

THE ROLE OF **HUMAN DIGNITY** IN STUDENTS' MIGRATION
TRAJECTORY: A CASE STUDY OF IRANIAN INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN CANADA (MONTREAL)

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

There is a dearth of literature examining the perspective of international students across their migration trajectory and scholars have given little attention to gender analysis in studies on international student migration. This thesis proposes a novel conceptual framework for examining this subject: human dignity. The following three-manuscript dissertation explores how Iranian international students living in Montreal have experienced human dignity in pre- and-post phases of their migration. In a case study using semi-structured qualitative interviews, 24 Iranian international graduate students (12 men and 12 women) explored the nexus of human dignity in relation to their motivations and experiences within Canadian universities and the immigration system. Data indicate that both women and men students, with minor differences, connect their reasons for migration to maintaining their human dignity. They attributed their motivation to study abroad to their pursuit of freedom of expression, socio economic rights, respect, equality, honor, and fulfillment. A gender analysis of students' experiences of human dignity within Canadian universities reveals some differences regarding perceptions of human dignity. However, contradictions exist between Iranian international students' experiences of human dignity within Canadian universities and in the immigration system. The study results reflect that while students were for the most part satisfied with their experiences at Canadian universities compared to those in Iran, participants reported that the Canadian and Quebec immigration systems did not respect their human dignity and failed to meet their expectations. Given the significant role of human dignity in Iranian international students' migration to Canada, this dissertation includes recommendations for policy makers, social workers, and future researchers. Recommendations include establishing settlement services for international students, extending the duration of international student visa, exercising transparent and supportive communication with immigration applicants, and establishing an independent advisory committee to evaluate the immigration system. The findings of this research reaffirm the responsibility of government and university policy makers in Iran and Canada, as well as social work advocates and researchers to explore human dignity when engaging with communities that have experienced varying precarity.

RÉSUMÉ

Il existe une pénurie de littérature examinant la perspective des étudiants internationaux tout au long de leur trajectoire migratoire et les chercheurs ont accordé peu d'attention à l'analyse de genre dans les études sur la migration internationale des étudiants. Cette thèse propose un nouveau cadre conceptuel pour examiner ce sujet : la dignité humaine. Cette thèse de trois manuscrits explore comment les étudiants internationaux iraniens vivant à Montréal ont vécu la dignité humaine dans les phases avant et après leur migration. Dans une étude de cas utilisant des entretiens qualitatifs semi-structurés, 24 étudiants 2e cycle internationaux iraniens (12 hommes et 12 femmes) ont discuté le lien entre la dignité humaine et leurs motivations et expériences au sein des universités canadiennes et du système d'immigration. Les données indiquent que les étudiants, avec des différences mineures entre femmes et hommes, associent leurs raisons de migrer au maintien de leur dignité humaine. Ils ont attribué leur motivation à étudier à l'étranger à leur poursuite de la liberté d'expression, des droits socio-économiques, du respect, de l'égalité, de l'honneur et de l'épanouissement. Une analyse genrée des expériences des étudiants en matière de dignité humaine dans les universités canadiennes révèle certaines différences quant aux perceptions de la dignité humaine. Cependant, des contradictions existent entre les expériences des étudiants internationaux iraniens en matière de dignité humaine dans les universités canadiennes et dans le système d'immigration. Les résultats de l'étude reflètent que si les étudiants étaient pour la plupart satisfaits de leurs expériences dans les universités canadiennes par rapport à celles en Iran, les participants ont signalé que les systèmes d'immigration canadien et québécois ne respectaient pas leur dignité humaine et ne répondaient pas à leurs attentes. Étant donné le rôle important de la dignité humaine dans la migration des étudiants internationaux iraniens vers le Canada, cette thèse comprend des recommandations pour les décideurs, les travailleurs sociaux et les futurs chercheurs. Les recommandations comprennent la mise en place de services d'accueil pour les étudiants internationaux, la prolongation de la durée du visa d'étudiant international, l'exercice d'une communication transparente avec les candidats à l'immigration et la création d'un comité consultatif indépendant pour évaluer le système d'immigration. Les résultats de cette recherche réaffirment la responsabilité des décideurs politiques gouvernementaux et universitaires en Iran et au Canada, ainsi que des travailleurs sociaux et des chercheurs, d'explorer la dignité humaine lorsqu'ils s'engagent auprès de communautés qui vivent de la précarité.

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To students
whose dignity has been challenged
but cannot be denied.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAQ	Certificat d'acceptation du Québec
CEC	Canadian Experience Class (Express Entry)
CSQ	Certificat de sélection du Québec
HD	Human Dignity
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IISs	Iranian International Students
ISs	International Students
MIFI	Ministère de l'Immigration, Francisation et Intégration Québec
MP	Member of Parliament
PEQ	Québec experience program
PR	Permanent Residency
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Introduction: Situating the Research

For as long as I can remember, inequality and discrimination have always troubled me deeply, and particularly the discrimination against women I observed in the Iranian society in which I grew up. My awareness of gender inequality has not only affected my personal and family life, but also my academic life. When I was choosing my undergraduate degree, I thought that in order to improve women's situation there must first be a change in sociocultural attitudes towards women, so I chose sociology as my major to learn more about cultural and social change. I then narrowed my focus, completing my master's degree in women's studies. While I completed both of these degrees in Iran, I was interested in living and studying in a Western country. I wanted to get to know the cultures of these nations closely and become more familiar with gender relations and attitudes there. Further, as most sociological theories I had studied arose in Western countries, I wanted to become more familiar with the context of their origin.

I began my PhD in Social Work at McGill University intending to study cultural violence against women in Iran to explore how the dominant culture in Iran plays a role in perpetuating and reproducing the cycle of violence. After four years of research and extensive discussions with my first supervisor on the subject, I came to the conclusion that most women's issues in present-day Iran are tied to political issues. Women have become the bearers of national identity in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the dominant political ideology holds that only in current social and familial structures, which they assume are based on Islamic rules, do women achieve true dignity (Najmabadi, 2005; Rahbari et al., 2019). In Iran, any changes in women's situation must be first filtered and approved by the government.

With this in mind, I decided to study gender policy and the process of its formation in Iran. In particular, I focused on policies preventing or limiting violence against women and I

realized that there was no specific law or policy in this regard. When I sought a reason for this gap, I came across the issue of contradictions between certain Islamic verses and hadiths regarding the existence of such a law. For this reason, I became interested in the views and actions of other Muslim countries regarding policy-making on violence against women. I found Indonesia to be most similar to Iran because it was a Muslim country that specifically had a law banning violence against women. After completing my comprehensive doctoral exam on this subject, I returned to thinking about how the issue of women's equality in Iran is more a political issue than a matter of religion or culture.

In January 2017, I became inspired by reading about the concept of human dignity (HD) in a study. Human dignity¹, as a subjective concept that indicates an inner feeling of worth related to one's perceptions and life experiences (Mégret & Hoffmann 2009), is a primary concept in the Iranian constitution² (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1980), Iranian policies, and the Islamic religion³ and moral rules. A spark was lit, and I began thinking that looking at gender issues through a different lens could shift gender policy in Iran. Therefore, instead of using Western language or theories to study discrimination or violence against women in Iran, I preferred to utilize the language of HD, which is familiar in Iran. I researched discrimination, violence, and inequality affecting women in Iran through the lens of human dignity and was interested to find that there had not been significant empirical research on this topic in Iran or other countries.

¹ Before providing a literature review about the concept of HD, here I present this definition of HD to give an idea about it. However, during my interviews, I did not impose any definition of HD to the participants and tried to explore their understanding.

² "[T] the exalted dignity and value of man, and his freedom coupled with responsibility before God" (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1980, as cited in Kianpour, 2016, p. 705).

³ The word dignity and its derivatives are cited 47 times in the Quran (Yadolahpour 2009, p. 121).

Both my experience as an international student in Canada and Iran's many economic and political changes and crises, affected my decision to switch my research topic. I began to wonder whether seeking freedom, equality, justice, and security are related to international students' perception or understanding of HD, specifically in regard to their decision to migrate and their lived experiences before and after migration. I wanted to understand how the concept of HD was defined by Iranian international students (IISs) in Canada, and decided to study the notion of HD in the context of migration and immigrants. I realized only a few studies had been conducted on Iranian students' experiences in Canada and that those related to the issue of HD in particular were even fewer. I chose to conduct this study in Montreal, Quebec, as it has the second highest number of postsecondary students in all of North America (Montreal International, 2011). Further, Quebec's specific policies in regard to the dominance of secularism and Francophone culture and language have made this province a special case to study, particularly in regard to the situation and experiences of ISs. Therefore, being closely acquainted with the challenges facing Iranian students in Montreal, I found it important to explore IISs' experiences of human dignity in this city.

As a social work graduate student, it was important to explore IISs' experiences in relation to specific social settings. I chose the nexus between universities and the Canadian/Quebec immigration system, with some exploration of the job market. In order to identify IISs' interpretation of HD in general and be able to compare it with the existing literature, I opened the interviews with a question about students' overall interpretation of the concept of HD without providing a set definition for them, and separate from their experiences with specific social settings. In order to assess how students' motivations and experiences led them to decide whether to remain in Canada or leave after graduation, I also asked about their

intention and current immigration status and its link to their HD. I only analyzed data about the link between IISs' motivation of migration and their experiences with universities and the Canadian immigration system, and left the rest for future analysis given time limitations and the overall scope of social work.

Justification for Research Project

Immigrants as a vulnerable population have always been central to social work research and practice (Craig de Silva, 2007). Given the wide range and direct nature of services that social workers may provide immigrants, they are potentially well informed about immigrants' needs, concerns, and challenges and are appropriate representatives to reflect these needs in both practice and policy making. Accordingly, social work research on factors affecting migration trajectories can provide an accurate picture of immigrants' actual experiences as well as practicable approaches and recommendations.

As the largest temporary migrant group in Canada, ISs are an asset to their host country (Dam et al., 2018). Both higher education institutions and governments count on ISs as an answer to shortfalls in the national economy, and compete internationally to attract them to the Canadian education market (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). Therefore a better understanding of students' experiences of and reasons for studying abroad is key to helping Canada develop strategies to increase its chances of attracting highly educated immigrants and to strengthen retention, integration, and resettlement policies.

In 2018, 1.5 percent of total Iranian domestic students migrated to study abroad, of which about 78 percent were exceptionally educationally talented and accomplished students (Iran Migration Observatory, 2021). In 2021, IISs comprised 3 percent of the 621,565 ISs in Canada and Iran is tied for fourth among the top 20 countries of origin for ISs in Canada (CBIE, 2021).

However, IISs are overrepresented among postgraduate (master and PhD) ISs, representing approximately 11 percent of Canadian international postgraduate students in 2019-2020 (Statistic Canada, 2021). Limited diplomatic relations between Iran and Canada have affected this population through challenges with required student visa documents and, in a number of cases, with obtaining permanent residency (PR) (Brend, 2018; Ghousoub, 2018). Despite this, scholars have rarely focused their work on this population in Canada.

Human dignity has a central role in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as other major human rights texts (Moli, 2019)⁴. This position demonstrates the importance of recognizing and respecting the HD of every human being, with particular applicability to vulnerable populations. People migrate with various aspirations and motivations, yet, whatever is the specific reason for this move (discrimination, unrest, economic or political situation, lack of respect or recognition, a wish to further one's life plan, etc.), it is an "exercise of dignity-seeking" (Crépeau & Samaddar 2009, p.11). Therefore, reflecting migrants' voices and experiences is significant in recognizing their dignity as bearers of rights (Crépeau & Samaddar 2009, p.11).

In my dissertation, I aim to explore how IISs relate their motivations for and experiences of migration to HD. However, due to the lack of a shared definition of HD in the literature, which is a subjective concept and a moral value that can be differently perceived based on its application in various contexts (Moli, 2019), I seek to identify how IISs defined this concept in their own lives. Participants may have their own definition or interpretation of HD, and these will be analyzed based on the HD framework adopted in this research, including concepts of freedom, honor, equality, self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, God-given

⁴ For instance, the Preambles of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (Moli, 2019).

gift, and human rights. The HD framework was based on several factors which will be explained in the conceptual framework section. To the best of my knowledge, the notion of HD has been under-researched to conceptualize ISs' migration. One of the goals of this study is therefore to understand whether IISs' perceived HD is respected during their migration trajectory, including their experiences in both home and host countries. Gender as "feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex" (American Psychological Association, 2011) can affect IS migration in different phases of their journey, from the decision making stage to the migration experience and post-study transition through a number of social levels (e.g. family, society, and national policy) (Raghuram & Sondhi, 2021). Yet gender analysis has rarely been part of empirical research about IS migration (Holloway et al., 2012; Raghuram & Sondhi, 2021; Sondhi & King, 2017). In order to address these gaps in the literature, Manuscript I explores the link between IISs' perceptions of HD and their migration, while considering differences between women and men's attitudes toward migration drivers and HD. Further, to understand students' experiences of HD after their migration, in Manuscript II and III, HD is identified in relation to two Canadian institutions: Canadian universities and the Canadian immigration system.

The following will detail the three manuscripts which take on independent yet intersecting themes and components of research regarding IISs' experiences and understandings of HD. Each of the manuscripts has been submitted for publication. The first manuscript (forthcoming), "In Search of Human Dignity: Gendered Motivations for Migration among Iranian International Students in Canada", will be a book chapter in *Leaving to Learn: Mapping the place of resilience in the journeys of international students to Canada*; a summary version of the second manuscript, "Gendered Experiences of Human Dignity Within Canadian Universities:

The Case of Iranian International Students”, is forthcoming in the *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education (JCIHE)*; and the third manuscript, *Far from Perfect: Iranian International Students’ Experience of Human Dignity within the Canadian Immigration System*, is under review in the *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies (IJMBS)*.

Intention of the Three-Manuscript Dissertation

Overall, each manuscript in this dissertation addresses issues related to IISs’ experiences of HD before, during, and after their migration to Canada. The dissertation is designed such that all three manuscripts are related to the issue of IISs’ HD and address HD from different angles. The three manuscripts can be read together as part of a unified analysis. The first article is intended to explore IISs’ motivations for migration to Canada and their link to HD while focusing on gender differences, and shows that elements of the HD framework shape IISs’ motivations for migration and that women and men IISs’ motivations differ somewhat. These findings led to identifying whether and to what extent IISs would be able to achieve their aspirations in Canada. Therefore, the second and third papers focus on empirical data exploring IISs’ experiences of HD within both Canadian educational and immigration systems. More precisely, the second manuscript describes how IISs experience and perceive HD in their educational life in Canada compared to Iran and whether gender affects their experiences during their academic journey. The findings suggest that while students perceived that their HD was respected in many ways within their Canadian educational experience compared to that in Iran, some controversy arose necessitating more considerations at the levels of policy and practice. Following students’ trajectory of HD in Canada, the third manuscript demonstrates students’ frustration with immigration rules and policies. Presenting these three documents in this way

provides the reader with a contextual landscape of (a) IISs' motivations for migration to Canada and as related to HD, (b) how students make sense of their experiences within two Canadian systems, and (c) recommendations for future research in Canada.

The dissertation is primarily framed via a case study while applying a conceptual framework of HD, including the concepts of self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, freedom, honor, equality, "God-given gift," and human rights. As a result, a certain amount of minor overlap exists between the articles concerning the adopted conceptual framework and methodology.

Summary of the Three Manuscripts

Prior to starting my dissertation, I had been thinking about the significance of HD in both IISs' motivations to migrate and their experiences of settlement in a host country. Following the growing number of Iranian students migrating abroad, particularly to Canada, I aimed to root my research in empirical data.

Manuscript One: In Search of Human Dignity: Gendered Motivations for Migration among Iranian International Students in Canada

Scholars have attributed various social, political, cultural, and economic factors to human decisions for migration. Yet the effects of HD in conjunction with gender on ISs' motivations for migration are understudied. The main objective of this manuscript is to explore this topic via interviews with 24 Iranian international graduate students (equally from both genders) who were currently living or had previously lived in Montreal. The data were analyzed according to an adopted HD framework. IISs discussed four overlapping themes contributing to their decision to migrate: 1) the influence of family, friends, and social networks, 2) the search for freedom and equality, 3) looking for security, and 4) seeking fulfillment and desirable social status. These

themes provided empirical evidence for some of the concepts within the HD framework, including freedom, socio-economic rights, respect, equality, honor, and fulfillment. Moreover, results show a small gender gap in IISs' motivations to migrate, with women addressing gender norms and discrimination, while men students raised issues like the influence of family and friends. However, both genders underlined their desire for more self-actualization and career progress.

Both men and women IISs referred more to the relational quality of HD rather than focusing on individual HD. While raising the concept of fulfillment is a sign of the importance of individual quality of HD, the concept does not exist independently of the broader context, such as the way students are treated or recognised, as well as the availability of adequate and appropriate resources. This paper poses the following questions: if seeking HD was a significant driver for the students' migration, how do other Iranian students find their HD while staying in their home country? Does having particular perceptions of HD motivate these students to migrate?

If an emphasis on HD motivated the IISs to migrate to Canada, have their lived experiences in Canada met their expectations of HD? This question led me to explore IISs' experiences of HD in both Canadian universities and within the immigration system, and exploration which is discussed in the following two manuscripts.

Manuscript Two: Gendered Experiences of Human Dignity Within Canadian Universities: The Case of Iranian International Students

Drawing on the same data and conceptual framework of HD as the first paper, IISs discussed three main themes as key to their experiences of HD within Canadian universities: 1) the relationship between students and university faculty and staff, 2) gender equality and freedom, and 3) being a member of a marginalized group. This manuscript illustrates that IISs

have varying experiences of HD during their studies in Canada. While students expressed their sense of fulfillment regarding access to adequate educational resources and support from university staff, as well as freedom and gender equality in the Canadian educational system, they argued that issues negatively affecting HD remained, including the quality of their courses, marginalization, and supervisors' authority over international graduate students. IISs' experiences reflect particular concepts within my adopted HD framework - including freedom, equality, respect, fulfillment, and human rights. This illustrates the importance of the relational versus the individual quality of human dignity within the Canadian education system.

On the topic of gendered experiences of HD, women students perceive that their HD was respected in Canada because of their sense of equal status and high level of connection with their supervisors and their professors' recognition of their efforts and competence. However, men students felt that in some situations their HD were threatened due to their perception of being simply a means for the Canadian educational system to reach its goals. Moreover, while both genders admired the level of freedom and equality present in Canadian universities, women students raised it in terms of empowerment and gender equality, while the men framed it in terms of the presence of meritocracy in this system.

Manuscript Three: Far from Perfect: Iranian International Students' Experience of Human Dignity within the Canadian Immigration System

The aim of the third manuscript was to investigate IISs' experiences of HD within the Canadian immigration system. Grounded in thematic analysis of the same data, two main themes emerged: 1) students' frustration with immigration rules during their studies, and 2) lack of clarity regarding processing times. Yet, there were other themes such as discrimination based on nationality, and international students' agency in relation to the Canadian immigration system that for the sake of time limit, I only discussed the first two themes. These themes provided

empirical support for some concepts of the HD framework including equality, humanity, respect, and human rights in such that students found their HD at risk.

From the interviews, it emerged that extensive red tape requirements for student visas, postgraduate work permits, and permanent residency have the effect of keeping IISs in a state of precarity. This paper provides research and policy recommendations to address these issues.

The “discussion and conclusion” section of the dissertation summarizes all three manuscripts, while highlighting links, similarities and differences among them. Moreover, it presents the study’s implications for the social work discipline (practice, research, and policy) while revisiting some of the main recommendations cited in all three papers.

Contribution to Original Knowledge:

As an intrinsic, permanent, fundamental, inalienable and common worth (Teji et al., 2020), as well as a foundational element of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, HD has recently been highlighted in studies related to the motivation to migrate as well as the experience of settlement in a new country (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009). Yet very little scholarly discourse has applied this concept to aspects of migration, including labor migrants (Dhungana, 2020; Monteiro, 2009), refugees (Cornelisse, 2019), and migrant shelters (Doering-White, 2019). Further, there is a dearth of research on students’ experiences of HD (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016) and the experiences of international students remain understudied. Instead most of the existing research comprises theoretical or historical debates on the meanings of HD (Andishan, 2019; Barshack, 2014; Brennan & Lo, 2007; Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009 ; Galvin & Todres, 2015; Habermas, 2012; Mautner, 2008; Menke, 2007; O’Mahony, 2012; Pollmann, 2011; Sari & Doganay, 2009; Stevenson, 2014). Accordingly, the main objectives of my dissertation were to

gain insight into how IISs understand and experience HD. By interviewing and observing Iranian international graduate students living in Montreal, this work attempts to shed light on students' lived experiences. Without including the voices of ISs, how can policymakers or stakeholders make policies or regulations that are relevant to individuals most affected?

Each of the three manuscripts in this project makes specific contributions to knowledge while adopting an HD conceptual framework to analyze data. Manuscript 1 concludes that via knowing ISSs' motivations related to HD, Canadian institutions working with ISs can be informed that seeking HD was one of the students' core objectives in deciding study in Canada and potentially stay longer. It is therefore critical to provide educational, immigration, and settlement services respecting HD. Moreover, Iranian institutions interested in returning migrated talents to their home country should provide services and resources within. It seems that currently most policies and regulations are developed according to officials' needs and goals. This research advances knowledge in international migration studies by illuminating IISs' motivations for leaving their home country, as well as exploring some of their challenges and concerns.

Manuscript II, via analyzing IISs' experiences of HD within Canadian universities, compared to their experiences within Iranian universities, provides valuable insight to the experiences of ISs in general as well as IISs' concerns and challenges in particular. Given that some IISs' experiences of marginalization corresponded with their sense of their HD being violated, this paper calls for Canadian university policy reform regarding hiring culturally competent staff as well as considering the third-party supervision or review for course content and quality. Such reforms can provide a space in which international students do not feel that they are "others" and feel more integrated and supported, which supports the ongoing

internationalization of Canadian higher education. Finally, this study hopes to inspire further research regarding international students from other nationalities' and professors' experiences of HD in Canadian higher education.

Manuscript III increases awareness of ISs' experiences of HD within the immigration system, which contributes to the support offered to ISs in Canada. The findings reveal situations where IISs' HD was threatened, which may provide useful information for Canadian policymakers and the postsecondary institutions that seek to attract international students.

Taken together, the dissertation's conceptual framework, methodology, research results, and discussions all collectively contribute to original knowledge that has the potential to enhance further research on a) Iranian international students in non-educational settings in Canada (e.g. the labor market), b) the experiences of HD among international students from other nationalities, and c) faculty members in Canada.

Overview of the Literature

While each of the three manuscripts include detailed literature reviews pertaining to the topic of each paper, this section will provide an overview supporting the central thesis. There will therefore be a certain amount of overlap and intersection between this central literature review and the literature reviews for each distinct manuscript. This study aims to reflect Iranian international students' voices in Canada. To this end, I have used the conceptual framework of HD, which will be discussed further in this chapter, to inform my analysis of the data.

Gendered Motivations for Migration among Iranian International Students

Education is highly valued in Iran, and having a university degree is a core requirement for gaining social status and good jobs in that country. However, for women, seeking higher education may be interpreted as part of a desire to challenge their unequal status in Iranian society (Aryan, 2012; Sadeghi, 2008). While graduating with a degree from an international university is seen as prestigious (Nafari et al., 2017; Wadhwa, 2016), Iranian students may also seek this path to escape from social, economic, and political unrest in Iran (Nafari et al., 2017).

International students launch their migration journey with different aspirations and motivations. Much of the existing literature on international student migration from countries in the so-called global South to countries of the global North discuss positive and negative factors at home and in host countries which push and pull students to move abroad (Cheung et al., 2019; Sia et al., 2017; Nafari et al., 2017; To et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). ISSs' migration journeys are linked to personal specific factors including material drivers such as getting scholarships and financial aid from a host country university (Wadhwa, 2016), as well as non-material goals like

self-actualization (Benefader & den Boer, 2006) or lifestyle-related aspirations (Baizán & González-Ferrer, 2016). Along with students' motivators, their access to tangible/financial resources (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017) and intangible resources such as internet access (Dekker et al., 2016) are significant in facilitating or restricting the process of migration. Further, students' characteristics such as personality traits (Canache et al., 2013), views about their country and the desire to live in another (Schapendonk, 2012), demographics (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004) and "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004) also influence their decisions. These studies too often fail to offer a holistic view of ISSs' motivations, instead providing overly simplistic accounts at the expense of considering "mobility within individual and situated contexts" (Chen, 2017, p.7). Moreover, the methodological problem of focusing on external factors is also that they tend to be unidimensional variables, meaning that the high rate of certain problems in the sending country is related to a perceived low rate of those issues in the receiving country (Tabor & Milfont, 2011).

As the number of IISs rises, a small number of studies (e.g., Didehvar, 2020; Hojati, 2011; Nafari et al. 2017; Nazari & Seyedan, 2016) have addressed the push and pull factors that influence student migration. Pull factors include overseas Iranian family and friends, aid and scholarships available in the host country, an environment free of certain sociopolitical dynamics in Iran, improving language skills, and the prestige of study abroad. Push factors include certain socio-political and economic factors in Iran, including political and social repression, issues with quality of education, inflation, the devaluation of Iranian currency due to economic sanctions imposed against Iran, gender discrimination, and lack of social freedom. While social and economic issues in the home country can motivate students to migrate, limited studies identify the reason these problems cause some students to migrate while others remain in

their home country. Further, these studies have given limited attention to personal factors vs. structural factors. Finally, the migration decision making process has been rarely discussed for IISs and other highly skilled im/migrants (Niraula & Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Few studies within the existing literature on gender and ISs studying overseas explore gendered motivations in relation to migration; for example, a study on Chinese women students in Australia (Martin, 2017) discussed influential factors including the presence of gender bias in the Chinese professional labour market (Du & Dong, 2009; Martin, 2014) or the university system, as well as studying abroad serving as marital capital for women (Martin, 2017). The students also considered migration to be a means to escape from the social regulation of women's behaviour in China, such as family surveillance of their daily activities, and students' desire for more freedom and individualism abroad (Martin, 2017). Scholars also address this topic through intersections with gender, class, sex, and religion (Holloway et al., 2012). One study on Indian students in Canada (Sondhi & King, 2017) found very few gender differences in motivations for studying abroad, but this study is one of very few that come to this conclusion. Among the very limited research on Iranian international graduate students in Canada, Hojati's study (2011) depicts women's students' mobility as a response to oppressive circumstances in Iran.

Gendered International Student Experiences of Human Dignity within Universities

Students' desire to realize their academic ambitions is one of the most common motivational factors influencing IS' decision to study abroad (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Studies indicate that ISs migrating from developing countries may be motivated by differences between home and host universities, including teacher-student interactions (Chen et al., 2019), available

resources, and educational methods (Abukhattala, 2004; Eland, 2001). Scholars have discussed factors that influence universities' overall performance in such a way that have led to the loss of universities' autonomy; these factors include the dominance of political discourse/ideology over universities in Iran (Eghtesadi Roudi, 2021; Golkar, 2017; Soltani et al., 2020) and the market rules in Western universities including Canada (Oleinik, 2009).

University students, whether domestic or international, face some similar challenges, including anxiety and depression, when adjusting to their new course of learning (Perry, 2016). Despite these similarities, ISs have particular challenges that require targeted support and consideration. In contrast to the relatively limited research on IISs in Canada (Didehvar, 2020; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Sadeghi, 2008), Canadian researchers have been giving increasing attention to international students as a category of precarious migrants to the country. The literature on this topic shows that ISs encounter difficulties adjusting to their studies and achieving academic goals (Andrade, 2006; Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Mostafa, 2006; Wisker, 2005; Wolff, 2014). Lack of language proficiency can negatively affect students' ability to communicate and learn (Andrade, 2006; Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Wisker, 2005), their sense of belonging (Wolff, 2014), their social integration (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2016) acculturation process (Kormos et al., 2014), and post-graduation employment (Kelly, 2012).

Students from certain nationalities or religious and ethnic backgrounds may experience additional challenges. Muslim ISs, for example, have disclosed experiences of discrimination and racism (Abukhattala, 2004; Hojati, 2011; Gutmann, 2004; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Samuel, 2005) resulting from Islamophobia (Abukhattala, 2004; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Mostafa, 2006), as well as marginalization due to language

and racialization, among other factors (Ahmed, 2016; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Samuel, 2005).

