



Migration to Kharej: Dreamed Expectations of Iranian Migrants vs. Experienced Actualities of Living Abroad*

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Abstract

The growing number of migrants from Iran to the Western World during the past decades represents opportunities as well as challenges for both migrants and host communities. One of the issues that challenge Iranian migrants who move to Western countries is their unrealistic ideas about their presumed destination. This study aims to measure how accurate were the expectations of Iranians about life in Germany before their migration. We conducted two quantitative surveys among Iranians already living in Germany, as well as Iranians who intended to migrate to Germany. Comparing the results of the two sets of data, the study argued that in most cases (74%) the expectations before migration were over-optimistic. In 17% of the cases, they were realistic, and only in some cases (9%), they were under-optimistic.

Keywords: Germany, Iran, Kharej, Migration, Overestimation, Over-optimism Survey

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1. Introduction

Naseraddin-Shah the Iranian King of the Qajar dynasty was the first Iranian king to travel to the West. When he traveled to Germany, Belgium, England, France, and other European countries in 1873, he was astonished by the financial and technological advances of the West (Salahshoor, 1397 [2018 A.D.]). Perhaps it was at the time of Qajar kings that the ancient terms “Farang” and “Farangestan” were coined to refer to Europeans and their countries, representing the higher socio-economic position of the (western) European countries compared to Iran. At around this time, the first proselytized Iranians had started to migrate to the West and this was possibly the first brain-drain in the Iranian history (Shahghasemi, 2017).

At the time of Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) the interaction between Iran and Western countries significantly increased and more Iranians traveled to the West for business, tourism and education. In 1928, the Iranian parliament ratified a plan to send Iranians abroad to continue their education (IRNA, 1400 [2021 A.D.]). The Iranians who interacted with these countries and the students who lived in Europe and North America started a new wave of influence at least on the Iranians’ perception of an ideal socio-economic and political situation.

Later, at the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, and perhaps due to the significant sociopolitical changes in the country, new waves of emigration started, which continuously increased the number of Iranians living abroad (Haji Yousefi & Behmard, 1385 [2006 A.D.]). Despite economic hardships in Iran, Iranians have lately developed a fascination with consumerism (see for example Shahghasemi, 2021) and hence, they have become more inclined to live in another country that provides more consumerist means to its

citizens. The Iranians who lived in the West – whether they returned to Iran or stayed in the host countries – continued to make an impact on the perceptions of the Iranians regarding the West, especially the rich countries of Western Europe such as Germany and France, as well as Canada and the United States.

At the same time, the Western countries, especially the United States actively tried to improve their image as the land of progress, happiness and prosperity. Using its globally influential media and Hollywood movies, the United States has been able to portray itself as a dreamland, in which anyone would want to live (Ibbi, 2013). Such impact can be greater among people who have higher trust in the Western media (Sabbar & Hyun, 2016) This utopian image can arguably have an impact on the way people of other countries think of the quality of life in the developed world as well as in their own countries. This seems to have become a characteristic of a glocalizing world (Sabbar & Dalvand, 2018).

Nowadays the term Farang is less often used in Iran. Most Iranians use the term *Kharej* to address countries outside of Iran; the word “kharej”, in Farsi literally means outside or abroad. Nevertheless, in the Iranian social and cultural context, this literal translation does not cover the associations linked to it. In this context, kharej points to a place where life is significantly better. The word usually refers to the West and going to kharej comes with expectations for “higher education, progress, and success” (Khosravi, 2017, p. 87). In this sense, kharej is an idealized place where the society, economy, and political processes are structured correctly in comparison to the perceived situation in Iran (Khosravi, 2008).

Iran, being the counterpart to this utopic kharej, can be

associated with negative attributes. For some people, the situation in Iran is related to lack of job opportunities and chances to build a life and a family and hope for progress and success in the future. In this context, the socioeconomic problems in Iran act as **push factors** and the perceived advantages of living in Kharej act as **pull factors** and feed into migration intentions. In 2020, a study by Azadi, Mesgaran and Mirramezani (2020) listed the major push factors of the Iranian migration; It followed the structure proposed by Van Hear, which addresses *predisposing*, *proximate*, *precipitate*, and *mediating* factors (Van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2018).

