SN Soc Sci (2022) 2:75
https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-022-00386-9

ORIGINAL PAPER

Am I Swede or Iranian? The question of national and ethnic identities among children of Iranian immigrants in Sweden

Fereshteh Ahmadi[1] · **Babak Ahmadi**[1] · **Saeid Zandi**[1]

Received: 14 August 2021 / Accepted: 5 May 2022

Abstract
This article examines the impact of the host society's social characteristics on second-generation immigrants' understanding of their national and ethnic identities. Specifically, we studied how second-generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves with Iranian society, with the Iranian ethnic group in Sweden, and/or with Swedish society, and then we compared second-generation Iranians in Sweden with those in the USA concerning the issue in question. To gather the data in Sweden, we used semi-structured e-mail interviews with 15 young people of Iranian background. We used secondary data to compare our results with those obtained in the USA. When comparing the results of this study with those obtained in the USA, we did not find the identity tensions and crisis reported by research on second-generation Iranians in the USA in members of the same generation in Sweden. Some policy recommendations were suggested.

Keywords Acculturation · Diaspora · Identity crisis · Immigration · International migration

Introduction

The intensification of nationalism and racism in recent decades, especially in the last few years, around the world has resulted in a serious problem concerning the ethnic and national identities of second-generation immigrants. This is especially the case in western countries, due to the tremendous increase in immigration to these countries.

Proceeding from the post-Eriksonian psychological notion of identity, which considers that identity is made up of "clearly identifiable static qualities without which members of ethnic groups are likely to suffer damage" we can assume that "a strong,

✉ Fereshteh Ahmadi
faw@hig.se

[1] Department of Social Work and Criminology, Faculty of Health and Occupational Studies, University of Gävle, Gävle, Sweden

Published online: 14 May 2022

secure ethnic identity makes a positive contribution to the psychological well-being" of immigrants and their descendants (Phinney et al. 2001, p. 502). As Behtoui (2021, p. 342) mentions,

> 'ethnic identity' is 'part of the "acculturation" process that takes place when immigrants come to a new society' (Phinney et al. 2001, 494)… According to this essentialist understanding of ethnicity, 'One's ethnicity can be defined in terms of one's ancestral heritage, specifically the culture or cultures of origin of one's parents and grandparents' (Phinney 2005, 188). The main problem with this perspective, as Phoenix (2010) posits, is that it tends to reproduce an idea of ethnic identity that is 'static, coherent and often unitary'.

As Behtoui (2021, p. 342) emphasises, what is lacking in such a view of ethnic identity is "the relationality of the different components and how they influence each other." In this article, we try to discuss one of these important components, i.e. the impact of the host society in the reconstruction of ethnic identity among the second-generation immigrants. We do not regard then ethnic identity as static. We believe, as Hall (2017, p. 127) mentions, that:

> Identity cannot be a fixed essence at all, as if it lay unchanged outside of history and culture, and this is so for one principal reason: identity is not given once and for all by something transmitted in the genes we carry in the color of our skin, but is shaped and transformed historically and culturally.

Accordingly, whereas first-generation immigrants usually have emotional ties and a strong sense of national and/or ethnic belonging to their country of origin, the third generation usually has a strong sense of belonging to the host country. The situation of the second generation is much more complicated. Members of the second generation usually have a dual sense of belonging to both their parents' native country and the host country. One of the factors that affect this sense is the social characteristics of the host society. A vast majority of second-generation individuals in western countries have parents who emigrated after 1980 from non-western countries. Aged 40 years or younger and in the stage of young or middle adulthood, this generation can be a danger or an important asset for the host country. We therefore turned our attention to the issue of the ethnic and national identities of second-generation immigrants. This paper examines the impact of the host society's social characteristics on second-generation Iranian immigrants' understanding of their national and ethnic identities. To achieve this aim, we studied whether second-generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves as Iranians and/or Swedes and then compared these results with literature findings concerning the second-generation Iranians in the USA.[1]

[1] Here, it should be mentioned that USA is a vast country with divergent ethnic and religious groups. Historically, each of these groups contributes to America's cultural heritage; especially during the last decades, the US local culture has rewarded "diversity" and "color". Although historically we cannot talk of such a diversity in Sweden, but during the last decades due to migration of almost two hundred nations to this country, Sweden is also enriched by a vast cultural diversity. In this article, we confined ourselves only to one of these groups, i.e. Iranians. We are yet aware of this vast diversity in both countries.

Theoretical framework

Ethnic identity, national identity, and Swedish mentality

Proceeding from results based on our primary data, we constructed theoretical patterns that can be regarded as Weberian ideal types. According to Weber (1904), an ideal type can be used to understand the chaos of social reality; however, an ideal type neither corresponds to reality as it is nor illustrates all the characteristics and elements of a given phenomenon. Ideal types are hypothetical constructions formed from real phenomena and function as theoretical tools to understand the reality; they have explanatory value. They are not therefore the instruments to denote statistical average. Weber (1904, p. 90) emphasizes that:

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct...

Ideal types also allow sociologists to do meaningful comparative analysis: using ideal types makes it possible to establish possible causal connections between different social phenomena. Identity construction is an ongoing and complex process. Therefore, applying ideal types for explaining different possible constructional model of ethnic and national identities helps us, without ignoring this ongoing and complicated process, to understand how in different ways these identities can be constructed.

