Rethinking Minorities' Integration into the Host Society: The Case of Indians in the Baharestan Neighbourhood of Tehran

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Abstract

This study on Indians in the Baharestan neighbourhood of Tehran investigates the nature of their social integration, and the factors which affect it. By considering integration as a two-way process, this research aims to contribute to the literature on integration, through the discovery of the status of foreign immigrants in a developing country with particular cultural, social, and religious regulations and norms. Based on semi-structured interviews with Iranian and Indian residents in the Baharestan neighbourhood, the study shows that these two groups live in Baharestan without tension. Using the theory of integration proposed by Bakker et al. (2014) as a "two-way" process, we argue in this study that the approaches taken by the two groups of Iranian and Indian residents have largely led to their social integration. The Indian minorities have preserved their own culture and adopted part of the host culture in order to respect the host community; likewise, the host community has accepted immigrant groups with an understanding of cultural differences, and this mutual respect has led to neighbourhood harmony. However, despite the willingness of both groups to expand their social interaction, this is difficult due to restrictions imposed on minorities, and insufficient public space.

Keywords: Ethnic Neighbourhood, Immigration, Indian Minority, Public Space, Tehran, Social Integration

1. Introduction

With greater global communication and the intensification of the migration process, many cities are witnessing an expansion of cultural diversity, which is an intrinsic characteristic of human societies. In the context of multiculturalism, Manço defines "intercultural competence" as the psychological capacity allowing individuals and groups to deal with complex and difficult situations caused by the multiplicity of cultures in unequal psychological, sociological, economic, and political contexts (Manço, 2000, p. 49). Among the tangible consequences of such cultural diversity is the formation of specific ethnic and racial neighbourhoods within cities, as well as multicultural neighbourhoods (Madyun & Lee, 2010, pp. 90–92; Logan et al., 2011, pp. 335–338).

Under such circumstances, in recent decades, many researchers have addressed the issue of the integration of minorities and immigrant groups in host societies (e.g. Reitz et al., 2009; Vervoort & Dagevos, 2011; Vervoort, 2012). However, the challenges to social integration in multiple neighbors including discrimination, exclusion, conflict, prejudice, and segregation have been highlighted by other researchers (e.g. Samers, 1998; Pierson, 2002; Ufkes, 2010; Maly, 2011). Numerous factors play a part in the integration or exclusion of minorities. Some of these factors are related to the features of the immigrant or minority groups while others are associated with the existing legal, cultural, economic and religious contexts of the host society (Cruz-Saco, 2008, p. 2; Peters, 2011, p. 46). While many countries have developed policies to increase the integration of minorities and immigrants (Triadafilopoulos, 2006; Joppke, 2007), in some countries discriminatory policies as well as societal prejudices against minorities prevent their integration in the host society (Berry et al., 2006; Berry and Sabatier, 2010).

This paper investigates the integration of Indian minorities in the Baharestan neighbourhood of Tehran, the capital of Iran. Tehran is a multicultural city which is home to people with different cultural characteristics. In most neighbourhoods of this city, there is a mix of people of different origins, but in some cases immigrants from a certain city or village have become concentrated in one neighbourhood, and have thus shaped their own spaces (Fazeli & Rasouli, (1391 [2012 A.D.]), p. 16; Kondo, 2015, pp. 7–11). In other words, individuals belonging to a particular culture always try to concentrate on "insider" areas, referred to as "minority-related concentratation" in the social studies literature (Fakouhi, 2006, p. 299).

Although there are different minorities living in Tehran, Armenians receive more attention compared to other groups (i.e. Iraqis, Indians) in the existing literature (e.g. Baghdasarian, (1381 [2002 A.D.]); Mahdavi & Tavakoli Ghinani, (1388 [2010 A.D.]); Fazeli & Rasouli, (1391 [2012 A.D.]); Kondo, 2015). Generally speaking, researchers tend to investigate the formation of ethnic networks and the creation of ethnic-specific places in Tehran neighbourhoods, paying less attention to how these networks have integrated into the host society. Among these studies, Fazeli and Rasouli (1391 [2012 A.D.]) examine the inter-cultural relationships between Tehran's Armenians and the host society using anthropological methods. However, their purely sociological research was based on interviews in different districts of Tehran without emphasising any particular neighbourhood, and thus physical and environmental aspects were not considered.

The history of Indians in Iran dates back one and a half centuries. The establishment of a customs collection centre in Dozdab (now the city of Zahedan) in the 1880s was one reason for Indian immigration to this city, and another was its location on the

border of Baluchistan and India. Many Indian Sikhs,[1] often business persons, migrated to Dozdab (Karimian Bostani, (1382 [2003 A.D.], pp. 80–84). On the eve of World War I, following the extension of the Indian railway line to Zahedan, a large number of Sikhs settled in this city as part of the workforce, and gradually took control of the city's economic life (Riahi, 1390 [2011 A.D.], pp. 17–19). Later, with the decline of economic prosperity in Zahedan during the first Pahlavi period (around 1930), many of these Sikhs migrated to Tehran, settled in the Baharestan neighbourhood, and built their own religious and cultural sites, including a temple and a school. As well as Sikhs, Muslim Indians also came to Iran, and indeed some Sikhs became Muslim through marriage to Iranians (Aftab, 1392 [2013 A.D.]), p. 8). Today, about 1,000 Sikhs live in Tehran (Afrakhteh, 1380 [2001 A.D.]), p. 81).

