



Original Research Paper

Intense cultural assimilation in the Iranian diaspora: A sociological explanation

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Abstract

Migration is not merely geographical relocation but a multi-layered process of redefining identity and rebuilding social relations. This theoretical article examines the sociological tendency toward intense cultural assimilation in parts of the Iranian diaspora. The objective is to move beyond reductionist and normative explanations and present a multi-level explanatory model for understanding this phenomenon. This research is a theoretical article (Conceptual Paper) organized through a systematic literature review and conceptual analysis. Classical and contemporary works related to the sociology of migration, diaspora studies, theories of cultural adaptation, status theory, symbolic capital, and media were critically examined. Key concepts were extracted and organized within three analytical levels: pre-migration contextual factors, post-migration mediating mechanisms, and status and identity consequences. The findings demonstrate that intense cultural assimilation cannot be reduced merely to cultural self-loss or individual preferences. Instead, it results from the interaction of historical, cultural, media, and status-related factors. Pre-migration cultural deposits, transnational media representations, structural ruptures, status pressures in the host society, and the effort to accumulate symbolic capital in transnational social fields interact within a causal-interactive structure. This pattern represents one of several possible cultural adaptation strategies among the Iranian diaspora. Intense cultural assimilation is not a sign of absolute passivity or lack of agency but rather a positionally rational strategy for gaining positive distinction and accumulating symbolic capital in transnational social fields. Alongside this pattern, hybrid, multi-layered, and transnational identities are also observable among different sections of the Iranian diaspora. Understanding this phenomenon requires simultaneous attention to social structures, lived experiences, and the status calculations of social actors.

Keywords: Iranian diaspora, intense cultural assimilation, cultural adaptation, status anxiety, positional agency, symbolic capital, hybrid identity

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مقاله پژوهشی

همسان سازی فرهنگی شدید در دیاسپورای ایرانی: تبیینی جامعه‌شناختی

رضا غلامی[✉]

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چکیده:

مهاجرت صرفاً به معنای جابه‌جایی از یک سرزمین به سرزمینی دیگر نیست، بلکه فرایندی پیچیده و چندلایه است که با بازتعریف هویت و بازسازی روابط اجتماعی همراه می‌شود. این مقاله نظری به بررسی گرایش به همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید در بخشی از دیاسپورای ایرانی از منظر جامعه‌شناختی می‌پردازد. هدف آن، عبور از تبیین‌های تقلیل‌گرایانه و هنجاری و ارائه الگویی چندسطحی برای فهم این پدیده است. این پژوهش در قالب یک مقاله نظری (مقاله مفهومی) و بر پایه مرور نظام‌مند ادبیات و تحلیل مفهومی انجام شده است. در این راستا، آثار کلاسیک و معاصر در حوزه‌های جامعه‌شناسی مهاجرت، مطالعات دیاسپورا، نظریه‌های انطباق فرهنگی، نظریه منزلت، سرمایه نمادین و رسانه به‌صورت انتقادی بررسی شدند. سپس مفاهیم کلیدی استخراج و در سه سطح تحلیلی سامان‌دهی شدند: عوامل زمینه‌ساز پیش از مهاجرت، سازوکارهای میانجی پس از مهاجرت، و پیامدهای منزلتی و هویتی. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید را نمی‌توان صرفاً پیامد از دست رفتن هویت فرهنگی یا حاصل ترجیحات فردی دانست. این پدیده در نتیجه تعامل مجموعه‌ای از عوامل تاریخی، فرهنگی، رسانه‌ای و منزلتی شکل می‌گیرد. رسوبات فرهنگی پیش از مهاجرت، بازنمایی‌های رسانه‌ای فراملی، گسست‌های ساختاری، فشارهای منزلتی در جامعه میزبان و تلاش برای انباشت سرمایه نمادین در میدان‌های اجتماعی فراملی، در قالب الگویی علی — تعاملی بر یکدیگر اثر می‌گذارند. از این‌رو، همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید را باید یکی از راهبردهای ممکن انطباق فرهنگی در میان دیاسپورای ایرانی دانست، نه تنها راهبرد موجود. در نهایت، این مقاله استدلال می‌کند که همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید نه نشانه انفعال مطلق یا فقدان عاملیت، بلکه راهبردی عقلانی و وابسته به موقعیت اجتماعی برای کسب تمایز مثبت و انباشت سرمایه نمادین در میدان‌های اجتماعی فراملی است. در کنار این الگو، اشکال دیگری از هویت، از جمله هویت‌های ترکیبی، چندلایه و فراملی نیز در میان گروه‌های مختلف دیاسپورای ایرانی مشاهده می‌شود. از این‌رو، فهم این پدیده مستلزم توجه هم‌زمان به ساختارهای اجتماعی، تجربه‌های زیسته و محاسبات منزلتی کنشگران است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: دیاسپورای ایرانی، همسان‌سازی فرهنگی شدید، انطباق فرهنگی، اضطراب منزلتی، عاملیت موقعیت‌مند، سرمایه نمادین، هویت ترکیبی

