

# **Life in between**

**A transdisciplinary research on being at home in Zürich and Isfahan**



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**This thesis dedicated to my parents for their endless love, support, encouragement and tolerating my geographical distance.**

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## Abstract

Since I have been living and studying in Zürich my personal definition of home has changed. As I am physically and mentally attached to multiple places, I actually live in an individually created in-between space. This project explores the experience and concept of belonging, and how it affects me and how it becomes visible, audible, and perceptible. It therefore explores how different places, each with its own specific features, can be connected and transformed into a personal space that bridges the geographical distance between them. The geographical displacement between Zurich and Isfahan stands in contrast to their presence in memory, creating a mixed, hybrid identity. Though it's impossible to be in two places at once, memories of somewhere else can produce a counterpoint to the physical space in which one finds one's self. This raises several questions dealing with how memory functions, and how they will be preserved.

My interest in this topic stems from the sense of loss and belonging I felt when I moved to Zurich from Isfahan two years ago. My aim is to explore and find the answers to questions such as: How do I create a sense of belonging in different situations? How do I create personal spaces?

This transdisciplinary research combines scientific and artistic investigations and involves three different processes: one, the specific perception produced by individual places, two, the comparison of the identities of different geographical or imagined places, and three, the replacement of significant and meaningful objects, metaphors, or memories. On a formal level, I show my findings through one, paintings and photographs, two, by field recordings in both places, through documentary videos detailing my writings, and three, by the juxtaposition of these elements together.

I am working with both elements from my current surroundings, as well as retrospection into my former surroundings, examining how they combine, and how they influence and comment on one another. Some of them include sounds connected to the most

important moments in my life, others deal with displacements, intertwining distance and closeness in the experience of a migrant. References to theoretical works by Tuan (1977), Christou (2006), and Relph (1976) have helped me to understand and reflect on concepts like space and place, the meaning of home, the sense of belonging, and the life in-between.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. From Isfahan to Zürich

I grew up in Isfahan-Iran, where I spent the majority of my life there and then in 2013 I moved to Zurich-Switzerland to continue my education and start a new chapter of my life. This movement was a drastic change in my everyday life as well as in my understanding and feeling of home. During the first months of living in Zurich, especially when I was walking around Limmat River, I felt I was walking around Live River in Isfahan. Two places evoked a similar experience. Such a displacement happened several times for me and after a while due to the environmental sound I noticed that I am in Zurich. This experience led me into this research process, including theoretical and artistic aspects.



Zurich

Isfahan

## 1.2. Where home is?

One of the key questions was where my home is? Where do I belong? Do I have to decide for only one place? Or can I bring various places together? Therefore I started to think about home, moving and about here and there. What home means? And how does migration affect these meanings?

The meanings of "home" for groups and individuals largely depend on how they construct "Home" and what kind of attributes they associate with. Thus the meaning of home varies from person to person and changes over the life course (Magat 1999).

According to Bourdieu (1977) people are able to link places through mobility and migrations. . Especially migrants have the ability to stretch social relations over various places. A Migrant's sense of place also involves duality as stressed by King (1995): "here" and "there"; "home of departure" and "of return."

Movements, mobility, migrations are products of an uneven development and further producers of it Massey and Jess (1985). In another statement Massey & Jess (1995) stress that migrations, physical dislocations of people raise an array of questions related to their existence and self-identity, construction of "others," and the engagement with the "place" in general .

Establishing and maintain relatedness to others, social institutions, environments, and self is considered as one of the important human concerns (Berlin and Johnson 1989). Sense of belonging is one of the component of connecting one's self into the fabric of surrounding people, places, and things.

Sense of belonging defined by Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer et al. (1992), as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment. A system can be a relationship or organization, and an environment can be natural or cultural."

Many definitions have been stated for place, but generally the term "place", as opposed to space expresses a strong effective relation between a person and a particular setting.

The phenomenological literature is the earliest stage for exploring the nature of people's relationship with places. Phenomenology is



defined as return to things, and focuses on the meanings and experiences of place. And experience is the most important element in perception.

Therefore, places to physical features include messages and meanings that people perceive and decode based on their roles, experiences, expectation and motivations.

Places are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world.

Spaces and the feeling of belonging are never given to us freely. According to (Stedman,2003 ), place attachment is defined as one dimension of total place sensitivity and positive emotional attachment that develop between place and individual and clarify ones sensitivity to especial geographical situation that bond individual to place sensitively.

Arriving on new lands, yet reaching back to touch the old, lingering for a moment, before the old crumbles away between our hands. .After arriving in Zurich about two years ago, for a long time I felt very disconnected and I started making small interventions to my environment in an attempt to unify the physical world with abstract feelings and desires. As if to represent what happens when you've spent too much time alone in your room and your belongings start to talk to you.

### 1.3. My Project

My project roots deeply in my personal experience of migration and the concept of belonging to a place. It investigates and explores how place and space engages likewise with a sense of un-belonging and of being in-between. Therefore, I consider geographical displacement and the contrapuntal virtual space of memory. The fragmentation of experience and identity. My challenge and my aim is to work with this ambivalent or multilayered experience being present in one place and time, but simultaneously experiencing a different place and time. I aim to express the experience of placing myself in a locally coherent

space-time-constellation but simultaneously being linked to a faraway time and place.

I tried to explore the sense of loss that I felt and specify what the sense of belonging is to me by painting, taking photographs and videos inside and around my home in Isfahan and during the past year. This artistic research is supported by numerous scientific papers related to its topics and the result will be presented in my exhibition.

#### **1.4. Transdisciplinarity**

Transdisciplinarity is not working with different disciplines, for me Transdisciplinarity is moving to another discipline consciously. Sometimes I will use one and sometimes another. It is important for me to use the medium that will get across my concept.