Two notions were used to construct these patterns, i.e., ethnic identity and Swedish mentality; in addition, the notion of national identity was used to analyze the results. The notion of ethnic identity was used to understand affiliation with the dominant features of Iranian culture and the sense of belonging to the Iranian minority ethnic group. The term "Swedish mentality" was used to address second-generation Iranians' adoption of dominant Swedish norms, values, and ways of thinking and living. The term national identity was chosen to refer to the sense of patriotism among this group.

Ethnic identity and national identity

Developing a sense of self is essential to the process by which a child becomes a mature adult. Each individual's understanding of himself or herself is a unique combination of identifying with and feeling part of various groups, such as a religious group, ethnic community, and nation. In terms of identifying with a large group, such as an entire nation or ethnic community, the situation of second- and maybe even third-generation individuals with minority ethnic backgrounds is even more complicated. Members of such groups must continually negotiate their identification with their ethnic group and with the mainstream culture of the host society. They

may also negotiate their identification with the nation of the country in which they live and with the nation to which their parents and ancestors belonged. One's ethnic identity cannot change during one's life span, although one's national identity can. Identity formation is an ongoing process driven by continual contrast between tradition and ritual, on one hand, and individuality and the adoption of new norms and values, on the other. Definitions of ethnic identity and national identity vary depending on scholars' theoretical understandings of identity and ethnicity and related concepts. An appropriate definition for this study is that of Trimble and Dickson (2005, p. 415): "Ethnic identity is an affiliative construct, where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group".

As Chandra (2006, p. 398) emphasizes,

> Ethnic identity categories are a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by descent-based attributes. By attributes that "determine" eligibility for membership, I mean either those that qualify an individual for membership in a category or those that signal such membership. By "descent-based attributes," I mean attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent. Attributes "associated with descent" include those acquired genetically (e.g., skin color, gender, hair type, eye color, height, and physical features), through cultural and historical inheritance (e.g., name, language, place of birth, and origin of one's parents and ancestors), or in the course of one's lifetime as markers of such an inheritance (e.g., last name or tribal markings). Attributes "believed to be associated with descent" are attributes around which a credible myth of association with descent has been woven, whether or not such an association exists in fact. The definition thus includes both a subjective and an objective element."

Definitions of national identity, especially in political philosophy, focus on national self-determination. The present study has chosen not to consider the political dimensions of national identity. National identity can be regarded as a person's identity and sense of belonging to one nation or state; it refers to a feeling that one shares with a group of people, regardless of one's citizenship status (Tajfel and Turner 2004).

We consider both notions to be largely socially constructed, although certain attributes are not easily modified by social processes. As Gong (2007, p. 506) noted:

> The relationship between ethnic identity and national identity can range from negative to no relationship to positive relationship. A negative relationship may be due to feeling of rejection by the society. Lack of a relationship might suggest the perception of the two as non-overlapping. A positive relationship might reflect an integrated bicultural identity. Attitude toward the majority group should be an important factor helping to tease these patterns apart.

Swedish mentality

Discussion of the Swedish mentality came to the forefront following the considerable increase in immigration to Sweden from 1980 onwards. Encounters between Swedes and non-Swedes have actualized the question of what it means

to be a Swede, in terms of thinking and behaving. Besides, as Daun (2012) explained, "the hardening market for Sweden in international business also explains the renaissance in the 80 s of thinking about national character in Sweden". Åke Daun is one of the best-known researchers of the Swedish mentality. He has identified some characteristics that constitute the Swedish mentality. These characteristics are thoroughly explained in Daun's book *Svensk mentalitet* (Swedish mentality) (Daun 1996). Below are the characteristics that he highlights as part of the Swedish mentality.

Independence Personal independence is highly valued in Swedish culture, significantly more so than, for example, in Finland, Italy and the US. The need for independence among Swedes may explain their generally positive attitude towards being alone.
Conflict Avoidance Swedes typically avoid face-to-face conflicts. Like the Japanese, Swedes tend to be in strong favour of agreement and consensus.
Honesty Swedes describe themselves as honest, although this notion has been considerably challenged in recent years: income tax evasion is frequently mentioned as one of several exceptions to the rule. It seems to be a tendency among Swedes to tell the truth in a very precise way, i.e., not to exaggerate, but rather to present all the details. But honesty is also praised in a more traditional way—lying is considered bad by a majority of Swedes (60%), compared with only 13% of Danes and 26% for Mediterranean Europe.
Emotions Among Swedes there are relatively few kisses, hugs and verbal emotional expressions. In child rearing, even Swedish-Americans report that the importance of retaining control over feelings was often impressed upon them in early childhood.
Reason: In Sweden, rationalism has long dominated the climate of opinion. There is a strong preference for rational arguments, facts and concreteness, as opposed to emotional and speculative imagination. The effectiveness of planning and ability or willingness among Swedes to negotiate and to agree on compromises has also been attributed to this rational argumentation.
Gloom In the eyes of many foreigners Swedes seem to be gloomy and joyless.

This study does not examine the extent to which the interviewees display the above-mentioned characteristics, as such an examination would require a more comprehensive quantitative study. In constructing the theoretical patterns (i.e., ideal types) for this study, we proceeded from our understanding of interviewees' adoption of the so-called Swedish mentality. These patterns were constructed to make it possible to distinguish the different ways in which our interviewees see themselves as Iranian or Swedish or both. As noted above, as ideal types, these patterns do not correspond to any reality as it is (i.e., the degree of Swedish mentality or "Iranianness") and do not consider all characteristics and elements of the interviewees' identities.

