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## Introduction

I get up and turn on my phone, remembering a message I received from Babak<sup>1</sup> yesterday. “Sorry, I have to work this weekend and I won’t be able to be with you [at the festival].” This is strange, I think. I know he sometimes works on the weekend. Babak is an artist in his early forties. But Milad, our common friend, told me that they were hanging out together yesterday evening. There must be some other reason why he won’t come. It’s the same for Milad, who did not follow up on my invitation, either. It’s a sunny Saturday in June 2013. Yesterday, I worked late: I am volunteering to help Behruz, a 27-year-old German-born man of Iranian origin, a student, organize the Iran-centered Color festival at Hochsieben, one of Hamburg’s most important avant-garde art venues.

When the 120 guests left after the ethnic (*mahali*) and traditional (*sonnati*) music concert yesterday, I heard a German technician ask Ziba “[Here lives] Europe’s biggest Iranian community – where were they tonight?” The cultural organizer in her mid-forties answered “Well, Behruz’s aim was to attract a German public and he succeeded in doing so [...]. If Iranians have to choose between several similar concerts, they

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<sup>1</sup>All names of interlocutors, associations, and events, in some cases also personal data, were changed in respect of their privacy and personal security.

will come to see Taghi tomorrow” (field notes June 2013). Taghi is a famous classical Iranian music singer based in Iran. In our last reunion, Behruz said that he expects violent contestation at the festival in response to Taghi’s political position-taking in the recent Iranian presidential elections.

My phone beeps. Yara writes that she is free today and asks if we need help. Apparently, Behruz doesn’t pick up the phone. Yara, an educator in her early thirties, has not been actively involved in the organization of this festival for months. Plus, as a member of the association Golestan, she is organizing a festival of young Iranian fusion music in only five months. Why does she want to help all of a sudden? I forward her quest to Behruz, who displays professionalism: “No, thanks, everything is under control.” He obviously does not want her support.

At the festival venue, the hall with the photo exhibition of Iranian landscapes fills indeed with a different kind of public than last night. Ziba was right! There are more than twice as many visitors as yesterday, most of them of Iranian origin. I spot her in the crowd and am struck by her feminine elegance. With her red sheath dress, she wears a black hat. The day before, she was dressed much more casually, in correspondence to Hamburg’s notorious understatement. “I told you, yesterday was for students, today is the real day”, she beams and takes a thousand pictures with all the people she knows. In our interview, she told me that she often feels suffocated within what she calls “the Iranian community”. Is she trying to challenge limitations through her slinky dress?

More and more people arrive and mingle. I greet merchants, artists, students, and political activists I know, members of the cultural association Golestan, people I met on the street when we promoted the festival, visitors I never met before, and my own extended family members who I invited. Two young men ask me for my number; a mother presents me to her son. Is the festival a dating market? My relative feels uncomfortable and says that there are many of her pharmacist colleagues. She obviously came to do me a favor.

Suddenly, I hear someone calling me by my family name “Miss Moghaddari!” Yara rushes toward me, energetic as ever and casually dressed in trousers and pullover. She presents me to her two female friends, like herself in their early thirties. One of them makes a compliment

for the Color festival t-shirt I am wearing: it bears the event's slogan written in minimalist white letters on a royal blue background. Yara, however, contests: "I don't like it." Later she comes back to show me the t-shirts of the competing FusIran festival, explaining "I just received them today." They bear the festival's name in an elaborate font that resembles Persian letters printed in two colors on a dark blue background. "What a funny coincidence", I think.

I catch Behruz at a moment of calm, between distributing flyers and preparing tea. "So how do you think the concert went yesterday?" "It was good but there were less people than I hoped. However, I really did not like when Hassan stepped on stage to dance. He didn't even have a ticket as far as I know" (field notes June 2013). The Iranian man in his sixties improvised Iranian dancing during the last song. Hassan is a modest person and I know him because he distributes flyers and promotions at every Iranian event in town. The public clapped hands to accompany him. Why did Behruz see this joyous performance as a problem, I wonder? Well, at least, there was no sign of a fight, so far.

Offering black tea, cooked in a samovar, on donation is one of my tasks. A woman in her forties, dressed in a feminine way with high-heeled shoes and her long black hair down, asks me to serve her two cups. She is accompanied by a man and a young blond boy, possibly her German partner and son. "It is Persian tea, isn't it?" "No, it's Turkish tea." I show her the package. "Oh, then I'll get just one for my son. This one is too strong. I always drink Persian tea, it's milder." Another woman, a stranger of about the same age, who is dressed more casually and also accompanied by her family, intervenes, "What's the matter? This tea is good!"

Nazanin arrives with her sister and German husband, dressed in a summerly skirt and high-heeled espadrilles. The 62-year-old, whose father was a professor of Iranian Studies in Germany, seems to enjoy the socializing at the festival. "Thanks for offering me the ticket although I dropped out early [from volunteering in the festival organization]. By the way, I tell you this in private, at Hochsieben they made fun of Behruz. He wanted to organize a big event and usually they do not collaborate with newcomers. But my friend Anna made a case for him and I am happy it worked out" (field notes June 2013). Does her getting demotivated from volunteering have something to do with Behruz' image at Hochsieben?

The doors to the concert hall are already closed and Behruz is nervous: some people on the guest list have not yet arrived. Is it an accident that the man who at last hurries in with his family—and thus evades the pre-concert sociability—is the representant of the local Iranian-run Imam Ali mosque? For the encore, the public requests a song called “Vatanam” (*My home country*). For just a few minutes, across all differences, the public seems to be moved, in good or in bad, by this first (but not the current) sweepingly emotional Iranian national anthem. It represents a pause from the atmosphere of antagonism that is at the heart of the interactions on this day at the festival.