For Azadi et al. (2020), some of the *predisposing* push factors in the Iranian context include: “lower per capita income compared to advanced economies”, “low quality of education compared to the developed countries”, “rise of labor mobility, urbanization, individualism, and secularism”. As *proximate* drivers, he mentions “economic stagnation, chronic unemployment, and bleak economic outlook, decay of the government institutions, loss of social capital, prevalence of endemic corruption and crime, environmental challenges in large cities, particularly air pollution” (Azadi et al., 2020, p. 14).

The aforementioned study, mainly focuses on push factors, only mentioning a limited number of pull factors under “mediating drivers”. This is while push and pull factors are both involved in the process of migration. The negative perception of the situation in one’s own country on the one hand, and a romanticized utopic perception of living in kharej on the other, can for some people become a powerful driving force for migration. A study conducted on the Iranian students in Malaysia showed that the perception that situations were better compared to Iran was the root of migration

intentions to Malaysia (Kazemi, Baghbanian, Mahmoudi Maymand, & Rahmani, 2018).

In fact, regardless of the level of satisfaction at home, the perception that life could be better elsewhere can create a motivation to leave. A study in 2016 argued that the strongest factor in migration intentions among Iranian health workers were “reaching out for better life” (Asadi et al., 2017). If kharej is not a specific country, investigated by the person who intends to migrate, but rather an “elsewhere with a future,” it can result in “longing to be anywhere but here”. This ambiguity can make it easier to fantasize and *build castles in kharej*, so to speak.

1. 1. Idealized Pull and Disappointment

In spite of the positive expectations, created by an idealized perception of kharej, emigration is, in most cases, a highly challenging endeavor. It is described as “uprooting the past and confronting an unknown future” (Peters, 2011, p. 52). Emigrants are uprooted from their habitual social and cultural context and need to adjust to a new context. In many cases, this process will require a reconsideration of one’s own identity and, in consequence, deprivation of self-esteem (Han, 2016), which can have negative psychological and physical impacts on the migrant.

Migrants may experience various difficulties, including discrimination, language barriers in communication, and economic problems (Mogharrab, 2018); a shock of disappointment, resulting from overestimation would certainly deteriorate the situation. An unfulfilled expectation for significant improvements in life upon migration can lead to major disappointment, even if the migrant’s

situation becomes relatively better in the host country. This can result from an underestimation of the quality of life in one's own country, an overestimation of the quality of life in the destination country, or a combination of both.

Discrepancy between imagined and prospective lives of migrants can cause problems, at both personal and social levels, and in the giving and receiving societies. At a personal level, such discrepancy can lead to various problems, including depression (Hosseini et al., 2017). Individuals, planning to emigrate to another country are probably making one of the most important decisions of their lives, and without sufficient and reliable information, they are prone to make wrong decisions.

Social satisfaction depends on the actual quality of life in comparison to the expected circumstances. A strong perception that life is better elsewhere can potentially cause significant social problems by creating widespread dissatisfaction in the home country. If the reference is an imagined dreamland, the problem can be more serious, because the improvement in the individual's own country would not necessarily lead to more satisfaction. As financial, economic, or political situations improve at home, the imagined situation in the hypothesized dreamland can further improve as well and the person can remain unhappy.

Statements heard from people can provide evidence that the abovementioned possibility can, in fact, be a reality. For example, an Iranian Taxi driver in Tehran, explaining the astonishing social and economic developments in Germany, claimed that he knew for a fact that traffic laws in Germany were heavily respected to the point that if at 2 am, a dog crossed the street while the traffic light was red, it would be shot by the police, so that the perfect discipline and order would not be disturbed in the city.