Social construction of identity and culture

According to proponents of the social construction theory of identity, there is no objective and independent "self"; rather, the self is shaped within the framework of various relationships. Every individual is thus created in relation to others and is constantly reconstructed on the basis of the historical, cultural, and social milieux in which these relationships are embedded. Accordingly, the social constructivists see *others* as the main determining factor in the individual's construction of self (Stevens 1998, pp. 241–243). In this sense, the issues we are used to taking for granted are not actually objective facts but are the products of human inter-subjectivity (Hacking 1999). Proceeding from the social constructionist theory, we can affirm that categories such as nation, ethnicity, or identity do not exist outside of the context of human social behavior, as they exist only by virtue of social interactions.

The process of identity construction is, as seen in Erikson's (1980) stages of psychological development, a life-long process. Erikson's discussion of the construction of identity reflects an ongoing process constituting the basis of meaningful future adult life. Identity is developed through the life stages. The society in which we live, the ethnic group to which we belong, and the cultural framework in which we are raised are important factors that, throughout our lives, continually construct and reconstruct our identities.

Concerning ethnic and national identities, it is therefore crucial to consider these identities as always under construction and reconstruction. The theory that we found important for our study is the social construction theory of identity with a focus on the role of culture. Concerning the role of culture in identity construction, Hall (1994, p. 224) addressed two approaches: In the first approach, identity is related to "a shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common". Thus, culturally constructed identities "reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (Hall 1994, p. 224). The second approach "recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened— 'what we have become'" (Hall 1994, p. 225).

The second approach can be applied in studying immigrant groups, which face the challenges of living in a cultural setting other than the one where they were first socialized. Questions concerning "what we really are" or "what we have become" are crucial in the immigrants' search to understand their identity. Culture has a crucial role in the construction of identity. As Ahmadi and Ahmadi (1998) have noted, belief systems, value systems, and personal lifestyles are culturally constructed. Every person's identity is directly dependent on the social structure in which her/his identity is constructed. There is no doubt that the construction of identity is an ongoing process, but here we address the primary and secondary socialization processes by which the individual internalizes the basic norms and values of her/his orienting system. There is a risk that the well-being of those who have moved not

only between countries but also between cultures may be threatened by the lack of coherence between the social structures of the societies where they are living and the social structures in which their identities were constructed (Haeri Darya 2007). The tension between the dominant culture of the surrounding society and the culture that the immigrants have internalized threatens people's perception of wholeness and inner integrity. Contact with a new society and its specific belief system and lifestyle needs—when cultural distance is great—can call for the reconstruction of identity. When there is a huge gap between a person's culture of origin and the new cultural environment, such a reconstruction of identity can result in the cancellation of the basic value system, i.e., a state of anomaly, which means, among other things, a rupture between past and present reality (Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1998).

Many immigrants, including Iranians, come from countries that are culturally very different from Sweden. For these people, migration has meant questioning their identities, and such confrontation sometimes strengthens their group identity, especially their ethnic identity. In the exile situation, such strengthening often results in a backward-looking caricature of the original culture. The tendency to preserve the group-based identity and understanding of fundamental values becomes even stronger than in the country of origin. The fear of losing one's group-based identity can have drastic consequences, such as so called "honour killing".

Here we should mention that sexuality is an extremely strong part of our self—whether this self is formed in a group-centered culture of shame or through an individuation process in an individual-based culture of guilt, we manifest both our sexuality and our conjugal family ties. In group-oriented societies, with strong group-based loyalties, sexuality of a member of the family is a matter not only for all family members but possibly a matter for the entire ethnic group. It presents symbolically the identity of the group. Girls / women are expected to preserve their virginity with regard to the family's honor, the children should marry in agreement with the parents, and the woman should give birth to a son to ensure the family's survival.

Therefore, even the second generation have adopted the lifestyle of the new culture, they sometimes find it problematic when someone in family violate the values with which they were originally brought up. The case of Fadime Shahandal[2] and several others in Sweden are examples of how the second-generation young boys made an alliance with their fathers to retain the honor of family (Ahmadi Lewin and Lewin 2003).

[2] During her life, Swedish-Kurdish Fadime Sahindal gave a voice and face to all people who live under honor-related oppression and violence. Fadimeh, who was under a long time threatened by her brother and father, was brutally murdered by her father on 21 January 2002. She was then 26 years old. Fadime's murder shook Sweden and brought about questions concerning honor-related norms, oppression and violence.

Methodology

Research design

The research design used a mixed-methods model incorporating the triangulation of data sources—i.e., checking the consistency of findings using different data sources within the same qualitative method—in this case using qualitative data from Sweden and qualitative narrative descriptions from 12 American cases described in the research literature. The study followed a sequential design divided into two stages: in stage 1, we conducted our own interviews using a semi-structured interview design; in stage 2, we used secondary data concerning studies of second-generation Iranians in the USA.

It is important to consider that our study is not a quantitative study, but a qualitative. We had not at all aimed *to generalize our results to all second generation Iranians, either in Sweden or in USA*. We aim *to bring a perspective to the question of national and ethnic identities among children of Iranian immigrants in Sweden* and hopefully to shed light on the problem of identity construction among second-generation immigrants in general. In a qualitative study, the informants are not representative of the population in question and the selection of sample is not randomly. Considering this point, neither our sample in Sweden nor our selection of secondary data regarding "sample" in USA are representative for the target group. We proceed from a convenience sampling which is a type of nonprobability sampling in which informants are sampled simply because they are "convenient" sources of data.