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Original-Forschungsarbeit

Intensive kulturelle Assimilation in der iranischen Diaspora: Eine soziologische Erklärung

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Zusammenfassung:

Migration bedeutet weit mehr als eine bloße geografische Verlagerung. Sie ist ein vielschichtiger sozialer Prozess, in dem Identitäten neu ausgehandelt und soziale Beziehungen neu gestaltet werden. Der vorliegende theoretische Beitrag untersucht die Tendenz zu einer intensiven kulturellen Assimilation in Teilen der iranischen Diaspora aus soziologischer Perspektive. Ziel ist es, reduktionistische und normative Deutungen zu überwinden und stattdessen ein mehrstufiges Erklärungsmodell für dieses Phänomen zu entwickeln. Die Studie ist als theoretischer Beitrag (Conceptual Paper) angelegt und basiert auf einer systematischen Literaturschau sowie einer konzeptionellen Analyse. Hierzu wurden klassische und aktuelle Arbeiten aus der Migrationssoziologie, den Diasporastudien, den Theorien kultureller Anpassung, der Status Theorie, der Theorie des symbolischen Kapitals sowie der Medienforschung kritisch ausgewertet. Die zentralen Konzepte wurden identifiziert und auf drei analytischen Ebenen strukturiert: migrationsvorgelagerte Kontextfaktoren, vermittelnde Mechanismen nach der Migration sowie status- und identitätsbezogene Folgen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass intensive kulturelle Assimilation weder ausschließlich als Verlust kultureller Identität noch als Ausdruck individueller Präferenzen verstanden werden kann. Vielmehr entsteht sie aus dem Zusammenspiel historischer, kultureller, medialer und statusbezogener Faktoren. Kulturelle Prägungen vor der Migration, transnationale Mediendarstellungen, strukturelle Brüche, Statusdruck in der Aufnahmegesellschaft sowie das Bestreben, symbolisches Kapital in transnationalen sozialen Feldern anzusammeln, greifen in einer kausal-interaktiven Dynamik ineinander. Intensive kulturelle Assimilation stellt somit eine von mehreren möglichen Strategien kultureller Anpassung innerhalb der iranischen Diaspora dar. Die Analyse macht deutlich, dass intensive kulturelle Assimilation weder Ausdruck vollständiger Passivität noch mangelnder Handlungsfähigkeit ist. Vielmehr handelt es sich um eine positionsbezogene rationale Strategie, die darauf abzielt, positive soziale Distinktion zu erreichen und symbolisches Kapital in transnationalen sozialen Feldern zu akkumulieren. Gleichzeitig lassen sich innerhalb der iranischen Diaspora auch hybride, mehrschichtige und transnationale Identitätsformen beobachten. Ein angemessenes Verständnis dieses Phänomens setzt daher voraus, soziale Strukturen, individuelle Erfahrungen und die statusbezogenen Kalkulationen sozialer Akteure gleichermaßen zu berücksichtigen.

Schlüsselwörter: iranische Diaspora; intensive kulturelle Assimilation; kulturelle Anpassung; Statusangst; positionsbezogene Handlungsfähigkeit; symbolisches Kapital; hybride Identität

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1. Introduction

1-1. Statement of the Problem and the Growth of the Diaspora

Migration is not merely the geographical relocation of individuals, but a multi-layered process of redefining identity, rebuilding social relations, and rearranging systems of meaning. In this context, the way migrants face the culture of the host society and their methods of adaptation is one of the most important topics in migration and diaspora studies. A significant part of the classical literature, from linear assimilation theory to multiculturalism models, has tried to explain different patterns of cultural adaptation. However, the experience of some migrant groups shows that these patterns do not always operate uniformly, and historical, status-related, and symbolic factors can produce different formulations of the relationship between the migrant and the culture of origin and destination.