The diverse objects of my research enquiries, reflect in a number of disciplines that have distinct but overlapping interests in architecture, cities and urban culture – open spaces, Environmental Psychology, Visual arts.

## **2. Literature review on place, space and belonging**

The amount of scientific articles on place, space, home and belonging is rich and indicates an inherent transdisciplinarity. The following literature review helps to ground the topic in scientific contexts by summarizing key concepts.

## **2.1 Sense of belonging**

Establishing and maintain relatedness to others, social institutions, environments, and self is considered as one of the important human concerns (Berlin & Johnson, 1989). Through interpersonal interactions, people survive, develop and grow. The importance of these element of human behavior led researchers to generate many concepts that explain interpersonal relatedness through social behavior and psychological drives (Berescheid1994,). Sense of belonging is one of the component of connecting one's self into the fabric of surrounding people, places, and things. While the need to belong is a basic aspect of being human, the ways in which we satisfy this need have changed significantly over time. Maslow (1954) identified belonging as a basic human need, ranking it third in his hierarchy.

Sense of belonging defined by Bonnie M.K.Hagerty, Judith Lynch-Sauer, as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment. A system can be a relationship or organization, and an environment can be natural or cultural."

Bonnie M.K. Hagerty, Judith Lynch-Sauer, proposed two dimensions for sense of belonging: (1) valued involvement: the experience of feeling valued, needed, accepted; and (2) fit: the person's perception that his or her characteristics articulate with or complement the system or environment.

Individuals may have different ways of belonging. In fact developing a sense of belonging is an ongoing process that involves membership in, or exclusion from, a wide variety of different groups during the course of our lives.

## **2.2. Place attachment**

According to Stedman (2003), place attachment is defined as one dimension of total place sensitivity and positive emotional attachment that develop between place and individual and clarify

one's sensitivity to a special geographical situation that bonds individual to place sensitively. Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992) said that the positive beliefs and emotions that individuals create in interaction with place and give the meaning to it can make the positive experience of place.

In terms of Anthropology "Place attachment" is defined as the symbolic relationship that is formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and group's understanding of and relation to the environment. Therefore, place attachment is more than an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place.

Kyle, Mowen et al. (2004) said that "Place attachment" is equal with social attachment and place sensitivity, since it emphasizes on emotional communication with place based on itself and when interaction took place during facing with place, it is based on attachment theory and belonging to society setting than mere devotion to place. Shumaker also expressed this word as positive emotional dependence between place and person in neighborhood units that social groups, physical appropriateness, individual personality and perceived position of place where people live play important role in it (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983).

Place attachment was built due to individual's interest, understanding and experience to place based on various personal, group and cultural features and social communication among them (Altman and Low 1992). Place attachment is also defined by (Bonaiuto, 1999) as emotional dependency to special place and convert person to an element of place identity and claimed that this case emerged in psychological and social process setting between person and place and its results in place sense and dependence.

#### **Place attachment affective factors**

Some factors such as: Social factors, Cultural factors, Personal factors, Physical factors, Place satisfaction, Interaction and activity features and Time factor that have more influence on creation or promotion of place attachment. Personal factors are more related to this thesis which is briefly explained below.

## **Personal factors**

Place attachment is different for different people from different cultures. People select and attach place due to their conscious tendencies that result from personal characteristics and factors. Individualism is more important factor in social orientation and how to develop intimacy of social communication that known as mental identities based on initial tendencies. "place reflect identities, differences and competitions in different groups based on gender, class, race, ethnic, and culture and indicate individual political tendencies, power, liberty, interest and social system and common interests in consumption motives".

Place attachment took place when people experienced powerful, long period of time in that place and in this process, place serve vast meaning. Tuan (1980) pointed to a factor like root in place that is correlation and integrity of person and place.

According to Piley (1992), place attachment deviated from development period memories and communication that took place in an areas not just a simple mere place. He believes that we remember a place that we experience and favorite adventures and place is part of our experiences and might be a symbol of that experience.

Amongst, Marcus (1992) studied place memoirs from students painting, adult remember their childhood and elders from their residential memoirs. In his point of view, people build sense of identity within themselves based on social communication experience and place of events and based on them, people form their dreams.

Reflection of this feeling reflected in selected residence and memories about people and places they remember because feeling took place within place and in such emotional communication with place every one experienced differently. In fact, person-place relationship is an interaction process rather cause an effect.

## 2.3. Identity of place

Place identity is a factor to define people social and personal identity (Proshansky, Fabian et al. 1983) and also their personality aspects (Relph 1976). "Place identity develops in direct experience of physical environments, therefore it's a reflection of place social and cultural aspects and play important role in growing personal character" (Walmesley, 1988).

Feld and Basso (1996) Believed that Place identity is a term used to refer to how people make sense of the places they visit or inhabit. The two types of identity, one's own and that of a place, are interdependent: "as people fashion places, so, too, they fashion themselves". Therefore, places have a strong role in the creation of the identity of people attached to them; the ideas and feelings that people have for places are often so strong that they become a central part of the identity of people experiencing these places (Rose, 1995). one creates the identity of a place both on a physical level (by physical action - constructive, destructive, or both, depending on who's watching) and on a discursive level (by symbolic representation).

According to (Jager 1974). Relationships to places reflect people's psychological landscapes, their personal issues and their particular journey in the world. Therefore, people develop relationships to a wide variety of places, the combination of which reflect people's particular way of "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 1971). The places that people deemed important enabled them to sort out their thoughts and feelings, to work out their identity, to dream and to grow so taking these into consideration, relationships to places represent people's ever-evolving identity and self-awareness because they provide opportunities for self-development (Korpela 1989); (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996).

