Focused on personal thoughts, memories, and relationships, Goli Taraqqi’s fictional works are set against a background that reflects the contemporary history and social milieu of Iran during the last three decades of the Pahlavi dynasty as well as the author’s later life in diaspora, following the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Taraqqi’s pre-revolutionary publications include the novel Khab-e zemestani (Winter Sleep, 1972) and a collection of short stories titled Man ham Chegvara hastam (A Che Guevara in My Own Right, 1969), both of which deal with the routines and obsessions of disoriented characters. The first three collections of short stories that appeared following her emigration to France—Khatereh-haye parakandeh (Scattered Memories, 1992), Ja-ii digar (Another Place, 2000), and Do donya (Two Worlds, 2002)—are mostly autobiographical and deal thematically with the traumatic sense of displacement and the nostalgic reconstruction of homeland.

One of the key concepts in Taraqqi’s later publications is the notion of “Farang” and its signification. Etymologically, the term Farang is the Persianized version of the word France. The adjective Farangi is thus generally used to indicate an association with Farang, that is, with France and, by extension, with Europeans.
and Christians (see Dehkhoda, vol. 11, “Farang”). According to Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, the terms Farang and Farangi were once used to refer to “the people and lands of Christendom,” but since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they have come to refer to “the West and Westerners in general, more specifically to the lands and peoples of Europe and North America” (2–3). Almost all the stories in Taraqqi’s later collections deal, in one way or another, with the notion of “Farang.” Although Taraqqi does not necessarily locate Farang as the central theme of these stories, the word itself, its connotations, and the ironic references to the notion permeate her narratives.

**FARANG IN TARAQQI’S SHORT STORIES**

Generally speaking, the concept of “Farang” in Taraqqi’s work comes up in two types of stories. The first consists of stories that open in a diasporic setting but that continue with the reconstruction of a temporally and spatially remote homeland, mainly depicted in the author’s autobiographical flashbacks. Examples are “Otubus-e Shemiran” (“The Shemiran Bus”), “Dust-e kuchak” (“My Little Friend”), and “Gol-haye Shiraz” (“The Flowers of Shiraz”). The second type is made up of stories that are specifically set in diaspora and narrate the very experience of displacement, examples being “Madam Gorgeh” (“The Wolf Lady”) and “Adat-haye gharib-e Aqa-ye ‘Alef’ dar ghorbat” (“The Bizarre Comportment of Mr. Alpha in Exile”). While in the stories belonging to the former group the concept of “Farang,” alongside its attributes, is represented positively, those of the latter group reflect a counter-Farangi discourse. Taraqqi’s upper-middle-class characters, when located in Iran, are depicted as individuals infatuated by Farang and the sociocultural connotations it communicates. Their passion for Farang is generally represented in the ways they try to imitate the Farangi ideal, their emulative attitude being reified in their everyday manners, cultural activities, values, and ambitions. In this respect, if Farang (in the first place, a spatial term) is socioculturally perceived as an ideal, then it can be logically inferred that the individual’s transition from the location she or he already inhabits (home/Iran) to the desirable and spatially remote space of Farang (France) would result in that person’s general satisfaction. However, Taraqqi’s account of her characters in France discredits that hypothesis. These characters are depicted as disillusioned, dissatisfied, and disoriented. In this respect, the following question is raised: What function does Farang fulfill in the sociocultural space of home/
Iran that it fails to perform in France, which is allegedly the very embodiment of the notion? In order to answer this question, it is important to clarify some ambiguities regarding the concept of “Farang.”

**FARANG SIGNIFIED**

Farang, like any other concept, depends for its meaning on discursive practice. That is, both the denotative and the connotative significations of the term are constructed and communicated within an intricate network of cultural and contextual interactions and power relations, which make it impossible for the term to retain a stable and fixed meaning. In this respect, one major question to be explored, here, is the meaning of Farang.

In “The Work of Representation,” Stuart Hall explores the theoretical development and the dynamics of the relationship between the subject and meaning in a cultural context. Drawing upon Saussure, he points out that language is a representational phenomenon that functions through signs and difference. That is, any particular signifier (word, item, colour) represents the signified (meaning, message, concept) through its difference from other signifiers. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and generally agreed upon in any culture (30–31). In this sense, meaning is *constructed* in a particular sociocultural context and is dependent on “conventions” rather than “nature.” Accordingly, Hall argues that “if meaning is the result of . . . our social, cultural, and linguistic conventions, then meaning can never be finally fixed” (23). Here, “discourse” (in its Foucauldian sense) takes over language as a “system of representation.” Discourse is understood as “a group of statements which provide the language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (44). But the construction of meaning is not exclusively based on what can be linguistically communicated. Meaning is also conveyed through social practices such as ceremonies, rituals, behaviours, dress codes, and relations. Since “all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do . . . all practices have a discursive aspect” (44). Therefore, if meaning, practice, and the sociocultural context are so closely connected, then meaning is prone to change based on the conduct of the *subject* as well as his or her historical and geographical standpoint. In other words, it becomes unavoidable for the subject to be defined by—and in—the discourse in which she or he is located. The discourse forces the subject into a specific “subject position” and thereby defines him or her (56).
The same rules apply to the signification of the term Farang. The meaning of the word Farang is not fixed: it changes on the basis of the discourse in which the concept is articulated—first, on the basis of how, where, and when the term is used and its meaning thus constructed and expressed and, second, on the basis of the social practices it stimulates. In Taraqqi’s stories, the most important factor influencing the meaning of Farang is the subject’s transition from one sociocultural space to another (here, from Iran to France)—a movement that shatters the word’s previous connotations and makes it ambiguous. In this sense, the intricacies and ambiguities concerning the signification of the term Farang in Taraqqi’s stories are closely related to the concept of space. This is not simply because Farang primarily denotes Europe as a geographical locale but rather because its denotative and connotative meanings shift in accordance with the location of the perceiving subject (character). Regarding the perceiving subject, I emphasize that owing to Taraqqi’s autobiographical style and her somewhat class-conscious approach to the events that she incorporates into her narratives, the reader typically perceives the narratives from the vantage point of the Iranian upper middle class. In this respect, in exploring the multi-layered signification of the term Farang in Taraqqi’s stories, I limit my discussion to the perspectives of those characters who, at a certain point in time and place, are infatuated with Farang and its attractions rather than the ones who are intimidated by it. Accordingly, by the location of the perceiving subject, I mean the spatial relation between the geographical standpoint of the subject both to Europe (which is primarily what Farang refers to) and to what Farang denotes in a more sociocultural sense.4

