چقدر ایرانی هستم؟ در جستجوی هویت (How Iranian Am I Still? In Search of My Identity): 21st-Century Iranian Immigrant Identity Formation in the United States

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"HOW IRANIAN AM I STILL? IN SEARCH OF MY IDENTITY): 21ST-CENTURY IRANIAN IMMIGRANT IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by

Aram Emamjomeh
B.A., Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, 2008
August 2018
In dedication to my family
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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies Iranian student immigrants in the United States in the special political tensions between the two countries from 2000 until present. This research provides a holistic view of understanding the new identity which Iranian students have reconstructed at the intersection of Iranian culture and U.S. culture through their past identity in confronting a new situation. It describes how Iranian students use individual, intellectual, and social resources to deal with the ignorance was that imposed on them when the governments of the two countries began to fight each other to achieve more political power. Data is collected from three sources: interviews conducted by the researcher, interviews conducted by BBC Persian, and autoethnography. A middle range of discourse analysis is applied to analyze and interpret the Iranian students’ stories to discover who they are and what they have in the United States.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

My story started on December 28, 2012, when my husband and I were packed and ready to move to the United States to pursue my husband’s education. We left our beloved family to achieve what attracted us to the United States: the responsibility for the individual and freedom in thought. We were so excited, and we were so happy. We had heard a lot about this “amazing” country: “land of opportunities” or “land of freedom and equality.” We had two suitcases, like other immigrants: one figurative suitcase full of hope, passion, and dreams for a better future for our family; the second suitcase full of pictures, memories, and whatever reminded us of our roots, our family, and our identity. Although I was so excited about the new place and the new life, after a while I struggled with a sense of home and belonging as an immigrant in this beautiful place. I was looking for something like a bridge to connect my past to the present. I was looking for something to give me a sense of home and belonging.

The study of immigrants and immigration is rooted in many disciplines: sociology, psychology, political science, economics, etc. The study has been also traditional among anthropologists since the 1930’s, and they defined the concept of acculturation to study immigrants and immigration. The concept was defined by Herskovits, Linton, and Redfield (1935 p.149): “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”. Individuals who were raised in one culture and used to all the values and worth of that culture experience some changes in themselves when settling into a new culture, and these changes which are produced by the home and the host culture result in a “new identity” (Garza-Guerrero 1974).
Iranian students, like other international students, are expected to return to their home country after finishing their studies; however, most of the Iranian students choose to remain in the United States. Research on Iranians immigrants in the United States do not count Iranian students as immigrants, and they generally fall into two large areas. In the first area of research, scholars such as Bozorgmehr and Sabagh (1988), Bozorgmehr (1998), Chaichian (2011), and Malek (2015) study Iranian acculturation in general and try to explain the Iranian diaspora in the United States. Other scholars such as Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009), and Keshishian (2000) have investigated the influence of the mass media on Iranian immigrants to explain how stereotypes affect the process of acculturation for them in the United States. Through they use different theories, all of these scholars have provided information for understanding the complex situation of Iranian immigrants in the United States, but they do not tell us much about the Iranian students. Iranian students are not officially immigrants, but they consider themselves to be immigrants in the United States.

This research, through a body of qualitative work such as interviews and autoethnography, intends to describe the “new identity” of the Iranian students by exploring their day-to-day concerns, inspirations, and motivations in the United States, to discover who they are. Listening to the stories that Iranian students tell about themselves allows me to reflect upon their senses of themselves, and how these stories make explicit their ongoing efforts to create meaning out of their lives (Linde 1993). Discourse analysis is applied to categorizing, comparing, and contrasting these stories to find how Iranian students use their own resources to overcome their special difficulties of how to adjust themselves to the new society.
1.1 Historical Context

The story of Iranian immigrants is similar to that of all immigrants in the United States; however, they have faced distinctive challenges due to the ongoing tension between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States. The post-revolutionary political relations between the governments of the two countries have always influenced Iranians’ everyday life in the United States. The story of Iranian immigrants in the United States is the story of people who choose to flee the economic and political crisis of Iran; however, these problems are always with them, even thousands of miles away from their home. The immigration of Iranians to the United States can be organized into three major waves which are strongly related to the socioeconomic status of immigrants and their motivations for leaving Iran. The first wave occurred between 1950 and 1979, the second wave was from 1979 to 2000, and the last one started in 2000 and is continuing to the present (Hakimzadeh 2006).

The first wave, which occurred between 1950 and 1979, was coincident with modernizing Iran. At that time, increasing oil incomes resulted in the rapid growth of the middle class in Tehran and some other large cities, and young people from this middle class started to pursue higher levels of education abroad. During this time, American universities offered good programs to attract students from foreign countries, and the Iranians who learned English as a second language considered the United States as a great place to study. Of the Iranians who emigrated during the first period, almost all were educated, and they had middle or higher middle-class social status, and most of them went back to Iran after their study (Hakimzadeh 2006).
The second wave of Iranian immigration to the United States began in 1979 and was relatively stable until 2000. The Iranian Revolution (1979) and after that the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which caused a huge economic crisis, increased Iranian migration to the United States during the second wave (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988). The population of the Iranian diaspora increased dramatically in this period; for instance, the Iranian population of Los Angeles quadrupled between 1980-1990 (Malek 2015).

The Revolution that overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was supported by the United States, changed the relationship between the two countries. The post-revolutionary political relations between the governments of the two countries have affected the volume and pattern of immigrants and also their process of acculturation in the United States. The revolution changed the situation for those students at the end of the first wave and decreased their ability to return to Iran (Chaichian 1997; Hakimzadeh 2006). It also formed a new population of Iranian immigrants to the United States which were dependant on the Pahlavi dynasty. Many Iranians who had official status in the Pahlavi dynasty or had any relationship
with it had to leave Iran to escape from the punishments that the Islamic regime imposed on them. This population thought that they would return to Iran after a while because they expected that the Islamic regime would not be stable for a long time. The fact that these people did not intend to emigrate permanently caused difficulties for them. They talk about having a packed suitcase in the corner of their homes which is ready for when they are able to go back (Vilk 2015).

The population of the second wave was not limited to students or dependents on the Pahlavi dynasty; it also included a huge population of refugees and exiles. Although the revolution was shaped and supported by secular individuals such as students, intellectuals, and leftists as well as Islamists, the establishment of Islamic law restricted the secular group. These restrictions caused many to become political refugees and exiles due to their religious beliefs, political status, and ethnic background during this period. The Islamic laws increased the refugee populations of Jewish, Baha’i, Zoroastrian, Sufi, and Christians as well as Azeris, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmens, and Armenians. Unlike the earlier immigrants, these refugees and exiles were not well-educated, but they had an overall high socioeconomic background (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1998). During the second wave also, a large number of academics and professionals had to leave Iran due to Iran’s economic crisis caused by the Iran-Iraq War 1980, a phenomenon described as “Brain drain”. “Brain drain” is a term used to describe educated and professional immigrants leaving their home country for better opportunities in other countries (Chaichian 2011; Hakimzadeh 2006).

The Iran hostage crisis, November 4, 1979, had harmful effects on Iranian immigrants during this period in the United States. The Iran hostage crisis was a diplomatic standoff between Iran and the United State in which fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held
hostage for 444 days by a group of extremist Iranian students in Tehran. From this time, Iranians have been represented by the U.S. media as religious extremists, terrorists, and enemies of the United States (Kamalipour 1995; Tehranian 2009).

These stereotypes have had irretrievable impacts on Iranian immigrants, and “they affect the immigrant’s self-concept, slow down her or his acculturation, breed mistrust, cause poor intercultural communication, and facilitate discrimination, leading to an unhealthy society” (Keshishian 2000, 102). Iranian immigrants were suddenly faced with discrimination, harassment, and violence in the U.S., and the horrible experiences during this time led them to adopt some strategies in order to cover their nationality. They often attempted to identify as Italian, Mediterranean or Mexican by changing their names. Indeed, they tried to be identified as being of another ethnicity or nationality in order to avoid the anti-Iranian sentiment during this terrible time (Malek 2015; Tehranian 2009). Iranians also have often introduced themselves as Persian rather than Iranian, and stores and businesses were also labeled as Persian: Persian carpet, Persian food, or Persian kabab. Although Persian and Iranian are both the same, Persian has a more positive connotation than Iranian (Malek 2015).

Finally, the third wave of Iranian emigration started in 2000 and continues to the present. This wave was shaped by Iran's economic crisis, the critical situation of human rights, decreasing opportunities especially for educated people, and the increasing tension between reformist and conservative factions in Iran. The third wave, like the second wave, consisted of two very distinct populations: highly educated peoples as well as refugees and exiles. The Iranian governments put pressure on people by forcing them to follow Islamic law, which caused a critical situation with respect to human rights, especially for minority groups. For example, gays and lesbians fled from Iran because homosexuality is banned and punishable by execution based
on Islamic law. Khomeini issued a fatwa in 1987. Due to this fatwa, Islamic law offers sex surgery as a solution for those who are gay or lesbian; otherwise, they face the death penalty. Governments provide all the financial support for gay and lesbian to change their body to include them in the binary position based on Islamic law. During this period, the United States hosted the second largest population of Iranian refugees after Germany (Hakimzadeh 2006).

Table 1. Immigrants from Iran Receiving Permanent Legal Resident Status in the United States, 1950-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-1979</td>
<td>46017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-2000</td>
<td>175040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2016</td>
<td>169565</td>
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</tbody>
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U.S. Iranian immigrants were affected critically during this time due to rising tension between the two countries. September 11, 2001 marked a new era for Iranian immigrants, who became the victims of “backlash” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). After September 11, 2001, individuals who had Middle Eastern physical features or Islamic sounding names became the victims of Americans’ anger. Iranian immigrants have suffered from a hidden fear of being other and of not being accepted by people around them in the United States, and it makes Iranians sometimes adopt strategies such as changing their names or their appearance to disguise their nationality.

By the time of the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iran’s economic and political crisis increased dramatically, and the number of Iranians petitioning for visas to
European countries and the United States had increased by 20 to 30 percent (Hakimzadeh 2006). Ahmadinejad refused to suspend Iran’s uranium enrichment in 2006, and this also increased tensions between Iran and many other countries. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1696 which imposed sanctions against Iran on 31 July, 2006. These sanctions not only put a great deal of pressure on the Iranian government, but also affected Iranian peoples inside and outside of the country; for example, blocking bank accounts of Iranians affected Iranian students who study abroad, especially in the United States. These students’ parents could not send money to them anymore, and students are not permitted to work in the United States while holding a student visa.

Reviewing the historical context provides some background about Iranian immigrants in the United States during the past fifty years. The Iran Revolution (1979), the Iran-Iraq War (1980), and the sanctions against Iran are elements that increased the volume and changed the pattern of Iranian immigration to the United States, and these problems also affected the process of acculturation and formation of “new identity” for them. This current thesis studies Iranian students’ everyday life and tries to understand their “new identity” at the intersection of Iranian and America culture.
2.1 Identity and Iranian Identity

The concept of identity is very difficult to explain because of the intricacy of its meaning which is intertwined with many factors. We construct our own identity through our experiences, emotions, connections, and rejections. Individualism changed the concept of identity from an inherent notion into a developing notion (Erik Erikson 1950). Erikson emphasizes the role of culture and society and he rejects the idea that identity is just formed during childhood as Freud stated. Erikson considers eight distinct stages such as youth, marriage, and getting old for developing the identity. In each of these stages, an individual reconstructs his or her identity based on his or her own past identity and taking into account the new conditions. Erikson (1950) emphasizes that there might be more stages throughout one’s life by continuing growth and development.

The central meaning of identity refers to “where one (a person or a group) belongs, and what is expressed as ‘self-image’ or/and ‘common-image’, what integrates them inside self or a group existence, and what differentiates them vis-à-vis ‘others.’” (Golubović 2011, 25). Based on structural linguistics, there are “universal categories of human thought” which are constructed from oppositions (Duranti 1997, 35), and most parts of our identity are constructed based on these oppositions. We construct our identity based on who we see ourselves as being, and also we construct our identity as being against others. For example, I am me because I am not her. Therefore, the existence of others is crucial in defining ourselves.

The concept of identity “naturally” is given by time and birthplace, but also it is “ideologically” defined and conceptualized in diverse ways by passing time (Golubović 2011).
Time and place of birth are important elements for defining the concept of identity. Golubović refers to Erich Fromm’s saying that many people die before they are fully born. That means, they never discover who they are, and they live with the identity which is prescribed to them. Golubović also refers to the process of identity formation in the context of time and argues that children do not possess full identity, and adolescents attempt to attain it. It might be argued that the concept of identity has some active and passive parts. The part of identity which is formed by time and birthplace is considered as passive; however, other parts of identity which change continuously by passing time in different contexts are considered as active.

The difference between collective identity and personal identity is also important for understanding the concept of identity. Collective identity is a phrase that describes the way a person accepts the norms, beliefs, meanings, and symbols of his or her group; as a result, he or she experiences a feeling of being a part of the group. Personal identity means seeking to find out who an individual is within prescribed values and norms through his or her own lens (Golubović 2011).

The concept of identity is hard to define for Iranians. Dale Eickelman (2002, 54) states that understanding public and private space of Iranian culture is crucial in defining the concept of identity for Iranians:

The “architecture” of Iranian verbal interaction indicates a pervasive distinction between the “external” (zaher), public aspects of social action and speech and an “inner” (baten) core of integrity and piety revealed only to one’s family and trusted intimates. In the “external” social world, characterized by insecurity and uncertainty, the cultural ideal is the clever dissimulator (zerangi), the shrewd and cynical manipulator capable of maintaining a “proper public face” and holding “true” feeling in check to trusted family and intimates.
Iranians’ public and personal identity are rooted in their thoughts and interpretations of space (Mostofi 2003). Expressions like *Ta’arof* and *Roodarvasi* refer to the cultural rules in Iran which words and behavior relate “metaphorically” to meaning, and they include a range of social behaviors. *Ta’arof* could be described as posing an offer to strangers or distant relatives and expecting them not to take the offer and to decline it. *Roodarvasi* is a consequence of *Ta’arof* where people never make a definite affirmation of their desire and do not accept the offered thing. As two people move to being in a close in relationship, less *Ta’arof* appears in their behavior towards one another (Mostofi 2003). For example, you are in a cab at Iran, and you arrive at your destination. You ask the cab driver how much you owe him. The driver will answer you: Oh nothing, it’s on me, but it is not a real offer. It is just *Ta’arof*, and you will not accept the offer because of *Roodarvasi*. In the other word, Iranians’ identity maintains a dual identity as Public and Private. The border between public and private identity is clear for Iranians and they know how to shift from one to the other, but it may seem confusing for other people.