The Baharestan neighbourhood is located in the twelfth district of Tehran, and is part of the old Dowlat neighbourhood, which was formed during the Qajar era (1789–1925). For this reason, it contains valuable historical features from the Qajar and Pahlavi periods. The Baharestan neighbourhood is known also for its many Indian citizens who have settled there and the Indian temple and school which remain operative. Currently, the largest Indian population in Iran (including both Sikhs and Muslims) in Tehran resides in this neighbourhood, although several Indians have moved out of Baharestan to newer neighbourhoods as a result of improved income.

Initial observation of the neighbourhood suggests that Indian minorities have integrated into Iranian society and are accepted[2] by

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1. A religion founded in the 15th century in the Punjab region in the north of the Indian subcontinent.
2 According to Süssmuth and Weidenfeld (2005, p. 12), acceptance means "maintaining a positive perception and appreciation of diversity. It is a two-way process based on rights and obligations of both the immigrant and the host society."

indigenous inhabitants, but the status of this integration and the factors affecting it is a topic that requires more in-depth research. Despite the long history of Indians living in Tehran, there is a lack of information about the distribution of the Indian population across the city, how they are integrated into the labour market, and how they live. Therefore, the objectives of this research are to understand the integration of Indians in the Baharestan neighbourhood of Tehran, and identify the factors affecting this integration**.**

2. Literature Review

The term *social integration* was first introduced by French sociologist Emile Durkheim as a principle of human organisation. According to Durkheim, the division of labour produces solidarity which contributes to the general integration of society. For Durkheim, social integration means the desire to live together, which implies acknowledging and making mutual sacrifices and strong bonds between individuals (Durkheim, 1933, pp. 64, 109, 228). In sociology, this concept is used to define the connection and association of individuals, groups and institutions in a whole system, community, or other unit (Beresnevièiûtë, 2003, p. 97).

The term *integration* has different dimensions that have been identified and discussed by numerous scholars. Vermeulen and Penninx (as cited in van Craen, 2012, pp. 6–7), and later Distelbrink and Pels (2002), and van Tubergen and Maas (2006), identify two main dimensions of this concept: structural integration, and socio-cultural integration. Vermeulen and Penninx define structural integration as "full participation" in the economic and political activities of the society, while socio-cultural integration means "the social contacts that members and

organisations of minority groups maintain with a wider society and the cultural adaptation to that society" (as cited in van Craen, 2012, pp. 6–7). Distelbrink and Pels (2002) define these two dimensions of integration more explicitly, as for them the indicators of structural integration comprise the educational attainment, employment and income status of minority groups, while those of socio-cultural integration are intercultural interactions, the formation of identity (ethnic, national, religious), and culture (norms and values etc.). As such, these authors seem to place less emphasis on the political aspect of integration. For van Tubergen and Maas (2006, p. 8), the indicators of structural integration are also involvement in the education system, and employment and income status. The authors define the indicators of socio-cultural integration as social contact with members of the majority group, intercultural marriage, and proficiency in the majority's language.

Compared to the abovementioned researchers, Kymlicka (2010) seems to give more importance to the political aspect of integration. He distinguishes three dimensions of integration: economic, political, and social, the first two of which are achieved through participation. The political integration of immigrants is successful when they participate in civil society and are present in elected bodies and the public service, while economic integration is successful when newcomers are included in the labour market. Such integration is fostered by multiculturalist policies that aim to eliminate discrimination based on race, culture or religious affiliation (Kymlicka, 2010, pp. 262–263). Kymlicka (2010, p. 263) also views social integration as feelings of "mutual identification and acceptance."

Hartmut Esser's classification is highly similar to the classifications suggested by Distelbrink and Pels, Vermeulen and Penninx, and van Tubergen and Maas. In the same vein, Esser

identifies two general and interrelated aspects, namely "system integration" and "social integration" (Esser, 2006, p. 7). According to him, social integration can be interpreted as the inclusion of individuals within existing social systems in the community, such as educational attainment or employment in a company. He also defines system integration as the cohesion of all the social systems and components of society.

The classification offered by Karin Peters, however, is different from the classifications given by the previous scholars, especially in terms of the designations applied. She distinguishes between four dimensions of integration: structural, cultural, interactive, and identificational. In her view, the structural dimension relates to the position of the migrants or minority groups in the host society and level of access to different systems (such as economic, educational, health, and political). Peters defines the cultural dimension as an "interactive" process with the host society which allows migrants to retain their own culture. Indicators of interactive integration are friendships, partnerships, or membership of organisations. For Peters (2011, p. 60), identificational integration relates to having a sense of belonging to the country or city, and having emotional bonds with the society members, values, and language of the majority population. She further states that in this process, in addition to societal elements and the characteristics of the host society, the characteristics of place also play an important role.

