tolerate the growth of a fellow one. ... They won't try to make you grow, become bigger or give you enterprise. I don't know why? Not everybody, but some Iranians are either selfish or greedy! I call them backstabbers, which are two-faced people.

In her narrative, Simin notes the way communal competition and antagonistic attitudes towards each other are negatively manifested in interpersonal interactions. Based on her experience, some Iranians cannot tolerate and do not support each other, particularly in business. This view, echoed by other participants, is that members of this community tend to view matters through a utilitarian lens. That is, interactions and friendships are based on "the logic of personal benefits", as Mostafa indicated. These views can be interpreted in the way that the Iranian community is morally under pressure. That is to say, mutual relationships are not in the service of communal values and solidarity (Durkheim, 1995). Rather, Iranian communal interactions in the UK have developed based more upon the values of a market economy or exchange-oriented relationships (Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012).

The lack of congruence among Iranian immigrants can be traced back to the dynamics of social status in Iran. That is to say, the middle class consisted of heterogeneous categories or strata that were based on a clash between traditionalism and those who wished to embrace certain cultural changes in contemporary Iran (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020). Similarly, in the UK, the study participants experienced a form of self-categorisation based not only on their religious, cultural, and political values, but also their social class. In this regard, for example, Sara (a 47-year-old married woman), who comes from an upper social class in Iran, casts light on the significance of one's residential location and practices to how one is identified with the community:

> When I go to the residential area of Iranians in London, the atmosphere is very strange, as if it is Iran. But I see people and according to my age and my experiences, I understand where s/he stands and what her story and thinking framework is. I mean their mindset differs from mine. There are people among them who think about renewing curtains and furniture or going to Iran and bringing classic and luxury armchair furniture for their London house. In addition, besides these Iranians, there are older generations of Iranians in London who have community among themselves and do not mix with newcomers. I cannot understand them.

In this comment, Sara asserts that those groups of Iranians who live in London (e.g., Richmond, Kensington, and Finchley) reflect a very traditional view of Iranian living for her. She narrates her experience of this community by referring to a personal framework – personal criteria used in social interaction and choosing friendships – and informs us about two groups that she cannot understand in the community. The first group contains those who are more consumerist and look for a luxury lifestyle. The second contains those pre-established or older generations who are mainly wealthy Iranians. This account is analysed based upon Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical framework regarding the ways in which groups employ cultural, social, and economic capital to signify and negotiate their symbolic boundaries and social status. In the comment above, Sara, even though she identified

herself as being from an upper social class, signifies her lifestyle and tastes, and distinguishes herself from a consumerist lifestyle that exists among some groups of Iranians.

Following the previous comment, which shed light on the significance of symbolic capital in demarcating intragroup boundaries, Mitra's narrative of her experience concerning living in this diasporic community demonstrates another form of capital important in social categorisation. Mitra (a 45-year-old lecturer in London) stated:

> When I came here, I understood how Afghan immigrants who work in Iranian shops in London are behaving courteously; how hard workers they are. They are even more honest than Iranians. I was witnessing dishonesty in particular between the Iranian community in London, not academics, but those who come to the UK as an asylum seeker through cheating and dishonest reasons. They have a lifestyle that we cannot abide, it [is not our cup of tea] and unfortunately defames our Iranian community in the UK.

In this passage, Mitra has concerns regarding those community members whom she labelled asylum seekers. Her main argument concerns the way some refugees are not honestly engaged in economic activities, unlike other groups of immigrants. As an academic who would be in the (upper) middle class, Mitra emphasises the role of "working and doing" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 238) in the construction of identity. Her view can also be interpreted as a way she attempts to mobilise symbolic capital as an educated immigrant who contributes to the economy and draws symbolic boundaries between her own social class and other members from a lower class of the community. More particularly, she has concerns with the way this group of Iranians does not work hard and, instead of contributing to the economy, they are "benefit receivers". Therefore, work status and the level of contribution to the UK economy can be viewed as a form of symbolic capital for some Iranians (e.g., academics) to mark boundaries between themselves and those who are perceived as

being from a lower class. Mitra's narrative also illustrates evidence regarding a polarisation (and/or social hierarchies) of the Iranian community based on the type of immigration, expatriates' accessibility to resources, and the level of integration in the host society, particularly through economic activities. These factors exacerbate the fragmented condition between these groups.

5.2.3 The Religious Aspect of Fragmentation

The analysis of my interview data demonstrated that religious diversity is also an underpinning reason for communal fragmentation. In response to my question regarding their opinion of the Iranian community in the UK, the interviewees largely agreed that Iranians gather based on their interests and backgrounds. That is to say, they named various religious and political groups, associations, and Persian cultural gatherings which represent aspects of community formation for Iranians in the UK. Based on this perception of community, each group of Iranians has a community, which, at the same time, reflects their shared interests. In this regard, Monir (a 51-year-old married woman) stated:

> There are many Iranian communities, say colourful communities in London, like a rainbow. We have Muslim Iranians, from normal to fundamentalist Muslim, with a varied mode of behaviour, thinking systems and beliefs which established a community for themselves both officially and non-officially. Official communities belong to those Iranians who arrived earlier. … I mainly prefer to engage with un-official communities, specifically religious ones.

Here, Monir borrows the analogy of a rainbow to give a sense of the diversity of Iranian communities in London. She provides a categorisation of Iranian communities based upon members' belief systems and their length of immigration. Monir agrees that Iranians are religiously divided and practise Islam along a continuum – from a more personal, conservative commitment to religion to having fundamentalist, strict Shia beliefs. In her words, some Muslim Iranians are

"normal", which can be interpreted as those groups of Muslim Iranians who may be distant from the Islamic state's ideological thinking system but observe Islamic moral values in a more personal sense.

Monir also draws a line between official or registered communities that are founded by the first generation of Iranian immigrants and informal communities. The latter group of communities involve small gatherings that are more 'organic' and formed based on personal friendships. Other participants echoed Monir's account and implied that religion is embedded in Iranian culture and so also in their social interactions. For example, Majid (a 47-year-old married British-Iranian) explains the importance of religion in gatherings among the members of part of this community:

> Religion has had the potential to gather a large group of Iranians, especially in London. … I can say that those who are religious form bigger groups and attend the religious gatherings. But these groups have no connection with other religious groups.

Majid sheds light on the significance of religion in uniting groups of Iranians in the UK. He clarifies, however, the presence of division even among religious groups of Iranian expatriates. This can be understood by considering the religious divergence in Iran, specifically the contemporary dynamics and movements against enforced wearing of the *hijab* (a headcovering worn by women) and in support of ending other Islamic restrictions and discriminations inside Iran. Over the last century, Iran moved from a traditional, Muslim society towards a secular one during the Pahlavi dynasty. Iran is, however, currently under the control of a theocratic Shia Muslim state, although various religious minorities in the country are actively suppressed by the state (Sanasarian, 2000). These religious groups include Sunni Muslims, Sufi, Zoroastrians, Baha'i, Christians, and Jews. Following state restrictions, a large group of these religious groups left Iran to go to the UK and other countries.

To summarise, in this section (5.2), I have provided and analysed findings concerning the ways in which Iranians experience their everyday social life in a diasporic context, as well as their connection to other Iranians in the UK. In this regard, I presented their accounts around four arenas of contestation (i.e., the political, socio-cultural, economic, and religious) to indicate their communal fragmentation. These findings illustrate that Iran's post-revolutionist policies, the Islamic Republic's antagonism against expatriates, and its politicised ideologies are reproduced through compatriot avoidance, mutual escape, lack of trust, and group categorisation among the émigré populations of UK-based Iranians. These reasons together are at play within diasporic fragmentation. Therefore, my findings suggest that Iranians in the UK have developed as a "disjointed and somewhat anti-communitarian" community (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016, p. 9). That is to say, as with their compatriots in France and Sweden (Khosravi, 2018), Iranians in the UK suffer from internal exclusion and conflicts, and form heterogeneous and isolated islands (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020). My findings also indicate the lack of interest among Iranians in attending formal, institutionalised associations, which fuels heterogeneity within their community. This contested backdrop again makes the desire or idea of shaping a communal or shared identity difficult. Certainly, it appears that an Iranian community that shares common interests based on the contemporary history of Iran, either that of Pahlavi or the Islamic Republic, is more an ideal than a reality. But what about ancient (primordial) pre-Islamic history? Is this to state unequivocally that there is no common ground for shaping a shared communal identity? In what follows, I demonstrate the ways in which the festival of Nowruz perhaps offers one aspect of Persian culture that might play such a role.

5.3 Listen to Us: We are Persian and Celebrate Nowruz

In this section of this chapter, I present my findings around two emergent themes that I refer to as *Nowruz as Persian roots* and *hope for rebirth*. That is, to acknowledge Nowruz as a primary resource of identity work for Iranian expatriates in the UK to be recognised as *Persian* and its capacity, as the celebration of the spring equinox, to set the context to provide meaning and an emblem for rebirth and hope for an auspicious beginning of their new life and solidarity within the community. The purpose of this section is to illustrate how Nowruz can serve as a temporary relief from some of the diasporic tensions within the fragmented Iranian community residing in the UK. In other words, I show the ways in which Nowruz presents an opportunity to alleviate some of the communal tensions and may offer a temporary respite for these groups of Iranians in the UK.

Prior research on this community argues that the Islamic fundamentalist state in Iran has increasingly established a Shia identity and gradually eroded apparently "true" Iranian culture – that is, a culture that is predicated upon non-Islamic values and traditions, Persian heritage, history, art, language, and literature – and attempted to indoctrinate Iranians to live in conformity with an invented tradition of Islamic culture (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012) and a Shia lifestyle that restricts personal freedom (Gholami, 2014). This interference by the regime in the individuality and private spheres of Iranians led many in Iran to experience a sense of confusion, particularly when they left Iran to live in a seemingly free culture (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). In response, my findings indicate that some expatriates endeavour to revitalise and reclaim their cultural heritages through active involvement in the celebration of Nowruz and its ritualistic consumption activities. Theirs is a communal performance opposing the governing myth of an Islamic state-engineered culture and narration of Iran that reproduced a sense of communal fragmentation in the diaspora.

In what follows, I present my findings and interpretations in terms of the recurring theme of *Nowruz as Persian roots*.

5.3.1 Nowruz as Persian Roots

During the interviews, I asked the participants to say whether their Iranianness (nationality) is important to them, and if they take the initiative to show their Persian culture within the diaspora. Interestingly, the participants mostly had a desire to introduce their Persian culture and Iranianness as their national identity to others. Specifically, this population builds upon Persian cultural representations (e.g., literature, music, food, handicrafts, such as carpets and rugs, and the celebratory rituals of Yalda, Mehregan [an ancient harvest festival], and Nowruz) as ways to "project an extension of self to 'other'" (Jafari and Goulding, 2008, p. 86). This action is part of a broader attempt by expatriates to invite others to recognise and differentiate them, first and foremost, from a national, Islamic identity project promoted by the Islamic Republic state, and the image associated with Muslim-Arab countries and neighbouring ethnicities (e.g., Pakistanis, Indians, and Iraqis). For example, Sara (a 47-year-old married woman) anchored her collective identity to Nowruz and expressed her desire to be acknowledged by others as Persian:

> Nowruz is a good time to say that we are Persian, we are not Arab. … We [Iranians] somehow are between Iraq and Pakistan. Sometimes they [English people] associate us to the former or latter. But we have this Nowruz and for now we say this is who we are.

The festival of Nowruz, as noted by Sara, is a way of negotiating national identity for Iranian expatriates in the UK. Sara, like other participants, mobilises the Persian celebration of Nowruz as a means to demarcate her identity from that of Arabs, or those of neighbouring countries that are taken mistakenly as Iranians by some Western people. This comment echoes the study participants'

sheer desire to put emphasis on this festival as a prime source of anchoring their identity, because they suggest that Nowruz is an 'uncontaminated' constituting element of UK-based Iranians' identity. That means that Nowruz is a part of Iranians' collective memory that has apparently survived historical, political, and religious changes in Iran (Ashraf, 2006), particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, yet requires active reclamation and repeatedly "imaginatively reenacting a past" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 24). Nowruz, as a facet of Iranian collective memory, along with other cultural practices and rituals, signals a valued identity for these expatriates. It also annually reminds Iranians not to forget who they were and who they are not. This point is captured well in comments by Mary and Shima, as follows:

> Even though I have lived many years in the UK, Nowruz is the only thing from my Persian and Iranian identity that I still like to keep here. I insist on and emphasise this celebration because after several years of living abroad, at some points you forget that you are Iranian. But Nowruz reminds you who you are and where you belong every single year. Let me put it in this way, Nowruz is the only nice thing that recalls Iran for me; other things make me upset. Because it is pure, it is the only thing in Iran that has not been contaminated with other things, like politics. [Mary]

> I think Nowruz just gives me that part of my identity that reassures me that yes, I am Iranian. [Shima]

In the above comments, both Mary and Shima assert that Nowruz is a site for remembering their Iranian roots. Nowruz is a sacred and ideal part of their collective memory that shapes their Persian identity. Drawing on Etzioni's (2004) theory of celebration, the festival of Nowruz is a medium through which Iranians can recommit to their moral values and principles, as they collectively acknowledge it as Persian culture. This idea can also be understood based on Schutz's (1967) conceptualisation of memory as an intersubjective object and the concept of a stock of knowledge. As the main tradition of Persian culture, Nowruz represents one of the critical stocks of historical

knowledge of Iranians, offering a "generalised memory" of the past that makes individual memory social and, therefore, becomes part of the shared world that they inhabit (Misztal, 2005, p. 38). Hence, Nowruz constitutes part of Iranians' shared intersubjective memory, creating a sense of continuity from the past to the present. Moreover, "that collective memory is a kind of socially accepted currency which we have all learnt how to use and agree regularly to exchange" (Misztal, 2005, p. 38).

The desire to be recognised as Persian and the great sense of pride that accompanies this was, moreover, consistently shared with other participants in this study. When I asked the participants to elaborate on their "sense of pride", they commonly described two main elements of Nowruz: they share the view that Nowruz is not a religious celebration, but rather a cultural and secular festival. Importantly, the participants also insisted that Nowruz runs contra to the ideology of the Islamic Republic. These views are reflected by Zahra (a 70-year-old female who had lived in the UK for around 48 years) as follows:

> They [UK-based Iranians] want to say to the world that we have an ancient culture…
> I think it is a cultural comparison in contrast to other celebrations which are
> religious. Our Nowruz is not a religious celebration. Also, it is somehow a bit of
> grimace [a way of expressing disgust] to the Islamic regime to say that our Nowruz
> is older than Islam and has nothing to do with Islam. It is also a connection feeling
> to Zoroastrians.

