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Research focus : Globalization
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A Case Study from Iran

Female Subjectivities in Times of Globalization

Research Questions

International exchange programmes have attracted a lot of Iranian female students to go abroad every year. Embarking upon a brief sojourn outside Iran, students are faced with divergent cultural and social circumstances, challenges and opportunities. In response, some might undergo a process of "identity development" and revise their views, while others may actively reinforce the gender norms of their home country.

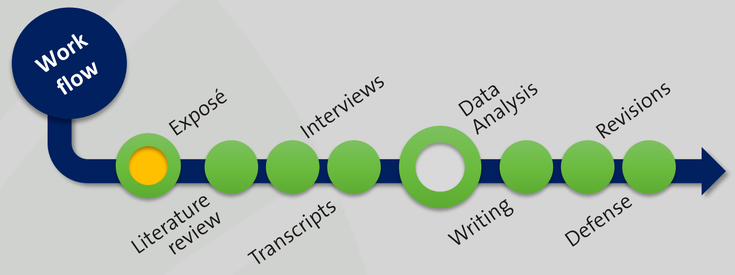
Their international experience, however, could challenge the social relations and in the longer term, provoke social change. This is of great importance to explore what aspect of gender norms in Iran is the target of attack and revision and what aspect is considered appropriate to maintain and strengthen. Listening to the stories of their experiences abroad, Iranian women are, in fact, producing a unique version of womanhood. Accordingly, our main research question would be: "what it means to be/become an Iranian young educated woman in times of globalization?"

↘ What happens to a young Iranian student during an exchange abroad? How do they story their experiences? Where is gender in their stories?

↘ Do these exchange programmes in culturally different contexts leave any impact on female students? In what ways does going abroad play a role in students' definitions of themselves as women? Is there a pattern in the end?

Method

The qualitative method of "narrative inquiry" will be applied in this study to conduct phone-based, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and give voice to 15-20 young Iranian female M.A./PhD students aged 25-35 with the background of doing exchange in Europe, Canada and the US to reveal themselves as gendered entities.



Theoretical Framework

↘ **Globalization**
Antony Giddens
↘ **Cultural aspect of globalization: communication technologies**
Arjun Appadurai
↘ **Gender-related theories**
Erving Goffman/ West and Zimmerman/ Michael Foucault/ Judith Butler

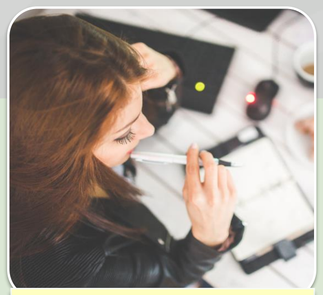
Globalization is not just about what is "out there", remote, but also influencing "in here", intimate relationships between individuals. Iranian women, therefore, following the concept of "structuration", produce, replace, reinforce or ignore the gender-related norms and re-construct the concept of "womanhood" throughout their active, everyday interactions. It is a site for "doing gender" where human agencies try to act in a gender-appropriate manner controlled and monitored by social groups known as social forces. Power, in this sense, plays a crucial role in naturalizing and perpetuating the gender relations, shaping individuals' understanding about the "correct" and supposedly "natural" forms of being a woman or becoming more feminine through shaping habit like dieting.

Contemporary humans, on the other hand, subject to an extraordinary diversity of information through communication technologies, are intensely influenced by the concepts, lifestyles and images from well beyond their immediate locales. "Self-identity" in modern time, therefore, would be a reflexive project: the story of who we are and how we came to be where we are now.

Hypothetical Perspective

Communication
Providing the student with opportunities to negotiate and exchange information and ideas

Hijab
There might be different situations to experience:
1. Belief
2. Compulsion
3. Choice



Freedom/options
Feeling free and safe. Having more options to pick from.

Self-identity
Deeper understanding about personal abilities.
feeling more powerful, more independent to make decisions.

Four main orderly stages are anticipated to happen for each above-mentioned sites:

1. Watching / observing
2. Experiencing the difference
3. Making comparisons
4. Revising or strengthen the old thoughts.

Young Iranian students would go through a change anyway. Revising an old belief, finding a new one to believe, other possibilities and forms of womanhood to consider or merely sticking to a certain way of thinking would be only some of the life experiences happening to the research participants. We aim to investigate how all of this could describe today's educated Iranian women.

"My landlord! We became friends so fast! She used to think that we are Arabs!... She thought we don't know our rights... I kept on explaining that we are so different from Arab people... well at first, I was wearing hijab there and they assumed that it was compulsory or that I was forced to and therefore they pitied me! ... It made me remove mine. I mean I was not the type who planned to go abroad to remove hijab... it's not really important to me. But I found it comfortable and I did that."

"I had Hijab there... And I was honestly scared to go out at first... people looked at me in a strange way... I felt I was avoided. I didn't like my hijab because of those looks but then I made friends and things got normal gradually... I am a very religious person ok?... It [the exchange programme] *changed my thoughts... about life, people. I don't feel bad now when I see somebody who drinks alcohol. I communicate with them so easily. I couldn't do so before this trip, I had stereotypes, very bad judgments about them. But now I don't. Generally I can speak more comfortably with men."*

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