Regarding the similarities and differences between the classifications suggested by these researchers, one comprehensive classification can be derived which covers all the important aspects and their indicators (see Table 1).

Table 1. Dimensions of Integration

Dimension	Indicators
Social (and emotional)	• Social contact • Interethnic friendship • Partnership • Membership of social organisations • Intermarriage • Emotional and spiritual bonds
Cultural	• Having a sense of belonging • Language skills • Identity formation (ethnic, national, religious) • Attitude to the rules, values and norms of the host society • Use of media
Economic	• Employment and income status • Participation in the labour market through the creation of new economic activities
Political	• Participation in power • Participation in elections • Membership of political organisations and committees
Structural (socio-economic)	• Educational attainment • Participation in the labour market • Income level • Social security payment access • Housing • Health

Source: Authors

Different categorisations have been proposed by various researchers for integration, and indicators used to describe it reveal that integration is not a one-way process related only to immigrant groups and minorities. Rather, it is a "two-way process" (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 432) in which the host society and immigrant groups adapt to each other. The prerequisite for this process is that on the one hand, the immigrants are willing to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society, and on the other, that the host society is willing to accept the immigrants and establish social interactions with them. This reveals one important difference between integration and

assimilation; the latter is a one-way process in which it is only the immigrants who adapt, making themselves similar to the host society (Bernard, 1973, p. 87).

In the present study, we adopt the concept of integration as the "two-way process" defined by Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen (2014), in order to evaluate the social integration of the Indian minority in the Baharestan neighbourhood of Tehran. Applying this analytical framework, we intend to examine how the Indians have integrated into the neighbourhood, by identifying the factors that affect their integration. As urban designers, we are also interested in understanding the role of the physical and spatial morphology of neighbourhoods in a state of living "together-in-difference" in "co-presence," as well as the "spatial dimensions of multiculturalism" (Young, 1999, p. 237; Amin, 2012, p. 59; Sarraf, 2015, p. 5).

3. Research Methodology

Given the selected analytical framework, i.e. viewing integration as a two-way process, this study examines how the Indians in Baharestan integrated into Iranian society, from the perspectives of both the Indians themselves and the local Iranians. In doing so, the study seeks to identify the factors which affect integration, for both the Indians and the host society. The explorative character of this research led us to conduct a qualitative study, because "qualitative research methods can more clearly capture the complexity and meaningfulness of human behaviour and experience by permitting more openness to findings and accessing participants' full description of their realities" (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004, p. 654).

The empirical material used in this paper was gathered during four months of ethnographic field research in the Baharestan

neighbourhood. In parallel, we reviewed official reports, regulations, books, articles, and websites to find information about Indians in Iran. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty-five residents of Baharestan, whose ages ranged from twenty-five to seventy years old, and who included ten Iranian men, fourteen Iranian women, eleven Indian men (six Sikhs and five Muslims), and ten Indian women (three Sikhs and seven Muslims). The interviews averaged between twenty to thirty minutes, and were carried out at schools, places of worship (including mosques and temples), the neighbourhood cultural centre, business locations, and other commercial spaces. In addition, we also conducted two complementary interviews—each of about an hour—with informed Indian people in order to gather information about their legal situation and the Iranian regulations affecting Indian minorities.

Since gaining the trust required to conduct interviews with Iranians is difficult, we, as female researchers, attempted to establish effective links with the interviewees through informal conversation. We asked about the classes and programs offered at the cultural centre, the addresses of famous historical buildings, and other everyday topics. In some cases, we were forced to devote several minutes to listening to people's personal problems, and we also helped any lady we saw in the street having difficulty taking her purchases home. Using such methods, we successfully established relationships with residents and earned their trust. Once this was achieved, we introduced the subject of our research, emphasising that our interest was solely academic, and that their words would be used anonymously and not disclosed to any third parties.

With regard to the analytical framework of the research (i.e. considering integration as a two-way process), as well as the factors affecting integration that were extracted from our review of

the existing literature (such as the characteristics of the immigrant group, the social, cultural and economic characteristics of the host society, and the physical and environmental characteristics), we considered it necessary given the objectives of this study to identify the opinions of both the Iranian and Indian residents about one another, and to learn how both groups communicate and interact socially, and where they do so. For this reason, the main questions of the interviews were prepared based on the following axes: the degree to which Indian/Iranian neighbours know each other; the type of relationship Iranian/Indian residents living in the neighbourhood have with each other; the places they use daily; their meeting/encountering places and extent of the interaction between Iranians and Indians; and, the level of their identification with the neighbourhood and relationship with its spaces.