2.2 Iranian Immigration and New Identity

Turner’s (1969) concept of “liminality” can be used to describe ambiguous and indeterminate attributes which individuals encounter in cultural transition when they no longer hold the ritual role of the previous society but still have not obtained the rituals of the new society. Turner resembles liminal entities as “nothing” and he argues that “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial (95).” The term also can describe the ambiguity of cultural and political changes as well as rites. Turner (1969) proffered the concept of “communitas” to describe people who experience liminality together at the same time. Communitas is “an
unstructured or rudimentarily structured and undifferentiated communion or community of equal individuals” (Olaveson 2001, 104).

Immigration adds a new stage of establishing an identity for one’s life. As was mentioned before, Erikson (1950) considers eight stages for developing the identity, and he emphasizes that there might be more stages by continuing one’s development. Immigration creates more stages for developing an identity, and it means that immigrants reconstruct their identity based on their past culture in the face of their new situation. During this process, immigrants find a “new identity” which is a product of their native culture and the host culture (Garza-Guerrero 1974). An American cultural anthropologist who lived in Niger for ten years explained immigration as follows: “For the first time in my life, I had fully experienced the uncertain feeling of being between things, of being neither this nor that […] put me between Niger and United States, between Songhay experience and American culture” (Stoller 2009, 33). When immigrants encounter social, psychological, and cultural changes, they constantly compare the new society with their own to define something between them.

The U.S. society’s vision is significant in forming the “new identity” for immigrants, and it covers the part of identity defined by others. From the eighteenth century until now, U.S. society’s vision of immigration has changed from assimilation to pluralism to multiculturism, and then cosmopolitanism (Patchen 1999). Following Patchen’s narrative, from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, the U.S. accepted assimilation as a “national goal”. The assimilationist vision is a nation in which ethnic identity would not be important in a person’s relationship with others, and where people of all ethnic backgrounds would share a common culture, which in this case is American culture. In this vision, the U.S. is a “melting pot” into
which people of many backgrounds merge to become part of American culture and achieve a single national identity.

The second vision that U.S. society adopted is pluralism, which offers the image of a “salad bowl” as opposed to a “melting pot.” In the vision of pluralism, each ethnic group preserves its own traditions, language, costumes, and lifestyle. Pluralism in the United States has focused on cultural aspects rather than structural pluralism, and each ethnic group in society preserves its own culture. For example, in the “ethnic revival” among whites in the 1970s, many people underlined their Italian, Irish, or Polish cultural roots, but there was a little interest in promoting social separation of these groups from other Americans (Patchen 1999, 277).

The third vision, multiculturism, emphasizes more strongly the value of cultural differences, and it advocates many arguments of cultural pluralism; the approach is most frequently applied in an education environment in the United States, and it tries to provide harmony among various ethnic groups (Patchen 1999).

The fourth vision is cosmopolitanism, the attempt to find a middle ground between pluralism and assimilation. Cosmopolitanism is the ideology that all humans are equal, and that they belong to a united community, which has grown out of different languages, skin colors, nationalities, and religions. In the cosmopolitanism vision, U.S. society respects cultural diversity, but this diversity is not officially promoted (Patchen 1999).

Immigrants encounter changes in cultural context and these changes may exceed the individual’s capacity, in which case individuals may experience “culture shock” (Oberg 1960) or “acculturative stress” (Berry 1997). Berry divides the factors that influence cultural shock into two parts: factors existing prior to immigration and factors rising after immigration. Education, reasons for immigrating, cultural distance, and personal factors are factors existing before
immigration, and they influence the degree of cultural shock for immigrants. The acculturation strategy of the host society is among the factors arising during acculturation and has a direct relationship with positive adaptation. Among these strategies, integration is usually the most successful mode, and decreases cultural shock; however, marginalization is the least successful way and increases cultural shock, with assimilation and separation strategies being intermediate strategies (Berry 1997).

The role of communication and language is vivid in the process of acculturation. Young Kim (1988) defined five components that affect the process of acculturation, and three of them are directly related to communication and space for communication. The first component is the degree to which individuals have communication skills in the host society, or how well individuals are able to communicate with the new language and understand social cues like smiling and waving in the new culture. The second is the immigrants’ participation in the hosts’ social communication, which means how much individuals mix with the groups of the host society such as getting involved in some public events. The third is immigrants’ participation in ethnic social communication which means communicating with other immigrants. The fourth is how the host society welcomes immigrants, such as providing opportunities for immigrants to get jobs or employment training. The fifth is individuals’ attitudes before immigration, for example, being forced to immigration by war or choosing to emigrate.

Iranians in the United States have been highly successful and described as “high-status” immigrants (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988; Mostashari and Khodamhosseini 2004). It seems that there is a contrast between stereotypes which caused discrimination, and being “high status” immigrants. Bourgois (2003) describes the ethnic and political problems that immigrants in the United States (in his case Puerto Ricans) encounter as “structural dilemmas” which
prevent them from absorbing into the mainstream U.S. society. Now the question is which
strategies Iranians have adopted to counter these “structural dilemmas” in order to achieve the
“high-status” standard.

Iranians’ interpretation of body and space have enabled them to integrate themselves into
the new society and also have enabled them to have good economic status (Mostofi 2003).
Iranians used body modifications (such as plastic surgery, contact lenses, dyed hair) as tools to
alter themselves to more closely resemble the American body norm, and they try to provide an
image of a “white model minority in the eyes of the majority” (Mostofi 2003, 694). Another
thing that helps Iranians is their interpretation of the use of space. “Iranian immigrants may
maintain a ‘proper public face’ or act zerang, in order to use a ‘public identity’ or ‘persona’ to
disguise a private self that may be considered by mainstream society as ‘freakish’” (Mostofi
2003, 696-697). Indeed, Iranians maintain a dual identity between their public and their private
selves. Body modifications help Iranians to assimilate their public identity into American culture,
while Iranians’ interpretation of privacy helps them to sustain the Iranian diasporic identity in
their community (Mostofi 2003).

Iranian immigration and identity formation in the United States developed through the
“exile media” after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Gajjala and McComas (2013) argue that
“post-1960s imagining of community, for instance, materialized through communicative spaces
of diaspora, where ‘home’ was a romanticized, frozen place remembered through nostalgic
storytelling and through radio, LP records, slides, photographs, home movies, and occasionally
television and screened movies from the subcontinent” (107). The first regularly scheduled
Iranian television program, Iranian, began in the United State in 1981, and since then gradually
the number of Iranian media outside of Iran have increased (Kelley, Friedlander, and Colby,
These Iranian media cover entertainment programs such as music, talk shows, and serials which are produced by the Iranian diaspora mainly in the Los Angles, and also they cover news which mostly reflected the view of the Pahlavi dynasty.

These media have helped to create and consolidate Iranian communities and Iranian diasporic identity, and they have connected Iranians who are heterogeneous through collective remembrance and nostalgia in the United States; a place for this remembrance has been created by Iranians in Southern California (Mostofi 2003). The Iranian television programs and music videos, produced in Los Angles shape, form the Iranian diaspora and Iranian diasporic identity, and this Iranian diaspora emphasizes common cultural and historical experiences more heavily rather than religious aspects (Mostofi 2003; Naficy 1993).

The concept of diaspora as well as diasporic identity is constantly changing through new technologies and inventions. Haraway (1985) defines identity in the age of science and technology as “fractured identities” (8). New technologies create “networks of connection among people on the planet” which “are unprecedentedly multiple, pregnant, and complex” (Haraway 1985, 15). Science and technologies provide situations where individuals can have horizontal experiences and it makes the concept of identity more one of “splitting” and more one of “layering” (Whitehead 2012).

By the end of the 1990s, new technological sources helped diaspora groups to build virtual communities which are not limited by borders. Technology provides a wide network across the Iranian diaspora, and it leads to a shift in the dominant pattern of identity for Iranian immigrants formed by Iranians in Southern California (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009). In the new form of diaspora, the virtual community has replaced the actual one. A visual community or “imagined community” provides a model of community where members may not know each
other, but all members share an idea of belonging to a collectivity (Spitulnik 1996). This shift was “from an exilic identity, with a ‘lost home’ notion at its core and a strongly politicized notion of change, towards a more diasporic identity with a more humanitarian notion of change” (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009, 687). Indeed, the Iranian diaspora has begun to realize its transnational potential and has used both online and offline opportunities to organize itself.

The transnational connection unites many Iranians both inside and outside of Iran, and it establishes a new form of negotiation of identities and interactions among Iranians all over the world (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009). In 2014, Iranian journalist Masih Alinejad launched My Steely Freedom, a Facebook page that invites Iranian women inside and outside of Iran to post pictures of themselves without their headscarves to show their disagreement with compulsory hijab. The page quickly attracted attention and has received hundreds of thousands of likes. The page also attracted international attention and Alinejad has received a human rights award in Geneva. My Steely Freedom as an online community gathers Iranians all over the world together to reflect their ideas and beliefs with a more humanitarian notion. The campaign as a virtual community gives a sense of home to Iranian immigrants due to communication that they have with Iranians inside Iran.

2.3 Discourse and Discourse Analysis in Linguistic Anthropology

Discourse and discourse analysis have different meanings to different people. Johnstone (2008) defines discourse as: “actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language” (2). Discourse is not just the language of an individual’s communication. Foucault (1982) regards discourses as the “systems of thought” within a particular historical context that makes certain things possible to think and correspondingly possible to say with regards to who
can say them. For Foucault, discourse is all kinds of ideas, understandings, and thoughts that precede any actual language.

Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2005) note that there are three main categories of definitions of discourse: “(1) anything beyond the sentence, (2) language use, and (3) a broader range of social practice that includes nonlinguistic and nonspecific instances of language” (1). Anything beyond the sentence refers to all kinds of linguistic details (phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax) that go into the sentence level, and discourse then looks at anything beyond just that singular sentence. Language use means any kinds of situation where people are doing things with language, such as conversations between students and teachers at a particular time in a specific place. In the third category, discourse includes social practices that are nonlinguistic and nonspecific. Nonlinguistic refers to all nonlinguistic communications such as clothes, adornments, and body modifications. Nonspecific instances of language mean the general understanding of what people do in conversations or writings.

Discourse is the “nexus” between language and culture; discourse “creates, recreates, focuses, modifies, and transmits both culture and language and their intersection” (Sherzer 1987, 295). Sherzer was looking at discourse in relation to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which argued that the restriction of vocabularies and morphemes in a language affected the way people thought and the way people behaved. Sherzer considers there to be a tight relation between language, thought, and culture.

Discourse analysis is a methodology that is useful in answering questions that linguists ask and also questions that people in humanistic and social-sciences ask. Discourse analysis “sheds light on how speakers indicate their semantic intention and how hearers interpret what they hear, and on the cognitive abilities that underlie human symbol use” (Johnstone 2008, 6).
Discourse analysis is not only about how people’s language use differs, but also what these differences might mean about the people in terms of how they see themselves and in terms of how others identify them (Sutherland 2016). Discourse analysis helps us understand people’s stories, the function of talk, and peoples’ multiple roles and identities, and it is a useful approach any time that we want to understand human life and culture.

Discourse analysis has been broken down into two basic approaches: descriptive and critical. The descriptive approach is largely linguistic, and it looks at the actual language details and how languages and grammars work together to make meaningful things in a broad sense. The critical approach is the applied understanding of that linguistic information with a particular political perspective that helps us to understand how power flows within society by using language (Johnstone 2008). A critical approach is a method of analyzing the discourses which are defined by Foucault (1982), and it involves seeking ideas behind languages which enable these discourses to form.

Hodges, Ayelet, and Reeves (2008) lay out three approaches to discourse analysis:

“Formal linguistic discourse analysis (such as sociolinguistics), Empirical discourse analysis (such as conversation analysis, genre analysis), and Critical discourse analysis (such as Foucauldian analysis)” (571). Formal linguistic discourse analysis lines up with language beyond the sentence, and it is very descriptive. Formal linguistic discourse analysis would be taking samples of written or oral language and texts and doing microanalysis of linguistic, grammatical, and semantic uses and meanings of the text. Empirical discourse analysis lines up with language in use, and it is less descriptive. Empirical discourse analysis would involve taking samples of written or oral language and texts and data on the “uses” of the text in social settings, and doing microanalysis and macroanalysis of the ways in which language constructs social practices. The
Critical discourse analysis is not descriptive. It involves taking samples of written or oral language or texts and data on the “uses” of the text in social settings as well as data on the institutions and individuals who produce and are produced by the language texts, and doing macroanalysis of how discourse constructs what is possible for individuals and institutions to think and to say (Hodges, Ayelet, and Reeves 2008).