Here, Zahra implies the importance of Persian culture for this community and the salient role of Nowruz as a source for their cultural identity. In emphasising the non-religious characteristics of Nowruz, she also reminds us that Zoroastrianism is an important source of Persian identification that is a reminder of the golden era of the Achaemenid Empire and a pre-Islamic ancient Iran (or Persia) for contemporary Iranians. Zahra also regards the celebration of Nowruz as a means of

anchoring her Persian identity while also resisting the Islamic Republic. In this vein, the ritual of celebrating Nowruz can be seen as an everyday act of resistance (de Certeau, 1984). My findings indicate that Iranian expatriates in the UK attach "countervailing meanings" to the celebration of Nowruz in order to resist the dominant ideological system experienced in Iran (Thompson and Haytko, 1997, p. 36). The participants commonly viewed the secular celebration of Nowruz symbolically as a tactic to resist the ideologies of Iran's Islamic state and the fundamentalist Islam that this regime enforces.

The participants also demonstrated their resistance to Iran's Islamic state in their repeated use of the term "Persian" as a means of self-identification. For example, Jalal (a 58-year-old male based in Reading) described this point as follows:

> I would never use this term [Persian], but my word is basically a defence. A response to an attack from this state. They have a problem with our Iranianness. I do not say they are Arab... I only know they have occupied our country. I applied the term Persian in response to those who occupied my country. My reason is that they substituted our flag with their own flag, which does not have any Farsi words on it. It is "God is great" in Arabic, which is not in my language. ... So, I suggest I am Persian to others to say that this state is not Iranian, but just occupied my country.

The above passage once again features the politicised sense of national identity of the participants in the study. Jalal criticises the way in which the current state of Iran downgrades his national identity, his Iranianness, by having changed the flag and added symbols containing Arabic words. National flags can either be considered as a symbol of communal unity or of segregation (Khayambashi, 2019). As the previous extract highlights, the participants express their Persianness against a backdrop that is highly politicised – using this work as a way of attempting to reclaim a

sense of their own national identity, which they perceive to be authentic (Ordabayeva and Fernandes, 2018).

The celebration of Nowruz is one of the unique opportunities for Iranians to gather together as a diaspora. In response to my question regarding the possible significance of Nowruz in gathering Iranians in the UK, Bahar (a 36-year-old female based in Leicester) discussed the way Nowruz parties gather Iranians like a family while providing a way of expanding the social network:

> When we sit beside other Iranians at Nowruz gatherings, after a while we start to speak about our job and business. Each one explains his or her work's activities. This helps you to know better your community, and when you require work (e.g., a skilful tailor), you remember them. We then may exchange numbers, follow each other on Facebook, and then every year we meet each other again during Nowruz. This party becomes like a family party and connects us. I mean you are able to know your community, and you can make business support for yourself.

For Bahar, the communal parties during Nowruz become like a family gathering for expatriates. These gatherings are now viewed as a social space into which new members of the family (newcomers) are socialised with the community and gradually become accepted as a member of this symbolic family. Social relationships will also continue after Nowruz through social media, which helps the members to remain connected.

Nowruz is an emotional time for Iranian immigrants, as it is one of the few times in the year that they get to feel a deep connection to home. Over the festival of Nowruz, they can look back and see a nation and families in Iran, and a community in the UK to whom they can be connected. For a short time at least, the Iranian community comes together, and people feel less lonely. This view is captured well by Ali (a 20-year-old male undergraduate student in Essex):

I think the pure feeling I had about Nowruz was I felt safe. It sounds strange, but like moving to a foreign country… not knowing anyone … And you're connected to the community and like the share of culture. You felt like you're in a cocoon; like you're in a little bubble. Yeah, it felt like a safe environment. It was safety. It was comfortable. It was my comfort zone. You felt the best feeling, comfortably.

For Ali, Nowruz is a "cocoon", a safe space where he feels connected when enveloped in Persian culture and its rituals. The analogy of a "cocoon" seems a good image regarding the idea of Nowruz as temporal and associated with the ideals of formation and even transformation for Iranians' self-identity. During Nowruz, the study participants enjoy a comfort zone that acts like a protective skin. Rituals function as a secure mooring that shields people, specifically in uncertain life situations, as is the case with many of the participants facing uncertainty in diaspora. As Gordon-Lennox (2017, p. 4) notes, "in the face of uncertainty, ritual contributes to our sense of security by beating time to our natural rhythms, helping us make sense of our world and enhancing our social bonds".

Nowruz is not only a symbol of communal identity, it is a critical part of the self for these immigrants. As Ali further noted:

It's part of my identity. I feel like imagine someone wants to swear at you or makes fun of your identity and you will feel sad. If I don't celebrate it, I feel sad; to just like part of me. I am sentimental to it. … Sometimes you couldn't really celebrate it with other Iranians. But no matter, I celebrate it myself.

Ali's comment is a good example of the significance of Nowruz, not just for communal identity work, but also as building a sense of self. The experience of single, non-family Iranian immigrants is slightly different from those who live within a family in the UK. For the former groups, the communal celebration of Nowruz is a pertinent chance to participate in and celebrate the festival with other Iranians. This is obviously a new mode of celebration of Nowruz which is not familiar

inside Iran. However, a communal celebration of Nowruz can be a way to 'compromise' and temporarily overcome differences among UK-based Iranians. In this regard, Ali commented:

> At one point there are many Iranian expats that come to the UK; they feel lonely. So, I think that element of family goes away because there is no family, so the community becomes a family at one point. ... I think that's a cultural shift from Iran to outside of Iran…Here you try to be more open minded and celebrate it [Nowruz] with other people. You might go to an event, but you don't even know them, but just to celebrate it. So, you compromise, like you maybe not try to see the differences between you and the other one.

In the passage above, Ali's sentiments echoed the view of many other participants regarding the psychological significance of Nowruz for expatriates who are away from home and often alone. For Ali, celebrating Nowruz in a communal space with others demands an "open-minded" subject that can tolerate others. It means that Nowruz is a time to put aside communal differences and sit beside each other, even if only for a few moments of festive time.

Overall, in this section, I first presented an emergent theme which I labelled *Nowruz as Persian roots*. I demonstrated the ways in which UK-based Iranians mobilise the celebration of Nowruz as an object and a site of the historical representation of Persian culture, which performs as a "mutually supportive scaffold" (Bell, 2003, p. 67) for their collective identity. Returning to the question that I raised at the beginning of this chapter, it is important to consider the ways in which the common past is recollected and interpreted among Iranian expatriates in order to negotiate their collective identity. In this regard, and to address this question, I borrowed from Schutz (1967) and Misztal's (2003, 2005) conceptualisation of memory and demonstrated that for this population Nowruz is considered as the representation of a historical collective memory. The participants in my study actively consume this object (the festival) to reclaim and *announce* the authenticity and

validity of their identity after their immigration to the UK. As Klein (2000, p. 45) pointed out, collective memory is a "therapeutic alternative to historical discourse". This conceptualisation of memory is resonant with the ways Iranian expatriates – with a rich history and civilisation – invoke an imaginary memory of their glorious past to protect themselves from the contemporary memory of the Islamic Republic. The republic is perceived by them as continuing with a historical wound of an Arab invasion of their land and culture, and, at the same time, the festival of Nowruz is a temporary remedy to their social trauma of interpersonal distrust and mutual avoidance in diaspora.

Specifically, the findings demonstrate that the festival of Nowruz is experienced as an idealised, political means of identity work for these expatriates and performed as a tactic for resisting Iran's Islamic Republic state ideologies and a crafted national identity. Nowruz is, moreover, perceived as the right moment to both differentiate the community from other apparently similar ethnic groups and may temporarily reunite some émigrés with other Iranian expatriates in public venues (e.g., restaurants and clubs) in the UK. These findings, therefore, demonstrate the possible nourishing practice of Nowruz as one aspect of Persian culture that is perceived as the roots of Persian identity and how it might help re-gather this fragmented community in a safe home in diaspora like a cocoon, in the hope of a rebirth.

5.3.2 Nowruz: Hope for Rebirth

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the analysis of my dataset is reviving the hope for rebirth through the celebration of Nowruz. In my discussions with the interviewees regarding the importance of Nowruz for Iranians, the majority of the participants were agreed on the intertwined meanings of Nowruz with nature. That is, they perceived the festival of Nowruz as a symbol of rebirth that gives them hope for an auspicious beginning of their new life in the diaspora. For example, the comments below by three interviewees (Ali, Forough [a 50-year-old female], and

Zahra) clearly illustrate the essence of the celebration of Nowruz for the participants surrounding the notion of rebirth.

> Nowruz is more cultural, emotional, and family bond. It is like rebirth. It is in the name; Nowruz means new day. So, it's about rebirth, fresh start, new beginning. [Ali]

> Nowruz is coincidental with the beginning of spring. So, it becomes unique for us. We believe that Nowruz is the time of the Earth's birthday. Trees will be in blossom, birds sing, everything will become new, everything smells the life, the aroma of freshness; everything is about growth. [Forough]

> We endeavour to say that we celebrate Nowruz as a green festival to celebrate the beginning of spring…. It is also a connection feeling to Zoroastrians and to show that it is not a religious celebration; it is a celebration of the rebirth of nature. [Zahra]

The comments of Ali, Forough, and Zahra show that, in contrast to Mardi Gras (Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012) and Christmas (Hancock and Rehn, 2011), the participants do not view the festival of Nowruz as materialistic or commercial. Rather, for the participants, Nowruz is an ancient, cultural festival to celebrate life and the rebirth of nature and reunion with the family. As Forough and Zahra suggested, Nowruz is a "green festival" to celebrate the beginning of spring. Zahra also views the connection of this festival to Zoroastrians. This point can be understood by referring to the Zoroastrians' great reverence for nature, and the symbolic significance of purity and maintaining the purity of fire (light) and water (Boyce, 2005; Foltz and Saadi-Nejad, 2007). In other words, the festival of Nowruz represents "order after chaos, a festival to re-establish order in the form of light, life, fertility, and growth" (Skjærvø, 2005, p. 12). In this respect, when the participants describe their experience of this ritual of New Year celebration, they shed light on the change in season through changes in the materiality of everyday life and the representations of change through ritualistic consumption activities, such as house shaking (cleaning) and New Year

shopping. In the following parts, I present two subthemes – *luminosity* and *newness* – associated with the aura of Nowruz and the notion of rebirth to capture the liminal phase of the equinox and the hedonic experience of newness attached to the celebration of Nowruz.

5.3.2.1 Luminosity

The subtheme of *Luminosity* was developed based on the participants' views regarding the intertwined meanings of Nowruz with nature and seasonal change at the 'magical' moment of the spring equinox. The findings show that Nowruz is perceived as a temporal, hedonic experience through the affective properties of luminosity and newness. These aspects present the significant role of light, luminosity, colour, and cleanliness as key means of shaping the experience of Nowruz and the spatial transition from winter to spring that projects hope for a fresh start for the participants in their contested context of a diaspora.

As stated, one of the ideas that construct the notion of rebirth is that of light and luminosity. The festival of Nowruz is experienced as a ritual that brings light into the celebrators' scope of attention. When discussing the experience of Nowruz, either surrounding the time of pre-immigration or post-immigration, the participants generally reminisced about the festival with memories surrounding light and luminosity. Specifically, in their accounts, they mentioned the manifestation of shininess by referring to Nowruz's house-cleaning practices and the feelings of being pristine and of cleanliness (Shove, 2003). For them, clean sheets, washed rugs and curtains, shiny windows and other surfaces (e.g., bathrooms and sinks, walls, lustres, cars, and shoes) bring luminosity and brightness to their senses and thus prepare them to celebrate and start a new year. This idea is described well by Sara (47, female). As she excitedly indicated,

> I think that brightness and shininess of Nowruz is amazing. I remember from my
> childhood that everything was shiny. During winter we did not see windows a lot,

and curtains were drawn as outside was dark or rainy. But as we are approaching Nowruz, days become brighter and shinier, so the window stains become highlighted and visible. When it became clean it could give you a good sense of cleanness and shininess. So, when I think about Nowruz, I remember those cleaned windows.

In the above comment, Sara – who was born and raised in the north of Iran (with weather like that in the UK) – reflects on her childhood and talks about Nowruz by emphasising the significant role of light, luminosity, and cleanliness in shaping the experience of Nowruz for her. The light and brightness experienced through cleaned windows provided a temporary chance for her to re-engage emotionally with the environment and the outside space. In the UK, however, although at the moment of Nowruz the weather is still cold and people live with a different time framework of everyday life in comparison with Iran, this group of Iranians still "expect" and "wait" for change in nature. As Hosein (a 70-year-old male, married, living in the UK since the 1980s) noted:

Although the weather is cold here, we feel it. Because at Nowruz's time the day will be longer, and the sunset comes to six o'clock. Yeah, you're gradually feeling Nowruz is coming.

In the above extract, Hosein refers to the idea of waiting for the beginning of Nowruz and explains how the length of the day is a hint for Iranians that Nowruz is approaching. This comment shows the harmony embodied between the changes in nature and the expectation of the coming of Nowruz for UK-based Iranians.

In addition, brightness and cleanliness are manifestations of the preparation rituals of Nowruz. Only after completing those cleaning tasks, buying red apples and vinegar, and colouring eggs for *haft-seen*, as Jalal mentioned, "we can smell the aroma of Eid". Consequently, the lived experiences of the participants regarding Nowruz were forged through their engagement with light

and luminosity. This experience is, moreover, able to create a ground to bring the participants together through the shared cultural meanings and practices related to cleaning – which is grounded in purity and luminosity. Therefore, the affective properties of light, cleanliness, and luminosity are sedimented in the lived experiences of Nowruz and activate the memory of Nowruz and bring a sense of hope.

5.3.2.2 Newness: From New Materials to Self-renewal

The second subtheme that constitutes the notion of rebirth from the participants' responses is the idea of newness. Newness in my dataset has a range of meanings, which again relate to the idea of rebirth. These meanings are related to re-starting, beginning a new life, the renewal of nature in spring. In my discussion with interviewees regarding their experiences of Nowruz, the majority associated the festival with renewal and rebirth, and specifically a natural renewal. Faranak (a 41-year-old female, based in Manchester) described the idea of renewal and re-start as follows:

> You just feel like nature is born again, and things are fresh, so you do want to start life anew or start new things. So, I think it's because our New Year fits with nature, and how nature evolves… so you are able to explain that. To be honest, it makes more sense than Western New Year.