Having undertaken the interviews and selected the qualitative content analysis method, data analysis was begun by transcribing the interviews and then rereading the texts to become acquainted with them and obtain an overall view. The next steps involved breaking the texts down and identifying the analysis units, then open coding or, in other words, assigning a concept to each analysis unit. Finally, we categorised similar codes by comparing them and formulating the main themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109–111).

4. Results

This section presents the analysis of the interviews with the Iranian and Indian residents and business people in Baharestan.

4.1. Long-Term Establishment and Anchoring in the Host Society

Time is an important factor in social integration. Over time, immigrants gain a greater understanding of the host community,

improve their language skills, and create social networks. The host community also realises the benefits that immigrants bring to their community and, with better understanding, their prejudices toward them reduce (see Allport, 1954 and Zuma, 2014).

The history of Indians has caused them to take root in Iran, and in the neighbourhood of Baharestan they feel "at home." This feeling creates a sense of belonging to a place in which effective social integration has taken place. In addition, taking roots leads to positive perceptions in the minds of both host societies and immigrants. This topic was mentioned by both Indian and Iranian residents of the Baharestan neighbourhood:

> Indians communicate easily, most of them have grown up in Iran. Ninety percent of were born and grew up here, and their religion is not so different from ours, it's not against us. We have a close relationship with them.

A twenty-six-year-old Indian woman said, "We are somehow Iranian. We are very comfortable. We do not see much difference between ourselves and the Iranians. The Iranians also deal well [with us]." It is important to note that all Indians born in Iran from Indian parents can obtain Iranian citizenship after reaching the age of 18. However, according to Indian law, no Indian can hold the citizenship of two or more countries simultaneously. Most of the Indians who are traders and businessmen in Iran have opted to obtain Iranian citizenship and nationality while others have chosen to preserve their Indian identity. But Indians who migrate in their retirement years often choose to keep their Indian citizenship (by holding an Iranian residence permit only). Additionally, Indian youth who intend to go to India or other countries to live or study prefer to have an Indian passport.

4. 2. Cultural Similarity and Attraction between Migrants and the Host Society

Similarity attraction is an important hypothesis in psychology, proposing that similarity causes attraction, and that individuals have a positive perception of those whom they think are similar to themselves (Osbeck et al, 1997, p. 114). The cultural similarities between Iranians and Indians means that the Indians in Baharestan have integrated well into the host community and do not feel different, and the Iranians accept the Indians in their society. The sense of cultural similarity has a significant role in shaping the positive perceptions of people on both sides.

It would seem that the Indians' long residence in Iran has contributed to this cultural similarity, according to a male Indian Sikh aged fifty years old:

> Because of having the same culture, I like this neighbourhood, and have many friends here, and I've been playing with children in this neighbourhood since I was a child... We have a common culture with Iranians, and we are comfortable communicating with each other.

In turn, the Iranians also feel a sense of proximity to the Indians, even the Sikh Indians, as noted by a female Iranian student aged thirty years old:

> They have a ceremony once a week and they have a holy book, like the Qur'an. We hear such things and we feel good toward them. Before, I had heard some bad things about Sikhs, but then I saw and encountered a few things. I saw that [what I had heard] was not true, and they are very good people.

It can therefore be seen that encounters and familiarity with minorities mitigate the prejudice of the host community towards

immigrant groups because, as people encounter one another, they obtain more information about each other's lifestyle, norms and beliefs. In families with one Indian and another Iranian member, family relationships and celebrations enable the two sides to become more familiar with each other's culture, and create more acceptance of the other culture.

Another point to note about the Indians is their ability to integrate the two cultures. While maintaining their own culture, the Indians have been influenced by Iranian culture in some cases, due to their long history of residence in Iran, and indeed the interviewees often stated that their culture is both Iranian and Indian. For example, a fifty-year-old Sikh man said:

> We are from the Sikh sect, I consider myself Indian. Regarding prayer and gathering together ... But I'm also Iranian in some respects: talking in Persian, communicating with Iranian friends, eating Iranian foods like Ghormeh Sabzi and Chelo Kabab and ... [laughter]

Religion also seems to play an important role in determining the identity of the Indians. Shi'a Indians consider themselves mostly Iranian. An Indian school principal who was born in Kashmir said, "As a Shi'a, I consider myself Iranian in the religious respect. But the culture of my life is Indian." However, among the Sikhs, there are also people who are more dependent on Iran and Iranian culture: "I consider myself more as an Iranian—I like Iranian culture very much. The day I leave Iran, I will cry," said an Indian spice shop owner, who is a middle-aged, Sikh, Iranian-born man.