Our primary data collection

The data were collected through semi-structured e-mail interviews with 15 young people of Iranian background (defined as individuals with two parents born in Iran). A qualitative data-gathering method was thought best for the purpose of this study, as it allowed us to obtain in-depth information from interviewees. E-mail interviews were used for data gathering because almost all selected interviewees were working or studying and had difficulty finding suitable times for in-person interviews. They suggested conducting the interviews via e-mail, as they felt that answering questions by e-mail would take less time; they also regarded e-mail interviews as more comfortable than face-to-face interviews. It should be mentioned that the interview guide and the interviewees' responses were in Swedish. The interviews were translated from Swedish to English for this article.

Here we should remind that data gathering by email may bring about limitations on intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is important in qualitative study, especially when applying deep interview method. The nearness between interviewee and interviewer helps the interviewer to better understand and interpret the interviews. Our study, however, was based on semi-structured interviews and therefore dialogue has not an important role on it. To generate fruitful and thoughtful interviews in the study we however used a well-planned interview guide with open

questions. Our questions were easy to understand and we sent our interpretation of the answers to each interviewee to verify or falsify them; this for being sure that there was not any conflict between our understanding and their answers. Our interview guide enabled us to receive rich information from interviewees' own answers. We used direct quotes for reporting the results so the readers can take advantage of informant's own descriptions. In this process, we tried to have a critical attitude to what was studied and to the obtained results.

Secondary data

The best data we found regarding how the second-generation Iranians, living in the USA, understand their ethnic and national identities came from the book *Hyphenated Identities: Second-Generation Iranian-Americans Speak*. The book is based on the stories of twelve University of Texas students who tell about their hyphenated experience as Iranian-Americans (Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar 2007).

Sampling for primary data collection

The sampling strategy used was purposive sampling, specifically, snowball sampling. The selection criteria were: both parents born in Iran; under 16 years old when arriving in Sweden; 18 years or older; and having lived in Sweden 15 or more years. The reason for the requirement that the informants should have lived at least 15 years in Sweden was that we wanted to be sure that the informants have had enough time to learn Swedish language and to internalize the dominant Swedish norms and values. This requirement did not therefore regard those who came to Sweden before 12 years old. This since those who came before 12 years old have certainly gone enough years in Swedish school for being able to learn the Swedish language and to internalize the dominant Swedish norms and values.

The sampling attempted to recruit people from different ethnic, social, and educational backgrounds. The interviewees were aged 21–36 years old at the time of the interviews and comprised five men and 10 women. Both parents of all informants were Iranians. One interviewee was born in Sweden. Nine interviewees were under six years old when their parents immigrated to Sweden, three were nine, one was 12, and one was 15 years old. Most interviewees had lived in Sweden for over 20 years, and none had lived there for under 15 years. The educational level of the informants ranged from secondary to university education, while that of their parents ranged from a few years of primary school to university education. The occupations of the informants and their parents ranged from low- to high-ranking jobs. As we were conscious that Iranian immigrants to Sweden belong to different ethnic groups in Iran, some questions were included about the ethnic identity of the interviewees' parents.

Methods of analysis

In the first stage of the research, we used our study based on 15 e-mail interviews to illustrate how second-generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves concerning their ethnic and national identities. In this regard, we used Weber's (1904) ideal type model: dividing the empirical data into different themes (i.e., ideal types) can be described as a form of meaning categorization or meaning coding. We created different ideal types based on our informants' answers to those questions that regarded ethnic- and national identities. As an analytical construction, ideal types served us to establish similarities as well as deviations in our concrete cases. This analytical construction helped us to compare different ways of approaching the issues of ethnic and national identities.

In the second stage, secondary data drawn from the literature on second-generation Iranians in the USA were used in theoretically comparing the two Iranian groups. Note that this comparison was not statistical but mainly theoretical, in order to show the impact of the host society on second-generation Iranians' understanding of their national and ethnic identities.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. We clarified to potential respondents that: participation was voluntary; agreement to participate could be withdrawn at any time without any consequences for the respondent; data would be treated with confidentiality and would not be made available to anyone outside the research team; and results of the study would be published such that identification of individual respondents would be impossible.

Results and discussion

Before presenting our results, we need to explain that there are different factors, such as gender, age, social background and class belongingness, which are important in shaping *one's identity*; but our aim in this study was not to discuss the identity construction of our informants individually. We did neither aim to present an evidence-based result with emphasis on the role of divergent variables in constructing ethnic and national identity; for the first one, i.e. discussion about the informants' identity construction individually an in-depth interview is needed, and for the second, i.e. an evidence-based result, a quantitative interview method is necessary. We aimed using semi-structured interviews to present ideal types of possible ethnic and national belongingness. This since identity is an ongoing and complicated phenomenon, which we believe, is difficult to identify and characterize as "thing-in-itself". Therefore, applying ideal types has helped us to obtain different illustrations of ethnic and national identities' place among *the group* in question.

This part is divided into two sections. The first section briefly presents the results of the empirical study in Sweden, highlighting the interviewees' understanding of their ethnic and national identities and how they have adopted the Swedish mentality. The second section analyses the case of second-generation Iranians by comparing them in Sweden and the USA concerning their understanding of their ethnic and national identities.