Here, Faranak indicates that Nowruz is a legitimate and meaningful festival for Iranians when compared to Western New Year festivals, because they can justify its logic according to spring and earth rebirth. Moreover, for Faranak and other participants, Nowruz and its associated practices bring "the fresh start mindset – a belief that people can make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life regardless of their past or present circumstances" (Price et al., 2018, p. 21). Although changes in nature and the seasons are central to creating that mindset, my findings also highlight the role of the marketplace in presenting and selling freshness and the feeling of a

fresh start through consumer goods. Participants talked about their experience of buying fresh *haft-seen* materials and vegetables as Nowruz foods in the UK (see Figure 4.4) and their memories of one of the main marketplaces in Tehran, namely Tajrish market. They described how fresh products – including flowers, vegetables, garlic, red apples, and red fish – shape their experiences of Nowruz. For example, Faranak further commented:

> Before Nowruz people used to go to Tajrish bazaar just to have a look at what is available, not just buying things. I think it's a communal movement towards being more positive, towards that feeling of freshness, New Year, a new beginning. And like in the market, so you could see all those fresh elements like *sabzeh*, *sabzi* [vegetables and herbs] … like you get some spring flowers. I think bazaars like Tajrish, or even small shops here become more beautiful because of these fresh products that they put on.

The quality of freshness is also experienced by the goods that participants utilised for offering to guests during the Nowruz festival, particularly the ritual of house visiting. This point was repeated in the interviews. However, Sara's comment below is interesting as it demonstrates how freshness became an issue of negotiation between her parents during Nowruz:

> Three to four days before Nowruz my father used to go to a specific confectionery near our home to buy fresh types of dried sweets, nuts, and fruits. And he used to shop too much. My mom always had argument with my dad and complained that why do you shop too much? Why did you buy 5 kg sweets, it will be stale? You could again buy more freshly!

The above comment demonstrates the importance of offering fresh nuts, sweets, and fruits in Iranians' culture of hospitality. Freshness in Nowruz is not just limited to buying consumer goods and products. Rather, consumption is utilised to turn a 'tired' person into a fresh one and renew the self, so that the person becomes 'ready' (Shove, 2003) for a new start in Nowruz. This point was

discussed by some of the participants in the way that they agreed that Nowruz demands personal efforts to be a fresh person (both bodily and spiritually or emotionally) for a new start. For example, Ali suggested that shopping at the festival of Nowruz is not about purchasing to give something to others as presents; it is essentially for the self. Shopping is, as he implied, a new or modern tradition which is performed in order to *upgrade the self* and make the person ready for a new year. In response to my question concerning his experiences of a Nowruz bazaar, Ali noted:

> It was very tiring. It was like you go for six hours non-stop; just shop shop shop. Buy this, buy that … but it wasn't as a present. Yeah, the thing of the shopping they did then, it's not like Christmas where purchase it, wrap it and give it. … It wasn't seen as a present, it was preparation for Nowruz…, it was seen as like upgrade, updates. Yeah, it was more like upgrading yourself; like being fresh, being ready for the New Year. You are just trying to look nice for the New Year.

> *Ali continued*: You go shopping and buy new clothes but not because of the clothes; just to feel fresh. Generally, if I feel like I need new clothes, I'll buy new clothes. I don't wait for Nowruz. But if I feel oh, I don't have nice clothes to wear at that moment of Nowruz, I will probably buy new clothes… But generally, I just go to get a fresh haircut to be looking nice, dressing well; but I wouldn't think about shopping at Nowruz.

In the passages above, Ali compares shopping for Nowruz with Christmas. He clearly distinguishes these two festivals and asserts that Nowruz is not a shopping festival like Christmas. The items that Iranians buy at this festival are not gifts. It is instead a matter of purchasing for the self, family members and the house to get ready for a new year. This comment shows that ritualistic consumption at Nowruz becomes a way to self-update, or to make a fresh image of the self. The participants consume goods associated with freshness, cleanliness, newness, and transformation to present a new and 'good' version of the self (McCracken, 1986; Price et al., 2018; Schouten, 1991; Shove, 2003). Looking "nice" through grooming rituals, such as having a haircut, is another

example of ritualistic consumption in which consumers consume to be fresh (McCracken, 1986). Therefore, Nowruz and its consumption practices provide consumers not just with a medium for anchoring their collective identity, but also allows them to *refashion* or *reconnect* with the self (Cova, 2021). Hence, my findings demonstrate that some Nowruz consumption activities point to a recreational and self-improvement experience for consumers and, as such, harmony with nature (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hirschman et al., 2011).

5.3.3 Section Summary

The findings presented in section 5.3.2 demonstrate the embedded meaning of Nowruz associated with nature and spring that provides a positive condition for Iranians to hope for rebirth and transformation. Shedding light on the participants' experience of this ritual of New Year celebration, the findings show the significant role of a change of season in shaping that experience through alterations in the materiality of everyday life and the representations of change through marketplace goods and rituals of house cleaning and New Year shopping. Introducing two subthemes of *luminosity* and *newness*, my findings suggest that Nowruz is perceived as a temporal hedonic experience that offers aspiration and hope for rebirth through the affective manifestations of light, brightness, colour, cleanliness, and newness. Nowruz, as such, allows those who celebrate it to *(re)frame* different aspects of their life anew, albeit temporarily.

Overall, the findings in the second part of this chapter show that Nowruz has become a cathartic remedy to help this population experience respite from their political and ideological divergence from their shared experiential memory of the Islamic theocratic state of Iran. Thus, the celebration of Nowruz and its temporal materialisation of a collective memory of the past, as well as its embedded meanings of the hope for rebirth and a new start, together help Iranian expatriates

rely on their ideal of Persian roots and collective identity to be temporarily reborn as a connected community in the UK.

The performance of Nowruz in reconnecting community members can be viewed based on the idea of the way "institutions bestow sameness" and confer identity in society (Douglas, 1986, p. 63). In other words, Nowruz provides a shared ground for dispersed expatriates to identify the self, based upon their embedded similarities, the same cultural narratives, an imaginary, collective memory and a historical stock of knowledge of Persian culture and Iranianness. This construction of identity has been labelled an *authentic identity project*; that is, UK-based Iranians pursue a legitimate and authentic position in their new context that is performed through representations of Persian culture, including rituals and symbolic activities, as well as by consuming "authentic" cultural materials and possessions (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Mehta and Belk, 1991). In the following section, I focus on the findings pertinent to consumption rituals and the practices of Nowruz in the UK and demonstrate how these evolved in a Western culture to support new identity projects of expatriates.

5.4 The Exhibition of Nowruz: A Commercialised Celebration of a Traditional Festival

In this section, I provide and analyse my interview and secondary data regarding the different ways in which consumption rituals associated with the festival of Nowruz are enacted in the politics of identity among the Iranian population in the UK. The findings, moreover, expose the diverse and changing identities of Iranian émigrés in the UK. Specifically, the results in the preceding section illustrate that despite community fragmentation (see section 5.2), Nowruz is a unique opportunity to provide a focus for a collective Persian identity to coalesce. The analysis and interpretation in this section reveals, however, that the practices and forms of celebration in communal spaces still

feature some aspects of divergence within this community. The observed changes in celebration and consumption in the diaspora in comparison to Iran are mostly as a result of an emphasis on secular aspects of Persian identity and the temporal and spatial elements of everyday life in a new culture (the UK) that require adaptation. For example, the participants described how the ritual of house visiting is performed in various ways in the UK that differ from traditional, intensive Iranian customs. Mary (44, married female), for example, described home-based and ticket-based Nowruz celebrations in the UK and asserted that her family continues the traditional custom within their "own bubble", thus making her family more Persian. She noted:

> Here we have a lot of Nowruz celebration events, but we usually celebrate it at home with our limited Iranian friends with our own bubble.... We do not celebrate like those communities who arrange Iranian celebrations by selling tickets, inviting a singer, and catering with dinner. Our celebration is private rather than going to those ticket-based Nowruz events to receive a service like food or live music. These public events are like Christmas parties that invite singers. But we mostly see the Nowruz celebration as a private event.

Here, in contrast with a routine, extensive house visiting which is limited to traditional families and kinship networks in Iran, the celebration ritual is polarised into private and public events. That indicates that although some groups of Iranians invest in their cultural status and prefer to celebrate Nowruz in traditional style in their private space, other groups of this émigré population mark the occasion in public gatherings, so-called *ticket-based* Nowruz parties, or those gatherings that are arranged as a Nowruz Exhibition (see Section 4.4.2 Figures 4.5 and 4.6).

The public gathering serves as a multifunctional space representing the changing priorities of these immigrants in their everyday life and the social norms of Nowruz visiting. That is to say, most of the participants suggested that instead of doing a demanding, time-consuming ritual of house

visiting during Nowruz, they attend the public or group-related Nowruz gatherings to celebrate this festival beside their friends and fellows and other UK-based Iranians. Jalal, for example, stated:

> I think we have done house visiting in a limited sense. Here it is just mainly one big gathering that we have had with friends.

Having other responsibilities and commitments over the Nowruz festival, the participants generally adapted their celebration style to their social life in a different culture, that of the UK. In other words, after their immigration, they started to celebrate Nowruz but not extensively. Other participants, such as Ali, also support the style of the communal celebration of Nowruz in the UK. However, he suggested that these gatherings do not happen on the day or during moments of the countdown, as happens in Iran. He contended that traditionally Nowruz in Iran was not a communal festival per se; it was private, as a personal celebration with your relatives and close family. According to Ali,

> We kind of replace lack of our families with the Iranian community that we found. We would get together. But obviously on the day of Nowruz, we wouldn't be together. But like, maybe two or three days later, we get together and celebrate with something like an after party. I think because Nowruz is something personal you wouldn't really try to celebrate it with strangers. I think Nowruz, specifically, is something more personal on a day of Nowruz.

Here, my findings show that there is a temporal and spatial change in Nowruz celebration in the UK in comparison with Iran. Living in a different social and cultural context also makes an asynchronous mode of celebration for expatriates with their families in Iran. According to the above comments (Jalal and Ali), some groups of Iranian expatriates celebrate Nowruz in a communal space; not exactly at the Nowruz countdown, but when it fits within their social time zone in the UK. However, for some participants, Nowruz gatherings in the UK still perpetuate communal conflicts. Similar to the comment by Mary (presented in an earlier section of this

chapter), other participants confirmed that negative communal practices (or conduct), such as malicious gossip or denigration, occur during Nowruz gatherings. For example, after Hawzhin (a 40-year-old female Kurdish-Iranian) was asked regarding her experience of attending Nowruz public parties in the UK, she replied:

> I attended only one time. It was okay, not bad. But you know after the party I saw some lady gave comments about the other's dresses or talking about other's dance...I did not like it.

Here, Hawzhin refers to a recurring form of denigration among some members of this community during Nowruz communal gatherings. This issue disinclined her towards participating in other communal gatherings and she avoids mixing with the Iranian community during this festival. This situation can be understood in the way that the emergence of public celebrations of Nowruz bring the identity conflicts and internal issues of this group of émigrés into the open. As prior research in CCT demonstrates, a variety of communities emerge when people come together temporarily to share an elective bond and interaction during a leisure activity (Arnould and Price, 1993; Kozinets, 2002; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012). My findings extend these studies and demonstrate the emergence of tensions among these populations of Iranians that are partly because of changes in the celebration of Nowruz in a new culture and the exposure of the participants to alternative forms of ritual consumption in a public Western communal space. This issue causes a clash between some members of the Iranian community, who have embedded cultural, moral, and traditional values, and those compatriots who follow secular, freedom-based transgressive lifestyles. For example, Bahar (a 36-year-old, female) explained this tension in the way that a Nowruz celebration in Leicester ended with a conflict between a single, newcomer Iranian and her friends during dancing at that Nowruz party:

Unfortunately, we held this celebration in Leicester, but before its finishing, there happened a fight and quarrel. You cannot believe it… It ended as a horrible Nowruz celebration, and we would never arrange such a programme.

Some Iranians come to the UK, and they want to bring Iran here. That is, they want to live here as they lived in Iran, with an "Irani" lifestyle. In that Nowruz gathering, the majority were families, but we also had some attendees which were single men or women Iranians... Unfortunately, while we were dancing, one of my friends – who has two teenage girls aged 17 and 19 – was dancing with her girls. At one point, a man who apparently was drunk, took the hand of my friend's girl to dance with her. He did not ask, and we did not even know him already …You see, this is the level of their [the newcomers] culture. Then unfortunately when we asked him what he is doing…, he and his friends started to fight. Therefore, this party faced a clash and ended unfinished. Their behaviour was ugly. If you want to do in this way, go to clubs; you cannot do it at a Nowruz party.

We can see from the above that Nowruz gatherings are an opportunity for social gatherings for Iranians from all walks of life (e.g., families, single people, newcomers, and pre-established immigrants). It demonstrates that Iranian expatriates, like other consumers, are willing to engage in what would be seen in Iran as transgressive consumption practices (drinking alcohol and dancing without moral consideration) within a Western consumer culture. In a communal setting, however, there are still some embedded cultural and social restrictions which constrain some Iranians from performing "un-prescribed" practices (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). Therefore, it is possible to argue that some groups of Iranians in the UK are not fully able to take risks through consumption in this festival and enact their individual freedom in the community. Thus, according to Bahar's narrative, although the Nowruz celebration is mobilised as a potential way to reunite expatriate Iranians temporarily, it is not always successful. That is to say, when some immigrants intend to conform to Western freedom consumption values (Reith, 2004) for pleasure (O'Malley and Valverde, 2004),

they contravene their homeland's embedded traditional culture and norms. This demonstrates the potential of Nowruz when celebrated publicly as a site where cultural and generational conflicts occur.