Therefore, we can argue that biculturality is an important factor in both the social integration of Indians into Iranian society, and their long-term peaceful cohabitation with Iranians. A thirty-year-old Sikh woman described Indians' different cultural approaches:

Being an Indian living in Iran since birth, I can admit that many Indians in Iran have adopted Iranian lifestyles but not to a very great extent. Starting from the aged Indians who have been living in Iran for half a century, they have retained an entirely Indian culture, from their eating habits to their traditional Indian clothes. On the other hand, a few the same age as my own family have adopted a mix of Indo-Iranian culture which is unique in itself. Looking at the Indo-Iranian culture deeply, they are many similarities between the two which have always fostered a peaceful and joyful environment between both the cultures. Coming to the younger generation, most have opted to move to India or abroad to live. However, during their stay in Iran they managed to adapt many Iranian cultural habits perfectly in order to be a part of the society. There is no doubt the younger generations of almost all cultures have maintained a distance from the faith, belief and traditions our ancestors had.

About Sikhs' traditional dress, an Indian man stated:

The Sikhs (our religion) starting from the men living in Iran, both the aged and the younger generation, have preserved the customary Indian dress, that is the turban, with pride. The interesting point is that this customary dress is very much appreciated and respected by the Iranians. The women, wearing the customary dress, the "salwar-suit" or "kurta" in unique colors have also preserved their uniqueness in Iran. In the last few years, the pretty colorful designs and colors of kurtas have also been appreciated by Iranian women and has entered the fashion of Iran.

Hence, we can argue that having stayed in Iran for long time, Indians have been capable of preserving their own culture, faith and beliefs alongside adapting many Iranian cultural habits.

4. 3. Common Religion as a Driver of Social Integration

Throughout human history, religion has been one of the factors underlying both social inclusion and exclusion. Having a religion in common increases both interactions between groups and the positive perceptions of each group towards the other (Sheikhzadegan & Nollert, 2017, pp. 5–6). Therefore, in the Baharestan neighbourhood, it seems that the relationships between Iranians and Muslim Indians are closer than those between Iranians and Sikh Indians. In addition, shared religious sites and ceremonies allow Iranian and Indian Muslims to gain familiarity with one another. In particular, some women go to the mosque before prayers start and have the opportunity to talk. A forty-year-old female Indian interviewee said: "We are Shi'a Muslims and participate in all ceremonies and mourning... in the mosque and elsewhere."

In addition to mosques, the neighbourhood cultural centre, the only local cultural and social place used by women and their children, is a place where Iranian and some Indian Muslim women meet, and they themselves or their children attend Quran courses at this centre. An Indian Muslim woman mentioned the use of cultural centre classes and attending religious ceremonies in mosques:

> We use the neighbourhood cultural centre because it has all the classes. For sport, the kids' painting class, the karate class, and the Qur'an class. We go to mosques: Ghaem Mosque, Bibi Mosque. We go there for Qadr nights. We go there on Fatemieh[1] days for the mourning ceremony. During the days of Muharram, we go to the small mosque here. All Indian Muslims who are here, come… we see each other in the mosque. We see

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1. Martyrdom of the Prophet's daughter.

each other in the same classes and I am very happy and we find Iranian friends there.

Another Indian aged about twenty-seven added:

Here [in the neighbourhood cultural centre] all sorts of classes are held for everyone, and we attend them too. In the mosque, we have Iranian friends. We see each other. We are Muslims and we attend religious ceremonies, but we do not go to the Sikh temples. We meet many of Iranians in the mosque, and together we take part in the mourning ceremony.

However, the interaction between Iranian and Indian Muslim women is not limited to mosques and religious sites, as they sometimes invite each other to their homes for religious ceremonies such as *roza*.[1]

The Sikhs have a temple located next to the Indian school, in which they are free to pray and hold religious ceremonies without any limitations.

4. 4. Mutual Respect as a Policy for "Living Together in Difference"

The Iranians and Indians, both Muslims and Sikhs, have a positive perception of each other. The Iranians expressed this positive perception of the Indians in the form of concepts such as "being inoffensive" and "do not bother anyone," which indicates that Indians do not interfere in the lives of others and do not disturb their neighbours. An Iranian man, aged about sixty, expressed his view of Indians as people who:

Do not bother anyone. They don't make a problem for others. We live comfortably without any problems, nobody disturbs

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1. A religious ceremony of Shi'a Muslims

others. Neither Iranians nor Indians. We, for example, go to their funerals, put on their special hats and participate in their funerals, when the child of an Indian who lives here died, we went to his funeral. Indians also come to our ceremonies.

What is seen in the Baharestan neighbourhood is that the Indians adapt to, and respect, the culture, values and laws of Iranian society, but at the same time adaptation does not mean assimilation and abandoning Indian culture. The interviews showed that Indians often maintain their own culture, and their adaptation, for example dressing in Iranian styles in public spaces, shows they respect the laws and norms of the host community. It also seems that some Indians preferred to dress like Iranians so that they feel more comfortable in public spaces and do not attract extra attention. The desire to resemble Iranians appears stronger among the younger generation of Indians, and some even want to marry Iranians, while the previous generation adheres to their own culture and traditions. A twenty-seven-year-old Iranian girl, who had grown up with Indian friends from childhood, said:

The new generation of Indians born in Iran try to make themselves look like Iranians. My Indian friends, who are of the same generation as me, marry Iranians and are not like their parents. They accept being like Iranians and living like them, but the older ones are very committed to their culture and keeping it. Some Indians are very prejudiced and do not take part in Iranian ceremonies; perhaps they celebrate Christmas, but they do not celebrate Norouz. But this friend of mine, who loves Iran and was born in Iran, performs all Iranian ceremonies but her friends are not like this and they say that my friend and her family are not Indian! Some Indians who have great relationships with Iranians, for example through marriage, are more like Iranians.