Regarding the Iranian diaspora, although a wide range of cultural adaptation methods is observed, some migrants – especially among the middle and upper-middle classes – adopt strategies in which symbolic distancing from the culture of origin and the effort for maximum assimilation with the culture of the host society play a prominent role. This phenomenon cannot be simply explained with concepts such as cultural self-loss or loss of identity, because such explanations often carry value judgments and ignore the sociological complexities of the issue. Therefore, the mentioned phenomenon requires a deep structural and multi-level analysis that goes beyond ethical judgments and explains the logic of action of this group of migrants. Addressing this gap is theoretically and practically critical, as ignoring the structural drivers of intense assimilation perpetuates reductive stereotypes about the diaspora and obscures the complex mechanisms of identity negotiation under unequal power dynamics.

1-2. Research Gap (Literature Gap)

A review of the existing literature shows that most studies in the field of Iranian migration have focused on demographic, economic, or pathological dimensions. In the few cultural studies as well, the phenomenon of extreme assimilation has either been considered as a natural and inevitable process (within classical assimilation theories) or has been criticized with a normative approach. The main research gap lies

here: few works have simultaneously examined the cultural deposits of the pre-migration period in interaction with post-migration status anxiety within a model of positional rationality. This article tries to fill this theoretical void and show how intense cultural assimilation is an agentic strategy for accumulating transnational symbolic capital.

1-3. Research Questions

To address this issue, the present study raises and pursues the following questions:

1. What factors cause part of the Iranian diaspora to choose intense cultural assimilation as a strategy for adapting to the host society?
2. Is this tendency merely the result of the migration experience, or are its roots hidden in historical processes and pre-migration cultural structures?
3. How do transnational media representations influence this choice by rearranging cultural horizons?
4. What role do status mechanisms, especially the experience of status anxiety in host societies, play in directing middle-class elites toward this strategy?
5. How does transnational symbolic capital function as the goal of this strategy in transnational social fields?

1-4. Research Objectives

- Main objective: Presenting a multi-level explanatory-theoretical model for understanding part of the Iranian diaspora's experience in adopting the strategy of intense cultural assimilation.

- Secondary objectives:

1. Critical analysis of the historical roots of the formation of Iranians' perception of the West and the resulting cultural deposits.
2. Explaining the mechanism of influence of transnational media on the production of migration imagination and status expectations.
3. Analyzing the relationship between symbolic insecurity, micro-aggressions, and status anxiety in the host society with identity management strategies.
4. Explaining the logic of social distinction through the conversion of capitals in transnational fields.

1-5. Theoretical Proposition of the Article (Main Argument)

The theoretical hypothesis of this article is that intense cultural assimilation in part of the Iranian diaspora is the result of the interaction of five categories of factors: pre-migration cultural and educational contexts, transnational media representations, structural ruptures in the origin society, status pressures in the host society, and the effort to acquire and accumulate symbolic capital in transnational social fields. On this basis, intense cultural assimilation is not understandable as a sign of absolute passivity, but as a strategy based on positional rationality – a strategy through which individuals try to redefine their social and status position in the new conditions.

Accordingly, the main innovation of the present article is not merely in proposing the concept of "intense cultural assimilation," but in presenting a multi-level explanatory model that, for the first time, links pre-migration cultural deposits, media representations, status anxiety, positional agency, and transnational symbolic capital within a single theoretical framework. The present article tries to explain the social mechanisms of the formation of this phenomenon at macro, meso, and micro levels by moving beyond reductionist and normative explanations. By doing so, the paper goes beyond synthesizing previous studies; it introduces a new analytical perspective that reframes cultural assimilation from a passive loss of identity to an active, strategic conversion of capitals in response to systemic marginalization.

2. Materials and Methods

This research is a theoretical article (Conceptual Paper) and has been compiled with the aim of presenting an explanatory framework for understanding the phenomenon of "intense cultural assimilation" in part of the Iranian diaspora. Unlike empirical research that is based on collecting field data or testing hypotheses, the goal of this article is to develop a theoretical model through critical rereading of the existing literature and integration of sociological concepts.