For the participants in this study, as Bahar also pointed out, a Nowruz party is not an ordinary party. Rather, it is a sacred gathering which is distinguished from profane communal spaces, including clubs and pubs. Moreover, the depth of connection and the quality of togetherness in Nowruz communal parties differ in comparison with organic, family-based gatherings. In this regard, Zahra illustrated how public gatherings to celebrate Nowruz in the UK create a very different consumption ritual, which, in her accounts, is experienced as superficial when compared with the private and intimate home-based spaces that characterise Nowruz in Iran:

> I feel when I went there, I could not make that connection with others. That connection must be created between all of us to bring the sense of Nowruz for us. I felt that they seem unhappy and without real joy. Perhaps because they are away from Iran. Although they dance at the ceremony, their face was not happy, and their laughing and pleasure seem fake to me; it was not from the bottom of the heart.

> And we did not know each other. We were just from the same homeland, without having any familiarity and intimacy between us. We were not close and cordial like a family. It was Westernised, like going to pubs and each one sits at a corner chatting with a friend.

In the above comment, Zahra echoes the similar experiences of many of the participants regarding the importance of Nowruz in connecting Iranian émigrés. However, the chemistry of this connection in Nowruz public gatherings does not seem authentic; it remains transitory or ephemeral. In addition, Zahra compares this style of Nowruz gathering to a Westernised party and meeting in pubs for social gatherings. The characterising and associating of Nowruz parties in the community with a Westernised style is not limited to the form of connection. The modes of

consumption practices within these parties are similarly different from the family-oriented nature, interiority, and sociality (Linnet, 2012) of Nowruz celebrations. This point is described well in Zahra's following comment:

> When I compare these gatherings to our normal [domestic] one with friends in the UK, it is like they go to make-up salons or wearing costly and sumptuous clothes, carrying expensive jewellery, and putting branded shoes to participate in these communal feasts. … They come to these Nowruz celebrations with a weird and strange appearance, extremely Westernised. It is not even Westernised because I have attended many European and English events and ceremonies, like Christmas parties. People come with quite simple appearance, even wearing casual clothes. ... I cannot feel connected with these people ... I feel sorry that is why our beautiful tradition has been transformed into a fashion salon.

In the passage above, Zahra criticises the way Nowruz celebrations in the UK have evolved towards fashion gatherings and hyperconsumption (Campbell, 2014). They have become space in which some groups of expatriates "seek visibility and a more intense and party-like atmosphere" (Linnet, 2012, p. 406). This is a consumption mode that contradicts Nowruz's traditional cultural code; that is, a private family-based celebration ritual based on the seasonal cycle (see Figure 4.5).

Zahra's discussion illustrates how the consumption habits of a cultural 'green' festival are evolving and becoming commercialised. To put it another way, the luxurious communal Nowruz parties inform us how this traditional celebration is becoming commodified and commercialised through the conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) of actions exemplified by fashionable dress and appearance. These modes of lavish celebration and Westernised consumption are, moreover, an objectification of status competition and formality within the community. When Nowruz is celebrated outside Iran, it evolves into a more Westernised and public festival, which causes

divisions and ruptures within the UK-based Iranian community, some of whom embrace this change and others reject.

Together, these findings suggest that the celebration practices of Nowruz are evolving in ways that are more secular, Westernised, and commercialised modes of festive practices among expatriates in the UK. This can jeopardise the potential experience of the *interiority* of Nowruz (Linnet, 2012; McCarthy, 2005) and the expected communal sharing of Persian traditions becomes fractured and disrupted.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to assist in understanding the significance of the festival of Nowruz as a medium of, and resource for, the negotiation and reproduction of individual and collective identities among Iranians in the UK. To achieve this purpose, I started the chapter with an elaboration of the context of my study and showed how the participants experience fragmentation. My findings (as discussed in section 5.2) illustrate that Iran's post-revolutionist policies – concerning the socio-cultural, political, and religious aspects of Iranian social life – reproduce fragmented communal experiences for émigré communities. Consequently, Iranians experience a highly fragmented community. Despite the present fragmentation, however, the findings of this study indicate a potentiality for the festival of Nowruz to symbolise a cultural anchor for Iranian émigrés. The celebration of Nowruz and its underlying narratives of Persian culture, as well as its embedded meanings of rebirth, help Iranian expatriates to rely on their Persian roots and collective identity in order to attempt to unify as a connected community. In other words, Nowruz is presented as an authentic festival to exhibit a Persian identity to non-Iranians or the mainstream, while these expatriates consume it politically as a form of resistance through reclaiming Persian culture to

protect themselves from a shameful Muslim-Iranian identity. This is a self-authentication identity project for these Iranians in the UK to claim legitimacy through one aspect of the Persian culture: the festival of Nowruz.

Finally, the analysis and interpretation in the third section of this chapter presented the evolution of consumption aspects of Nowruz in the UK. It revealed that the consumption activities and forms of Nowruz celebration in communal spaces are moving away from the festival's traditional, so-called authentic cultural ceremonies, and the public, rather than private/familial celebrations, are experienced as episodes of conspicuous consumption. Taken together, these results suggest that even though Nowruz represents a temporal limbo (or liminality) for émigrés and is celebrated collectively as a constituting pillar of communal identity at the macro level, it is still developing as a site in which to flesh out ranges of socio-cultural positions for expatriates to (re)negotiate their individual identities. These positions are enacted as the consumption practices of Nowruz undergo spatial and temporal changes in the UK.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a summary of the findings presented in the previous chapter and reflects on these findings in more depth to address the thesis questions posed in Chapter Three (section 3.5). The chapter first summarises the study's core argument, aims, and research questions. In the second part, it provides an overview of the critical findings of this study. It then discusses the findings and addresses the research questions by returning to the literature reviewed on consumer identity politics, festivals, and ritualised consumption. Next, it discusses the contributions and implications of the study, both theoretical and empirical. Finally, the chapter considers the study's limitations and offers recommendations for further research.

6.2 Overview of the Thesis Argument

This study set out to shed light on the consumer identity work of an immigrant population using the medium of festival and ritualistic consumption. As indicated in Chapter Two, the studies reviewed show that consumers co-constitute multifaceted forms of identity in complex and dynamic relationships within a constellation of other constituting forces, such as religion, the market, state, gender, and social class. For this reason, I took up Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call to draw on social phenomenology (Schutz, 1967) to study the role of consumption in identity work, as it is negotiated through the intersubjective relations of consumers within their socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts. Moreover, in response to a call in consumer research to consider rituals and traditions as one of the critical experiential consumption contexts for consumers in their identity negotiation process (e.g., Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Duffy and Mair, 2018b), and acknowledging the integral role of rituals and festivals as prominent sources of

collective identity (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998; Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Kates and Belk, 2001; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012), further research was needed to bring those aspects together. This study, therefore, addresses this paucity and aims to understand the following:

how migrant consumers use the context of the festival of Nowruz and its associated rituals as an intersubjectively shared interpretive resource in conjunction with other socio-cultural forces to negotiate their collective identities politically.

Empirically, this study focused on the Persian New Year (Nowruz) as a site for exploring UK-based Iranians' consumer identity work and the potential socio-historical tensions among community members and for understanding the role of consumption practices and rituals in respect of how these tensions are negotiated. To fulfil this aim, in Chapter Three, I established my argument concerning the role of festivals and their associated consumption rituals in framing immigrant collective identity. In doing so, I built on a body of research into rituals and festivals to develop part of my theoretical background and then reviewed established approaches and arguments relevant to theories of festivals and holiday celebrations, primarily from anthropological and sociological perspectives (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]; Etzioni, 2004; Falassi, 1987; Miller, 1993; Turner, 1982).

Working within the CCT domain of consumer identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) and its strand of identity politics (Thompson, 2014), and building on prior consumer research on ritualistic consumption (e.g., Belk and Bryce, 1993; Hirschman and LaBarbera, 1989; Sandikci and Omeraki, 2007; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Weinberger, 2015; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012), this study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of a group of UK-based

Iranian immigrant consumers in relation to broader structural forces in the consumption context of the festival of Nowruz. In doing so, I posited the following questions:

(I)   What identity-related goals, if any, do UK-based Iranians express through the medium of the festival of Nowruz and its associated rituals?

(II)   Is Nowruz experienced as a commercialised festival in the UK?

(III)   Whether and how do UK-based Iranians utilise Nowruz ritualised consumption objects and activities to manage their identity project?

To address the above aim and questions, and in line with Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) argument concerning 'the context of contexts' detailed in Chapter Four, I adopted a qualitative research approach that is grounded in social phenomenology. Designing this study as an ethnographic case study, a total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, mainly over the online platform of Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were analysed manually by conducting thematic analysis. In Chapter Five, I presented the findings in three sections incorporating three key themes to provide insights into the following: a) the characteristics and political and socio-cultural make-up of the Iranian émigré community as fragmented communities; b) the ways in which the participants experience the festival of Nowruz in the UK politically as a prime medium of recognition and boundary work; and c) the polarity and commercialisation of Nowruz in the UK and the evolving forms of this celebration and its consumption activities in adapting to the spatial and temporal aspects of living in a Western consumer culture. The following section seeks to provide an overview of these findings.

6.3 Overview of the Findings

My initial findings helped clarify the background of this study and brought to the fore the overlapping lines of communal fragmentation experienced by the study participants along political, social, economic, and religious lines. Based on the first emergent theme, *fragmentation*, my findings illustrated that this group of expatriates experienced some socio-cultural disintegration in the diaspora that originated in Iran. Specifically, my findings indicate that Iran's post-revolutionist policies, the Islamic Republic's fundamentalist ideologies and antagonism towards expatriates, as well as the international economic sanctions and challenging situation of immigration, are reproduced through practices of compatriot avoidance, mutual escape, lack of trust, and group categorisation among these émigré populations of UK-based Iranians. This finding, therefore, suggests that Iranians in the UK suffer from and, in turn, perpetuate, internal exclusion and conflicts, resulting in a fragmented diasporic community.

This contested context makes the desire or idea of shaping a communal or shared identity difficult. However, my findings reveal that Persian culture and the Zoroastrian tradition of Nowruz offer common ground for shaping a shared collective identity for Iranians in the UK. The findings in section two of the last chapter (see section 5.3) show how the festival of Nowruz secures a temporary respite from diasporic-related tensions among the UK-based Iranian community. These findings were presented around two emergent themes: *Nowruz as Persian roots* and *hope for rebirth.*

The results of this study present the participants' retrospective desire to introduce their Persian culture and one of its constituting aspects, Nowruz, as exemplary of their Persian roots and national identity to others. This action was identified as part of a broader attempt by these

expatriates to pursue a redemptive form of identity politics. This identity work is, however, constructed through intersubjective relations within their socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts. In this process, they invite others to recognise and differentiate them, first and foremost, from the national Islamic identity promoted by the Islamic Republic state and the image associated with Muslim-Arab countries. The study participants' accounts show that they experience Nowruz as a non-religious festival that runs contra to the Islamic Republic ideology. They view the secular celebration of Nowruz tactically, as a means of symbolically resisting the ideologies of Iran's Islamic state and the fundamentalist Islam this regime enforces. This finding demonstrates the politicised sense of national identity that exists around the celebration of Nowruz outside Iran, and that encompasses the idea of Persianness as an "authentic" identity project among the study participants. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that Nowruz is experienced as a context for boundary work between Iranian émigrés and other neighbour ethnicities (e.g., Pakistanis, Iraqis, and other Arab ethnicities).

The findings also indicate the therapeutic function of Nowruz and the consumption practices associated with it. The celebration of Nowruz is one of the unique opportunities for diasporic Iranians to gather together. The results of this study show that Nowruz parties and exhibitions bring Iranians together while providing a way of expanding their social network. Furthermore, my findings show the psychological significance of Nowruz for expatriates who are away from home and often alone. For them, Nowruz was experienced as an emotional time at which they can feel a connection to home and to feel less isolated as they experience themselves as part of a broader, connected community. Therefore, these findings demonstrate the therapeutic function of Nowruz to affirm a sense of Persian identity to re-gather this fragmented community in a spirit of rebirth.

My findings also highlight the participants' experience of Nowruz as a *meaningful* festival. They commonly agreed on the intertwined meanings of Nowruz with nature and seasonal change at the 'magical' moment of the spring equinox. They therefore perceive Nowruz as a justifiable and meaningful festival in that its timing and the reason for celebration make sense because it attunes to nature, synchronises with earth rebirth, and offers a positive atmosphere and condition for transformation and a new start. Against this backdrop, the change in season is presented through alterations in the materiality of everyday life, which were captured by the spatial and temporal aspects of the participants' sensory experience at Nowruz: *luminosity* and *newness*. The findings in this respect show that consumption activities during Nowruz play an important role in shaping those hedonic experiences pertinent to the affective properties of luminosity and newness. These aspects present the significant role of light, luminosity, colour, and cleanliness as key means of shaping the participants' experience of the seasonal transition from winter to spring at Nowruz, projecting hope for a fresh start. These associated qualities were illustrated through ritualistic consumption activities, such as deep cleaning, house visiting and party gatherings, gift-giving, and by displaying and consuming the seven items of the *haft-seen* table (see section 4.4.1) and new clothes.

Lastly, the analysis in this section reveals, however, that despite the capacity of Nowruz to unify community groups by focusing on Persian culture and the construction of a collective Persian identity, the practices and the form of the celebration, specifically its consumption activities, are increasingly being changed in communal spaces. The observed changes in celebration and consumption in the UK in comparison to Iran are mostly a result of the emphasis on the secular aspects of Persian identity and the temporal and spatial aspects of everyday life in a new culture that differs from celebrations in Iran and requires adaptation. My study shows, for example, that

the ritual of house visiting is performed in various ways in the UK that differ from traditional Iranian customs. This means that, in contrast with the routine, extensive house visiting which is limited to families and kinship networks in Iran, whereas this ritual is polarised into private and public events in the UK. Specifically, my findings indicate that although some groups of Iranians rely on their cultural traditions and prefer to celebrate Nowruz in their private space and with their close friends, other groups of this émigré population celebrate it in public gatherings, at so-called *ticket-based* Nowruz parties.

This plurality implies a temporal and spatial change in the way Nowruz is celebrated in the UK compared to Iran. Iranian expatriates tend to celebrate Nowruz in a communal space that is not strictly at the Nowruz countdown, but when it fits within their social time zone in the UK. For example, Nowruz exhibitions gather a large population of Farsi speakers across the UK to enact Persian culture and create celebratory interactive moments for them through the performances of Haji Firuz, DJs, dancing while wearing ethnic clothes, and the promotion of essential *haft-seen* items and other related products and services. However, for some participants, these gatherings still perpetuate communal conflicts that are experienced through harmful communal practices (or conduct), such as malicious gossip or denigration. In line with previous research (Jafari and Goulding, 2008), this finding suggests that the emergence of tensions among Iranians is partly because of changes in the celebration of Nowruz and conflict between some members of the Iranian community who adhere to traditional and cultural values, and those compatriots who embrace more secular, and transgressive lifestyles. Hence, this finding suggests that the emergence of public celebrations of Nowruz, rather than the festival itself, can bring identity conflicts and the internal issues of these groups of émigrés into the open.