This set of individual encounters highlight the diversity of positionalities Hamburg-based people identifying (at least partly) as Iranians<sup>2</sup> (*Iraner*) take in relations to one another, here in the context of this Iranian cultural event. The encounters reflect, following Pierre Bourdieu’s approach to the study of power and inequality, subjacent micro-negotiations over the criteria by which agents evaluate each other’s ideas, objects, and practices (Bourdieu 1979). They appear as practices of social differentiation. A struggle is the essential feature of a social field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). It is in the context of such systems of relations that individual encounters take all their meaning. How do agents weigh between attendance and abstinence, choose their clothing and behavior at the event, and evaluate that of others? Considering that agents are migrants,<sup>3</sup> which local and transnational social relations play a role in their decision? How do they evaluate the influence it will have on them? In other words, how do dynamics in different local and transnational social fields, and their prevalent systems of evaluation—hence, of value—interrelate?

People constructed as a cultural or racial Other form an integrate part of today’s Western societies. While migration studies shed light on many

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<sup>2</sup> I use this emic appellation throughout the book. Importantly, it does not discriminate between people who migrated themselves and those who were born in Germany. It will become clear by the conclusion why the title bears the notion of Iranian-Germans, instead.

<sup>3</sup> For reasons of readability, I will use this term throughout the book. It also corresponds to the way people with non-German identifications tend to be constructed in German society, namely as migrants or foreigners (*Ausländer*). However, numerous interlocutors in this study, in particular those who could be considered second-generation migrants, did not migrate themselves and the Iranian is only one among several national identifications.

aspects of their presence in these countries, relations among migrants from the same country of origin are understudied due to dominant paradigms that privilege their interaction with the society of residence and origin or altogether non-ethnic approaches. Yet, diversity in local in-group relations is crucial to understanding social cohesion in contemporary societies of immigration. This is particularly urgent in times of the European border regime's crisis, where the question of migration has become a subject of political maneuvering; in times in which the traditional party system is destabilized by the rise of populist, nationalist, and extreme right forces to power positions in national governments where racist violence is seeing a drastic increase across the continent (Jäckle and König 2017; Vertovec 2018).

Extant research on such internal diversity reveals that processes of differentiation are related either to migrants' conditions of incorporation in the locality of residence or to their pre-migratory social context. Transnational reasons for these dynamics, however, are rarely examined in enough detail. Conversely, an emerging strand of research focuses on how migrants create different forms of capital in transnational social fields, but tends to neglect the connection with local dynamics. This book asks how diversity among Iranian-Germans, as it derives from processes of social differentiation, relates to their past and ongoing historically situated experience of generating capital in local and transnational social fields.

## Internal Diversity

When the transnational approach to migration became dominant in the early 1990s, it was conceptualized as a “transgressive movement” that challenges, through cross-border circulation, dominant ideas, and practices linked to nation-states and, in general, to the global political economy (Glick Schiller et al. 1997, 136f.). Accordingly, transnational migrants are seen as acting in contestation of and in confrontation to power structures such as national institutions and multinational corporations. Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt, for instance, conceive of transnational activities as being “commonly developed in reaction to governmental

policies and to the condition of dependent capitalism fostered on weaker countries” (idem 1999, 20). These research trends nourish the development of what I call the “paradigm of internal horizontality”, according to which migrants are agents of change that engage in vertical relations with structures and institutions of their societies of origin and residence, while internal relations remain largely horizontal.

As a consequence, studies that reveal unequal relations among migrants did not receive enough attention. Their findings, however, forcefully argue against the idea of internal horizontality, as does for instance Pnina Werbner’s (1990) work on Pakistani entrepreneurial families in Manchester. Social differentiation among migrants evolves “in response to the changing communal and economic contexts” (idem 1990, 342) in local and in transnational social fields. Ludger Pries (1996) and Michael Smith (2005) also stress that migrants’ social spaces are heterogeneous and shaped by relations of power.

Eventually, the conceptualization of migration as transgressive movement became criticized for its dualistic and romanticizing vision. Likewise, the paradigm of internal horizontality was gradually superseded by what I identify, building on an expression of Carter and Fenton (2010), as the “paradigm of not-thinking-ethnicity”.

The early 2000s saw the rise of a critique of “methodological nationalism”, postulating that the analytical centrality of nation-states had left research conceptually blind for processes that cannot be grasped in terms of national belonging (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 324ff.). Taking further Brubaker’s (2002) important argument for the use of ethnicity as a category of practice instead of a category of analysis, the debate entails a critique of the ethnic lens, with the argument that research had fostered the construction of “migrant communities” based on a common ethnic or national origin. But instead of acknowledging the internal heterogeneity of migrant “communities” and questioning the horizontality of their relations, studies involving people who share a single ethnic or national identification gradually lost scholarly interest in favor of so-called non-ethnic approaches (Glick Schiller et al. 2006; Carter and Fenton 2010).

Diversity studies form part of the so-called local turn which aims at comparing place-making involving migrants in urban contexts (Brettell 2003). The field of study is concerned with “understanding the modes

and processes of social differentiation” (Vertovec 2015, 10). Within this framework, the focus lies on multi-group relations, that is, between people with a variety of ethnic, status, and gender identifications from different countries of origin (Vertovec 2007). As diversity and transnational interconnectivity characterizes today’s societies of immigration, they offer insights into the social and administrative conditions to the construction of social cohesion in contemporary societies of immigration (Dobusch 2017; Nieswand 2017). Yet, their focus on the local and on non-ethnic approaches leads to leaving transnational interconnections largely out of the picture (Lamont et al. 2016, 287).