In this sense, there are at least three layers of meaning within the concept of “Farang” in Taraqqi’s stories. The first is related to what Farang signifies for the subject living in Iran for whom it is perceived as a geographical point of orientation and a desirable object of emulation. The second layer is related to the moment of confrontation: the moment when the geographical distance between the subject and destination is overcome and, as a result, the subject is confronted with disillusionment and new interpretations of the concept. The third layer is related to how the signification of Farang is altered when the old and the new definitions of the term are reconsidered. In this case, the admiring and emulative attitudes of the subject in Iran are reviewed by the subject who has already been exposed to a newer signification of the term after emigration. The perceiving subject, accordingly, experiences a slippage in the signification of the concept of “Farang.” For him or her, Farang is no longer an admirable object of imitation nor is it only associated
with the biting experience of disillusionment. The meaning of Farang becomes vacillating and the truth of the term is disturbed. Although the first and the second attitudes toward the concept of “Farang” function as Taraqqi’s raw materials for her narratives, her retrospective authorial stance leads to an ironical style that undermines both. In other words, she tells us the stories from an in-between position—from “other narrative spaces” (Bhabha, Location 177–78).

Irony and the Third Space

Here, I would like to draw some links between irony, as a linguistic and literary trope, and Homi Bhabha’s notion of cultural translation. Taraqqi’s later stories are generally narrated in an ironic and somewhat objective tone. At the same time, they are narrated from the specific subject position of a marginalized migrant—the position that Bhabha refers to as “the third space” (Bhabha, “Interview” 211). The point here is that Taraqqi’s ironical style is not merely a matter of choice but is also a result of the discursive position she occupies as a migrant author writing about her own experiences—an in-between hybrid subject position from which two or more cultures (and hence two or more discourses) go through the process of cultural translation. It is only through this “third position of removal and distance” that the subject is able to “objectify and judge the different strata of culture” (Byrne 32). Through distance and objectification, the representational aspect of culture is revealed. This means that what is generally signified as the stable truth in a cultural discourse can be approached as merely a conventional representation of a message through cultural translation in the third space. In this way, the authority of truth is destabilized and the effect becomes ironic.

As an Iranian writer living in France and writing about nostalgia, homeland, and diaspora, Taraqqi occupies a third-subject position—a position that enables her to go back and forth between two cultural discourses. In this sense, she is constantly engaged in an act of translation in order to produce meaning. During the process of cultural translation, the authority of truth is destabilized and the representational function of cultural practices is revealed. In the story “Gol-haye Shiraz,” for instance, Taraqqi provides the reader with the stereotypical images and sociocultural practices that both convey and construct the Farangi discourse. What makes the story amusing and ironic is the fact that through her authorial stance (positioned in between Iran and France) and certain narratological strategies, Taraqqi illustrates the ways in which Farang is represented in the discourse
of the upper and upper middle classes in the Iran of the 1950s. I will come back to this issue with more detailed discussions in the analysis of the story “Gol-haye Shiraz.”

**REPRESENTATION, IDENTIFICATION, AND THE SELF-SPACE**

Before dealing with the textual analysis of the stories “Gol-haye Shiraz” and “Madam Gorgeh,” I return to a question posed earlier in order to formulate the central premise of this paper: What function does Farang (as a discursive construct) fulfill for Taraqqi’s characters in the sociocultural space of home/Iran that it fails to perform in France? The answer to this question can be comprehended in terms of the relation between identification and the possibility to construct self-space in a specific discursive domain.

If the subject is defined by discourse, then identification (i.e., the construction and the communication of the meaning of self) becomes a discursive phenomenon, too. That is, identification becomes dependent on—and only possible in—a specific discourse. In other words, the identification strategies developed by an individual in a particular discourse fail to function in another discourse. The subject, therefore, has to develop other strategies (through language and practice) to be able to represent the self in the new discursive space that she or he occupies. In this sense, what lies beneath the discontentment of Taraqqi’s characters in Farang has to do with their inability to preserve the same identification strategies for the representation of the self, and thereby, the construction of self-space.