Highlighting what is important helps us to recognize what needs to be transcribed and consequently what need to be analyzed. In this research, the formation of Iranian students’ new identity is under study, therefore a middle range of discourse analysis, which is the range of Foucauldian analysis and sociolinguistic analysis, is taken as the method. I listened to Iranian immigrants’ stories and looked for the thoughts that are behind their stories which formed their “new identity.” Peoples’ stories about themselves express their senses of themselves and these stories explicate their ongoing efforts to create meaning out of their lives (Linde 1993). People not only tell their stories, but also through their stories they “contextualize, compare, reflect upon, and analyzed [their lives]” (Quinn 2005, 42). In this research, the interviews begin with interviewees’ immigration stories, and in this way, the interviewees provide information about their past, and they form and create their own stories in their own ways. Concerning the analysis and interpretation of the interviews, I look for recurring images, words, and phrases in each interview and then select out and categorize all statements referring to each interview question, and finally seek to find patterns across the stories.
CHAPTER 3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Through qualitative methods, this thesis studies the formation of Iranian students’ new identity in the United States. The qualitative approach has attracted many researchers especially in human and social sciences for answering questions that cannot be explained by numbers or quantitative methods, and they have found the method as a useful approach in their research studies because of its “explanatory power” (Flick 2014, 1). The research focuses on the various modes of narratives in the specific form of interviews as suggested by Flick (2014) for immigration studies. Peoples’ stories about themselves express their senses of themselves, and these stories provide some meanings to their lives (Linde 1993). When people tell their stories, it helps the researcher in the process of analysis and interpretation.

Data was collected through a combination of narration interview and in-depth interview to provide a situation where interviewer and the interviewees “co-create knowledge” or “co-construct” reality (Hennik, Hutter, and Bailey 2011, 109). In this study, the in-depth interviews involve a semi-structured interview by asking open-ended questions which motivate participants to tell more about themselves and also provide a situation of trust between the interviewer and interviewees.

In this research, data were collected from three sources: the researcher’s interviews, a BBC Farsi radio show called "چمدان" (suitcase), and the researcher’s personal experiences as an Iranian immigrant. Triangulation in collecting data in qualitative research, which provides different sources of data, may extend one’s methodology and theoretical access to the issue or the subject under the study (Flick 2014).

The first type of data used in this research is based on the interviews conducted by the researcher. Drawing on anthropology theory and practices, interview and audio recording are
important methodological tools for a research (Duranti 2001). I conducted five interviews with Iranian students at Louisiana States University to examine their experiences of everyday life in the United States.

In accordance with University guidelines for research involving human subject matter, an application to conduct this research was submitted on October 18, 2017, for review by the Louisiana State University Institution Review Board (IRB), and was approved on October 20, 2017. Before participation in the interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form. Interview information collected in this study is anonymous. Participants were informed that although results of the study may be published, no names or any identifying information about them would be included. The interviews were conducted in the Farsi language. The Farsi language is the appropriate tool for both the researcher and the participants as it is their first language. Most parts of the interviews are transcribed in Farsi language and then translated into English in this thesis. The place for holding each interview was chosen by the interviewee to provide more convenience for her or him during the conversation.

I made decisions as I translated the interviews such that minimum resonances that might be lost or added as the interviews are taken out of Farsi language. The interview questions allowed for an open-ended response in order to obtain a wide range of possible answers. The interviews started with participants introducing themselves and telling their stories of immigration. In this way, they provided information on their background identity (as mentioned before, Iranians are not homogeneous) and they also recounted points in their story which are representative of their own life as a meaningful important whole. The interviews continued with questions that enabled interviewees to compare their past and present to discover some patterns in their “new identity” after immigration. The interviewer also asked the key question of the
BBC Persian radio show, “چمدان”: to encourage interviewees to choose a feature of the host and the home societies to understand some reasonings behind Iranians’ decisions in reconstructing their “new identity” in the United States.

The second type of data to be analyzed was collected from BBC Farsi radio show named “چمدان,” which means “suitcase,” is a BBC Farsi radio show about immigration which was produced for four seasons; each season includes twenty to thirty episodes. The show is interview based. Individuals were considered for the interviews based on their voluntary participation and the director’s choices. All interviews were conducted by Amir Payam in Farsi at a location chosen by the interviewees. Discussions that took place during the show were archived by BBC Farsi on its website. Iranian immigrants share their immigration stories and tell their experiences of immigration (mostly in the United States). At the end of each interview, the interviewer asked his guests: If you want to choose a cultural feature of your host country as a souvenir for the Iranian people, what feature would you choose? And what features would you not choose? In contrast, what features of Iranian culture would you prefer to offer American people? These questions reveal some reasonings behind Iranians’ decisions in reconstructing their “new identity” in the United States. Five interviews from this radio show were selected for this thesis, and they were transcribed, translated, analyzed, and compared to describe the “new identity” of Iranian students in the United States.

The last source of data is my own experiences as an Iranian immigrant. Through an autoethnographic approach, I reflect on my own feelings, experiences, and emotions.

Autoethnography is “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahay 1997, 9). Saltmarsh (2001) applied autoethnography as an approach to study pit closures in Britain and the subsequent loss of mining culture. She argues it is not just a way for
expressing knowledge, it is also a way to deal with past and present, and she argues autoethnography is the only way that she can share “its richness, its pain, its pleasure, and its everydayness [of her culture]” (148). Geertz (1988) argues that research needs qualitative work such as autobiographical studies that would bring out participants’ voices. These studies will help us to understand the complexities of acculturation.

The data from all three sources are analyzed by using discourse analysis and are compared to ascertain the formation of the “new identity” for Iranian students in the United States. Concerning the analysis and interpretation of the interviews, I was looking for recurring images, words, and phrases in each interview and then I selected out and categorized all the statements referring to each interview question, and finally sought to find patterns across the stories.
CHAPTER 4. BBC INTERVIEW RESULTS

CHMEDAN (Suitcase) received an award from the New York International Festival for being among the world's best documentary radio programs on in 2013. The program explores Iranian immigrants’ living experiences in different parts of the world, and it considers the comparison between the two societies as a notion which integrated the immigrants’ everyday lives. Amir Payam, its director, stated that a part of Iranian history has happened outside of Iran during the recent fifty years. CHMEDAN provided an opportunity to study this part by listening to Iranian immigrants’ stories. A wide spectrum of Iranian immigrants was interviewed to reflect a comprehensive image of Iranians who live outside of Iran.

The program is in interview style, and Amir Payam interviewed participants for about 2 or 3 hours at their homes or offices or any places that were chosen by interviewees. They talked about everything. They started from their childhood and then they moved to recent time, and it provided a situation where people felt comfortable and talked about themselves without difficulty. The length of each episode is about 15 minutes, and it shows that interviews are heavily edited. It seems that the parts of the interviews which related to interviewees’ lives in Iran were removed and edited more to provide information about their immigration stories. Payam used just audio as a tool for recording the interviews. People are more comfortable with microphones, and a camera might reduce the feeling of intimacy. As I mentioned before (chapter 2), Iranians have distinct private and public identities, and it is important to provide a situation in which interviewees felt comfortable enough to talk about their private lives. Starting from childhood and using audio recording only are two elements which provide this situation.

All interviews include three parts. The first part involves talking about their life in Iran, starting from their childhood and continuing until their immigration. This part provides
background information about their Iranian identity. The second part of the interviews start by asking questions such as when they immigrated, why they chose to live in another country? or how they immigrated? These questions are considered as a bridge to move from the first chapter of their lives to the second, after the immigration. In the last part, they talk about their lives after immigration by answering questions such as what they are doing in the host countries? How much have they integrated into the host society culturally, socially, or even politically? Eventually, Payam asked the interviewees to compare the two societies. The main question in the last part is: What features of the host society would they choose as a souvenir if they wanted to go back to Iran? And what features would they not choose? Infrequently, he asked if they wanted to bring a souvenir from Iran to the host countries, what it would be? These questions revealed the Iranian immigrants’ identities and showed which parts are from their Iranian identity and which parts are borrowed from the new society.

The first season of CHMEDAN interviewed Iranian immigrants in the United States. For the current research, five interviews from the first season were selected, where all interviewees moved to the United States on student visas and intended to stay after finishing their studies. Three of the individuals selected are women and two of them are men. As was mentioned before (in chapter 3), the length of the interviews were about two or three hours, but the length of time for each broadcast episode averaged approximately 10 minutes, which means that the interviews were heavily edited. For the present research, I reflected some part of each episode which revealed Iranian students’ identity in the United States and tried to do it in such a way as to keep the interviewees’ vision. Since the interviewees were aware that the interviews were to be broadcast by BBC Persian radio, and would be accessible on the internet, it was not necessary to avoid identifiable information. Each interview is discussed individually below.
4.1 “I had to choose between my mom and the U.S.”

In this episode of CHAMEDAN, Payam visited Gelareh Azadi (May 2013), an Iranian student who recently graduated with a Ph.D. This episode lasted 6 minutes and 41 seconds. Gelareh and her husband moved to Boston, Massachusetts for her husband’s study in 2002, and then she also started to pursue her own study in Biomedical Engineering. Gelareh is an Iranian name that we do not hear frequently, but her story is of the type that we hear a lot these days. By this, I mean that there is a commonality of Gelareh’s story with that of many Iranian students in the United States; otherwise, her story, like her fingerprint, is unique.

Figure 2. Gelareh Azadi, by BBC Persian

When Payam asked Gelareh what kind of visa they took, she responded “student visa, the single type.” The Student visa is issued in two types: multiple and single types. The multiple visas allow students to enter the United States multiple times without reapplying for the visa, and it means that students can travel back and forth to their home. However, the single visa allows students to enter the United States just once, and if they leave the U.S., they need to re-apply for a visa to return. For Iranian students, just the single type is issued because of the conflicts
between the U.S. and Iran, and it means that they cannot return to Iran at least until they finish their studies. In the following, Payam asked Gelareh how she experienced the single type of student visa, and she responded:

In the beginning, we did not think about how we could return to Iran because we were so excited to experience living here… It was one of the hardest days of my life, the day that I had a call from Iran, and my brother told me that my mom was very sick, and there was no hope for her recovery. My brother asked me to come back. Then I talked to my sister and she told me that my mom did not want me to return because of her. That time was really, really hard time for me. I asked myself several times if being here, continuing my study, and losing the last chance of seeing my mom is right, or returning to Iran and losing my study chance is better. I convinced myself with great difficulty that my return would not change anything (All translations herein are mine unless otherwise noted).

When Gelareh was asked if time returned to the morning that she had that call from Iran, what would be her decision now? She responded, “definitely I would return.” Gelareh stated her serious problem during these years was her suffering from lack of her family here. She could not go back to Iran during those ten years, and she was unable to visit her family.

When asked about her excitement, which she mentioned at the beginning of the conversation, about the United States after living there for eleven years she responded:

Maybe it does not exist anymore. My idea of living in the United States has been changed dramatically, but not in a way that would cause me to return to Iran… I still think I can live here better than Iran beside all these difficulties because my education is appreciated.
here, but in Iran, it is just nepotism.

4.2 “This is the message that I received from U.S society”

Another individual who was interviewed is Rosa Khorshidi (October 2013). The part of the interview that was selected for the program lasted 17 minutes and 22 seconds. Rosa had studied psychology and worked as a family consultant in Iran. Rosa and her husband moved to Massachusetts in 2007. They got student visas and they like, many Iranians, intended to stay in the United States after completing their education. Now she works as a consultant in a counseling center in the U.S.

Rosa described the day that they moved to their new place which was a nice neighborhood of Newton city as the “happiest time” in her life. She mentioned that when she moved to the United States, she had a special way of thinking, and in that way, she divided everything into two categories: black and white, or good and bad. At that time, she labeled living in the U.S society with a white color, but her vision changed after a while. Rosa explained the first experience of U.S. society which caused her view to be changed:

Figure 3. Rosa Khorshidi, by BBC Persian
It was the third day that we moved here in 2007. I went to a bank to open an account at Newton city. They gave me an application form; it asked about race. I still do not know why they asked me about my skin color. I wanted to open a bank account, why did they ask me that question? Money for all people has the same color. The question had multiple answers: white, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and the last one was, other. I said to the bank clerk that I was none of them. She instructed me to choose other. From that time, the bitter feeling that I am other is still with me. This is the message that I received from U.S. society. Later, I find that it is not just skin color, but religion is also considered as race, and in this society, it is not easy for others to grow up as it is easy for the dominant group.

Payam continued by asking that since you are living in Massachusetts where there are multiple nationalities, and it seems that all are others, so being other may not be hard here? She replied:

The ideal is what you said. I am working in a big consulting center now, and one of the reasons that they hired me is that they want to have staff from different nationalities and races to enhance the cultural competency of the agency… in our meeting, the dominant group, which is the white middle class, state that they name themselves ‘Melting pot’, but they are more like a ‘Salad bowl.’ In a salad bowl, there are many ingredients. They are in the same bowl, but they do not meld with each other. The dominant group confesses even though the United States is a country which accepts immigrants each year, the deep layers of the society do not accept minorities.

Rosa stated that in the middle of the way she figured out that she might never achieve the
social status that she already had in Iran, and a question gradually formed in her mind: why not
go back to Iran? She could be more beneficial for Iranian society, and consequently more
beneficial for herself.

Rosa still wears hijab after her immigration. Payam argued that wearing hijab might
result in a situation that she was considered as a minority in minority society and asked her to
explain her experience of being a minority in minority in U.S. society. Rosa responded:

The only people that directly ask about my hijab are Iranians. No other group than
Iranians ask me why I am wearing a hijab with a kind of aggressive tone. Sometimes
Americans also ask me, but they are curious about it. At first, they get permission from
me to ask about my hijab and then they ask…there is no blameful sense in their looks.

Rosa replied to the question about which features of U.S. society she would prefer to
choose as souvenirs:

Things that I want to put in my suitcase as souvenirs are what I have learned here. I
divide them into practical and theoretical sections which are not independent of each
other. In the practical part, my souvenirs are politeness, respect for privacy, and
frankness. Not the level of frankness which is common here because it will not match
with our culture… In the theoretical part, the best souvenir that I am going to put in my
suitcase is the gray color. I do not mean that I like the gray color in real life. For example,
I do not like gray clothes, gray walls, or gray cars. I mean gray color in the way of
thinking. In the past, I had black and white vision like most of my countrymen, if not all
of them. In my earlier vision, everything was divided into two categories, black and white or good and bad. According to that vision, people, books, foods, cities, religions, cars, all things were divided into the two categories. I learn here that those people, foods, and religions are not totally good or bad, they are not completely black or white, they are gray. Everything is a combination of goodness and badness which depends on an individual’s perspective.