On the other hand, the receiving country can be negatively affected as a result of the overestimation of its life standards by people who immigrate there. An incoming migrant, who had a relatively clear understanding of the destination country and made his/her best decision would function better within that society, and as a result would better benefit the host country. On the other hand, disappointment of immigrants, which results from pre-migration overestimation can lead to health-related problems or lack of motivation, which can become a burden for the host country.

The objective of the current study is to determine how different is a migration destination for two groups of people: Iranians who intend to emigrate there, and Iranian migrants who experienced living there. In this article, Germany was chosen to be the example country to represents the concept of kharej for the Iranian participants. Clearly the two sides of the comparison are subjective understandings, not objective realities, meaning the study will not examine the actual possibilities or problems in Germany; it will compare the presuppositions of a group before migration, with the understandings of another group after actually experiencing life in Germany.

Germany was chosen as the example of kharej for the following reasons. In 2021, the Iranian Foreign Ministry published a report on the Iranian population living outside of the Iranian territory. According to the report, 319,000 Iranians live in Germany. This represents the second biggest Iranian Community in Europe (only outnumbered by the United Kingdom with 400,000 Iranians) and the fifth biggest Iranian community worldwide (1. United States: 1,500,000, 2. Canada: 400,000, 3. United Kingdom: 400,000, 4. United Arab Emirates: 357,000) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Iran), 1399 [2021 A.D.]).

According to the numbers provided by the Federal Statistics Office of Germany, the number of Iranian people living permanently within the borders of Germany is smaller than the number given by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, but amounts to 237,000 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020). Germany is not only a popular migration destination based on the size of the Iranian community living there, but also a favorite one for Iranian migrants due to its perceived high standards of life. Germany, as a wealthy European country, is a migration destination that provides European standard of living and possibly – if the immigrant lives there long enough to become a German citizen – the freedom to live and work elsewhere in most of Europe.

In order to determine the congruence between expectations and actual experiences, it is necessary to conduct the study on two different groups: a representative sample (1) of Iranians living in their own country, who are willing to migrate to Germany; and (2) of Iranians living in Germany. The first group will provide the research with information on the prevalent images and expectations among the potential emigrants in the pre-emigration phase. The second group will enable the study to compare the answers of the first group to actual first-hand information of the Iranians that experienced both the process of emigration and the life realities and circumstances in Germany.

If the difference between the pre-migration expectations and post-migration perceptions prove to be significant, the current study could provide a valuable source of knowledge for the authorities of both sending and receiving countries. Such information could be used in the national and demographic plans in these countries. More importantly, the results of the current study could be used as educational material to inform people who are

planning to migrate, especially for the Iranians with intentions to emigrate to Germany.

1. 2. Hypothesis

It appears that many Iranians who are interested in migrating to the West rely on vague and utopian understandings of life in the developed world. Arguably, even the people who have a more accurate understanding of life in Western countries can be affected by the overly positive image in the minds of the public around them. Therefore, the hypothesis of the current study is as follows:

RH: The imagined quality of life in Germany by the Iranians who are interested in emigrating to this country is significantly higher than the quality of life perceived by the Iranian immigrants who have lived there for at least six months.

Clearly, the quality of life cannot be easily measured as a general indicator. Instead, more specific sub-concepts will be measured and compared. The details will be discussed under the research methodology section of the paper.

2. Literature Review

The present research aims to determine the accuracy of the expectations of Iranians willing to migrate to Germany, regarding their post-migration life. The related literature will be briefly reviewed under two titles: The Iranians, perception of the West, and migration.

2. 1. Iranian Perception of the West

The contact between Iran and the West dates back to the antiquity. The earliest literary sources concerning the mutual perception date back to the Roman Empire and are also authored by early Roman historians. “On the Iranian side, the scarceness of evidence is nearly total” (Bagot & Whiskin, 2020, p. 36) at this period. One of the rare sources about that time, however, authored in the 10th century AD is Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, which is believed to represent a relatively neutral approach to Iran’s pre-Islamic history. This source suggests, that Europeans were perceived as “figures of fun [...] with limited intellect and moral turpitude” (Bagot & Whiskin, 2020, p. 46). Nevertheless, the scarcity of sources at that time does not allow more than speculation.