Since any discourse is developed in a specific social and cultural territory, identification becomes space-dependent. This, however, is not the only factor that relates identification to the notion of space. The relation between identification and the concept of space stems also from the fact that the construction of identity functions through symbolic or “signifying practices.” If identity is constructed and communicated through difference (as is the case with any other signifier in a sign system), then there should exist a virtual (or even actual) borderline delineating the difference (Hall, “Introduction” 3)—there should exist boundaries that outline the territories of the self.

In this respect, the present essay will be engaged with the textual analysis of two of Taraqqi’s stories: “Gol-haye Shiraz,” from the collection *Do donya* (2002), set in the Tehran of the 1950s, and “Madam Gorgeh,” from the collection *Khatereh-haye parakandeh* (1992), set in Paris during the 1980s. The analysis of the former story
will be concerned with the relation between identity formation and the notion of space vis-à-vis Farangi values, and that of the latter, with displaced identities and the relation between sign systems and space (re)construction in the very space of Farang.

“GOL-HAYE SHIRAZ”: SIGNIFYING THE FARANGI AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-SPACE

“Gol-haye Shiraz” delineates a city on the verge of change. The story is set in the summer of 1953 and sketches the streets of Tehran from downtown Laleh-zar to the northern district of Shemiran. Amid the confusion during the overthrow of Mosaddeq’s government, the fourteen-year-old narrator gives us the account of the background setting of the narrative in a rather lighthearted but ironical tone. Wandering down the streets of Tehran, she is enticed by the sparkling shop-windows, cinemas, bistros, bookstores, colourful ads and posters, fashionable dandies, and bantering vagabonds.

Concerning the sociohistorical setting of the story, it is relevant that European cultural practices—such as dress codes, foods and beverages, arts and entertainment, and moral conventions—helped to create a new value system during the reign of the Pahlavis. These “Farangi” cultural practices came to exercise hegemony over the already familiar for at least three reasons: first, because they were promoted by the state authorities; second, because they were new, unfamiliar, and exotic; and third, because of the economic superiority of the social class that consumed them. The construction of this value system elicited, in consequence, certain reactions from the individuals exposed to it. This reaction or attitude fluctuated between the extremes of “Europhilia” and “Europhobia” (Tavakoli-Targhi 19). In another sense, this value system functioned as a point of orientation based on which subject positions or identities were constructed.

The change that the city in “Gol-haye Shiraz” is about to undergo is of a spatial nature. Not only is the change rooted in remote places and geographies (such as Europe or America), but it also constructs new boundaries within the larger space it enters. The introductory paragraph of the story is full of nouns and modifiers designating different social and cultural spaces within the setting of the narrative. For example, the Armenian Madam Yelena, who teaches dance to children, has formed a group, Gol-haye Shiraz, whose young members give public performances (attended mostly by parents and family friends) in spaces rented for the occasion,
such as Talar-e Farhang and Cinema Metropole (Taraqqi, “Gol-haye Shiraz” 95). Not only do these cultural spaces function as performance venues for the newly imported cultural products (such as international dance, films, and plays), but they also vividly signify newly constructed exotic spaces through their very names. In addition to Cinema Metropole, for instance, two other cinemas mentioned in the story have Euro-American names: Cinema Mike (103) and Cinema Rex (109). Even Cinema Bahar (101) is immediately described as the cinema screening American films.

Apart from this, Talar-e Farhang, because of the phonetic similarity of the word Farhang to the term Farang, signifies a discursive tension between the geographically indefinite notion of “farhang” (culture) and the spatially specific word Farang (Europe). This tension arises from the connotations of the term farhang in Persian: the word is in no sense a value-neutral term. Although it is an objective reference to the notion of culture in general, it is also widely used in everyday conversation—in combination with prefixes and other words—to engender complimentary or derogatory terms and phrases such as bi-farhang (uncultured), ba-farhang (cultured), and farhang-e paiin (low culture). Of course, an equivalent usage can also be seen in European languages: for example, uncultured, unkultiviert. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the tension communicated by the term uncultured in a European context can be explained in terms of class dialectics. In the Iranian context, however, this is not exclusively the case, since the matter of class in the contemporary society of Iran, in addition to its economic and educational dimensions, is rather defined by the extent of the acquisition of the standards of Western culture by the subject in question. That is, the signification of farhang is constructed through the discourse of “civilized West versus uncivilized East.” In this sense, the concept of “farhang” (culture) cannot be exclusively interpreted, and hence communicated, without its spatial connotations.

When it comes to the relationship between identity and cultural practices, it is interesting to note that the introduction of certain cultural practices into a society also means that they are introduced into the social sign system of that particular region. That is, they are practiced to be perceived, and when perceived, interpreted. Stuart Hall refers to this phenomenon as cultural “representation” (“Work of Representation” 15 and 21). In cultural representation, a certain behaviour goes through a two-stage procedure before the process of signification is completed. First, a meaning is encoded in that certain behaviour, and then it is decoded and interpreted by the perceiver. The encoded and decoded messages play a significant role in the construction of an identity and its communication; in other words,
“codes make it possible . . . to establish the translatability between our concepts and our languages which enables meaning to pass . . . and be effectively communicated within a culture” (22).