Feminist contributions in migration studies are wide-ranging (Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; Oishi, 2005), however, explaining the processes and discourses of migration involving both genders, their relationships (Erel, Morokvasic, & Shinozaki, 2003), women's relations with each other (Parrenas, 2009), and the intersections of gender and class, age, and ethnicity which specially concentrate on the migrants' voices and experiences (Danaj, 2019). Within the existing empirical literature on international students' experiences studying overseas, the influence of gender on ISs experiences in host country educational institutions has been discussed in relation to women students' double experiences of discrimination according to gender performance and racialization (for example, Muslim women wearing a hijab) (Li & Zizzi, 2018). Cross-cultural adaptation (Chirkov et al., 2008), as a reaction to discrimination and exclusion, may include withdrawal from social interaction with other students (O'Connor, 2019), conforming (Soheil, 2013), trying to disrupt the host country's dominant gender discourses (Sondhi & King, 2017), and women's challenges with gender scripted spaces (Liu, 2011). Meanwhile, very few studies consider gender in their analysis on IISs, and existing discourse on this has focused on cross-cultural transition and acculturation issues (Didehvar 2020; Nahidi et al. 2018; Najmi, 2013; Sabouripour & Roslan, 2015).

According to available literature, there is a need to understand how ISs give meaning to their experiences regarding HD in host country academic institutions. Doing so will help universities to improve institutional regulations concerning students' integration while acknowledging and respecting their differences. Moreover, a change in the dominant ideology/policies controlling universities in both countries is recommended.

Human Dignity within the Canadian Immigration System

International students are an excellent source of permanent immigrants for Canada. They tend to be young, are often able to speak English or French fluently, have Canadian postsecondary experience, and already have social ties and are acculturated, accelerating their integration (IRCC, 2017). Moreover, ISs make considerable contributions to the Canadian economy at the government and university levels (Geddie, 2015; Global Affairs Canada, 2016; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015) and play a significant role in “building a stronger international and intercultural scope to pedagogy and research and are crucial to Canadian campuses” (Cudmore, 2005, p. 47). Given their significant benefits, ISs are not adequately supported by the Canadian government and higher education institutions to fully integrate into Canadian society and the Canadian economy (Binka, 2019). For example, as temporary immigrants, ISs are not considered eligible by the Canadian federal government to receive free employment- or language-related settlement services⁵ (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Instead, ISs are only eligible for limited support from their academic institutions, which are not sufficiently equipped to provide settlement services (Artur, 2017) or have excluded such services from their mandate (Covell et al., 2015).

Moreover, ISs are vulnerable to economic, political or sociocultural changes (Hari et al., 2021), as well as changes to immigration policies and institutional regulations (Rosenfield, 2020) of both origin and destination countries. “Lack of integration of information across the federal, provincial and institutional scales” (Binka, 2019, p. 64), or within university institutions or

⁵ There are only very limited local settlement agencies and community organizations that are linked with some higher education institutions to support Ontario ISs and their family members during the process of their settlement and integration, e.g. International Student Connect (ISC) which is funded by the Ontario government (COSTI, 2020).

settlement organizations' services, contributes to students' precarious status (Armos, 2018; Covell et al., 2015; Goh, 2019).

During their studies and after graduation, ISs' precarious immigration status (temporary visa) can lead to labor exploitation (Maury, 2017; Robertson, 2015), difficulties in finding jobs related to their education (Frenette et.al, 2019), and reduced capacity to control their work environments (Perry, 2018; Hanley et al., 2020). In the context of immigration applications, ISs' temporary status also makes them vulnerable, as it can lead to status renewal challenges and ambiguity for their future life and postgraduate professional plans (Gilmartin et al., 2020). Moreover, delays or extended processing times and lack of reliable information about the stage of applications increase the span of newcomers' precarious immigration status within Canada (Dennler, 2020, p.501).

ISs have also disclosed challenges during their transition to PR, including lack of awareness about immigration programs (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Covell et al., 2015; Dauwer, 2018; Roach, 2011; Kelly, 2012); lack of community support to help navigate the complexities of the immigration system (Dauwer, 2018; Esses et al., 2018; Qian, 2017; Gomez, 2017), the difficulty of staying up to date on frequent changes to policies and regulations, lack of access to campus resources, the cost of applications, and the exclusion of university work experience from work experience recognized for PR (Al-Haque, 2017).

Given the increase of Islamophobia in the West and specifically in Canada (Hanniman, 2008; Helly, 2004; Wilkins Laflamme, 2018), ISs' religion becomes an important factor affecting the immigrants' experiences of discrimination in these countries (Alizai, 2021). The manifestation of this discrimination in Quebec, the province with the second largest Muslim

community in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022), appears in Bill 21⁶ with respect to secularism. This Bill increases veiled Muslim women's marginalization as it affects their "ability to work and continue school, as well as on their affective, psychological and spiritual experiences" (Jahangeer, 2022, p.307). Further, the Government of Quebec recently underwent unexpected and major changes in its PR requirements (e.g Bill 9) that create barriers and leave ISs in a precarious position. ISs generally have to face these challenges with no help or insufficient support as there are few settlement services available to them.

Like many other ISs, Iranian students have had various challenges with Canadian and Quebec immigration policies and regulations; however, the issues of lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries and very limited literature reflecting IISs' obstacles in Canada have made this population particularly vulnerable. Many applicants and their advocates believe that this population faces unfair treatment in terms of processing times and security screening requirements (Brend, 2018).

⁶ According to this Bill, teachers and certain public servants in positions of authority are restricted from wearing "religious symbols" in Quebec (National Assembly of Québec 2019)..

Conceptual Framework: Human Dignity

The way that a subjective concept like HD is defined shapes how it ought to be approached in research. In every study about HD, therefore, it is important to specify how the concept is interpreted and understood. Accordingly, in this section, I try to provide a brief historical background of this concept as well as some theoretical and empirical discussions about HD. Human dignity has been a regularly mentioned concept in religion, philosophy, law, and bioethics, however, rarely explained in other disciplines because of the lack of agreement on its definition, which causes a challenge while trying to apply this concept.

Historical Development of the Concept

Examining the historical roots of the term human dignity, Pollmann (2011) reconstructed four main stages: 1) “Roman antiquity”, 2) “Christianity”, 3) “Early modernity”, and 4) “After 1945” (p. 246). In Roman antiquity, only privileged persons with high rank in public life deserved dignity because of their special duties and responsibilities (Pollmann, 2011). Later, in the second stages, during the European middle ages, Christian theology transformed this notion to the idea that every human being, regardless of their differences, has inherent dignity (Pollmann, 2011). However, it is worth mentioning that not only in Christianity, but in most religions, every human being is inherently dignified. In Islam, according to the Quran (17:70):

We [God] have honored the sons of Adam and carried them on land and sea, and

provided them with good things, and preferred them greatly over many of those We created.’⁷ (Quran 17:70)

Ja’fari (1990), an Islamic theologian/scholar, argues that not only does every human being have potential dignity as a God-given gift that should be recognized and respected by others, but he/she has the capacity to acquire higher levels of dignity as well (as cited in Kianpour, 2016). Meanwhile, there is an argument by Andishan (2019) discussing the confusion between the concepts of honor and dignity among Islamic scholars. He believes that according to certain Quranic verses, Islamic scholars mistakenly refer to “dignity” when in fact what is being referred to is an “honor”, a “type of value bestowed by God on mankind”, for “his or her admirable status”. Therefore, in order to keep it, “the honored has obligations to perform” (p. 469). I believe that however we define, interpret or translate this concept of a “God-given gift”, the important commonality is that all human beings have been born with an inherent capacity or features that are valuable, deserve to be respected and necessitates protecting their human rights.

Continuing in the stages of Pollmann (2011), in early modernity, including the Italian Renaissance and later the Enlightenment movement, the notion of HD was more secularized by certain philosophers, like Kant (Pollmann, 2011). In his theory, HD was linked to the rational and autonomous capacities of human beings (Giselsson, 2018; Waldron, 2013). This conception of HD proposed that human beings do not possess dignity because they reflect a “divine splendor” but rather due to human potentiality for rational thought (Pollmann, 2011, p.246).

The fourth notion of human dignity emerged after 1945, because of the horrible totalitarian experiences of humans during the Second World War. In this new approach,

⁷ وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا
The key word of ‘*karam-na*’—the second word in the Arabic version and the fourth in the English translation of this verse—and its derivatives have been used several times in the Quran. English translators suggest different translations for it, which the most common are ‘dignity’ and ‘honor’.

philosophical thoughts about human rights and human dignity were intertwined (Menke, 2007), meaning that “not all human beings and not even all persons have full dignity, but due to the moral and also political claim, they should all count as legally equal” (Pollmann, 2011, p. 260); all individuals have “the same universal rights, which have to be respected, protected and fulfilled” in order to respect their inherent dignity (Pollmann, 2011, p.260). This is the notion that was implemented in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Pollmann, 2011). According to the preamble of the UDHR, all human beings have “inherent dignity” and are born equal in dignity and rights (UN General Assembly, 1948).

Current Theoretical Elements of Human Dignity

In many instances, the various theoretical notions of human dignity contradict each other.

HD has also been defined as variously as:

- respect (Stevenson, 2014);
- reason or intellect (Mautner, 2008);
- self-respect (Brennan & Lo, 2007; Sari & Doganay, 2009);
- a foundational notion for human rights (O’Mahony, 2012);
- honor (Galvin & Todres, 2015);
- family (Barshack, 2014), and;
- a connection between morality and the law (Habermas, 2012).
- Inner feeling of worth (Mégret & Hoffmann 2009)

Various factors, including gender, age, race, ethnic identity, personal preference, community values, religious beliefs, and ideological opinions can all influence one's understanding of human dignity (Sossin, 2003). For instance, Sayer (2011), in identifying various meanings that exist across and within cultures, distinguishes the Western, liberal interpretation of HD from non-Western versions. While the former emphasizes the autonomy of the individual, non-Western accounts are more of a relational sense of dignity that is “a collective status which individuals are entitled to by virtue of their belonging to a community and assuming certain social roles” (Lee, 2008, p. 15). Moreover, through relying on data from a quantitative systematic analysis of 108 organizational ethnographies, Hodson (2001) studies meaning and satisfaction at work and demonstrates that concerns about respect and dignity are common across gender and race. However, what counts as dignified or undignified varies somewhat culturally.

According to Sayer (2011) various meanings and interpretations of the concept of dignity are situated between two dominant applications of dignity: 1) HD as an intrinsic quality of all human beings, by which individuals are born equal in dignity regardless of their social status, behavior, having particular characteristics or their relation with other people; and 2) HD as a relational quality which is vulnerable and depends on both how an individual behaves and how he/she is being treated by others. Therefore, others' recognition of it is important. Whereas the first quality of dignity is more related to the autonomy of people, the second quality is more relational and depends on others (Malpas & Lickiss, 2007; Sayer, 2011). Hence, It seems reasonable to consider human dignity as something dancing between these two realms, however, it should create harmony.

What all people, including oppressed groups, expect from a state constitution in terms of their dignity is both 1) respecting similar and distinctive certain human capacities and needs which address what people are and are capable of, and 2) allowing people to meet their needs and exercise their capacities (Sayer, 2011, p.195). Therefore, to have autonomy, individual differences must be recognized and respected, which is likely to lead people to feel dignity (Sayer, 2011). For example, universities should recognize and respect different cultures and religions and let students observe their specific practices. Moreover, people's dignity is respected when they are allowed to speak out, air their disagreements, be listened to and have their opinions taken seriously (Sayer, 2011). Furthermore, due to the relation between dignity and the "treatment of people as ends in themselves", individuals' dignity may be threatened where individuals are treated as means to others' ends (Sayer, 2011, p.198). Having dignity is also associated with exercising one's higher abilities and flourishing as human beings (Sayer, 2011, p.199).

Maintaining dignity depends not only on the way a person behaves, but on others' evaluation of the material resources one has (Rawls, 1971; Sayer, 2011). Therefore, people's search for dignity sometimes takes the form of looking for resources that are recognized as valuable by others (Sayer, 2005). Being trusted is another way of gaining a sense of dignity. People seek to be recognized as trustworthy and competent without others being afraid that they will use their power against others (Sayer, 2011). Sayer (2011) also discusses that ignoring one's vulnerability is not an indication of respect for dignity. Vulnerable people prefer to be treated "in a way which discreetly acknowledges that vulnerability without taking advantage of it" (p. 203).

Scholars have argued that poor and marginalized communities usually experience various forms of human dignity violation, which are due to an unequal distribution of power relations,

lack of social safety provisions, discriminatory laws and policies, and official apathy (Dhungana, 2020; Farmer, 2004; Gupta, 2012; Harrell-Bond, 2002; Yamin, 2016). While criticizing some State institutions because of their irresponsibility, incompetence and abuse of power, many studies (Dhungana, 2020; Farmer, 2004; Gupta, 2012; Harrell-Bond, 2002; Yamin, 2016) have proposed a shift from normative and philosophical discourses on human dignity to what Kaufmann and his colleagues (2011) term a “negative approach to human dignity”, highlighting how particular social groups experience “humiliation, degradation or dehumanization” (p. 3).

Empirical Applications of Human Dignity

Migration has been recognized as an important area with the purpose of practicing HD (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009). Whereas different social, political, cultural, and economic reasons that may be related to HD have been recognized as contributing to motivations for human migration (Kazemi et.al., 2018; Preston, 2014; Tsapenko, 2015; Van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2012), only a few studies consider the role of HD in the actual experiences of migration itself (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009; Dhungana, 2020; Monteiro, 2009).

Canada, as the host and destination country for many international students, has its own interpretation and application of the concept of HD. Therefore, in order to discuss IISs' experiences of HD within the Canadian immigration system, it is important to first briefly identify the position of HD in the constitution of Canada, Canada's Supreme Court decisions and Canadian public policy debates. As mentioned before, according to the preamble of the Canadian Bill of Rights, the Parliament of Canada affirms that the Canadian Nation is founded upon principles that acknowledge HD (National Legislative Bodies, 1960, p.1). However, this concept does not explicitly appear in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*. But the Canadian

Supreme Court has noted that the Charter and the rights it covers are “inextricably bound” to “concepts of human dignity” (Sossin, 2003, p. 228). While considered to be a cornerstone of Canada’s system of justice, there is no clarity “to what constitutes human dignity and what role it should play in constitutional interpretation” (Sossin, 2003, p. 230). Therefore, “it is a judicial contrivance” (Sossin, 2003, p. 228). According to a study by Sossin (2003), a review of the major Supreme Court decisions related to human dignity and the Charter demonstrates that this concept has been used by the Court in six main legal categories: “psychological integrity; physical security; privacy; personal autonomy; professional reputation; and personal affiliation or group identity” (p.230). In most of these settings, human dignity appears as a manifestation of “what makes individuals unique and self-contained” (p.230). The Court has approached HD “as an organizing principle of Canadian society - as the underpinning of what some observers have identified as ‘legal humanism’” (p.230). In another study examining Canada’s Supreme Court decisions and Canadian public policy debates surrounding human dignity about abortion, physician suicide, and new reproductive technologies issues, Penninga (2009) explains that human dignity is being identified as “individual autonomy and equality” (p. 8.).

According to Penninga (2009)’s study, Canadian public policy discourse is consistent with Supreme Court decisions in terms of causing confusion about human dignity’ meaning and application. Moreover, the study discloses that in Canadian public policy “an account of dignity is being advanced which is not truly human (i.e. it also privileges autonomous individuals) and which promotes individualism at the expense of community responsibility” (p.39). Penninga (2009) concludes that when the government adopts a bottom-up approach in identifying what matters for its citizens, the policies could reflect the reality of people's life, specifically concerning HD.

In other countries like Brazil, De Oliveira (2013) analyzes “citizenship on the relation between conceptions of equality, dignity and fairness” and discusses how demands for citizenship rights do not take the same shape or meaning everywhere and must be considered in the interplay between these three notions of equality, dignity and fairness, which depend on local civic sensibilities. The author discusses two contrasting conceptions of equality as they relate to local ideals of dignity and fairness: “equality as uniform treatment to the equality of rights, and the conception of equality as differentiated treatment to the justification of privileges” (p.133). The study concludes that while notions of equality, dignity and fairness seem to be present in all Western societies, their meanings, articulation and implications vary, in different circumstances, for the exercise of rights and citizenship. Therefore, more empirical research from the lens of citizens is required to achieve common ideas about situations “where differences of treatment imply a devaluation or denial of the actor’s dignity” (p.139).

De Oliveira (2013) compares the results of his study concerning the distinction between two notions of equality in Brazil with Taylor’s work (1994) in Quebec, Canada. De Oliveira (2013) explains:

While the claims to distinctiveness, or the demands for distinct treatment in Quebec – associated with the recognition of the value or merit of the French culture that predominates within the province – aims at the affirmation of an equal status in relation to the Anglophone majority in the rest of Canada (regardless of the latter’s difficulties to look at it in the same way), the conception of equality that demands differentiated treatment in Brazil draws on the perception or identification of inequalities of status among citizens that have social currency. (p.135)

Moreover, Taylor (1993) compares Canada and the United States in relation to dignity, and provides two different concepts of dignity: whereas in Canadian citizens’ dignity was associated with their participation in the formation of the general will, in the case of United states, citizens’

dignity was linked to their condition as a holder of absolute rights permanently at his or her disposal (Taylor, 1993, p. 92). With reference to Taylor's research (1993), Canada's history demonstrates that 'the general will' of indigenous people has yet to be respected in this formation. Therefore, Canadian citizenship is not a guarantee to access to HD. In a third example of how HD is operationalized in different governments' policies, Dhungana's (2020) review of selected articles and reports concerning marginalized communities' experiences of HD and state policies discusses Nepali labor migrants' experiences of dignity violations in India as part of governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The author concludes that the Nepali state's decision to seal its border with India violated the human dignity of Nepali returnee migrants in favor of protecting the health of the rest of the population.

Human Dignity and Students

Despite these examples, empirically, HD remains understudied (Oleinik, 2016a). Concerning students' understanding and interpretation of HD, there are very few scholars who have used this concept in relation to students. In a qualitative study in Iran, Kianpour (2016) explores that there is a difference between seminary versus university students' understandings of HD in Iran. While university students defined HD in terms of moral concepts such as love (the right to love and be loved), equality (having equal rights and gender equality vs. gender stereotypes), respect (recognizing citizens' decisions by the state and society; being treated with kindness versus being humiliated, intimidated by threats or acts of violence particularly by bureaucratic systems; being respected regardless of one's social positions, such as gender, class, race [could be considered equality] and freedom (power to choose and self-autonomy) that are related to the responsibility of society to provide it (Kianpour, 2016, p.714). Seminary students

perceived HD as a religious concept, “a God-given gift”, whose level depends on the Muslim individual’s willingness and effort to gain it (Kianpour, 2016, p.719). Accordingly, it could be understood that these two types of students, based on their choice of the nature of their educational institutions, provided distinct definitions of HD, meaning secular (by university students) versus religious (by seminary students) interpretations.

With the same purpose, Oleinik (2016a) conducted an online survey amongst university students in eight countries regarding the words they ascribe to HD. The study reveals that students from different cultural contexts have different interpretations of HD. For example, while Canadian university students referred to respect (47.9%), self-respect (21.3%), pride (20.2%), self-worth (14.9%), equality and human rights (10.6%), in Iran, university students had very diverse responses, referring to self-esteem and self-respect (2.8%), respect (2.4%), fulfilment (greatness) (2.4%), freedom (2.4%), humanity (2.2%), God (2%), human rights (1.8%), morality (1.4%), value (1.4%), forgiveness (1.4%), equality (1.2%), honor (1%) as the most common synonyms (Oleinik, 2016a). Concerning the terms that university students ascribed to HD, this study did not provide definitions of what, for example, students mean by freedom or greatness.

While these two empirical studies (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016a) have specified students’ understanding of HD, as I mentioned, only in Kianpour (2016)’s research some of the elements of HD is clarified, according to the students’ interpretation. Therefore, in order to clarify how these elements are defined in relation to HD, I refer to other studies as well. In a mixed method study, Oleinik (2016b) explores the meanings that are ascribed to HD in Russia and Ukraine with special attention into two correlated concepts, honor and human rights (p.671). Through attributing two types of social organization, hierarchical and horizontal to honor and human rights respectively, he explained that while the notion of human rights is more similar to

equality and covers some basic natural rights only as a result of being human (Green, 2007), the idea of honor is restricted to “one’s position in the social hierarchy” (Oleinik, 2016 b, p.671). Moreover, few people can claim such honor since it is not inherent in all human beings and depends on external assessment of a person by other people (Shultziner, 2007). In contrast, human rights are inherent to people (Oleinik, 2016). Although the application of honor is more ascribed to traditional societies, a modern manifestation of this concept is related to the level of reaching or failing particular goals that are specified by society or individuals (Helkama et al., 2012; Oleinik, 2016 b). Overall, results of this study depict that in both countries, Russia and Ukraine, “human rights are far from being a key correlate of human dignity”, with Ukrainian culture more compatible with a human rights reading of human dignity (Oleinik, 2016 b, p. 694). Concerning the respondents’ profile associating honor or human rights with human dignity, those who live in urban areas of both countries, associate human rights to human dignity. In Russia, office workers, who are mostly active internet users as well, are more inclined to choose honor readings of human dignity than individuals who were self-employed and business owners, but economically unsuccessful, who selected human rights reading (Oleinik, 2016 b, p.692). Moreover, in Ukraine, educated men urbanites, with a lower-middle level of income, associate honor with human dignity. In Russia, concepts including “decency, conscience, intelligence, pride, willpower, male dignity, and honesty” co-occur in the respondent’s synonym lists for human dignity, in Ukraine, terms such as “respect, justice, willpower, male dignity, understanding” were mentioned (Oleinik, 2016 b, p.691-692).

Human dignity versus Human rights

In addition to HD's role as a foundation for human rights discourses and the importance of human dignity in the context of migration, there is another reason that I prefer to use the concept of human dignity over human rights in this study, which can be clarified by Donnelly (2013)'s argument. While distinguishing between these two terms, and considering cultural diversity as a challenge to the universality of human rights, Donnelly (2013) believes that all societies possess conceptions of human dignity, while the notion of human rights traces its origin in the West. Hence, it can be argued that many non-Western interpretations of human rights are not conceptions of human rights, but rather different perceptions of human dignity. For instance, according to Donnelly (2013), in Islam, people have to respect each other in order to obey God's commands to respect the rights of faithful believers. However, based on human rights, every human being should be treated with respect only because of their inherent quality of being human. What Donnelly and other scholars (e.g. Hughes, 2011) have noted the cultural diversity in interpreting the concept of human dignity. This diversity of understanding helps to explain why the first drafters of the UDHR left the concept of dignity as an empty box, so every individual culture can fill it based on its preferences and according to their perception of why humans should have equal dignity or why humans should have rights (Hughes, 2011). Accordingly, I found the concept of HD to be more resonant than human rights within the context of the dominant discourse in Iran.

To date, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have discussed how international students experience HD during migration and specifically within the immigration system. Although there is no agreement with regard to the theoretical definition of human dignity, in this study, a

framework of HD was designed inspired by the available empirical research about university students in Iran and in Canada (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016a). Accordingly, the concepts of freedom, honor, equality, human rights, self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, and God given gift will form the HD framework for this inquiry (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Human dignity Conceptual Framework



Methodology: Case Study Method

The objectives of a study shape the research methods (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). Accordingly, this research is qualitative in nature given that it aims to study phenomena “in their natural settings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3), and to interpret them according to the meanings people attribute to them. Moreover, qualitative methods are most appropriate when the purpose of the study is to come to an in-depth and detailed understanding of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002) “the advantages of qualitative portrayals of holistic settings and impacts are that greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context” (p. 60). Further, qualitative methods are the best choice where the intention is to empower and encourage people “to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

As a qualitative research methodology, the case study allows researchers to explore cases within a real setting, ongoing context or situation (Yin, 2009). Researchers who ask “how” or “why” questions about complex social phenomena often employ a case study approach. Attempting to understand a specific concern, problem, or issue through case analysis is an appropriate objective for use of this methodology (Stake, 1995). Accordingly, in order to explore human dignity within the experiences of IISs in Canada, I used a case study approach. In my study, the case is IISs living in Montreal. According to Flyvbjerg (2006)’s strategies for the selection of samples, my cases can be considered as “deviant cases”⁸ because of the particular

⁸ It is a type of selecting cases when a researcher needs “to obtain information on unusual cases, which can be especially problematic or especially good in a more closely defined sense” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 34).

context of Quebec where ISSs living experiences are different from those in other Canadian provinces. Through choosing this population, I explore how these Quebec-based students experience and define HD in Canada.

Methods

According to Patton (2002), qualitative research does not prescribe any rules regarding sample size. However, a minimum sample size can be “based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 246). Therefore, I started with in-depth interviews of 20 IISs (10 women, 10 men) living in Montreal, and four Iranian students (two women and two men) who had left Canada. Three students had returned to Iran and one had migrated to the US when she could not find a job in Iran or Canada. I continued interviewing participants until I reached data saturation. My sampling method was “criterion sampling,” which is one of the purposeful methods (Creswell, 2007). In order to best obtain adequate answers to my questions and invite new information, I used semi-structured interviews to ask people about their life experiences related to their migration, education and employment, with questions informed by my human dignity framework. In addition to in-depth interviewing of 24 participants, my understanding of their experience of living in Canada and HD were triangulated through secondary sources of data, including documentary analysis of immigration and integration policies, reports from Statistics

Canada, IRCC, Statistical Center of Iran, as well as policies raised by participants as having influenced their migration trajectory. Finally, to answer research questions, a thematic analysis was applied.

Sample criteria

Participant eligibility criteria include that they must: 1) have entered Canada with a student visa, 2) have completed at least a bachelor's degree in Iran, 3) have lived in Canada for at least two years, 4) be between 25 and 45 year old, and 5) be completing or have completed graduate studies at a Montreal university.

As the few studies on IISs in Canada have focused on women (Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Sadeghi, 2008), in this study I chose to recruit a gender-balanced sample. I chose equal numbers of men and women participants from three broad academic disciplines; namely, the humanities and social sciences, engineering, and medical science. I sought to have students from these three disciplines to have diversity in students' perspectives and experiences; because most IISs are from engineering the experiences of students from other disciplines are not sufficiently reflected in research. For instance, in engineering, IISs' educational experiences are different from humanities in Iran and Canada in terms of research resources and equipment as well as course outlines. While in Iran, engineering students have challenges and limitations in accessing research equipment due to sanctions, students from humanities have limited access to updated research as well as lack of freedom of expression and discussions concerning sensitive topics in Iranian universities. Moreover, as I thought that students' motivations for migration and understanding of HD might be affected by their religious ideology, I included participants adhering to both religious and semi-secular belief systems.

I have several important reasons for selecting IISs among other international students in Montreal, Quebec. First, IISs were 3 percent (621,565) of international students in 2021 and Iran is tied for fourth among the top 20 countries of origin⁹ for ISs in Canada (CBIE, 2021). Second, as an Iranian international student living in Montreal for over eight years myself, I am well informed about IISs' experiences and challenges, and I know the context from which the students migrated. Having an insider identity has been helpful to my research within Muslim communities, as I am able to establish trust and build rapport with participants relatively easily due to a shared cultural background and language (Giwa, 2015; Rezai-Rashti, 2013), which was particularly helpful in the context of qualitative interviews that involved a significant degree of self-disclosure. Third, I was already familiar with the literature (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016) concerning Iranian students' perceptions of HD in Iran. Fourth, while IISs have undergone many challenges with their immigration documents and PR pathway in recent years (Brend, 2018; Burgess, 2018; Ghossoub, 2018), scholars have rarely focused their work on Iranian international students (ISSs) in Canada.

I chose Quebec as the site of this study since it hosts 15 percent of Canada's international students (CBIE, 2022). In 2019-2020, Quebec had 21 percent of Canadian international PhD students and 32 percent of Canadian international master's students (StatsCan, 2021), indicating that Quebec is more popular as a destination for graduates rather than undergraduate students, which is why I selected participant IISs studying at the graduate level. IISs represent 13 percent of international PhD and 7 percent international master's students, respectively, in Quebec (StatsCan, 2021). Further, students often have more life experience at the graduate level, and in

⁹ Iran, Philippines and South Korea share 4th place, each with 3 percent of total number of international students.

this case had completed an undergraduate degree outside of Canada, allowing them to be able to compare educational experiences in different countries.

In recruitment, I used a screening tool that posed simple questions that allowed me to roughly identify participants according to certain categories such as their gender, academic disciplines, and belief system (Appendix C). I kept track as recruitment evolved, and whenever I found I was missing or overrepresenting people from particular categories, I adjusted my recruitment strategy accordingly.

Moreover, I ensured that I used other sources of data, including any available and relevant immigration and integration documents and reports from Statistics Canada and policy documents were collected and reviewed.