In sum, the commonality between the paradigm of internal horizontality and the paradigm of not-thinking-ethnicity is that they curb the study of social differentiation among migrants. The lack of interest in these dynamics, their historical depth, and their geographical scope, indirectly reifies migrants of the same ethnic or national origin as a homogeneous group. Notwithstanding these general trends in research on transnational migration, there is evidence on how relations among migrants produce and engage with power and the experience of inequality. Most of the studies on internal relations explain hierarchical behavior either through social dynamics in the context of residence or in the context of origin. With regard to the society of residence, studies argue that specifically local conditions to incorporation contribute to “deep divides” (Ehrkamp 2006) between migrants. “Reactive ethnicity”, that is, the (collective) exasperation of ethnic identifications as a means to differentiate from unmarked locals, can be a way to deal with ethnic, racial, or religious discrimination (Portes 1999; Çelik 2015). Intragroup Othering is yet another. According to Pyke and Dang (2003), the usage of categories such as “fresh of the boat” and “whitewashed” indicates that migrants internalize values that contribute to their own discrimination by the society of residence. Another strand of research relates the origins of these categories to the unequal relations engendered by different historical conditions of emigration, as well as to diverse political and socio-economic backgrounds in the country of origin (Kunz 1973; Charsley and Bolognani 2017; Su 2017). Yet, while both the context of residence and of origin are certainly crucial in shaping internal relations, considering

one without the other offers only a partial analysis of the social dynamics at hand.

To gain greater insights into the historical depth and transnational scope of internal differentiation, this book examines it as an engagement with interconnecting hierarchical structures prevalent in the society of origin and of residence. Following Kelly and Lusic's (2006) work on the way evaluations of resources among Toronto-based Filipino-Canadians are informed by interrelating strands of transnational connectivity, I combine the study of local social differentiation with that of migrants' engagement in transnational social fields.

## Transnational Social Fields

The so-called transnational turn represents another effort to overcome the limitation posed by methodological nationalism. Building on previous research on "transnational social spaces" (Pries 1996; Faist 1998), Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004, 1015) suggest that, in order to understand migrants' sometimes contradictory social processes, we need to recognize that they "occupy different gender, racial, and class positions within different states at the same time". Drawing on Bourdieu's work on capital creation, they introduce the concept of the "transnational social field" (idem 2004, 1008f.). Since then, a growing body of research explores the transnational dimension of migrants' social mobility. These studies show that, as migrants engage in multiple local and transnational social fields, the positions they occupy in different contexts are interdependent and complementary (Nowicka 2013, 2014). In creating capital, different European case studies show that migrants rely on two types of resources whose availability is conditioned by gender, class, ability, or age identities: "location-specific capital", that is, locally relevant cultural and social capital (Nowicka 2013; Nohl et al. 2014; Cederberg 2015), and "migration-specific capital", which is created through resources that draw on migrants' racial, ethnic, and cultural identifications (Erel 2010). Thus, both location- and migration-specific resources are crucial in migrants' creation of capital.

This literature has a tendency to assume that, through their capital creation, migrants challenge and transform hierarchal orders in the country of residence and of origin—an idea that reminds us of the paradigm of internal horizontality. However, the focus on migrants' capacities to transform societies entails the danger of sidelining individual difficulties and structural barriers migrants may meet in trying to create capital. It is thus useful to complement these studies with research that considers how past and present dynamics of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and nation-state policies shape migrants' self-perceptions and their image among locals (Henry 1999; Glick Schiller 2005). Aihwa Ong offers great insights into the ways migrants' strategies of creating capital respond to, and engage with negative stereotypes that draw on historically built international economic and political hierarchies (Ong 1992, 1996). Importantly, she observes that barriers to capital creation emerge “when there is a mismatch, from the hegemonic standpoint, between the symbolic capital and its embodiment” (idem 1999, 91). In other words, a resource may not be recognized as a capital if it is devaluated by the subjection of its holder to negatively charged social categories. In a similar vein, Anja Weiss shows that not only the identifications and categorization of its holder, but also the origin of the resource itself plays a role in its valorization (idem 2005, 717–22). We thus retain that migrants' strategies of capital creation navigate between individual dispositions and a variety of structural—even though to some extent variable and negotiable—constraints.

In short, research shows that the use of location- and migration-specific resources plays an important role in migrants' creation of capital, because their valuation is influenced by historically grown international social inequalities. Relations between people who are engaged in the same transnational social field reflect these inequalities. Strikingly, however, so far research on transnational social fields mostly traces unrelated individual migrants' trajectories, privileging the interest in migrants' agency in relations with the society of residence and of origin over local internal relations.

To summarize, dominant approaches to internal differentiation and transnational social fields, respectively, neglect the study of the transnational and the local dimension, which explains why we yet know relatively

little about the way migrants engage with unequal relations across local and transnational social fields. The way I propose to address this issue is in combining both strands of research through their common theoretical background: Pierre Bourdieu's work on social fields and symbolic struggles over the definition of criteria of evaluation.

## Evaluation and Capital Creation Through Boundary Work

Pierre Bourdieu's work certainly is one of the most substantial theoretical frameworks in the social sciences. Following Wacquant's suggestion (2018), I use it as a toolbox rather than applying it in its integrity. Bourdieu (1979) argues that processes of evaluation and judgment form the basis of social differentiation. These relational processes represent the expression of relations of power and inequality resulting from the uneven distribution of resources and from variations in their recognition as capital. They take place when agents use distinctive symbols or practices in order to sustain their struggle over the valorization of their resources as capital in a particular social field. Here, an agent's position is determined by his capital's relative volume and its composition compared to that of other agents. He defines a capital as a material or immaterial resource whose symbolic power is acknowledged in the social field in which it is employed. The three categories of capital are economic capital, which relies on financial assets or properties; cultural capital, which can be created through professional, practical, or cultural knowledge that may or may not be institutionalized; and social capital, which derives from meaningful or creative relationships (Bourdieu 1985, 724).

In this book, I refer to two authors whose work is a productive expansion of Bourdieu's approach to power and inequality: Michele Lamont's boundary approach and David Graeber's theory of value. The link between the three approaches is their focus on practices of evaluation within particular social fields.