In order to explore the representational aspect of Farangi social practices in “Gol-haye Shiraz,” it is useful to see what Farang and Farangi are associated with in the text of the story. The word Farang and its derivatives appear only four times in the text of “Gol-haye Shiraz.” However, what gives the reader the impression that the story is permeated with the concept and images of Farang is the kind of discourse constituted around the very term. Regarding this issue, the descriptions about Gol-Maryam’s father provide the reader with appropriate examples.

Gol-Maryam is the narrator’s newly found friend. She is also the focal point of the narrative. Although the narrative does not begin with Gol-Maryam’s story, somewhere in the middle, she attracts the narrator’s attention, after which the story continues and finishes with a focus on her and her father. Gol-Maryam’s father used to be a doctor but has stopped practicing medicine as a result of some undisclosed bitter experience. He is described as a person who “lived abroad for many years, in France, in Switzerland, and Belgium. He knows several languages and has read thousands and thousands of books” (Taraqqi, “Gol-haye Shiraz” 104). A few pages later, another descriptive passage about the father appears. The passage more or less reiterates the same points but ends emphatically with a brief conclusion: “My father is a doctor. He has spent most of his life abroad, in France. He has always thought rationally and scientifically. Like Farangiha” (106; my emphasis).

In the sociocultural context of Iran, the fact of having travelled to or lived in Europe communicates a Farangi identity. Science, rationality, and the command of knowledge, implicitly juxtaposed to superstition, emotionality, and ignorance, are also associated with the West. Thus, embedded in Gol-Maryam’s description is the colonial relation between West and East, with the emphasis falling on the resemblance of her father to the former. Since Gol-Maryam’s father is not originally European, however, but rather like Farangiha, he is presumably engaged in a process of emulation in order to communicate the resemblance. The practice of emulating what is attributed to Europeans results in the formation of cultural signs: that is, titles (such as “Doctor”), claims to knowledge (through books, for instance), and a rational and scientific point of view all become signals for the perceiver’s interpretation. In other words, these cultural signs represent and communicate a discursive message, namely, that the person displaying them has an identity based on the imitation of that which is attributed to Farang—thus, a Farangi identity.
Regarding Taraqqi’s ironical style, it is through irony and during the process of cultural translation that the authority of truth is destabilized and the representational function of cultural practices is revealed. At this point, therefore, it is relevant to explore the ironic elements used in describing the character of Gol-Maryam’s father, for instance, in order to better comprehend how Faranginess shifts from being a stable truth to merely a representation of a particular concept.

Gol-Maryam’s father is regarded as a Farangi person, since he is allegedly rational and has a scientific point of view. This description is, however, followed by the paradoxical information that he regularly holds meetings to summon ghosts and claims to have contact with the ghosts of the dead (105, 106). Here, superstition and rationality are put side by side quite matter of factly, as if they were not in conflict. The narrator’s objective tone adds to the ironic effect. In the message transmitted to the reader, the father’s rationality (which is a Farangi attribute) is destabilized. In other words, rationality is no longer a truth about the father but only an attribute that makes his character signify as a Farangi person. The term rationality, in this respect, becomes only an arbitrary signifier of a Farangi identity to the perceiver who shares and has knowledge about the sociocultural conventions of the same discourse.

The Farangi identity, in this sense, is represented through certain stereotypical images and characteristics. The word image, here, is a key term, since the function of an image in communicating messages is the closest to the function of a signifier in a sign system. Another descriptive passage about Gol-Maryam’s father allows me to elaborate on this issue. The narrator is spending an evening with Gol-Maryam and her father at their place:

That evening’s program after dinner is looking at the photo album: the photos of Mr. Doctor in different cities all over the world: with an umbrella, a hat, and a raincoat in front of a church; in swimming gear on the beach; in a black frock coat, a white official shirt, and a bow tie; arm in arm with a blond woman; on a bike; on a horse; in the park; at the zoo; at the museum; lying down; standing up; sitting down; and so on. (109)

Taraqqi captures the character of Gol-Maryam’s father in caricature-like snapshots. The fact that the photos are arranged in an album and watched in the company of a stranger emphasizes that they have been primarily taken with the intention to be shown—with the intention of transferring a message to the perceiver. Farang and the message “I am very much like Farangiha” emanate from the photos. The
garments and the accessories mentioned are particularly interesting: for instance, the umbrella, hat, raincoat, swimming gear, frock coat, and bow tie all belong to the category of Western clothing. The places referred to are also quite telling: the beach, the park, the zoo, and the museum. Although the equivalents of these spaces have also been constructed in Iranian urban space, these spaces and the very cultural practices performed within their structures originated in the West. So the photos reflecting Gol-Maryam’s father, dressed and performing “like Farangiha” in the very space of Farang, indicate and communicate his Faranginess. What undermine the very concept of Faranginess, however, are the humorous tone and the ironic implications of the narrator as she describes the father. The narrator is reporting on the events of the evening that she spends at her friend’s home. Although the photos are supposed to be entertaining, they bore the narrator. She is “yawning” all the time and is “exhausted with all the photos and memories” (110). The tempo of the text also has an ironic effect. The narrator starts describing the photos—first, in long descriptive clauses but then switching to briefer prepositional clauses read with a faster tempo: “on the bike; on the horse; in the park; at the zoo; at the museum” (109). Finally, the description is closed with references to the father’s body postures: “lying down; standing up; sitting down” (109). The visual image of the snapshots, one moving after the other with an increasing tempo, calls to mind the movements produced by a flip book or motion-picture animation. The whole description of the father becomes, therefore, caricaturized. In this sense, the seriousness of Faranginess is destabilized, and thereby, the symbolic (representational) function of Farangi practices is revealed.