Even the religious difference between Indian Sikhs and the local

Iranians has not led to negative perceptions of them in the host society. The reason for this may be that the Sikhs are also monotheistic, and the fundamentals and moral teachings of their religion are very similar to Islam. A female Iranian interviewee aged about fifty-five years old said:

> All of us are human beings, we must behave well. What difference is there among us? God in the Qur'an has said that you must live well together, some of these Indians are Sikh and have a different religion, and some are Muslims. Those who are Sikh have a holy book and believe in it. We also have to deal well with them, we buy from them and we have no problems.

This extract illustrates an important factor in the Iranians' positive perception of the Indians, that the immigrant group came to Iran from the outset to do business, and now enjoys high economic status. Indians with Iranian citizenship can easily work in any field (in either the public or the private sector). Other Indians can operate their own businesses if they have a yearly Iranian residence card and a work permit. According to interviews with residents, those Indians holding Indian nationality tend to be busy in family businesses or spare parts trading which has been a part of Indo-Iranian trade for decades, or work in other businesses mainly with Iranian partners. Many of the Indian nationals are investors in trading companies that earn them large profits. It is important to note that Indians are permitted to purchase a property in Iran once they obtain an Iranian national ID card.

According to a Sikh Indian woman:

> To my knowledge Indians with Iranian nationality do not face any obstacle to employment in Iran. In fact, they are very much appreciated and are offered good jobs in Iran due to their language skills and business know-how. They are also provided with insurance at the first level of employment.

For this very reason, the Iranians' view of them is different from that of other immigrant groups (especially Afghans) who came to Iran due to war and turbulent economic conditions in their own country, and many of whom are engaged in low-level jobs.

The Indians also regard the Iranians as "genial" and "cordial" people, and do not feel any difference between themselves and Iranians. These positive perception of each other has led to mutual respect and, as a result, peaceful coexistence between the Iranians and the Indians, and indeed one Iranian female (about forty years old) said:

> They are very good people. We have no problem with them. They are better than Iranians. In our building, there are Indians. We are good together and they don't offend us. We live peacefully, we live together. Actually, they are much better than some of Iranian neighbours. If we have a problem, we will visit each other.

The respect shown by the Indians for Iran's culture and laws as one of their "policies for living together" (Sarraf, 2015, p. 16) has resulted in the respect of Iranians for these immigrant groups, although many of them have different religions and cultures. One manifestation of this mutual respect and the acceptance of the Indians by the Iranian community is the "right to be visible in the city" or "leave visible traces in the city" (Boucher, 2016, p. 63). This visibility is manifested notably in the construction of ethnic places, such as religious places, and commercial spaces. It seems, however, that Indians do not enjoy much of their right to be seen in the Iranian community. For example, as stated above, the wearing of Indian clothes (which, like Iranian clothing, completely covers the person and is thus not contrary to Iranian law) is not prohibited, but many Indians prefer to dress like Iranians. The reason for this is respect for the Iranians, and perhaps the fear of attracting attention

and avoiding potential strife. However, others wear Indian clothes and say they have experienced no problem in this regard. Wearing Indian clothes is more common among older Indian women and Sikh men. Not only in the Baharestan neighbourhood, but also in other parts of the city, Sikh men can be found wearing their special clothing, including a turban and a long white shirt, and even when they wear a formal suit like Iranians, they wear their turbans with it.

4. 5. Retail Stores as Places of Encounter

Baharestan is a mixed-use neighbourhood. According to the interviews, its commercial spaces are the main places where Iranian and Indian residents come into contact. Because the neighbourhood has a variety of functions and a diversity of uses, the everyday needs of residents are provided for, and so they do not need to leave the neighbourhood. Therefore, Indian and Iranian residents encounter each other in commercial spaces, including bakeries, fruit stores, and grocers. Indians do not have their own spaces and places for shopping. A woman whose husband is Indian said: "Indians do not have any special places for shopping. They shop everywhere. Maybe you see a few people and do not notice that they are Indians, especially if they are Muslims. Otherwise, Sikh men have a special look." Shopping in the neighbourhood sometimes led to interaction between Iranians and Indians, according to one interviewee, who said: "We buy from where you do your shopping... I talk to Iranians when I go shopping and we go home together" (a forty-five-year-old Sikh woman).