"All people experienced being in a place, the respect it and concern about lack of such things. Comprehensible and meaningful places are appropriate support that values, personal memories and feeling rely on them. Place identity has close relation with personal identity, that "I am here" means "I am existing" (Madanipour and Hull 2001).

Relf (1976) in his book *Place and Placelessness* believed that, Identity is founded both in the individual person or object and in the culture to which they belong. Therefore it is a subjective concept and It is not static and unchangeable, but varies as circumstances and attitudes change; and it is not uniform and undifferentiated, but has several components and forms. In his opinion, beside the importance of the place identity, the identity that a person or group has with that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider is very important.

## **2.4. Space to place**

What space and place is in the geographical knowledge, cannot be refer to whether the question of “where” matters in the way that “when” does in explaining “how” and even “why” something happens. It is also about “how” it matters. Given that both space and place are about the “where” of things and their relative invocation has usually signaled different understandings of what “where” means, it is best to examine them together rather than separately.

Space and place maybe deemed as a simple and understandable concept but with a deep look into the Dictionaries and literature, it is easily can be found that space and place are fairly complex words. The Oxford English Dictionary gives over about two pages to space and around three and a half pages to place. Space is regarded largely as a dimension within which matter is located or a grid within which substantive items are contained.

## **2.5. Senses of Space and Place**

The simplest sense of place refers to either a location somewhere or to the occupation of that location. The first sense is of having an address and the second is about living at that address. Sometimes

this distinction is pushed further to separate the physical place from the phenomenal space in which the place is located. That why place can become a particular or lived space. Location then refers to the fact that places must be located somewhere. Place is specific and location (or space) is general.

While the definitions of these two are largely acceptable but the basic formulation, however, has been subject to two very important points of contention. The first one is that the language of location (or space) and place is often omitted with the language of geographical scale. Scale has been a major concern of many geographers since the 1990s, often without much explicit linkage to disputes about space versus place.

Jeff Malpas (2006, 17-27) believed that Place is often associated with the world of the past and location/space with the world of the present and future. From one perspective, place is therefore nostalgic, regressive or even reactionary, and space is progressive and radical.

Another scholar Relph (1976) believed that however, place is being lost to an increasingly homogeneous and alienating sameness. "Placelessness" is conquering place as modernity displaces traditional folkways.

Everywhere is increasingly alike as we all spend more of our time in non-places such as airport lounges, shopping malls and on the Internet, living lives increasingly without any sense of place whatsoever. Place is the setting for social rootedness and landscape continuity. Location/space represents the transcending of the past by overcoming the rootedness of social relations and landscape in place through mobility and the increased similarity of everyday life from place to place.

The second sense involves a primary focus on the first-hand experience of human subjects in places (Sack 1980; Entrikin 1990). According to (Casey 2001), Space qua location is bracketed, or put to one side, because its "abstractness discourages experiential explorations".

For the second perspective the focus lies in relating location to place through the experiences of human beings as agents. In one of the most sophisticated statements of this perspective, drawing most obviously on the pioneering writing of Tuan (1974), Robert



Sack (1997, 58) provides the essential thrust when he writes that his "framework draws on the geographical experiences of place, space, home, and world which people use in their lives to integrate forces, perspectives, and selves." From this point of view: Place implies space, and each home is a place in space. Space is a property of the natural world, but it can be experienced. From the perspective of experience, place differs from space in terms of familiarity and time. A place requires human agency, is something that may take time to know, and a home especially so. As we move along the earth we pass from one place to another. But if we move quickly the places blur; we lose track of their qualities, and they may coalesce into the sense that we are moving through space (Sack 1997, 16).

What can be conducted from this reference is that Places are invariably parts of spaces and spaces provide the resources and the frames of reference in which places are made.

(Agnew 1987) Specified clearly the meaning of place in three dimensions that tend to re-occur across the various theoretical positions and which can be examined empirically.

The first dimension is place as location or a site in space where an activity or object is located and which relates to other sites or locations because of interaction, movement and diffusion between them. A city or other settlement is often thought of this way as always part of a system of places with mobility inherent in the relations between them.

The Second dimension is the view of place as a series of locales or settings where everyday life activities take place. In this case the location is not just the mere address but the where of social life and environmental transformation. Examples for this case would be such social settings from everyday life as workplaces, homes, shopping malls, churches, vehicles, etc., whose structuring of social interaction helps forge values, attitudes and behaviors. Some locales are not necessarily tied to particular locations and can be of no fixed or permanent abode (even though they are located in motion); for example vehicles and Internet chat rooms. The third dimension is place as sense of place or identification with a place as a unique community, landscape, and moral order. In this construction, every place is particular and, thus, singular. A

strong sense of “belonging” to a place, either consciously or as shown through everyday behavior such as participating in place-related affairs, would be indicative of “sense of place.” But this need be neither totalistic, in the sense of excluding other objects of affection or identity nor reactionary and exclusionary.

## **2.6. Placing experience, experiencing place**

According to Turner and Bruner (1986), We can only experience our one life and can never know completely another’s experiences even they might be willing to share them, as everyone censors, represses and/or might not be able to fully express all aspects what has been experienced. Turner and Bruner (1986) referring to Dilthey (2002) states that in order to overcome such limitations we “transcend the narrow sphere of experiences by interpreting expressions” [representations, performances, objectifications, texts] . The relationship between experience and expressions is dialogic and dialectical - the experience structures expressions, as we understand other’s experiences through our own experiences and self-understandings, but expressions also structure experience, as the dominant narratives influence inner experience. Bruner (1986) Believed that Expressions of experiences as stressed by are not abstract texts but constitutive and shaping in the activity that actualizes them. Expression involves the procession activity— rituals are enacted, narratives told, myths recited. All stories become transformative only in their performance (Bruner 1986). Thus, expressions of experience must be considered as performed texts and socially constructed units of meaning.