The boundary approach traces the construction and deconstruction of social boundaries. Social boundaries are thereby defined as "objectified

forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities” (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). The strength of this approach lies in its ability to reveal intersecting inequalities as it takes into account the usage of boundaries based on any socially and situationally relevant marker of difference. Moreover, the conceptualization of boundaries respects the fluctuant nature of structural constraints and the great importance of individual agency. In doing so, it offers an alternative view to a widely critiqued path-dependency in Bourdieu’s conception of the interaction between structure and agency (Lahire 1999; Martuccelli 2006). In bringing together Bourdieu’s concept of capital creation with the boundary approach, I understand the deconstruction of a boundary, in other words, inclusion, as the valorization of a resource as a capital. Vice versa, exclusion represents the denial of a resource’s value, which is expressed in the construction of a social boundary. Tracing differential patterns of evaluation in boundary work is a tool to understand the way different systems of evaluation interrelate (Lamont 2012).

In his anthropological theory of value, David Graeber introduces an understanding of such systems of evaluation that goes beyond Bourdieu’s relatively state-centered and static view. In Bourdieu’s conception, agents’ activities in a social field simultaneously exhibit and reproduce incorporated evaluation criteria which he calls classificatory schemes<sup>4</sup> (Bourdieu 1979, 191). The attribution of worth through practices of differentiation does not only represent individual cognitive structures, but such criteria of evaluation reflect and engage with the dominant social structure (Wacquant 1992, 12f.). Accordingly, the symbolic struggle over the definition of these classificatory schemes is at the heart of power relations (Bourdieu 1985, 729). Graeber (2001, 115) agrees with Bourdieu in understanding struggles over the definition of structures of reference, but also their relation to one another, as the most crucial political project.

Despite the diverse theoretical origin of Bourdieu’s and Graeber’s<sup>5</sup> work, their notions of classificatory schemes and systems of value converge

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to explain these processes.

<sup>5</sup> Graeber builds on Marxist and Maussian thought, in which he follows the action-oriented anthropology of value in the tradition of the University of Chicago (Robbins and Sommerschuh 2016).

in a crucial point. Following Bourdieu, mental structures incorporate social structures. According to Graeber (2013, 224) the worth that is given to an action or practices (its exchange value) mediates larger values, in the sense of “ideas about what is ultimately important in life”. Using Graeber’s vocabulary, criteria of evaluation reflect and engage with larger “systems of value”. Thus, in combining Bourdieu’s approach to power and inequality and Graeber’s theory of value, I conceive the creation of economic, social, and cultural capital in boundary work as essentially geared toward to mediation of particular values within a prevailing system.

However, Bourdieu foregrounds the national homogeneity of classificatory schemes: systems of evaluation of all social fields embedded in one particular nation-state follow the same principles of division (Bourdieu 1997, 98). Graeber (2013, 226), instead, suggests that in complex societies, a practice of evaluation is received in one or in several overlapping social fields (which he calls “social arenas”). Against Bourdieu, he sees social structure as inherently elusive, as it gets lost in the messiness of continuous social action, that is, its production and reproduction; social fields themselves are fragmented and ephemeral (Graeber 2001, 259ff.). Hence, the system of value by which one social field is shaped may or may not relate to those others in the same national context. Graeber’s more versatile conceptualization of systems of value will be useful to complement Bourdieu’s failure to theorize the interconnection between different social fields.

This book offers a fine-grained ethnography of the conditions and processes in which difference, in the form of social boundaries, is constructed and deconstructed in internal relations. How do these processes interact with the Iranians’ opportunities and limitations to have their resources acknowledged as capital in social fields relative to the German or to the Iranian society? In tracing internal relations across a period stretching from the 1930s until today, I study how agents engage, through evaluation in boundary work, with diverse, partly competing systems of value that prevail in the different social fields. In doing so, I examine the role of systems of value as structures of reference in the interrelation between dynamics in local and transnational social fields.

Needless to say, if it comes to studying internal diversity as a factor influencing social cohesion in European societies, we could think of a

great number of case studies. Similar dynamics to those this book will explore can certainly be found among other migrant groups. However, the historical depth and the geopolitical relevance of the presence of Iranians in Germany, more precisely, in the city of Hamburg, make it a particular case of study.

## Iranian Migration to Hamburg

Iranians did not start to emigrate after the Islamic revolution in 1979.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, the events which led to the replacement of the Western-oriented Pahlavi monarchy by a republic based on the principles of Islam under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini marked a turning point in these processes not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of the diversity of emigrants' social profiles and their destinations. However, the territory of contemporary Iran has always been shaped by the fluctuation of people (Keddie and Matthee 2002; Daryaei et al. 2010; Dabashi 2016). Depending on the time of emigration, reasons for geographical mobility vary from economic motivations to studies, from flight of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) and political persecution to social and family issues. Today, people identifying as Iranian are dispersed all over the world. They still live in some of the earliest places of settlement, that is, Iran's neighboring countries, the Persian Gulf region, and India, in Europe, and more recently in North America and Australia (Subrahmanyam 1992; Koser Akcapar 2006; McAuliffe 2008; Adelpak 2012; Khosravi 2018). Finally, since the 1990s, Southeast Asia, in particular Japan and Malaysia, has become a destination of migration (Fozi 2013). Due to the great historical depth, coming with important generational variety, and the uneven quality of statistical data provided by the countries of residence, the quantity of Iranians living abroad can only be approximated to 4 million, which represents about 5% of the population of Iran (Vahabi 2012, 13). Currently, the most important places of settlement are the USA (with about 481,000 (Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans 2014, 3)), Germany (197,000 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017a)), Canada (about

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<sup>6</sup> See timeline in the appendix.

108,000 Iranian-born, (in UNICEF 2013, 2)), the UK (about 80,000 Iranian-born in 2014 (Office for National Statistics 2015)), and Sweden (about 65,000 Iranian-born in 2014 (Malek 2015, 87)).