Moreover, I demonstrate that for the latter group in particular (those who, for example, embrace a more secular lifestyle), there is a shift in the style of Nowruz gatherings towards a more British approach to collective celebration that takes place in clubs and other popular venues. The change to a more local style of celebration is not limited to venues and activities. Consumption practices associated with these parties are also similarly distinctive compared to the family-oriented interiority and sociality of traditional Nowruz celebrations. Nowruz parties in the UK have become much more fashion oriented as spaces of *hyperconsumption* (Campbell, 2014). These are spaces where some seek visibility and a more intense, pleasurable, and party-like atmosphere (Goulding et al., 2009). This pleasurable collective consumption mode contradicts Nowruz's traditional cultural code; that is, a private family-based celebration ritual based on the seasonal cycle. Thus, the findings illustrate how consumption practices of a traditional festival are evolving and becoming commercialised in the UK. Together, these findings suggest that Nowruz celebration practices are developing in more secular and Westernised ways, featuring pleasurable modes of festive practice among expatriates in the UK. In the following section, I show how these findings address the research questions.

6.4 Discussion

As indicated earlier (section 2.4.3), this study considered societal class divisions, historical processes, and cultural values and norms to situate consumption beyond the isolated subjectivity of the agent and to better understand the underlying ideological forces moulding the subject. Against this backdrop, and by conceptualising the interactive and ongoing process of consumers' identity construction in its socio-cultural and geopolitical context, this study sheds light on the communal context of Iranians in the UK and the setting of Nowruz as follows.

6.4.1 Fragmentation and Sources of Conflict

The findings of this study highlight a salient shadow over and the interactional challenges facing this immigrant community that are characterised by four arenas in respect of political, socio-cultural, economic, and religious aspects of fragmentation. My findings suggest that Iranians in the UK have developed as a "disjointed and somewhat anti-communitarian" community (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016, p. 9). This finding is in line with the previous literature on Iranian émigrés in the US (Malek, 2011; Mobasher, 2006), Canada (Malek, 2015; Nasrullah, 2020), France (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020), Germany (Moghaddari, 2020), Sweden (Graham and Khosravi, 2002; Khosravi, 2018), and the UK (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016). These findings illustrate that Iranian expatriates experience a high level of disappointment and lack a sense of belonging within their community. Iran's post-revolutionist policies and the Islamic Republic's politicised ideologies and antagonism against expatriates are reproduced in the emerging scattered clusters of Iranians through compatriot avoidance, mutual escape, lack of trust, and group categorisation.

Regarding the sense of distrust among these Iranian groups, the findings of this study illustrate a similar pattern to other studies of Iranians in other countries. That is to say, there is a strong sense of interpersonal fear, particularly within the émigré populations of Iranians in European countries, such as Sweden (Graham and Khosravi, 1997; Khosravi, 2018), the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2002), and the UK (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016), and in Asia, such as in Malaysia (Fozi, 2021). This fear can be traced back to political-ideological hostilities from either the SAVAK (the secret police and security and intelligence service operating under the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran) or the Islamic Republic's foreign intelligence service towards oppositions in exile. As such, the discourse of the possibility of one's political association with the state, the Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), or other political groups is salient to understanding the interpersonal distrust among Iranians in the UK.

This fragmentation and inflammatory communal situation can be analysed as a continuation of Iran's internal politics and socio-economic difficulties and the homeland's international political and economic pressures; that is, the US sanctions and their consequences, particularly the sharp devaluation of the Iranian rial in 2011 and 2018 (*The Guardian*, 2018). These pressures drastically changed Iranians' lifestyles over the last decade, increasing social tensions and discrimination and creating a new class stratification in Iranian society (Papoli-Yazdi, 2021). These changes, along with the decades of state's social and economic mismanagement, have, therefore, made Iranians, specifically the middle classes, much poorer, more vulnerable, and exhausted (Papoli-Yazdi, 2021).

Fragmentation and the Iranian community's contested situation have fuelled an identity crisis and a lack of a unified sense of national identity for these immigrants (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Mobasher, 2006; Mostofi, 2003). For example, Mostofi (2003) discussed a sense of collective identity among Iranians in California based on nostalgic memories of Iran and experiences of the immigration process. She contended that a lack of trust among Iranians in North America acts as a barrier against strong intracommunity ties. Mostofi (2003) observed that these assumptions and suspicions among US-Iranian groups had created a culture of scepticism among these Iranians, further preventing coherence in the Iranian immigrant communities. The present study identifies a similar phenomenon: the lack of interest among Iranians in attending formal, institutionalised associations based on religion and politics, which fuels heterogeneity within their community. Thus, it is clear that the primary source of mistrust and scepticism among Iranians can be traced back to the political situation and lack of trust in their homeland. Specifically, as Bayat

(2022) observes, there is a profound level of distrust in Iranian society, specifically between citizens and the state. This issue fuelled the nation's recent movement under the slogan of *Woman, Life, Freedom* across Iran and the diaspora (ibid.).

This study and other similar ones have highlighted that the contemporary history of Iran, either Pahlavi or the Islamic Republic, cannot unite Iranians as a community in the UK. However, as Mostofi (2003, pp. 684-89) pointed out, "cohesiveness" based on "neutral traditions" (i.e., those which are not related to specific religious or political backgrounds) is needed among Iranians so that a community can be formed. Previous research has suggested that despite the acknowledged fragmentation and scattered situation, Iranians in exile "are proud to be affiliated with the Persian culture and heritage but are ashamed and embarrassed to be identified with the Iranian national government" (Mobasher, 2006, p. 100; see also Mostofi, 2003; Gholami, 2016). My findings in the following section build on this line of the literature and address the first research question:

What identity-related goals, if any, do UK-based Iranians express through the medium of the festival of Nowruz and its associated rituals?

6.4.2 Persian Culture, Nowruz and Collective Identity

The results of this study revealed that some UK-based expatriates endeavour to revitalise and reclaim their cultural heritages through active involvement in the celebration of Nowruz and its ritualistic consumption activities. My findings indicate that Nowruz is celebrated publicly as a party and exhibition. These privatised yet public events (Turner, 1982) are unique episodes that illustrate the capacity of Nowruz to gather fragmented populations of Iranians and draw their boundaries. Furthermore, it is a collective performance that represents the politics of identity among this population of Iranians through opposing the governing myth of the Islamic state's engineered

culture, the prescribed social values, and a narration of Iran as a Shia-Muslim country that, in its way, reproduced a sense of communal fragmentation and "the torn self as a reflection of the inner conflicts and tensions that result from extreme systems of domination and the desire to resist" (Jafari and Goulding, 2008, p. 88).

This finding can be explained in light of the politics of identity, cultural authenticity, stigma, and prestige (Bourdieu, 1984; Goffman, 2009 [1963]) and the therapeutic function of Nowruz as a festival (see section 6.4.2.1). For example, my research indicates that the study participants use the idea of the reclamation of Persian identity, or dis-identifying from Muslim Iran and re-identifying with a secular Persian identity, in the context of global politics and the enduring diplomatic tensions between the Islamic Republic and Western nations as host countries for Iranian immigrants (Mostafavi Mobasher, 2018). They also seek to reclaim a sense of Persian identity in response to the increasing setting of Islamophobia in the West that results in an experience of racism, prejudice, discrimination, and social injustice against Muslims (Gholami, 2016). My findings indicate that UK-based Iranians, akin to "many diasporic Iranians commonly dis-identify as Muslims and as Iranians, identifying instead with their historico-cultural heritage as *Persians* rather than their national background as *Iranians*" (Sayadabadi and Howland, 2021, p. 338).

In this context, celebrating Nowruz is seen as an everyday act of resistance (de Certeau, 1984) in which Iranian expatriates in the UK attach "countervailing meanings" to this festival to resist the Islamic Republic's dominant ideological system (Thompson and Haytko, 1997, p. 36). This political action can be interpreted based on a top-down approach to identity politics, as conceptualised by Hill and Wilson (2003). This means that "people choose, and sometimes are forced, to interact with each other in part on the basis of their shared, or divergent, notions of their identities", whereby culture is used as a way to express triumph (Hill and Wilson, 2003, p. 2).

Accordingly, the participants in my study reclaim a secure continuity of ancient Persia for their identity politics (Hall, 1990) through cultural representation (i.e., the festival of Nowruz) and the mystic narrative of a golden past. This enactment is regarded as boundary work and as a defensive tactic for these émigré populations to protect their image from the stigma of being identified as fundamentalist Muslim Iranians. This finding in my study is in line with previous CCT research on identity politics (Belk and Costa, 1998; Thompson, 2014). For example, it shows Nowruz is perceived as a spiritual and empowering source for my participants identity work. Reclaiming allows consumers to undergo an empowering transformation by drawing on spiritual connections with the myth – literally or figuratively (Muñiz and Schau, 2005). However, reclaiming also involves performing the myth (Thompson and Üstüner, 2015), a well-known tactic in identity politics that disrupts established narratives and ways of doing. This performing is enacted through commercialised Nowruz parties and utilising Westernised consumption activities by some groups of Iranian in the UK. It is also part of emancipatory identity politics performed by oppressed immigrant consumers that resist the established ideological, political, and religious structural forces of their homeland.

6.4.2.1 Therapeutic Function of Nowruz and the Politics of Identity

The findings of this study show there is a rhetoric of *saving* and *defence* among the participants in the context of Nowruz. This means that after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and over the 40 years of repression under Shia Islam, a subjectivity has been constructed that is defensive, sceptical, and confused (Ansari, 2019; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Yarshater, 1993). Based on an intersubjectively shared narrative among the study participants, Iranians try to save their meaningful secular selves from what they consider to be a toxic, state-promoted identity. My findings indicate that the context of the festival of Nowruz enables these consumers to work on their identity politically and enact

the endorsement of a Persian identity. This identity construct is cultural, spatial, and, in part, (anti)nationalistic. Thus, the festival and its so-called secular cultural connotations have *therapeutic functions* for this community that help its members to liberate themselves from the stigmatic image of being Muslim Iranian.

As discussed in the previous chapter (see section 5.2.3), Nowruz becomes a cathartic, imperfect solution that helps provide this population with some respite from their political and ideological divisions. Thus, the celebration of Nowruz and its temporal materialisation of their collective memory of the past, as well as its embedded positive meanings of the hope for rebirth and a new start, help Iranian expatriates draw on their ideal of Persian roots and collective identity to be temporarily reborn as a community in the UK. Drawing on Klein (2000, p. 45), collective memory is a "therapeutic alternative to historical discourse". The discourse of collective memory is, however, political and, as Misztal (2003, p. 124) notes, "is used strategically not merely to explain the past but also to transform it into a reliable identity source for the present". Collective memory is the part of a society's intellectual and moral framework that is associated with myths, represented through ideology, and is an essential factor in promoting solidarity (Misztal, 2003). This conceptualisation of collective memory is resonant with the ways Iranian expatriates evoke an imaginary memory of their past to protect themselves from the recent memory of the Islamic Republic, which it perceives as continuing a historical wound that started with the Muslim-Arab invasion of their land and culture around 600 AD (Yarshater, 1993). At the same time, this study shows that Nowruz is a temporary remedy to their social trauma and interpersonal distrust and mutual avoidance.

The above finding is in line with previous consumer research that shows how consumers search for self-transformation by consuming a mythically authentic image of the past and operate

politically through shaping creative and even counter-ideological activities around rituals and festivals (Belk and Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002; Üstüner and Holt, 2007; Sandikci and Ger, 2010). CCT studies inform us that consumers use objects, rituals, and festivals to claim authenticity and legitimacy (Belk and Costa, 1998; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; O'Leary and Murphy, 2019; Thompson and Kumar, 2022). They suggest that consumers use rituals and festivals purposefully as *authoritative performance* to display their culture, gain status, and mark their social and cultural boundary, thus promoting and protecting a desired sense of a collective self (Arnould and Price, 2003). Authenticity as "an element of boundary work" (Michael, 2015, p. 178) is conceptualised by constructs such as real, genuine or originality (i.e., not being a copy), accuracy (i.e., being true to others), and integrity or being true to oneself (Michael, 2015; Thompson and Kumar, 2022). However, interpretations and perceptions of authenticity are evolving, grounded in a dynamic cultural system (Thompson and Kumar, 2022) and consumer identity "goals that influence which properties of a context are uniquely identified as significant and relevant" (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010, p. 839). Building on this literature, the findings of my study indicate that the participants perceived Nowruz as a medium through which they form emotional attachment and can exhibit their cultural authenticity to others, differentiating themselves from the current Iranian state and from other Muslim minorities in the UK. This finding also demonstrates a sense of cultural superiority associated with Persian culture and its role in identity work among Persians. The study participants utilised Nowruz as a unique secular cultural source to claim legitimacy and social prestige in a new society (Bourdieu, 1984). This means that Iranian immigrants perceive this festival as more 'natural' and as an authentic way of celebrating a new year at the spring equinox and not in the winter. For them, moreover, this festival is not just a tradition inherited from the past, but rather is a progressive and modern festival that is 'open' and fits into a modern consumer culture (Michael, 2015).

The cultural capital and novelty latent within Nowruz and Persianness further highlights how groups employ cultural and social capital to signify and negotiate their symbolic boundaries and social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). This finding reflects how Iranians believe they are culturally authentic, isolating themselves from Islamophobic views in Western societies and, at the same time, contending that their beliefs and rituals are adaptable to modern cultures of the West. In the UK, these ideas are reified through pleasurable, marketised collective consumption activities pertinent to the celebration of Nowruz. This setting helps Iranians express their secular cultural identity and experience cultural integration with their host country, thereby allowing them to minimise cultural clashes within British society.