If we accept that Gol-Maryam and her father resemble a Farangi identity to a certain degree in a certain discourse, then it is interesting to see where and how the borderlines of their difference are delineated. Gol-Maryam and her father live in a lonely castle-like house in Shemiran, surrounded by “tall pine trees” (107). They have isolated themselves from the rest of the world and rarely have contact with other people. From her very first encounter with Gol-Maryam, the narrator points to the invisible borderlines between Gol-Maryam and the rest of the dancers. She drives back home in a car that has dark gray glass. The narrator wonders “why the inside of the car cannot be seen from outside” (106). She describes Gol-Maryam as someone exceptional, someone who is different from others (tafteh-ye joda bafteh) and “belongs to another tribe” (99). The descriptions about her difference continue with the narrator’s comments on her beauty, which is explicitly attributed to her similarity to Europeans:
[She is] thin and pale with dark, big, black eyes. She is beautiful and her beauty is of a special kind as if she were half European, half French, half Russian. Her name suits her. Her skin is as white as tuberoses and, contrary to other Shiraz Flowers, she smells good. Madam Yelena is in love with her. (99)

The position of the aesthetic criteria in this excerpt is an unstable one. Gol-Maryam, with her “dark, big, black eyes” and light complexion, does not necessarily resemble the most typical European visage. Therefore, the narrator’s comparison of her beauty to Europeans does not stem from an actual resemblance; rather, Gol-Maryam is generally recognized as a Farangi type in a specific sociocultural context (because of her manners, conduct, lifestyle, and, of course, being the daughter of a Farangi father). As a result, her beauty is interpreted as “a special kind,” not because she looks like Europeans but because she resembles the Farangi.

In “Gol-haye Shiraz,” a Farangi identity is also communicated through having a Farangi mentality. Since thoughts and ideas cannot be concretely displayed in public, the subject in question has to adopt certain behaviours and use certain objects in order to render the intangible mindset communicable. The narrator in the story, seemingly naïve but endowed with an ironic voice, foregrounds such behaviours and items not only to represent (signify) a specific disposition but also to caricaturize it. What exactly constitutes a Farangi disposition is not directly discussed in the story, but according to the text of the narrative, a person who thinks like Europeans is relatively open-minded in regard to the social relation of the sexes. The parents of Parviz (a friend of the narrator), for instance, allow him to throw mixed parties and “dance with girls his age or even older” (113). A person with a Farangi outlook should also be politically involved and have great affinity with books and all sorts of other print publications. In this respect, smoking, political engagement, journals, and even books come to be linked with the characters’ Farangi mentality in the text of the story.5

Smoking while in deep thought is a hackneyed and stereotypical pose signifying intellectualism. The pose can be observed in photographs of prominent Iranian poets, artists, actors, and political activists of the 1950s up until 1980s, who are, in many cases, even dressed in Western garments. In “Gol-haye Shiraz,” Taraqqi reproduces the stereotype in descriptive passages about some of the characters through a certain narratological strategy. The following two passages provide examples of these techniques. The first passage depicts Gol-Maryam’s father, and the second describes Parviz, the dandy teenager of the neighbourhood, and his parents:
Mr. Doctor [. . .] is wearing his pajamas—silken pants and shirt, in dark blue with a yellow collar. His room smells of cologne and cigars. His whiskey glass is half full. He himself is also half asleep, half drunk. Everywhere is full of books and magazines, from the floor up to the ceiling, bookshelves, bookshelves, bookshelves, covering the four walls. On the bedside table, there is a big framed photo of Dr. Mosaddeq. (108)

[Parviz] gives political lectures. His father and mother think like Farangiha. [. . .] Every Friday afternoon, we gather at his place and hold a literary and political session. Parviz lends us the books he has read and talks bigger than our juvenile minds. He has pinned the picture of Lenin to his wall and intends to change the world. His parents are members of the Tudeh Party and smoke cigarettes. (113)

On the narratological level, the functional objective of both of these passages is characterization. By representing the characters in question alongside certain items and actions, the author not only introduces the characters but also presents them as stereotypical. The cliché, as mentioned above, is the image of the smoking Farangi intellectual. The linkage among intellectualism, smoking, and Faranginess in each passage is established by the employment of descriptive sentences, the subject matter of which is similar in the two excerpts. In other words, the existence of similar characteristics in certain entities produces types. In both excerpts, for instance, the characters are portrayed as Farangi—in the former through the way the father is dressed, the glass of whisky, and the odour of cologne and, in the latter, through the explicit description of the parent’s mental outlook. It is worth noting here that the exact phrase “like Farangiha” (106) has been used earlier in the story with reference to the father’s way of thinking. Moreover, books and political issues are mentioned with a certain degree of ironic exaggeration and the photos of political leaders are displayed in both excerpts. Smoking is another subject common to both descriptions—in the former, the action is terminated but the effect is perceptible through the very smell of cigars, and in the latter, the act of smoking is referred to as the parents’ habit.