Recruitment of Participants

As one of the purposeful methods of recruitment, “criterion sampling” (Creswell, 2007) was adopted to select research participants, giving consideration to factors such as gender, academic discipline and religious beliefs. It refers to a method through which a researcher purposefully chooses sites and individuals for study since they can provide an understanding of the research problem and main concern of the research (Creswell, 2007, p. 125).

The recruitment advertisement (Appendix A) was distributed via flyers at three Montreal Universities (McGill, Concordia, and Universite de Montreal), as well as via the internet through Montreal Iranian social networks such as *Montrealnameh*¹⁰ and *Danesgjooyan-e McGill*¹¹ (*McGill university*), which are two well-known Telegram¹² groups, among others. These sources

¹⁰ This platform has 1596 members.

¹¹ This platform has 1124 members.

¹² This is a cloud-based instant voice or massaging over IP service.

are diverse in terms of gender, age, religious belief, migration status, and educational levels. Therefore, after participants showed their interest, I determined participation eligibility via a brief phone screening. All interested potential participants were asked to consent to an initial in-depth interview and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion (Appendix B).

In the end, most of the students recruited (19) were at the PhD level, one was a postdoctoral fellow, and four were master’s students. Four were in humanities and social sciences, four were in natural sciences, and sixteen of were studying engineering. Participants’ ages ranged from 29 to 43 years old. They had all lived in Montreal for more than two years, with an average length of five years in the city. All had completed at least a bachelor’s degree in Iran. At the time of the interviews, 11 participants had graduated and four had returned to Iran (one of these four had returned to Canada and ultimately migrated to the United States). Most participants were ethnically Persian. While 13 students defined themselves as religious, in terms of belief in God and respecting and observing key Islamic practices such as daily prayer, fasting, and participation in religious ceremonies, 11 participants considered themselves secular, meaning that they had a belief in God but did not engage in any Islamic practices.

Table 1: Immigration status of participants at the time of the interview

Immigration status	PR	Student	Intend to become PR	Not sure	No intention to become PR
N	9	15	10	4	1

Table 2: Participant demographic information

Age	Ethnicity	Religious belief	Educational degree	Marital status
29-43 years old	Persian = 21	Religious = 13	PhD = 19	Married = 15
	Turk = 3	Secular = 7	Master = 4	Single = 9
		Between R & S = 3	Post-doc = 1	

Table 3: Participant profile

N	Name ¹³	Sex	Marital status/ kid	Age	Level/ major of study	Ethnicity	Religious /Secular	Previous major	Job status in Iran	Edu. Abroad before	Mode of contact
1	Dana	F	S*	32	MA/ Law	Persian	Re*	Law/ PhD student	P* R*	No Tourist	Face to face
2	Shadi	F	S	35	PhD/ Eng.	Persian/ Turkish	Both	Eng. MA	RF*	No	Face to face
3	Sara	F	S	43	MA/ Economy	Persian	Re	MA/ Economy	F R	No Turist	Face to face
4	Sahar	F	M*/3	34	PhD/ Education	Persian	Re	BA/ Eng.	N*	Yes	Phone
5	Neda	F	S	36	PhD/ Bio- medical	Persian	Se	MA/ Eng.	P R	Yes	Face to face

¹³ All names used are pseudonyms.

6	Leyli	F	M	33	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Both	MA/ Eng.	P R	Yes	Face to face
7	Niki	F	M	32	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Se	MA/ Eng.	F NR*	No	Face to face
8	Mina	F	M	32	MA/ Architecture	Persian	Re	MA/ Architecture	F R	No	Face to face
9	Baran	F	M	31	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Se	MA/ Eng.	F R	No	Face to face
10	Sama	F	M	29	PhD/ Noro Science	Persian	Re	MA/ Eng.	F R	No	Face to face
11	Negar	F	S	33	P.Doc Eng.	Persian	Re	MA/ Physics	N	No	Phone
12	Mahtab	F	M/1	39	PhD/ Islamic history	Persian	Re	MA/ Islamic history	P R	No	Face to face
14	Masih	M	M/1	33	PhD/ Physics	Persian	1	BA/ Eng.	F R	Yes	Face to face
15	pooya	M	M/2	33	PhD/ Computer science	Persian	Re	MA/ Eng.	F R	No	Face to face
16	Nima*	M	M/1	37	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Se	MA/ Eng.	F R	No	Face to face
17	Ali	M	S*	29	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Re	BA/ Eng.	P R	No	Face to face
18	Yavar	M	S/D*	35	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Re	BA/ Eng.	P R	No	Phone
19	Amir	M	M	31	MA/ Eng.	Persian	Se	BA/ Eng.	F R	No	Face to face
20	Soheil	M	M/1	36	PhD/ Jewish studies	Persian	Re	MA/ Religious study	P NR	No	Face to face
21	Sina	M	M	31	PhD/ Eng.	Persian/ Eng.	Re	BA/ Eng.	F	No	Face

					Eng.	Turkish		Eng.	R		to face
22	Farhad	M	S	33	PhD/ Eng.	Turkish	Both	MA/ Eng.	F R	No	Face to face
23	Nikan	M	S	29	PhD/ Eng.	Turkish	Se	MA/ Eng.	P NR	No	Face to face
24	Said	M	M/2	34	PhD/ Physic	Persian	Re	MA/ Physic	N	No	Phone
25	Matin	M	M/1	34	PhD/ Eng.	Persian	Se	MA/ Eng.	F R	Yes	Face to face

D: Divorced

F: Full time job

M: Married

N: No job

P: Part time job

R: Job related to the education

S: Single

NR: Job non related to the education

Re: Religious

Se: Secular

I- I cannot define myself in any of these two categories

Nima switched to MA.

Interviews

As a method of collecting qualitative data, interviews are a significant aspect of case study research (Yin, 1984, p. 88). Interviews can include open-ended questions and provide in-depth understanding of people's perceptions, opinions, knowledge, and experiences. The responses derived from qualitative interviews include "verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable" (Patton, 2002, p. 4).

I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I selected this approach because, compared to an unstructured interview approach, this enabled me to focus on certain topics while

at the same time allowing space for participants' stories (Rabionet, 2011). Consequently, to set the interviewees at ease and start an open conversation, my first questions did not pertain directly to my main topic. Instead, I started with an informal conversation, then continued with some demographic questions (Appendix D), and finally, I asked the prepared questions according to my guidelines (Appendix E).

It is important to mention that, at first, I did not provide any definition of the concept of HD for the students and I asked them to explain their own perceptions of this notion. Then, I tried to explore their understanding of HD in relation to different contexts such as education and job market¹⁴ and the Canadian immigration system.

I interviewed participants between January and March 2019. I met the students at a scheduled time at a location of their choice such as coffee shops or at McGill library, and the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. After arriving at the interview site, I asked participants to complete a consent form, stating the approximate amount of time the interview would take and reviewing the purposes of my research as well as my intended use of the results (Creswell, 2007). Phone interviews were conducted with the few participants who had left Canada. All interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed verbatim. They were then filed, password protected, and stored on my personal laptop. All interviews were conducted in Persian and then translated into English.

Before starting my interviews, I verified my questions with colleagues from Iran and Canada who knew both contexts well and who were best placed to check the clarity and

¹⁴ Because of time limitations, I could not analyse my data concerning students' experiences within the Canadian job market.

suitability of my questions. For example, from Iran, I consulted with a professor in the sociology discipline who was expert in English and qualitative methods as well as had sufficient knowledge and research experience in regard to my topic about HD.

Rigor and trustworthiness

Creswell (2013) describes eight strategies to ensure rigor and trustworthiness: 1) “prolonged engagement and persistent observation”; 2) theoretical and methodological triangulation; 3) “peer review or debriefing”; 4) “negative case analysis”; 5) “clarifying researcher bias”; 6) “member checking”; 7) “rich, thick description”; and 8) “external audit” (pp. 250-252). Accordingly, I applied three of these strategies in my research: 1) peer review, which included extensive consultation with my thesis advisor as well as both internal and external committee members regarding each stage of the research process, 2) clarifying insider biases was also addressed through engaging in direct observations by recording my thoughts in a reflexive journal, and 3) methodological triangulation including using other data sources such as document analysis of immigration and integration policies, reports from Statistics Canada and IRCC, and policies raised by participants as having influenced their migration trajectory.

As I carried out a thematic analysis as part of this research, I wanted to ensure trustworthiness, which, according to Nowell and colleagues (2017), is significant in this type of analysis. It is a researcher’s responsibility to depict that “data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner” and this aim could be reached by “recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible” (p.1). Therefore, I recorded my thoughts in a reflexive journal, one of the strategies to ensure a study’s trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

This research conformed to the ethical protocols of McGill University. I requested that the participants sign a consent form prior to participating in the research and I assured the participants that their confidentiality would be protected by giving each of them a pseudonym. I made it clear that the interviewees had the right to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time during the research. Each participant received an honorarium in the form of a \$10 Visa gift card for their participation in the in-depth interviews. Montreal Transit Commission fare was also made available to cover the commute to and from each of the meetings.

Self-Reflexive Process

As a researcher, I was well aware of the unequal power dynamic between researcher and participant. Because of this, I aimed to approach participants carefully. Qualitative researchers can partially address this power imbalance through exercising reflexivity and becoming more self-critical (Creswell, 2007). According to Warin (2011), reflexivity is a type of

relational awareness . . . an interdependent awareness of how I as a researcher am influencing my research participants' perceptions and a simultaneous and interdependent awareness of how they are influencing me. (p. 811)

Therefore, as an applicable strategy in social work, reflexivity can be utilized according to researcher's experience with the subject under study, whether the researcher, 1) is familiar with the subject of study and has had common experiences with that person, 2) the position of a researcher changes from insider to outsider, and 3) the researcher has no personal or professional

experiences with the subject (Berger, 2015). In the next section, I will discuss my self-reflexivity in these positions during my study pathway for this thesis.

I came to Montreal, Canada in 2012 as an international student. I started my study of HD in relation to IISs experiences and motivations five years later, when I was better established professionally and personally in Canada. I remained an international student legally until 2021. I have had my own experiences of facing Canadian immigration services, coping with the challenges of living and studying in a second language as well as reconstructing my credentials, social, and financial status. Having common immigration experiences with the study participants gave me an “insider” role with three advantages, as identified by Padgett (2008), including being more easily accepted by the participants, as well as having a certain amount of advance understanding of the topic of study and subtle reactions of interviewees. Interviewing immigrants is considered difficult because of “their socio-economic position, their cultural difference, their racial visibility, and their legal position as denizens” (Perez, 2006, paragraph 16). Scholars have addressed several challenges in recruiting and interviewing immigrants, including unwittingly eliciting suspicious or reluctant responses when a researcher is not a member of the minority group under study (De Tona, 2006; Perez, 2006).

Being part of the IIS community facilitated my recruitment of participants, and the IISs I interviewed were very receptive and cooperative. Moreover, they believed I had an accurate understanding of their responses and feelings about the research questions, and therefore appeared to have confidence that I would represent and voice their opinions and concerns well, compared to a non-Iranian international student. It also boosted both of our levels of comfort and helped in developing rapport – the moment some participants heard my particular Persian accent

(unique to the people living in the city of Isfahan in Iran), they told me they felt comfortable and able to relax.

My immigration status as an international student also influenced the process of data collection and analysis (Berger, 2004) because it allowed me to approach the study with some knowledge and insight (i.e. knowing participants economic, political and cultural background in home country as well as certain Canadian immigration policies related to immigration documents or PR) and to address them more easily. Our shared experience reduced the distance between us, such that I generally understood what they were talking about without any need for them to finish certain sentences. Nevertheless, in order to reduce misunderstanding or misjudgment on my part, I asked them to clarify as much as they could and fully finish their sentences. Further, I was guided by their reactions, including body language and vocal intonation, to explore topics in a way that would not have been possible if I was not an IIS. Nonetheless, as an insider, I tried to be alert to how my own position, in terms of my values, beliefs, and perceptions, might shape or direct our conversations. When I introduced myself to participants and stated my immigration status, I was careful to disclose my own story in a way that did not impose my own feelings or values on the interviewees.

My shared background with participants also meant that I was aware of their potential sensitivities, so I knew what and how to probe regarding certain questions for what was unsaid. Shared experiences also affected the power relationship between me and the participants. As a Muslim woman wearing a hijab, I found that my gender and religious appearance affected some participants, specifically some of the men and non-religious students. However, after starting informal chats, I was able to temper this first impression by showing my unbiased and democratic beliefs.

As I mentioned earlier, self-reflexivity is a significant part of establishing rigor in a study. Accordingly, during the data analysis stage, due to my position as an insider, I read transcripts several times searching for any biases or nuances to which I may have been blind, and I discussed my suggested codes and themes with my supervisor, committee members and colleagues.

Further, studying topics with which the researcher does not have personal experience can have both advantages and disadvantages (Berger, 2015). For example, one of the participants described experiencing challenges with her father's views on her migration; however, knowing that I did not have comparable experience supported the participant being in the empowering position of a subject-matter expert (Berger & Malkinson, 2000), and fully express her emotions regarding how her father had violated her HD. Yet, my experience living in Iranian patriarchal culture still allowed me to understand what she was trying to convey.

The flipside of exploring certain topics without having personal experience of them is the possibility of viewing participants' stories through a judgmental lens (Smith, 1999). For instance, while one of the women students was expressing her negative feelings about missing her mother, who died while the participant was in Canada and far from home due to challenges with the Canadian immigration system, I was wondering how she could endure the situation and still find her immigration experience useful in spite of her suffering. Therefore, I tried to be conscious about the possibility of my reaction to such narratives in terms of overemphasizing some aspects and ignoring others which might shield the truth of the students' voices (Berger, 2015).

Analysis

I applied thematic analysis to analyze the research data, a method that not only identifies, organizes, analyzes, and reports themes within the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), but also expands beyond the particular research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004) discuss thematic analysis as a valuable method for exploring the perspectives of various participants via underlining similarities and differences, and creating new insights.

After audio-recording my interviews, I transcribed them verbatim as soon as possible, removing all identifying information, in order to be able to properly document both my impressions and the notes taken during the interview (Omidian, 2000). Further, the transcripts were reviewed several times during the transcription process to ensure that they correspond to the audio recordings. Finally, I wrote memos throughout the course of the study, which helped me to provide documentation of my thoughts and decision-making processes, as well as initial inferences, themes, and reflections (Padgett, 2017).

My analysis strategy was to identify the terms and ideas that explicitly or implicitly referred to the concept of HD in the students' statements. I considered equivalent meanings of the notion of human dignity in the Persian language and translated these to English. Accordingly, when analyzing my interviews, I first chronologically traced the students' reasons for migration by providing a timeline and attempted to capture the major factors that had motivated them to leave their home country. Further, by relying on an HD framework, I explored which of these factors related to HD and how the students connected decisions for leaving their home country, and whether to then stay in Canada, to their HD.

The interviews lasted an average of one hour, covering such themes as participants' views on and understanding of HD, and their experiences as an international students, particularly with respect to: 1) Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 2) Canadian universities compared to Iranian universities, 3) the Canadian job market compared to that in Iran and their perception of these in relation to HD. Further, I asked the students whether and why they intended to stay in or leave Canada and the relationship of this decision to their HD.

While employing a thematic analysis does not require following a specific coding method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), what is significant is the consistent use of the same coding strategy for all of the single study data (Nowell et al., 2017). Hence, the research analysis was conducted at three levels: 1) coding for high-level themes, including identifying all passages in an individual transcript related to a particular theme (e.g., students' understanding of human dignity; experience as an international student; experience with the Canadian immigration system), and then extracting passages from all interviews related to a particular theme to bring them together (such as a document on HD, including passages from all participants related to this theme), 2) coding for subthemes (e.g., seeking respect, equality, freedom, etc.) and 3) a final analysis consisting of the relative importance of each subtheme, whether there was consensus or disagreement, and contradictions for individuals or between people. The codes and citations used in this chapter were translated to English by the author.

BRIDGING TEXT: MANUSCRIPT 1

In the first Manuscript, “**In Search of Human Dignity: Gendered Motivations for Migration among Iranian International Students in Canada**”, I seek to understand how human dignity and gender play a role in international students’ decisions related to migration. This paper is forthcoming as a book chapter in *Leaving to Learn: Mapping the place of resilience in the journeys of international students to Canada*, edited by Ghosh, Veronis and Walton-Roberts. I was fully responsible for the data collection and analysis in this manuscript. My supervisor, Dr. Jill Hanley, participated as the second author of this manuscript, contributing in terms of helping to plan the structure, giving feedback on main arguments and giving feedback on the content and editing. I received additional feedback from my other committee members, Dr. Oleinik and Dr. Abisaab. I also benefited from the peer reviewer associated with the book.

MANUSCRIPT I: IN SEARCH OF HUMAN DIGNITY: GENDERED MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION AMONG IRANIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CANADA

Abstract

While various cultural, social, political and economic elements are recognized as push and pull factors contributing to human migration, this chapter explores how human dignity (HD) and gender play a role in international students' decision for migration. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 10 women and 10 men Iranian international students (IISs) in Montreal and 4 Iranian students (2 women and 2 men) who left Canada, we were inspired by some empirical research about international students in Iran and Canada to form a framework of HD to analyze the data. Four overlapping themes emerged as being key to IISs' motivations to migrate: 1) Influence of family, friends and social networks, 2) Searching for freedom and equality, 3) Looking for security, and 4) Seeking fulfillment and desirable status. We offer a discussion of how our findings compare and contrast with the existing literature on international students and HD and conclude with observations about how having an awareness of gender dynamics and students' demand for HD could strengthen the support offered to students in Iran, with the goal of retaining talent, and to international students in Canada as they seek to fulfill their aspirations, facilitating the process of integration or retention of these ideal potential immigrants.

Keywords—Canada, gender, human dignity, Iran, migration, university students, international students

Introduction

Human dignity is one of the fundamental notions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a primary concept in both the Canadian Bill of Rights¹⁵ (Tarnopolsky 2014) and

¹⁵ According to the preamble of the Canadian Bill of Rights “The Parliament of Canada, affirming that the Canadian Nation is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions” (Tarnopolsky 2014, 1)

Iranian constitution ¹⁶ (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1980). Moreover, HD is emerging as an important factor in both the motivation to migrate and the experience of settlement in a new country (Crépeau and Samaddar 2009).

The concept/notion of HD encompasses a subjective dimension insofar as it refers to an inner feeling of worth which depends on one's perceptions and life experiences (Mégret and Hoffmann 2009). A small number of studies has applied this concept to different aspects of migration, including labor migrants (Dhungana 2020; Monteiro 2009), refugees (Cornelisse 2019), and migrant shelters (Doering-White 2019). Yet to date, few studies have considered HD in the trajectories of international students, a group whose presence and significance has been growing in Canada. At the same time, we know that gender is important to both the conceptualization of HD (Van Engeland and Narain 2010) and the experience of migration in general (Silvey 2004; Christou and Kofman 2022) and for international studies in particular (Fais 2012; Alqudayri and Gounko 2018). Accordingly, more qualitative research is needed on HD and gender in migration to advance awareness about (1) whether seeking HD motivates international students to migrate to Canada, either temporarily or permanently; and (2) whether and to what extent differences may exist between the way men and women are motivated by various elements of HD in their decision to migrate to Canada.

Given the existence of specific gender dynamics in contemporary Iran, as well as the rising numbers of IISs in Canada, few studies (Didehvar 2020; Hojati 2011; Khosrojerdi 2015; Mehrabi 2018) examine the case of this population in Canada, and little is known about their experiences, challenges, concerns, and needs. Therefore, an improved understanding of IISs' motivations and aspirations can contribute to developing better support after their arrival and

¹⁶ “[T]he exalted dignity and value of man, and his freedom coupled with responsibility before God” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1980, as cited in Kianpour 2016, 705).

throughout their integration in Canada, as well as providing lessons for policy and practice that might be applied to other groups (ex. Iranians in other immigration pathways, international students from other countries).

Gendered dimensions/relations of education, work and family in Iran

In order to contextualize our gender analysis, first we discuss the conditions in contemporary Iran, especially the gendered dynamics of education, work and family, that may be influencing the decisions and perspectives of our participants. Historically, having a higher level of education is valued in Iranian culture (Aryan 2012) due to the honor and respect it brings to a person. Individuals with higher education are also considered very knowledgeable and are consequently more likely to obtain a well-paid job, even if this positive relationship between level of education and job status has diminished in recent years. In the case of women, however, obtaining higher education is also sometimes interpreted as a reflection of their desire to challenge their unequal status in the family and in Iranian society at large. For example, many women see obtaining a university degree as a means to leave home and attain more independence and freedom; pursuing higher education also postpones marriage until after women build their intellectual and material assets, in order to have more control over their life and receive sufficient respect and equality in their family and social relationships (Aryan 2012). Moreover, women's attitudes towards higher education attainment reveal their hopes for increased social and gender consciousness in Iranian society, and more employment opportunities for themselves (Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam 2011).

In Iran, since the 1990s, women's enrolment in higher education increased to such an extent that, in the 2000s, there were multiple years when women surpassed men in entering

universities, especially at the bachelor level. At the graduate level, however, men's enrolment remained higher than women during all these years (Statistical Center of Iran 2021).

Whereas the gender gap in the Iranian university enrolment at bachelor level has not been very substantial, the explanation of why, in some phases, Iranian women surpassed men in university enrolment at the bachelor level but never at post-graduate levels (both nationally and internationally) requires further analysis. One of the reasons might be the many challenges and constraints that women face on the Iranian job market in terms of obtaining positions and wages that reflect their knowledge and expertise. This happens despite significant progress in their access to higher education. According to the Iranian Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, in 2014, men's labor force participation rate was 62.5 percent, while women's participation was only 12 percent, a significant gap. In 2019, among faculty members of universities and higher education institutions, there were 63,288 men compared to 23,644 women (Ministry of Science, Research & Technology, 2019).

Despite the emergence of more equal relationships between women and men, a patriarchal structure remains dominant in Iranian families (Safa and Ahmadi 2011). Within the context of Iran's conservative theocratic state, the experiences of Iranian women vary based on their social location, such as age, religion, class, ethno-linguistic group, and urban or rural background (Rostami-Povey 2012). Family responsibilities and rights are mainly assigned according to gender, and according to Iranian Civil Code (Article 1107), religion and culture, men are recognized as the head of the family, with financial accountability. On the other hand, women's role is primarily defined as motherhood and homemaking with lower expectations to engage in paid work (Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale and Chinichian 2011). This gendered division of responsibility is legally supported to such an extent that a husband has the legal right to prevent

his wife from engaging in or continuing her work after marriage (Zar Rokh 2011). Moreover, according to Iranian law, men's right to divorce and the custody of children is very accessible while for women, it is regulated under limited circumstances (Zar Rokh 2011).

While women's position within the family and society is undergoing changes, the result of factors such as emerging feminist movements and progress in women's awareness of their rights, Iranian law and policies continue to be governed by patriarchal ideologies and conservative interpretations of Islam (Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale and Chinichian 2011). The Iranian government's dominant approach towards women is to consider women the bearers of national identity. Any changes are resisted with the excuse that only within Iran's current structure of the society and family, which they assume is based on Islamic rules, do women achieve their true dignity (Najmabadi 2005; Rahbari, Longman, and Coene 2019).

Within such a context, then, the added status and possibilities that higher education offers women, even if far from guaranteed, are attractive to many, including both women and men. Having a university degree is one of the main requirements to gaining social status and desirable occupations in Iran, yet an undergraduate degree no longer ensures access to a good job, so individuals may have to get a higher degree in their discipline (Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam 2011). Moreover, having a degree from an international university is a source of value and prestige (Nafari, Arab and Ghaffari 2017; Wadhwa 2016) and some students are heavily influenced and persuaded by networks of family and friends living abroad (Eghbal Kalvir 2014). Hence, both men and women students' limited prospects, unmet expectations, the challenges of unemployment and underemployment as well as the economic and political instability, and social repression lead many Iranians to pursue graduate studies. Further, given the patriarchal and conservative Islamic nature of the society and state, men and women are not subject to the same

limitations, therefore, women's demands for equality in family and society is an additional motivation for some of them to go abroad to pursue their objectives.

International students in Canada and Quebec: Where do IISs stand?

Since the early 2000s, the number of Iranian students registered in foreign universities has reached about 130,000 (Azadi et al. 2020). In Canada, IISs were 3 percent of international students (621,565) in 2021 and Iran is tied for 4th among the top 20 countries of origin¹⁷ (CBIE 2022). IISs represented 15 percent of international PhD students in Canada and 6 percent of international masters students in 2019-2020 (StatsCan 2021). Quebec, the Canadian province that is the site of this study, hosted 15 percent of Canada's international students (CBIE 2022). In 2019-2020, Quebec had 21 percent of Canadian international PhD students and 32 percent of Canadian international masters students (StatsCan 2021), indicating that Quebec is more popular as a destination for graduates rather than undergraduate students. IISs represent 13 percent of Quebec international PhD students and 7 percent of Quebec masters international students (StatsCan 2021). It can be concluded that Quebec is one of the most desirable provinces in Canada as a destination for IISs at the graduate level (especially the doctoral level).

As the number of IISs is growing internationally, a small number of studies (e.g., Nafari et al. 2017; Nazari and Seyedan 2016) have addressed the push and pull factors influencing their decisions to study overseas. While the influence of overseas Iranian family and friends is addressed as a pull factor contributing in IISs' decision to migration, the effect of some social, economic and political factors in Iran, such as political and social repression, low quality of

¹⁷ Iran, Philippines and South Korea share 4th place, each with 3 percent of total number of international students.

education, high price inflation, devalue Iranian currency because of imposed economic sanctions against Iran, gender discrimination, and lack of freedom are discussed as push factors. Often, students believe that their country of destination, such as Canada, will offer the positive opposite of what they are trying to leave behind. In particular, Nafari et al.'s quantitative study¹⁸ (2017, 2) identified 15 influential factors in Iranian students' "decision-making process concerning the choice of study abroad and host country and host institution selection". Most important were the availability of aid and scholarships in the host country, and studying in an environment free of some of Iran's political and social dynamics. Improving language skills, the value and prestige of study abroad, as well as job and career issues in Iran (ex. low or underpaid wage, unrelated career to studies, little or no opportunity for occupational advancement) were less important to their motivations (2017, 15).

Moreover, there are a very small number of studies (Didehvar 2020; Hojati 2011; Khosrojerdi 2015; Mehrabi 2018) focusing on Iranian international students in Canada. For instance, Didehvar (2020, 103), in a phenomenological study, found that participants' main motivation in relocating to Canada was the socio-political unrest in Iran. Migration led them to re-think their existential state, "the meaning, purpose, and direction of their lives", and caused feelings of isolation while living in Canada and guilt, due to leaving their family behind in Iran. Another study about Iranian female graduate students in Canada (Hojati 2011) discusses challenges that these students face at Canadian universities and workplaces. The study reveals that while female graduate students sought to leave behind oppressive circumstances in Iran, hoping for a safe and just situation in Canada, they came across new forms of oppression in

¹⁸ This study used Fuzzy-Delphi Method (FDM) to assess the relative importance of 15 factors according to prospective international tertiary-level students, faculty members, deputy deans of management departments of the top universities in Iran, and Iranian international tertiary students studying outside Iran.

Canada. They nonetheless prefer to stay in Canada rather than returning to Iran, where they have to face socio-political unrest (Hojati 2011). The common results of these studies (Didehvar 2016; Hojati 2011; Nafari et al. 2017) demonstrate that the current economic and socio-political challenges in Iran are very influential in IISs' decisions to migrate to Canada.

Gender and International students

The limited number of studies on gender and international students in Canada indicates that gender plays a role shaping international students' experiences (Fais 2012). While some scholars have discussed the role of gender in shaping cross-cultural adaptation (Chirkov, Safdar, Guzman, and Playford 2008), others indicate factors influencing female students' academic and personal experiences in Canada (Alqudayri and Gounko 2018; Hojati 2011; Ahmad 2016) or their decision to stay in Canada after graduation (Fais 2012). For example, Chirkov et al. (2008, 429) investigated the role of gender "in moderating the effect of motivation on the students' adjustment"; they found that women showed a higher level of relative autonomy than men in their motivation to study overseas (Chirkov et al. 2008).

Fais' (2012, 130) qualitative study on the influences playing a role in women international students' decision to stay in Canada after graduation reveals that the main motivation is related to "advancing their careers and the hope for a better future". It is worth mentioning that, while female international students did not tend to feel any gender discrimination in Canada, they did identify a certain level of racial and/or ethnic discrimination among potential employers working as a major obstacle to achieving suitable employment within their areas of expertise.