Rosa believes the change in her way of thinking has influenced her behavior toward others. She had already tried to tolerate unpleasant or opposing thoughts, but now she does not become sad if others have opposing ideas. She is more welcoming of people who are different from her and she respects their ideas.

4.3 “For me, private space is not a space that other people do not look at”

Another of the individuals to be interviewed is Leva Zand (June 2013). The part of the interview that was selected for the program lasted 10 minutes and 4 seconds. Leva moved to Santa Barbara California in 2003, and then she moved a lot in across the United States. Leva changed her major several times and finally, she received her master’s degree in sociology, but she gave up on her Ph.D. in Feminist Studies. Now she works as a manager at Zarnegar Journal which is an online journal about women in the Farsi language in Washington, D.C. The interview was conducted at Leva’s home, and Payam noticed that the windows were without curtains [it is not common in Iranian culture to go without curtains] and asked Leva about it; she responded:

Windows were created for transferring light from the outside, and for seeing views from the inside. Curtains are useless things which provide an extra privacy that I do not believe in it. For me private space is not a space that others do not get to look at it. I make myself comfortable if someone looks at me when I am bare in my home, or I am picking my nose.
When Leva was asked to compare being a woman in Iran with being a woman in the U.S., she responded:

I was a junior student in law school in Iran, and I was desperately looking for a job. The last place that I applied was a law firm. When I said to the notary that I am a junior student and I am desperately looking for a job, even a part-time job, he asked me “Are you a virgin?” It was a time that I really felt that I did not like to live and work in Iran anymore. I am not very concerned that I am a woman in the United States. Actually, I had completely forgotten during the recent ten years that I as a woman need to protect myself in a society until I traveled to Lebanon two years ago. I heard taunts in the street, or a stranger touched my body when he passed me, or a car stopped for me on the street. All of this reminds me again that I as a woman need to protect myself more because I am a woman … I remember my first summer here. I had an old car and it did not have an air
conditioner. I had to open its windows, and I took great pleasure in feeling the wind through my hair for the first time … I think the compulsory hijab is an initiation for many other limitations which are imposed on women in Iran which force women to sacrifice their primary rights. In fact, many other things are internalized in our character by hijab such as to keep quiet if a stranger touches your body in a taxi, to change your way of thinking if it is against the norms etc. In fact, all the components of the society provide more limitations for women in Iran.

When asked about her dream, Leva responded that she wants to have an inn, and she wants to produce her own products in it, something like what people here call a Bed and Breakfast. Payam wondered and said that her dream reminded him of the same image of women from her small hometown in Iran and asked her to compare herself with those women in order to find out what changed in her after lots of traveling and studies. Leva responded:

Those women are the strongest women I have ever seen. They learn how to be strong by getting pregnant each year, by living in poverty, and by working in the fields from the early morning, while we change its form here into studying in universities, traveling to new places, and doing hobbies … Its end may be the same. We all are powerful women but in different forms.

4.4 “Migration is not a good thing for immigrants, at the same time it is a good thing for them”

Another of the individuals interviewed is Hesam Fetrati (June 2013). The part of the interview that was selected for the program lasted 7 minutes and 20 seconds. Hesam studied Graphics in Iran, and he moved to the United States in 2011. After his immigration, he changed the subject for his Ph.D. and he started to research about immigrants, and the process of changes which they underwent to become better suited to their host societies. When asked his idea about immigration, he responded:
Migration is not a good thing for immigrants, at the same time it is a good thing for them. There is no doubt that it brings pains for them... sometimes immigrants escape from themselves, and they emigrate from their past. However, some others rethink their past and their basic principles. In fact, the lonely place, which comes into being after immigration, causes depression for some people, while there are positive changes for others, and the second group thinks and focuses more on themselves.

When asked what he would prefer to choose as a souvenir from U.S. society, he responded:

In the past, no one saw or heard that I expressed patriotic beliefs, and I did not have a dependency on my culture. But now, when I am looking at my culture from a distance, I have a special kind of dependency to my culture or to the place which I grew up. I want to bring this new vision with myself.
4.5 “When we admit a new culture, it is like hacking a game unlocked”

One of the individuals to be interviewed is Amir Hossein Sajadi (October 2014). The part of the interview that was selected for the program lasted 10 minutes and 27 seconds. Amir had studied Electrical engineering in Iran and then he got his master’s from the University of Warsaw in Poland and now he is studying for his Ph.D. at Case Western of Ohio. When asked to compare the two host societies, he responded:

Racism is not common in Poland. In Poland, an individual just introduces himself or herself, and one is not concerned about introducing the country that he or she comes from or the race that he or she belongs to … In the five years since I have immigrated from Iran, I traveled a lot in my free time and when I do not have enough money or time to travel, I sit and look at people to know what other people who are not like me do in their everyday life … When we familiar with a new culture, it is like hacking a game unlocked. It breaks down the walls between nations and cultures, and then you see how we all look alike. We talk in different languages and we eat different foods, but all of us
wake up in the morning and eat something and then go to our work every day.

When asked which feature of the host society he would put in his suitcase as a souvenir for Iranian people from U.S. culture, he responded:

I want to bring the encouraging space of the U.S. university to my country. For example, I saw a person in a competition between universities, and he offered a proposal which could not be run based on the rules of physics. No one said to him that his project was completely wrong. Instead, they said to him ‘research more, or work more on your idea’… I was wondering why no one said to him that his idea was basically wrong, and I asked about it. They responded: ‘his idea is wrong one time, or two times, but if we encourage him, someone like Mark Zuckerberg may finally result.’
CHAPTER 5. INTERVIEW RESULTS

All the individuals I interviewed are Iranian graduate students at Louisiana State University, and they all moved to the United States on student visas which are called F1 single type, which is the most common type of visa that is issued for Iranian students based on political issues between the two countries. Most of the Iranian students intended to stay in the U.S. from the beginning, and they consider themselves as immigrants. Of the twelve individuals I contacted for an interview, one respectfully declined, six showed interest but did not follow through with scheduling an interview, and five allowed for an interview to take place. The number that showed interest but did not scheduled an interview or canceled it at the last minutes was predictable for the researcher, based on Iranian culture in which saying “No” is hard. The length of time for each interview averaged approximately 47 minutes with the exception of one lasting an hour and 6 minutes. Each interview was conducted in a place chosen by the interviewee for their convenience during interviews. All the questions presented in appendix 3 were addressed in each interview. Identifying information regarding interview participants is not mentioned in this thesis, but I include enough information to provide basic characterizations. Each interview is discussed individually below.

5.1 “I learned to be independent”

The first individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Mana, is a female around 35 years old. Mana moved to the United States in August, 2012, by herself to pursue her study in biology, and she intends to stay here after her graduation. This interview lasted 1 hour and 6 minutes, and it took place in Mana’s home, as she preferred. When asked to relate her immigration story and to explain the reasons which caused her decision to leave Iran, she
responded:

There were many factors that motivated me toward immigration. I worked five years in Iran. When I was a master’s student in Iran, I was an independent teacher at schools. I tried hard to be hired as a permanent teacher, but there were so many marginal factors which were considered more important than my skill for teaching … Since there was not a good job opportunity for me, I decided to take the doctorate exam in Iran. When I asked my professor about the exam materials, he responded: ‘If you want to continue your study, leave Iran, we taught you what we know.’ Until that time I never thought about leaving Iran … At the same time, many people around me were moving to the United States: my cousin, my close friend, and some of my classmates … Ultimately, I figured out that I must leave Iran … I just passed the TOEFL and GRE exams when I received a call from my close friend who was studying at Louisiana State University. My friend said that her professor had a position and asked me to send my CV to him. Therefore, I applied for it and I came here.

When asked if her idea about the United States changed after the immigration, she responded “Yes”, and described her answer as follows:

Although my friend was here before me and she described Baton Rouge for me, it was very different from what I had expected. The transportation system was poor. I did not have a car during the first year, and I was so dependent on other people. One time I needed something, but it was hard for me to ask for a ride from my friends. I had also heard bad things about the buses, therefore I decided to walk a long way to Walmart … There were some things which shocked me during the first year, such as normal people not using the transportation system, it is not common to walk when it is dark, and most of
The roads are dark at night.

She continued that her idea about Americans also changed a lot during these five years:

The first year, I wondered why they seemed so nice. They were always smiling, and I compared their behaviors with foreigners with our behaviors in Iran which were not good at all. After a while, I figured out that they have an outward appearance of niceness, but deep down they do not accept us. In the beginning, they may have a conversation with us to know about our culture, but it finishes soon. It is caused by differences or lack of common conversation … I think they are not deeply nice, and they have learned to appear nice with others. I am not sure, maybe I am thinking wrong... Especially in an academic environment, it is required for individuals to have intellectual behaviors, not concerning nationalities or races. However, it is not what they deeply believe. For example, I was a teacher assistant with an American girl. She was very nice to me, and I decided to hang out with her out of school. She did not say 'No' to me, but she never agreed a time. I felt that she did not prefer to hang out with me.

When asked if being Iranian affected her relationships with the people here, she responded:

بعد از بن فکر که کمی بیشتر شد. تا خودآگاه وقیف قانون مملکتشون میگه که هفت تا کشور هستند که برای آمریکا ضر دارند روشن از آن می گذارد. احساس میکنم که اینها خیلی رسانه هاشون را قبول دارند و به ایرانی ها خیلی دید خوبی نیست. تو میحیات دانشگاه خیلی کمتر هست ولی هر چیزی پیرون بیشتر میشه ... با گذشت زمان بیشتر آمریکاییها دید کردن با یک خارجی جا افتاده ولی این تک یک ایرانی جلوی این رو برای ما می گیهد. مثل از یک بار با یک پسر آمریکایی دید کردم وقتی فهمید ایرانی هستم، درباره حکومت ایران پرسید. اکنون هم قبلی از دوست نمی شود چرا این دوست نمی شود که با بهبود یک خواننده و یک خواننده پسر مرسیان بنویسد. رفته بودم بیک سفر مرسیان پلی دوست خاله ام به هواي جنوب فکر م کردم که برام در دو جلوی نکه م دارد، بیک دو نرد دو داشتم م خویر تو سوختن. بعد فهمیدم این یک چیز جنونی است. وی در عمق رابطه هاشون در شال بیشتر می توانی به یکی بهاری م خانم، دوست خداوند کردن، منظور گردی یکدند، منظور یک هسته که شاید شال می نابش و لی عما آنها نایسر هستند.
I feel it more after the Trump Travel Ban. When their government says that there are seven countries which are dangerous for the U.S., it influences them. I think they really believe their media, and they do not have a good view about Iranians. I feel it less at the university, but it is more tangible outside of the academic environment … Recently it is common for some Americans to be in relation with other nationalities like Chinese or Latino, but having the Iranian tag also affects these kinds of relations. I experienced it once when I went out with someone and he learned that I am an Iranian. On the first date, he asked me about the Iranian government. I myself do not agree with them, but asking about my government at the first date! … I think it is different between Americans in the North and the South. I traveled to Maryland to visit my cousin. I expected people to open doors for me as the Southern people do, but they did not. Later I found out that opening doors is a part of Southern culture, but it is not necessarily showing that Sothern people like you. When I was at Maryland, I saw many white Americans were in relation to other nationalities. I mean Northern people are not as apparently nice as Sothern people, but they are practically nice and they mix more with foreigners.

When asked about her main concerns as an Iranian international student studying in the U.S., she responded:

I would like to be a faculty member of a university in the future, but I feel that being an international person will affect my dream. I think white faculty does not accept others unlike themselves because I see white American professors are more together in our department … I am an English second language speaker, and I am afraid that it will affect my career … Generally not being accepted as a member of the society is my main concern. The concern is not only about myself, but also it is about my children in the future. The other concern is that I do not have family here, and I think it is an important point. I grow up in a culture where the role of family is very important, so I am always missing them here… I intended to stay here at first, but now I am in a dilemma about it. We achieve something and simultaneously we lose some other things, and I still do not know which of them is more valuable.

When asked about the process of learning language and if it is a barrier for her to join
When asked if she prefer to follow American TV programs or Iranian, she responded:

I do not follow Iranian serials anymore, but sometimes I watch Iranian movies. I watch more American programs. I follow American series online, and sometimes TV shows. I still listen to Iranian music. I tried to listen to their music or attend their concerts, but I am not used to them.

When asked if she wanted to choose features of American culture as a souvenir to take to Iran what feature she would choose, she responded:

I am not going to bring anything home. I am going to bring my memories. My memories are all part of my culture. I like American culture, but I don't want to bring anything home.
حالا فکر می‌کنم که آنها به جهت هایشان هم بیشتر لطف میکنند. جون احساس عذاب و وجدان را به آنها انتقال نمی‌دهند... یک چیز دیگر که از فرهنگ این‌ها دوست دارم برخودرشون با مردمی هست. یک خانم در دیپارتمان ما هست خیلی خوش‌تیپ و زیبا، یک بار که از این‌ها دور می‌آید، و دیپارتمان کلی پخشی با همراهی مواجه شده است. ما وقتی دعا می‌کنیم اول برای سلامتی دعا می‌کنیم و تا به هنگام یکبار متین به مردمی می‌دهیم. ولی در واقع مرضی یک چیز‌گیر ناپید است و برای همه آدم‌ها پیش می‌آید. احساس می‌کنیم ما ایرانی‌ها یاد‌گیرفتی‌ام که چگونه با شریف سخت‌نگین مواجه شویم. فقط یک گرفتی ایم که دعا کنیم برای این شریف سخت‌نگین پیش نیاود. من سال ۱۵۰۲ بود که انجا به شدت مرض شدم و دو ماه نمی‌توانستم دانشگاه بروم. دکتر به من فکت که مرضی آم یک مقدار فزیکی و یک مقدارش روحی است که نمی‌توانم با مرضیم مقابله کنم.