### **Experiencing Past**

Boym (2001) believed that Nostalgia is as much about the loss and displacement as it is a romance with one’s fantasy, the illusory attempt to replace the real home with the imaginary one. Boym (2001) indicated that Nostalgia can survive only in long-distance relationship where this cinematic image works as a superimposition of two images of “home” and “out-there,” past and

present, dream and everyday life and cannot be reduced to a single one. Nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, and in a sense a resignation of personal responsibility, a guilt-free history, an ethical and aesthetical failure (Boym 2001);

## **2.7. Phenomenology and experience**

Sense of place in phenomenology point of view, is a connection to the place through symbols and daily activities comprehension. This sense can emerge in one life and get deep over times (Falahat, 2007). In Canter point of view, mass and individual values and sense of place interact with each other and people usually participate in their social activities due to their sense of place. Main Concepts related to express sense of place in phenomenology point of view, are words like loving place, place experience and place character. Sense of place is an abstract features or place character that means spirit of place. Place experience is a mental and cognitive process that most of people feel the same and this sense of sameness is called place sense. From the objectification of place and its meaning (Millon, 1996). It also provides a conceptual language that allows us to explore every day, often taken-for-granted experiences of place (Seamon, 1996). Examined place in a way that seeks to go beyond both reductionist paradigms and the focus on spatio-temporal location. They embrace movement and rest (Seamon, 1979), "implacement" and "displacement" (Casey, 1993), insideness and outsideness (Relph, 1976), as part of the geography of the life world. These continua and dialectic phenomena allow for a full range of place experiences positive and negative, intimate and distant. The empirical In Philosophical point of view, many literatures has been done on people's emotional relationships to place shows that these emotional relationships has roots in phenomenology (Relph 1976). This perspective provides a rich understanding of complex, intangible phenomena that do not readily lend themselves to psychometric measurement. Indeed, the phenomenologists call for a return to the everyday life world of

lived experience and a move away work on place attachment and meaning has a great deal to learn from these conceptualizations.

## **3. Interviews and self-observation**

Aside of conclusions from scientific papers I decided to find data in the field and to observe myself, how I gained awareness and to interview people with similar experience of migration and belonging/not belonging to a place.

### **3.1 Interviews**

In times of migration, living in more than one place is an increasing experience. I discovered that I share my experiences with many people. In order to support my literature review I was looking for supplementary data. In social sciences research is often based on qualitative surveys, interview and observations to better understand people.

To compile a minimalistic qualitative data survey, I have selected three different groups of interviewees and asked them a short question. Where is home for you?

The first group is those people who live in a foreign country, the second group is those who has returned to their homeland after a while of immigration and finally the last group is those who never has the experience of living outside their country.

The question is: where is home for you?

**Mr. Darvishi :**

Home is where, that you can find an absolute freedom and peace with no lies and deception.

**Mahmoud Anooshfar:**

Home is where, I can do whatever I want in terms of economy and communication, I have strong sense of belonging to Iran and hope that I can do whatever I am doing right now outside Iran.

**Anahita Mir:**

Home is where, we can open the door of our house to people who we like and close it to whom we don't like and wear whatever we want and don't wear whatever we don't want to wear.

**Iman Mohebi (Italy):**

Home is where I have born in and I belong to there.

**Erfan Afrasiabi (Italy):**

Home is where that I could have an unencumbered sleep at night but generally I belong to any place that my family are there since my mom always used to clean my room.

**Mr.Abrishamkar:**

Home is here (my shop) that I spend whole my day working in it and I can show my art to whole the world, the place I sleep in is not my "home", it is just a restroom.

**Mr.Sadegh Shahandeh:**

If home can be a place that you can be free to drink, wear and sleep in any way you want it could provide a comfort situation for the whole family. Home is not just an enclosure that limited to sleeping and eating issues but it is much related to a place that you are free to think to whatever you want.

**Mr.Mazloom:**

Home is where, you can find love, cooperation, friendship and people are united and respect each other.

**Mrs.Shahnaz Haghiri :**

In my opinion, "Home" doesn't belong to a specific place but to me whole the world could be my "home".

**Iman Zeighami:**

Home should be somewhere you are free to smoke, otherwise where we should go and smoke.

**Mrs. Z. Nekoui:**

I cannot imagine "home", somewhere else except my current place since I have never had the experience of living abroad I cannot call somewhere else as "home".

**Mr. Mesghali:**

Home is my Hometown and my country that I have born in.

**Mr. Akbar Nekoui:**

To me home is somewhere that those I am living with them has strong belonging to each other and we can have a peaceful life.

**Benjamin:**

My real home is where, I can have real friends and I can hear familiar sounds and faces that I grew up with them. For example, when I came out from Iran I really missed the familiar sounds that I used to hear in the street and I lost my really good friend.

**Mr. Miveforosuh:**

Home is somewhere that there is no cultural poverty and I you will be proud of living there and there is no feeling of inferiority.

**Mr.Riahi:**

My home is my fatherland. I have lived abroad but I prefer to live somewhere that I can find people who speak the same language as mine.

**Mrs.Riahi:**

To me, home is somewhere that has an antiquity and recall the past memories.

**Mr.Dabirzadeh:**

Home should be a place that you are safe in. The location of "home" is also very important. If you have a house made of Gold but located in desert has no value. I am really interested in the design of my home and believe that it should not have a same structure and form. To me home is somewhere that I apply all my tastes and feelings.

**Mrs.Soltani:**

Home is somewhere, there is no cheating on your partner. I am divorced and I am really satisfy with that.

**Mrs.Mahvash Nekoui:**

Home is a small place that everybody on this planet are obliged to live in or they used to get in to it.

**Mrs.Mahsa Movahedi(UK):**

Since the time I have left my country , I don't know where my home is and I don't know what are my belongings . I don't know whether I belong to Iran or United Kingdom.