Iranian migration to Hamburg, Germany's second largest city, dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, thanks to early trade agreements. Only the important waves of immigration that followed the Iranian revolution in 1979 diversified the movement along lines of class, gender, ethnicity, political orientations, and religious adherence (Hesse-Lehmann 1993). Today, more than 23,000 among the city's 2 million inhabitants are of Iranian origin (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein 2018, 7), constituting Europe's second largest Iranian population, and Hamburg's fifth important immigrant group. Through naturalizations, onward or return migration, and mixed marriages,<sup>7</sup> the true number of people nourishing Iranian identifications is certainly much higher. Thus, as a city, Hamburg counts the largest number of Iranians in Germany, while it is the third federal state in numbers of Iranians after North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017b, 128ff.).

Iran's place in the international political and economic landscapes, shaped through its Islamic government and its richness in natural resources,<sup>8</sup> influences the lives of its emigrants. At present, it has the second largest economy in the Middle East, after Saudi Arabia, and, with about 80.6 million people (as of 2017), the second largest population after Egypt (The World Bank 2018). Since the revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic constructs its political discourse on an opposition to the USA and Israel and, in its extreme, on a condemnation of anything associated with the West. Since the hostage of US-embassy staff in Tehran in 1979, this political stance and Iran's pursuit of a contentious nuclear program has seen the country repeatedly subjected to partly severe economic sanctions both from individual nation-states and international organizations. Within Iran, the revolution, the war with Iraq, and a neoliberal economy under sanctions fostered the development of tangled, competing

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<sup>7</sup>Until October 2019, when Iranian legislation changed, children of a foreign father and an Iranian mother were not eligible for Iranian citizenship.

<sup>8</sup>According to the World Bank (2018), "Iran ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves and fourth in proven crude oil reserves."

political and economic power structures (Therme 2013). In the face of internal and external restrictions to the participation of people living in Iran in global cultural and economic flows (Appadurai 1990), its migrants have come to play an important role, acting as intermediaries for the circulation of ideas, practices, and goods between Iran and the West (Azadarmaki and Bahar 2007; Sreberny-Mohammadi 2013; Moghaddari 2015). This is even more significant, as the large portion of Iranians—at least those who go to Western countries—are not classical labor migrants; in Germany, they are typically characterized (and like to characterize themselves) as being one of the immigrant populations with the highest average level of education<sup>9</sup> (see also Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988; Sadeghi 2015). As this book will show, the particular place of Iran in the global political and economic landscape, power constellations in Iran, and the average educational level of Iranian migrants shape their conditions for capital creation in the place of residence.

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, social scientists have produced a substantial body of qualitative research on Iranian migration, to which three critical remarks are at order. First, studies carried out in diverse countries of residence at different points in time observed a strong tendency toward social differentiation between Iranians (Kamalkhani 1988; Bozorgmehr et al. 1993; McAuliffe 2007; Khosravi 2018). However, schemes of social differentiation are often drawn along emic markers such as ethnicity and religion, generation (Chaichian 1997; Daha 2011), “vintages”<sup>10</sup> of migrants, political convictions (Nassehi-Behnam 1991), and class (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988; McAuliffe 2008). If we understand these labels as “categories of practice” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4ff.) rather than as analytical instruments, such constructions of difference appear much more flexible and versatile. Second, as I showed earlier, inequalities related to Iran cannot be understood without taking into account their linkages with inequalities in the country of residence. Maybe because of the practicalities and risks of doing research in Iran (Nadjmabadi 2009), transnational dynamics have not yet received

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<sup>9</sup>In an OECD report (OECD-UNDESA 2013, 6), half of the 845,000 Iranian-born adults living in member countries in 2011 are qualified as high educated.

<sup>10</sup>I understand “vintages” of migrants with Kunz (1973) as people who move for similar reasons at the same period of time (see Chap. 3).

enough consideration in the study of Iranian migration. Third, much of the research on Iranian migrants' identifications centers on the USA and Canada (Mobasher 2006; Alinejad 2013; Maghbouleh 2017; Malek 2019), while there is a need for more research on these negotiations in the European context. Despite Germany's historical importance as a country of destination and the large number of residents of Iranian origin, there are few empirical studies providing consistent material for comparison (see Sanadjian 1995; Sadeghi 2018a, b). This book contributes to a more complex understanding of Iranian migration, tracing the fluidity of social boundaries and the transnational dimensions of local inequalities.

Since 2012, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) receives, with 20–50%, the biggest share of asylum requests in the European Union (Migration Policy Institute 2018). Nevertheless, the society only awoke to the fact that it had become a country of immigration at the turn of the twenty-first century. At about the time, the national economy began its growth rate that made it one of the world's leading economic and political powers today.

Just like in all Western European countries, the history of mass immigration to Germany started after World War II (WWII)<sup>11</sup> (Castles et al. 2013, 102–26). In contrast to other important European countries of immigration, however, Germany does not have a prolonged colonial past. Thus, most people who came to Germany from the mid-1950s were not former colonial subjects, but “guest workers” (*Gastarbeiter*) mostly of Italian, Spanish, Turkish, and Yugoslavian origin, called upon to provide manpower for the thriving German economy (Göktürk et al. 2007, 9ff.; Messina 2007, 124f.). This immigration was conceived of as being temporary: work and residence permits were only granted for restricted periods, family reunification was discouraged, and programs to facilitate insertion were largely directed toward their orientation in the job market (Castles et al. 2013, 107). From the recruitment ban for labor migrants in 1973 onward, immigration policies became ever more restrictive. Instead of diminishing the movement, this change led a growing number of migrants to try to obtain a residence permit via the asylum procedure in the following decades. While immigration became durable regardless

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<sup>11</sup> These were previously rather countries of emigration.

of policy changes, politicians continued to deny this reality (Aumüller 2009, 195). Significantly, in 1991, the then-chancellor Helmut Kohl stated “we [...] have to be conscious about the fact that we cannot admit all those who want to come. The Federal Republic of Germany is not a country of immigration” (Kohl 1991). Uncertainty and unemployment after the German reunification in 1990 fostered xenophobia and racist thought and urged politicians to implement a more restrictive legislation in order to decrease the number of asylum seekers (Messina 2007, 127ff.; El-Tayeb 2016, 143ff.; Mushaben 2017).