Moreover, Nowruz is a unique context in which Iranians can feel that they are not segregated from a more Western and, therefore, commercially oriented global citizenship. Therefore, this thesis argues that the Persian identity project in the diaspora is a political identity; that is, a dynamic and relational project socially constructed in the diaspora and practised and become increasingly oriented towards a Western society. Prior research on this group of immigrants illustrated a similar practice of recognising and mobilising Persian culture as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to create new cultural meanings in the context of Persian festivals, such as the celebration of the ancient harvest festival of Mehregan (Ghorashi, 2004). The festival of Mehregan is both a de-territorialised ritual and an imaginary cultural performance that is not celebrated in Iran now. However, it is the re-creation of this festival in the US that shows the American public "who we are" (Ghorashi, 2004, p. 334). It is a kind of identity politics specifically adopted to counter the negative image of Iran associated with terrorism and fundamentalism after 9/11 in the US. In this context, Iranians present Persian festivals politically as being secular (non-religious) symbolic resources that fit into Western consumer culture. In this way, they endeavour

to protect their collective identity from the threat of being regarded as "terrorist" (Jafari and Goulding, 2008).

Together, the findings in this section show that members of this community reclaim cultural practices of Persian identity that have historically been associated with ideas about pre-Islamic Persia. As the main tradition of Persian culture, Nowruz represents one of the critical "stocks of historical knowledge" of Iranians (Schutz, 1970, pp. 236–242) that create a sense of continuity from the past to the present through the annual celebration of the festival. As such, this cultural reclamation allows this population of immigrants to represent their secular identities within the diaspora in the UK. Nowruz and its associated meanings support this group of Iranians to reconstruct their identity in congruence with the socio-cultural landscape of Western society and their modern lifestyle. This is in line with McCracken's (1986 p. 84) view of rituals as "an opportunity to affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order". In line with a functionalist perspective of rituals and festivals (see section 3.2.3), Nowruz rituals and traditions have essential roles to play in marking community boundaries and maintaining the culture of a community (Etzioni, 2000; Moufahim et al., 2018; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). These conventions and shared ethos "perpetuate the community's shared history, culture, and consciousness, and set up visible public definitions" (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, p. 65), public recognition (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), and social solidarity (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]).

6.4.3 The Commercialisation of Nowruz

This section discusses findings pertinent to the consumption aspects of Nowruz and how UK-based Iranians mobilise consumption practices at Nowruz to negotiate their political identity. This section answers the questions of (a) whether Nowruz is experienced as a commercialised festival in the UK and, if so, b) how do UK-based Iranians utilise Nowruz consumption objects and activities to manage their identity project?

The findings of this study reveal that Nowruz is evolving as a commercialised and Westernised festival through public parties and ticket-based events, so-called Nowruz parties, or Persian night events to celebrate it. The emergence of these events is one example of the commercialisation of Nowruz, whereby the marketplace provides a setting in which some groups of these consumers can perform secular aspects of their Persian identity that have been previously suppressed (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). During these events, Iranians undertake various forms of ritualistic consumption, such as dance, food, alcoholic drinks, and music, as well as crafts and decorated objects which are designed with the symbols of Zoroastrianism and the Pahlavi dynasty (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9). The use of Zoroastrian, Achaemenid and Pahlavi symbols in objects related to Nowruz, such as the Faravahar - i.e., a symbol associated with the Zoroastrian mythology that "represents an effulgence of the light of Ahura Mazda… Corresponding to the Zoroastrian cosmology of a constant battle between good and bad" (Fozi, 2014, p. 42) - and Persepolis, is another reason for the significance of Persian heritage as an ideological background of identity politics for this group of consumers.

These acts of consumption are perceived as consumers playing with the visibility of an object (such as decorations pertinent to *haft-seen*) through different regimes of value and considering its "perceived visibility" in a social context in terms of identity work (Appadurai,

1986). The regime of values, as Corvellec and Hultman (2014, p. 359) point out, relates to "institutionalised ways of assessing and communicating value. They are expressions of established understandings of what matters as opposed to what does not matter". The consumption associated with Nowruz allowed the participants of this study to express their politicised values through the performance of an idealised Persian identity. For example, my findings show how the participants put effort into transgressing prescribed Islamic values promoted by the Iranian state by dressing in what might be considered stylish clothes during Nowruz, consuming alcohol, and dancing with others. The intensified deployment of Westernised signs in the consumption setting of Nowruz is in line with the desire for visibility and inclusion among these groups as modern Persian consumers in mainstream society (Gholami, 2016). It is, therefore, an identity that works to alleviate and deconstruct the torn self and construct a legitimate self as secular Persian Iranians or British Iranians (Gholami, 2016; Jafari and Goulding, 2008).

This finding extends the previous research on this community in a way that illustrates the Persian festival of Nowruz and its secular consumption activities as being mobilised as a valuable cultural resource for UK-based Iranians to alleviate their identity tension as *the torn self* that is characterised by inner tension, cultural confusion, guilt, and self-doubt (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). However, this finding is inconsistent with Sandikci and Ger's (2010) study that demonstrated that religion influenced consumption choices and simultaneously provided individuals with another set of resources and ideals for identity construction. In contrast to this study of Turkish-Muslim consumers, my finding illustrates that the religion of Islam is a structural force of socio-political limitation and a source of stigmatisation for UK-based Iranian consumers, and they deploy secular consumption practices (e.g., consuming alcoholic drinks and dancing with others at Nowruz parties) in line with Western consumer culture to work on their non-religious nationalistic

collective identity. Specifically, they perform demythologising acts through the celebrations of Nowruz and its collective consumption rituals to construct their political identity. This issue can be explained by the demythologisation of consumption in consumer research (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Weinberger, 2015). In this process, some UK-based Iranians actively try to present an authentic image of Iran in the diaspora through their collective and ritualistic consumption, by pleasure-seeking consumption activities, such as drinking alcohol, and by attending dance parties. Repurposing Nowruz from a family-based traditional celebration in a private space in Iran to a Westernised event in the UK through parties and Persian Nights in clubs, hotels, and restaurants and intensifying this festival with Persian-related signs and brands is, as such, a good example that documents how a tradition is reinvented according to the needs of society and its audience.

Another finding of my study is the significant role that the consumption of new objects, particularly clothes, plays during Nowruz. Although, as I have noted, this is a traditional aspect of the Nowruz celebration, this temporal desire for new and stylish clothes in the context of Nowruz is understood based on a conceptualisation of *newness* in modern consumerism and how this value informs consumption practices (Campbell, 1992, 2021; Coskuner-Balli and Sandikci, 2014; Hirschman, 1982). The meaning of newness and novelty is dynamic, context dependent, and socially constructed. It is grounded in the authenticity and unfamiliarity of the item, which is temporal (Coskuner-Balli and Sandikci, 2014).

The novelty and authenticity of new objects are a source of cultural meanings and consumers engage with these meanings in different ways to negotiate their identities. However, as Campbell (2021, p. 168) argues, the high value attached to the new (as a temporal quality of fresh, improved, and novel or unfamiliar objects or experiences) is increasingly responsible for the

contemporary tendencies towards hyper-consumption. This quest for newness and novelty are not created by modern consumers alone, but by the fashion industry, marketplace forces, and manufacturers play a significant role in this process (ibid.). In the context of Nowruz, although self-renewal consumption practices through new clothes and other objects are required by Iranian consumers to accomplish social practices of house visiting (in its traditional form) and collective gatherings (in their modern form), they quest for the *cultural novelt*y of the newness pertinent to Nowruz. Newness and its symbolic meanings attached to Nowruz rituals and consumption practices are interpreted as 'natural', is required to acknowledge the regeneration of time and seasonal change, as well as for the function of self-renewal and expression as a modern self.

The role of clothing in ritualistic experiences, such as participant dress in festivals, has been documented in CCT consumer research, such as in heavy rock music festivals (Chaney and Goulding, 2016). In a ritual experience, ways of dressing are used by consumers to shift temporarily from one identity to another, and can be a way of demarcating insider and outsider status (McAlexander and Schouten, 1995). My analysis shows how tradition institutionalises the desire for the new, whereby consumers use new clothes and other objects or services to transform themselves emotionally and physically. This, in turn, allows them to escape temporarily from the mundane to celebrate a new year. In this sense, and based on Campbell's (2021) conceptualisation of the desire for the new, the consumption context of Nowruz (with its closeness to nature) and its sensitivity to fashion in Western culture overlap, generating unique desires and aspirations. In these ways, the ancient festival traditions become meshed with consumerist Western values, with Nowruz becoming a site of hyperconsumption.

The emergence of luxurious communal Nowruz parties informs us how this traditional celebration is being commodified and commercialised through conspicuous consumption (Veblen,

1899) and fashionable actions exemplified by stylish dress and appearance. These modes of lavish celebration and Westernised consumption, moreover, bring new ways of achieving status within the community. These consumerist developments polarised Nowruz consumption practices, have brought divisions and caused ruptures within the UK-based Iranian community, some of whom embrace this change, and others who reject it. This means that although some groups of participants in the study still rely on their cultural traditions and prefer to celebrate Nowruz in their private space with their close friends, other groups of this émigré population celebrate the festival in public gatherings, commercialised Nowruz parties, or those gatherings that are arranged as a Nowruz Exhibition, Show or Bazaar. Thus, there is tension among the participants regarding how they perceive Nowruz as a traditional, non-commercialised or non-materialistic celebration versus those who experience it as a commercialised, pub-style event. This tension can, from one side, be understood by highlighting how some of the participants bring forth the unique aspect of Nowruz as an ancient and authentic celebration that is contrasted with Christmas, which is viewed as a commercialised festival (Hancock and Rehn, 2011; Storey, 2008).

In this respect, some of the participants in this study perceived Nowruz and its consumption activities as an authentic experience. Specifically, this festival and its consumption (*haft-seen* items and ritualistic foods that are served during Nowruz – herbed rice with white fish, herb omelette, Persian rice and thin noodles, and *ash-e reshteh*, a warm soup filled with fragrant herbs, hearty beans, and noodles – are perceived as tenable and defensible, because they fit with nature and the spring equinox. This finding can be explained by the concept of authenticity and the desire for *decommodified authenticity* identified in consumer research (Belk and Costa, 1998; Holt, 1998; Mason, 2007; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991).

Finally, my study provides evidence to consider festivals as another site that adds cultural value for some groups of consumers to gain legitimacy in a society (e.g., Belk and Costa, 1998; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Kates and Belk, 2001). The Persian tradition of Nowruz allows these consumers to invoke their desire for decommodified authenticity and use it against the dominant commodified Westernised festival of Christmas. For example, some of the participants suggested that Nowruz is about something other than intensive shopping or purchasing presents; shopping for this festival is essentially for the self to "refashion" the self (Cova, 2021). By shedding light on the issue that Nowruz is imbued with the idea of transformation and self-reflection, some study participants experienced it as a unique tradition performed to upgrade the self and prepare the person for a new year. This finding, moreover, contributes to CCT research on consumers' "fresh starts" (Price et al., 2018) by showing how festivals provide opportunities for self-renewal and self-transformation. It also allows us to better understand how cultural capital resources shape the pattern of consumption practices and collective consumer identity among immigrant consumers in the festival context.

6.5 Contributions

The originality of this study lies in its exploration of consumer identity politics through the collective consumption context of a festival. First, it responds to a paucity identified in the CCT literature regarding the limited amount of exploratory research on non-Western and Asian consumer culture (Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Thompson, 2014; Üstüner and Holt, 2007). Although previous consumer research has investigated this context, specifically, Turkish consumer culture (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Torlak et al., 2018; Üstüner et al., 2000; Üstüner and Holt, 2007), my study contributes to the CCT tradition of consumer research by extending research on Iranian consumer culture in the current diaspora

(Jafari and Goulding, 2008). The present study explores the consumer culture and consumption practices of Iranian émigrés in the UK, illustrating the heterogeneity of their ritualistic consumption activities. It also reveals the overlapping cultural meanings and identity work of these consumers within the multicultural society of the UK.

The current study redresses the gap in the literature that called for "consumer researchers to go beyond the concept of market capital ideology and study the interconnectivity of power relations between the political dynamics and traditional/institutional forces that generate certain ideologies" and identities (Jafari and Goulding, 2008, p. 88). It reveals how the clash between politicised ideologies in the context of the festival of Nowruz and collective consumption allows immigrant consumers to construct a new identity. Specifically, previous CCT research on Iranian consumers focused on clothes and make-up consumption among the young generation (Jafari and Goulding, 2008), without exploring their collective consumption rituals. The current study redresses this gap and explores Iranian immigrants' identity work in the context of the festival and its associated collective consumption practices. By shedding light on a redemptive form of identity politics, this study demonstrates that Iranian consumers resolve their identity tensions not only through the dialogue of objects and activities (Jafari and Goulding, 2008), but also by mobilising their so-called authentic Persian traditions and the festival of Nowruz.

The study, moreover, explored identity politics beyond the individual level and reflected on the structuring effect of culture and ideology on shaping consumers' lives and identity (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). My study responds to a call in CCT research to explore consumer experience and identity by acknowledging the cultural, historical, and societal conditions that help shape this identity (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al., 2009; Thompson, 2014). This need specifically speaks to studying consumption and identity in a communal context that is

"highly responsive to... cultural norms, juridical structures and direct political intervention" (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011, p. 396). Adopting the social phenomenology of Schutz (1967) and his concepts of a stock of knowledge, the We-relationship, and collective memory, this study responds to that call and demonstrates how collective identity in a diaspora is constructed intersubjectively at the junction of embedded cultural values and norms, politicised ideologies, historical trauma, a communal context, and Western consumer culture.

To provide one example, my study contributes to and builds on the previous CCT research on collective ritual consumption and offers insights into the dynamics of how and why consumers strategically mobilise the elements of a festival and a non-dominant culture and rituals in the broader work of their identity politics (Weinberger, 2015). This study is significant against the backdrop of CCT research on consumer resistance and stigmatisation. Prior consumer research documented consumer resistance strategies against the domination of global brands and multinational corporations (Arnould, 2007; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Thompson et al., 2006) and neoliberal institutions (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014). In line with these studies, but in a different context, my research demonstrates how UK-based Iranian consumers mobilise ritualistic consumption relevant to the Persian New Year to resist the Islamic ideology and domination of the fundamentalist Shia state in Iran. This act of resistance against state-associated stigma does not target the self to reform (Crockett, 2017). In contrast, it is an intersubjective act of resistance that speaks to the other to alleviate collective identity confusion and gain legitimacy as part of a diaspora. In doing so, these consumers benefit from new identity positions "that enable them to negotiate the complexities of social life and, in some cases, opportunities to turn the ideological system to their unique social or economic advantage" (Thompson and Haytko, 1997, p. 36).