**Mr. Amir Torabi :**

In fact, where my home is, is a really complicated and it has wide range of meanings and also it is a subjective concept. I cannot give

you an absolute place that I call it “home”. But for me After departing Iran for Italy , I missed manythings in myhomelandand also I have manythings here in Europe that I am sure if I leave here I will miss them .

**Miss. Haleh Moattar:**

Home is somewhere that you belong to it and it also belongs to you, if you leave it, you will miss it, finally home is somewhere you are happy with that.

## **Outcome**

As an outcome these short interviews deliver definitions of home, which also mirrors the three categories of interviewees.

- Home attached to familiar language and happiness: For the first group who is living abroad, they defined “Home” in a bigger scale. Wherever they can find people who speak the same language as they do and wherever you can find happiness.
- Home attached to expanded freedom: The meaning of “Home” for the second group who experienced living abroad and now they are living in their homeland, was that wherever you have all freedom such as drinking, wearing, expression and social activities.
- Home as matter of habit: For the last group who never experience living out of the country, they did not have a clear idea to think the other place as their “Home” because of language and cultural barriers.

### **3.2. Self-observation/ introspection**

As I am personally deeply involved in this process, observing and looking at myself is a key moment. Both terms self-observation and introspection turn the focus on my personal experience. Observation is widely used as a primary research method. Observations can be conducted on nearly any subject matter, even on one's self, and the kinds of observations depend much on the research question. The term introspection, used in contemporary philosophy of mind, is a means of learning about one's own ongoing or recent past, mental states or processes.

Since I came to Switzerland realized that I also have changed my work and I have learned new things. I learned that ornaments can be visualized in many ways and since, texture became as a core of my work. I found the surfaces with texture became greener more minimal more silent in Zurich. I tried to use color, texture to create my new surface in my paintings, printmaking. I found not only visual effect but also new tactile. I tried to concentrate on memories.

The move from Isfahan to Zurich has an impact on my work.

What impact will this Replacement on me? In what way will I remember Isfahan city: space, details, shapes, colors, sounds, quantities, limitations, possibilities? How does memory work? How does it work in what is my memory strategy?



## **4. Artistic Research**

My theoretical framework following my practical questions about sense of belonging, the meaning of Home, Living in between and identity of place.

The work I do as an artist is about my personal feelings or opinions. The statement of my work leads me to find my medium.

As an artist I do not follow the predefined scientific settings. I work on researching and representing my personal feelings and experiences. Such personal statement can only be represented by finding "my" corresponding form and medium.

As a visual artist, working mainly with photography, painting and collages. I began to take pictures of the people, nature, different textures and the situations I was in, so while I was doing photography, I documented things I was involved in or thinking about.

Now, with my own practice, I began that way but now I work with photography, installation, and sometimes-video installation, lots of mediums and experimental video between two locations (Isfahan/Zurich) to show all different ornaments from two different places and the medium itself is no longer important to me and the result of my experience will be present as a mixed media exhibition on May 2015.

### **4.1. Perception**

#### **4.1.1. Elements: Memory**

I tried to concentrate on memories. What impact will this Replacement on me? In what way will I remember Isfahan city: space, details, shapes, colors, sounds, quantities, limitations, possibilities? How does it work and what is my memory strategy?

Due to remembering my hometown and considering the process of memories I started to paint and it became clear for me that my paint pallet has changed. I noticed new variation of colors in my pallet.

“All people experienced being in a place, they respect it and concern about lack of such things. Comprehensible and meaningful places are appropriate support that values, personal memories and feeling rely on them. Place identity has close relation with personal identity, that “I am here” means “I am existing”(Madanipour and Hull 2001). Places play an important role in forming people’s social and personal identity (davenport & Anderson, 2005).



From the collection "My city, Isfahan".

#### **4.1.2. Elements: Texture**

As, I'm coming from the city of ornaments I tend to think in layers and I am fascinated by the blend of textures. For many years the ornaments in traditional Iranian architecture inspired me. The ornament in the oriental world is meant to define space, to make the space visible. The ornaments catch the light and transform it into an image, everything that comes from above will return to the sky. These surfaces led me to the inscriptions, which I found on many surfaces and out of different materials.

Since I came to Switzerland I realized ornaments can be visualized in many ways, therefore, the texture became as a core of my work. The surfaces with textures became more green more minimal and more silent, being in Zurich.

I tried to use color, texture to create my new surface in my paintings, printmaking. I found not only visual effect, but also new tactile elements.

#### **4.1.3 Elements: Sounds**

How is your sound habitat today?

All sounds are equal

But some sounds are more equal than other sounds

Listen for your self

Let's share the sounds we hear

Even if it sounds quite different than

The sounds we are common to hear

All ears are equal

But some ear more equal than other ears

Listen for yourself, listen together

Lets share the sounds we hear

Even if it sounds more quite

Than we expect to hear

Lets share sound meanings  
Lets share the sounds surrounding us  
Lets listen to our sound- habitat  
And the listen to our sound-habitat

Lets hear, rehear and do re-hear-sales  
Lets capture and create our own sound surrounding  
And treat the sound habitat with respect

How is your sound-habitat today?

(Huisman 2003)

Sound enfolds us, bring us into a space, we also name ourselves through sound. Sound make us aware of our bodies and Sound makes us aware of the presence of others.

A space is an abstract conception, and the information we divine about the source is about the “other”, the external, detached object of the mind’s eye.

Sound is also fundamentally a temporal medium-requiring inquiry and patience to unravel the complex data contained there. In fact, the concept of hearing for our understanding of places, remarkably one that arises in near silence.

By going through the literatures it seems that the following questions should be addressed in this part.

How do we hear things around?