Ethnic and national identities and Swedish mentality

The analysis of the answers to the questions revealed several patterns. The first pattern is labelled a "strong sense of ethnic identity, moderate adoption of the Swedish mentality". This pattern represents those interviewees who exhibited an intense feeling of being Iranian and seemed to have only moderately adopted the Swedish mentality. When asked, "How do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?" some interviewees viewed themselves as Iranian. They stressed that they would support Iran national football team if it played against Sweden's, that they liked Iranian food and Iranian music, and that they had a reasonable knowledge of the Persian language. They would prefer their partner to be Iranian or at least to know the Persian language. They were interested in Iran's culture and/or political situation and/or history. These interviewees also mentioned that they did not have many ethnic Swedish friends and did not socialize in private life with ethnic Swedes. Their answers to certain questions gave the impression that they did not view Swedish society especially positively and did not regard themselves as Swedes.

One interviewee, a 31-year-old male who moved to Sweden at five years of age, explained that "Sweden has never been my home country and will never be either". In response to the question "Do you see any difference between you and ethnic Swedes in everyday life? If yes, how?" this respondent answered: "Many are suspicious at first—you have to prove that you are good enough sometimes. *In my country*, I was one of the crowd". As his answer indicates, he refers to Iran as "my country".

A 33-year-old female interviewee, who came to Sweden at nine years of age, answered the question concerning ethnic identity as follows:

> Emotionally, I am definitely more Persian than Swedish. But I am like a Swede in that I am more organized and like order and clarity [i.e., *ordnign och reda*]. Clearly, I would live a different life if we had stayed in Iran, so I'm much more Swedish than I realize or dare to admit.

On the other hand, she answered the question "Do you see in everyday life any difference between you and ethnic Swedes? If yes, how?" as follows:

> I'm neither afraid of conflict nor cautious, as Swedes are. I feel much more generous to people with whom I have direct contact [i.e., not in terms of charity in general]. I always feel less inclined to be law abiding. I don't passionately like animals and nature, as Swedes do.

All interviewees in this group displayed a similar approach to their ethnic identity and the country in which they live. In general, despite their strong sense of Iranian ethnic identity, the interviewees showed no signs of idealizing the Iranian national identity or Iranian history or culture.

The second pattern is labelled a "strong sense of ethnic identity, full adoption of the Swedish mentality". This pattern represents those interviewees who seem to have adopted the Swedish mentality but also feel a strong sense of belonging to their Iranian ethnicity. When asked "How do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?" these interviewees said that they had an Iranian identity but did not consider Iran their home country. Interviewees in this group indicated that they would support the Iranian football team against the Swedish one, that they liked Iranian food and Iranian music, and that they had a reasonable knowledge of the Persian language. They also showed an interest in the culture, politics, and history of Iran. However, they did not consider ethnicity to be a crucial factor in the selection of a partner. On the other hand, despite their Iranian identity, they also felt Swedish in that several of their characteristics were more like those of ethnic Swedes than of Iranians, they socialized with ethnic Swedes, and had several ethnic Swedish friends. Their answers to certain questions gave the impression that their view of Swedish society was positive and they shared many points of view and social norms with mainstream society.

A 24-year-old female, who was 11 years old when she came to Sweden, said that she considered herself both Iranian and Swedish. She responded to the question of national identity as follows:

> When it comes to culture, I feel like the Iranians and of course celebrate everything that we grew up with; but otherwise, I also follow Swedish traditions. It is not so easy to be exact about this issue.

She explained that she would support the Iranian football team against the Swedish one and that she had a very good knowledge of the Persian language. She also said, "Persian food? Love it. Persian music? It is my favorite kind of music."

When asked, "How do you understand your national identity, i.e., membership of a society and a country?" the informants in this group answered that they felt as though they belonged to both nations. One interviewee replied, "I sometimes see myself as part of society, and sometimes not, depending on where I am at a certain time". Another wrote: "Very difficult question … If I had to choose, my national identity would always be Persian in my heart. From a social perspective, however, it would probably be more Swedish. I feel I can be proud of Swedish society, but I do not feel pride in the country of Sweden". Identifying as both a Swede and an Iranian is a sense of belonging also recognized among those represented by pattern three, below.

Pattern three refers to those respondents with a "moderate sense of ethnic identity, full adoption of the Swedish mentality". This pattern represents those who seem to have adopted the Swedish mentality and developed a moderate sense of belonging to the Iranian ethnic group. When asked "How do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?" some interviewees said that they were Swedes with an Iranian background or minority/immigrant background,

while others said that they were both Swedes and Iranians. No one in this group regarded Iran as their home country. These interviewees said that they would have difficulty supporting either Iran or Sweden if the football teams of these countries were to play each other. Some said they would support the team that was better, while some said they used to support the teams from poor countries.

Members of this group indicated that they had sufficient knowledge of the Persian language—that is, they could speak and understand it without difficulty. They liked Iranian food and did not feel that ethnicity played any role in their selection of a partner. Their level of interest in Iranian music, culture, politics, and history varied, although their level of interest was apparently due to a general interest (or lack thereof) in politics, art, or social issues rather than a genuine interest in Iran specifically.

