

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the social reality of Iranians living in the United States. The main objective is to find out how Iranians (Iranian Americans) maintain, construct and perceive their Iranian identity and to identify factors that could intervene in this process. Another aim is to examine intra-diasporic social relations, social interactions with American society and stance towards Iran. To fulfill the purpose of this dissertation, a qualitative research method was applied. The selected qualitative data consisted of thirty-one in-depth interviews with Iranians in New York City and Los Angeles. The results of the research indicated a strong sense of Iranian pride among all respondents, regardless their religious, inner ethnic or generational affiliation. This pride stems from ancient Iranian cultural heritage (and from Pahlavi era that adopted ancient symbolism into its ideological repertoire) and is still kept alive through pre-Islamic symbols and religiously indifferent traditions. It is obvious that the “pure Iranian identity” belongs to the first generation Iranians only, while the 1.5 and second generations, in their self-concept, proved to be rather hyphenated or torn between three spaces (typically young Iranian Jews). Research revealed their identity is oftentimes chosen, according to situation and social context. Respondents demonstrated their rejecting and hostile attitude towards the Islamic theocracy in post-revolutionary and present-day Iran; such attitude is deep-rooted and prevalent even among young generation. Research participants articulated their common ambivalent feelings towards American society: on the one hand, they expressed their gratitude to America for providing them with a new home and opportunities, on the other hand they reflected periods of aversion and discrimination they went through and felt from Americans during escalated periods in U.S.-Iran relations.

Keywords: Iranian-American, Persian Jews, U.S.-Iran relations, iranianness, hyphenated identity, Tehrangeles.