In order to comprehend better the irony of these passages, it is useful to consider the type of narrator from whose vantage point the story is rendered. The seriousness of the quotations above is questionable because these are the words and comments of a teenage girl about the weird father of a friend and a fascinating sixteen-year-old boy, who, so to say, “gives political lectures.” The teenage narrator
observes and categorizes naïvely; nevertheless, her point of view is merged with that of the cynical author who remembers and despises. The ironic voice of the author is heard, for instance, later on when the narrator wonders “what this man [Gol-Maryam’s father], who deals with ghosts and indulges in the events of the past, has to do with Mosaddeq” (121).

The teenage narrator observes, associates items and actions with certain meanings, and imitates in order to perform within a semantic system. For example, her association between Farang and smoking is illustrated in the comparison she makes between the taste of Farangi cherry ice-cream and the joy of smoking stealthily (119). Similarly, she uses books in order to communicate specific messages. The symbolic function of books, for instance, is highlighted when the narrator walks back and forth in front of Rahi Mo’ayyeri (an Iranian poet and lyric writer [1909–68]) carrying two thick books that she has specifically brought to the course with the intention of attracting Mo’ayyeri’s attention (97). The irony is accentuated by the fact that Mo’ayyeri was never married during his lifetime (Sabur 13).

Categorization, or determining semantic borderlines, is performed by the subject in the dynamic process of constructing semantic systems. Such categorizations can be observed in the prevalent usage of the word ahl in combination with politics and printed materials in the text of “Gol-haye Shiraz”: phrases such as “ahl-e she’r va ketab” (a person interested in poetry and books) (97), “ahl-e bahs” (a person interested in taking part in discussions) (98), “ahl-e ketab va ra’iznameh” (a person interested in books and newspapers) (99), “ahl-e siyasat” (a person interested in politics) (121). The idiomatic use of the word ahl as seen in the structures of these phrases indicates a person who is considerably involved with books, magazines, and politics. But apart from this, the literal meaning of the word ahl (inmate, inhabitant) once again denotes geographies and boundaries that connote inclusion and exclusion.

The boundaries of identity, and their struggle for hegemony, can also be observed in the setting of the story, in the breech between shahr (city) and Shemiran (102, 104, 113)—with the latter being located on top of the former, for instance—or even more emphatically, in the descriptions about Tajrish Square where “up on the bridge, Tajrish is divided into two parts” (118). Sa’d-abad Street, which resembles a glorious party furnished with fashionable men and women, is decidedly juxtaposed to the “the other side” of Tajrish—the bazaar entrance and the district of Darband—which, being “dim and less crowded,” belongs to taxi and bus drivers, women wearing chadors, street fights, shouting machos, and drunken vagabonds.
The borderline between the two sides of the square is emphasized by the narrator's statement that she and her friends “are not allowed to cross to the other side” (119). They always meet in front of “Villa Ice-Cream Store,” where they can have the brand new Farangi fruit ice-cream: “the ice-cream that smells of another world, a world on the other side of the borderlines” (119). The two parts of Tajrish construct a spatial binary. The spatial binary also represents Farang as the source of joy and as the ideal object (space) of desire. The names of the streets are also quite telling: Sa’d-abad (place of prosperity) and Darband (captive). But the spatial binary also implies that all this joy takes its significance from the fact that it is juxtaposed with the world of the common. In other words, the process of identification functions through inclusion and exclusion. Identification would be a loose term without the emphasis on difference and without the interpreting eye of the other.

In “Gol-haye Shiraz,” Farang, in the way it is represented and interpreted, is perceived as an ideal object of imitation and a point of orientation. In the socio-cultural context of the story, elements that are representative of Farang (including characters) are symbolically associated with rather positive notions such as knowledge, rationality, intellectualism, freedom, flexibility, exotic appeal, joy, and beauty. Certain social and cultural practices, similarly, come to signify an individual’s association with Farang and what it stands for. The emulative attitude toward Farang therefore leads to the formulation of social codes that can be deciphered by an observer who recognizes and understands the discursive conventions. It is through this act of decoding that the boundaries between social groups are delineated and social identity thus defined. The borderlines of social difference in “Gol-haye Shiraz” are traceable everywhere in the setting of the story—in cultural spaces such as cinemas and theatres, in the dichotomous charting of neighbourhoods, in the categorization of people into different groups, in the characters’ specific lifestyles. In other words, in “Gol-haye Shiraz,” Farang functions as a shared point of cultural reference that enables the construction of self and social spaces.

In “Madam Gorgeh,” however, the term Farang loses its previous connotations and stops signifying joy, beauty, or knowledge; instead, it signifies being “cold, sad, and unaffectionate” (Taraqqi, “Madam Gorgeh” 141). The Farangiha, too, are not regarded as rational or flexible but rather are referred to as “greedy, superficial exploiters” (140). The previous signification of the term Farang is shattered in the new discursive space—the space that, paradoxically enough, has the same geographical dimensions as the Farang of homeland. In this new and ambiguous discursive space, the protagonist of the story is struggling to construct self-space.
“Madam Gorgeh” is apparently an autobiographical account of Taraqqi’s life in a small flat in central Paris, where she lived for several years with her two children. The plot of the narrative focuses on the relationship between the autodiegetic narrator of the story and her nagging neighbour (Madam Gorgeh), who is always blaming them for making excessive noise. The story’s climax is built upon the narrator’s extremely harsh argument with the neighbour after discovering that all her claims about the irritating noises have been unsubstantiated.