Therefore, the research method is based on Critical Literature Review along with Conceptual Analysis. In this approach, the goal is not merely collecting or summarizing previous studies, but comparing, critically

evaluating, and recombining theoretical concepts in order to produce a new analytical framework.

In the study process, classical and contemporary works related to the sociology of migration, diaspora studies, theories of cultural adaptation, status theory, symbolic capital, identity, and media were examined. The selection of sources was based on three main criteria:

1. Direct relevance to the main concepts of the article;
2. Scientific credibility of the sources (books and articles published by university publishers and reputable scientific journals);
3. The theoretical role of the works in explaining the relationship between identity, status, migration, and cultural adaptation.

In the analysis stage, key concepts were extracted and organized within three analytical levels:

1. Pre-migration contextual factors;
2. Post-migration mediating mechanisms;
3. Status and identity consequences.

Then, by integrating these three levels, the theoretical model of the article was formed, which explains the relationship between cultural deposits, media representations, status anxiety, transnational symbolic capital, and intense cultural assimilation as an interactive process.

To strengthen the arguments, secondary data published by reputable international institutions about the demographic and educational characteristics of the Iranian diaspora were also used in relevant sections. However, these data play a complementary role, and the main basis of the article is theoretical argument and conceptual analysis. Therefore, the findings of the article should be considered as theoretical propositions whose empirical validity requires testing in future research.

3. Results and Discussion

3-1. Conceptual Framework and Analytical Model

a) Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization

One of the central topics in migration studies is how migrants face the culture of the host society and how they redefine their identity in new conditions. John Berry (Berry, 1997, p. 10) in his famous model distinguishes four main strategies of cultural adaptation: assimilation (Assimilation), integration (Integration), separation (Separation), and marginalization (Marginalization). In this framework, cultural assimilation refers to a situation in which the individual or group gradually fades their cultural attachments to the society of origin and makes themselves similar to the culture of the host society. However, the experience of some migrant groups shows that cultural assimilation does not always occur gradually and passively. In some cases, the individual consciously and actively turns symbolic distancing from the society of origin into part of their identity strategy. In this article, this situation is formulated under the title "intense cultural assimilation." By this concept is meant not merely learning the language or accepting the norms of the host society, but a type of identity strategy that is accompanied by emphasis on distancing from previous symbols, values, and cultural attachments.

The present article is based on the assumption that such behavior cannot be explained merely with concepts such as cultural self-loss. These concepts often carry value and normative loads and miss the analysis of social and status mechanisms. Therefore, the article draws on the approach of positional agency and tries to explain this behavior as a rational response to specific social and status conditions.

b) Pre-Migration Cultural Deposits

In this framework, the concept of pre-migration cultural deposits is used as a proposed analytical concept. By this concept is meant a set of assumptions, value judgments, and cultural perceptions that have been formed over historical, educational, and media processes in parts of social groups, in which development, progress, and social status have been largely linked to Western civilizational patterns. These cultural deposits do not necessarily mean the negation of native culture, but represent a

kind of value hierarchy that can influence the way individuals face the migration experience.