The only special shop for the Indians is a grocery store, at which Iranians also shop. As a result, because Indians shop in the neighbourhood, this makes Iranians feel closer and more similar to

them, and leads to the perception that the culture and lifestyle of the Indians is close to their own. An Iranian woman talked about this similarity: "Indians use all the same places that we do. Their needs are like ours. They also eat the things we eat." This sense of similarity has contributed to the acceptance of the Indians by the Iranians.

4. 6. Lack of Public Spaces as an Obstacle to Spatial Encounters

Participants' statements show that, although Indians are integrated into Iranian society and live well, this relationship remains at the level of peaceful coexistence and in most cases, is not much deeper. According to the interviews, an important reason for this is the lack of necessary spaces for interaction and communication. When referring to issues such as the lack of a park, residents expressed awareness of the necessity of having public spaces for interacting and communicating. Both the Indians and Iranians consider the existence of places that allow interaction and communication between them to be very necessary. At the time of writing, their relationship was often confined to the commercial spaces of the neighbourhood, and for Muslims was limited to visits to mosques, and during religious ceremonies. Several interviewees noted this lack of public spaces: "We were living together in a building, and it was not a problem. But it's not that we'll be together in other places. There's no place to visit them outside. There is no park," said a fifty-year-old Iranian man. In addition to the Iranians, the lack of a public space for engagement was also raised by Indian interviewees:

> There are few public spaces in this neighbourhood. We have no park. We go to Khanehye Honarmandan park, which is far from here, or another park near the Vali Asr intersection. My children and I used to go to Amjadieh Stadium to exercise. We have no

space to be together. During childhood, we were playing with children in the street and became friends. Now, children's relationships are less common (an Indian male, fifty years old).

Due to the lack of public spaces, the connection of many Indian women to the neighbourhood is also restricted to children's schools and shopping areas. Some Indians who are friends with Iranians interact at each other's homes. In the past, the neighbourhood population was smaller, the typology of the houses was different, and there was more possibility for interaction between neighbours. Today, because of the growing population and changes in the typology of houses (multi-storey apartments instead of one- or two-storey houses with yards), resident interactions have declined. Indeed, this is true of most neighbourhoods in Tehran. In such situations, the lack of space and context for interaction exacerbates the problem.

The notion of the "inter-cultural city" comes from the belief that cities can contribute to social integration through the way in which their public spaces allow intercultural interaction in daily life (Boucher, 2016, p. 63; Aboutorabi, 2018). These intercultural exchanges take place at the local level, in the infrastructure and the utilitarian or recreational physical spaces that exist in the city. As the Council of Europe (2008, p. 33) points out in its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue:

It is essential to engender spaces for dialogue that are open to all. Successful intercultural governance, at any level, is largely a matter of cultivating such spaces: physical spaces like streets, markets and shops, houses, kindergartens, schools and universities, cultural and social centers, youth clubs, churches, synagogues and mosques, company meeting rooms and workplaces, museums, libraries and other leisure facilities, or virtual spaces like the media.

Encounters in public spaces lead to mutual understanding of groups and a deep understanding of differences, which then end in the formation of "ties" between cultures (Sarraf, 2015, p. 48). These encounters are not only important in the formation of social ties, such as friendship and neighbourhood relations between immigrant groups and the host community, but also mitigate the prejudices of individuals or groups towards one another, allowing individuals to know and understand each other better (Peters, 2011, p. 65).

In most countries where immigrant groups exist, schools are a focal point for social integration and a place where children and parents interact. However, in the Baharestan neighbourhood, the Indians have their own school and this separation means that relationships between Indian and Iranian children are not formed. Indian children with Iranian citizenship can study in Iranian schools. However, according to the interviews, the Indian school (*Kendriya Vidyalaya*) has many advantages over local Iranian schools and is preferred by most of the Indians. In particular, the Indian school enrols children from different countries with different cultures and traditions, children are taught to speak five world languages (English, Hindi, Punjabi, French and Urdu) and Persian is an optional language. The lessons being in English language provides the opportunity to children to continue their education at international colleges. In addition, *Kendriya Vidyalaya* is a coeducational school, so social behaviour between the two genders is enhanced. Even Indo-Iranian children with Iranian passports are often inclined to obtain a permit from the Iranian Ministry of Education to study at the Indian school.

In addition, language is a problem, especially for Indian women, and acts as an obstacle to communication with Iranians. In this regard, a female Indian Muslim, aged twenty-six, said, "More at the

shopping centre, they see each other, those who have children are out more and, for example, use the neighbourhood cultural centre. Women don't really know the Persian language, but the children know and communicate better."

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study showed that Iranians and Indians live peacefully together in the Baharestan neighbourhood, and this is the result of several factors. According to the "two-way integration" theory suggested by Bakker et al. (2014), we argue that the host community and the minority group are two influential parties in the formation of the integration. One factor is the history and length of residence of the Indians in Iran, and this has made it possible for the Indians to adapt to Iranian society and its existing norms and laws; to some extent, the Indians feel they are Iranians. Familiarity with the Iranian lifestyle means that the Indians organise part of their lives according to Iranian ways and have therefore formed an Indo-Iranian identity. Where Indians have married Iranians, the formation of this Indo-Iranian identity has been faster, and is stronger for children born and raised in Iran.