Concerning the early Islamic period, we still face scarcity of reliable sources, especially concerning public perceptions of the West. Apart from individual perceptions of Iranian rulers and elites regarding the West, it remains uncertain, how much can be said about the image of the average Iranian citizen vis-à-vis the West (Bagot & Whiskin, 2020, p. 46); although it can be stated that among Muslims, Europeans were generally assumed as infidels and thus impure people (Savory, 1985, pp. 2–5). This was probably also the case for Iran. During the reign of the Qajar dynasty and in the face of two painful military defeats against Russia and Napoleons plan to conquer India through Iran, the perception of the West changed and it started to be perceived as technologically superior. There were also attempts to copy the West (Savory, 1985, pp. 4–5).

In this period Iranians were systematically sent to Europe for educational motifs, which led to the introduction of Western ideas and concepts in the Iranian academic and professional arenas, and resulted in the development of a dichotomy in the Iranian society,

consisting of two groups with opposing goals: “the *Ulama*, and the Western-educated intellectuals” (Savory, 1985, p. 5). From this point forward, two opposing perceptions of the West have been competing in Iran: “the perception of the intellectuals, that the West is desirable because it is the source of rational thought, of democratic constitutionalism, of secularism, of the emancipation of women, and so on; and the perception of the *Ulama*, that the West is undesirable for precisely the same reasons” (Savory, 1985, p. 6).

Even though in the following period, the encounters with the West were dominantly negative, only by the mid-20th century, a shift in the perception of the Iranian elites towards the West can be detected. Mossadegh, Iran’s democratically elected prime minister was overthrown in a coup organized by the U.S. and the U.K. which is often defined as a starting point of the enmity against the West among the Iranian elites. Several other reasons are assumed as major motifs in this context: “a growing sense of threat to Iranian culture and national identity from the overbearing Western cultural and economic domination, disillusionment with Western and universal philosophies of liberation, and resentment of Western support for Muḥammad Reza Shāh’s oppressive regime” (Litvak, 2021, p. 34). The enmity toward the West and especially the United States peaked during the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and became a “major pillar of the Islamic Republic’s official ideology” (Litvak, 2021, p. 40).

Examining the perception of the West in Iran during the past twenty years, one can refer to the Iranian anthropologist, Shahram Khosravi, who qualitatively researched the issue. He suspects the prevalence of a geographic hierarchization, subordinating the home country, Iran, to a glorified and idealized image of Western countries. A common belief that he found among Iranian youths

was “how badly everything is carried out in Iran compared with the kharej where everything is correctly managed” (Khosravi, 2008, pp. 2-4). Thus, kharej becomes a synonym of superiority in contrast to the deficient Iran (Khosravi, 2008, p. 102). This comparison might have led to a magnification of the West and a depreciation of the home country, which represents both, a push factor to leave Iran and a pull factor from the West.

Furthermore, in the Iranian discourse, the West is assigned with attributes such as “humanism, [...] as well as materialism, rationalism, positivism, empiricism, imperialism, scientism, secularism, individualism, pragmatism, and utilitarianism” (Litvak, 2021, p. 35), which are especially well-regarded among young Iranians. In this context, it must be mentioned that it is assumed that within this discourse, the West is not to be understood geographically, but rather as a notion for “wealthier and more technologically advanced nations and, most importantly, as a cultural and ideological concept” (Litvak, 2021, pp. 34–35).

2. 2. Migration

Generally, the academic literature on migration can either be assigned to macro-level approaches (e.g. Gardner, 1981) that emphasize on broader migration patterns and focus on impacts of and on societies, cultures, economies, etc., or to micro-level approaches, that emphasize on smaller units, such as a family or an individual. The latter emphasizes on the individual process of migration and contains the procedure of migration decision making (De Jong & Gardner, 1981, p. 2), which is the subject of the current study. The micro-level approaches, can be divided to pre-migration and post-migration phenomena. The latter is dominated by

psychological researches, describing the impact of migration on the mental and physical health (e.g. Kasl & Berkman, 1983; Carballo & Nerurkar, 2001; Mansel & Hurrelmann, 1993).