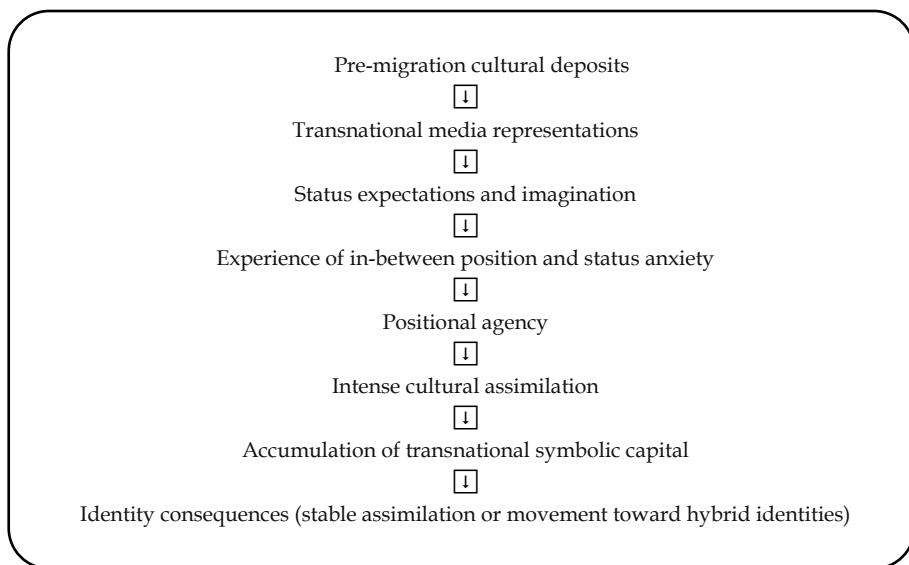
c) Status Anxiety

The article also uses the concept of status anxiety. This concept refers to individuals' concern about their social position, the degree of acceptance, and others' evaluation of their situation. In migration conditions, especially among individuals with educational and economic capital, the experience of relative status decline or encountering cultural stereotypes can intensify the feeling of status insecurity and affect the choice of identity strategies.

d) Transnational Symbolic Capital

The concept of transnational symbolic capital is used as an analytical concept. This concept, inspired by Bourdieu's theory of capital, refers to the capacity of some cultural resources, lifestyles, and lived experiences to create distinction and gain credibility in social fields beyond national borders. Accordingly, the experience of living in the West, mastery of foreign languages, or acceptance of specific cultural styles can become a resource for gaining status and reproducing social distinction in some contexts.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model of the Article (Analytical Framework)



3-2. Historical Contexts and Pre-Migration Cultural Deposits

Understanding some cultural tendencies among sections of the Iranian diaspora is not possible without paying attention to the historical contexts of the formation of Iranians' perception of the "West."

However, reducing this issue to specific events such as Iran's military defeats from Russia or directly attributing today's behaviors to those events would be a simplistic approach. What matters is how the initial encounter with the new civilization turned into a set of intellectual, cultural, and institutional formulations that have been deposited over time in educational structures and social discourses.

From the second half of the Qajar period, simultaneously with the increase in political, economic, and scientific contacts with Europe, the issue of backwardness and Iran's relationship with the new world became one of the main concerns of the elites. The establishment of Dar al-Fonun and the expansion of sending students to Europe opened new horizons for Iranian society; but at the same time, a kind of dualism between "tradition" and "modernity" also emerged in parts of the elites' thought. As Algar (1969, p. 45) and Tavakoli-Targhi (2001, p. 78) have shown, modernity in Iran was experienced more as an asymmetric encounter with Western power and knowledge than as an initially endogenous transformation.

In this process, parts of the intellectuals and political elites sought progress and development mainly in Western patterns. Kachouyan (1384, p. 112) shows that from the late Qajar period and especially after the Constitutional Revolution, new identity discourses were formed in which the West was not considered merely as one of the historical experiences, but as the dominant criterion of development and progress. Of course, this trend was never the only or absolutely dominant one, and alongside it, there have always been diverse interpretations of the relationship between tradition, modernity, and Iranian identity.

State Modernization and the Redefinition of Cultural Capital: The modernization project in the Pahlavi period brought these intellectual tendencies into the arena of official institutions. In the words of Atabaki and Zürcher (Atabaki & Zürcher, 2004, p. 12), the Pahlavi government pursued a kind of state and top-down modernization whose goal was to

build a modern nation-state and rearrange the country's social and cultural structures. This process, in addition to economic and administrative changes, also had important cultural and symbolic consequences.

Katouzian (1981, p. 156) considers this development model a kind of authoritarian modernism in which some Western cultural symbols became carriers of the meaning of progress, status, and innovation. As a result, parts of the new urban middle classes defined their cultural capital in connection with modern education, new lifestyles, and closer proximity to Western cultural patterns.

Of course, such a trend did not mean the formation of a uniform Western-oriented culture in Iranian society; Iranian society has always had extensive cultural, religious, and identity diversity, and various patterns of encountering modernity have formed in it. However, it cannot be denied that in some social layers, a kind of symbolic correlation was formed between development, social status, and closeness to Western culture — a correlation whose effects continued in subsequent generations as well.

Educational System, Cultural Capital, and Reproduction of Distinction: From the perspective of Bourdieusian sociology, the educational system is not merely an institution for transferring knowledge, but plays an important role in reproducing cultural capital and shaping patterns of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 98). In contemporary Iran as well, the expansion of higher education, familiarity with foreign languages, and access to global scientific resources gradually shaped part of the cultural capital of the middle classes.