Another contribution of this study is to present aspects of the therapeutic capacity of the festival of Nowruz at the communal and personal levels. My study contributes to CCT research on consumer self-transformation and "fresh starts" (Price et al., 2018). Specifically, these findings demonstrate how fresh starts are experienced through the ritualised consumption surrounding Nowruz. This research shows how the festival and its associated consumption practices are imbued with ideas of rebirth and newness. Consumption in this context is utilised to turn a 'tired' person into someone that is 'ready' (Shove, 2003) for a new start.

The present study contributes to CCT research that illustrated the potential of ritualistic consumption experiences to underpin personal transformation, enabling consumers to participate in self-actualising and 'cathartic' activities (Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Kozinets, 2002) and to enact cultural myths (Belk and Costa, 1998; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). The findings of the current study show that consumption at the festival of Nowruz in the UK is primarily self-motivated, as opposed to being about buying gifts for others. It is a tradition that is performed in order to 'upgrade' the self and make the person ready for a new year. These findings suggest that Nowruz consumption rituals are characterised as a legitimised and self-improvement experience in that they are in harmony with nature's renewal and spring. Building on the strand of consumer research pertinent to newness and its consumer practices (Arnould and Price, 1993; Coskuner-Balli and Sandikci, 2014; Hirschman et al., 2011) that conceptualises newness as a liminal phase imbued with socio-cultural meanings (e.g., joyful and hopeful beginnings and changes, and a temporal sense of self-renewal and transformation), my study exemplifies some of this socio-cultural meaning of newness in the context of a seasonal festival that is defined with the ideas of earth rebirth, re-starting, beginning a new life, and reconnecting with the self (Cova, 2021).

Finally, in line with CCT research on the separation of sacred and profane contexts to minimise the likelihood of unwanted contamination (e.g., Belk et al., 1989; Coskuner-Balli and Sandikci, 2014; Holt, 1992), my findings show that Nowruz is, in its traditional form, a sacred gathering which is distinguished from profane communal spaces, including clubs or pubs. In the Western consumer culture, however, it has evolved in such a way that the sacred and profane overlap (Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019). UK celebrations of Nowruz are different and, in comparison to traditional forms, some consider them to be superficial and inauthentic; for others, the celebrations remain therapeutic in aiding the temporary unity of the community and providing resources for their diasporic identity.

6.6 Practical Implications

As stated in the methodology chapter (see section 4.2.2), this study has epistemic limits that do not allow the researcher to generalise the findings beyond the context. I would argue, however, that the findings of this study can offer insight into the complex socio-cultural configuration of these groups of Iranian consumers in the UK for market practitioners, policymakers and community planners.

From a managerial perspective, this study presents implications for marketing and consumer research companies, specifically regarding marketing opportunities in respect of ritualistic consumption (products, events, and services), market segmentation, targeting, and positioning in the Iranian consumer market in the UK. Specifically, the present study sheds light on the dominance of the discourses of nationalism and secularism among Iranian expatriates, particularly in cultural events and celebrations. These retrospective tendencies regarding Persian culture and the golden past underpin the collective identity construction of Iranian consumers.

Previous research on immigrant consumers demonstrated the significant role of consuming home-related objects in nurturing their collective sense of belonging and ethnic consumer identity projects (Askegaard et al., 2005; Firat, 1995; Mehta and Belk, 1991). In a similar pattern, the participants in my study demonstrated a great desire to use the medium of the festival of Nowruz and its consumption forms and objects to construct their cultural and national identity as part of a diaspora. This finding provides marketplace practitioners with a close-up perspective on the potential of the Iranian market niche regarding cultural products and services that are specifically consumed during the festival of Nowruz.

The findings of this study illustrate, moreover, the existing ideological and cultural sensitivities among Iranian community members and their increasing tendencies to differentiate themselves from other apparently similar communities, such as Iraqis, Arabs, and Pakistanis. On the other hand, Nowruz is a unified consumption setting for ethnicities such as Iranian, Afghan, Tajik, and Kurdish to have similar consumption needs. These findings could inform marketing practitioners and those retail companies that target the transnational ethnic consumer market in the UK, specifically Middle Eastern communities.

The present study offers context-oriented nuances about communal interactions and identity construction in the setting of rituals and festivals among groups of Iranian immigrants in the UK. Community managers and policymakers could utilise the context of Iranian cultural festivals as a medium to increase internal tolerance, communication, intercommunal recognition, and mutual understanding. Considering the rising numbers of Iranian immigrants who are settling in the UK, the current issue of communal fragmentation identified in this study and other similar studies, and the therapeutic capacity of Nowruz for alleviating those communal issues, offers insights for UK community managers and policymakers to consider Persian culture and its festivals

in their decision-making and planning activities. This means that local authorities could arrange and promote events and festive activities surrounding Persian culture, such as Yalda, Chaharshanbeh Suri, Nowruz, Mehregan, and Tiregan, in order to help this community manage their solidarity and interactions.

To give one example, as with the New York Persian Parade (Malek, 2011), UK local councils could support this community and organise the festival of Nowruz to bring together not only scattered UK-based Iranian expatriates, but also other communities that are associated with the culture of Nowruz (e.g., Kurdish, Afghan, Tajik, Uzbek, Turkish, and Albanian communities). These decisions and policies could help Iranians use their cultural capital and negotiate their position in the host society. Thus, these immigrants can create a sense of inclusion and belonging to the multicultural society of the UK.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

As indicated in the methodology chapter (see section 4.3), the current study was mainly undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020–March 2021). This placed practical limitations on my ability to gain physical access to and participate in public events associated with the festive time of Nowruz (21st March). I was, therefore, forced to amend my research design to adapt to a remote, less obtrusive, and limited ethnography. Given the qualitative methodology and research design of this study as an ethnographic case study, the result of this study cannot be generalised to the whole population of Iranians in the UK or other countries.

Moreover, because of the lockdowns and restrictions arising from the pandemic, I missed the chance to attend and observe a communal celebration because all the events during my fieldwork were cancelled or postponed. As a result, this study was, in practice, restricted to online

recruiting or data collection. I therefore missed the opportunity to meet my study participants and view the areas in which they lived and celebrated Nowruz during my fieldwork. I lost out on those moments when researchers might uncover unexpected details during their fieldwork, such as meeting a person in a public space or finding local advertisements.

One of the issues that I faced in this study was the nature of the discussion and the reality of life during the pandemic. That means that even though I aimed to discuss celebration and consumption activities during Nowruz, many of my interviewees were distressed due to the tragic COVID death statistics in Iran and other countries. Thus, I experienced difficulty in discussing with the participants the experiential level of consumption and other ritual practices, as many were otherwise distracted.

A further limitation of the study was the limited use of and access to consumers' photos, specifically for the interviews. Despite my intention to use the images individuals had taken on their previous Nowruz ceremonies in my interviews to trigger discussion, and although participants were informed of the research confidentiality and ethical approval, they did not share their photos. This issue is understood as being based on the communal problems discussed in the previous chapters, such as lack of mutual trust and ideological or religious differences in the community that restrict access to the family and private festival-related photos of Iranian families.

Finally, this study primarily reflects the voice of secular Iranians. It does not engage perhaps as much as it might have done either with those who publicly practise Shia Islam, and who might be more sympathetic to the policies and beliefs of the Islamic Republic, or with Iranian political and religious minorities, such as Mojahedin, Zoroastrians, Jewish, and Baha'i members of the community. While this research sampled Iranians of varying ages, occupations, and educational

backgrounds, future research is required to provide greater specificity regarding how Nowruz is experienced in relation to class statuses and religious minorities.

6.8 Suggestions for Future Research

When considering the limitations of this study as mentioned above, further research is needed to explore the festival of Nowruz from a relational perspective, and to understand the experiential aspect of consumption and identity construction by considering individuals' interpersonal and family relationships and how people generate the atmosphere of a festival in their interpersonal relationships and narrations. Thus, it is suggested that further research could extend the theoretical aspect of this research by focusing on the atmosphere or the non-representational aspect of festivals and ritualised consumption (Hill et al., 2022). Specifically, more research is still required to interrogate the entangled relations present between the human and non-human aspects that conjure up the atmosphere and experiences of celebrators within this festival.

In a similar vein, another line of research that requires further investigation is the intersection of materiality with ritual. As Chitakunye and Maclaran (2014) suggested, although previous CCT research acknowledged the material aspect of consumption rituals (Curasi et al., 2004; Miller, 1987; Otnes and Lowrey, 2004), it gave less attention to the transformative role of material objects in rituals of consumption and a network of ritual practice. The concept of materiality, that is, the relation and co-creation of subjects and objects (Miller, 2008), and its co-constituting role in shaping consumers' experience and their collective identity within a festival is a relatively new avenue for future research. This would contribute to research that is concerned with materiality in consumer research (Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Epp and Price, 2008). It

could also extend the analysis by going beyond the structuring elements of collective rituals in consumer identity construction by bringing forth the role of materiality in those activities.

This study highlighted the potential ability of Nowruz to generate temporal communal unity for some groups of Iranian expatriates. Although the findings indicate that this respite may happen in certain, but not in all circumstances (e.g., in community-based parties or ticketed parties, as opposed to home-based parties), further research is necessary to focus on ticket-based Nowruz parties and draw evidence-based conclusions on possible opportunities of the celebration of Nowruz for temporal communal unity among Iranians in the UK.

Finally, the existing research shows that social media affects festivals in two main ways: first, it has expanded the place/space in which festivals take place and/or are distributed; and second, it has allowed many different actors to initiate and organise festivals (Mair and Weber, 2019; Sigala, 2018a, 2018b). I suggest that future research could investigate the ways in which the marketplace and the state use social media through creating content, arranging shopping events, and recollecting the reasons and memories associated with a festival to initiate and organise the festival. Moreover, the role of social media in shaping the lived experience of consumers in the context of festivals is also worth exploring further (Duffy and Mair, 2021).

6.9 Conclusion

This study aimed to address a lacuna in CCT research investigating the nexus of festival, consumption, and diasporic identity among Iranians in the UK. The findings show that Persian culture, and specifically the festival of Nowruz, is not simply mobilised as a medium to resist the Islamic Republic's political oppression and authoritarian reactionary religious values. Nowruz also performs a social and cultural function for immigrants in a new culture that is represented through

consumption practices. Against this backdrop of Nowruz, Iranian expatriates negotiate their identity as secular Persians to mark the self from the image that the Iranian regime imposes upon their identity. This position fits within a Western culture that is based on secular values and consumerism. This study revealed that Nowruz is mobilised by UK-based Iranians as a cultural exhibition or show to correct and (re)construct their identity, and to present that identity to the next generation of Iranians and desired others in a deterritorialised context of the host country.

The findings of this study show that the celebration of Nowruz in the UK is not merely centred around the private space of home and family. Rather, it has evolved into a commercialised, public celebration that is celebrated by intimate friend networks as well as non-familiar expatriates in public spaces, such as clubs, restaurants, and community halls, and other social institutions, such as schools and universities. Furthermore, the public gathering serves as a multifunctional space reflecting the changing priorities of these immigrants in their everyday life, representing their secular, yet politicised, identity.

Taken together, my study demonstrates the different ways in which UK-based Iranians experience, and consume, their main cultural festival in the UK. This research sheds light on various aspects of the fragmentation that characterises this community and demonstrates the therapeutic capacity of Nowruz to gather these groups of immigrants together, albeit temporarily. This study suggests, however, that even though Nowruz is celebrated collectively as a constituting pillar of communal identity, it is still developing as a site in which to flesh out ranges of socio-cultural positions for expatriates to (re)negotiate their identities. This means that the emergence of public celebrations of Nowruz is bringing identity conflicts and internal issues of this group of émigrés into the open.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Haji Firuz

Ensafi, J., An Iranian actor who is famous for his Nowruz related performances. Source: *Hamshahri Online*

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Dear participant,

I am Hesam Dehghan Nayeri, a PGR student at the University of Essex. I am currently carrying out a piece of research entitled, The Reproduction of Symbolic Consumption Practices: The Interplay of Immigrant Consumer Subjectivity and Consumption of Celebration in the festival of Nowruz, under the supervision of Dr Stephen Murphy and Professor Philip Hancock.

We are investigating how members of the Iranian community in the UK celebrate, and exchange gifts during the festival of Nowruz.

This information sheet provides you with information about the study and your rights as a participant.

What does taking part in the research involve?

The interview will be fairly informal and will take no more than 45 minutes of your time. It can be conducted in either English or Persian. The interview will cover topics such as whether or not you celebrate festivals such as Nowruz here in the UK and, if so, in what ways; what kinds of gifts do you buy and exchange– if at all- and how your own practices and those of say family members, might have changed by virtue of living in the UK. In order to use the information in the research, the interview will be recorded.

Do I have to take part?

Naturally, there is no obligation to take part in the study. It's entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to give consent to take part. If publications or reports have already been disseminated, these cannot be withdrawn, however, these will only contain anonymized or aggregated data. If you decide to participate in the study and then change your mind in the future, you can withdraw at any point, even after the data

has been collected. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, please contact the researcher on the details below.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected will be kept securely on a password-protected computer and will only be accessible by the research team. However, this research forms part of my Ph.D. project at the University of Essex and therefore may be subject to scrutiny by other University staff in determining the outcome of my degree.

Moreover, if you are mentioned individually in any publications or reports then a participant number or pseudonym will be used and identifying details will be removed. A list may be kept linking participant numbers or pseudonyms to names, but this will be kept securely and will only be accessible by those listed above. A copy of the information which we record about you, but not other participants, will be provided, free of charge, on request.

In addition, the research data generated by this project will be retained for a period of at least ten years after the completion of the study and it will be destroyed. the University's Research Data Management Policy requires that research data are made available for access and re-use where legally, ethically and commercially appropriate, taking note of any relevant safeguards.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks of taking part? N/A

What is the legal basis for using the data and who is the Data Controller?

The legal basis for processing the data collected from this project is informed consent. The Data Controller for his project is the University of Essex and the contact is Sara Stock, University Information Assurance Manager (dpo@essex.ac.uk).

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you are interested in taking part in this research, please contact the researcher (Hesam Dehghan Nayeri) as follows.

Who is funding the research?

The research is not funded by any institutions neither in the UK nor Iran.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The interview recording and transcript may be quoted in parts in the thesis, published academic journals, books, or during media interviews, but only in the aforementioned anonymized form. Similarly, the identities of respondents, as well as the content of individual discussions, will remain confidential in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Essex. In order to ensure this I will remove any information that can personally identify you, or any organizations that you have worked for from any interview transcript, and any reference to you will only be by the participant identification number or a pseudo name that I will assign to you at the point of the interview

Who has reviewed the study?