A 33-year-old male interviewee, who came to Sweden at nine years of age, when asked about his ethnic identity, answered "Swedish immigrant". His answer to the question concerning his national identity was "Swedish". Another interviewee, a 27-year-old female who was three when she came to Sweden, answered the question about ethnic identity as follows:

> I often feel like a Swede with a Persian [immigrant] background. I look like an Iranian physically, and have some Persian traits, behaviors, cultural heritage, and upbringing, but I am usually more Swedish than Iranian, both here in Sweden and in Iran.

Regarding her national identity, she said that she was "Swedish with an Iranian background".

The answers to the questions concerning the Swedish mentality showed that the interviewees in this group had internalized many Swedish norms and values; they socialized with ethnic Swedes and had ethnic Swedish friends. Interestingly, these interviewees seemed quite multicultural, socializing with people with a range of ethnic origins, and considered their nationality multinational or globalized. Several interviewees had lived or studied in countries other than Sweden and saw themselves as belonging to a larger entity than just a certain nation or ethnic group. They had experienced different cultures and had a sense of being cosmopolitan. They seemed to consider the experience of dealing with different cultures to be an asset in life.

A 28-year-old female interviewee, who was four years old when she came to Sweden, answered the question about her national identity by saying, "I am well integrated in Swedish society but not the Iranian one." She continued, "I have lived an international life, with one foot in France, one in Sweden or in Iran. I see this as an asset".

The fourth pattern, referred to as a "weak sense of ethnic identity, full adoption of the Swedish mentality," represents those individuals who seemed to have adopted the Swedish mentality and had a weak sense of belonging to the Iranian ethnic group. The interviewees in this group answered questions concerning ethnic and national identity by saying that they were Swedes and had a Swedish national identity. They asserted that they would support the Swedish football team against Iran's football team. They could speak and understand Persian. They said that ethnicity did

not play a role in the selection of a partner, and that they enjoyed Iranian food but had little or no interest in Iranian music, culture, politics, or history.

A 36-year-old male interviewee, who was 12 years old when he came to Sweden, said that he understood his ethnic identity and national identity to be Swedish and that he would support the Swedish football team if Iran and Sweden played against each other. However, he could speak and understand Persian. It should be noted that his parents belonged to the Armenian minority group in Iran. Interestingly, this interviewee said that he enjoyed Persian food and sometimes listened to Dariush (an Iranian singer), but was not interested in Armenian food or music. It is notable that the Iranian community in Sweden consists of people with divergent Iranian minority backgrounds and that Iranians in Sweden socialize with one another regardless of these backgrounds. However, it is clear that belonging to an Iranian minority group may have affected the above interviewee's weak Iranian ethnic identity. Having said that, belonging to a minority group does not necessarily result in a weak ethnic Persian identity or full adoption of the Swedish mentality.

Comparison between second-generation Iranians in Sweden and in the USA

Detailed comparison between second-generation Iranians in Sweden and the USA in terms of identification, identity crisis, and individuality would demand empirical work in both countries. In the absence of the necessary resources to conduct such research, this paper offers some reflections based on the findings of the authors' own empirical work in Sweden and literature produced in the USA, where the largest number of Iranian immigrants currently live.

A point highlighted in the literature on second-generation Iranians in the USA is the development of a "reactive identity" among them. According to scholars such as Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2011, p. 8), this reactive identity has developed in reaction to the American view of Iran, especially after the events of 11 September 2001:

> The findings suggested that tense US–Iran relations influenced the way the members of the second generation self-identify. As was the case for Iranian exiles who arrived after the Revolution, the second generation was also likely to assert a Persian identity which de-emphasized association with the Islamic Republic of Iran in the post-9/11 era, even if 9/11 had nothing to do with Republic of Iran in the post-9/11 era.

Milani, cited by Vedadi (2007, p. 20), described this reactive identity as follows:

> In the anxious wait of such troubled times, the safest path for Iranians was either to become 'invisible' or to opt for the relative safety of a new, hyphenated identity such as Persian-American, or Iranian-American. Such names tried to emphasize, by their very morphology, an emotional detachment from Iran. They posited political distance from the regime at home.

This reactive approach to self-identification was endorsed by several youths of Iranian origin quoted in the book *Hyphenated Identities: Second-Generation Iranian-Americans Speak*. The study reported in it is based on the stories of 13

University of Texas students who wrote about their "hyphenated world" of Iranian-Americans versus that of other Americans. Tasuji (2007, p. 6), one of these students, explained this reactive approach as follows:

> The anti-Iranian reaction was so widespread that it caused many Iranian-Americans to misinterpret or misrepresent their ethnic identity. It also caused feelings of inferiority and insecurity and even feelings of self-hatred and shame among second-generation Iranian-Americans and these types of sentiments continue to be reinforced by negative images from popular culture and the mass media.

The development of reactive identity has often led to the idealization of the pre-Islamic period in Iranian history. Bagheri (2007, p. 80), another contributor to the above-mentioned book, defined this as the "Persian Myth":

> The Persian Myth is somewhat crippling to Iranian identity… . These are precisely the heavy layers of historical and cultural identity that many Iranians carry with them, what Fisk describes as the 'malevolent influence of history', and these heavy layers are often passed on to the next generation.

Concerning the idealization of Persian culture among Iranians in the USA, Tasuji (2007, p. 5) added:

> To reconstruct a new national identity for Iranians in America, they have become extremely interested in pre-Islamic Persian civilization. This revived sense of identification for Iranians is based on the hostage crisis and also on the assumption that all Americans have appreciation for pre-Islamic Persian heritage.