These approaches emphasize the challenges and the traumatizing experience of displacement and their effects on the mental and physical health of the migrated individual (Carballo & Nerurkar, 2001, p. 557): “The process of migration is a process of physical transition from one society to another. Through it, the immigrant is taken out of a more or less stable social system and transplanted into another” (Eisenstadt, 1952, p. 225). In this context, difficulties in the process of acculturation are only one example for the many topics covered by researchers.

The present study is closer to the field of decision-making. Petrus Han structures the process of decision making into five phases: Social circumstances and the perception of pressure, motif formation through answering major questions concerning the migration, search for information, willingness to take the risk and the decision (Han, 2016, p. 199).

At the individual level, it is assumed, that every potential migrant has certain expectations and images of the destination country, which often do not comply with the actual prevailing conditions. This precondition of migration might lead to disenchantments and disappointment and further complications. In addition, it is assumed, that instead of following rational and logical arguments, potential migrants tend to rely on advices given by family members and friends (Goodman, 1981, p. 137; Han, 2016, p. 202; Fiedler, 2017). Another reoccurring finding of previous research suggests that certain independent variables correlate with specific migration behaviors. In this context it is

assumed, that the level of education (Han, 2016, p. 203) and a higher social status (Goodman, 1981, p. 138) of the respective migrating individual increases the probability of a more rational approach and the consideration of a wider range of sources for the search for information.

Communication and digital revolutions have provided people with easy access to information including images and videos of other countries, which may influence the decision-making process of migrants. Research should answer whether Goodman's assumption that migrants rely on personal contacts rather than rational information is still relevant, or the advent of the online world has changed the dynamic of information-gathering and decision-making for migrants (Hamel, 2009, pp. 34-35).

Online networks have densified migration networks (cf. Dekker & Engbersen, 2014) and seem to be acting as an enhancing factor for migration. In addition, they are assumed to play a key role in the integration and success of migrants in their destination country (Elsner, Narciso, & Thijssen, 2013; Poros, 2011). However, Elsner argues that online networks might lead to misinformation and consequently decrease the success of migrants (Elsner et al., 2013, pp. 35–36). Well integrated migration networks are those that provide reliable information on the situation and the circumstances of the destination.

Whether misinformation and unrealistic expectations lead to over-optimism or underestimation in the context of migration is controversially debated and seems to be different from one context to the other. Some researches ascertain an underestimation of economic possibilities in the destination country: “we find striking evidence that emigrants tend to underestimate the employment likelihood and the income they can earn abroad” (McKenzie,

Gibson, & Stillman, 2013, p. 24) while others determine that the possibilities are overestimated (Hoxhaj, 2015). Apart from the correctness of financial success in the destination country, it is claimed that even in cases in which migration increases financial success and well-being, the subjective well-being is decreased (Stillman, Gibson, McKenzie, & Rohorua, 2015).

3. Research Methodology

The present research aims to determine to what extent the expectations of Iranians with intentions to migrate to Germany are congruent with the experiences of those who have already migrated to and have lived in Germany. In addition, it aims to detect variables that indicate a correlation with the accuracy of the expectations. Since the study is comparative in nature and involves generalization, it needs to adopt a quantitative approach. In addition, since we need to rely on individuals' self-report, surveying would be a proper method of data-gathering.

However, to create a proper questionnaire for a quantitative survey, a proper set of questions/items need to be developed. Such items should cover the social, political or economic factors that influence one's perception of the quality of life in his/her own country or his/her migration destination. Therefore, in a first step, qualitative interviews were conducted with the two groups of Iranians to extract the most common fields of expectation and experience among the participants. The interviews were continued with more people until statistical saturation was reached.