One of the major problematics of the story is the construction of space in the setting of the narrative. The narrator is incessantly obsessed with the question of space and repeatedly complains about the lack of self-space in Paris. The concepts of space, borderlines, rooms, home, and the like are frequently mentioned in the story. The very opening lines, for instance, indicate that “life in diaspora, in Paris, is full of hidden anxieties and the guilty feeling that one is the outsider who has come from the other side of the borderlines and has usurped the space of the insiders” (Taraqqi, “Madam Gorgeh” 140). Throughout the story, the narrator refers to her apartment with phrases such as “small and limited,” “a mouse nest” (142), “four walls” (147), “a hand-span space,” and “a place in which one cannot stir” (143). Not only is the narrator’s space small and limited, but the very act of possessing it is also denied her, for, after all, she is an outsider—an outsider who can, of course, be the usurper but definitely not the owner.

The actions of the narrator and her children are also restricted and repressed in the very space of the apartment. In order not to disturb Madam Gorgeh, they have to “be cautious,” “stay silent,” and “walk quietly” (147). They even receive a letter from the neighbour “emphasizing that they should stay at home less and rather try to spend their time outside” (147). Later in the story, the narrator draws a comparison between her present situation and her previous life in Tehran, where she was “not horrified by the neighbours and was able to scream, caper about, laugh, cry, and dance” in her private territory (150).

This latter example correlates the concept of space with an individual’s capability of self expression. If we interpret the absence of self-expression as the nonexistence of the self, then it is possible to link the concepts of space, identity, and language (or any other shared sign system through which self-expression becomes possible). The interrelation among these three concepts is better clarified in the following excerpt, where the narrator, describing her efforts to placate Madam Gorgeh, ironically compares “silence” to “death”:

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I’d promise her that all these inhuman voices would never be repeated again [. . .] and that I’d fly away, without my feet touching the floor, like a light mosquito, to the end of the corridor; and I’d spend three days and three nights under the mattress, or under the bed if necessary, in the silence of death. I would try my best to stick to the rules of this land and adhere to the principles of its people. (142)

Here, two actions—the muting of “inhuman voices” and the shrinkage of the self to the size of a “mosquito”—result in the erasure of the self. The same relations can also be detected in the narrator’s death wish, the entombment imagery, and the association between death and silence. In other words, what results in the nonexistence of the self has both semantic and spatial significance. In this sense, identification can also be defined as the ability to construct self-space through mastery over a particular sign system: that is, mastery over the rules of encoding and decoding. Accordingly, the trauma of displacement is not merely caused by transference from one particular space to the other but rather by transference from one “semantic realm” (Syzska 11) to the other. This issue is verified in the last sentence of the above excerpt, where the narrator talks about adherence to the “rules” and “principles” of the “land” that she has recently entered.

The location of the narrator in the story of “Madam Gorgeh” is a liminal one. However, not only is she geographically displaced, but she also occupies a space that has shifted semantically from her original. This issue, by itself, foregrounds the significance of language in the formation of Bhabha’s in-between position—as “a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (“Interview” 211). By significance of language, I do not exclusively refer to the fact that the subject in question (here, the narrator) has not yet acquired the foreign language with which she has to deal in the new locality but rather the semantic ambiguity caused by displacement—an ambiguity that gives way to the subject’s interpreting attempts, an ambiguity that is the generative force behind “cultural translation” (209–10).

The displaced subject is exposed to a new sign system that has to be learned and internalized before identity formation is ever possible. In other words, integration precedes identification. Several times in the story, the narrator points to her inability to make sense of the ambiguous situation in which she is trapped. She refers to the neighbour, for instance, as “the ominous ghost who has a perpetual, invisible presence” in her “chaotic” life (Taraqqi, “Madam Gorgeh” 141). Some lines further, she indicates that having just arrived, they “don’t know the whys and hows of living in Farang, [. . .] have been thrown up to the other side of the world and
turn around each other like sleepwalkers” (141). Here, we can see that the concept of “Farang,” which in the story of “Gol-haye Shiraz” is assumed as already known, becomes ambiguous. In order to render the new space intelligible, the narrator frequently articulates generalized descriptions about the manners and lifestyle of Parisians and thereby attempts to construct narratives about her surroundings:

People, in this town, do not sit out on the balcony of their houses; they do not chatter and giggle over nonsense; they don’t spend their invaluable time for happy-go-lucky blather. [ . . . ] The French do not easily open up the doors of their houses [ . . . ] greetings, here, are not regular. (143–44)

Along the same lines, it is also relevant to pay attention to the concept of rights. What determines an individual’s right to a certain behaviour in a social context? In addition to the scripted version of rights, generally known as the law, there is an unwritten convention that ascertains the rights of an individual in any community. This conventional legal system is embedded in the behavioural sign system of that community. That is, in order for a person to know about his or her rights and act upon them, it is indispensable for that individual to have enough knowledge about the discourse in which she or he is communicating. In “Madam Gorgeh,” the ambiguity of the narrator’s situation is due to the fact that she is not yet able to recognize what her rights are. She is constantly obsessed with a vague sense of guilt. Contemplating her situation, she refers to herself as “the Iranian, accused of an unknown guilt,” a person who does not “have the right to object” (143); later, commenting on her intimidated relationship with the neighbour, she muses, “[L]ittle by little we have forgotten that we, too, are human beings and everyone is free in his own house [ . . . ] we are not used to defending our own rights, since we do not know them in this very land” (147).