It was only at the turn of the century that more and more voices brought the culturally heterogeneous reality to the public debate, even though they were forcefully countered by anti-immigration discourses that did not originate exclusively from the social margins.<sup>12</sup> The approach to immigration shifted from differentialism to assimilationism (Brubaker 2001). Within this new conception, education, occupational achievements, and, importantly, resources conceived as Germany-specific,<sup>13</sup> such as language skills and cultural knowledge, are seen as criteria for successful integration (Bail 2008, 49). Comprehensive federal programs promoting integration were developed, which, however, lay the responsibility for assimilation on the migrants (Aumüller 2009, 199f.). Research on interactions between Germans and people of foreign origin shows that migrants’, their children’s and even grandchildren’s chances to generate capital in Germany are restricted by their construction as cultural or racial Other (Weiss 2001; Sökefeld 2004; Terkessidis 2004; Ehrkamp 2006; Gruner 2010; Marschke and Brinkmann 2015). At least since al-Qaida’s attacks in the USA of September 11, 2001, Islamophobia has become one of the main vehicles for racial and cultural discrimination in Europe (Fekete 2004; Shooman 2014; De Genova 2017). In Germany, strong anti-immigration and anti-Muslim resentments are represented in movements such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization

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<sup>12</sup>One example is the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) politician Thilo Sarrazin, whose book “Germany abolishes itself” (2010) caused a huge public debate, and was sold in over 1,3 million copies (cro 2012).

<sup>13</sup>I use the notion of “Iran- and Germany-specific resources” to designate assets which are, in a specific social interaction, conceived of as being created in or representative of identifications related to these national contexts.

of the West, initiated in late 2014) and the increasingly popular right-wing nationalist party AfD (Alternative for Germany), founded in 2013.

The crisis of the European border regime in the context of the movement of people by the thousands through the Mediterranean and the Balkans that began in 2015 eventually challenged the prevailing discourse on immigration. In June 2015, chancellor Angela Merkel stated for the first time that “we are after all already a country of immigration” (dpa 2015). In that year, 434,750 first asylum requests were filed in Germany—more than 3 times the number of the preceding year and 15 times as much as in the year 2008 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2016, 3). Within the government-promoted, but highly controversial, “Welcome culture” (*Willkommenskultur*) (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018), not only Germans but also already established migrants mobilize or become mobilized as benefactors, mediators, spokespersons, and critiques of the newly arrived (Karakayali and Kleist 2015). These developments make Germany an important place to study the stakes of transnational migration and the internal construction and deconstruction of difference today.

The fluctuation of people between Germany and Iran goes back to the Middle Ages, when merchants, soldiers, and political dignitaries began to travel between the Habsburg Empire and Iran (Kochwasser 1961, 28ff.). The contemporary conditions of Iranian immigration to Germany are structured by political and economic collaboration between the two countries throughout most of the twentieth century until today (Adli 1960; Khatib-Shahidi 2013). Moreover, in contrast to North American countries of destination where Iranians can only enter after gaining a green card, due to its geographical proximity, Iranian migration to Germany passes through both regular and irregular entry and the asylum procedure (Hesse-Lehmann 1993). In the course of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, Iranian asylum applications in Germany reached peaks that exceeded the post-2009-anti-election protests in numbers of applications (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2017, 21). As a matter of fact, in the past ten years<sup>14</sup> Iranians figure among the ten largest groups

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<sup>14</sup>Except for the years 2014 and 2015, as numbers of asylum requests from other nationalities skyrocketed.

of asylum seekers in Germany (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2016, 8), alongside other forms of entry such as through student visas. Over the past 20 years, several people of Iranian origin have reached important levels of public renown. They include the federal politicians Sahra Wagenknecht (die Linke), Omid Nouripour (Alliance '90/the Greens), actress Yasmin Tabatabai, journalist Bahman Nirumand, architect Hadi Teherani, composer Ramin Djawadi, artist Parastou Forouhar, and the footballer Ali Daei—to name but a few.

In sum, at a time in which Germany experiences a turning point in its history of immigration, studying the shifting reception of Iranians, most of whom have a Muslim background, over more than 80 years and their engagement with these changing conditions in internal relations offers crucial insights on the future stakes of recent influxes. The way migrants negotiate between different systems of value in processes of boundary work allows us to understand transversal social dynamics in one of Europe's major countries of immigration.

## Fieldwork

According to the German poet Hermann Hesse (1999 [1923], 123), “the things we see [...] are the same things that are within us”. Experiences of community and conflict in Iranian-German contexts and of cultural and racial Othering in contact with Germans stimulated my interest in studying internal diversity. I am the child of an Iranian-German binational couple and that I grew up in a small rural town at the coast of the North Sea, which is a one-and-a-half-hour-drive north of Hamburg. More particularly, I grew up between a largely migrant-less everyday life and regular get-togethers with some of the few local Iranian families. Every few years we spent our holidays in Babol—my second place of origin. Episodes of racism I experienced myself or I witnessed my father experiencing marked me. These experiences also informed my relations in the field and the way I interpret ethnographic data.

This book is based on material I raised through nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Hamburg between March 2013 and April 2014. However, rather than being single-sited in the “classical” way, it was a

“strategically situated ethnography”, that is, there was a “sensed, partially articulated awareness of specific other sites and agents to which particular subjects have (not always tangible) relationships” (Marcus 1995, 111). Hence, between 2012 and 2016, the research followed me during my temporary stays in Iran—I spent a total of three months in Tehran, Babol, a city in the north of Iran, and Mashhad—and in Geneva, where I was based.