This cultural capital in many cases had positive consequences such as increased social mobility, scientific development, and expansion of intellectual horizons; but in some contexts, it unintentionally reproduced a symbolic hierarchy in which greater closeness to Western lifestyles and cultural patterns was considered a sign of status and distinction.

From this perspective, what is named in this article as pre-migration cultural deposits is not the product of a single policy nor the result of a kind of conscious planning, but the outcome of multiple historical, educational, and cultural processes that have formed over more than a

century. These cultural deposits alone do not cause intense cultural assimilation, but they can provide specific mental contexts that, in interaction with other factors, influence the choice of migrants' adaptation strategies.

From Historical Contexts to Contemporary Actions: On this basis, the present article distances itself from any deterministic explanation. The existence of some West-oriented tendencies in layers of Iranian society does not mean determining the behavior of migrants or ignoring the diversity of their lived experiences. What matters is paying attention to the point that today's cultural actions do not form in a vacuum, but gain meaning in connection with historical memory, educational institutions, status structures, and generational experiences.

Theoretical Proposition 1: Pre-migration cultural deposits are the most important mental context for producing intense cultural assimilation; however, these deposits are not the complete cause or direct driver of the phenomenon, but act as one of the contextual variables and structural catalysts that direct the actor's interpretive capacity in encountering the host society.

3-3. Transnational Media, Cultural Representation, and the Production of Migration Imagination

Globalization of Media and Rearrangement of Cultural Horizons: Technological developments and the expansion of transnational media have been one of the most important factors in transforming the migration experience in recent decades. If migration in the past mainly meant entering an unknown world, in the era of satellite media, the Internet, and social networks, a significant part of the mental experience of migration takes shape before physical relocation. Individuals, before migrating, through continuous consumption of images, narratives, and lifestyles, gain a kind of imaginary familiarity with the destination societies.

Appadurai (1996, p. 56) shows that in the contemporary world, media and visual flows play an important role in shaping imagined landscapes. From this perspective, the decision to migrate is not merely the product of economic or political calculations, but is also influenced by social imagination and cultural perceptions. Transnational media provide the possibility of symbolic experience of distant worlds and present new

horizons of desirable life to audiences.

In the case of Iranian society as well, the development of communication technologies and wider access to global media has caused many individuals to form a mental image of life in Europe and North America before migrating. These images, although reflecting part of reality, are not necessarily a complete and unmediated representation of the social complexities of destination societies.

Cultural Hegemony and Soft Appeal: Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971, p. 234) does not consider hegemony merely the product of political or economic domination, but the result of cultural acceptance and the formation of social consent. In the contemporary world, cultural power and the ability to produce meaning have become one of the most important sources of influence.

Joseph Nye also, by proposing the concept of "soft power," shows that countries and civilizations can influence the preferences of others through cultural appeal, lifestyle, education, media, and social values (Nye, 2004, p. 45). From this perspective, the popularity of some Western cultural patterns cannot be reduced merely to media advertisements or domination relations, but attention must also be paid to the capacity of these societies in producing cultural appeal.

On this basis, the present article does not assume that Western media present a completely unrealistic image of Western societies; rather, it argues that media logic naturally tends more toward highlighting successes, individual freedoms, welfare, and available opportunities and pays less attention to the regular representation of complexities, inequalities, and internal tensions of societies. For this reason, the real lived experience of migrants may differ from their initial expectations.

Media, Identity, and Processes of Cultural Redefinition: Hamid Naficy (Naficy, 1993, p. 89) in his studies on media and migration shows that media images and narratives are not merely tools for transferring information, but play an active role in shaping identities and cultural imagination. Also, Alinejad's studies (Alinejad, 2017, p. 370) on transnational media and diaspora show that migrants are not passive consumers, but actors who, in interaction with media, reconstruct multi-layered and complex identities.

From this perspective, a linear relationship cannot be established between media consumption and cultural assimilation. Individuals, depending on their cultural capital, class position, lived experience, and social networks, show different reactions to media messages. Some individuals may emphasize their native identity more, some move toward hybrid identities, and some others experience more intense cultural assimilation.