Within the existing literature on gender and international students studying overseas, only a few studies discuss the case of IISs, with a dominant focus is on cross-cultural transition and acculturation issues (Didehvar 2020; Sabouripour and Roslan 2015; Nahidi et al. 2018; Najmi 2013). For instance, Sabouripour and Roslan (2015) found a high level of resilience among Iranian international graduate students in Malaysia, yet did not explore gender differences. Nahidi et al. (2018) demonstrate that Iranian international female students in Australia experience psychological distress more than males. This gap has been attributed to cultural differences concerning gender roles, expectations and socialization between the two countries.

Conceptual Framework: Human Dignity

HD has been a concern in a number of disciplines and appears in legal, moral and philosophical discourses (Shultziner 2007). However, scholars have not reached a consensus regarding the definition of HD as a theoretical notion. Hence, various definitions have been proposed within different academic disciplines. For example, within moral/philosophical traditions/approaches, HD has been defined in multiple ways as: a manifestation of human beings' moral autonomy as rational beings (Kant 2000), respect (Stevenson 2014), self-respect (Sari and Doganay 2009), a foundational notion for human rights (O'Mahony 2012), reason or intellect (Mautner 2008), honor (Galvin and Todres 2015), , social rank (Lewis 2007), an inner feeling of worth (Mégret and Hoffmann 2009), and a connection between morality and the law (Habermas 2012).

According to Sayer (2011), there are two dominant applications of the concept of HD: 1) an intrinsic quality of all human beings, by which individuals are born equal in dignity regardless

of their social status, behavior, having particular characteristics or their relation with other people; and 2) a relational quality which is vulnerable and depends on both how an individual behaves and how he/she is treated by others, making others' recognition of HD important. Whereas the first quality of dignity is more related to the autonomy of people, the second quality is more relational and depends on others (Malpas and Lickiss 2007; Sayer 2011). The fact that people relate their HD to others' recognition can reflect another meaning that has been ascribed to HD, including in studies with Iranians: honor (Galvin and Todres 2015; Oleinik 2016 b). Although the application of honor is more ascribed to traditional societies, a modern manifestation of this concept is related to the level of achieving or failing to achieve particular goals that are specified by society or individuals (Helkama et al. 2012; Oleinik 2016 b).

Various cultural, social, political and economic factors that may be related to HD have been recognized as contributing to human migration (Kazemi, Baghbanian, Maymand, and Rahmani 2018; Preston 2014; Tsapenko 2015; Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2018). But only a limited number of studies discuss the role of HD in motivations and experiences related to migration (Crépeau and Samaddar 2009; Dhungana 2020; Monteiro 2009), while no studies examine specifically how women's migration is related to HD. For instance, concerning marginalized communities' experiences of HD and state policies, Dhungana (2020), in reviewing selected journal and media articles as well as related petitions and reports, concludes that the Nepali state's decision and interventions to seal its border with India have violated the HD of Nepali returnee migrants in favor of protecting the health of the rest of the population.

Additionally, few scholars have used the concept of in relation to students. Kianpour (2016)'s qualitative study in Iran observes that there is a difference between university versus seminary students' descriptions of HD in Iran. While university students defined HD in terms of

moral concepts such as love (the right to love and be loved), equality (having equal rights and gender equality vs. gender stereotypes), respect (recognizing citizens' decisions by the state and society; being treated with kindness versus being humiliated, intimidated threats or acts of violence particularly by bureaucratic systems; being respected regardless of one's social positions, such as gender, class, race [could be considered equality] and freedom (power to choose and self-autonomy) that are related to the responsibility of society to provide it (Kianpour 2016, 714). Of further interest to the current study, Oleinik (2016 a) conducted an online survey amongst university students in eight countries regarding the words they associate with HD and found that different cultural contexts appeared to produce different meanings of HD. This study presents the possibility of differences between the meanings people associate with HD in contrast to meanings provided by theory (Oleinik 2016a). For example, while Canadian university students referred to respect, self-respect, pride, self-worth, equality and human rights, in Iran, university students had very diverse responses, referring to self-esteem and self-respect, respect, fulfillment, freedom, humanity, God and human rights as the most common synonyms (Oleinik 2016a).

Whereas there is no consensus with regard to the theoretical definition of HD, in this study, a framework of HD was designed according to the available empirical research about university students in Iran and in Canada (Kianpour 2016; Oleinik 2016a). Accordingly, the concepts of self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, freedom, honor, equality, God given gift and human rights will form the HD framework for this inquiry.

Methods

This is a qualitative study employing a case study approach. This chapter draws on the data from a broader qualitative study¹⁹ on the experiences of twenty-four Iranian international graduate students (half men/ half women²⁰), who studied or are studying at one of the Montreal universities, at least for two years, participated in semi-structured individual interviews. Participants' ages ranged from 29 to 43 years old. All had completed at least a bachelor's degree in Iran. At the time of the interview, eleven participants had graduated; four participants (2 men/ 1 women) had returned to Iran after their graduation or during the writing of their thesis, but one of them (a female student) had returned to Canada and ultimately migrated to the United States. Concerning ethnicity, most of them were Persian, and while thirteen students defined themselves as religious, in terms of belief in God and respecting and observing key Islamic practices like daily praying, fasting and participating in religious ceremonies, eleven participants considered themselves secular, meaning they had a belief in God but did not engage in any Islamic practices.

Human dignity, gender and motivations to migrate

IISs in this study provided rich accounts of their motivations for migrating to Canada. According to interviews, the concept of HD emerges as a strong motivator for both women and men Iranian international students. Specific aspects of HD sought by participants followed different patterns according to gender. In this section, we discuss/present four overlapping main themes related to participants' motivation for migration: 1) the influence of family, friends, and

¹⁹ The main study was the doctoral thesis of the first author. The second author was her supervisor. They collaborated on this analysis.

²⁰ Recruitment materials did not specify gender criteria and participants of any gender would have been welcome. All participants who came forward, however, identified clearly as either men or women, in line with norms within Iranian society.

social networks; 2) searching for equality and freedom; 3) looking for security; and 4) seeking fulfillment or desirable status. For each theme, gendered variations are examined.

Influence of family, friends and social networks

For both genders, the influence of family, friends and social networks was a motivational factor before and during their migration. However, it is worth discussing by whom and why, and how the students have been encouraged or supported, as the scenario was different for male and female participants. Some male participants shared that their family members, like their fathers or brothers, persuaded and supported them to go abroad for their education or to settle permanently. Moreover, several male and female participants were influenced by their friends and social networks as well. The participants expressed that when they saw that their friends or classmates had migrated, it caused them to think about migration for themselves and consider following them to have the same experience. Some were concerned about falling behind their friends if they did not migrate or worried that their talents would be underestimated if they did not gain international experience. Accordingly, they applied to overseas schools to try their chance, and increase their likelihood of achieving their goals and gaining the respect and recognition of others as they related it to their HD in terms of being accepted competent by others. For instance, Nikan, a PhD, Turkish student, single, 29 years old, studying engineering in Canada, demonstrates the significant role of peer competition in the students' decision to migrate. He shared:

I was studying at Sharif University [the top rank university in engineering] in Iran and honestly, I could say that it was not my interest to go abroad. However, when I saw that most of my friends had migrated, I said to myself that if I do not do the same, it would seem like I was unable to do it. It is likely that my first reason for migration had been to

prove that I had the capability to go abroad and get accepted from one of the universities abroad.

While seven male students were married at the time of interview, only one of them referred to his wife's role in his decisions to migrate. However, the situation for female students was different. About half of them were married at the time of migration, and most of them referred to their husband's supportive role during the pathway for applying abroad. There was only one case among female students whose motivation to migrate was to accompany her husband to continue his education. However, after a while, because she felt lonely in Canada, she decided to apply for a master's degree (and then PhD) as well. Moreover, none of the female married students reported their husbands being in disagreement with their decisions. Concerning single students, their parents (mainly fathers) and siblings (mostly brothers) had a leading role in influencing their decision; but while some female students (in contrast with their male peers), described their family members as encouraging their aspirations, there were students referring to their family members as discouraging - even posing barriers. For instance, when Shadi, a PhD student, single, 35 years old, studying engineering in Canada, was asked about her family's opinion in regard to her migration she explained:

When I was admitted, I told my father one week later. Although I was admitted to 3 Canadian universities on a full scholarship, you should know what an introduction I had to prepare. I asked for my brother's help... However, my father did not say any congratulations and looked at me very badly. I didn't show that I had noticed his disappointment but after two hours that my father left home I went to the Shrine of Hazrat Reza and prayed there to relax. You should know how much pressure we have to tolerate in that country; even my father didn't say goodbye to me... My father was in a good financial situation, but he did not support me at all. However, thankfully, my brother supported me during this time, even though I did not ask for his money...

Shadi's quote can demonstrate how gender inequalities are still salient in some Iranian families.

The fact that she had been accepted in 3 different Canadian schools with a scholarship shows

how smart and determined she has been, however, because of her father's attitude, she had to manage a lot of pressure simply to be allowed to leave the country, while the situation was totally different for her brother. She had a financially fortunate family, yet despite this, she still was treated unfairly by her father and did not receive support and respect from him. She felt she was suffering under patriarchy and that her HD has not been respected.

In search of freedom and equality

Freedom and equality were mentioned repeatedly in the participants' accounts, but with notable differences between female and male students. While most female students raised the issue of freedom and equality several times, only three male students considered these objectives as motivational factors. And among them, only one male participant refers to these factors directly; the two others only made implicit reference. For instance, Masih (33 years old, man, married student) expressed his intention to migrate as being explicitly related to a search for freedom of action, of choice, and of speech, linking his HD to autonomy, which he believes was not respected in Iran.

The matter of equality also was raised by male students who believed were marginalised due to their ethnic background (Nikan, 29 years old, and single, Turkish student), was not admitted into a PhD in Iran because of discrimination or what he described as "lack of meritocracy" (Pooya, 33 years old, man, married student), or a lack of political fairness, meaning that members of opposition political parties in Iran do not have equal opportunities (Masih, man, married student, 33 years old, man). Therefore, the students claim that their HD - in terms of equality of treatment, being able to attain their capacity while their unique characteristics are acknowledged - was threatened.

On the other hand, female participants spoke about freedom in terms of overcoming gender stereotypes, such as customs or traditions that consider women dependent to men with no autonomy (Neda, 36 years old, single) or “transcending limitations that have been imposed on women in Iranian society and finding out how other countries treat women” (Shadi, single, 35 years old). Women students relate their HD to a sense of freedom in which their autonomy and competence is respected and recognized by others, independent of their gender, as well as being permitted to exercise them. Sara (single, 43 years old) expressed her dissatisfaction with conventional Iranian cultural and religious beliefs; instead, she wanted to act freely according to her own belief system. She told us that:

Actually, what drove me to migrate to Canada was cultural and social issues; I was a religious person, however, my religious beliefs were different from other religious people in my society. For example, in Iran, as a religious person with Hijab it was not acceptable for me to bike or play music... These circumstances limited my social life and in going to any public places like cinema or participating in any artistic activity. At the same time, [ordinary people] thought that any problems that exist in Islamic society of Iran, and people’s suffering, were because of religious people... so they behaved very violently and rudely with me...

According to Sara, as a religious person living in an Islamic society, she felt that her HD was undermined because of being treated judgmentally and “rudely” by some people in Iran due to their frustrations and assumptions about anyone who appeared to be religious - as well as the gender limitations expected according to some interpretations of Islam.

Several female students were pursuing equality because they had suffered gender discrimination in their professional lives in Iran. These students spoke of the existence of gender discrimination in Iranian workplaces in terms of unequal salaries, unfair task distribution between men and women, and the underestimation of women’s talents and abilities. Shadi conveyed that:

There is a huge difference between the university atmosphere and the workplace in Iran. Managers of companies not only don't give any place to young people, but humiliate them or ridicule their suggestions. In some cases, they convey that this is not a woman's job. They don't want to help you to do your duties, but to convince you that you are not able to do even a very simple task whereas you [female students] were able to do much more complex tasks at universities.

Shadi questions the gender stereotypes leading some male managers to underestimate women's abilities and performance. She found her HD at risk since she was treated discriminatorily compared to her male colleagues, and overall was not being trusted and recognized as competent.

Concerning underestimating women's talents and abilities and its influence on women's lives, in contrast to Shadi's satisfaction with how women are treated at Iranian universities, Neda (36 years old, single) expressed her frustration with the way male faculty members at Iranian universities treated women, considering them to be "the second sex". She mentioned how this attitude caused male professors to "not respect female staff members' privacy, like their appearance, Hijab or clothing style and intervene in their research tasks".

Again, by condemning some male's faculty members' attitude or behavior concerning threatening women's autonomy, freedom of choice or competence, Neda believes that her HD is violated. She, like some other female students, also questions Iranian family law for being discriminatory towards women, and shared her sister's experience of divorce proceeding in Iran:

Another reason [for my migration] was about my sister's marriage problems, leading to her divorce; whenever she went to the court, she was always crying when she returned home. I saw that in the courts [in Iran], women's rights were not respected and I suffered very much. This issue affected my decision to migrate. For example, I saw how much the family of my sister's ex-husband hurt her and she [my sister] had to try five times more than her ex-husband to prevent the issuance of a settlement against her.

By sharing her sister's difficulties with Iranian divorce law, Neda tries to demonstrate how women's rights are not respected in the current judicial system of Iran. She found this situation against women's HD so intolerable that she felt unable to stay in Iran.

Looking for security

Different dimensions of security, including psychological, interpersonal, social, political, financial, occupational and natural-environmental, were raised by the international students. Male and female participants were equally likely to refer to a desire for security among their motivations for migrating from Iran and were very similar in terms of the mention of the different types of security, yet gender differences in experiences were still apparent.

For example, with regard to job security, Amir (31 years, man, married student), speaking about his life in Iran, explained that:

I was working in Iran and, actually, I didn't have any problems. I am not a political person, meaning that political issues [in Iran] were not important for me. Social matters were somehow important for me but not to such an extent as to cause me to migrate. I loved and love my country, however, the economic situation [in Iran] was unclear. While, at that time, I was working and had a good salary, I couldn't see a good future [in Iran] for myself. Because disasters were occurring continually, unconsciously, and unexpectedly. You saw that a business was [suddenly] closed, locked; the situation was very unexpected. I thought to myself, "In the future, what will happen for me?" If I am very fortunate, I will manage to keep my current situation for myself, meaning that I will not have any progress.

Since Amir was asked to explain his experience of HD in different contexts in Iran, by referring to unstable economic situations, specifically job insecurity, he relates his HD to the ability to meet his basic needs and exercise his capacity, which he believes were at risk in Iran.

With regard to the psychological aspects of security, Farhad (man, 33 years, single student) described feeling disappointed about lacking control over the situation in Iran and feeling unable to effect any changes:

I always wanted to see improvement for the situation in the country [Iran], but I couldn't... For example, when I was doing my military service in a research center, I saw that as a researcher, I could help their system. One time I talked with my manager and I gave him some suggestions and told him that if they allowed me, I could help them... However, their structure [system] didn't want to have any changes and they didn't

believe in doing research to solve problems. They had their traditional beliefs [that they try to enforce], for example, by putting pressure or using violence...I would say that they are afraid of it and this is why they don't accept [any changes].

Being hopeless or disappointed about having any changes or improvements in the current situation in Iran, was mentioned by the participants several times. Farhad believes that because of the lack of chance to speak out about the problems and not being taken seriously when a person wants to provide suggestions or improvements, his HD has not been respected.

On the other hand, for female students, it is important to note that contrary to common perceptions, insufficient financial and occupational security in Iran were very influential in their decision to migrate. For example, Baran (women, 31 years, married, PhD student) complained about the lack of laboratory resources in her job (engineering), but she also referred to her experience of financial insecurity:

I liked my field of study very much...I worked for six months, but there was no salary. Also, the scientific level of equipment that worked there was very low. . In Iran, I can say that in my field, they are still working with low-level technology... I wanted to study somewhere that at least has one antenna room where you can see these things up close.

For Baran, having financial security in her job is important, but working in an atmosphere that allowed her to flourish and exercise her higher ability (a form of HD) was also significant and fell below her expectations.

Neda (36 years old, single, PhD student) talked about the type of interpersonal relationships that existed at her workplace and influenced on her decision to migrate:

The atmosphere in my workplace [in Iran] was very formal; but here, in Canada or the West, the atmosphere is very intimate, while your privacy is being respected. If you call someone with a personal pronoun or plural one, he/she doesn't feel upset [insulted]; that person knows that words don't change anything. However, in Iran, they use formal words [plural pronouns], but they don't treat you with respect and they talk behind a person's back a lot while appearances are preserved... I prefer what is said in appearance to be true to reality, rather than being respected and honored in appearance when someone wants something from you and then, once the work is over, you no longer have value and importance to them.

Whereas making a distinction between privacy and intimacy in an interpersonal relationship, Neda expresses her dissatisfaction with the level of intimacy at her workplace in Iran, and claims that people are not treated as valuable in themselves. Therefore, she thinks that her sense of HD was threatened in that situation.

Seeking fulfillment and desirable status

Several participants, of both genders, aspired to feel fulfillment in different aspects of their life, through their migration. They believed that, before their migration, they hadn't achieved an appropriate status in Iran, therefore, in order to fulfill their potential, they felt the need to migrate. When talking about the situations they found unsatisfactory in Iran, both male and female students often talked about their occupational or financial status or conditions. For some of the male students, satisfaction with their financial status or occupational conditions was related to the possibility of progress or advancement in their careers and personal growth. For example, Masih (33 years old, man, married, PhD student) described his motivational factors as follows:

Actually, in Iran, I was socially, culturally, financially, politically and educationally oppressed and I wanted to grow and flourish; so all of these factors motivated me to migrate. At the time of making my decision to migrate, I had a feeling that now is the time to leave, and this feeling - meaning my gut feeling - could be called inspiration and wisdom. When I give a positive answer to my deep feelings and inner inspiration, I later realize what wisdom was behind this feeling of mine. Sometimes you have a call from your gut feeling to do something, it motivates you to do something. You feel and know you have to do it, but you do not know why you have to do it....In fact, continuing my education was important to me not because I considered it a degree or rank, but rather it could open my eyes and complete my information. The PhD is a transformation agent. Everyone grows in their own space and acquires these capabilities. For me, there was no other space for this growth to take place and I had to achieve it through pursuing a PhD.

In addition to some factors that Masih explicitly refers to, he also shares his “feelings and inner inspiration” about migration that seem rooted in his subconscious, something that can have a leading role in students’ decisions rather than other factors that students perceive more easily as influential.

Farhad (man, 33 years, single, PhD student) also clarified the importance of having positive feelings of satisfaction:

Feeling satisfied is very important to me. I prefer to work in a place where I feel more satisfied, even if I have a lower income. I like to be in a place where I feel good about that space. Maybe it feels good with a good co-worker or because it’s a useful job. In fact, it depends on the mood of human beings, and for me, personally, the environment is a very important parameter. When I say “progress” I mean in every aspect. It can be financial, spiritual, and etc. For example, [it would be progress] to move from a bad environment to a better one.

Again, according to Farhad’s quote, we can see the role of some factors that even are not very well-defined for him, ones he relates to her mood or feelings which are very relative - yet having them recognized gives him a sense that his HD is respected.

For female students, the feeling of fulfillment was a significant factor as well. For example, Dana (woman, 32 years, single, master’s student) explained her motivation to migrate mainly in terms of looking for professional satisfaction:

I was doing my PhD in Iran, and simultaneously, I was seriously looking for a job. I was a top student at university and had a very good situation as well as a very suitable appearance for getting a government job in Iran [meaning having religious beliefs and wearing Hijab]. But because of a lack of contacts [networking, favoritism], I found that I didn’t have any chance of getting a good position in governmental agencies. I had to continue working individually, which had become harder in the [poor] economic situation in Iran. Although I didn’t have any financial concerns... I was not achieving the level of satisfaction I wanted or the stage of career that I found suitable, **the status that I deserved** and I have worked for... Salary was not important for me, but I couldn’t reach a level of satisfaction, or feel that I was reaping the rewards of my hard endeavors. (emphasis added)

It is interesting that after Dana's migration to Canada, she had to redo a master degree in her field and, while it is not guaranteed that she could reach her desired level of professional satisfaction in Canada due to being a Muslim immigrant with Hijab, she is optimistic. She links her HD to a sense of status and fulfillment that roots in being recognised as competent through the offer of a well-deserved job position. Sama also denounced the issue of lack of meritocracy as an influential factor for migration for herself and others. She said that when individuals find that their skills and talents are not recognized and respected, or when they encounter external barriers that hinder them from being in their rightful place, they prefer to migrate. However, It is interesting to note that for Sama, as a religious and spiritual person, her main motivation was wanting to practice her spiritual life in Canada, one that she thinks was threatened in Iran and, yet she is now not very optimistic about fulfilling in Canada. Nonetheless, she condemns unfair access to research opportunities in some Iranian universities and believes that this situation undermines students HD.

DISCUSSION

The main reason for choosing HD as our conceptual framework is its fundamental position in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in both the Canadian Bill of Rights and Iranian constitution. According to the IISs, searching for HD— including complex and intertwined interactions between personal, interpersonal, spiritual, cultural, social, political, and economic factors—plays a significant role in their decisions for migration. Both male and female students expressed a strong willingness to preserve their HD, albeit with slight gender differences concerning its dimensions.

While for most male participants' families played an encouraging and supportive role for their migration, females' families were generally much less supportive, experienced as a violation of HD. This reflects Ahmad's 2016 study about the experiences of Saudi women international students in Canada highlighting the significant role of students' culture in their experiences, but is contrary to the family support documented in Tyrer and Ahmad (2006)'s study on Muslim women students in UK who lived with their parents, suggesting that the lack of support may be less do to women's pursuit of higher education and more due to their leaving home alone before marriage. Moreover, while our participants' stories share some similarity with Nazari and Seyedan (2016)'s findings on the influences of personal and familial issues in students' decision to migrate, their findings depict specific situations like changes in a father's workplace or the divorce of their parents which led Iranian female students to decide to migrate. In our study, female students offered examples of independent decisions to migrate, sometimes resisting their father's advice to not leave, which points to changes in women's agency.

Concerning the influence of friends on students' decisions to migrate, several men participants referred to it, but not women. Men followed their peers to preserve their relative status and achieve recognition (Eghbal Kalvir 2014; Wadhwa 2016), which could be related to the honor element of HD, as they feared being at a disadvantage to friends studying abroad. This result is contrary to Chirkov et al. (2008)'s findings that women, more than men, seek approval and recognition as their motivation to study overseas. It is also worth mentioning that none of our students, of either genders, referred to their mothers or sisters' influences on their decisions, a likely reflection of male-dominated power structure within Iranian families.

The second theme, seeking freedom and equality, was mentioned repeatedly by participants of this study, in line with Kianpour (2016)'s study of Iranian university students'

understanding of HD. However, women and men students in our study addressed this theme differently. While most women students raised the issue of freedom and equality several times, only a few men students considered these objectives as motivational factors, possibly a sign of the gender inequality/discrimination in Iran that is also reflected in the type of freedom and equality that students sought. Very few male participants explicitly related their migration to a quest for freedom of action, of choice, and of speech, despite some of them having referred to being marginalised as members of ethnic minorities, experiencing discrimination, the lack of meritocracy in being admitted into a PhD in Iran, or to a lack of political fairness. Yet, female students spoke about freedom mostly in terms of overcoming gender stereotypes like considering women as passive and dependent, and surpassing limitations that have been imposed on women in Iranian society and family law; this motivation is the same as what Saudi women graduate students provided for their migration to Canada (Ahmed 2016). Women students also raised being free of conventional Iranian cultural and religious beliefs and gender discrimination in Iranian workplaces, unfair task distribution between men and women, and the underestimation of women's talents and abilities as their motivational factors. With regard to unequal salaries, our results are consistent with the issues raised in Nazari and Seyedan (2016)'s study of the causes of Iranian women students' migration to developed countries.

The third theme, looking for security as a basic element of human rights (UN General Assembly 1948) was discussed by international students as a motivational factor to migrate. Different dimensions of security, including psychological, interpersonal, social, political, financial, occupational and natural-environmental, were mentioned by participants. Male and female participants were equally likely to refer to a desire for security among their motivations for migrating from Iran. Moreover, concerning types of security approximately all aspects of

security have been mentioned alike by both women and men. This is in slight contrast to Chirkov et al. (2008)'s study, wherein the issue of preserving security or freedom is mentioned as men's goal for migration, whereas women showed being less motivated by this factor. Male students in our study did emphasize the matter of financial and occupational insecurity in Iran.

Simultaneously, however, they raised the psychological aspect of security as well, experiences such as: feeling disappointed about lacking control over the situation in Iran; feeling unable to effect any changes or have any progress; as well as being unable to imagine "a good future" for themselves in that condition. These findings relate to Wang et al. (2019, 2423)'s concept of "self-psychological security", referring to "the individual's safety expectations for future life based on past life experiences, and their positive experiences of maintaining a favorable position in their own situation through the process of interpersonal interaction". When people feel they have no control over the future, it causes serious mental health problems for them (Wang et al. 2019).

Contrary to common perceptions, insufficient financial and job security in Iran were also very influential in female students' decision to migrate, the fact highlighting women's growing requests for financial independence. Moreover, like men students, women's quotes also contained their demand for psychological security for themselves or their husband, but it was more implicit. Furthermore, several women suffered from the lack of interpersonal security in their social life in Iran that was a driver for their migration's decision. The interpersonal type of security was also reflected in male and female students' demands for being respected with regard to their privacy, time, freedom, and attitudes. It is surprising that nearly all aspects of security have been mentioned by both women and men. Yet, types like interpersonal security, compared to financial security, seem more important for women. According to the Iranian Civil Code

(Article 1107), women are not considered to have any financial responsibilities within the family (Mehrpour 1995); this may be one of the reasons for declining the rate of Iranian women's enrolment at post-graduate levels in Iranian universities, while migration for education remains appealing.

The fourth theme, seeking fulfillment and appropriate status, was raised by several participants of both genders. These students aspired to feel fulfillment in different aspects of their life, through their migration. They believed that, before their migration, they hadn't achieved desirable status in Iran. When talking about the situations they found unsatisfactory in Iran, both male and female students often talked about their occupational or financial status or conditions. For some of the male students, satisfaction with their financial status or occupational conditions was related to the possibility of progress or advancement in their careers and personal growth as well as having positive feelings. For female students, however, the feeling of fulfillment was discussed in terms of gaining professional satisfaction or deserved status, echoing Chirkov et al, (2008)'s and Ahmed (2016)'s findings that women expressed intrinsic motivation related to the view that studying overseas is a satisfying opportunity.

Concerns about social and economic issues were mentioned as motivational factors in Iranian students' decision to migrate in both Didehvar (2020)'s and our study. However, in terms of seeking fulfillment or making progress, Didehvar's interpretation of students' motivations differs from ours; she perceives students' feelings of guilt for leaving their family behind in Iran's unrest as a sign of the importance of human relationships over their desire for individual fulfillment within their collectivist culture. This sense of guilt was not mentioned by our participants, which seems to counter Didehvar's argument of a dominant collectivist culture in Iran. Furthermore, while in our study, students referred to financial or job insecurity in Iran as

their motivational factors, their desire for more progress or self-actualization seemed as much or more important in leading them to migrate.

CONCLUSION

This study leads to a better understanding of the link between HD and motivations for immigration based on the gendered perspectives and experiences of IISs. The IISs provided empirical evidence that elements of the HD framework shape their motivations for migration, including: freedom (of action, choice, and speech; overcoming gender stereotypes); socio-economic rights (stable and predictable economic situation, secure employment and fair interpersonal relationships in the workplace); respect (of people's privacy, time, and attitudes); equality (being treated equally before the law and by family members as well as regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender); honor (achieving or receiving recognition compared to peers); and fulfillment (having progress and self-actualization). As discussed above, there are slight differences in emphasis between women and men IISs with women raising gender norms and discrimination, while still sharing the more general desire for respect and recognition, as well as professional opportunities, voiced by men.

Students were interviewed early in their migration journeys; it remains to be seen whether and to what extent they will be able to achieve their goals – including with regard to levels of support from family and friends, their families' response if they remain in Canada, and the degree of Iranian friends' and colleagues' influence as they build lives in Canada. In terms of seeking equality and freedom, we know that the Canadian labour market and relationships within Canadian families still exhibit significant gender bias and disadvantage for women, and

both women and men will encounter ethno-racial and religious discrimination in Canada (Schirle and Sogaolu 2020), albeit to a different degree than in Iran. Women Iranian international students will discover that Canada will not allow them to entirely escape gender bias.

Having temporary status in Canada also weakens international students' security and social status. While international students may find more security in their interpersonal relationships in Canada than in Iran, as non-citizens they face limitations with regard to their economic activities (potential hours worked, sometimes limitations on employers) that can pose a risk to their financial security in Canada, and simultaneously, on their psychological security (in terms of being under financial stress or pressure) and their social status. How do students, from both genders, interpret and understand these types of insecurities over the short and the long term? Will such migration experiences impede their sense of fulfillment? How will this affect their plans for the future in terms of staying or leaving Canada? Accordingly, further investigations of IISs' experiences in different contexts of the host country and whether their migration fulfills their motivations is recommended.