I have applied for ethical approval to undertake this study. My application was reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of Essex.

What happens if something goes wrong?

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. Regardless of this, if you wish to complain, or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been treated during the course of this study then you should immediately inform the student and/or their supervisor (details below).

If you are not satisfied with the response, you may contact the Essex Business School Research Ethics Officer, Dr. Maria Hudson (mhudson@essex.ac.uk), or the University of Essex Research Governance and Planning Manager, Sarah Manning-Press (sarahm@essex.ac.uk) who will advise you further.

Name of the Researcher/Research Team Members

We would be very grateful for your participation in this study. If you need to contact us in the future, please contact me (hd18329@essex.ac.uk) or Dr. Stephen Murphy (sjmurphy@essex.ac.uk) or Professor Philip Hancock (phancock@essex.ac.uk). You can also contact us in writing at: EBS, University of Essex, Colchester CO4 3SQ.

You are welcome to ask questions at any point.

Yours,

Hesam Dehghan Nayeri

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Dear participant,

This research is being carried out by Hesam Dehghan Nayeri under the supervision of Professor Philip Hancock and Dr. Stephen Murphy. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by the researcher. The answers which you provide will be recorded through notes taken by the interviewer and audio recording.

Please see the attached Participant Information Sheet for details about the study and your rights as a participant.

<u>Statement of Consent</u>	<u>Please initial each box</u>
• I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet dated 30/09/2020 for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had any questions satisfactorily answered.	☐
• I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I understand that any data collected up to the point of my withdrawal will be destroyed.	☐
• I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project and that confidentiality will be maintained.	☐

• I understand that my fully anonymised data will be used for MPhil project, research publications (e.g. journal articles, book and media interviews.	☐
• I understand that the data collected about me will be used to support other research in the future, and may be shared anonymously with other researchers.	☐
• I give permission for the data to be stored in the form of anonymised interview transcripts and audio recording that I provide to be deposited in [either the name of data repository, if known and included on the PIS, or a research data repository] so that they will be available for future research and learning activities by other individuals.	☐
• I agree for this interview to be audio recorded.	☐
• I agree to participate in the research project, "The Reproduction of Symbolic Consumption Practices: The Interplay of Immigrant Consumer Subjectivity and Consumption of Celebration in the festival of Nowruz", being carried out by Hesam Dehghan Nayeri.	☐

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Interview Guide for semi-structured interview

Ice-breaking questions (5 minutes):

□ Give information about the interview (e.g., time, language, ethical issues)

□ Introduce the research

□ Ask about the demographic background of the interviewee (e.g., age, education, job, marriage status, children, and length of residence in the UK)

□ Remind the interviewee that if he/she can use her taken photos while narrating Nowruz's experiences

Questions about past experiences of Nowruz in Iran (15 minutes)

□ Could you tell me about your celebration of Nowruz when you were in Iran? How did you and your family celebrate Nowruz?

□ How did you know that Nowruz is coming in Iran?

□ How did you prepare (your house/yourself) for that celebration?

□ Could you tell me about your shopping for this festival? What did you usually buy for Nowruz when you were in Iran?

□ Did you remember any specific moments or memories (e.g., feeling of happiness or unhappiness) regarding Nowruz?

□ Did you buy and exchange any kind of gift for Nowruz? If no, why? If yes, could you tell me more about it?

Questions about the individual and collective identity, and social relationships (10 minutes)

□ Do you identify yourself as an Iranian? Why? Which parts of your Iranianness do you like? Dislike?

□ Can you tell me about your feelings of being an Iranian in the UK? How does it look to be an Iranian migrant in the UK?

□ Comparing to the time you were in Iran, how much have you changed personally after coming to the UK? Did you face or experience any internal challenges, problems or even new feelings regarding yourself or nationality by living in the UK?

Questions about the experiences of Nowruz in the UK (15 minutes)

□ Do you still celebrate Nowruz, here, in the UK? If no, why?

□ If yes, why is Nowruz still important for you and your family? What aspect of Nowruz is important for you?

□ Could you tell me about your experiences of celebrating Nowruz after your immigration? How do you celebrate it? What do you do during Nowruz?

□ Is shopping important for the festival of Nowruz?

□ If yes, can you tell me about your shopping for this festival? Comparing to Iran, what do you buy and how do you enjoy around the festive time of Nowruz in the UK?

□ How about exchanging gifts? Is it important to buy and exchange any kind of gift for Nowruz? If no, why?

□ If you could not celebrate Nowruz, what would you lose?

□ Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences of Nowruz in the UK? Do you have any comments or recommendation for my research?

Photos

Who is/are in the photo? What does it mean for you? Why is significant? Who has taken the photo?

Appendix E: Invitation Letter)

Invitation to Participate in a PGR Research Project

To Whom It May Concern,

I am Hesam Dehghan Nayeri, an MPhil candidate in Management and Marketing at Essex Business School, University of Essex. My doctoral project examines how members of the Iranian community in the UK celebrate the festival of Nowruz.

This is an invitation to you to take part in an online interview (through Skype or Zoom) to discuss your experiences of enjoyment and celebrating the festival of Nowruz. I'm particularly interested in discussing the way you celebrate Nowruz in the UK; the significance of Persian culture and Iranian traditions in your social life; and how your own experiences of celebration may have changed or adapted by virtue of living in the UK. My doctoral project is positioned within the field of marketing, and so I am also interested finding out about how consumption features in the celebration of this festival.

I would be very grateful if you would be willing to take part in an interview so that I could find out about your experiences of this topic. The interview itself would be informal in style, can be conducted either in English or Persian, and takes no more than 45 minutes of your time.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and your anonymity will be protected at all times. Ethical standards will be adhered to in line with the University of Essex policies and oversight in this regard will be provided by my supervisors Professor Philip Hancock and Dr. Stephen Murphy.

Appendix F: The Iranian Diaspora in the UK

Iranians are one of the West-Asian, Middle Eastern immigrants who are constituting the diasporic population of the UK. Prior research on this émigré population geographically is focused on Iranians in the United States (Mobasher, 2006; Malek, 2011), Canada (Khayambashi, 2019; Malek, 2015) and some European countries such as Sweden (Malek, 201f; Khosravi, 2018; Graham and Khosravi, 2002), France (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020) and Germany (Moghaddari, 2020). Nevertheless, research on Iranian diasporic population in the UK is limited (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016; Soleiman, 2017). This is also the case for this diasporic group of immigrants in consumer research and CCT (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). So, to define the context of the current study and to put consumers' broader context into perspective (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), I reviewed the population of the Iranian immigrants in the UK and briefly discussed the backgrounds and status of this diasporic group in Britain.

<u>The Population of Iranian in Britain</u>

There is no exact figure for the population of Iranians in the UK. Because some Iranians registered themselves as British or other nationalities and thus the exact number of this population is not recorded (Sreberny and Gholami, 2016). Moreover, the statistics which is provided by Iranian officials is largely different from UK figures. That is to say, the Iranian consulate in London estimated the number of Iranians in the UK above a half of million (Faghih, 2011, stated in Economic Focus - Issue No. 16). But, according to the 2011 census data, there are 84,735 Iranians (by country of birth) of whom 75,590 live in England, 1,695 in Wales, 2,773 in Scotland and 282 in Northern Ireland. Recent figures presented by <u>The Office for National Statistics</u> show the population of Iranian-born in the UK in 2020 are approximately 90,000 (ONS, 2020). Also, Iranians are dispersed geographically in the UK but generally settled in London. This means more

than 30 thousand Iranians live in London. To establish characteristics of this group of immigrants, I step back and discuss the main waves of their immigration and discuss potential reasons behind their decision for coming to the UK.

The Demographic Profile and Backgrounds of Expatriate Iranians in the UK

Iranian expatriates are the victim of prolonged political and economic instability and unpredictability in Iran (Ansari, 2019). This group of migrants are different from other contemporary ethnic communities in the UK (Spellman, 2004; Soleiman, 2017). Reviewing the literature pertinent to this diasporic population demonstrates three significant immigration movements to the UK as follows (Nassehi-Behnam, 2016; Soleiman, 2017; Spellman, 2004; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016).

I.   Pre-Islamic Revolution: 1960s-1970s

A population of Iranians left the country to study abroad between the 1960s-1978. These group sought to acquire the qualification, cutting edge skills and knowledge, and intended to return and serve their country (Raji, 2013). Thanks to the increase of oil price which led to the surge of Iran's economy, and the emphasis of Pahlavi government on modernisation in Iran, the first immigration of Iranians to the UK happened between the 1950s-1979. More precisely, according to Iran's chamber of commerce in the UK, In the 1977-1978 academic year, about 100,000 Iranians were studying abroad, of whom 36,220 were enrolled in US institutes of higher learning; the rest were mainly in the United Kingdom, West Germany, France, Austria, and Italy. Nevertheless, some population of this group of students did not return to Iran during the Islamic revolution (Raji, 2010). Besides of this population, a group of Iranians were composed left opposition who identified themselves as anti-monarchist Iranians that flee from Iran because of their divergence with

Monarchy system. This is one group of political oppositions who identified themselves as exilic Iranians before the 1979 Islamic revolution.

II.   After the 1979 Islamic Revolution: Iraq-Iran Imposed War (1980-1988)

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the UK has been one of the popular destinations for Iranian immigrants and hosted over three million Iranian immigrants (Khosravi, 2018; Sreberny and Gholami, 2016). More specifically, part of this population were diplomats associated with Shah's political system and those who had a relation with monarchy's family, entrepreneurs who did not see any future in a turmoiled field of Iran in the early years after Iran's revolution. They identified themselves as monarchists and looking forward to downturn the current state to re-establish a monarchy system, so they came temporarily in the UK. This group of Iranian émigrés were from wealthy upper, and upper-middle-class, benefitting from accumulated various capitals which were fluent in English and familiar with the Western lifestyle. They resided in affluent areas of London, such as Kensington and Chelsea, Knightsbridge, Richmond, Hampstead, Swiss Cottage, and the City of Westminster (Ghorashi, 2005; Spellman, 2004).

In addition, another motivation behind the second wave of immigration was the disenchantment and frustration of elites, middle class, and secular Iranians regarding the initial desires, missions, and goals of the revolution. It is argued that after the establishment of the revolution, fundamentalists Shia groups have stolen the revolution from other political groups and attempted to structure the state based upon Shia's religious ideologies. As a result, a large group of Iranians found no hope in their future and flee from Iran to Western countries. It is worth adding that part of Iranians in the UK came here not permanently. They supposed, however, that the Islamic revolution could fall, specifically after the Iran-Iraq war, and the death of Khomeini in 1989. Part of this population, moreover, came to the UK as a transitory destination to prepare the

condition for immigrating to the United States (Spellman, 2004). This can be considered as a reason that using the expression of the Iranian diaspora in the literature is back to the 1990s (Boyce, 1996; Ghorashi, 2004; Naficy, 1993).

III.   The Third Wave of Immigration of Heterogeneous Groups: 1990s-2010s

Beside the immigrant who left Iran because of pre and past revolution's political drives, along with those groups of Iranians who left Iran during the war between Iran-Iraq, there are new political as well as non-political reasons for other Iranians to leave Iran after 1990s. These include socio-cultural reasons and anti-secular policies such as Islamisation of daily life, compulsory hijab, pursuing higher education for adults and better education for their children, gender discrimination specifically for females and minority groups, converted religious people from Islam to Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Baha'is, and Sufism, lack of job for the middle class and those who have a degree (Nassehi-Behnam, 2016). These groups of Iranians were mainly from a lower middle class, religious minorities, and even lower economic background, like the working class and therefore settled in a less rich area of London and outside of London.

Following the continuous phenomenon of the Iranian *brain drain* situation, the third waves of Iranians immigrant to the UK are mainly educated and skilled individuals, including universities professors, physicians and dentists and engineers (academic, professional immigrants) and middle-class, business or economic immigrants who left Iran to the UK (Hakimzadeh, 2006). One of these groups is political activists or middle class who came to the UK after 2005 during Ahmadinejad's presidency and his fundamentalist, Islamic ideologies. This wave of immigration accelerated particularly after the 2009 contested presidential election in Iran. That is to say, Iranians' continued migration due to the political tensions, most notably the contested 2009 presidential elections and 2019 civil' s economic protests, so-called the Bloody November as a result of economic instability,

structured economic corruption, high unemployment and inflation rate. Thus, these last groups of Iranians left Iran again mainly because of the political prosecution of the Islamic Republic state and its socio-cultural and political policies.

Iranian' immigration is described as "protest migration" because of diverse reasons of emerging incongruency within social classes, and between public demand and government response (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020). This incongruency and divergent among immigrant traced back to their recent dynamics of social status in Iran in which middle class consisted of heterogeneous categories or strata that is shaped based on a clash between "normativity" and socio-cultural changes in contemporary Iran (Etemadifard and Khazaei, 2020, p. 5). Thus, Iranian immigration style now can be categorised as individual projects and each person, particularly the younger generation who immigrate for education, is considered as *an individual hero* in the view of their family who intentionally and calculatedly leaves Iran with a long-term personal project as they pave the way for their next generation to grow up within higher standards.

In addition, among Iranian expatriates in the UK, individual, single parents consist of most figures of this population. And the number of Iranians in the whole family and/or with their extended or large families are limited (Nassehi-Behnam, 2016). Thus, it can be said besides of the aforementioned reasons for the first and second groups of immigrants for leaving Iran, there are also diverse personal motivations, specifically for the third and recent immigrants to the UK that inform their decisions to immigrate in recent years. These are including education, marriage, emancipating from political, socio-cultural pressures and pursuing individualistic, personal lifestyle (Jafari and Goulding, 2008). There is a desire of living independently, achieve personal goals in which pave the way for Iranians to focus on personal projects rather than communal goals. Moreover, receiving a permanent residency and British passport to be free from the constraints of

Iranian weak passport, working and investing in global economies are among their reasons for coming to the UK. Thus, it can be argued that the type of immigration for this diaspora has been shifted towards individual, not group or family immigration which is different from Turkish and Indian immigrants.

The above discussion and review of Iranian's reasons of immigrations to the UK helps readers of this thesis to gain a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of Iranian immigrants in the UK and in the reading of the findings of this study.