Migration Imagination and the Formation of Status Expectations: One of the important consequences of consuming transnational media is the formation of a kind of migration imagination; an imagination in which migration is not just geographical relocation, but a passage to a world with more opportunities, broader freedoms, and higher social status. This imagination, especially among groups with more educational and cultural capital, can be accompanied by specific status expectations.

However, the real experience of migration is not always consistent with these expectations. Entering the destination society confronts individuals with complex class structures, cultural differences, institutional limitations, and various forms of social categorization. In such conditions, the gap between previous expectations and new realities can prepare the ground for redefining identity and adopting different cultural adaptation strategies. Therefore, transnational media should not be considered the direct cause of intense cultural assimilation; their main role is to provide imaginary contexts and specific meaning frameworks that, in interaction with other historical, status-related, and structural factors, can influence the way migrants face the culture of the host society.

Theoretical Proposition 2: Transnational media and the global circulation of images continuously reproduce and pre-polarize the status imagination of migrants; this mechanism raises the ceiling of identity expectations before migration and, in encountering the realities of the destination, becomes an accelerator of status crises.

3-4. Status Anxiety and the Experience of In-Between Position in the Host Society

Migration and the Redefinition of Social Status: One of the important features of migration is the relative rupture between the previous social position and the individual's place in the destination society. Migration,

even in cases accompanied by economic or academic success, can lead to the redefinition of capitals and changes in status evaluation systems. Capitals that brought credibility and social distinction in the origin society do not necessarily have the same function in the destination society, and the individual is forced to reconstruct their position in the new social fields. In the case of a significant portion of Iranian migrants, especially groups with educational and economic capital, the main issue is often not material poverty or economic deprivation, but the experience of change in status position and encountering new classification systems. Many of these individuals considered themselves part of the middle or upper-middle classes in the origin society and expected that their cultural and educational capitals would also be a source of credibility and acceptance in the destination society to the same degree. However, entering a new environment confronts them with different mechanisms of social evaluation.

Experience of In-Between Position and Identity Management: One of the important concepts in this context is Goffman's concept of stigma. Goffman (1963, p. 112) shows that in situations where individuals feel that some of their characteristics may become the basis for judgment or stereotyping, they resort to various ways to manage identity and redefine their social image. Maghbouleh's studies (Maghbouleh, 2017, p. 134) about Iranian Americans show that part of Iranians in the United States are in a complex situation between racial, ethnic, and cultural categories. This situation creates a kind of "in-between" experience; a situation in which the individual is neither fully assimilated into the majority group nor necessarily defines themselves within traditional racial minority categories. In such conditions, some migrants try, through active identity management, to increase their distance from negative stereotypes associated with the Middle East, migration, or existing stereotypical perceptions. This effort can take various forms; from emphasis on professional success and individualism to broader cultural assimilation with the host society.

Status Anxiety and Symbolic Insecurity: The concept of status anxiety, which has received attention in contemporary sociological works, refers to individuals' concern about their social position, the degree of social respect, and others' evaluation of their situation. This anxiety does not necessarily mean economic deprivation, but can also exist among

successful and privileged individuals. Sue (Sue, 2010, p. 67), by proposing the concept of microaggressions, shows that many forms of discrimination in contemporary societies appear not in overt and direct forms, but in subtle behaviors, everyday stereotypes, and imperceptible forms of rejection. Such experiences, even in the absence of overt discrimination, can strengthen the feeling of symbolic insecurity and sensitivity to social position. In this framework, the present article argues that intense cultural assimilation in some cases is not merely the product of cultural fascination or passivity, but a response to status anxiety and an effort to increase the degree of acceptance and reduce symbolic distance from the majority group. This process should not be understood merely as purely reactive or unconscious, but can be seen as part of the actors' rational strategies for managing social position.

ositional Rationality and the Choice of Adaptation Strategies: The migration experience places individuals against a set of opportunities and limitations. In such conditions, choosing between preserving the identity of origin, forming hybrid identities, or moving toward broader cultural assimilation is the result of interaction between structures and individual agency. On this basis, the present article distances itself from deterministic approaches and assumes that intense cultural assimilation in some cases can be the result of a kind of positional rationality; meaning that the individual, based on their evaluation of opportunities, costs, and status mechanisms of the destination society, chooses a strategy that they believe provides the greatest possibility of acceptance, social mobility, and reduction of symbolic insecurity. Of course, such a strategy is not necessarily successful and is not observed among all Iranian migrants. Many migrants succeed in creating stable bonds with the host society without distancing from the identity of origin, and some others move toward multi-layered and hybrid identities. Therefore, intense cultural assimilation should be considered merely one of the possible responses to the migration experience and the redefinition of social status.