It seems that many young people feel they have no choice but to leave in order to preserve and/or pursue their own HD, therefore, Iranian officials concerned with the loss of talent and skills, and interested in persuading international students to return after their studies, will need to consider to what degree the country offers conditions of HD 'according to students' expectations' in the personal, professional and public spheres. Conversely, Canadian institutions working with Iranians - and likely many other international students - should be aware that the pursuit of HD informs their choices about coming to Canada, and ultimately, whether to stay. It is thus essential to offer educational, settlement and immigration services that promote autonomy, dignity and respect according to international students' expectations. Canada restricts

most settlement services to those already holding Permanent Residency. The settlement services required by international students are expected to be provided by their host institutions, with little oversight as to their expertise and capacity to offer such support. Given Canada's interest in attracting international students as permanent residents, it would make sense for IRCC to fund and support on-campus settlement services and allow their eligibility in broader community settlement services.

Moreover, whereas the recent literature on international students has shifted to note the heterogeneity of this population, a considerable amount of these studies still consider them as a homogenous group. Hence, while this study helps us to better understand the motivations of the particular immigrant community of Iranian international students, conducting research on international students from different nationalities, backgrounds, religions, or levels of education seems necessary to appreciate their motivations and understandings of migration and particularly about why and in which situations students found their human dignity to be at risk.

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BRIDGING TEXT: MANUSCRIPT 2

In aiming to assess how IISs have experience HD after their migration to Canada as well as gender differences, the second Manuscript, **“Gendered Experiences of Human Dignity Within Canadian Universities: The Case of Iranian International Students”**, explores gendered experiences of human dignity (HD) within Canadian universities, compared to Iranian ones. This manuscript is a single authored article and a summary version is forthcoming in the *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education (JCIHE)*. My supervisor and committee members provided feedback on its structure, arguments and editing. I also benefited from the feedback of two anonymous reviewers from the journal.

MANUSCRIPT II: GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND WITHIN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF IRANIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Abstract

While various factors contribute to international students' experiences of migration during their studies, this article explores gendered experiences of human dignity (HD) within Canadian universities, compared to Iranian ones. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 10 women and 10 men Iranian international students (IISs) in Montreal and 4 (2 women, 2 men) who left Canada, we created a conceptual framework of HD to analyze the data. Three themes emerged as key to Iranian international students' experiences of education: 1) relationship between students and university faculty and staff, 2) gender equality and freedom, and 3) having a minority or marginalized identity. I conclude with observations about how having an awareness of students' demand for HD could strengthen the support offered to students in Iran and to international students in Canada.

Keywords - Canada, gender, human dignity, Iran, migration, university students, international students, educational system

Introduction

Human dignity (HD), as a subjective concept, referring to an inner feeling of worth which depends on one's perceptions and life experiences (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009) is emerging as an important factor in both the motivation to migrate and the experience of settlement in a new country (Crépeau and Samaddar 2009). Gender also as a social construction (De Beauvoir, 1952) has potentially this capacity to inform different perceptions and understandings of humans' lived

experiences and affect the way individuals are treated as well as are expected to behave. Meanwhile, universities or higher education as a significant setting dedicated to the learning and personal development not only can generate or affect dominant perspectives but can reflect and reproduce new discourses. To date, a very small number of studies have considered human dignity in the trajectories of international students, a group of increasing importance in Canada, and gender. Therefore, aiming to increase awareness about how elements of HD have been experienced by IISs contribute to offering this better support after their arrival and through their integration in Canada. Hence, this study by using in-depth interviews with 24 IISs (20 in Canada and 4 out of Canada) and adapting a conceptual framework of HD explored: 1) how do IISs experience and perceive HD in their educational life in Canada compared to Iran? and 2) how does gender affect their experiences of HD within Canadian universities vs. their experiences in Iranian universities?

This paper is organized as follows. First, we situate the study within the literature on ISs', and IISs' experiences of education in Canada and elsewhere with particular gender consideration. It is followed by an overview of the conceptual framework of human dignity and a description of our methods. Our results are presented according to the following themes: 1) relationship between students and university staff (professors and employees), 2) gender equality and freedom, and 3) being a minority or being marginalized conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research for policy makers, universities and international students themselves.

Iranian international students in Canada

Every year, international students from all over the world come to Canada to continue their education, pursuing their academic and professional goals (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). These students constitute a “key part of building a stronger international and intercultural scope to pedagogy and research and are crucial to Canadian campuses” (Cudmore, 2005, p. 47). International students choose to come to Canada for different reasons. According to CBIE (2018a), the top three reasons for choosing Canada to study include Canada’s reputation: (1) for a high quality education system; (2) as a tolerant and non-discriminatory society; and (3) as a safe country.

Since the early 2000s, the number of Iranian students registered in foreign universities has increased (Azadi et al., 2020). In Canada, IISs were 3 percent of total number of international students (621,565)²¹ in 2021 and Iran is tied for 4th among the top 20 countries of origin²² (CBIE, 2022). At the doctoral level, however, IISs constitute 15 percent of Canadian international PhD students and 32 percent of Canadian international masters students, but Iran was not in the top 10 source countries for the bachelor’s level in 2019-2021 (StatsCan, 2021). In the same year, Quebec had 21 percent of Canadian international PhD students and 32 percent of Canadian international masters students (StatsCan, 2021), indicating that Quebec is more popular as a destination for graduates rather than undergraduate students. IISs represent 13 percent of Quebec international PhD students and 7 percent of Quebec masters international students (StatsCan, 2021). It can be concluded that Quebec is one of the most desirable provinces in Canada as a destination for IISs at the graduate level (especially the doctoral level). In 2017,

²¹ This number includes college students too.

²² Iran, Philippines and South Korea share 4th place, each with 3 percent of total number of international students.

Montreal hosted 59,885 international students (CBIE, 2018); it is ranked as the most desirable place to study in Canada (QS, 2022).

International Students' Experiences in Canada

In contrast to the relatively limited research on Iranian international students in Canada (Didehvar, 2020; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Sadeghi, 2008), Canadian researchers have been giving increasing attention to international students as a category of precarious migrants to the country. The literature depicts a number of challenges faced by international students, including difficulties with academic adjustment and achievement (Andrade, 2006; Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Mostafa, 2006; Wisker, 2005; Wolff, 2014), lack of language proficiency negatively affecting students' communication and learning (Andrade, 2006; Hellstén and Prescott, 2004; Wisker, 2005), their lower sense of belonging (Wolff, 2014) and the process of students' acculturation (Kormos, Csizér & Iwaniec, 2014). Yet, no research has studied the role of HD in ISs' experiences with the educational system.

As one of the significant factors affecting international students' educational experiences, professors or instructors are recognised by many ISs in different studies. Therefore, in the following section, it will be more discussed.

Role of supervisors: student-faculty interactions

Academic ambitions are among the most prominent motivational factors influencing international students' decision to study abroad (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Razavipour & Hanley, 2021). Usually, international students enrolled in North American universities experience differences between educational systems in their home and host countries. Some differences

related to educational methods, types of knowledge valued, availability of facilities and technology and types of relationship between students and their instructors (Abukhattala, 2004; Eland, 2001). Types and perceptions of student-teacher interactions may also vary across individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Chen, Zee, Koomen & Roorda, 2019). For instance, Iranian culture and Islamic religion place great emphasis on having respect for teachers, therefore teaching is perceived as a sacred and honored job in Iran (Eghtesadi Roudi, 2021). Moreover, since most Iranian universities are state-run, Iranian universities are highly politicised and run according to the Iranian government's interpretation of Islam. The Iranian government invests a lot of importance in this approach to education (Golkar, 2017; Soltani, Boostani & Golestani, 2020). This dominant approach to universities has led the Iranian educational system to be notably gendered, fundamentally shaping student-faculty relationships (Soltani et al., 2020). According to Soltani et.al. (2020)'s qualitative study, the presence of gender boundaries at Iranian universities and faculty members' viewpoints also affect student-faculty interactions.

Studies also provide evidence that other factors such as race, ethnicity, gender (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Marginson, 2013), institution type or culture, workload, personality, and interpersonal skills have a pronounced impact on student-professors relations in American (Cole & Griffin, 2013). For example, some international students, based on their past educational experiences, may expect more support and guidance from their supervisors compared to students who come from systems that emphasize independence. For the first group, they may follow the advice of their supervisor and avoid any disagreement due to their assumptions about the role of a student or a teacher (Wisker, 2005). The quality of student-faculty interactions, both formal and informal (Soltani, et al. 2020), is key to international students' academic trajectory, in terms of students': motivation and learning (Cole, 2010; O'Meara,

Knudsen, & Jones, 2013); socialization and social integration (Sonnenschein, Barker, & Hibbins, 2018); transition to the university when they struggle to succeed (Glass et al.2015); as well as their academic achievement, performance and fulfillment (Cox et al., 2010; Mara & Mara, 2011). For international students, even very simple acts of care and concern have a high influence on their performance and feelings of support (Glass et.al., 2015). Research indicates that students especially appreciate the connections formed through such simple faculty actions as setting regular office hours for students, and showing respect and care for students by being willing to discuss assignments and ideas from readings, o career plans, or program requirements, or by inviting students to participate in activities and projects other than coursework (Grantham, Robinson, and Chapman, 2015).

Education and Gender Considerations

While Canadian women account for the majority of enrolments in universities at both the master (62%) and PhD level (55%), the ratio of women is significantly lower among total international students and particularly, IISs in Canada (see Table 1 for details). The situation is the same in Iran at graduate levels, while the ratio of gender gap is more among IISs at the PhD level in Canada.

Table 1: Iranian International enrolments at Canadian universities and Quebec for both men and women (2019-2020) (StatsCan, 2021)

Geography	Canada						Quebec					
Level of Degree	Master			PhD			Master			PhD		
Gender	T	M	W	T	M	W	T	M	W	T	M	W
Canadian Student	170616	38%	62%	36012	45%	55%	60594	37%	63%	10137	43%	57%
International Student	45399	55%	45%	20871	60%	40%	14688	56%	44%	7599	59%	41%
Iranian International Student	2646	52%	48%	3210	61%	39%	966	53%	47%	990	61%	39%

Source: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3710008601-eng>

Total (T) – Man (M) – Woman (W)

Reviewing the limited number of studies on gender and international students in Canada indicates that gender plays a role shaping international students’ experiences (Fais, 2012). While some scholars have discussed the role of gender in shaping cross-cultural adaptation (Chirkov, Safdar, Guzman, and Playford, 2008), others indicate factors influencing women students’ academic and personal experiences in Canada (Alqudayri and Gounko, 2018) or their decision to stay in Canada after graduation (Fais, 2012). For example, Chirkov et al (2008) investigated the role of gender “in moderating the effect of motivation on the students’ adjustment” (p.429) and found that women’s higher level of “autonomous motivation²³ (intrinsic motivation and identified regulation combined)” (p.430) was related to more somatic and mental health problems for them in comparison to men. Moreover, they determined no gender differences in sociocultural struggles²⁴. Another study Alqudayri and Gounko (2018) explored the experiences

²³ It is “over controlled motivation (external and introjected combined)” (Chirkov et al, 2008, p.430).

²⁴ These related to “skills that are necessary in managing everyday situations when living in a new society,

of Saudi Arabian women graduate students across five Canadian universities. Their findings indicate that living and studying in Canada influences participants' personal values and transforms how they perceive themselves, their culture and community. In terms of educational experiences, participants shared that the reality of gender segregation and cultural expectations in Saudi Arabia made some participants uncomfortable when they participated in Canadian educational and social activities. Some participants also indicated that during their time living in Canada, they had changed in such a way that it increased their confidence, courage, and independence. Fais' (2012) qualitative study on the influences playing a role in University of Calgary women international students' decision to stay in Canada after graduation reveals that the main motivation is related to "advancing their careers and the hope for a better future" (p. 130) which participants found is more achievable in Canada comparing to their home country due to the presence of higher gender equality in family, society and labor market as well as higher personal safety in Canada. Yet, it is worth mentioning that, while women international students did not tend to feel any no gender discrimination in Canada, they did identify a certain levels of racial and/or ethnic discrimination among potential employers that worked as a major obstacle to achieving suitable employment within their areas of expertise.

Within the existing literature on gender and international students studying overseas, only a few studies discuss the case of Iranian international students, with a dominant focus is on cross-cultural transition and acculturation issues (Didehvar, 2020; Sabouripour & Roslan, 2015; Nahidi, et al., 2018; Najmi, 2013). For instance, Nahidi, et al., (2018) demonstrate that Iranian international women students in Australia experience psychological distress more than men. This gap has been attributed to cultural differences concerning gender roles, expectations and

including, 'Making friends', 'Finding food that you enjoy', 'Following rules and regulations', 'Dealing with people in authority'" (Chirkov et al, 2008, p.430).

socialization between two countries. The authors explained that women in Iran are socialized to be obedient and passive, as well as behave conservatively in their interaction with men particularly in the public domain. Also, while men have limited restrictions for their sexuality, women are expected to be virtuous and control their sexuality. The result of this study is contrary to Sabouripour and & Roslan (2015)'s research in which Iranian graduate students in Malaysia experience a high level of resilience, there is no consideration of gender differences in their level of resilience.

Muslim International Students in Canada

Scholars have also discussed Muslim international students' specific challenges concerning their experiences of discriminatory/racist actions (Abukhattala, 2004; Hojati, 2011; Gutmann, 2004; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Samuel, 2005), false stereotypes, practices resulting from Islamophobia (Abukhattala, 2004; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Mehrabi, 2019; Mostafa, 2006) as well as marginalization due to language, race, religion, nationality (Ahmed, 2016; Hojati, 2011; Khosrojerdi, 2015; Samuel, 2005). For instance, in a qualitative study about the impact of gender, ethnicity, age, and religion, and their intersection with Muslim women students' overall experiences of higher education in Canada, Khosrojerdi (2015) documented how students highlighted their experiences of marginalization within Canadian universities based on their racial, ethnic, gender, and religious identities (p.183). None of them felt they had experienced racism directly, however, they talked about their feelings of being Othered among non-Muslim students or their experiences of "accent discrimination and racial prejudices" from non-Muslim peers and professors (p.182). In comparing veiled and unveiled students' experiences of discriminatory treatment, the author identified that veiled students had

more explicit experiences of discrimination, and “feelings of exclusion and invisibility” with professors and non-Muslim students than non-veiled students (p.183).

In another qualitative study, Mehrabi (2018) examines the lived experiences of Middle Eastern international students from Iran, Iraq, Palestine and Syria in Canadian society. They indicate that the conflict and war atmosphere in students’ homelands influences their current experiences in Canada in terms of having senses of anxiety, fear and insecurity, yet as Middle Eastern Muslim individuals, they also have struggles with discrimination, racism and othering in Canadian society, without detailing the nature of these experiences. According to Gutmann (2004), Muslim Middle Eastern international students in Canada experience discrimination and marginalization, being denied civic equality or recognition both at school or in society at large; students in that study questioned why they were considered only “residents” and not full citizens.

Muslim students have also denounced prevailing stereotypes that misrepresent Muslim people in Western countries. For example, a qualitative study of Arab international students at McGill University (Abukhattala, 2004) reveals that, while the students appreciate the cultural diversity of Canadian society, they were disappointed by their experiences of anti-Muslim encounters with some professors, in the form of using discriminatory words, or with regard to veiled women. They noted strong perceptions in Canadian society that all Muslim women are “victims of patriarchal structures” and “of oppressive male relatives” (p. 125).

Studies about Muslim women’s experiences of higher education in Canada (Hojati, 2011; Ahmad, 2016) also discuss the prevailing stereotypical attitudes toward Muslim families, representing them as oppressive or blocking their daughters’ entrance to universities. Further, women students questioned dominant discourses about the meaning of the hijab in the western

societies for not representing Muslim women's voices and interpretation about the hijab (Khosrojerdi, 2015).

Conceptual Framework: Human Dignity

While the concept of human dignity (HD) appears in legal, moral, and philosophical discourses (Shultziner 2007), no consensus has been reached regarding its definition. HD has been defined as relating to moral autonomy (Kant 2000), as respect (Stevenson 2014), as self-respect (Sari and Doganay 2009), as a cornerstone of human rights (O'Mahony 2012), as reason (Mautner 2008), as honor (Galvin and Todres 2015), as family (Barshack 2014), as rank (Lewis 2007), and as a connection between law and morality (Habermas 2012).

A number of HD-related factors have been recognized as relevant to the experience of human migration (Kazemi, Baghbanian, Maymand, and Rahmani 2018; Preston 2014; Tsapenko 2015; Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2012). However, the role of HD in migration motivations and experiences would benefit from further exploration (Crépeau and Samaddar 2010; Dhungana 2020; Monteiro 2009), and the literature on this issue in relation to student migration is particularly sparse. Kianpour's 2016 qualitative study describes the difference between university and seminary students' descriptions of HD in Iran, with university students connecting HD to moral concepts such as love, equality, respect, and freedom, while seminary students characterized it as a religious concept, a God-given gift. An online study surveying university students in eight countries (Oleynik, 2016) found that meanings ascribed to HD appeared to depend on cultural context, suggesting differences between people's individual understandings of HD and those provided by theory (Oleynik 2016). For example, Canadian university students

spoke of concepts like respect, self-worth, and human rights, while Iranian university students referred to some of the same concepts as well as fulfillment, freedom, and God (Oleynik 2016).

In light of the lack of consensus on a theoretical definition of HD, this study designed its HD framework based on the empirical research about students in Iran and in Canada described above (Kianpour 2016; Oleynik 2016). Accordingly, the concepts of freedom, honor, equality, self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, God-given gift, and human rights will form the HD framework for my inquiry.

Methods

Data from semi-structured interviews with 24 Iranian international graduate students (half men, half women,²⁵) informed this qualitative study. The students were all between the ages of 25 and 45, had entered Canada on a student visa, were studying at a Montreal university, had completed at least an undergraduate degree in Iran, and had lived in Montreal for over two years. The majority (19) were PhD students, four were masters students, and one was a postdoctoral fellow. Four were in humanities and social sciences, four in natural sciences, and 16 in engineering. Eleven participants had graduated and four had returned to Iran, while one student had come back to Canada and ultimately migrated to the United States. Thirteen of the participants were observantly religious, while eleven considered themselves secular, meaning they had a belief in God but did not engage in Islamic practices.

Students were recruited by flyer distribution at Montreal universities, via the internet through Montreal Iranian social networks, and through snowball sampling.

²⁵ Recruitment materials did not specify gender criteria and participants of any gender would have been welcome. All participants who came forward, however, identified clearly as either men or women, in line with norms within Iranian society.

Interviews were conducted and translated by the first author from Farsi to English. Each interview lasted an average of one hour and focused on students' experiences of HD as graduate students within the Canadian educational system. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded thematically for analysis according to 1) high level themes (such as understanding of HD at universities and experiences of equality and freedom), and bringing the extracted passages together , 2) relevant sub-themes identified in relation to HD) and 3) a final analysis of each sub-theme. The codes used in this study were translated to English by the first author.

In addition to the interviews, the author used debriefing, peer review, and other data sources to ensure rigor and trustworthiness (Creswell 2013) such as Statistics Canada and the Statistical Center of Iran.

Results: Iranian international students' experiences of HD within Canadian universities

Given the Iranian students' overall experiences in Canadian universities vs. Iranian ones, our analyses reveal that Iranian international students in Canada quickly referred to some differences that exist between Iran and Canada in terms of methods of education, level of research and available resources. For instance, several students talked about the importance of teamwork and discussion-oriented teaching methods in the Canadian academic system versus the limited application of this method in Iranian universities. Whereas Iranian education relies more on theory and memorization, students felt the Canadian system is more based on practice, comprehension and analysis (Soheil, Nikan). Students mentioned the importance of course

outlines, clear expectations for academic assignments and student evaluation of courses and of professors in the Canadian system, and considered these things lacking in the Iranian system.

Further, international students were asked to discuss their experiences of HD in Canadian universities and compare them with their pre-migration experiences in Iran. Most students emphasized the importance of relationships between students and their teachers/ supervisors or university staff. In providing a comparison, they explained some of the reasons for the differences in terms of cultural differences, and universities and supervisors' relative access to budget and financial resources as well as academic resources like internet, or equipment. They felt the differentiations were mainly at the graduate levels (master and PhD) and not at the bachelor's level. Overall, students pointed to three major themes as defining their HD experiences in Canada vs. Iran: 1) relationship between students and university staff (professors and employees) 2) gender equality and freedom, and 3) being a minority or being marginalized.

Relationships Between Students and University Staff

With regard to the main research question about students' experiences of HD in Canadian universities, Iranian students, several times, brought our attention to the disparities existing in relationships between students and professors in Canada versus Iran, in terms of level of connection or privacy as well as the formality or informality of relationships, comparative rank and status, power dynamics, and receiving support from university staff.

By comparing relationships between supervisors and students in two countries, IISs sought to depict the extent to which their HD has been respected in Canada. The students signified the importance of a distinction between connection and respecting one's privacy. For example, Neda (W 36, PhD student in engineering) shared:

One of the significant differences between the Iranian and Canadian systems [in terms of dignity] is related to the level of respect and connection between students and teachers in the educational systems. For example, in Canada, while you are very close with your teacher, you go out or go to a cottage with him/her, when doing work or a project or an exam, it [the relationship] is very formal and serious. The supervisor never asks me about my family, my religion. But if I am upset, he [supervisor] asks me why, and: Can I help you? However, in Iran, they ask about your families, ask who your father is, who your mother is, what they do, where they live. In Iran, people's privacy is invaded. If you are religious or if you do some specific practices or behaviors [related to Islamic religion], your position is better. That is, your position is measured by your opinion. But here [in Canada], what you do and present [in your work] determines your position.

Neda complained about the way some Iranian professors threaten students' HD through invading students' privacy or personal beliefs and they questioned the evaluation criteria that bring status for people in Iran by relating them to a private realm which are mostly attributive characteristics and compared them to those criteria in Canada which are achievable by individual efforts. She considered the evaluation criteria in Canada is a reflection of respecting students' HD since they are recognised by their competence versus the situation in Iran where students' HD is respected according to their social or religious status which brings honor for them as well. Moreover, she also related the existence of intimacy in relation between students and supervisors as a sign of respecting students' HD in Canada. It can be understood that, according to Nada, in an intimate relationship, students feel they are worthy, and instead of some educational stuff, they can have close relationships with professors and deserve sympathy. Therefore, this type of connection leads students to feel their HD is respected.

Concerning the level of connection between students and professors, Ali (M 29, PhD student in engineering) explained this different type of relationship according to the cultural gap existing between Iran and Canada. In his opinion:

In Canada, the hierarchy between students and professors is not like in Iran. In Canada, the relationship is very close and intimate, but in Iran, the hierarchy between students and

professors is much stronger than here [in Canada]. So when a person is in a higher position, he can behave better or force an inferior person to do something. And where there is a difference in opinion [between student and supervisor]... he [a supervisor] could easily exercise his power. I prefer the intimacy that exists between professors and students in Canada. However, I do not think that professors who are in Canada do not consider themselves superior to students. In Canada, the relationship with the student should be intimate and if the student calls the professor by his/her first name, not only will nothing change in the professor's social status, but even this intimate relationship is more amusing for the professor. This type of relationship in Canada is not due to the fact that Canadian people or their culture are better, but because it reduces costs a lot and things are done more easily.

In referring to the cultural gap, first, Ali conveys the fact that in Iranian culture, a teaching position brings honor to professors/ teachers which requires a special code of conduct leading to a different type of relationships between students and professors in Iran and Canada. Ali depicts how this honor grants professors a higher rank or status than students which not only can create a barrier between students and professors and limit their intimacy, but it can put students in a precarious status and be a risk for their HD due to the power dynamic if it is misused. On the other hand, he analyzes the level of connection between professors and teachers in Canadian culture and relates it to the status and rights held by professors, an issue linked to the different economic role that universities play in the Canadian versus Iranian educational system.

The topic of the university's role or its function in a country's economy was raised by other students to clarify some differences between the two countries. Soheil (M 36, PhD student in humanities and social sciences) mentioned:

In the Canadian educational system, a university is considered an economic enterprise. That is, the teacher considers himself very weak in front of the student, which of course is a problem. This issue has two sides to the coin, one side is that it gives the student self-confidence to speak and the other side is that they have no respect for the teacher. It's like a professor is a servant. I heard from a professor who challenged a student for being late, and the student responded "Because I pay money for my education, it is not your business"! That is, the relationship between professors and students is a money-making system because of the system of capitalism. In this system, universities force the professor to respect the student. Especially at the undergraduate level. Whatever is considered respect for a professor in

Iranian culture does not exist in Canada and this is a flaw. However, I believe this type of relationship doesn't exist at the post graduate levels since for those levels, it is mostly the university that funds students.

Contrary to Ali, Soheil believes that the economic role of universities in Canada not only does not carry professors and undergraduate students equal status, but it puts professors in a lower position than students which makes them vulnerable and threaten their HD, yet increasing students' confidence and authority. According to Soheil's understanding of the certain role of universities and the type of relationships between students and professors in Canada, it can be concluded that both professors and students are used by the system of capitalism as a means to reach its objectives; the situation that puts the HD of teachers and students at risk.

Neda also discussed another aspect of respect in terms of the existence of mutual responsibility between Canadian supervisors and students in which students respect their commitments to their supervisors and the supervisors also support their students financially.

In Canada, there is a mutual respect between supervisors and students; if I promise my supervisor to do something, I will do it at the specified time. But in Iran it is not the case that when I promise to do something in a certain period of time, I consider myself committed to do it. Because there is no commitment to do or not to do it, meaning a job [task] may be defined but it will not be completed at all. But here in Canada, when a project is defined, a budget is considered for it, it is monitored, and everyone is obliged to do the specific task and should be accountable. But in Iran, when a professor offers a job [project], because there is no financial support, the student has no motivation or obligation to do it. So the work becomes imposed and the student, in any way and for any reason such as family or socio-economic problems, tries to shirk his /her responsibility. And no one could claim the responsibility since no budget has been set for it.

By relating the issue of respect and HD to different levels of support that students received from their supervisors in Iran and Canada, Neda demonstrates the importance of supervisors' recognition of students' needs and overall performance by financially supporting them. Further, several other students also referred to this matter as a critically important topic. For instance,

Nikan (M 29, PhD student in Engineering) not only criticized lack of financial support for graduate students conducting research for their supervisors, in Iranian universities, but he questioned the absence of a responsive institution when there is renegeing on a promise. He told:

While in Canada, we receive funding from our supervisors for doing research, in Iran, doing research is a form of forced labor for the professor. Whereas, the [Iranian] government has promised to pay a few funds to doctoral students, this has not been achieved, and the government is lying. In fact, in the Iranian education system, what is your right and has been approved by the government, you will not be paid. Where can you complain? Nowhere.

Whereas Nikan and Neda criticized the Iranian educational system for inadequate financial support of students, it should be noted that students do not pay any cost for studying at public universities; the costs that Canadian universities do not cover.

In contrast to Nikan, Matin (man, 34, PhD graduated in engineering) complained about the influence of employment on the quality of relationship between supervisors and students within the Canadian educational system. He mentioned:

In Canada, the relationship between students and professors is like a manager and an employee and they [professors] don't consider that they [students] are doing research and they are not in a company. Maybe the type of relationship is related to the money that professors give to their students to do research... I can say that the Iranian educational system is better in this regard since the money comes from the government so teachers don't have specific expectations from their students other than studying their lessons. In Canada, supervisors don't pay a lot of attention to students' comprehension of course material, and when faculty members, after some years, get tenure, they don't pay enough attention to students' demands. In response to students' complaints, professors just simplify their course materials. This goes against students' rights because the teachers have underestimated their students' understanding and don't consider what is necessary for students' future careers and only think about the influence of students' feedback on their position. However, in Iran in this aspect, the situation is better because when faculty members are hired, nothing can change their position so they don't pay attention to students' feedback and are more focused on the quality of course materials. But I cannot say that everything is perfect.

While Matin positively evaluated the way Iranian professors engage with students in terms of their expectations and the quality of their performance, he believes that students' HD is

threatened in the Canadian universities, due to not covering students' needs in terms of both the level of respect and quality of education that students expect from their teachers. Nonetheless, Mahtab (W 39, PhD graduate in social science) disapproved of the current power dynamics between Iranian students and their professors. She mentioned:

In Iran, professors sometimes demand extra work from students and sometimes do not even allow them to graduate until finishing [these extra] projects.