Some of the contributors to the above-mentioned book have interpreted this reactive identity as an identity crisis. For example, Anvari (2007, p. 30) wrote:

> A problem that seems to face many Iranian-Americans is the identity crisis between being Iranian, Persian or Middle Eastern? … As an Iranian-American youth, I am tentative when someone asks me what my ethnicity is. I know the social stereotypes and I know the negative connotation the word 'Iranian' has.

This feeling is endorsed by another student, Rountree (2007, p. 102), who defined this identity crisis as one of having a hyphenated identity, an identity torn between being Iranian and being American:

> Iranian-Americans' identity is crucial to their place in American society. If they are too American, they may alienate their heritage and relatives back in Iran. If they are too Iranian, they run the risk of being cast aside while African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans grab all the minority rights and see prejudices against them destroyed.

Mehdi (1998), a pioneer of research within this area in the USA, does not consider the idealization of pre-Islamic society among second-generation Iranians in the USA only as a reaction to the negative view of Iran held by some Americans;

he also refers to the part played by the parents of the younger generation specifically and the Iranian community in USA in general. Mehdi (1998, p. 79) wrote:

> The Persian magazines and journals published by Iranian immigrants exhibit a pervasive desire for future generations to retain the Persian language and culture. Iranian parents do not see their children's Persian proficiency as a marketable skill. Rather, they see it as the only effective medium through which their culture can be transmitted to their children. This paper contends that popular approaches to Iranian national, cultural, or ethnic identity have been essentialist, static, monolithic, and idealistic. These approaches draw selectively on isolated instances of national traditions, failing to contextualize these instances historically, spatially, or conceptually. They often ignore the vast array of patterns and instances that might contradict their claims to a homogeneous, cohesive, and expanded notion of identity.

Mehdi (1998, p. 93) also referred to the poor ability of this generation to speak the Persian language, which prevents them from having a clear idea of the multifarious elements of Iranian culture, both before and after the Iranian Revolution:

> Given that most Iranian youths' exposure to the Persian language is oral rather than written, and given the generally low level of proficiency of these youths in this language, it is difficult to imagine how these youths can maintain the elements of a culture that they cannot fully understand, and a culture whose semantic community they are not sufficiently in contact with. … [F]or second-generation Iranians such actions are extremely difficult, if not impossible. Not only are their linguistic and cultural interactions with their parental culture very limited, but their access to a linguistically Iranian community in the USA is also limited by their geographical dispersion.

Mehdi (1998, p. 77) summarized this selective, situational, and interpretive approach to Iranian culture, describing it as a "transplanted culture" that has been reconstituted to make it more appropriate to the lifestyle of the immigrants in the host society, and consistent with their outlook on Iranian culture:

> Based on what we know so far about Iranian youths, they are drawing some ideas from the stock of their parental culture. Their references to these cultural objects and symbols are selective, situational, interpretive, and often symbolic. They understand Iranian culture in their own terms, relating to it when suitable and appropriating from it what is relevant to and desirable for them … . This selective and interpretive identification is not unique to these youths; their parents' representation of Iranian culture in the USA also conforms to this pattern. All the observable elements of Iranian culture in Southern California, where the most concentrated and largest Iranian population is located, are indicative of a 'transplanted culture'. As a reconstituted reality, these cultural elements are selective, more appropriate to the lifestyle of the immigrants in the host society, and consistent with their outlook on Iranian culture.

As mentioned above, the empirical work in the present study did not find much evidence for the tensions and crises reported in the literature presented above. This is even valid for those individuals who fully identified with Iranian culture and/or those who felt as though they had been exposed to discrimination in Sweden.

Of course, there is clear evidence that "reactive identity" is usual, even among second-generation Iranian immigrants in Sweden, but this reactive identity does not find its expression in a return to Iranian culture before the Islamic Revolution; instead, it is expressed in the emphasis of a multicultural and global identity.

How can these differences be explained? As mentioned, the lack of empirical data on the situation in the USA makes it impossible to provide a conclusive answer. However, it is possible to present some reflections that can be used as a basis for relevant studies in the future. Some of these reflections refer to the different compositions of Iranian immigrants in Sweden and the USA, while others refer to the different structures of these two societies.

(1) Many members of the Iranian community in California and Texas (where much of the Iranian population lives) are monarchists, meaning that they often exaggerate the pre-Islamic cultural heritage to justify the Pahlavi regime before the Iranian Revolution. This is not the case in Sweden, where many Iranians belong to the lower middle class, have a leftist ideology, and have opposed both the former and existing political systems. In Sweden, as in the USA and other European countries, there is a negative image of Muslim immigrants. However, this negative image does not go so far as to describe young people from Muslim countries, including Iran, as "terrorists".
(2) Unlike the USA, Sweden does not have a strong Iranian community. As the above quotations indicate, it is the Iranian community in the USA that, through a different kind of community mass media, has reconstituted Iranian culture, especially the idealized form of pre-Islamic culture. The weakness of the Iranian community in Sweden could have resulted from the demographic structure of Iranian immigrants in Sweden, and from the lack of a minority-based community tradition in Sweden.
(3) The weakness of national identity in Sweden and the dissemination of multicultural ideology over the last few decades, especially among the young generation, could be another factor. Sweden is one of the few countries to have accepted multiculturalism as its official policy and attempted to implement it in society. The dissemination of multicultural ideology and the facility of movement in European countries may be the main factors behind the search for multicultural and global identity among second-generation Iranian immigrants in Sweden.
4) The richer knowledge that second-generation Iranian immigrants in Sweden have of the Persian language compared with their counterparts in the USA gives the former a more realistic understanding of Iranian culture and its diversity. This knowledge comes in the form of easier travel to Iran, free access to mother-language education in Swedish schools, and, especially, the daily use of Persian in family life. Unlike Iranian parents in Sweden, many Iranian parents in the USA do not speak Persian at home. This is partly because these parents mastered English

before emigrating from Iran and partly because of the more positive image that English has internationally.