Do we just hear them with the mind and not the body?

How does the landscape sound recall the memories?

How is it possible to lift up the listener from a familiar world to another acoustic world?

How does the audience cross a border beyond which the imagination is set to work?

My perception of these places is shaped in general by how I hear them. Additionally, the primary stage of society, which is attaining awareness of the presence of the other. The silence of the local area, which I live in Zurich, and the noise of traffic on a crowded

street in Isfahan are an example of aural and acoustic environments that materially change my experience of and response to the places in which they are encountered.

I am trying to explore the concept of place with consideration of my sonic landscape between Zurich and Isfahan. We perceive the role of sound when in acoustic spaces the sounds of human voices and engaged in everyday activities, play, political discussion, can make a place. A sonic habitat with intersection of human communication with specific language responded how hearing is understood and interpreted place across social, cultural, artistic, historical and geographical perspective.

One part of my research focus on sound divided into three categories.

I have observed the city and neighborhood outside/inside; old part and the new part of the city and I needed to understand the current environmental situation surrounding the Isfahan and Zurich;

Recording video and sound in the Bazaar of Isfahan, where you can find many different jobs and vocation in one street, and also the old town of Zurich. Interviewing people in the city in order to find out what kind of sounds can be currently heard, and what could be heard formerly, both in-door and out-door.

To compare the level of sound's belongings which recorded acoustic aspects of the environment between Isfahan and Zurich. This research provided me some information about the acoustic experience in Zurich. The sounds heard in Zurich would have included the various environmental sounds inside my place which I am living now and those from the street, including running fountains and the different songs of birds; I hear the sound of churches several times a day whilst in Isfahan, the sound of children who are playing outside can be heard in every sunny days.

I move forward through sound in the Bazaar, old town and new part of the city. In fact, thinking through sound is not easy as a visual artist, I was between my visual perceptions and visual modes of representation. However, I've found that this experiment in thinking aurally has enriched to investigate the different level of

sound between two different places (geographically location) in a number of ways.

Firstly, when I walk between two different cities, the texture, in particular, takes on a new importance for me as a visual artist. Secondly, as I mentioned above, a consideration of sound tell me, in many cases, what a space or area should be like, adding definition and richness to my perceptions.

Thirdly, thinking through sound forces I or rather allow me to consider the activity of human beings, not as an abstract imagination through a drawing, but as real actors in the place. This seems to me the most important aspect of the exercise, as it reminds us at every turn that the making of place is a social and communal activity.

One of the most interesting point that encouraged me to continue this experimental research was that, when I came to my hometown, I really notice that the environmental sounds I hear are different, and eventually there's a particular moment where sounds stand out more than they normally would.

I attempt, to recognize space, through space and realize the relationships of its elements in order to find out what the place is. Furthermore, I realize there are many simultaneous layers of communication that gain and wane with the weight of my motion. I start to find out a cognitive map of my engagement. I went everywhere with my tape recorder and microphone, and I investigate most of the everyday sounds normally in Zurich and also in Isfahan. My bedroom window in Isfahan has a big view of the mountain, almost surrounded by mountains, the sound of barking of dogs is audible – which gave it an extraordinary acoustic. In contrary, my room in Zurich is located in a very quiet and silent area. And then I came up with an idea- I recorded those sounds which repeated most in daily activities at home in Isfahan; or some activities that are passed by same time every day in Zurich, the singing of birds at morning in Isfahan and singing of birds in Zurich in our garden.

I'm wondering how different sounds from two different geographic locations with different languages and soundscape could be felt? And also what is making sense? Making sense of these

differences is a complex translation of all kinds of information collected by our senses in a certain time/space –constellation.

The process of this translation information related to our personal (un)conscious and collective (un)conscious of being and acting in that specific space( for example in a traditional Bazaar with different smells ), our intentions for that to investigate how sound is related to the visual, the haptic, the hearable, how we can sense our surroundings our being in a place, how our brain and body is collecting information for experiencing the touchable and hearable sounds in a way that it is making sense-or not. In this regards, by connecting a microphone, the public has the opportunity to give their reaction by adding their own voices and stories and these voices and stories provide the possibility of exchanging the stories, memories, and their associations of the old people in a touchable way that reminds me many specific memories.

We have to take advantage of living in the multicultural society, which helps us to shape, and create our own style. I see myself between fabric of sound which sensually woven between my acoustic landscape and communities. I recognize it when I speak and I feel it when I listen. Obviously the sound of my mother's voice, the gurgle of heater at night, the barking dog outside, the school bell ringing, the noon whistle, car cranking over, the phone ringing, children playing in the neighborhood –are all for example a part of my personal auditory map with the power.

I remember when I came to Switzerland and being deeply moved by the sound of the Azan. It had a place in my unconscious. I'd not heard the call in Zurich at all, but it had been in the background all the time during my life.

Each mosque has at least one minaret from which the call to prayer resounds. Their call to the prayer is clear; it occurs predictably three times a day, it serves a moment and place , our being connected to the(sound) habitat, etc.

As an artist I'm interested in the effects of touch sound for all people within the public and private space. I like singular and clear purpose, though singing it requires a gift of voice. The call of the Muezzin is also more centripetal than bells—it is an attracting sound rather than a boundary-setting sound. When I moved to Zurich the sound of the church replaced to this

sound which was unfamiliar for such a long time. In the other example, in Isfahan car horns in busy streets, which I did hear continuously even throughout the night (where the car horn is most often a personal extension of anger or anxiety).

In this chaotic setting, driving in “traffic lanes” is useless, so the drivers use their car horn while driving toward their destination as a normal way, notifying slower traffic of a rear approach with a delicate “tap, tap” on the horn. This tapping is so habitual that even in cases where there is little risk of collision, the “tap, tap” is still expressed, sort of like a “tipping of the hat” to other drivers.