According to Mahtab, professors' full authority in Iranian universities can undermine students' HD in such a way that on some occasions, professors deny students' rights and autonomy. For example, she shares her pregnancy experience in Canada and complained about the lack of respect and support which some students in Iran experience with regard to their private issues while Canadian students receive support in such a circumstance. She mentions:

In Iran, when a student becomes pregnant, her supervisor is disappointed since she can work less. The supervisor looks at her with a negative view: "Why doesn't she wait till the end of her education?" But in Canada these cases are completely personal and nothing will change in other people's view. For example, when I got pregnant in Canada, I was upset. Why did this happen? However, my supervisor said, "Why are you upset? This is God's mercy. They [university policy] even give you a year in Canada. Your study time does not count and this is very valuable. Canadian professors become kinder to you and support you so that you are happy and think you should be proud of being pregnant, but in Iran you feel bad.

Despite the presence of a pregnancy leave in Iranian universities, still Mahtab admired the Canadian universities policy for support students and the level of respect students received from their supervisors concerning their personal choices. Mahtab also pointed our attention to the gender dynamic in both Iranian and Canadian systems. The issue will be discussed more in the next section.

Seeking equality and freedom

The topic of gender equality and freedom also was raised by different international students during discussing their HD in the context of universities in both countries. International students referred to their experiences in Canada in terms of quality of work and the range of salary for women, unbiased gender attitudes, freedom of choice, and freedom in expressing themselves or disagreement as well as freedom from any type of abuse. Accordingly they believed that their HD is respected in Canadian universities.

Both men and women students talked about their experiences of gender equality at universities in Canada. For example, while we know that gender pay inequity and discrimination in the workplace exists in Canada, in Mahtab's experience:

Gender issues in Iran are very problematic, but in Canada the rights of men and women at universities are the same and they are paid the same and they (employees) demand the same work from both gender and a gender perspective does not change the salary.

Iranian international students were sometimes lacking knowledge about gender discrimination in Canada, but generally compared the situation in Canada positively with that in Iran and perceived this equality as a respect to their HD. Shadi (W 35, PhD student in engineering), for example, in comparing the influence of gender attitudes in evaluating one's behavior or task between Iran and Canada, expressed:

How much have you been encouraged in Iran when you came up with a new solution or new idea during your studies? When did they talk to you about your abilities? Whenever a woman appears in a group where everyone else is a man, if she talks with a loud [clear without being shameful] voice and shows good presentation and communication skills, everyone in the audience thinks: "Woe to her husband!"... But here [Canada] everything is considered as the characteristics of an adult who can communicate. How much you are admired here as an immigrant, especially since you are a single girl and you have come. Even on my behalf, the ladies who came from another country and came here praised me because I came here as a single girl without a sister, family and husband, and I do all my work myself.

Shadi appreciated the way she was accepted and admired in Canada, and found it as a sign of respecting her HD because she was taken seriously and recognised as competent; she also referred to her experience with regard to the freedom of choice and expression of herself in Canada. She told:

As a PhD student in Canada, I have an office for myself and I can put anything that makes me happy on my table. I have everything I want...And we are friends with all my officemates who are all Arabs. And we talk about every topic, from Islam and Muhammad to Valentine. Although at first it was difficult for them to accept me as a woman in this office. [In our department in Canada] The ladies are all on another floor and I am the only woman who has an office on this floor. My supervisor asked about my preference if I want to be in this office...At the beginning, my officemates believed in a series of issues, but they are a little more open now... I respect their opinions...Because they respect me. But in Iran, religious people do not walk and communicate with non-religious ones without judging them.

By referring to her sense of autonomy and satisfaction of being trusted by her supervisor and co-officers at the university, Shadi explains why she found her HD is respected in Canada compared to Iran.

The issue of sexual harassment or abuse, the different approaches a victim or a perpetrator might adopt, and the way different cultures, specifically in Iran and Canada, deal with this issue were also raised in Soheil's (M 36, PhD student in humanities and social sciences) explanations:

In Iran, the issue of sexual harassment is very obvious. Due to the cultural context of Iran, in most cases the victims of sexual harassment are women...however, in the West, this is one of the issues that, after years of trial and error, and given that religious issues are not taken into account, they decided to pay attention to this issue from the perspective of human dignity and prevent sexual violence against women. But given that we have a religious background in Iran, we are still far behind in this area... For example, last year a professor was expelled from the university for his immoral behavior, and he filed a lawsuit...he had hired one of the undergraduate students as a research assistant and established a sexual relationship with her with her consent, but the problem arose when this professor was in a relationship with two other students at the same time. It was not illegal to do so, but it was immoral, and the girls

launched a campaign to discredit the professor, and wrote an anonymous article in a university magazine. This means that at Canadian universities, students are allowed to anonymously write and publish an article about an immoral behavior by their professor, which means making the space unsafe for people who behave immorally. However, this is not the case in a religious community. And still in Iran, it is a taboo for a woman to speak publicly about her victimization and not protest for fear of being accused.

While this is a man student's reaction to the issue of sexual violence, the topic was also addressed by women students several times as well. While condemning the presence of sexual violence in both countries, Soheil valued Canadian culture for making progress in providing a potential capacity to speak out or disclose experiences of abuse. In particular, he believes the issue is addressed in the West from a human dignity lens, while recognizing that the issue has not been completely eradicated.

Being a minority or being marginalized

In comparing the perception of HD as experienced in Iranian versus Canadian universities, international students also referred to their experiences of marginalization in terms of language, nationality, race, religion or appearance. Within the specific context of Quebec, some francophone universities offer programs in English, intending to recruit more international students. Upon arrival, however, some of our participants shared that lacking French capacity was actually a real barrier to them within the program and they felt marginalized if they only spoke English. As explained by Ali:

Some professors are very sensitive to the French language and this is a type of racism in my opinion. Some of them only teach in French [when the program has been advertised as being available in English]. They do not even allow other professors to teach in English. And they complained that specific courses must be presented in French. In short, they agreed that the course should be presented in French every other year. There was a case that the student submitted his thesis and only because the abstract must have been in French, in the defense

session, he was not accepted and he was forced to change and write an introduction in French in his thesis.

By showing his disapproval of the current constraint imposed by some professors with regard to the knowledge and application of French language, Ali found it “a type of racism” which threatens students’ HD because of underestimating students’ resources and competence, causing their isolation. Yet, Nikan, belonging to an ethnic minority in Iran, compares language rights in the Canadian educational system versus the Iranian one, and tells us:

The Quebec education system is a French system, while in other provinces in Canada it is English. This means that in Canada one can choose to study English or French, but in Iran the same basic rights are not observed in different cities. For example, if I want to study in Turkish language, the education system does not allow you to do so. That is, from the very beginning, this issue has been violated according to the law. For example, why should I not know my mother tongue?

While acknowledging the dominant role of French language in most Quebec universities, Nikan believes that at least students have a freedom of choice in their educational language (between English and French), hence, he condemns Iranian educational system in which minority’s rights and autonomy are not respected and considers it a sign of HD violation against ethnic minorities in Iran.

Moreover, whereas Canada has been recognised as a multicultural and bilingual country, the way some international students have been treated in some university places demonstrates conflicting evidence. Dana (W32, Master student in law) described her experience:

When I came to Canada, our department was a French one. I went to a women’s dormitory for the room that I had reserved. When I told the man receptionist that I would like to have a room in the women’s dormitory, he talked to me in a bad tone and told me to talk with him in French and not English. He told me: “I know where you came from but this is Canada. You should change your opinions. You should go to the same class with men.” He treated me very badly. Actually, his prejudice about me as a muslim woman from an Islamic country was that I didn’t have any contact with men in my life and I am a dependent person who can not understand things properly. And if I am asking to be in a women’s dormitory it is due to my

ignorant and limited thoughts. Although, then, I explained to him that the reason I wanted to be in a women's dormitory is because of my wearing a Hijab.

Dana's quote reflects her disapproval of the way she was treated by a university staff in Canada; the situation leading her to feel that as a muslim immigrant woman was underestimated and recognised incompetent. Therefore she found that as a new immigrant, her HD was not respected in Canada.

The issue of marginalization is not always by a state against its minorities, but against some other countries by imposing sanctions on them. The issue that limits ordinary people to meet their needs and flourish, hence putting people's HD at risk. For example, in the context of education, having access to resources and being able to pursue a higher level of research are very significant. Sina (M31, PhD in Computer engineering) explained:

It mostly depends on the field of study. For instance, in applied and operational fields of study that need different laboratories and materials, it is more advanced here [Canada] but in Iran because of the sanctions, they [Western companies] do not sell the equipment to Iran. Iranian universities do not provide funding for students while in Canada, universities do not allow students to pay for equipment materials [themselves]. Also, the level of the projects presented here [Canada] is very different from Iran... In fact, we [Iranian students], when participating in software competitions in writing codes, are very successful. So it shows that we, Iranians, are very smart but when there is a need for money, a need for facilities and equipment, Canadian students are better. [So it can be] best [for us] here in Canada. It means that if Iranians come to work here, they will be very successful.

While referring to inadequate educational resources in Iran, compared to Canada, Sina also addressed a critical issue like imposed sanctions against Iranian government which consequently has influenced people's life at various levels; the fact that limits students to exercise their capacity is considered a threat to their HD.

Discussion and Conclusion

Iranian international students have varying perceptions related to their experiences of HD during their educational life in Canada (Montreal), compared to Iran and, in this article, we give specific consideration to gender differences. This study offers a helpful contribution to our knowledge about the experiences, needs and challenges of this minority population (IISs), as well as insights for our understanding of the experiences of international students in general.

The issue of different methods of education and level of access to resources was expressed by most students as one of the significant differences between the educational systems in Iran versus Canada (Abukhattala, 2004). In addition to having more access to resources and being able to pursue a higher level of research in the Canadian system, several students mentioned the importance of teamwork, course outlines, clear expectations for academic assignments and student evaluation of courses and of professors in the Canadian system, and considered these things lacking in the Iranian system. While the sanctions against the Iranian government have influenced people's everyday life at various levels back home, most students found fulfillment of the Canadian educational system due to its providing adequate educational resources and support for students. This sense of fulfillment corresponds to what can be considered a respect of HD.

In the first theme, students depicted the disparities that exist in the type of relationship between students and university staff in Canada and Iran. These differences were related to respecting students' privacy since they were evaluated according to students' achievements or individual efforts in Canada. Moreover, the level of connection (feeling of sympathy and worth), comparative rank and status, power dynamics, and support received from Canadian university staff led to a sense of students' HD being respected. Being treated with respect and humanity in

the Canadian educational system, as elements of HD, was also addressed by IISs as being important to both student and faculty HD. I would argue that these results - where IISs did not raise ethnic or racial discrimination within the university setting - contrast with other studies such as Garrett's 2014 survey of international students at selected universities in the U.S., U.K., and Australia, in which students reported racial discrimination. According to this study, Asian internationals reported lower levels of satisfaction and a higher level of discrimination by professors, and university staff compared to European peers. In another study (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014), ISs from Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia also rate the quality of their interactions with professors significantly lower than their peers from North American and Southern Asia. Moreover, in addition to the influence of gender, race and ethnicity on the quality of interpretation of professors with ISs (Glass et al., 2015; Marginson, 2013; Rienties et al., 2012), scholars have discussed the negative impact of low financial and academic preparedness on gaining cooperation and favour from professors in the US (Glass et al., 2015). In this study, however, participants reported feeling language discrimination in the context of francophone institutions.

Concerning gender differences in international students' experiences of HD in Canadian universities, both genders discussed the quality of their relationships and the importance of mutual respect between students and professors. Women students, however, mentioned appreciating the high level of connection and emotional support received from their Canadian supervisors, while still feeling that their privacy and autonomy are respected; it is versus their experiences within Iranian universities (Soltani et al., 2020). This type of communication gave women students a sense of equal status with their Canadian professors and led students to perceive their HD to be respected. In addition to students' experiences of connection, women students perceived their HD to be recognised by their Canadian supervisors because of their

efforts, personality and competence rather than the socio-economic status of their family or their religious beliefs; in contrast, students believed these last two criteria were heavy factors in some Iranian professors' evaluation of their merit, representing a violation of the notion of honor of the adopted HD framework as well.

Most men students, when addressing HD in terms of the quality of relationship between students and supervisors, focused on the reasons and roots of the gap between Canada and Iran, such as each country's distinctive culture and policies. Men students discussed how, in Iranian culture and religion, teachers are honored, placing teachers in a higher status than their students (Eghtesadi Roudi, 2021). According to the students, in Canadian universities the HD of professors is undermined due their lack of honored status and to undergraduate students having a market/client relationship to the university because of their high tuition. Yet, men students felt that, since most graduate students are funded by Canadian universities or their supervisors, and with international students funded at higher rates than domestic students because of international tuition fees, graduate students are felt to have a more vulnerable status. Within such a context, supervisors can misuse their power and authority over students, conduct that threatens students' HD. It can be concluded that capitalist forces in the Canadian educational system, wherein both professors and students are means to reach its objectives, the situation that puts the HD of teachers and students at risk.

When discussing HD, men students were more likely to feel that students' HD in Canada is more respected than in Iran in terms of having access to adequate resources. However, the quality of education was a controversial issue. Some students claimed that, in Canada, professors' main concern is student feedback rather than concentrating on the quality of course content. Because student feedback influences instructors' academic status, professors keep

content simple, sometimes undermining the quality of education. This situation puts students' HD at risk due to not paying sufficient attention to their needs for their future careers.

The second theme, gender equality and freedom, was raised by different international students during our interviews. While the issue of gender pay inequity and discrimination in the workplace exists in Canada (Schirle and Sogaolu 2020), international students referred to their Canadian experiences in terms of quality of work and the range of salary for women, unbiased gender attitudes, freedom of choice in their educational language (between English and French in some Quebec universities) freedom in expressing themselves and freedom from any type of abuse. These observations reflect positive elements of HD.

Further, the issues of equality and freedom were addressed by both genders, but in different ways. Women students admired the prevalence of women's empowerment and gender equality in Canadian universities. They felt their HD to be respected when they were taken seriously and given autonomy. Men students raised the presence of meritocracy as a strong point at Canadian universities while discussing HD. Both genders condemned Iranian universities, compared to Canada, for limiting students' freedom to speak out or air disagreements, and perceived this situation to be against their HD.

Unlike the previous two themes in which students mostly discussed their positive experience of HD in the Canadian educational system, the third theme referred to IISs' experiences of marginalization in the Canadian educational system due to having been misled about the possibility of studying in English in some Quebec universities, and discrimination based on their nationality, race, and religion. Such discrimination should be considered a violation of human rights as it is related to the prohibited grounds of discrimination such as nationality, race, and religion, etc...(Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985) while also reflecting an element of the HD framework. Experiences of marginalization were in contrast to IISs'

expectations of Canadian society as a multicultural and bilingual country (Hojati, 2011; Alizai, 2021).

Students further expanded the issue of marginalization to conditions that Western countries have created by imposing sanctions against some other nations like Iran. Sanctions have caused many challenges for regular people, such as limiting access to research resources and materials for students while studying in their home countries. This in turn creates motivation to migrate to study in Western countries.

Our data reveals that students can have contradictory experiences. For example, while students referred to their experiences of vulnerability, racism, and powerlessness in Canada, they also mentioned positive experiences in terms of finding Canada to be a place where they can reach their goals and explore new things, as well as offering the opportunity to have more progress, freedom, peacefulness, pursue plans for their future, or experience equal gender rights. Whereas IISs revealed their challenges in Canada concerning such things as language barriers, relationship difficulties, cultural gaps, settlement struggles, missing family, difficult climate as well as financial insecurity, they also appreciated Canadian codes of conduct with regard to being responsible, honest, accountable, respectful and the level of acceptance of immigrants. Additionally, students positively regarded how Canadians respect people's character, feelings, intelligence (intellect), honesty, and people's humanity. However, IISs also mentioned that there is a gap between the way ordinary people in society and university members treat immigrants. While the former may approach immigrants with racist attitudes, at universities, students were treated more appropriately.

IISs' experiences of HD within the Canadian educational system provide empirical evidence for particular concepts within our adopted HD framework - including respect, freedom, equality, fulfillment, human rights, and humanity - highlighting the importance of the relational

versus the individual quality of human dignity within the postsecondary education system. While students perceived that, compared to in Iran, their HD is respected in many ways within their Canadian educational experience, some controversy arose concerning the issues of marginalization, quality of courses, and supervisors' authority over international graduate students in Canadian universities necessitating more considerations at the levels of policy and practice.

Recommendations

In order to attract and retain international students, it is essential to give voice to international students' (IS) experiences of HD at Canadian universities and understand situations that put students' HD at risk in order to inform Canadian university policy reform. When hiring staff, Canadian universities should also consider cultural awareness with respect to international students with different cultural and religious norms, supported by policies to ensure representation and diversity.

Moreover, expert supervision is required in order to support the quality of course content and ensure that faculties provide appropriate guidance and services for ISs, particularly in the case of students with precarious status.

The issue of students' experiences of marginalization in the Canadian educational system necessitates further study to explore whether the students decide to stay in Canada after their graduation, and if the answer is yes, what factors contributed to their decision.

While gender pay inequity and discrimination in the workplace exist in Canada, international Iranian students have a generally positive perception of gender equality in the Canadian system, more research is required to explore the reasons for this misperception.

Finally, it is recommended that research be conducted regarding professors' experiences of HD in the Canadian educational system in order to better inform future policy.

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BRIDGING TEXT: MANUSCRIPT 3

In the continuation of my exploration of IISs' experiences of HD in Canada, after their migration, the third manuscript, *Far from Perfect: Iranian International Students' Experience of Human Dignity within the Canadian Immigration System*, reflects Iranian international students (IISs) experience human dignity (HD) in relation to the Canadian immigration system (CIS). This single author manuscript is under review in the *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies (IJMBS)*. My committee members have provided feedback on the main arguments and the writing.

MANUSCRIPT III: FAR FROM PERFECT: IRANIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF HUMAN DIGNITY WITHIN THE CANADIAN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Abstract

Every year a great number of international students (ISs) move to Canada to pursue university education, and encounter myriad challenges at the different stages of their migration. This paper explores how Iranian international students (IISs) experience human dignity (HD) in relation to the Canadian immigration system (CIS). Drawing on in-depth interviews with 24 current and former IISs (10 men and 10 women ISSs in Montreal, and two men and two women graduates who had left Canada), this paper adopts a conceptual framework of HD to analyze the data. Two themes emerged as key to IISs' experiences with CIS: 1) frustration with immigration rules during their studies, and 2) lack of clarity regarding processing times. These themes provided empirical support for the HD framework including equality, humanity, respect, and human rights. An awareness of ISs' experiences of HD within the immigration system could strengthen the support offered to ISs in Canada. The findings also have useful implications for Canadian government personnel and policymakers, as well as administrators of educational institutions that seek to attract ISs.

Keywords: Canada, human dignity, international students, Iran, migration, permanent residence, immigration policy

Introduction

Every year, international students (ISs) from all over the world come to Canada to pursue academic and professional goals (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). Although Canada welcomes ISs, it continues to subject them to “bordering” (Brunner, 2022). Despite being valuable financial

resources for public universities and potential future workers and taxpayers, ISs in Canada live in a precarious state, dependent on institutional regulations and immigration policies (Rosenfield, 2020; Sultana et al., 2021). Since 2014, Canada's citizenship and immigration policies have undergone changes directly affecting ISs (Adams et al., 2014), marginalizing this population and potentially making Canada a less attractive place to study (Tamburri, 2014).

In discussing the challenges and barriers ISs face within Canada's immigration pathways, this article explores how the bordering of Canada's citizenship and immigration policies impact international graduate students, particularly during their transition into permanent residency, from the perspective of human dignity (HD), one of the five fundamental concepts enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Wronka, 2017).

HD is emerging as an important factor in both the motivation to migrate and the experience of settlement in a new country (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2009; Razavipour & Hanley, 2021). A small number of studies have utilized the concept of HD in relation to migration (Doering-White, 2019; Dhungana, 2020; Monteiro, 2009; Cornelisse, 2021; Brownsword, 2021). To date, very few studies have applied HD to the pathways of ISs experiences in Canada, a group of increasing importance in Canada, and scholars have rarely concentrated on IISs in Canada. This paper begins with an overview of the literature on ISs within Canada's migration system and the effects of immigration policies related to student visas and permanent residency (PR) pathways at the federal and provincial levels. I then provide the study's conceptual framework, method, and results, and, drawing on interviews with 24 Iranian international students, I explore two themes: 1) frustration with immigration rules during ISs' studies, and 2) lack of clarity regarding processing times. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research for policymakers, universities, and ISs themselves.

Literature Review: Growing Importance of International Students within Canada's Immigration System

International students are “non-Canadian students who do not have ‘permanent resident’ status and have had to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government [typically via a student visa] to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education” (Statistics Canada, 2010). Canadian authorities seem to welcome ISs as future permanent residents. According to the Honorable Ahmed Hussen, Canada's former Minister of Immigration (IRCC, 2017):

Why wouldn't we want to hang on to [ISs]? These are already people who are proficient in English and French or both and who have a postsecondary education in one of our fine institutions.

These factors can facilitate the integration process and make ISs an asset for the host country (Dam et.al., 2018). Both higher education institutions and governments count on ISs as an answer to financial shortfalls, competing internationally to attract ISs to the Canadian education market (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). ISs form a “key part of building a stronger international and intercultural scope to pedagogy and research and are crucial to Canadian campuses” (Cudmore, 2005, p. 47). Their contribution to the Canadian economy includes generating approximately 81,000 jobs and \$445 million annually in government revenue (Global Affairs Canada, 2016).

ISs' post graduation plans vary; 10% intend to return to their home country after completing their education, 30% are not sure about their post graduation plans, and 60% wish to remain in Canada and apply for PR (about a 10% increase from 2015 (2018))(CBIE, 2021). Whatever their plans, ISs welcome flexible immigration policies that pave the way for staying (Shih, 2016).

The Precarious Status of International Students

The concept of precarious immigration status describes the insecurity of living or working within a country without full access to rights and resources (De Genova, 2002; Goldring et al., 2009) and limited access to a pathway to permanent stay, healthcare, housing, education, and sociocultural benefits (Chacko, 2020, Goldring & Landolt, 2011; Vosko, 2010). Immigration policies produce and reproduce precariousness for noncitizens (Binka, 2019; De Genova, 2002; Hari et al., 2021), even to the point of detention and criminalization (Crépeau & Nakache, 2006; Chacko, 2020; Meloni et al., 2016). Such is the case for those living on restrictive student visas.

While ISSs' economic precarity is demonstrated by living and educational expenses and challenges to finding employment (Gilmartin et al., 2020), personal precariousness is associated with the way precarity affects people's intimate lives (Robertson, 2015), including their health and relationships (Gilmartin et al., 2020). Students' immigration status is subject to and regulated by changes in economic, sociocultural, and political conditions of both host and home countries (Hari et al., 2021). ISSs' precarious situation partly depends on the host province's immigration policies and institutional regulations (Rosenfield, 2020). Various factors contribute to creating and maintaining ISSs' vulnerable position in Canada, including their "financial dependence, less developed social connections and language skills [...], challenges of navigating through a new system", and lack of resources to cope with discrimination (CBIE, 2013, p. 36).

To study in Canada, ISSs must obtain and maintain a valid study permit, resulting in a temporary resident status that is precarious both due to status renewal challenges (Calder et al., 2016; CBIE, 2013), and to lack of access to many of the welfare services available to permanent residents and citizens (Goh, 2019). The temporary nature of student visas can lead ISSs into situations of labor exploitation (Martin, 2017; Maury, 2017; Robertson, 2015), as well as restrict avenues for future employment mobility in a host country (Martin, 2017). Further, this precarity

increases vulnerability to sexual, physical, and financial abuse, and reduces capacity to control one's home and work environments (Beatson et al., 2017; Perry, 2018; Hanley et al., 2020).

International Students' Immigration Journey: Student Visas, Postgraduate Work Permits and Permanent Residency

In order to obtain a student visa to enter Canada, all ISs accepted to a Quebec program of longer than six months must first apply for a Certificat d'acceptation du Québec (CAQ) from the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Francisation and Integration (MIFI). The CAQ can then be used to apply for a study permit and student visa from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Student visa applicants must indicate a minimum income or savings of \$10,000 that can be used towards the cost of living in the destination country (CIC, 2021). ISs are responsible for maintaining valid immigration documents and legal status throughout the duration of their studies. A valid student visa does not generally entitle ISs to receive publicly subsidized social services (Goldring et al., 2009).

Upon graduation, ISs can obtain a post graduation work permit (PGWP) valid for two years if they 1) hold valid temporary status or have left Canada, 2) have graduated from a program of at least eight months at an eligible Canadian designated learning institution leading to a degree, 3) submit evidence showing full-time student status in Canada, and 4) have maintained full-time student status in Canada during each session of the completed program (IRCC, 2022a).

Pathways and barriers to permanent residency

After graduation, ISs can apply for Canadian PR if they meet educational or work experience requirements, which vary from province to province (Goh, 2019). ISs in Quebec

wanting to immigrate must first be “selected” by the province (Papademetriou and Hooper, 2019). If their application is accepted, they receive a Certificat de sélection du Québec (CSQ) allowing them to apply to IRCC for the final PR steps (mostly security and health checks).

Of the economic immigration programs that offer PR in Quebec, the Quebec Experience Program (PEQ) is the most popular one for students. Between 2010 and 2018, most international graduate students who studied at a Quebec postsecondary institution qualified for the PEQ. However, in order to apply major changes to the program, in 2018 the Government of Quebec temporarily stopped accepting new applications and canceled all ongoing applications submitted before that date (“Quebec moves,” 2019). In 2019, despite opposition, the provincial government adopted a bill that both affected previous applicants and influenced thousands of ISs in Quebec who intended to remain after graduation (Hinkson, 2019). The bill’s main objectives were “to establish the necessary legal basis for improving the francization and integration of selected candidates as well as a better alignment of Québec’s labor needs with the profile of selected candidates” (Immigration, Francisation et Intégration Québec, 2019, para.1).

The new PEQ regulations increased French language proficiency requirements (Major, 2018). In 2019, the Quebec Minister of Immigration also floated the idea of restricting PEQ access to educational programs with graduates considered more in-demand on the Quebec job market. This idea was ultimately dropped when the government was unable to justify its list of desired professions. Unexpected changes in requirements leave ISs in a precarious position and create barriers to obtaining PR. In 2020, another round of changes was introduced for ISs seeking PR in Quebec: PEQ candidates must now acquire 12 months of postgraduate Quebec paid work experience in a professional occupation (NOC level O, A or B) (MIFI, 2020).

Canada spends significant resources recruiting, developing, and educating ISs while simultaneously benefiting from their higher tuition payments. However, significant systemic barriers still exist within Canada's immigration pathways (Al-Haque, 2017), even though by the time ISs apply for PR, they have already been assessed twice: first through the formal process of applying for a student visa, and second, through informally demonstrating their contributions by successfully living, working, and studying in Canada (Ho, 2018, p.7).

Barriers and challenges in ISs' immigration trajectories include the difficulty of keeping up with frequent changes in policies and regulations; the lack of access to campus resources; the cost of applications; and lack of recognition of university work experience; (Al-Haque, 2017). Other challenges include lack of knowledge about immigration programs (Belkhodja & Esses, 2013; Covell et al., 2015; Dauwer, 2018; Roach, 2011; Kelly, 2012); lack of community-based support to navigate the complexities of immigration procedures (Dauwer, 2018; Esses et al., 2018; Qian, 2017; Gomez, 2017); the limited time allotted to collect required documents (Kelly, 2012); and language barriers (Covell et al., 2015).

Dam, Chan and Wayland (2018) argue that Canada's Express Entry System increases ISs' precarity. The federal Canadian Experience Class (CEC)²⁶ program presents barriers for IS PR applications through 1) "inconsistent, unrealistic, and confusing work experience requirements" (p. 897); 2) only accepting applications for PR after students have graduated; 3) only counting work experience gained after graduation, and 4) creating a risk of becoming undocumented during the gap between the expiry of PGWP and the final PR decision. The CEC also gives "heavier weight to Canadian work experience and lighter weight to Canadian credentials" (Wang, 2018, p. 1074).

²⁶ This is one of three immigration programs managed through the Canadian Express Entry System, which is for skilled workers who have Canadian work experience, gained in the 3 years before applying (IRCC, 2022b).

Understanding the role of international student offices in universities is important to addressing the barriers ISs experience during their transition to PR (Dauwer, 2018). Some studies have identified international offices as unsupportive (Covell et al., 2015; Roach, 2011), being too busy and too often unfamiliar with the complexity of providing PR services (Roach 2011) or excluding such services from their mandate (Covell et al., 2015).