Women have their own individuality here. My mom used to cook for me and my siblings and clean our rooms and when we left our mom, she was depressed. My mom as a woman did not learn how to deal with her loneliness; she did not even keep two or three friends for herself. Before I came here, I was thinking that moms who cared about themselves were selfish, but I learned here that not only they were not selfish, but also, they helped their children more because they did not cause their children to have a guilty conscience … Another thing that I like about their culture is their ability in confronting illness. A beautiful woman is in our department who suffers from cancer, but she encountered cancer very well. In our culture, we always pray for healthiness, and unconsciously we are afraid ourselves of illness. While illness is a part of our life, and it will happen for all of us. I think Iranians do not learn how to challenge difficulties.

Instead, we just learn to pray to get rid of them. I was sick here for two months in 2015, and I could not go to school. The doctor said me that my illness was partially physically and partially psychological, which prevented me from overcoming the illness.

When asked if she wanted to choose a feature of Iranian culture as souvenir and bring it here, she responded:

فکر می‌کنم آن چیزی که ما از فرهنگ ایرانی می‌توانیم به این‌ها بدهیم روابط انسانی هست. ما عاطفه نتو هستیم و به همدیگر بیشتر می‌کنیم. نفک خانواده‌ها را هم دوست دارم از فرهنگ خودمان. این انجا بایرام، این به این‌ها که در انجا انجا که تو ایران نرستیم.

I think what we can offer to Americans from our culture is the sense of humanity. We are more emotional, and we care more about each other. I also want to bring the role of the Iranian family here, but not as dominant as it is in Iran.

When asked about how immigration to the United States changed her, she responded:

احساساتم کم رنگ نیست. شده است، کم کم دارم یاد می‌گیرم وقتی یک اتفاقی بیش می‌یاد. احساسی درمانی کرک گرفتم و با منظمی فکر می‌کنم. بعد از احساسی را درمان کنم. در انجا خیلی مستقل شده‌ام. تو ایران از انجا که تو انجا کنیم، حتی بعد از انجا منطقی هم خیلی وابسته به خانواده هستیم، ولی انجا فقط خودن و خودش... این استقلال در درمان هم اثر شد. این امر از انجا در امریکا، این امر از انجا در امریکا است. در امریکا اگر سوالی برای پیش می‌آید، آن‌ها دوست نشان‌دهنده می‌باشند، ولی انجا اگر سوالی برای پیش می‌آید، خودنی به دوستی جواب می‌دهند و دوستی به خودنی می‌دهند.

I have become less emotional. I am learning how to encounter difficulties by logical thinking. I become more independent here. When you are in Iran, you are dependent on
your family even after you get married. While here, you live independently … It also influences my academic approach. When I was in Iran, I frequently asked questions of my friends, but here I myself search to find the answers. I learned here that it is not possible to learn every subject from others, I must learn things by myself.

5.2 “I learned to be myself”

The second individual interviewed, hereafter referred to as Sara, is a female around 30 years old. Sara moved to the United States in 2013 with her husband, but now she is single. She is studying for a Ph.D. in construction management at Louisiana State University, and she intends to stay here after her graduation. This interview lasted 37 minutes and 55 seconds, and it took place in Sara’s home as she preferred. When asked to tell her story of immigration, Sara explained it as follows:

My grandparents, my aunt, and my uncles are living in the United States, and I always was curious about the U.S., and I wanted to live here. I finished my bachelor’s in Architecture in Iran, and then I got my master’s in Cyprus. I decided to get my master’s in Cyprus because I knew that it was hard to get admission and funding in my major from U.S. universities. Finally, I moved to the United States in 2013, and I won the U.S. Green Card Lottery last year, and so I will definitely stay here … I did not have serious problems in Iran; I had a good job, my family supported me, but I wanted to experience the U.S.

When asked if her idea changed about the United States after her immigration or if she had an experience of cultural shock, she responded:

I knew the U.S. from the images and movies that I had seen. I entered in a small town, and it was very different from my previous image of the U.S., but I quickly adapted to the new place. I spend most of my time at school, and I did not have a special problem.
When asked about her relationship with the host society, and if she socialized with Americans as much as Iranians, she responded:

“When I was asked about her relationship with the host society, and if she socialized with Americans as much as Iranians, she responded: ‘I socialize with Iranians or other international students more than with Americans. The Iranian community is amusing, and I like to spend most of my time with them. I also have a host family, and they invite me for holidays like Thanksgiving or Christmas. I like to be with my host family on holidays, and it gives me a sense of having family here. My host family is curious about Iran, and I tell them about our food, our architecture, and our traditions … I became familiar with other Americans when my mom came here to visit me. She attended English classes at Chapel in the campus. My mom invited her teacher, who was a young girl, and I became familiar with her. My mom’s teacher also invited us and introduced some of her friends to me. I sometimes socialize with them, but it is not an intimate relationship. I would like to socialize more with Americans in the future. I do not like to limit myself to the Iranian community.’

When asked if the stereotypes about Iran caused judgments to be made about her, and what strategies she used when she face the prejudice, she responded:

‘It happens sometimes. When I feel they (Americans) are wrong about my past or the place that I come from, I start to give them information about myself. Once it was in a painting exhibition. They asked me about my nationality because my name was different, and my painting was different from others. When I saw in their eyes a flashback to the stereotypes, I started to introduce Iran by discussing Iranian artists and their paintings. In fact, I try to introduce other facets of Iran than the political facet: the culture of people, ethnicity, food, seasons, etc. … It does not change the whole impact of the stereotypes, but I am sure it would have some impact on them.’"
When asked if language was a barrier for her or if she ever experienced a situation caused by lack of language or culture, she responded:

I am a good language learner. My ex-husband was from Turkey. I met him in Cyprus, and then we lived for a while in Turkey. I quickly learned the Turkish language, and we talked together in his language. I had lived in the two countries before I moved to the U.S., and I had learned how to learn a language and how to make connections with new people. I had learned that cultural misunderstanding is inevitable. For instance, I had a psychology class here, and I did not get the cultural points of the discussions.

When asked if she prefer to follow American TV programs or Iranian ones, she responded:

I watch more Iranian programs. I watch channels from outside of Iran like “Manoto”, and also I follow Iranian movies and serials produced inside of Iran. I like to watch them before school and after school when I am alone at home. I am used to their sound; it makes me calm and feeling a sense of home. I occasionally watch American series like “Modern Family”.

When asked to choose a feature of U.S. culture as a souvenir for Iran, she responded:

We do not show our real face in our relationships in Iran. Most of the time we hide our feelings and we do not say our real ideas. It also affects other aspects of our life. For example, in our architecture, we built a long street of the bazaar, and then we add two subsidiary ways behind stores for hiding some stuff. However, the people here do not have such secrecy in their mind or in their behavior. I like this feature of American people and I want to bring it to Iran. I used to be like that in Iran, and I was afraid to state my purpose most of the time. I think the secrecy hurts our connections, and I am trying to
When asked what feature of Iranian culture, she would prefer to add to U.S. culture, she responded:

The role of family is very tangible in Iran. I would like to raise my children here like how I grew up in Iran. My family always supported me; when I got divorced my family supported me emotionally and financially. I would like to do the same for my children.

5.3 “I learned that there is no absolute truth”

The third individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Shahan, is a male around 33 years old. Shahan moved to the United States in July, 2015, with his wife. He is studying mechanical engineering at Louisiana States University, and he intends to stay here after finishing his study. This interview lasted 52 minutes and 13 seconds, and took place in Shahan’s office, as he preferred. When asked to tell his immigration story, he explained the reasons which caused his decision to leave Iran:

After I finished my undergraduate, I started to work. Although my work was related to my study, I did not like it. It was repetitive and I did not learn anything new. Therefore, I started my master’s in order to find a better job. During the master’s program, I also was...
working in a company and it was very hard to handle both studying and working at the same time. I finished my master’s, but I still did not have an optimal condition in my job. I figured out that to have a better job, I needed to have a specialized skill or knowledge. Therefore, again I decided to continue my study for the Ph.D. I knew the problems that Ph.D. students had in Iran. Universities do not provide funding for Ph.D. students and they themselves had to cover all the costs for their studies and living. Therefore, I made a decision to leave Iran to concentrate more on my studies and also to live better during my Ph.D. At that time, I was getting to know my wife, and one of my criteria for choosing her was that she also wanted to continue her studies out of Iran. We decided to divide our responsibilities to achieve our goal. I was working, and financially supported our decision and my wife was learning English and applying for universities. Finally, my wife got permission from Louisiana States University and we both moved to the United States at 2015, and after moving here I passed The TOEFL test and I also got the permission from the University.

When asked about his connections to the host society, and if he socialized with Americans as well as Iranians, He responded:

Most of my socializing is with the Iranian community here, but I have never been a closed person. I also have a few American friends as well as some international friends. I think one of the important issues for immigrants is to be absorbed and to be accepted by the host societies, and for doing so we need to learn the host societies’ culture … I have been always welcome to have a connection with them. For example, in my English course (1004), my teacher asked us to be a volunteer for a weekly meeting with American students who need an international student for their project. I was a volunteer, and I met my partner ten or fifteen times and she asked me about compulsory hijab in Iran. It was an intentional act by me to become more familiar with new people, and I also was helping with her project. We also have a close American friend. My wife met her at the Chapel at the campus, and she taught English to my wife. Gradually their relationships become closer and we regularly meet with each other … I also have some connections with other international students and I am trying to have relationships with them.

When asked if being Iranian affected in his relationships with people here, or if he experienced a situation influenced by stereotypes, and what strategies he applied to address
them, he responded:

All people unconsciously have an image in their mind before meeting new peoples, and they paint the image based on information that they get from the media. Therefore, the imaginary image is not a bad thing. However, sometimes we do not like them, and we think that they are not genuine. This situation happened to me sometimes, but I did not apply a specific strategy to change their mind. I just told myself how they have reacted to us is based on people having such wrong images of us.

When asked about his future, if he intended to stay here after finishing his study or if he considered himself as an immigrant, he responded:

I have an image of the future. After I finish my Ph.D., I would like to get a postdoctoral position and then I would like to be a faculty member here … Until I become 60 years old, and then I would like to return to Iran.

When asked about his main concern as an Iranian international student studing in the U.S., he responded:

My main concern is to get results from my research … I do not have a special concern about the new society because I still do not have a tight connection with it. If you look at my everyday life, you can see it. My wife and I spend five days a week in our office, and we do shopping, and we cook food on the weekend for the rest of the week.

When asked if his idea about the United States changed after immigration, or if he experienced any cultural shock, he responded:

Hoping for the best, he continued:
My pause before answering this question showed that there was not any special thing that was a cultural shock for me. Some things were different from my assumptions, but they were not so far from them. For example, the role of the family in the south is tangible, and I did not expect that. If you look at their photo albums, you see their aunts, uncles, and cousins. … about their relationships with other nationalities, I was thinking they were very nice with other nationalities in the early months because they always had smiles on their faces. After a while, I was thinking they are very strange people. Now I think they are neither very kind nor strange. They are people like us … It takes a while for me to know who they are.

When asked about the process of learning language and if it was a barrier for him to connect himself to the society, he responded:

When moved here, I was afraid to speak English, but I knew the role of language in connecting me to the new society. So, I pushed myself to speak more in English. I think learning English is the most important thing for us. For example, a person who has good knowledge but is not able to present it is less productive than a person who has less knowledge but is able to present it. Although I have improved my English a lot, I still have problems with it, but these problems do not prevent me from making connections.

When asked if he preferred to follow American TV programs, movies, or music, or Iranian, he responded:

I watch American movies and serials like “Parenthood” more than Iranian because I want to discover the cultural points of their relations. Sometimes I watch Iranian movies, especially when I am really tired. About music, it is completely different. I listen to Iranian music more than American.

When asked if he wanted to choose a feature of American culture as a souvenir to take to
Iran what feature he would choose, he responded:

Our religious, cultural, or ideological system is like a shrine in Iran. For example, the cultural concept of ‘masome’ means a person who is innocent and does not do anything wrong, or the religious concept of ‘taghlid’ means to follow a leader who knows everything … While their ideological or their cultural system is more like a cylinder. There are the theories, ideologies, or groups in the cylinder instead of a single theory, an ideology, or a person. In our classes here, it is said that there is not a single way of solving a problem or there is not a perfect solution for a problem. It is said that you should look on the opposite side of your solution to find out the differences, and this may give you an ability to look at the issue from the third perspective. This way of thinking, that there is no absolute truth, affects all parts of our life. I want to take this way of thinking as a souvenir to Iran.

When asked if he wanted to choose a feature of Iranian culture and bring it to U.S.
society what feature he would choose, he responded:

I would bring the structure of an Iranian family because it would bring many things with it. Each of us had a cousin who made us mad or a grandfather who was tough, but we spent our weekend with them. It taught us to get rid of just focusing on ourselves. If we want to spend our time just with people who make us happy, we might end up in a situation that we become alone in our lives.

When asked what changes he considered as important changes in his identity after his immigration, he responded:
5.4 “A feature that completely makes them different from us is that they are frank”

Another individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Bahar, is a female around 38 years old. Bahar moved to the United States in July, 2009, with her husband. She is studying Oceanography and Coastal Science at Louisiana States University, and she intends to stay here after finishing her study. This interview lasted 46 minutes and 43 seconds, and its place was Bahar’s office, as she preferred. When asked her to tell her immigration story and to explain the reasons which caused her decision to leave Iran, she responded:

My husband and I worked in Iran for some years after we finished our master’s. We both worked at a private company which did projects funded by the government, and the company earned a great deal of money, but our salary was not good. Sometimes we worked until 2 a.m. to submit the projects on time, but the ratio between our work and our incomes was not fair … On the whole, the injustice that we had seen from our work caused our decision to leave Iran. We applied to Louisiana State University and we both got permission in 2009.

When asked to remember the beginning days of her life in the United States, to remember something as cultural shock, or something which was different from her expectation, she responded:

Yesterday, I was a week person and I needed others to solve my problems. Now I am much better and I do not give up soon.
It did not match with what I had expected. I am not sure if it was the place that I entered or the people who I met during the first days. Our first home here was Edward Gay Apartments on the campus. It was a very bad place. It was unclean, close to the North gate, which was not a safe place. Maybe it was ok for someone who was single and did not spend much time at home, but it was not good for us. I matched with (international) students who are in my office, but I did not match with students of another office who were Americans … I think that they (American students) also do not hang out with other nationalities such as Indians or Chinese, rather they are interested to be with themselves. I was invited to their birthdays or to a lunch sometimes, but I did not have a deep connection with them.