The Participant in my gallery not only see the visual elements of my artworks, but also they will be engaged with the sounds and it helps them to make life with those sounds after leaving the gallery space, although they don't observe it at the same time.

#### **4.1.4. Elements: Taste**

I found myself in the conversation with new foods and recipes mixed with Persian spices which I brought from Iran. Food as an important and unique site of cultural exchange between people from different cultures and geographical regions.

How can we insert ourselves fully into the new food culture, and yet retain our own food taste? Migration influenced global food production, culinary traditions, eating habits, and gender dynamics. Food has also offered a way for migrants to maintain ties to their homelands. Recipes, imported products, and culinary rituals have provided imagined and real bonds between family and kin, and served as a symbol of comfort and stability during the economic, social, and political upheavals associated with migration. At the same time, immigrants also creatively modify their traditions as they interact with new ingredients, tastes, and market forces.



How might these documents be examined together to hypothesize about effects on culinary traditions and eating practices?



*Integration with foods; showroom 2013*

Additionally, I had one workshop in Zurich with the title «Creating the Third Space», and combined various forms of art to create an encounter: Travelling on a passenger ship on the Lake of Zurich she will relate Farsi poems, which will then be written down on prints depicting Persian motifs. In the end the sheets will be transformed into folded paper boats, which symbolically connect two distant places: Zurich and Isfahan (Iran). Undoubtedly, language is as a database of cultural identity. The project aims at exploring the complexity of language in a globalized world and it negotiates hybrid, multi-cultural identities. The past and the present are dynamically recombined in order to create an abstract

space, in which language plays a crucial role and in which concepts of place, home, memory, identity, territory, and geography overlap.



"Creating the third space" workshop

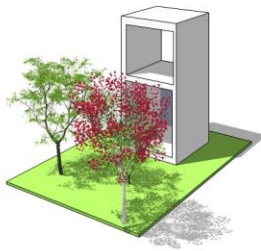
#### 4.1.5. Elements: Nature

This process ranges from physically integrating myself into an environment to simply waiting for sun to come in through my room window, illuminating some strange, to discover ornaments. I tried to create a new dialog between many different layers of surface, environment, people. the objects are reaching, touching, holding onto one another, yet desperate and unresolved. The main question is now how would be an environment as an ornament? My focus attracted to new surface, texture and environment but also this new transitions in my visual view. Unconsciously, I was looking for ornaments outside, I recognized nature became as an ornament in my photography. I found out a group of people, open spaces; different shape of home, any many different types of tree can have the character of an ornament for me.

My observations in Zurich, showed me, that the landscape, tree, house even people itself can be read and introduced as an ornament itself. Ornament that represents the constant flow in the city. Also I found Traffic in Esfahan is like water, it is a constant flowing stream, which organizes itself within some written, and unwritten rules. I think each repeating pattern, which is organized in a large scale network, but is almost unpredictable.



From Mural shadow collection





Leaves movements Project Fall 2013

#### **4.1.6. Elements: Culture**

Culture is not something I think about but it is a part of my nature .I had tremendous problems for adjusting myself to my new place. For example, in Switzerland I found that life is so much slower and relaxing here. Everything is organized and due to the well organization of facilities such as public transport and less bureaucracy in the administrative activities, life seems easier than Isfahan where despite the simple nature of tasks, everything is so difficult and in many cases stressful to be done. One main reason of stress in Isfahan is the awkward way of driving the cars

which makes lots of stress and it is totally different from the way people drive their cars in Zurich.

Going back to my previous place and space may be considered as returning to the past but in fact it might be equal to a new beginning. I find and lose myself in such situations. In fact, it has different layers, complexity and dimensions. Due to movement and migration, the communication and intimate relationship between people, community and place that you had before also has changed during this period of time.

Rarely you can find individuals that returning to their 'own' past has satisfied them due to the change of circumstance and identities change. The most important topic in Immigration issues, the levels of ambivalence, of plurality, of shifting identities and interpretations are perhaps greater than in many other aspects of life.

I had totally different mentality in politics. , I have no interest in politics and whatever that goes on in this issue but right now, although I am not living in Isfahan anymore, I have been more involved into the politics and follow the news here in Zurich rather than the time I used to live in Isfahan. In Iran , politics plays a significant role in people's lives, therefore, people dedicate a significant time of their day listening to the news and almost everybody has his/her opinion on different topics and insist that their opinion is correct and usually insist to convince others with his/her opinions. "Politics" is something that definitely defines an Iranian. That's what all people talk about. You could hear and see how ordinary people involve in the discussions about political issues and economic matters in almost everywhere and every occasions such as Bazaar, taxi, shopping malls family gathering parties and etc.

As an Iranian woman coming from Iran to Switzerland, I usually face many questions about women situation in Iran. Challenging these questions made me to get involve in political issues while I live in Zurich comparing to the time I was living in Isfahan. Therefore, I try to study and keep in touch with all those issues which is related to my homeland both politically and economically and keep my eyes and my ears open to be updated by the news. As a pristine notion, "belonging" is closely interwoven with and imbricated in the notion of 'home'. In fact, what we call "home" is

where we belong, territorially and culturally, where 'our own' community is, where our family, friends and acquaintances reside, where we have our roots, and where we miss it and our heart beat to return and see it again while we are living somewhere else in the world. In this sense, belonging, (...) is a notion replete with concreteness, sensuality, organic meanings and romantic images. It is a foundational, existential, 'thick' notion. In the ways that it circumscribes feelings of 'homeness', it is also a significant determinant of individual 'identity', that elusive but still real psychological state of feeling 'in sync with' oneself under given external conditions. Most importantly, 'home' and 'belonging', perceived to have affective meaning rather than cognitive meaning; the indicative and simplistic statement above, 'home is where we belong', really means 'home is where we feel we belong' (Hedetoft 2002: 5; quotations and italics in the original). Home is about belongingness and this type of connectedness is about the 'fundamentals of culture and identity. And, as such, it is about sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness.