Long processing times and security checks, particularly for Iranians

Delays, processing time extensions, and lack of reliable application status information cause longer periods of precarious immigration status for ISs (Dennler, 2020, p. 501). According to advocates, living in limbo causes psychological problems (Ghoussoub, 2018) and job insecurity for ISs, leading to a loss of talent and skilled workers for Canada (Burgess, 2018).

According to IRCC (2021a), processing times can be influenced by application type, level of completion, time required to process other applications, how easily information can be verified, and applicant response times. There are shockingly different processing times for applications to immigrate to Quebec compared to the rest of Canada. The federal processing time for Quebec skilled workers (who have already waited through the CSQ process) is an estimated 26 months (IRCC, 2021b), compared to six months for the CEC program (IRCC, 2021c). The Quebec Association of Immigration Lawyers (AQAADI) recently filed a formal notice demanding that IRCC systematize its process of assessing and finalizing applications for PR in the Quebec skilled worker category by processing applications based on date of receipt, respecting fairness and applicants' HD, and committing in writing to respecting a schedule for processing and finalizing Quebec applications that is public, clear, orderly, and reasonable (AQAADI, 2022).

Many IISs and their advocates believe that processing and security check timelines vary according to applicants' country of origin. According to Ali Ehsassi, Liberal MP for Willowdale, Ont., "When you compare all the evidence, it suggests we're talking about undue delays for many applicants that are of Iranian origin." While he acknowledged the importance of security checks for a migration application, he said that Iranian students seem to have been singled out (Ghoussoub, 2018). Long processing times and security screenings for Iranian applicants have been reported by dozens more in the news (Brend, 2018; Burgess, 2018; Ghoussoub, 2018) and acknowledged by the Canadian government, yet the problem persists (Burgess, 2018). IRCC has declared that delays in Iranian immigration applicants are caused by difficulties verifying information for security checks (Brend, 2018; Burgess, 2018).

While the Department of Foreign Affairs has described CIS as "fair and non-discriminatory" protecting the "safety and security of Canadians", diplomatic relations between Iran and Canada complicate the admission of Iranians (Brend, 2018). In 2012, Canada suspended any diplomatic relations with the Iranian government and listed Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. Many advocates, including the Iranian Canadian Congress, believe that Iranian migrants to Canada are victims of this situation (Brend, 2018).

Conceptual Framework: Human Dignity

Human dignity (HD) is a common concept in religion, philosophy, law, and bioethics; however, there is a lack of agreement on its definition. According to Sayer (2011), most interpretations of HD are situated between two dominant ideas: dignity as individual autonomy and as relational dignity (Malpas & Lickiss, 2007; Sayer, 2011). What most people, including oppressed groups, expect from a state is both 1) respect for certain human needs that are both

fundamental and distinctive; and 2) allowing populations to meet these needs (Sayer, 2011, p. 195). Therefore, to have autonomy, individual differences must be recognized and respected.

International migration regimes may be interpreted as threatening dignity (Crépeau and Samaddar, 2009). Sociopolitical, cultural, and economic motivations related to HD have been recognized as contributing to human migration (Kazemi et al., 2018; Preston, 2014; Tsapenko, 2015; Van Hear et al., 2012), yet few studies consider the role of HD in the actual experience of migration itself (Crépeau & Samaddar, 2010; Dhungana, 2020; Monteiro, 2009). To date, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have discussed how ISs experiences HD within the immigration system.

As a host and destination country for many ISs, Canada has its own interpretation and application of HD. The Canadian Bill of Rights preamble affirms that Canada is founded upon HD principles (National Legislative Bodies, 1960, p.1). The Supreme Court of Canada has declared that the rights enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* are “inextricably bound” to “concepts of human dignity” (Sossin, 2003, p. 228). A review of Supreme Court decisions related to HD and the Charter demonstrates that the Court has generally considered this concept in six legal categories: “psychological integrity; physical security; privacy; personal autonomy; professional reputation; and personal affiliation or group identity” (2003, p. 230). The Court has approached HD “as an organizing principle of Canadian society” (Sossin, 2003, p. 230). Penninga argues that Canadian public policy “promotes individualism at the expense of community responsibility” (2009, p.39).

Very few scholars have applied this concept to student experiences. In a qualitative study in Iran, Kianpour (2016) explored differences between seminary versus university students’ understandings of HD. University students defined HD in terms of moral concepts such as love,

equality, respect and freedom, concepts that are related to social and state actions (Kianpour, 2016, p.714). Seminary students perceived HD as a religious concept, “a God-given gift”, which the level of it depends on the Muslim individual’s willingness and effort to gain it (Kianpour, 2016, p.719). With a similar purpose, Oleinik (2016a) conducted an online survey amongst university students in eight countries, documenting how students from different cultural contexts have different interpretations of HD (findings that are echoed in Donnelly, 2013 and Hughes, 2011). Canadian university students referred to respect, self-respect, pride, self-worth, equality, and human rights. Iranian university students’ diverse responses referred to self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, freedom, humanity, God, human rights, morality, value, forgiveness, equality, and honor (Oleinik, 2016 a). Although there is no agreement with regard to the theoretical definition of HD, in this study, a framework of HD was designed inspired by the available empirical research about university students in Iran and in Canada (Kianpour, 2016; Oleinik, 2016 a). Accordingly, the concepts of freedom, honor, equality, human rights, self-esteem, self-respect, respect, fulfillment, humanity, and God given gift will form the HD framework for this inquiry.

Methods

The overall study design was qualitative and my analysis is based on data from semi-structured interviews with 24 IISs or recent graduates who responded to recruitment calls in 2019. I recruited 10 men and 10 women IISs in Montreal and four Iranian graduates (two men and two women) who had left Canada. My data has been retrieved from a broader study²⁷ on the experiences of IISs who studied at Montreal universities after having completed at least a

²⁷ The main study was the doctoral thesis of the author.

bachelor's degree in Iran. Participants had to have lived in Montreal for over two years and be 25 to 45 years old.

The recruitment post was distributed via flyer at three Montreal universities (McGill, Concordia, and University of Montreal) and via the internet through Montreal Iranian social networks such as Montrealnameh and Danesgjooyan-e McGill, among others. ISs were also recruited through snowball sampling, with those interviewed referring others to the study. All interviews were conducted in Farsi by the author and took place in person in Montreal, except for those with students who had already returned to Iran, which were conducted through WhatsApp and then coded thematically for analysis. In order to ensure rigor and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013), in addition to prolonged engagements and observations of IISs in Montreal during the time of my interviews, I applied peer review as well as triangulated data sources by reviewing immigration and integration documents and reports from Statistics Canada.

Results

The findings of this study document how students' experiences with the immigration system fail to incorporate many elements of the HD framework, an outcome at odds with HD as a core driver for IISs to migrate to Canada (Razavipour & Hanley, 2021). In responding to the questions about their experiences with the Canadian immigration system and the role of HD in this system, IISs emphasized two themes: 1) frustration with immigration rules during their studies, and 2) lack of clarity regarding processing times. Most IISs also expressed their experiences of discrimination within the Canadian immigration system and their agency to preserve their HD, however, because of time limitations, I will discuss these results in another article in the future.

Frustration with immigration rules for international students

IISs expressed their frustration with the contradiction between Canada's economic need for immigrants and its overly complex immigration application procedures. Students referred to the benefits of migration for both the host country and immigrants, and raised the issue of their unmet expectation of HD in immigration procedures. Some felt that Canada was cynical in promoting itself as humanitarian in its approach to immigration when, in fact, immigrants are necessary for Canada's wellbeing. For instance, Soheil (M34) felt that Canada's economic need for immigrants was the truer reason for certain immigration decisions than the government's positioning as offering humanitarian assistance.

As a minority, I see the Canadian government in need of immigrants... for example, the events that took place in Canada under Justin Trudeau in the shadow of the Syrian refugees. He settled ... Syrian refugees in Canada, which I think was a propaganda issue because Canada needs immigrants, and it is not just a humanitarian issue. The issue is because of Canada's need to have specialized and expedient immigrants, and a war like the Syrian war was an opportunity for Canada to attract all of Syria's elites... Politicians prioritize the country's economic issues and exploit them in their own interests. I think immigration is a win-win situation.

Therefore, as an element of HD, he did not consider humanitarian motives to be the Canadian government's main concern. Similarly, Dana (W32) and Sama (W39) questioned CIS for choosing immigrants based on factors such as age, education, profession, and financial situation over humanitarian criteria. Sama (W39) argued that Canadian immigration criteria in the skilled worker classification are only "material and not spiritual" and ignore applicants' needs, which she believes fails to respect immigrants' HD. She stated:

For example, consider that I am now 34 years old, and for some reason, maybe, I cannot live in my own country, and I want to immigrate. But weighting points based on age and education is not so great.

Students criticize the Canadian immigration system for selecting migrants based on Canada's interests over more humanitarian concerns. There is a link between dignity and being treated as an end in oneself (Syrian, 2011); therefore, when the Canadian government treats ISs as a means to an end, ISs may experience this as a threat to their dignity.

Many ISs were frustrated with seemingly arbitrary changes to immigration eligibility rules for PR during their studies. They also questioned Quebec's 2018 rejection of 18,000 PEQ applicants in order to apply major changes to the PEQ program. While many students acknowledged the importance of proficiency in Quebec's official language, they believed that returning the cases was not fair or reasonable and attributed the rejection to the students' lack of French language knowledge. For instance, Farhad (M33) discussed the changes to Quebec immigration policy and its consequences:

I applied for Quebec PR.... After some [about 18] months, I was asked to prepare some documents...After passing [another] year and a half of my submission, it was reported that they had [frozen] our cases; we came across 18,000 returned cases and my case was one of these... All my plans have been disrupted by these new conditions. I mean, the plan I made for my life during the last year and a half. Cases are being evaluated retroactively. In fact, when a law is passed today, it applies to all cases that have been in the queue for the past! When I submitted my application, I met all the requirements, but now they are judging my case with new law; you have violated my rights here!

Farhad's story demonstrates immigrants' vulnerability and the way their lives can be drastically affected by officials' capricious decisions. Participants felt that the impact on current and future ISs must be taken seriously in making policies. Otherwise immigrants' HD and basic rights will continue to be violated.

Yavar (M35), an international student who had graduated and returned to Iran, also discussed precarity in the PR application process:

Immigrants' situations are dissimilar; there are people who burned bridges behind them, sold their houses, spent all their money and investments, and were in a difficult situation to get PR.... Such people are so desperate and vulnerable when confronted with the immigration policies that they have to accept anything [any work] to keep their status and solve their family problems.

It is worth mentioning that Yavar works for an international human rights organization, and his responsibilities relate to migrant and refugee rights in Iran. Acknowledging diversity among immigrants, he emphasized that some immigrants are more financially insecure than others, and that therefore unpredictable policy changes may mean they will feel they must accept any type of work they can find. This could manifest a violation in students' HD because of not respecting their vulnerable and dissimilar situations when making policy.

In describing their experiences with CIS, some students expressed different levels of satisfaction with student visa policies compared to PR policies. For example, Nikan (M29) was satisfied with the visa process, but not the one for PR. He considered that CIS was "not treating immigrants in a just way" and found this was a violation of HD, perceiving the new French language policy as unfair. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with the media not covering the policy change.

Amir (M31) also criticized Quebec's new policy concerning PR, calling it discriminatory:

I do not have a good feeling about this system due to the 18,000 rejected immigration cases. When I arrived in Canada in October 2015, it was Mr. Harper's government. However, he intended to divide citizenship into two types,²⁸ and this was not good, this was against my HD. I immigrated to live here. I am considered a citizen here. I should be

²⁸ He refers to Harper's idea of two classes of citizens: "some whose citizenship can be removed for certain offenses, and others who, being real Canadians, might go to jail for their crimes but will always be citizens." (Plant, 2015).

treated like other people, and the government should commit to this. With the arrival of Mr. Trudeau, the situation has improved a lot. People have a stronger sense of accepting immigrants.

These new policies in Quebec [concerning very high levels of French proficiency as a requirement] have created problems for us again. I do not know what logic is behind their new policy and the immigration office does not explain it... What I understood is that they look at this issue with discrimination...

While admiring Canada's immigration approach to accepting immigrants from various nationalities, Matin (M34), a PhD graduate who has already received his PR, also questioned Quebec's new PR criterion as not respecting immigrants' HD. He explained:

About HD, I cannot say that I am fully satisfied... the current issue regarding making knowledge of French mandatory is not good because when you consider something only for a specific group, it causes discrimination. I think when they accept students with knowledge of the English language [into both anglophone and francophone universities in Quebec], they should not impose learning another language on them; maybe the government only wants the money that anglophone ISs bring for the system. This is against HD.

Matin believed that ISs were being treated in an undignified manner and being used to achieve government goals.

While French language knowledge plays a critical role in social integration in Quebec, ISs should not reasonably be expected to understand the complex historical and sociopolitical reasons that English is certain Quebec universities' primary language of instruction and communication despite the province's French proficiency requirement. It is assumed that students must have taken into account before their migration that Quebec's main language is French, but this is not necessarily the case, and it is a particularly unjust expectation where advanced French proficiency was not a mandatory requirement when the student decided to migrate.

Mina (W32) was shocked by an unexpected change in Quebec's immigration policy and by the discrepancy between the face that Canada portrays in the media and what the Quebec government practices in reality:

Our points were enough to apply for PR, but with the return of these 18,000 cases and the fact that they have now announced that we want to get more Francophone immigrants; I see that in practice they discriminate between Francophone nations and other nationalities, while in the media, they always advocate for democracy. I chose this country [Canada] for my immigration because I thought it is more immigrant friendly than other countries!

It should be clarified that Canada and Quebec's immigration requirements are distinct. For example, students can apply for CEC if they get a postgraduate job elsewhere in Canada. Nevertheless, these students thought their English would be valued in Quebec, particularly as it was sufficient to apply for PR in Quebec before the changes to the PEQ.

While many students found the policy change discriminatory, a few students were resigned to following the host country's rules despite significant negative effects on their lives. For example, Niki (W32) stated:

I do not feel good about this system because it is very racist and the fact that the French language is emphasized in this system forces immigrants to take a high French score to be able to apply for PR. — Now we cannot apply because we do not know French. Of course, it should be taken into account that we came to a country and we want residency; giving residency is a gift. While treating it this way may not be right, I do not know, but in any case we are the ones who have to coordinate with them...Our problem is that it is difficult for us to stay in our country [Iran] and we have to come to Canada and comply with Canadian laws and policies to get PR. The current situation in Iran has caused us to accept any Canadian policy in order to succeed in obtaining it.

Like Mina, Niki also didn't feel satisfied with the situation but resigned herself to the fact that to obtain PR in Quebec, she had to accept and adjust to any policy changes that might arise. She did not see any other viable choices for herself.

In agreement with Niki, Ali (M29) did not deny the extent to which the policy change put ISs in a precarious situation and negatively affected their HD. However, he accepted the justifications Quebec officials provided for their decision:

Many Iranians and I were very upset by the new changes, and we were under the influence of this decision, but it was a reasonable decision, and this change was acceptable.... Maybe Canadian officials had justified their decision, but in the end, this justification convinced me. Perhaps because the culture in Quebec is intertwined with the French language and they want to preserve this culture... Maybe the reason is that the... government wants some immigrants to go to other cities [immigrants to Quebec currently stay overwhelmingly in Montreal, and French is absolutely necessary to settle elsewhere in the province]... so, skills and expertise in all cities become balanced. In any case, the discussion of culture and familiarity with French culture seems to be more prominent than other reasons.

While the PEQ policy changes have affected ISs' lives from different angles, they can still apply for PR in other Canadian provinces. Yet, it might be a time and energy consuming task that puts these students in a more vulnerable position. Moreover, according to Ali and Niki's responses, while immigrants can resist changes in various ways, they might not be familiar with their rights as immigrants, and therefore end up resigning themselves to the situation however they may feel.

Lack of clarity regarding processing times

Many of the students interviewed highlighted the issue of lack of clarity for PR application processing times as having a huge negative impact on their lives and their dignity.

For example, Farhad (M33) shared:

In the Quebec immigration system, people are confused because there is no time limit defined by this system... From the day someone submits an application, the system should be able to provide a certain processing time to review the case. I even called the immigration agency and a respondent simply said that he had no information about the

processing time. So, what are you doing? Why do you have no information as someone who answers my phone call while you are a member of that organization? I believe that in CIS, HD is not exercised at all; but the process of getting PR is better in the federal system.

Farhad criticized immigration officials for not being adequately responsive to applicants and for being inconsiderate of their needs and their dignity, as the system leaves immigrants in a precarious living situation such that they cannot make plans for the future.

IISs identified issues related to security checks concerning particular nationalities that affected student visa or PR application processing times. For example, Mahtab's (W39) life was deeply affected by a slow security check. She could not get a student visa to visit her mother while she was seriously ill and, after her mother died, was not able to attend her funeral. She explained:

In my opinion, HD means that basic human rights should be respected by a society, meaning all the institutions and organizations must at least acknowledge your basic rights. In CIS, your rights are being violated. For example, last year my mother went into a coma due to an illness and I tried to get a visa to visit her; however, because the process is very slow in Canada and they have a lot of bureaucracy to give a visa, I could not get my visa while she was alive in Iran... Although the immigration officials knew that my mother had died in Iran and that my situation is exceptional, they asked me for a background [security] check. If I had not left Canada for three years, why would they need a background check [from Iran]? Just because I am an Iranian... I am upset with the immigration system, so I no longer want to apply for a student visa in Canada. All problems are due to the fact that we are Iranians... How can I leave my child alone here and go to Iran?... In CIS, our rights as citizens from Iran, and our human dignity are not respected... They did not sympathize with or support me... they should not procrastinate in such cases. The background [security] check should be for someone who travels [outside of Canada] regularly, not for me who only visited Toronto during the last three years. I believe that the rules and regulations should be clearly explained. If I had known that I had to do a background check, I might have chosen to leave Canada sooner, before my mother died; I have to be able to choose. It was very difficult for me, just when I needed to go to be beside my sister and father and cry on my mother's soil, to empty and rebuild myself.

Mahtab criticized CIS for not issuing her visa on time, experiencing this situation as a violation of human rights and a sign of the immigration system's lack of respect for the dignity of immigrants. She believed that if she had had certain information about her visa status, she would have been able to decide and plan for her travel to Iran; however, lack of information put her in a precarious situation that limited her freedom of movement. She also addressed other disadvantages of processing time ambiguity both for immigrants and for Canada:

I know several Iranians who left Canada due to this uncertainty about the processing time of getting a student visa. What distress if we want to go to Iran again... [concerning renewing their visas]. Moreover, financially we need to have a schedule for our life; we have to know when to get a house and when to pay it back, so our task must be clear... The relevant authorities should issue us a five-year visa to reduce some of the issues. Why don't they do this?

Mahtab opined on the negative consequences of processing time uncertainty for both immigrants and Canadian society, as it can discourage ISs from staying in Canada permanently. Saied (34) a graduate who lived in Canada for five years before returning to Iran after completing his PhD, also described his negative experience renewing his student visa to participate in a conference:

While in general, I give a good score to respecting HD in Canada, concerning CIS and getting a study permit and work permit, my case took two months longer than the regular processing time... The way the Canadian immigrant office treated me was not sympathetic.

Saied felt that his HD was violated by the immigration system's unsympathetic treatment.

Masih (M33) linked the issue of long processing time for Iranian applicants to the influence of international politics on the status of Middle Eastern immigrants in the West. He stated that, "this delay may be done deliberately to put pressure on Middle Eastern immigrants. Or they might have to devote this time to a security check because they want to make sure."

Further, due to a huge increase in the number of Iranian immigrants in Canada and their demonstrated contribution to the Canadian economy, ISs expect better services from CIS. For example, Sina (M31) criticized Canada's immigration services this way:

Every time we called immigration offices to follow up our cases, they said that our file is in the security check process, and the processing time was not clear. If you do not have enough employees, why not add them? We pay a lot of money for immigration. It has been said that 70% to 80% of Canada's income comes from immigrants, so they get good money. Why not spend it? This is the case for a country [Iran] whose number of immigrants in Canada is second or third. Why this behavior?

Sina believed that Iranian immigrants' rights were not adequately respected during the PR process, despite struggles to expedite their PR applications.

Lack of clarity regarding processing times restricts ISs' ability to make life plans. Immigration status precarity negatively affects ISs' psychological and financial wellbeing, and has negative consequences for Canadian society. Students have highlighted issues concerning security checks and discrimination against Middle Eastern immigrants as contributing to long processing times. Given the harmful consequences of uncertain processing times, IISs call for more defined timelines. Students consider the ability to make life plans and attend to emergencies as basic rights, and consider unclear and extended processing times to be a violation of their HD.

Discussion

Since 2014, Canada's citizenship and immigration policies have undergone many changes that directly affect ISs (Adams et al., 2014). These changes have created barriers and challenges in Canada's citizenship and immigration pathways, marginalize this population, and potentially make Canada a less attractive place to study (Tamburri, 2014). Studies concerning

IISs in Canada are few, and therefore this study offers a helpful contribution to our knowledge about the experiences, challenges, concerns, and needs of this population regarding CIS. Since HD is one of the motivational factors influencing IISs' decision to migrate (Razavipour & Hanley, 2021), exploring IISs' experiences of HD through their immigration trajectories is worthwhile.

Students criticized Canadian immigration criteria for selecting migrants according to Canada's interests over humanitarian reasons. In my study, Iranian students' interpretation of HD involved humanity, sympathy, and being treated with kindness and respect regardless of social position (Kianpour, 2016). IISs' experiences of HD with respect to CIS exclusive selection criteria were contrary to their expectations of humane and dignified treatment. IISs objected to Canada's selection of individuals with very specific (and changing) qualifications, and believed they were treated as objects to be used for Canada's economic ends, undermining their dignity.

IISs expressed a deep sense of frustration with what they considered to be arbitrary changes to immigration eligibility rules, creating difficulties during their studies as well as barriers to PR (Al-Haque, 2017; Covell, et al., 2015), putting them in a precarious situation (CBIE, 2013; System et al. 2018). The students' central objection concerned Bill 9 and Quebec's rejection of 18,000 applicants due to new French language proficiency requirements. The students considered unexpected changes to immigration eligibility rules a violation of their HD through limiting their ability to plan for the future. The results of the interviews echo Sayer (2017), who associates HD with individual autonomy, being taken seriously, and acknowledging people's vulnerability. The IISs found that in being unable to plan for the future, their personal autonomy became completely dependent on Canadian government policies that could be changed at any time without notice.

The study results also correspond to Kianpour's (2016) research, in which students defined HD as freedom, meaning having individual autonomy and the power to choose. IISs perceived the new PEQ criteria for French language knowledge proficiency as linguistic discrimination (Tannock, 2011), which is prohibited by the Canadian Charter.²⁹

IISs' perceptions of discrimination and dignity contradict the findings of Taylor's (1994) study, in which francophones made claims regarding the value of French culture in Quebec, addressing the affirmation of equal status in relation to Canada's anglophone majority. IISs found the Quebec government's purpose for francization to be a threat to their HD. Almost all the IISs interviewed argued against Bill 9 and its retroactive rejection of applicants. Most felt that this policy had huge negative impacts on them. While IISs did not deny the extent to which the PEQ policy change put them in a precarious situation, few students found Canadian officials' justifications behind the new policy reasonable. These students considered Canadian citizenship an honor and accepted the Quebec government's justification regarding recognition of French language and culture. As a result, they did not perceive this policy change as discriminatory, which corresponds with the interpretation of equality in Quebec in Taylor's 1994 study.

Many IISs claimed that their applications had far exceeded expected processing times and criticized the lack of clarity regarding PR and, in some cases, student visa applications. The students disclosed that this situation put them in a precarious situation financially and psychologically, and potentially inhibited them from remaining in Canada after graduation. The students also discussed security checks and international politics as factors affecting the length of

²⁹ According to the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (2021) "Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap." (p. 17)

processing time for immigrants with certain nationalities. They felt that the Canadian immigration system not only did not support or sympathize with immigrants experiencing emergency situations, but also that changing rules and uncertain processing times deny immigrants' basic human rights and freedom of movement.

Conclusion

Although ISs have made great contributions to Canada's domestic economy and internationalization aspirations, barriers and challenges to PR and student visa renewal made ISs in our study feel "unwelcome, unwanted, and undervalued" within CIS, reflecting Al-Haque's findings (2017, p. 8). The repeated experience of "bordering" – jumping through immigration hoops for student visas, postgraduate work permits, and especially for PR – keep IIS in a state of precarity, with constraints on both their current activities and ability to plan for the future. Highly skilled migrants may decide to return home or seek opportunities in other countries rather than navigate these barriers (Al-Haque, 2017). The issue of islamophobia and political conflicts between Iran and Canada distinguish this study from other literature concerning ISs in Canada, adding another layer of complexity.

Giving voice to ISs' experiences of HD is a key element of considering ISs as bearers of rights, and as equal in value and worth to citizens. National policies governing migration must respect HD, and immigration policy reform must prevent rules or treatment that place immigrants' HD at risk.

Based on IISs' experiences with CIS, the length of time to evaluate PEQ migration applications is overly long compared to the CEC program, which causes vulnerability and

insecurity for applicants. By considering the precarious status of ISs, which also affects their integration, the Government of Quebec should implement legal remedies that facilitate and expedite evaluating immigration applications. Canada's current social policy approach prioritizes economic needs over human ones (Graham et al., 2012, p. 11). This is reflected in IISs' experiences with CIS, including experiencing a lack of sympathy and consideration. IISs have called for CIS to remedy policy to encourage respect of immigrants' HD and humanity. Accomplishing this will require challenging the power establishment and evaluating whether Canadian immigration policies are in line with human needs and Canada's stated commitment to respecting HD.

By the time ISs apply for PR, they have already been assessed twice regarding their security background and integration into Canadian society. Accordingly, IISs ask for more consideration from Canadian policymakers regarding the PR pathway and the process of renewing student permits and visas. By extending student visas, students could freely travel without jeopardizing their standing in university programs, where many have studied for several years. Students feel that they have been left stranded in Canada for lack of these basic rights, negatively affecting their HD.

The Canadian immigration system must develop mechanisms to facilitate improved visa and PR processing, ensuring that the steps are clear and accompanied by precise timelines. Moreover, an independent group should be established to control, evaluate, and make recommendations regarding the functions of the immigration system.

Canadian institutions working with Iranians – and likely many other ISs – should be aware that the pursuit of HD may inform ISs' choices about coming to Canada and, ultimately, whether to stay after their graduation. It is thus essential to offer educational, settlement, and

migration services that promote autonomy, dignity, and respect. Canada does not currently provide immigration and settlement services to ISs, but rather only for PRs. Universities are responsible for these services but do not necessarily have the skills or knowledge to deliver them, so it is important that universities and the settlement sector (with the help of IRCC) work together.

According to IISs' understanding, as well as policy analysis regarding university international students offices' responsibilities, these offices do not have any authority to interfere with students' immigration applications. MPs do not have any written authority to interfere either, even in emergency cases. Therefore, while some students find the current situation satisfactory, many students referred to a lack of official institutional support.

As a minority group in terms of their relative social and economic power regarding social policy (Graham et al., 2012, p. 125), ISs should have a voice to reflect the reality of their experiences. Since ISs do not have a right to vote, the electoral democracy cannot represent them and immigration policies are therefore made by non-migrants for non-migrants. However, by forming a community, ISs can transfer responsibility for their challenges to policymakers through their representatives. During this process, social workers as a pressure group can support ISs by involving them "not as passive objects of charity, recipients of aid, or needy vessels awaiting professional intervention but rather as fully realized subjects, full of capabilities, potential, and human rights" with a right to HD (Androff, 2018, p. 181).

Further, social workers can relate policymaking processes to social impacts through 1) expanding community consciousness regarding current policies and their potential consequences; and 2) forming community feedback to policies with negative outcomes (Graham et al., 2012, p. 204). For example, the results of this study could be understood as a warning for the Canadian

system that aims to retain these skilled immigrants; however, most of the students have applied or intend to apply for Canadian PR (Hojati, 2011). Accordingly, further study is recommended to explore the factors affecting their decisions.

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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As each manuscript has a discussion section linking the findings to the literature most relevant to the topic of the manuscript, in this section, a summary of the discussion, as well as an overall contribution to social work discipline are presented. By conducting a qualitative study that included interviews with 24 IISs (12 men and 12 women) as well as a review of policy documents, I sought to identify the determinants that led Iranian international students to migrate to Canada. Simultaneously, I explored IISs' post-migration experiences to assess whether they were aligned with their pre-migration expectations as well as how students related their pre-and post-migration circumstances to their HD. I analyzed Iranian international students' experiences of HD in Canada, at Canadian universities, and within the Canadian immigration system.