When she stated that Americans do not intend to have relationships with other nationalities, it seemed that her relationship is more with Iranians, but she said:

I socialize more with the other international students. In the early years, I had many Iranian friends, but I became disconnected with them gradually. It happened maybe because I was very sensitive or because when my husband was sick, they (Iranians) did not care about us in the way I expected from them. Many factors caused my relation to be almost severed with the Iranian community.

When asked if the stereotypes of Iran influenced her rejection by the U.S society, she responded:

I do not think that the stereotypes affect my relations which are mostly limited to academic environments. It happened a few times when I introduced myself as an Iranian, their speech tone went down, but it was not common. In fact, I think that they do not have deep relationships with other nationalities because they do not need this kind of relations. It may be understandable if we look at the issue from their view.
conversations or what special strategies she applied to overcome these conversations, she responded:

When their speech tone became unfriendly I tried to keep my self-confidence because I had not done anything wrong. I did not explain anything to them to change their opinions; I just was trying to end the conversations.

When asked if the language influenced her connections with U.S. society she responded:

When I moved here, I decided to not watch Farsi movies and not read Farsi books because I wanted to improve my English. I watch mostly American TV shows or serials because I think it is necessary for me to know about them.

When asked to explain her main concerns as an Iranian student in the United States, she responded:

In the beginning, it was very hard for me. I even did not know how to start a conversation and how to continue it. It took a while before I figured out that sometimes they started a conversation with a nice compliment while we started the same conversation with a question in Iran. For example, they say ‘I like your shirt’ but we say, ‘where did you buy your shirt?’ In both we want to make a connection but in different forms.

When asked if she preferred to follow American TV programs, movies, or music, or Iranian ones, she responded:

When I moved here, I decided to not watch Farsi movies and not read Farsi books because I wanted to improve my English. I watch mostly American TV shows or serials because I think it is necessary for me to know about them.

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My main concern is my visa status, and I am always worried about the new laws and how they affect my life. I don’t want to return to Iran because I do not have the energy to restart again even in my home country … Maybe I am not a good person for this question because during these years I did experience very bad situations that changed my concerns. My husband had diabetes type 2 when we moved here, but it was changed from type 2 to type 1. He lost his vision for a while, and he underwent several surgeries to regain his vision partially. He needs to use insulin regularly and his eyes need to be checked frequently. If we go back to Iran, he may have a problem to receive health care because of the sanctions [which limited exportation of goods, even medicine, to Iran].

When asked if she could choose features of U.S. culture as a souvenir to take to Iran what features she would choose, she responded:

If you asked me this question on the early years I might say that they were not gossipy people, or they were not interfering, but later I saw that they also sometimes were; however, they did so less than us. I think a feature that completely makes them different from us is that they are frank. If they can not fulfill your request, they say ‘I am sorry.’ It is easy for them to say ‘No’, however, we promise and give hopes dishonestly.

When asked what features of Iranian culture she preferred to add to American culture, she responded:

I prefer to choose a feature of Iranian women and introduce it to American women. We are patient in our family life during difficulties and we let them be resolved by the course of time. I do not mean to be the underdog. Instead, I mean to be more tolerant in difficulties, and we do not end our relationships because of small problems.

5.5 “I socialize more with Iranians because I am well familiar with our cultural boundaries and our norms”

The last individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Omid, is a male around 32 years old. Omid moved to the United States in 2015. He is studying Construction Management at
Louisiana States University, and he intends to stay here after finishing his study. This interview lasted 38 minutes and 50 seconds, and its place was his office, as he preferred. When asked to tell his immigration story and explain the reasons which caused his decision to leave Iran, he responded:

I was not a good student when I was an undergrad in Iran. When I finished my bachelor’s, my friends were saying that Iran was not a place for living anymore because of its many problems and we should leave it. So, I also decided to emigrate, and I started to learn English …, my real goal was to leave Iran and not to study. At first, I moved to Malaysia for my master’s. Most of the Iranians who choose Malaysia do not intend to be there for a long time. Instead, we choose Malaysia as a bridge to prepare us for our destinations, which are the U.S., Australia, or Canada. When I finished my master’s, under the influence of my close friends who love the U.S., I also decided to apply for the U.S. universities.

When asked to remember the beginning days of his life in the United States, to remember something as a cultural shock, or something which was different from his expectation, he responded:

My first home here was in the Nicholson residential life on the campus. It was a very dirty place, and I had not expected that a campus apartment would look like that. Last year, the university destroyed them and replaced them with new buildings, but when I lived there, they were awful. Generally, the city was not how I was expected. For example, there were no sidewalks, and most streets were flooded after a rain … about its people it was opposite, and they were much better than what I was expected. It was pleasurable for me that they gave me smiles as they passed me, they said ‘bless you’ as I
sneezed, or they opened the doors for me.

I socialize with Iranians, Americans, and other nationalities, and I do not like to limit myself to one group. I have good American friends, and I spend some time with them. They invite me to their parties and I have enjoyed them. I need to add that my friends are from those Americans who accept foreigners … In the early times, I liked more to socialize with Americans, but now I prefer to socialize more with Iranians. It doesn’t mean that I don’t like them, or I am upset with them. Instead, I am more comfortable with my community because I am well familiar with its cultural boundaries.

When asked about the process of learning language and if it was a barrier for him to join the society, he responded:

I did not have problems in the early times because I had studied in Malaysia and my English was improved there. Even though my English seemed to be good, when I made friends with Americans, I had some problem with language … For example, I was kidding with a girl in a gathering, and I had not expected that she would become upset, but she did. Since that time, I try to not kid with them because I do not know their cultural boundaries. This is the main reason that I said I want to be more with Iranians now because I am used to kidding and I do not know how to do it in their culture.

When asked to explain his main concerns as an Iranian student in the United States, he responded:

My main concern is my research. Now I am working on a project and my concern is to finish it on time. I am not worried about the future because I have already published some papers and I will do two or three more soon, so I can get the green card if I apply for NIW (National Interest Waiver Green Card) … I am not worried about Trump because I
think he cannot change a lot. I become sad when Trump talks about Iranians or immigrants, but I do not think he can change a lot in this country.

If he were asked to choose a feature of American culture as a souvenir to take to Iran what feature would he choose, he responded:

I would choose the smiles that they always have on their faces from this city, but from the U.S. in the whole, I would choose academics’ behavior. For example, in the university, when a person does not speak English properly or does not have enough knowledge about something, they are very patient with him or her.

When asked what features of Iranian culture, he would prefer to add to American culture, he responded:

I would prefer to bring the structure of the Iranian family to the U.S. I also want to bring our food diet which is full of vegetables and fruits.

When asked what changes he considered as important changes in his identity after his immigration, he responded:

I am more open-minded. Before, I insisted on my opinion and I did not accept opposing ideas, but now I am better.
CHAPTER 6. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I moved to the United States on December 28, 2012, with my husband and my twins. We had three flights from Tehran to Baton Rouge. As long as we were on our first flight, Tehran to Amsterdam, everything was good for me. I was hearing familiar voices that were talking in the Farsi language. When we changed our flight, from Amsterdam to Atlanta, those familiar voices were not heard anymore. All the passengers were talking in their own languages which I was not used to hearing. That moment was the first time for me that I doubted about our decision. I was asking myself: What we are doing? Where are we going? What will be our fortune?

Our decision for leaving Iran was influenced by many intertwined factors. When I was very young, my youthful excitement was replaced with the surrender to the dominant system of thought which required young people like me to change our dreams to match them with what was expected from us in Iran. A part of the limitations were imposed by the government like the compulsory hijab; however, another part of these limitations was imposed by my culture on girls like me just because we were girls. All these limitations motivated me from a young age to emigrate from my homeland, but I did not have an opportunity to do so at that time. When I got married, my husband’s idea was also like mine, but our dependence on our families dissuaded us from leaving Iran. My husband and I decided to tolerate the difficulties and go on living in the land that raised us for many years. But the issue became worse after the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

When the Iranian government refused to suspend the uranium enrichment program during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2006, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1696, which imposed harder sanctions on Iran than those imposed in 1995. Prices increased dramatically, and it made life more difficult even for middle-class people like us. The
problems were not just limited to the sanctions and the economic situation. In fact, the government’s corruption affected all aspects of people’s ordinary life, for instance, the air pollution levels in Tehran, my home city: Tehran had become one of the world’s most polluted cities, and it was often covered by smog. It was estimated that about 27 people die each day from pollution-related diseases. Eighty percent of the city’s pollution is due to cars which were produced by two Iranian factories (BBC Persian 2017). The low-quality products of these two factories were the main reason for Tehran’s air pollution, but the government supported them by controlling car imports because of their benefits (because the companies are for the government), and people could only buy the low-quality products. We became disappointed when the situation was becoming worse every day, and then we convinced ourselves that Iran was not a livable place anymore.

Getting admission into a university was the best way for us to escape from the worsening situation. My husband started to study for the TOEFL and GRE tests every day after his work hours. It was hard for us to manage everyday life as well as planning for our decision with our twins, who were around 2 years old at that time. My husband got admission from Louisiana State University, but we were rejected by the U.S. embassy on the first attempt. The officer said to us “it seems that you want to escape from the situations of Iran.” The officer was right. We again reapplied for the visa, and we were rejected one more time. The visas were issued on the third try. Each time, our family had to travel to Dubai to the U.S. embassy, and it was expensive.

Everything was new during the first days. We started our new life: renting an apartment, opening a bank account, weekly shopping, learning everyday expressions, exploring the city, etc. I was enthusiastic about the new place. The city was green and beautiful. It was small and not crowded and of course, not polluted. Everything about the new place was exciting and interesting
but making connections with new people was hard for me. I was pondering how to create a space for connection, I mean a real connection which was a critical need for me at that time. I was thinking how to speak in the new language to create intimacy between me and the new people.

My husband started his study, and he was more adapted than me to the new place. I was looking for a bridge that would connect my past with the present, a bridge that could give me a sense of belonging and identity. To establish this tie, I looked for connections with various networks. I joined the Iranian student association at LSU, and it functioned as a community for me. Some Iranians considered the Iranian gatherings as an obstacle for their adaptation, but they played an important role in the social realm of my life in the United States. These interactions eased my connection to the new place. We assured one another that we were all going through a similar path and we all had similar problems. These interactions helped us feel somewhat safe and secure and not completely out of place.

As time went by, I was thinking how to create a home and a community that integrated the two cultures. I started to attend to English classes which were at Chapel on the Campus. Some Iranian students did not have positive ideas about the classes and they believed that the Chapel’s primary goal in offering these classes was to spread its religious propaganda and not teaching English to us, and these Iranians, who escaped from compulsory religious beliefs, preferred not to attend to these classes. The Chapel English classes helped me a lot in relation to the new place and the new people. It did not mean that the Chapel did not talk about religious issues. In fact, their religious way of thinking and ideas reminded me of the religious people of my country and it made me think deeply about my past and my future. I was thinking how religious ideologies in all different forms had the same function. It was interesting to me that like Iran, besides strict religious people, there were kind, humane, and thoughtful people who also
believed in religious ideas.

People from different ethnicities and nationalities used the space of the Chapel for making connections. Most people who attended the classes used the space to see and to connect with people from their own country. It seemed that not only teaching was English not the Chapel’s primary goal, but also it was not the main concern for people who were attending the classes. The Chapel provided a space for me to create connections with people of other nationalities as well as Americans. It was interesting for me to understand how other nationalities adjusted themselves in the new place. I become a close friend with Christina who is from Germany. She is studying for the Ph.D. at LSU, and she has lived in Baton Rouge for five years. I was pondering that even Christina, who was from a European country, did not have a deep connection with Americans, and most of her relations were limited to other international students. Maybe our shared experience of immigration connected people like me and Christina to each other more than we were connected to Americans.

I decided to study here to have a shared experience with the people of the new place, which might help me to understand the reality of displacement. It seemed hard for me at that time, since my twins were only 4 years old. I passed the TOEFL and GRE tests. I had to change my visa from F2 to F1 which was not a simple process, especially for Iranians. I could not leave the country because there is no guaranty for my return and changing the visa from inside the U.S. was time-consuming and no one could estimate how long it could take. I also needed funding for my studies from the university because my family could not send money to me from Iran, due to the sanctions. Finally, all things like pieces of a puzzle matched on time together and I returned to school.

The university established my tie in a different way, and it helped me clarify some of my
confusion about my unfamiliar surroundings. It taught me to live with the reality of displacement and I became less dependent on the Chapel classes until I stopped going to them. As much as the Chapel helped me to figure out the dominant culture of southern people and gave me an image to understand who they are, the university helped me to understand the American intellectual ideas and thoughts. It provided an opportunity to compare the concept of modernity which I already learned in Iran with the American one. From the Iranian Constitutional Revolution until the Iranian Green Movement, a footprint of religion and myth was vivid in the ideas of Iranian intellectuals who are concerned about modernity in Iran. In other words, intellectuality in Iran is always wrapped within a religious view and offers an indigenous form of modernity. I was thinking about the main component of modernity: democracy in the political area, capitalism in economics, and respect for individualism and regard for human dignity in the social area. I was wondering if modernity could be indigenous, and if it could change its form into a new form like Islamic Feminism, while at the same time maintaining its function? All these questions forced me to rethink my past and my previous ideas to discover my new self.

I, like many other immigrants, was experiencing the shock of displacement, but my connections to the new networks eased this shock. I was expecting to see more powerful women, to see more income equality, to see more intellectuality among ordinary people etc., however, the huge shock for me was the notion of immigration itself. Immigration was not like what I had expected. Immigration for a person like me who came from a society with complex problems seemed like a sweet dream, but it was more like an adventure story. Immigration took away many things from me, but it also gave many other things in return for me. On the whole, I am satisfied with the transaction.