The qualitative phase can enable the study to determine the main pre- and post-migration concerns and considerations among our

target groups. It can provide the research with the material necessary to design two sets of questionnaires – one for Iranians in Iran and the other for Iranians in Germany. In the course of the initial qualitative interviews, the Iranians in Iran will be asked for their *expectations* of the migration processes and their future life in the destination country, while the sample consisting of the Iranians living in Germany will be asked for important *experiences* regarding the process of migration and during their life in Germany.

In order to achieve comparability between the two sets of results - expectations and experiences - the questionnaires will exclusively contain questions with pre-formulated answers and in the form of multiple-choice questions. Since, the study aims at finding significant relationships between the accuracy of expectations and other variables, a number of questions will be added to the questionnaire given to Iranians in Iran. These questions will address (1) the respondent's information source regarding emigration and the target country, (2) if they know someone in Germany and (3) their media usage. Furthermore, the additional questions will address (4) the respondents' level of education, (5) their reasons for emigration, and (6) proximity of the intended emigration.

Following the qualitative phase, two questionnaires will be created based on the results of the interviews, one for the participants in Iran and one for the participants in Germany. The questionnaires will be administered to the participants online through internet-based platforms. Every question regarding the respondents' expectations or experiences will be a statement that the respondents would rate with a 5-point Likert scale. As an example, a question for the Iranians in Iran can be: "My financial

situation will improve in Germany”. The respondents would choose an item from “I do not agree at all” to “I completely agree”.

In order to make comparison possible, each statement in the questionnaire for Iranians in Iran will have an equivalent in the questionnaire for the Iranians in Germany, and vice versa. The only difference between the questions in the two questionnaires will be the necessary difference in the wording of the statements, since the Iranians in Germany are supposed to answer questions regarding their experience not their expectations. Therefore, the aforementioned statement in the questionnaire for the Iranians in Iran, would change to the following statement for the other questionnaire: “My financial situation improved in Germany”. The respondents would use the same Likert scale to answer the question.

3. 1. Sampling

Based on Cochran’s formula, for large populations (including populations with over hundreds of millions of members) to have a confidence level of 95% and an interval of 5, the sample size should include at least 384 randomly chosen members. The current study aimed for a sample containing at least 200 participants in Germany and 200 participants in Iran. A larger sample size could be ideal but due to the fact that the study targeted very specific members of the two societies (Iranians willing to emigrate to Germany and Iranians who lived in Germany for at least 6 months), and because of the limitation of the research fund, a significantly larger sample size was not feasible. As it will be mentioned under data analysis, the actual sample group who filled the research questionnaire was larger than the targeted 400 people.

The participants in Germany were chosen randomly through social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp. The researchers approached a major Iranian cultural association in Germany and their questionnaire was introduced to the members by the administration. Furthermore, the questionnaire was published in several social media groups related to the Iranian community in Germany. In addition, the respondents were asked to further distribute the questionnaire in order to help the research.

The participants living in Iran were partly reached in a similar manner, through social media networks of Iranians, willing to migrate. Additionally, several German language institutes in Teheran were visited and their students who had emigration intentions were asked to fill the questionnaire. They were also asked to distribute the questionnaire especially among people from other cities in Iran.

3. 2. Data Analysis

A total of 222 people filled the questionnaire that was aimed at the Iranians living in Iran. From this number 210 people showed the incentive to migrate and were thus evaluated as valid participants of the study. The youngest participant was 18 years old, while the oldest was 44. Exactly 50% of the participants were female, and the other half were male.

Among the Iranians in Iran, as for their source of information on migration *family and friends in Germany* played a major role. For 46% of this group, it was the first and for 42% it was the second source. For this sample, another main source of information can be identified as *the Internet*, as 37% mentioned it as their first and 35% as their second source. In this group 47% of the participants

had a Bachelor's degree, while 33% had a Master's degree. Only 13% had no higher degrees than a high school diploma and 4% held a PhD. The majority of the participants (57%) were planning to migrate within the following twelve months.

The second sample, the Iranians in Germany, consists of 250 individuals, from which 245 provided the study with valid filled questionnaires. 56% of this sample were female while 44% were male. The oldest participant of this sample was 68 and the youngest 19 years old. The majority (53,5%) of the participants lived in Germany for less than five years.