The memorialization of 'home' in the terrain of belongingness is reflective of such feelings and relations that bring about a sense of comfort and security. 'Home' is a virtual place, it is a repository for memories of the lived spaces. It locates lived time and space, particularly intimate familial time and space (Mallet 2004: 63).

It is very difficult for me to distinguish between my physical presence and my mentality, sometimes I am physically in Zurich but live mentally in Isfahan and vice versa. In some cases I feel inconvenient here, and I go back, and I feel like I am also inconvenient there.

Being an Iranian living in the West, I feel myself curiously 'bound' equally to both. It is as if being caught between the divergent cultures of both East and West have somehow re-'molded' my perspectives, allowing me to appreciate and understand them in new ways. Because of this, I find myself politically, psychologically and emotionally torn. So much so, that even time spent in either sphere is physically disorienting. This continual conflict within my life has shaped – and continues to – my character and personality. Being centered from within, my principles and values clearly reflect these influential conflicts externally through my work.

## **5. The practical outcome**

The practical outcome of this research and investigations represented in the following parts during my exhibition in May 2015.

### **5.1. My heterotopia**

The project began with questioning the idea, concept and perception of space; this investigation was carried forward using the mirror as a tool for this construct of space through its sensations. The idea is holding the mirror over face to discover our absence from the place where we are since we see ourselves over there to blend our surroundings. The question of this concept is how the mirror is a medium for representing social relationally, framed by its placement over face in a public place. I would like to frame mirrors, just like photographs, but even when the mirror's frame is broken or missing, it continues to reflect its gaze back to the viewer. Put differently, mirrors—like photographs—are a medium by which we take account of our self-presentation to the world. In following these questions I was impressed by paper of Michel Foucault about heterotopia and utopia. MICHEL FOUCAULT says In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real,



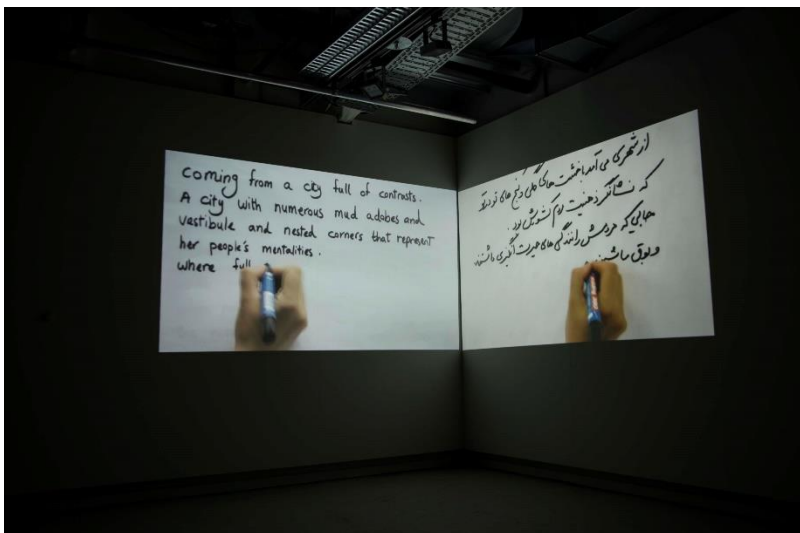
connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. The camera shows us the world it is pointed at. A mechanical representation of the world, the mirror, however, assumes a raised degree of objectivity and a relative degree of passivity in as much as it literally reflects back everything within its preview. Photographs of the mirror's gaze are not unusual and they offer impressive examples of what W.J.T. Mitchell calls "showing seeing," a pedagogical strategy for challenging the boundaries between nature and art, or what we might call the "real" and the "image".



From the collection of "My Heterotopia"

## **5.2. Life in between**

Being forgotten and distance is an intertwined feeling of a migrant, which is difficult to ignore or keep them forever. In this regard, these two video channels which are documented during my travels between Isfahan and Zurich, I tried to show how I experienced being present in one space and time, but simultaneously experiencing a different space and time in my mind. I consider geographical displacement and on the other side the contrapuntal space of memory. This project is an engagement with those elements that represent being in between situation such as writing, environmental sound, and indoor-outdoor activities that make this displacement evident to me.



Two video channels for life in between project

### **5.3. The forgotten Tree**

In This video installation I attempted to attach the greenness of my current environment as a visual metaphor to the completely dried up tree in my hometown in order to make it alive. During my visit from the homeland I faced with the crucial drought issues that my city is confronting these days, though I tried to combine her current surrounding element with the former one in order to create a sense of belonging to myself.



Painting over video Installation, "The forgotten tree"

## 5.4. Flying on colors

This is an abstract collection that represents my perception of color's variety during my flight from Isfahan to Zurich. I tried to capture the differences of the landscape between Iran and Switzerland from the bird's eye view perspective. This collection, accordingly, reflects the color change that influenced me for abstract art.



Flying on colors

## 5.5. The live river

Isfahan is a home to a once mighty river, the Zayanderood, or the Live River, that cuts through the historic center like a clumsily rolled out carpet. Iran's drought situation is most visible where the water of River of Life under the famous Bridge of 33 Arches has disappeared.

For several months after my movement to Zurich, while I passed over Limmat River, I still felt walking through that bridge and also hear its environmental sound.

For me, the Bridge of 33 Arches shows its architectural elements while the water passes through the bridges. Therefore, attaching this famous bridge to the Limmat River by painting over the video is a kind of replacement for my sense of loss.



Two video channels - The Live River



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