The tensions between Iran and the U.S. during these five years always makes me worried,
and it blurs my image of the future. My worst experience was last year when my husband graduated, and he was looking for a job. He applied to a company in California; it was his dream to work there since we moved to the U.S. He passed several call interviews, and he had an inside interview with the company. On the interview day, the clerk asked my husband for information to enter into the computer. When the clerk entered my husband nationality, the computer did not permit for the next stage. It was horrifying. The clerk also became sad for my husband and chatted for an hour with managers to figure out how to deal with the problem. Ultimately, they apologized to my husband, and they explained the problem. They told him that people from the five countries which the U.S. boycotts could not even enter the company for an interview. It took a week for my husband to recover from this shocking experience, and he reapplied with other companies until he got a job.

The internet and media help me to have tight relation with my home country as well as provide a visual space to connect myself with the new place. I am still following Iran from my computer screen. I mean, I left Iran, but I carried it on my laptop and it is still with me. During the early months, my Facebook walls were more familiar to me than my home walls here in the United States. I received messages from my family and my friends which warmed my heart when I felt loneliness. Facebook also is the main platform of the Iranian association of LSU, and it provides a space for transferring information and making announcements. I am still following Iranian films and music shows online, and they give me a sense of comfort. I also watch American’s TV shows and films. In the beginning, I forced myself to watch them to improve my English, but I actually become interested in watching them. I listen to the music which is produced by the Iranian diaspora in the United States, especially that which combines elements of Iranian music with elements of American, like Rana Farhan who combines Iranian traditional
poems with jazz and blues.

It is hard to choose one feature of Iranian culture that would be beneficial for U.S. society. I do not mean that this society is free from problems; instead, I mean it is hard to find a feature from my culture that would be practical for this society. Maybe our food diet which is full of fresh vegetables and less meat is a good souvenir from Iran for American people. I also believe that Iran already gave its best gifts to many countries as well as the United States, which are its young educated persons who left Iran during the recent 40 years.

In return, I would choose happiness and hope from U.S. people to take it to Iran. In the early months when I saw smiles and hope in their faces, I was thinking that their happiness resulted from their good living situation, but then later when I became aware of their difficulties, I understand they learn to be happy at the moment even if they have some problems. Their hope encourages them to change the unpleasant situation. Hope and happiness are the essential things that my people need. Happiness would offer us enjoyment of the moment and hope would encourage us to change the tough situation. Maybe if people like me had had this hope when we were in Iran, we would never have left it and instead, we would have tried harder to change the difficult situation.
Analysis and interpretation may be challenging for qualitative research. Whereas “analysis might be seen to be addressing the key features from the data, interpretation attempts to move beyond the data, not to be restricted by it (MacKian 2010, 2-17).” MacKian adds that a level of “reflexivity” is needed to move from categorizing, comparing, and contrasting data in discourse analysis into interpretation from the discourse.

Researchers of culture who use narratives are concerned about two issues in the process of analysis and interpretation (Quinn 2005). The first is an uncertain feeling about using what people say as evidence for what they think, as their words might mislead. The second worry is that the ideas and thoughts of those who are under the study could be lost to the researcher’s perspective and interests. Quinn (2005) offers what she called “good enough” methods, whereby “researchers think about their research decisions in terms of what is lost and is gained, rather than what might be ideal” (244). Taking these ideas into account, the current research moves from the analysis of Iranian immigration stories into the interpretation to discover who they are in the United States.

In this research, the interviews begin with interviewees’ immigration stories, and in this way, the interviewees provide information about their past, and they form and create their own stories in their own ways. It is visible especially among the interviews conducted by the researcher that interviewees refer to the problems which forced them to leave Iran or their reasons behind their decision in answer to the opening question. Seven of the eleven interviews explicitly refer to the political, social, and economic problems in Iran and considered them as the main reasons that encouraged them to leave Iran. Mana, Gelareh, Bahar, Shahan, and Leva all refer to relevant factors which influenced job opportunities in Iran, and they complained that
these factors are often more important than their professional skills. Mana, who wanted to be a teacher in Iran, stated that there were so many “marginal factors” which were considered more important than her skill in teaching, Gelareh referred to “nepotism” in Iran, and Bahar referred to the inequality and injustice that she experienced in her work environment. Shahan told that he finished his master’s, but he still did not have an “optimal” condition in his job. Even Amir Hossein, who considers his studies as the main reason for leaving Iran, refers to injustice in job positions as a reason that prevented him from returning to Iran.

Leva referred to special problems that women had when they are looking for a job in Iran, and she explained about her own experience when she was a junior student, and she went to a law office for an interview. Leva said to the notary that she was desperately looking for a job, and the notary asked her if she was virgin. This is clearly an inappropriate question. Difficulties that Iranian youth encountered were considered as the main reason for their immigration. Among the interviewees, the females have more complaints about their tough situation in finding an appropriate job in Iran, which indicates special difficulties that women have in Iran for presenting themselves in the society.

Among the interviewees, Amir Hossein is the only individual who considers his studies as the main reason for his decision to leave. Hesam and Sara referred to their curiosity about the United States, and they related that they wanted to experience living in the U.S. Hesam considers himself as a “traveler” who wants to understand the concept of modernity in the United States. Roza did not explicitly explain her reasons for leaving Iran, but from her unhappiness of the early days, it could be interpreted that she imagined a better life situation for herself in the U.S.

Omid, Mana, and I refer to our hopeless situation in Iran caused by a government that is not fit to control the country. Omid and Mana state that their friends all were thinking about
emigration because they did not have any hope for improvement. Omid explicitly said that he was not a very interested student in Iran, and his aim for applying for universities was just to leave Iran.

This quote from Mohsen Namjoo (2016), an Iranian singer-songwriter who emigrated to the United States in 2008, may describe some of the main reasons that force Iranian youth to leave their country:

وزرا و دولت مردان زمان مرا در دادگاه نیکولوس به عنوان مجرم بین المللی شناختند و قرار تعقیب برایشان صادر کردند. من جگونه می‌توانستم در جامعه ای که سردمدارانش مجرم تحت تعقیب –آن‌هایی که شاعری خود می‌افتادند و یا شاعری را می‌خواستند– نهادم، یا کسی که تاریخ گسترش و پی‌شکت، زبان فکری که تاریخ هست، صنعتی که منتاژ است، هواهای آلوده شهرت، طبیعت، کوه و مهک، یا صدا و سیم‌های فرهنگی، معمولاً به فواره می‌تواند و ساختن‌های دود آلود و کم‌آگاه، سقوط اختلافی یافتند، جامعه‌ای که می‌تواند به شدت تصمیم، یا شدت، مهم و مهم همه سراسر هستند را یا چهار می‌کشد، آن‌وقت تنها چیزی که پاک‌تر می‌ماند تن نازک آرای روابست (ص.۱).

How I can be proud of myself that I am a poet in a society where the government was convicted at the Nicolas International Court and its leaders were chased by the international police? How I can be proud of myself when our thinking language is a translation [refers to the censorship of ideas in Iran]; when our industry is assembled companies [refers to industries which were destroyed]; when our city is covered with the smoke and our nature is lost. How I can be proud of myself that I am a poet when I see death and migration of our intellectuals; when I see the growth of the moral corruption in my society; and when I see that voices of freedom were strangled at an early stage? When all this hopelessness covers our own existence, there is no way, unless, to live in a dream world (p.1).

7.1 The Conception of the New Place

Immigrants encounter changes in cultural context, and these changes may exceed the individual’s capacity. At that point, individuals may experience “culture shock” (Oberg 1960) or “acculturative stress” (Berry 1997). Some of the interviewees experienced cultural shock during the early months. Berry (1997) defines some general patterns of cultural shock, and he considers education as a “predictor” for low stress, because educated persons usually have an initial acculturation experience before they immigrate to the new society (503); they also have more
intellectual, economic, and social resources to deal with the changes and difficulties in the new place. For example, when Shahan was asked to remember his experience of cultural shock, he paused for a while and he did not consider anything special as being cultural shock.

Mana, Bahar, and Omid argue that the new place was not the way that they expected it to be. Bahar and Omid complained about the university apartment which was a very dirty and unclean place, and they considered it as a cultural shock in the early months, but both of them were able to change their places after six months and overcome the unpleasant situation. Mana complained about public transportation and she explained it as her cultural shock during the first year. Mana explained her difficulties during that time, but after a year she got her driver’s license. Gelareh and I consider the notion of immigration as the cultural shock because we were so excited to experience living in the U.S. that it prevented us from thinking deeply about what would happen in future or the reality of immigration.

Figure 7. Cultural shocks change into awareness of differences
Roza considered the concept of race or skin color as her cultural shock. The categorization of race is sometimes a confusing issue for immigrants to the United States, especially for those who have not experienced such classification in their home country.

In Working Toward Whiteness, Roediger (2005) explains the transformation of immigrants including Jewish, Italian, and Polish, into the “white ethnics” of America today. Roediger discusses how income and upward social status help immigrants to obtain white identity in the United States. Bozorgmehr and Sabagh (1988) consider Iranian immigrants as “high status” immigrants in the United States, and Mostofi (2003) also explains Iranians in the United States as trying to provide an image of a “white model minority in the eyes of the majority” (694).

Among the interviewees, Roza experienced cultural shock more than other interviewees, and it seems that the shock is still with her, as she said: “I still do not know why they asked me about my skin color.” Roza argues that the discrimination is not just limited to race, and that religion also makes an individual different or marked in the United States. It seems that it is wearing hijab which marks Roza as Muslim in the society which has a hidden anger against Muslim immigrants (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009) that resulted in a situation where Roza experienced the notion of race as cultural shock more than other Iranian students.

Berry (1997) also argues that acculturation strategies have close relationships with cultural shock, and he considers integration with the new society as a successful way of reducing cultural shock. Studying as a graduate student eases integration for Iranian students in the new place, as Sara said that she spent most of her time at the university so she quickly adapted to the new place. Iranian students also make intentional efforts to have more connections with the new society. For instance, Shahan and Omid said they never limited their relationships to the Iranian community and they always try to have connections with Americans. Shahan also argues that it
is important for immigrants to be absorbed by the host society and these connections ease their acceptance. It can be explained that Iranian students experience less cultural shock in the United States and they use their resources and their abilities to decrease its effects.

7.2 English Language as a Barrier

Language is among the most important aspects which influence connections of new immigrants. Keshishian (2000) and Sales (1990) examine the critical role communication plays in acculturation, and they look at English language proficiency and the role that language plays in immigrants’ adjustment to difficulties in everyday situations. The interviewees considered language as a barrier, especially during the first year. Mana said that she did not have enough self-confidence even to go shopping alone, and Bahar said that she did not even know how to start a conversation or what subject could be considered as the opening part of a conversation. Engaging with the school helped them to improve their language ability in order to respond their everyday situations.

The language difficulties for Iranian students are not just limited to their proficiency in the spoken language; perhaps, more importantly, they are influenced by the notion of the new culture. Bailey (1997) examines miscommunication due to cultural and linguistic differences, and he argues that different ideas about the appropriateness of speech activities are the main reason for this miscommunication. Omid, who is a witty boy, and is used to use words in a clever way to make fun in friendly gathering, is confused to do the same with his American friends. Omid considers cultural points of language as the reason that now he prefers more to socialize with his Iranian friends than with Americans. It seems that individuals who have a kind of deeper relations with their American friends and participate more in parties or gatherings, have more
experienced the notion of culture in the new language.

Iranian students are aware of the cultural points of the new language, and their efforts to understand the difference are considerable. Interviewees deliberately try to follow Americans TV programs or movies, and they consider this to be essential in help removing the ambiguities about the new culture. For example, Bahar decided not to watch Farsi movies or read Farsi books from the early days because she wanted to improve her language and also she wanted to learn the cultural notions of the new language.

7.3 Making a Connection with New People

Iranian students describe their relationship with Americans as being on the surface level. Roza, Amir Hossein, and Mana argued that the notion of race divides U.S. society into two main fractions, white and others, and they argued that underneath the white society does not accept others. Roza stated her own experience about making a bank account application in which she was classified as “other,” and she added: “the bitter feeling that I am other is still with me from that time; this is the message that I received from the society.” Pluralism offers the concept of “salad bowl” with respect to minorities’ lifestyles; however, Roza has a different interpretation of “salad bowl,” and she argues that even though the ingredients of the salad are in the same bowl, they never mix with each other. Roza considers skin color as a barrier for immigrants in the U.S., and she stated that “it is not easy for others to grow up as it is for the dominant group.” Amir Hossein compares the U.S. with Poland, where he lived there for a while, and he argues “racism is not common in Poland, and individuals just introduce themselves, not the countries which they come from or races that they belong to.” Mana stated, “Americans have an outward appearance of being nice, but deep down they do not accept us,” and she also argues that
stereotypes influence the relationship between Iranians and Americans and the stereotypes create limitations for Iranians.

Shahan, Omid, Bahar, and I also consider the cultural distance as the reason that we do not have deep connections in this society. Omid likes to make a joke and it is part of his character, but he did not know how to do so in American culture in order not to bother anyone. Omid said that in the early times he liked to socialize with Americans more than his Iranian friends but now he prefers to socialize more with Iranians because he is more comfortable and well familiar with the cultural boundaries of the Iranian community. I refer to lack of shared experiences as the main reason that deprives me of having appropriate connections, and I refer to my relationship with Christina, who is also an international student, I think the similar situation that we both are international students, and that both of us use the English language as our second language enhances our understanding of each other. Bahar said that she did not even know how to start a conversation when she first arrived, and she refers to cultural differences between Iranian culture and U.S culture in starting a simple conversation.

Although both groups, those who consider race as the reason which prevents them from having more relationships with American people and those who consider cultural distance as the main reason, have almost the same level of connection to U.S. society; the second group is more satisfied with their relationship.