3. 3. Qualitative Results

In the first phase of the research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. It was done to develop a list of issues to be used to create the questionnaires. The interviews were continued until statistical saturation was reached. For the interviews with Iranians in Iran, saturation was reached after seven interviews, while with Iranians in Germany it was reached after five interviews. The result of the interviews was a list of the following 19 items, which could be divided into positive and negative groups. The positive items are the ones that someone willing to migrate is looking forward to experience.

From the viewpoint of an Iranian person willing to emigrate to Germany, once he/she has settled in Germany he/she will experience financial improvement and experience the admiration of the Iranian culture, etc. The complete list of the positive issues is as follows.

1. Financial improvement
2. Financial stability
3. Admiration of the Iranian culture
4. Common sense of humor
5. Acceptability and value of Iranian certificates (e.g. university degrees)
6. Equality of chances
7. Obtaining a German passport
8. Finding friends
9. Equal treatment of all people in the society
10. Improvement of social status
11. Inner Calmness
12. Free choice of university
13. Free choice of education field
14. Social freedom

There is a list of 5 negative issues/feelings that the people willing to migrate thought that they may experience in future. Those already in Germany said that they had experienced these issues/feelings after their migration.

1. Climatic issues
2. Language issues
3. Bureaucratic issues
4. Loneliness
5. Desire to return

3. 4. Quantitative Results

In order to make the comparison between the two groups (Iranians in Iran = group-I & Iranians in Germany = group-II) the five possible answers of the Likert scale were assigned with numeral

values from 1 to 5. The higher numbers indicate higher agreement. In order to understand the data, different methods were used, which will be discussed in the following section.

3. 5. Significant Relationships

The respondents in Iran answered 19 Likert-type questions to specify how much they expect to experience any of the 19 positive and negative issues discussed before. Iranians in Germany answered similar questions to specify how much they actually experienced those 19 issues. The hypothesis of the study is proved correct if at least for some of the 19 items there are significant differences between the expectations of the Iranians in Iran and the experiences of the Iranians in Germany. For instance, if there is a significant relationship between the degree of loneliness expected by group-I and the degree of loneliness experienced by group-II, we could argue that the Iranians overestimated or underestimated the loneliness they would experience after emigration to Germany.

Therefore, the quantitative data analysis should include testing 19 relationships. For every relationship under question one side of the equation is a nominal variable with two possible values (willing to migrate vs. already migrated) and the other side is a numeric value derived from each of the 19 Likert-type answers (loneliness, financial stability, etc.). Strictly speaking, these are ordinal values, although it is common to treat them as numeric values. To test the significance of the relationships between a nominal and a numeric variable, we will calculate Eta square using SPSS.

The analysis of the 19 relationships resulted in 19 Eta square values. It is common that if the value of Eta square is more than

0.06, the strength of the relationship (AKA the effect size) is considerable. The following table indicates the relationships with Eta squares higher than 0.06.

Table 1. Where Expectations and Experiences are Significantly Different

Positive Items	
Improvement of social status	0.117
Financial stability	0.060
Easily finding friends	0.103
Easily obtaining German passport	0.061
Negative Items	
Language problems	0.066

Source: Authors

It is common to consider the association strong if the value of Eta square is over 0.14; values over 0.06 indicate medium strength effect sizes. Therefore, all of the significant relationships found here are medium size. However, two items of Improvement of social status and easily finding friends have relatively larger effect sizes. Based on the findings, Iranians who consider migration to Germany tend to overestimate the improvement of their social status, their financial stability, as well as their ability to easily find friends in Germany. They tend to underestimate two items, one positive and one negative. They tend to underestimate easily obtaining the German passport, as well as the degree of difficulties they might face regarding the language of the host country. Therefore, at least regarding four items, the Iranians tend to be overoptimistic. Therefore, the hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

It was argued that some of the five considerable effect sizes indicated overestimation and some indicated underestimation. To

make such judgements, two elements had to be considered: (1) if the item is positive or negative, and (2) if group-I expected it more or less than group-II. For instance, we argued that Iranians overestimated the improvement of their social status. First of all, improvement of social status is a desirable item and secondly while nearly 70% of the Iranians in Iran expected it to be the case after their migration, less than 39% of Iranians in Germany reported that to have happened. Therefore, there seemed to be overoptimistic ideas regarding post-migration improvement of social status.