Life experiences as a “halfie” (Abu-Lughod 1991) in itself does not say much about the level of my personal involvement and the relations that I developed with my interlocutors (Narayan 1993). In researching differentiation, I am necessarily involved in its relationality. The following vignettes both introduce my ethnographic methods, illustrate my relational approach to ethnography (Desmond 2014), and offer insights into questions of my own positionality, research ethics, and political issues in encounters with my interlocutors.

In anthropology, participant observation remains a crucial method—and so it was in this research. More than that, I voluntarily, and sometimes also involuntarily, became an observing participant. For instance, I worked as a waitress in a local Iranian restaurant for six weeks, I participated in the organization of two cultural festivals (see Chaps. 3 and 5), and engaged in several research vulgarization activities on the invitation of different interlocutors. Several times, interlocutors accompanied me to field sites (for instance to meet a person that could have known a deceased parent) thus directly and indirectly prompting me to confront my perceptions and interpretations with theirs. I also spent free time with people I met in the field and who later became research participants. It is through such long-term relations that I understood my role in the construction of social boundaries.

On a warm summer evening in 2013, for instance, I joined Babak, Yara, and a few other friends at the Schanzenviertel, a recently gentrified district popular with young professionals and leftist activists. It is a quarter of town where I lived before, where I felt at home. We made a barbecue in a park and then walked round the lively streets. I knew these people since a few months already. Certainly, it helped that I could participate, despite with less fluency, in their discussions in Persian. We wanted to go somewhere together, but we still hadn’t decided on a destination. After a

while, I got tired of purposelessly standing on the street. I wanted to suggest we join some friends of mine. “Okay, what should we do now?” I asked. Babak laughed “You are such a potato (*sibzamini*)! So funny. I have no idea, nobody cares, we just hang out here.” “Potato” is an expression popular among migrant youth to designate Germans. Babak had called me that way before and he had told me that it was meant as a joke. Yet, even if it was effective just for a few minutes, Babak created a boundary between me and the group. He interpreted my impatience as a Germany-specific resource and did not acknowledge it as a capital. Incidentally, four months later, I told him that I was tired of him repeatedly identifying me as a German. “But you are German!” he said again. Then again, on the next Iranian new year, he invited me to a party at his place. When I asked if I could bring a Belgian friend, he said “I am sorry but I would like us to be only among ourselves.” Who did he mean by that this time? At the party, all guests were Persian speakers and his acquaintances.

But let me finish the story of the summer evening: just an hour after Babak’s boundary-making, Yara invited me to a high-end bar. While she included me, she managed to discreetly leave behind the others including her close friend Yalda whose new German boyfriend had just joined us. When we arrived there, I realized that Yara wanted to meet a new lover, the bar’s Iranian owner. I was a female of her age and unaccompanied—probably the most suitable company of the group in this case. Thus, in my relations with interlocutors, I noticed how we used a variety of markers of difference to create boundaries that drew us together or created distance depending on the situations and the moments in the evolution of our acquaintance.

It is in observing the way my self-claimed and attributed identities shifted and how my resources were valorized differently in different social context (also compared to those of my interlocutors) that I understood the importance of taking situations as units of analysis (Eckert 2016). To account, against Bourdieu, for the complexity of individual situations and trajectories (Martuccelli 2009), I thus approach the production of difference through “ethnographies of the particular” (Abu-Lughod 1991, 148ff.).

Interviews were a crucial part of my research, but while I carried out a small number of formal interviews, most occurred spontaneously and in

informal context. Some interviews were directed toward exploring the past rather than the present, relating oral history, while others narrated life courses. An issue that was omnipresent in this research, but that was particularly noticeable in conversations, was the concern with political position-taking, and, in as far as they may be interpreted as connected, with religious beliefs. There is little anthropological research carried out in Iran today, which is largely due to the Iranian state controlling access and publications (Nadjmabadi 2009; Khosravi 2017). Within the past decade, many researchers, mostly those with Iranian citizenship, have been detained in the country. Many non-citizen researchers have been denied entry or research permits. This is why my research in Iran was completely informal. However, even in researching Iranian migration in Hamburg, avoiding political risks for both my interlocutors and myself is a primary concern. This is a particularly acute concern in this city as there is a strong presence of Iranian state institutions: the Consulate General, a school for Iranian expats, an office of the Iranian national bank, and the Imam Ali mosque. Moreover, many local Iranians told me that they were suspicious of being spied on by peers.

The concern for my interlocutors and my own political safety shaped my fieldwork encounters. I particularly remember the one interview with a clerk of the Imam Ali mosque. I met Mr. Saidi once when I visited the mosque. However, it took months of negotiations and several refusals from his part before I could send him a list of questions and he agreed to the interview. Mr. Saidi must be around 60 years old, but his hair is completely white. Although he has a limp, he walks straight and exudes dignity. It is a Friday afternoon and I follow him through the building, in which he opens doors to look for an empty room. Later, he told me that he chose that day of the week because he knew the place would be empty. Finally, we stay in the library hall. He lays my printed questions with written notes in Persian on the sides in front of him—he was clearly cautious. Although I planned to be equally careful not to express any political or religious opinion in my questions and in my demeanor—I wore the veil—our conversation, in German, starts off with hitting a taboo. “Since when do you know Hamburg and the Imam Ali mosque?” “Since 1982.” “What do you mean? Is it since 1982 that you live in Hamburg, or that you work at the mosque?” “Neither.” He explained me his

professional and migratory trajectory prior to 1987, then he adds “but you should not mention this!” (field notes October 2013). Moreover, during the interview, my headscarf fell off several times. Every time it took a minute before I noticed it. He never even twitched his eye. In the end, he told me a secret which he also insisted I should not write about. In doing so, he presented himself as having a critical distance to the ideology of the Iranian government.