Stereotypes about Iranians had a considerable impact on Iranian immigrants during the first and second waves of immigration. Malek (2015), Tehranian (2009), and Kamalipour (1995) recount horrible experiences that Iranians had during that time, which led them to cover up their nationality. Among the interviewees, Mana experienced stereotypes more than other interviewees, and she argued that it has become worse after Trump’s Travel Ban. Sara, Shahan,
Bahar, and I also have experienced the stereotypes, but we said that it happened only a few times for us. Malek (2015) explains the influence of stereotypes on second-generation Iranians and describes their experiences at school when their classmates bothered them because they were from Iran. Iranian students experience stereotypes less than the second generation, mostly because they moved to the U.S, as graduate students and, as Mana argues, “in the academic environment, it is required from the individuals to have intellectual behaviors, not concerning nationalities or races, even if they do not deeply believe in it.” The other reason that Iranian students experience stereotypes less might be that being Iranian is not detectable from their appearance in the United States, and they are considered more or less like other international students. For example, African students are marked as African American or students who wear hijab are considered to be strict Muslim students; however, for secular Iranians, there are no such features that overtly mark them in U.S. society.

Malek (2015) showed the different strategies that Iranians adopted to disguise their nationality when encountering stereotypes during the first and second waves of immigration. Iranian students do not disguise their nationality as Iranians did during the first and the second waves. It seems that they rather adopt one of two different strategies. Sara said “when I feel they (Americans) are wrong about my past or the place that I am come from, I start to give them information”, and in this way, she tries to show other facets of Iran rather than the political facet. However, other interviewees, like Shahan, Bahar, and I do not try to change their views. Bahar said: “I do not explain anything to convince them that they are thinking wrong. I just try to end the conversations.”
7.4 The “New Identity”

Erikson (1950) argues that big changes in an individual’s life such as immigration result in continuing the development of identity. Immigrants reconstruct their new identity based on their past identity faced with the new situation. During this process, immigrants continuously compare the new society with their home, and they try to find themselves a place in the new location. Garza-Guerrero (1974) describes a “new identity” which is a product of their native culture and the host culture. Interviewees constantly compare the two societies during these interviews, and they sometimes argue how these differences have changed them.

The new way of thinking, which Turner (1966) describes it as “in between,” accounts for the considerable change in Iranian students’ identity in the United States. Roza describes her new way of thinking as the “gray” color, and she considers it as her big change after immigration. In the past, everything was categorized as good/bad or black/white in Roza’s mind, but that binary categorization does not exist after her immigration. Now Roza argues that all things are a combination of good and bad, and she considers a nation of “between” to describe everything; she believes that her new vision has changed her into a more welcoming person.

Shahan also compared the two societies, and he referred to the same issue from a different perspective. Shahan argues that our religious, cultural, or ideological system in Iran, is like a shrine, and it is intended to guide our way of thinking into a single point. However, here instead of having a single theory, people are guided by various theories or ideologies which have different goals. Shahan provides an example from his classes to explain the issue more clearly. He said that in his classes (in the U.S.) it is emphasized that there is not a single way of solving a problem and that there is no such a thing as a perfect solution. He added that his professors ask him to look at different solutions, and this might enable him to look at the problem from a third
Amir Hossein also referred to the same example as Shahan. Amir Hossein said if an individual has a wrong idea about something, professors do not tell him or her that it is completely wrong. Instead, they encourage her or him to do more research. Omid also refers to this vision and explains how it influences the academic environment in the U.S. Amir Hossein, Shahan, Roza, and Omid consider their new way of thinking as a souvenir that they would want to take to Iran. This way of thinking also has been seen among other interviewees who do not emphasize it like Roza. For example, Hesam said “immigration is not a good thing for immigrants at the same time it is a good thing for them” and Mana said that she was an emotional person, but now she combines her logical thought with her emotion when she wants to make a decision. Awareness of differences between the two societies enables Iranian students to discover new ways of thinking and apply them in their life.

Leva, Mana, and Bahar compare femininity in Iran with that in the U.S. Mana argues that each woman has her own individuality in the U.S, and she argues that this individuality does not exist for women in Iran. Mana refers to her mother in Iran who lives her life through her children, and she complains that Iranian women do not learn to pay attention to themselves. However, Bahar prefers to choose a feature of Iranian women and offer it to American women. Bahar argues that Iranian women are more patient during difficulties, and this ability enriches the family institution. Leva has a view between that of Mana’s and Bahar’s: she considers the women of both societies as strong women but in two different ways. Leva refers to the women of her small village and she argues that they learn to be strong by getting pregnant each year, by living in poverty, and by working in the fields from the early morning, while we change the form of strength here into studying in universities, traveling to new places, and doing hobbies;
ultimately the functions of the two forms are the same. In fact, more difficulties are imposed by society on Iranian women, and involves lots of limitations upon them, but they are still rich and have powerful notions. Comparison between the Iranian women and the U.S. women has a different meaning for individuals which may be influenced by their personal characters.

Sara, Bahar, and Roza refer to one of the special components of Iranian culture Ta’aroof and Roodarvasi (see chapter 2). Sara said that we do not show our real face in our relationships in Iran, and most of the time we hide our feelings and we do not say our real ideas. Sara argues that this feature of our culture also affects other aspects of our life, and it makes our life more complex and difficult. Sara argues that Americans do not have such secrecy in their minds, or in their behavior; therefore, they encounter fewer difficulties in their relationships. Bahar also considers frankness as the feature that completely makes us different from Americans. Bahar, Roza, and Sara consider frankness as the feature that they would like to add to Iranian culture, but they also mention that it should not be at the level of frankness that is in U.S. society because it does not match with Iranian culture.

Two main concerns are visible among Iranian students. Women like Mana, Roza, and Bahar are concerned about their integration into U.S. society, and they generally are afraid of not being accepted by the new society. For instance, Roza thinks that she might never achieve the social status that she previously had in Iran. However, men such as Shahan, Omid, and Amir Hossein are more concerned about their studies and their research results. This might be a result of the notion of masculinity in the United States, where men are still more comfortable than women.

Most of the interviewees follow Iranian shows or movies as well as American ones. They argue that they learn cultural rules of the new place by watching American programs; however,
they have a good feeling when they watch movies or listen to music in the Farsi language. For instance, Shahan said when he is really tired he prefers to listen to or watch something in the Farsi language. Ghorashi and Boersms (2009) argue that new technology provides an opportunity for Iranian immigrants in the United States to switch from having an “exiles identity” with the notion of having “lost home” toward a “diasporic identity” with the notion of being “humanitarian” (687). In fact, online resources such as music and film provide an opportunity for Iranian students to maintain a close relationship with their home, which enhances the Iranian part of their identity. Interviewees follow online many Iranian serials or movies which are produced inside of Iran as well as programs which are produced within the Iranian diaspora, and it may show that Iranian students belong themselves to the Iranian communities both inside and outside of Iran.

One of the parts of Iranian culture that almost all interviewees emphasize to keep is the structure of family in Iranian culture. The emotions and feelings that Iranians experience in their family is the main part of their identity that they never want to sacrifice in a new place. Gelareh told that the only thing that she has missed during the eleven years here is her family. Mana said the role of the Iranian family is more active in our culture and it is more supportive, and it provides a comfortable feeling. Sara related that her family always supported her emotionally and financially and she would like to raise her children here in the way she grew up in Iran. Omid and Shahan also chose the structure of family in Iran as a souvenir and Shahan argues that family gatherings and the close relations in Iran would bring many good things with it. He explains that each of us had a cousin who makes us mad or a grandfather who is tough, but we spend our weekends with them and it teaches us to get rid of just focusing on ourselves.

To sum up, Iranian students’ new identity is based on the main components of the Iranian
culture, but it is also influenced by the U.S. academic and social culture. Iranian students’ awareness of the differences between the two cultures enable them to achieve a third vision between the Iranian’s vision and the U.S. vision, and the new vision helps them to redefine their identity.
CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

During the third wave of Iranian immigration to the United States, Iranian youth, who become hopeless in Iran from the unpleasant political, social, and economic situation, use student visas to get around the laws which limited emigration of Iranians to the United States. These students who intend to stay in the U.S. after finishing their studies are very determined to connect themselves to the new society.

Iranian students are different from other types of Iranian immigrants in the United States. They move into U.S. society when they are young as graduate students. Studying in universities integrates them from the early days with the new place and bombards them with new cultural and social information. This information enhances their awareness of differences between the two societies, and therefore enables them to adjust themselves to the new place quickly. Universities not only gradually impart the new cultural and social forms to Iranian students, but also they prepare them for professional careers. These students, who gradually because aware of U.S. culture and also who are learning professional skills, are expected to find appropriate jobs in the United States in the future.

Iranian students plan to socialize with Americans as well as other nationalities, and they consider these relations as a way to be a member of the new society. Their intentional relationships with Americans help them to figure out the new forms of relationships, and their relationships with other nationalities enhance their sense of belonging to the new place. Finally, all these connections give them a sense of home and belonging.

Although Iranian students try to socialize with Americans and people of other nationalities, their relationships mostly are related to their own community. Iranian students feel comfortable when they hang out with their Iranian friends. They also use the space of loneliness
after immigration to think about their past. It sometimes increases their dependency on their own culture or the place where they grew up them. New technologies such as Skype, Facebook, and Telegram increase their connections with their families at home and their past and continuously remind them of their roots: who they were and what they had. These connections which tie Iranian students with their own past enable them to keep their past identity proudly. For instance, Iranian students do not deny their nationality like Iranian immigrants during the first and the second waves (Malek 2015) when encounter stereotypes.

Iranian students continuously compare various aspects of the two cultures, and they try to find themselves or reconstruct their identity between the two cultures. They compare the structure of Iranian family with the structure of American family, they compare femininity in Iran with femininity in the U.S., they compare the special components of Iranian culture Ta’arof and Roodarvasi with the frankness of people in the U.S., etc. These comparisons between the two societies resulted in their new identity. Iranian students’ new identity is a combination of elements of the two cultures which was described by Turner (1966) as “in between” to define the situation that individuals grew up in their own culture but start to live in a new culture and are exposed to new form of living.

Iranian students had two suitcases when they moved to the United States. They try to keep the components of their first suitcase which reminded them of their roots and their family. However, their second suitcases, which were full of hope, passion, and dreams were mixed with the reality of immigration, and provide a new understanding of the concept of immigration for them. Hesam stated: “immigration is not a good thing for immigrants at the same time it is a good thing for them” and I said: “immigration took away many things from me, but it also gave many other things in return to me.”
Since Iranian students’ stories are ongoing and they are in the middle of their own ways, drawing a conclusion from these ongoing stories is hard. What gives us some cause for optimism from these stories are the Iranian students’ agency and their awareness about the two societies. Iranian students’ agency helps them to change unpleasant situations which are imposed on them and their awareness helps them to find solutions for their lives. Being between the two societies gives them a power that enables them to choose features of the two cultures to reconstruct their new identity or redefine who they are in the new place. It seems that Iranian students keep the main components of Iranian culture such as the construction of family, but they also influenced strongly by the U.S. academic and social culture like the “gray” color in the way of thinking. In other words, Iranian students keep the main elements of their past identity, but they experience a revolution inside themselves which changes them into new persons in the United States.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1. IRIB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Aram Emamjomeh
   Anthropology

FROM: Dennis Landin
   Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 20, 2017

RE: IRB# E10701

TITLE: 21st century Iranian Immigrant Identity Formation in the United States


Review Date: 10/20/2017

Approved  X  Disapproved

Approval Date: 10/20/2017  Approval Expiration Date: 10/19/2020

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Interview Consent Form

1. Study Title: "The 21st century Iranian Immigrant Identity Formation in the United States"

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study,
   M-F, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
   Dr. Mary Brody (225) 578-8174
   Aram Esmaili (225) 302-4797

4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to examine the formation of Iranians’ identity in the United States. How do Iranians find their new identity through Iranian culture and American culture in the United States?

5. Subject Inclusion: Individuals over the age of 22 who are graduate students at Louisiana State University. To participate in this study, you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

6. Number of subjects: Maximum 5

7. Study Procedures: The study will be conducted 5 interviews with 5 Iranian graduate students at Louisiana State University. Subjects should spend approximately 1 hour answering questions about their everyday life experiences in the United States.

8. Benefits: This study may yield valuable information about formation of Iranians’ identity in the United States. Immigration and establishing a “new identity” are important issues not only for immigrants but also for the United States, because with each wave of immigration, new ethnicities and culture absorb into the American culture or American identity.

9. Risks: No known risk is expected to occur to individuals who participate in this study. Files will be kept in secure cabinet to which only the investigator has access.

10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
12. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board (225) 578-8892, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________
APPENDIX 3. QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

1- Tell me about your immigration story? how did you come here?

2- Tell me something about the first days that you moved here? What was your feeling at the beginning?

3- Do you have the same idea about the United States before and after you came here? If your answer is “No” explain it more?

4- As a person who studies in the U.S what are your main concerns? How has the fact that you are from Iran contributed to your concerns?

5- Talk about your connections here? Do you socialize more with Iranians or Americans?

6- How is the process of learning English for you? Do you think that language is a barrier for you here? If yes describe it?

7- Does the fact that sometimes we do not get the cultural points of language here bother you?

8- Do you follow any American TV program here?

9- Do you follow any Farsi language program? Or Do you watch any Iranian channels (inside or outside of Iran)?

10- If you want to choose a feature of people here and bring it to Iran as a souvenir what the feature you choose?

11- In contrast, if you want to choose a feature of Iranians and bring it here what it would be?

12- Do you celebrate American events or rituals like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween?

13- Do you like to socialize more with Americans or Iranians or other nationalities? Why? (ask about their actual socialization)

14- If you try to socialize with Americans, are you successful in doing so? Explain more.
VITA

Aram Emamjomeh was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1979. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English translation at Islamic Azad University of North Tehran Branch in 2008. Thereafter, she worked as an English teacher in Tehran. When she moved to the United States, her interest in anthropology grew, and she made the decision to enter the graduate program in the Department of Geography and Anthropology in Louisiana State University to study Linguistic Anthropology in the fall of 2016. She expects to graduate in May 2018, with a Master of Arts in Anthropology. She plans to pursue a career in Anthropology.