Human dignity as a factor in the experiences of international students

This thesis proposes a novel conceptual framework for looking at international students' migration trajectory. I created a human dignity framework for use in this study after reviewing a selection of the available Canadian and Iranian empirical literature on students' understanding of HD. This framework includes the concepts of freedom, respect, self-respect, humanity, self-esteem, equality, human rights, honor, fulfillment, and God-given gift. I chose the concept of HD for two main reasons: 1) the concept of HD with respect to human rights is critical in both Quranic lessons and the Iranian constitution, and 2) HD is the basis of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and a primary concept in the *Canadian Bill of Rights*. Given the significant role that this concept plays in both countries, it is worth studying how individuals' HD has been respected in practice in Iran and Canada.

IISs linked their motivations for migration to HD in the context of their rights to freedom of expression, socio economic rights, and the concepts of respect, equality, honor, and fulfillment. Most students I interviewed said that their HD was at risk in Iran. With the exception of some experiences of marginalization, IISs' descriptions of their experiences in Canada show that most of their migration aspirations in relation to HD were realized at Canadian universities. However, a number of IISs' stated encounters with the Canadian immigration system. Moreover, in reference to students' experiences of HD within Canadian universities, IISs have varying perceptions of HD. For instance, while they acknowledge the presence of equality and meritocracy at Canadian universities, some students also argue that ISs are marginalized due to their religion, race or language; their experience of this issue is very dependent on the province and type of university in terms of language preferences, and cultural diversity. For example, students who studied at McGill expressed less experiences of marginalization due to lack of French proficiency than students at the Université de Montreal.

Students' motivations for and experiences of migration with respect to the HD framework demonstrate that concepts play a role individually in students' migration trajectory, but the intersection of the concepts also affect ISSs' migration path. For instance, women students perceive their HD was respected in Canada because of their sense of 'equal' status and high level of connection with their supervisors and their professors' recognition of their efforts and competence, highlighting their sense of equal status in power dynamics between supervisors and students, but also how it relates to their sense of 'fulfillment'. Moreover, the students perceived that they were treated with 'respect' and 'humanity', as their different academic status with supervisors has not influenced their relationships. Furthermore, the role of gender, as a social

construction, in forming Iranian women students' experiences of HD is noticeable since most women students, compared to men, recognised these differences.

Overall, my research highlights that IISs' perception of HD is not only an individual process, but a dyadic, context-bound process that is mediated by others' reactions and treatment, with the latter feature more emphasized by the students. Further, the results of my study indicate that determinants exist more at a micro level and that personal factors have significant effects in making a decision to study abroad and forming experiences in Canada. This is a counterexample to neoclassical migration theory (Czaika & Reinprech, 2022), which tends to place economic factors at the center of the migration decision-making process for those from non-western countries. Moreover, the study's results also contrast to another of Hofstede's (2011) theories of "cultural dimensions" as a characteristic of developing countries where collectivist culture is dominant, and pursuing personal goals is less the norm.

Looking at the current situation in Iran, it seems that there is a gap between the prescribed culture (or the one that is preferred by the dominant discourse in Iran) and what many Iranian people have accepted; this issue is illustrated by the IISs whose understanding of HD tended toward the secular and human rights-oriented conceptions of HD. For example, none of the students referred to the notion of God-given gift that was addressed by seminary students in Iranian another study while discussing HD. The seminary students believed that HD actualization depends on the believer's endeavor to obtain it which is also close to Islamic and Iranian officials' discourse of HD. However, in my study, IISs' perceptions of HD root in their actual/real everyday experiences, rather than abstract ones. Moreover, while in theory, HD is considered very significant in the Islamic and officials' discourse in Iran, many students found their HD at risk when they were living in Iran, which could lead students to dissociate

themselves from religious/officials' interpretation of HD. This difference also exists between the Iranian officials' interpretations of other rights such as freedom or equality and what many Iranian people, particularly youth believe. This discrepancy between prescribed norms and accepted ones may have alienated students from their society, who feel they no longer belong to Iran, and hence decide to migrate. This is what Durkheim (1950) calls “social anomie”; that is, a transition phase when common values and norms during one period are not accepted as valid anymore, but new ones have not yet been established.

Moreover, while most IISs stated that their HD was not respected in Iran, it is important to consider whether the students who did not leave Iran have the same perception regarding their HD, or whether there are other factors at play (other than access to tangible or intangible resources, which some students in Iran do not lack) contributing to students' decision to migrate involving their character or psychological traits, which may make them more vulnerable in unrest situations but which they may not be fully aware of. While this research aims to depict how IISs connected their migration trajectory to their HD, understanding the reasons for why and how students perceive the same situations differently is critical for both students and policy makers.

Gender as a factor in the experiences of IISs

Further, I undertook a gender analysis of students' reports about their motivations and experiences within Canadian higher education institutions. The results reflect slight differences between men and women students, but show that seeking HD was critical for all IISs' decisions to migrate. IISs linked their motivations for migration to HD in the context of their rights to freedom of expression, socio economic rights, and the concepts of respect, equality, honor, and

fulfillment. Most students I interviewed said that their HD was at risk in Iran. With the exception of some experiences of marginalization, IISs' descriptions of their experiences in Canada show that most of their migration aspirations in relation to HD were realized at Canadian universities. However, a number of IISs' stated encounters with the Canadian immigration system and within universities contradict this picture.

The results of the gender analysis showed that, unlike men ISs, for most women students not only were family and friends not influential in the decision to migrate, but in few cases, family was actually an obstacle to migration. Despite this, the women students were able to assert themselves and realize their ambition to study abroad. This result counters Hofstede's (2011)'s theory of "cultural dimensions" about the prevalence of masculine culture in developing countries. According to Hofstede (2011), these societies' norms impose strong differentiation between genders, and being ambitious or assertive is mainly a masculine characteristic while women should be modest and caring. As mentioned in Manuscript I, both genders related their motivation for migration to a search for security. Women students, like their male counterparts, referred to their need for financial and occupational security. This is in spite of the fact that under Iranian civil law, women are not the breadwinners in the family. Further, both genders discussed their experiences of equality and freedom within Canadian universities, but women students expressed admiration for Canadian universities because of the prevalence of women's empowerment, while men students referred to the presence of meritocracy as a strong point in the same context.

Limitations

Like all research, this study has some limitations, the identification and acknowledgement of which can open avenues for further research. The first limitation is related to some characteristics such as the French language social context, the higher level of universities in terms of being culturally diverse and receptive as well as government policy in Quebec, which makes it distinct from the rest of Canada. Given this difference, some aspects of the results of this study may not be applicable to ISs in the rest of Canada. Second, while IISs enter Canada with a student visa, the current circumstances in Iran have influenced Iranian students' motivations, which are mostly related to factors other than continuing education. Therefore, the study's results may not apply to other ISs who mainly come to Canada to continue their education, since students' drivers for migration affect their overall expectations and experiences. Moreover, a psychological assessment of factors influencing migration was beyond the scope of my PhD project, but such an assessment is recommended in order to gain a richer understanding of ISs' motivations and experiences. While I tried to choose participants of different ages, disciplines³⁰, ethnic/class backgrounds as well as various religious beliefs, due to the time limit, I could not analyse the intersectional nature of IISs' motivation and experiences with respect to the mentioned factors in depth. Lastly, accurately translating students' quotes from Farsi to English was challenging in regard to subjective concepts that can be subject to different interpretations. However, I aimed to address this issue through adopting peer review and seeking the help of native English translators.

³⁰ While the participants were recruited from various disciplines, because most IISs in Canada are in engineering, in my study they are represented more than other disciplines.

The rest of this section will provide study recommendations and the implications of my dissertation for social policy, research and social work theories and methodologies.

Implications for social policy

Insight into ISSs' HD-related experiences is key to comprehending their worth as equal to that of citizens. Immigration policy and policy reform must include guidance on respect for immigrants' HD and prevent approaches that place their HD at risk. For example, the evaluation period for PEQ migration applications is significantly longer than that for the CEC program, which causes or contributes to increased vulnerability. Not only is there the extra step of needing to obtain a Certificat de sélection du Québec, but IRCC takes much longer to evaluate applications from Quebec once they reach the federal level (AQAADI, 2022). In order to minimize applicants' vulnerability in keeping with respect for their HD, both levels of government should facilitate and expedite the evaluation of immigration applications. In Canada, the approach to immigration prioritizes economic/market needs over human ones (Graham et al., 2012, p. 11). IISs' negative experiences with the Canadian immigration system reflect this reality. Policy reform will require determining whether Canadian immigration policies are aligned with Canada's stated commitment to respecting HD.

IISs are seeking improvements to the PR pathway, including the student permit and visa renewal process. Recently, IRCC has begun emitting student visas which cover the usual length of a student's program (IRCC, 2022). However, as the time for finishing a program may vary according to different challenges and barriers, as well as IS capacities, this period may take

longer for many ISs. IRCC and MIFI (for CAQ³¹) should consider this issue while making policy in regard to student visas. In this way students could freely travel without concern for their standing in university programs. To improve visa and PR processing, the Canadian immigration system must ensure that the steps are both clear and accompanied by precise timelines. Further, an independent advisory committee related to the international student immigration program should be established to evaluate, and make recommendations regarding it. A potential format for such a committee would be tripartite: 1) Government (Canada/Quebec and representatives of sending countries); 2) students (represented through student federations) and; 3) universities and student employers.

It is important for institutions in Canada working with Iranians and other ISs to be aware that the decision to study in Canada and potentially to stay after their graduation are both informed by HD considerations. In light of this, educational, settlement, and migration organizations should offer services that promote dignity and respect. For example, Canadian universities are responsible for student immigration settlement services, without necessarily having the ability to deliver them effectively. It is therefore important that universities work with the settlement sector (with the help of IRCC) to ensure appropriate services. Canada has an interest in attracting international students as permanent residents, and it would therefore make sense for IRCC to fund and support on-campus settlement services. Further, Canadian universities should consider cultural awareness with respect to international students when hiring staff. This author's understanding is that university international student offices and MPs do not have any authority regarding students' immigration applications, even in emergency cases. It is

³¹ The CAQ is for a maximum of 49 months (IRCC, 2021).

therefore understandable that many international students have identified a lack of official institutional support.

HD is an important component in the choice to pursue studies abroad. Findings from this study, as indicated in manuscript I, demonstrate that many young people feel they must migrate in order to protect or secure their HD. Iranian officials who wish to prevent brain drain would do well to consider the degree to which the host country offers conditions of HD in comparison to the current situation in Iran. It is recommended that Iranian organizations hoping to encourage policy change hire staff from among students of both genders, and various ethnic, religious, political, educational and disability-related backgrounds. Including a diversity of perspectives helps stakeholders to change current policies in order to address students' actual needs. A demonstration of Iranian students' demands for policy changes is the current anti-government protests in Iran which may require a revolution in the current dominant political discourse.

Moreover, according to students' claims in manuscript II, third-party or expert supervision would ensure that guidance and services for ISs was appropriate, particularly for vulnerable students.

Implications for social work

As a group with relatively little power to affect social policy (Graham et al., 2012, p. 125), there should be a way for ISs to have their experiences heard. ISs cannot vote and therefore are not represented in Canada's electoral democracy. Immigration policies are not made by or for migrants. However, ISs can have policymakers address their concerns through their representatives. Social workers can provide support to ISs in this process by involving them “not

as passive objects of charity, recipients of aid, or needy vessels awaiting professional intervention but rather as fully realized subjects, full of capabilities, potential, and human rights" with a recognized right to HD (Androff, 2018, p. 181).

Social workers can make the link between policymaking processes and social impacts through 1) raising awareness about current policies and their possible ramifications; and 2) helping to elicit and direct community feedback regarding policies with negative outcomes (Graham et al., 2012, p. 204).

Politicians tend to treat all immigrants as a group with no individuality. While immigration policies related to international students must be applied equally during the policymaking process, the characteristics of international students with different nationalities must be taken into account. Social workers are a type of pressure group that involves social policy in Canada (Graham et al., 2012). By acknowledging diversity among international students, social workers influence policymaking or policy reform through collecting information about ISSs' social, cultural, and political backgrounds, as well as similarities and differences in their motivations to migrate to Canada. Social workers can then make this information available to the policy makers.

In terms of services for international students either in the university or in settlement agencies, hiring social workers with an international background can tap into valuable insight about the actual challenges and limitations faced by ISSs. As an insider, a social worker with a background of migration may have an easier understanding of how international students experience precarity in their lives, affecting students' personal, family and socioeconomic situation - and therefore should be taken into account in social work interventions. Moreover,

social workers can get firsthand information by communicating with different international students' communities at universities.

Implications for research

Research participants are important resources with valuable information to contribute towards a true understanding of an issue. Recent literature on international students has focused on the heterogeneity of this population, yet many studies still treat them as a homogenous group. This study provides insight into the motivations of Iranian international students specifically, but conducting research on international students from a variety of nationalities, backgrounds, and religions is necessary to understand student migration and human dignity more broadly.

Further, students were interviewed early in their migration journeys, and it would be important to follow up in later years with them in order to know whether they achieve their goals and how their social support system influences the choices they make along the way and the experiences they encounter. Such experiences may include a more in-depth understanding of the Canadian labour market and social mores, both of which still demonstrate significant gender bias. Women Iranian international students will likely discover that Canada will not allow them to entirely escape gender bias, as discussed in manuscript I and II, and both women and men will almost certainly encounter ethno-racial and religious discrimination in Canada (Schirle & Sogaolu, 2020). Accordingly, conducting research at different stages of ISS' journey, including

after graduation when they achieve some work experiences in Canada, is important to reaching a comprehensive understanding of ISSs' experiences in Canada.

The issue of temporary and therefore precarious status should also be explored in this context. As non-citizens, international students face economic limitations. These limitations can pose a risk to both ISSs' financial and stress-related psychological security in Canada, as well as their social status, and make them vulnerable to exploitation. Violating the conditions of their work permits can lead to loss of legal status in Canada. It is therefore important to identify: how ISSs understand this precarity in the short and the long term; how these stresses and experiences impede their sense of fulfillment; and how this affects any plans to stay or leave after completing their studies in Canada. Further exploration is recommended to better understand IISs' experiences in different contexts (job market, everyday life, or political settings) and whether migration has been fulfilling .

IISs have expressed that their HD has not been respected within the Canadian immigration system, (see manuscript III) or, sometimes, Canadian universities given their experiences of marginalization (see manuscript II). Nevertheless, most IISs have applied for or expressed an intention to apply for Canadian PR (Hojati, 2011), a situation I also found among my participants. Accordingly, further study is necessary to explore the factors contributing to their decisions to stay in Canada.

Despite gender pay inequality and social discrimination in Canada, international Iranian students tend to have a positive perception of gender equality in Canada, as mentioned in manuscripts I and II. More research is required to explore the reasons behind this view and how this view might evolve as they spend more time in Canada.

Finally, according to manuscript II, some students believe that the HD of professors is being threatened in Canadian universities, in large part due to their perception of market forces introducing pressure to act or perform in particular ways. More research should be conducted to explore whether instructors themselves consider their HD to be at risk, so that this can inform future policy.

Some of the challenges that IISs face may be related to misinformation or lack of adequate information about the actual policies governing institutions and organizations, as well as the basic requirements of living in a host country, particularly with respect to Francophone culture in Montreal if IISs are more English-speaking. Therefore, providing pre-arrival information is critical to limiting ISs' challenges and precarity during their studies in Canada. This information could be provided by independent institutions before students' migration.

Since I have initiated my PhD project, IISs have been influenced by a series of unprecedented events, such as unexpected changes in Canada PR policies, severe economic sanctions against the Iranian government which caused a significant drop in Iran's national currency in 2018, Qasem Soleimani's assassination³² and consequently a fear of war between Iran and US, the shooting down of airplane flight PS752, COVID 19, and recently many Iranian youth and students protesting against the Iranian Islamic government, demanding a secular government that would provide freedom, gender equality, as well as social, psychological, economic and political security in Iran. The significant feature of this protest is that it was launched by Iranian women due to the death of an Iranian girl, Mahsa Amini, who was arrested by Iran's morality police for not sufficiently respecting the country's dress codes. Iranian women

³² One of the government's supreme leaders who was killed by Trump's order.

believe that women's human dignity and basic human rights have been violated by the current Iranian regime.

What seems notable in all these incidents is a sense that individuals' HD has been undermined and threatened in different ways. People who live inside and outside Iran have been seriously affected by such negative experiences and feelings, which lead many inside Iran, particularly university students, to think about migration yet many people still prefer to stay in their home country. It is worth paying attention to the factors influencing their choices and decisions, and my research suggests that the quest for human dignity is likely playing a central role.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

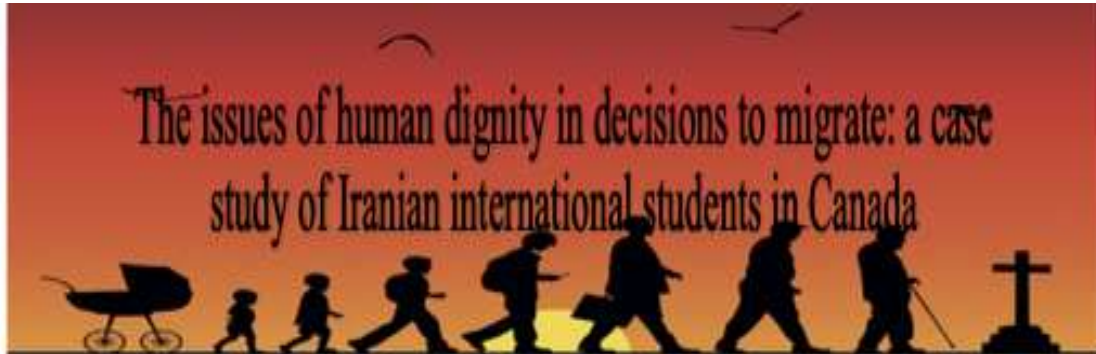


Photo: Shutterstock

Are you an international student studying at University in Montreal?

Have you lived in Canada for more than 2 years?

Are you in a range of age between 25 and 45?

Would you like to share your experiences and/or perceptions of human dignity in decisions to migrate?

If so, I would be interested in hearing from you!

To say thanks!

You will receive an honorarium in the form of a \$10 Visa gift card for in-depth interview and a \$10 Visa gift card for participation in the focus group as a token of appreciation.

Who am I?

I am a PhD candidate in the School of Social Work at McGill University. I am supervised by Dr. Jill Hanley. For doing this research, I have a Research Ethics Board (REB) approval.

What is the study about?

The aim of this study is to obtain further understanding about the experience of human dignity among Iranian international students living in Montreal. As experts of your own life story, I would invite you to share your experiences of human dignity before and after migrating to Canada for improving issues in this regard.

What's required?

Only your time and willingness to participate.

The interview and focused group will be in Farsi.

How long will all this take?

First interview: you will meet with me for approximately one hour.

Focus group: you will meet with me and up to 9 other participants for approximately one hour.

Where/when will the study take place?

This study will be taking place at various times during 2019. Interviews can take place at any place that is more convenient for you.

Contact information

If you would like more information and/or to see if you are eligible to participate in this study, please contact:

Erfaneh Razavipour Naghani

PhD Candidate

McGill University

School of Social Work

Email: Erfaneh.razavipournaghani@mail.mcgill.ca

Phone (514) 2970171

This research is supervised by Professor Jill Hanley in the School of Social Work.

Email: jill.hanley@mcgill.ca

Tel: (514) 398-4046

Appendix B: Study Information and Informed Consent Form

Title of Project:

Issue of human dignity in decisions to migrate: A case study of Iranian international students in Canada

Purpose of Study

You are being asked to take part in an interview and optional focus group for the purpose of a doctoral dissertation. The aim of this study is to obtain further understanding about the experience of human dignity (defined in the literature as involving such concepts as respect, a God-given gift, human rights or freedom) among Iranian international students living in Montreal. As experts of your own life story, I would invite you to share your experiences of human dignity before and after migrating to Canada for improving issues in this regard.

How do I participate?

Participation in this study is voluntary and will take place in Montreal in 2019. There are two separate phases for participation in the study that will, with participant's permission, be audio-recorded for accuracy in later transcribing:

1) The first face-to-face interview with Erfaneh Razavipour Naghani, the doctoral researcher of this study (approximately 60 minutes): During this interview, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic form (approximately 5 minutes) and then asked to respond to questions regarding your experiences and understanding of HD such as details related to your motivations to decide to migrate to Canada as an international student, your experiences after migration to Canada and how you find this migration (your reflection).

2) An optional focus group with up to 9 other participants with Erfaneh Razavipour Naghani (approximately one hour): You will be invited to participate in a discussion with other participants that will help to explore various factors contributing to your decision to migrate and your life experiences after migration which you will share with other participants in a group discussion. This stage also will be used to review the researcher's preliminary analysis of research findings with you to check for accuracy and additions and gather any reflections you may have had after your participation in the first interview.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and all your data will be permanently destroyed unless you specify otherwise at the time of withdrawal. If you wish to withdraw, please notify the doctoral researcher or doctoral supervisor (contact information is below). If

publication has occurred, the participant can still withdraw her contributions to the study from future analysis and publication.

Compensation

You will receive an honorarium in the form of a \$10 Visa gift card for in-depth interview and a \$10 Visa gift card for participation in the focus group as a token of appreciation. You will receive your honorarium at the start of each of our meetings regardless of whether you decide to withdraw from the study.

Benefits/Risks

Since reporting and narrating memories and past experiences that have been particularly challenging could cause distress, you should only participate in this study if you feel that sharing some of your stories will not cause you any pressure or harm. Furthermore, you may find satisfaction in sharing your experiences and story with another individual who has lived through similar situations. You may also find satisfaction in knowing that you are contributing to a body of knowledge through thesis, posters, presentation, etc., that may directly or indirectly affect policy change to improve HD among students in Iran or Canada through the participation of this study.

Confidentiality

Once audio-recordings have been transcribed, they will be deleted immediately. Identifying information will be removed from transcripts and saved as a separate file to be analyzed. The original transcripts with the identifying information will be kept securely in a password-protected file with the doctoral researcher for seven years from the date of completion. At this point all identifying materials related to the study will be permanently deleted and/or destroyed. However, due to the nature of a focus group, confidentiality of participants is not fully guaranteed as participants will hear what others are saying. In order to respect privacy, we ask that all participants refrain from sharing information with others outside the group.

Consent Questions

Audio-recordings:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| Do you allow your voice to be audio-recorded during interviews? | Yes | No |
| Do you agree to take part in a focus group? | Yes | No |

If yes, do you allow your voice to be audio-recorded during the focus groups? Yes No

Post-study Participation:

The results of this study will be disseminated in my thesis, some conferences and journals, do you permit the doctoral researcher to contact you to share the results after the end of the study (e.g., to share publications or invitations to attend presentations, conferences)?

Yes No

Contact Information

For questions and concerns, please contact the doctoral researcher or doctoral supervisor of this study:

Doctoral Researcher

Erfaneh Razavipour Naghani

PhD Candidate

McGill University

School of Social Work

Email: Erfaneh.razavipournaghani@mail.mcgill.ca

Tel: (514) 297-0171

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Screening Questionnaire

Title of Project: Issue of human dignity in decisions to migrate: A case study of Iranian international students in Canada.

Opening Script

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. In order to assess your eligibility for this study, I would like to ask you just a few brief questions. Would that be alright with you? Your responses will be kept confidential.

1. Are you between 25 and 45 years old at this time? Yes
No

2. To which gender identity do you most identify? Woman _____ Man _____
Transgender _____ Prefer not to answer _____
3. Have you lived in Canada for more than 2 years? Yes No
4. Are you an international student who are studying at one of the Montreal universities without having permanent residency or citizenship status?
Yes No
5. Do you consider yourself more: Religious _____ or Secular _____ ?
6. What is your educational degree: (last degree completed in Iran) _____ In which discipline?
_____ a. To what degree are you studying now? _____ In which discipline?

7. Will you be living in Canada during 2019? Yes
No
 - a. Are you available for an in-person interview?
Yes No
 - b. The second phase of this study involves a focus group. Do you feel comfortable talking in small groups (approximately 9 other participants will be in the room)? Yes
No

If a participant answered “yes” to all the above questions, she/he is eligible to participate in this study.

Closing Script

To those eligible: *I'm pleased to inform you that you are eligible for participation in this study. Thus, I would like to schedule our first interview. When might you have time to meet?*

To those not eligible: *Unfortunately, you are not eligible to participate in this study but I appreciate your willingness to contribute your time with me today. All of your information will be destroyed immediately.*

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

Title of Project: Issue of human dignity in decisions to migrate: A case study of Iranian international students in Canada.

Participant Pseudonym: _____

- 1) To which gender identity do you most identify? Woman _____ Man _____ Transgender _____ Prefer not to answer _____
- 2) What is your age? _____
- 3) What is your marital status? Married _____ Single _____ Divorced _____ Widowed _____
- 4) Do you have children? _____ If yes, the number _____
- 5) When did you leave Iran? _____
- 6) How long have you lived in Canada? _____ years
- 7) Education: (last degree completed) _____ The degree you are studying now _____ The discipline you are studying now _____ The discipline you studied in Iran _____
- 8) What is your present religious affiliation? _____ Nothing in particular _____
 - a) If you believe in any type of religion, do you participate in religious ceremonies? _____ Do religious daily practices such as praying? _____ Believing in Hijab _____ Wearing Hijab (for women) _____
- 9) Do you have any job in Canada now? _____
- 10) What was your job in Iran? _____
- 11) What is your ethnic background? _____

For questions and concerns, please contact the doctoral researcher or doctoral supervisor of this study:

Doctoral Researcher
Erfaneh Razavipour Naghani
PhD Candidate
McGill University
School of Social Work
Email: Erfaneh.razavipournaghani@mail.mcgill.ca
Tel: (514) 297-0171

Appendix E: In-depth Interview Guide

Title of Project: Issue of human dignity in decisions to migrate: A case study of Iranian international students in Canada.

Date and time of interview: Month _____ day _____, 2019 at _____:_____ AM/PM

Location: _____

Research participant pseudonym: _____

Opening Script

Thank you very much for participating in this study. I appreciate the time you're taking today to speak to me about your experiences of human dignity (HD) in Canada. The purpose of this stage of research is to gain an understanding of your experience of HD after and before your migration to Canada.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I want to also confirm that you understand the contents of the consent form and that you consent to have this interview audio recorded [leave space for questions]. When I have the interview transcribed, all identifying information will be removed and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym of your choice [leave space for participant to select a pseudonym]. You are free to end the interview and take a break at any time. If there are any questions you don't want to answer, please feel free to let me know. Also, as a token of appreciation for spending your time with me during this interview, I wanted to provide you with a \$10 visa card.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| a) Confidentiality and consent information reiterated: | Yes |
| No | |
| b) Demographic questionnaire completed: | Yes |
| No | |
| c) Honorarium provided: | Yes |
| No | |

Do you have any questions or is there anything I can clarify for you at this time? Okay, let's get started then...

Questions:

1. What did a typical day look like while living in Iran? Let me know about your past experiences before coming to Canada and provide an example of the events that led you to decide to migrate.

2. Please tell me as much as possible about your decisions to migrate to Canada.

3. How do you come to this decision to come to Canada as an international student?
 - a. Is your decision to leave Iran related to family, economic, political, social and/or spiritual reasons?
4. What is your experience as an international student in Canada?
5. How did you find the Canadian educational system compared to Iranian ones?
 - a. Concerning respecting HD, what are their differences and similarities?
6. How did you find the Canadian job market compared to Iranian ones?
 - a. Concerning respecting HD, what are their differences and similarities?
7. How did you find the Canadian immigration system?
 - a. Concerning respecting HD, what are their differences and similarities?
8. How did you find and understand migration? Does your migration give meaning to your life particularly regarding your evaluation of your HD?
9. Do you find any differences between men and women's experiences of migration and their motivation behind it?
10. Where do you see yourself going in the future?

Ending Script

Thank you very much for sharing your story with me today. I wanted to let you know that your contribution will be used to provide direction for future doctoral dissertation research and it is my hope that this will also result in contributing to policy and practice. If you would like a copy of the final report of this project, I am happy to forward it to you. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel welcome to contact me. But before we formally end this interview, do you have any questions or concerns at this time? I hope to see you at the focus group and will be in touch soon to go over the scheduling details.

d) Requests a copy of resulting publications: Yes No

For questions and concerns, please contact the doctoral researcher of this study or the doctoral supervisor of this study:

Doctoral Researcher
 Erfaneh Razavipour Naghani
 PhD Candidate
 McGill University
 School of Social Work
 Email: Erfaneh.razavipournaghani@mail.mcgill.ca
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