Just like Mr. Saidi, interlocutors shared political opinions or a personal history of confrontations with Iranian authorities with me. It was only those who were sure never to return to Iran who did so without reminding me that I should not write about this. Some interlocutors also chose not to tell me certain relevant personal matters. In many cases, when people withheld information, they did so in an attempt to influence my image of them and the way I represent them in my research. More often than not, these matters reveal the way my interlocutors engage with the historically situated experience of inequality. They form, as the “unknown known” (I know it but I behave as if I do not) or the partly “unknown unknown” (I just don’t know or I guess there might be more to it but I do not ask) (Žižek 2004), a ghostly presence in this book (Gordon 1997; Cabot 2016). Human beings are complex. Persian vocabulary has a word for the protection of the space for the unknown in our complex personhood: *ta’ârof* (Vivier-Muresan 2006). Relating to Islam, it serves to preserve a person’s honor (*âb’e ruh*) in social interactions.<sup>15</sup> It is a concept I strive to respect both in fieldwork and in writing. As far as I can sense it, this (un)knowledge informs my analysis. In this book, I mostly strive to respect the cover of the unknown and write around it.

Following Ann Stoler (2009) in reading “along the archival grain” is one way to study the ghostly—because tabooed or untold—stories of power inequality through written policy documentation (Vaught and Orum Hernández 2017). Reading along the archival grain consists on taking the archives as a site of ethnography rather than using archival documents as counterweights to the stories of the people (colonial) states govern. It means studying archival production on its own behalf, as a

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<sup>15</sup>Tellingly, a religious saying goes “cover the believers’ failures, as god forgives all failures a thousand times” (*pushândeye oyub-e moïmenân bashin ke khodâvand satârâloyub ast*).

technology of rule, by reading “for its regularities, for its logics of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies and misinformation, omission and mistake” (Stoler 2009, 100). More generally, my writing an historically informed anthropology is motivated by the aim to complement Western historicity which tends to deny its “Others” a past of similar complexity as their own, and thus reproduces unequal power relations (Said 1978; Wolf 1982; Chakrabarty 2000). My interest is exploring how contemporary internal differentiation relates to local and transnational dynamics that shaped relations among Iranian migrants in the past. For all these reasons I studied the Hamburg government’s internal communication and correspondence with local Iranians as well as Iranian immigration-related newspaper documentation at the city’s archives, Staatsarchiv Hamburg (STAHH). These documents cover a period from 1857 until the 1980s.

The archives entertain a close relationship to the present. I could observe it when Karim, a barista in his early thirties, asked me if he could come with me. The tall man stands out by a dense black beard and long hair. He never went to college, but he said that he was curious about history. The lady at the entry studied him closely, suspiciously, when she asked him to sign the usual documents. As we looked through the archival files, a signature saying “Heil Hitler” caught our attention. Karim’s first reaction was to raise my attention to the fact that the small cell that we occupied had no direct windows to the exterior and that there could be gas streaming through the ventilation system. “Everywhere I go, I first check possible escape routes. My father taught me this” (field notes June 2013). His sense of threat together with my own trepidation which were provoked by the Nazi salutation made me shiver.

Finally, I used document and media analysis (newspaper articles, leaflets, private photos, videos, TV documentation) in order to cross and complement ethnographic data (Image 1.1). Media procurement and visioning were also sometimes integrated in relational dynamics. I obtained some of the most interesting pictures and movies through Parviz. The former carpet shop owner, in good shape despite being in his eighties, invited me to his home and enjoyed spending afternoons with me, scanning through his vast music and video archive together. He was more patient than me I admit. In the end, he handed me a DVD with a



**Image 1.1** Black tea, a tablecloth from Iran and a part of Siavash’s family archives at his home. (July 2013, author’s photo)

personal selection and one video struck me in particular: shot with an amateur camera in the 1990s, it showed the flat, green, northern German landscape passing before the front window of a Mercedes Benz while the tape recorder played Iranian classical music.

## The Structure of This Book

This book is a knitwork between fine-grained narratives taking the reader ever more deeply into the complexities of the social construction of diversity among Hamburg’s Iranians and how it relates to their chances and difficulties to create capital in different social fields. The four first chapters are “paired”, with each pair looking at social dynamics which involve two occupational groups who entertain transnational relations.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the ways import-export entrepreneurs negotiate their presence in Hamburg—a discussion that simultaneously traces

in the history of Iranian migration to the port city. Chapter 2 investigates how Ali and Jalal, two early Iranian merchants who came to Hamburg in the 1930s, mobilized kin to generate capital along the lines of generation, gender, and age and how this affects the way their children engage with other Iranians today. Chapter 3 reconstructs, through archival documents and historic accounts, how Iranian carpet merchants' collective identitary narrative became motivated by shared politics of value that engaged with changing systems of value in three local and transnational social fields over more than 60 years.

Chapters 4 and 5, in turn, concern contemporary dynamics and examine the individual trajectories and interactions among artists and people who consider themselves in connection to the world of art. Chapter 4 looks at the creation of collective identifications from an in-group perspective, that is, through the analysis of processes of inclusion and exclusion of different people in the cultural association Golestan. It illustrates what it means to claim culturally pluralistic identifications in the system of value that shapes the German public sphere and sees national identifications as mutually exclusive. Conversely, in Chap. 5, I take an intra-relational perspective to examine how boundary-making between three film professionals relates to their politics of value and barriers to their capital creation in different social fields.

Chapter 6 offers, in the examination of social interactions around the organization of an Iranian cultural festival, a context in which different agents that appeared in previous chapters interact. The juxtaposition of the different ways interlocutors engaged with the festival's organizer Behruz allows me to show how social differentiation among Iranians in Hamburg engages with multiple, contradictory systems of value.

In the conclusion I stress that migrants are active agents, who, depending on their personal trajectories, interests, and engagements, juggle resources to negotiate barriers to their capital creation in ephemeral, situational, often contradictory, and not always conscious ways in order to navigate swiftly vanishing and appearing chances and barriers to their generation of capital. Studying internal diversity, I argue, is showing how migrants are active agents in local and transnational relations that contest, evade, reproduce, and produce inequality.

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