Significantly, the rising action of the plot is also initiated at the very instant when the narrator becomes assured of her right to act. It is midnight and the children are in bed when the neighbour knocks at the door complaining about the noise they make. With increasing excitement, the narrator relates:

I stand still. I listen. There is sheer silence. [ . . . ] There is no need for the French language; there is no need for any knowledge about the cultures of East and West. It is the simple logic of all humankind. There is no sound inside, and the neighbour from the lower floor is wrong. This time, I won’t be bullied, since I am right; and being right is a great privilege that gives me power and courage.

(151–52)
Upon recognizing her right, the narrator explodes, abuses the neighbour, and harshly chases her away. The neighbour never comes back, and in this way, the first self-space is constructed in the setting of the narrative. The narrator describes the life of herself and her children in the absence of Madam Gorgeh: “life regains its natural form,” “we talk cheerfully with no fear,” “we sit on the balcony and laugh with no apprehension,” “we go out when we want and staying out is not an obligation” (154).

The framework of a home, as one of the most symbolic terms referring to the concept of self-space, is finally delineated in the setting of the story. Although, from a narratological point of view, the conflict of the plot is somehow resolved, the text of the story bears witness to the continuing obsession with an original homeland: “Years pass and we still dream about going back” (155). The present tense of the verb “pass” indicates that probably there will be no end to the obsession with the idea of an ever-postulated return and the troubled sense of belonging. This issue is even better emphasized in the original Persian text, where the verb “pass” is in the present continuous tense—sal-ha migozarad—inducing a sense of perpetuity as if the oscillation of the self in between two spaces, once inaugurated, might never be completely resolved.

Conclusion

In Taraqqi’s stories “Gol-haye Shiraz” and “Madam Gorgeh,” the reader is exposed to two different significations of the term Farang. Its meaning and connotations, and what it generally signifies for the subject/character communicating in a specific discourse/setting, vary extensively from one story to the other. While the word Farang, in the former story, appears to represent a concept already known and signifying positive notions such as knowledge, beauty, and joy, in the latter (paradoxically set in the very geographical dimensions of Farang), the term loses those connotations and becomes ambiguous.

In the setting of “Gol-haye Shiraz,” Farang functions as the ideal point of orientation for the identifying self. Through what Farang represents and how it is interpreted in the semantic system of the setting of the story, the differentiation of the self becomes possible, and thereby, the boundaries of identification can be constructed. However, in the case of “Madam Gorgeh,” the displaced subject, having entered into the ambiguous semantic realm of Farang, faces difficulties with the construction of self-space. Self-expression, as the indispensible prerequisite for
the existence of the self, becomes problematic in the new sign system and, thereby, the construction of identity. The ambiguity associated with Farang (the subject’s new geographical standpoint) is therefore not merely directed to a specific locale but rather to a liminal semantic situation that disturbs the certainties exposing the subject to an array of possible interpretations. The encounter with the ambiguous, in consequence, leads to the subject’s urge for narration.

NOTES

1 Included in the collection *Ja-ii digar* are three stories—“Derakht-e golabi” (“The Pear Tree”), “Bozorg banu-ye ruh-e man” (“The Great Lady of My Soul”), and “Ja-ii digar” (“Another Place”)—that do not specifically address issues surrounding Farang and the diasporic situation, although, in keeping with the title of the collection, they do deal with the concept of space. In addition, Taraqqi’s most recent collection, *Forsat-e dobareh* (Second Chance, 2014), contains several stories that do not concern matters of emigration and displacement.

2 Considered on its own, “Gol-haye Shiraz” might seem an exception, as the story is not explicitly framed within a diasporic setting. However, the collection *Do donya* is framed by two narratives, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the book, both of which are set in France. In these two stories, the autodiegetic narrator declares that the stories in the body of the book, of which “Gol-haye Shiraz” is one, are the result of her obsessive retrospections during her residence at a mental hospital in France.

3 Three of these stories—“The Shemiran Bus,” “My Little Friend,” and “The Bizarre Comportment of Mr. Alpha in Exile”—are included in *A Mansion in the Sky*, an anthology of Taraqqi’s stories translated by Faridoun Farrokh. All translations in this essay are, however, my own.

4 No doubt the signification of the term *Farang* and the way it influences an individual’s sociocultural practices is also a matter of class. But in this essay, I have chosen to limit myself to the matter of space.

5 Books and other published materials function as symbols in “Gol-haye Shiraz.” Several times, the story implies or directly expresses an association between books and Farangi characters. In this sense, certain items, subjects, and images such as photos, books, magazines, and political issues are signs used to express a certain message, which not only imparts the character’s desire to be perceived as learned but also conveys an association with Farang. Nevertheless, I emphasize that this in no sense implies a factual association between books and the West in Iranian history and culture. What is at issue here is that in this specific story, such an association is implied: books and other published materials are presented ironically and not literally, and the characters affiliated with books (as symbolic items) and political causes are the ones who are also described as Farangi.
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