For similar reasons, *financial stability* and *easily finding friends* were areas for which Iranians in Iran showed an over-optimism. In the case of easily finding friends, while over 37% of group-I expected to be able to easily find friends, only 17.1% of the members of group-II reported to have experienced finding friends to be easy. A different case is *language problems*. Unlike the three previously mentioned variables, the numbers received from group-II are lower than the numbers received from group-I. While less than 30% of the Iranians in Iran expected to be faced with difficulties regarding the German language, more than 54% of the Iranians in Germany reported that to be the case. Even though the direction of the data is different here, it should be categorized as overestimation or overoptimism due to the fact that language problems are not desirable.

In the case of difficulties for obtaining the German passport, expectations were less optimistic than the actual experiences. Less than 13% of the Iranians in Iran expected that it would be easy to obtain a German passport, while nearly 35% of group-II experienced it to be easy. Since obtaining the German passport is a desirable item in the list, it should be categorized as underestimation or under-optimism.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to elaborate on the extent to which the expectations of Iranians willing to emigrate to Germany match the actual experiences they could have after their migration. The results indicate that at least regarding four concepts, Iranians can be significantly overoptimistic. There was also one issue about which Iranians were under-optimistic. The four issues about which Iranians seemed to be overoptimistic are related to very significant areas in life. One could argue that financial stability, social status, and finding friends affect (if not cover) almost every social, economic and psychological aspect of life. Someone's disappointment in all of these areas after migrating to another country, could have very serious consequences for the migrant, the people related to them and the host country. Furthermore, language problems can almost affect every aspect of one's social and professional life.

At the same time, the fact that this research did not find significant relationships regarding the rest of the 19 items ($19 - 5 = 14$) indicates that the expectations of most of the respondents were more or less correct about these issues. Iranians in Germany reported more loneliness compared to what Iranians in Iran expected, and they experienced more bureaucracy than what Iranians expected. However, the statistical analysis of the data did not show a significant difference in these cases. Therefore, the differences between perceptions and reality might be considered reasonable for many migrants and they may be therefore able to cope with the difficulties of immigration. Studies with larger sample sizes may shed more light on these issues.

The results obtained in this study are in line with those presented in Khosravi (2008)'s article, in which he claimed that in the minds

of Iranians, an overvaluing misconception of ‘*the West*’ is prevalent (Khosravi, 2008). Therefore, the fear that in many cases, migration of Iranians to Germany can be accompanied by disillusion and disappointment might be real. The disappointment of overoptimistic expectations might add to the natural difficulties of migration. Furthermore, unrealistic high expectations may have an impact on the pre-migration decision-making process. While assessing and evaluating factors in favor and against migration, over-optimism regarding the migration-process and regarding the situation in the destination country does not provide a reliable basis for a reasonable decision. Thus, overoptimistic expectations harbor a risk with extensive consequences for both, the respective migrant, and the host community. Further research ought to be done to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of certain variables on the pre-migration expectations and imaginations of Iranians.

Since misconceptions of migrants can affect the citizens of the sending society as well and those of the receiving country; it seems that it is the responsibility of the both countries to do their best to better inform migrants about the difficulties followed by migration, as well as the realities of the migration destination. For instance, it would be in the interest of the German government to assess over-optimism among people who are going through the process of migration and try to solve the issue even before the migrants arrive in Germany. It would be reasonable for countries to reject applicants simply because of over-optimism, but in many cases effective ways of informing the applicants about the realities of life in the host society could reduce the negative effects of pre-migration over-optimism.

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