Conclusion

Before presenting our conclusion, we should mention that we have not aimed to generalize the results, but to bring a perspective to the issue in question; our aim was to introduce certain patterns concerning ethnic and national identity, not to provide any evidence or approved assumption. Just like the previous section, in this section, we will present certain reflections for shedding a better light to the question of identity among second-generation immigrants.

This article has explored how second-generation Iranian immigrants in Sweden identify with Iranian society, with the Iranian ethnic group in Sweden, and/or with Swedish society. It has also explored the tensions arising from these different types of identification. In the case of identification with the Iranian ethnic group in Sweden and/or with Swedish society, four patterns were identified: (1) a strong sense of ethnic identity and moderate adoption of the Swedish mentality; (2) a strong sense of ethnic identity and full adoption of the Swedish mentality; (3) a moderate sense of ethnic identity and full adoption of the Swedish mentality; and (4) a weak sense of ethnic identity and full adoption of the Swedish mentality.

The findings indicate that second-generation Iranian immigrants do not suffer especially from any form of identity crisis. However, this does not mean that there is no difference between the members of this group and so-called typical Swedish children. The present findings were compared with those of studies of second-generation Iranian immigrants in the USA, where the largest Iranian community outside of Iran is located. This comparison showed that the identity tensions and identity crisis reported by the research on second-generation Iranian immigrants in the USA do not exist among members of the same generation in Sweden. We have presented some reflections that can be used as a starting point for future studies. These reflections cover the differences in the population structure of the Iranian community in Sweden and the USA, the political, social, and cultural differences between the two societies, and the opportunities available for Iranians in these societies.

Against the background of a social constructivist theoretical approach, the results suggest that the social identity constructions of these two populations differ as follows: As the social construction theory of identity suggests, second-generation Iranians in the USA, by creating an ideal conception of their "fatherland", have constructed a national identity for themselves. Their poor knowledge of the Persian language and lack of first-hand contact with Iranian culture and history hinder them from obtaining a realistic conception of their fatherland and its history. Creating such an ideal conception is also an answer to the humiliation they feel because of the political hostility between the USA and Iran. What is said above about the first and second generations in the USA can hardly be applied in full to Iranians in Sweden. As we have tried to show here, constructing an ideal conception of the fatherland has not been a salient strategy for second-generation Iranians in Sweden. As mentioned, instead of a reconstructive identity expressing itself in creating a "reactive

identity" based on an idealized form of Iranian pre-Islamic culture (as in the USA), second-generation Iranians in Sweden have forged a reconstructive identity expressing itself through creating a global and multicultural identity.

The problem of the second/third generation of immigrants in the Western societies is an important, not only social but also political, issue. How these young people reconstruct their identity has a direct relation, as we showed in this article, with how the host society regards and treats them. As some attacks of young immigrants in recent years have shown, the young jihadists' or racists' violence is not always political anger, but often a sense of personal anger. In recent years, Western societies have become more fragmented by identity politics. The feeling that the world is out of control or controlled by malevolent forces is augmented rapidly among people. The western governments should take the problem of such personal anger, which has its roots in alienation and disappointment, very seriously. As Esbati (2021), a member of the Swedish parliament who witnessed personally the brutal violence of Andrew Berwick, the Norwegian terrorist who committed the 2011 Norway attacks, discusses in his recent attention-grabbing book, the solution maybe to augment the feeling of solidarity. The government and other organizations instead of extreme focusing on migration and its negative outcomes should turn their focus to our shared problems, for instance, the climate change, pollution, environmental degradation, resource depletion, unemployment and poverty. The political and social agency should invite people to solidarity actions against our shared problems instead of dividing people in different ethnic and racial groups. Such a division is one of the most serious dangers, which threatens our democracy and even civilization.

Limitations of the study

Despite our attempt to recruit informants with different age, gender, social, and ethnic backgrounds, using snowball sampling for data gathering hindered us from obtaining rich variation in our sample. In general, being a qualitative study, our inquiry cannot be seen as representing second-generation Iranian immigrants.

Acknowledgements We thank all of our informants who were cooperative in facilitating the interviews.

Author contributions FA and BA: conceptualization; BA: data curation; FA, BA and SZ: formal analysis; FA and BA: investigation; FA and SZ: Methodology; FA: Project administration; BA and SZ: Resources; FA, BA and SZ: writing—original draft; FA, BA and SZ: Writing—review and editing.

Funding Open access funding provided by University of Gävle. The authors received no financial support for this study.

Data availability Data sharing not applicable to this article.

Code availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors report no conflicting interest.

Ethical approval The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent to participate We clarified to potential respondents that: participation was voluntary; agreement to participate could be withdrawn at any time without any consequences for the respondent; data would be treated with confidentiality and would not be made available to anyone outside the research team; and results of the study would be published such that identification of individual respondents would be impossible.

Consent for publication Informed consent was obtained from respondents.

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