Another factor which has played an important role in the social integration of the Indians and their acceptance by the Iranians is the cultural and religious similarities between Iranian and Indian societies. These cultural similarities have facilitated the Indians' compatibility with Iranian culture and helped them adopt "a bicultural way of living" (Van Craen, 2012, p. 16). This similarity has also contributed greatly to the acceptance of Indians by the Iranian community. In terms of religion, since some of the Indians living in the neighbourhood are Shi'a Muslim, their common

religion has played an important role in their social integration. Compared to the Sikhs, the Shi'a Indians appear to have a stronger Iranian identity and the Iranians feel they are more similar to themselves, and have a positive understanding of them. There is also more likelihood of encounters between this Indian group and the Iranian community in religious places and at special religious ceremonies, and therefore they can more easily become acquainted. Nevertheless, the Iranians also have a positive attitude towards Indian Sikhs, because their religious practices, like the ritual of reading their religious book, look similar to their own religious ceremonies. For this reason, Sikhs are not challenged by Iranian Muslims. Additionally, Iranian law does not impose any restrictions on Sikhs in terms of worship and holding religious ceremonies in their temple. In this way, mutual respect is the policy of both the Indian and Iranian groups living in a shared neighbourhood, and allows them to live "together-in-difference" (Young, 1999, p. 237).

Regarding the social integration of Indians in the Baharestan neighbourhood, it was observed that the integration process is not one-way. That is, it is not only the Indians who set aside their socio-cultural background and adapted it in order to be accepted in the community. While retaining their own cultural characteristics, they have acclimatised to the norms and laws of the Iranian community and in some cases, even imported Iranian culture into their lives. Such integration has not fully altered their lifestyle, but changed it and enabled them to follow a lifestyle that is an Indo-Iranian lifestyle (Kamali, 1999, p. 82). An important reason why the Indians are able to experience this integration without being submerged by the dominant culture is the acceptance of these minorities and their culture by the host community. The similarities and the mutual positive understanding have prevented differences

leading to tension and dispute, so both groups can live "together-in-difference."

Existing theories about migration are more related to immigrants moving from developing to developed countries. In such migration, the socio-economic levels of immigrant groups are often lower than those of the host community, and they migrate to developed countries due to issues such as adverse economic conditions or war. They often live in deprived neighbourhoods, and at a lower social level than local people (Poirier, 2007, pp. 19–20). For the Indians living in Iran, however, this is not the case. These groups came to Iran because of trade and currently play an important role in trade (in particular, the import of spare car parts in Tehran). The group lives in a medium and relatively high-ranking neighbourhood in Tehran, although those who have become richer have moved to more expensive neighbourhoods. Because of the socio-economic level of this immigrant group, the host community has a positive perception of them and have accepted them. The Indian minorities have also been able to "actively participate" in the process of "producing and reproducing" their lives independently (Kamali, 1999, p. 82). Therefore, it can be argued that the economic level of the two groups facilitates the integration of immigrants into the host community.

However, what is seen in the Baharestan neighbourhood between Iranian and Indian residents is more of a peaceful coexistence—based on mutual respect—than a genuinely shared social life. At the moment, contact between Iranians and Indians often happens in the shops and commercial spaces in the neighbourhood. The traditional pattern of the mixed-use neighbourhood has made it possible for residents to obtain all their everyday requirements in the neighbourhood, and to encounter

each other in the course of doing so. In some cases, Muslim Indians and Iranians encounter one another in religious places and at ceremonies, but what is evident is that the required context for complete and deep social integration (such as inter-ethnic friendships, inter-marriage, and emotional and spiritual bonds) do not exist in this neighbourhood. Social centres and public spaces (such as parks) allow social interaction between the Iranian and Indian residents, but there are none in the Baharestan neighbourhood.

We argue that measures could be taken to improve social integration, which at the same time do not conflict with existing Iranian laws. In Baharestan, the neighbourhood's cultural centre has made some Indian and Iranian residents (women and children only) feel more familiar and connected, and so this type of centre could be expanded in the neighbourhood. Since the neighbourhood is compact and it is impossible to create open, green spaces, at the same time there are many historic identity-forming buildings in the neighbourhood (many of which are currently unused or inaccessible to the public). These buildings could be refurbished to address the needs of residents. In this way, "sites of shared living" (Amin, 2012, p. 79) could be created to reinforce the sense of belonging for all groups of residents. It is this point that urban managers and heritage officials should consider, since their respective goals are to promote the quality of life in the neighbourhoods of Tehran, and conserve heritage. In a future study, we intend to focus on the possibility of creating public spaces in existing historical buildings in the neighbourhood, which can be proposed to the municipality and the Cultural Heritage Organisation.

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