Intense Cultural Assimilation as a Status Strategy: Based on the above discussions, it can be argued that some behaviors that are sometimes described with concepts such as "cultural self-loss" must actually be understood within the framework of the sociology of status and identity management. The migrant individual, in facing in-between positions,

symbolic pressures, and new classification systems, may choose intense cultural assimilation as a tool for gaining more acceptance, reducing identity ambiguity, and stabilizing their social position. From this perspective, intense cultural assimilation is not a sign of lack of agency, but one of the forms of strategic action in specific social conditions; an action that, although it can have different consequences, its understanding requires simultaneous attention to social structures, lived experiences, and the status calculations of the actors.

Theoretical Proposition 3: Status anxiety is the fundamental mediating and psycho-social mechanism between the experience of devalued symbolic capitals and the adoption of the intense cultural assimilation strategy. Through this mechanism, the actor translates the structural insecurity of the new environment into an active identity management strategy.

Theoretical Proposition 4: Intense cultural assimilation is not a reflection of absolute passivity or emptying of agency, but on the contrary, the embodiment of a kind of intense "positional agency" in which the actor tries to accumulate higher status in the destination by paying the cost of distancing from the origin.

3-5. Secondary Data and Statistical Evidence on the Diaspora

The data presented in this section have not been collected with the aim of empirically testing the theoretical model of the article, but have been used merely as secondary evidence to describe some structural characteristics of the Iranian diaspora and to strengthen the theoretical arguments. Therefore, the conclusions of the article still have a theoretical nature, and the empirical validity of the proposed causal relationships requires future field studies.

Table 1. Macro Indicators of the Cultural Capital and Demographic Structure of the Iranian Diaspora (Based on International Secondary Data)

Secondary Data Source	Indicator Examined	Demographic and Structural Characteristics of the Iranian Diaspora	Sociological Implications for the Research Model
Pew Research Center	Higher education attainment and employment	More than 55% of first-generation Iranian immigrants hold a bachelor's degree or higher, with a substantial proportion employed in managerial and professional occupations.	Indicates high initial status expectations and increased sensitivity to microaggressions and symbolic downward social mobility.
Eurostat / Statistics Austria	Employment-education match	A considerable proportion of highly educated Middle Eastern immigrants, including Iranians, experience educational and occupational mismatch during the early years of settlement.	Reinforces the perception of occupying an in-between social position and reproduces status-related anxiety in the host society.
Gallup Inc.	Identity orientation and distancing from official institutions of the country of origin	Survey evidence suggests a strong tendency to redefine personal identity independently of official institutions and traditional regional stereotypes.	Strengthens situational rationality oriented toward active symbolic distancing as a strategy for achieving positive social distinction.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on secondary data from Pew Research Center, Eurostat/Statistics Austria, and Gallup Inc.

These secondary empirical observations directly support and refine the article's theoretical concepts. Specifically, the data on high educational attainment combined with occupational mismatch substantiates the concept of 'status anxiety' and 'symbolic boundaries.' It demonstrates how the theoretical framework of positional agency is grounded in the tangible

reality of migrants attempting to bridge the gap between their pre-migration cultural capital and their post-migration structural limitations.

Theoretical Proposition 5: Evidence from international secondary data shows that there is a direct relationship between "the volume of initial cultural capital in the origin" and "the intensity of status anxiety in the destination." This unique feature of the structure of the Iranian diaspora (high education and class position before migration) increases the tendency to adopt the strategy of intense cultural assimilation as a compensatory mechanism.

3-6. Symbolic Capital, Social Distinction, and Redefinition of Status in Transnational Fields

Symbolic Capital and the Logic of Social Distinction: One of the fundamental concepts in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology is the concept of symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1984, p. 102) shows that social actors do not only strive to accumulate economic capital, but gaining credibility, status, and recognition also shapes a significant part of their actions. Cultural, social, and economic capitals have the ability to convert into one another under specific conditions, and individuals compete for distinction in various social fields through these capitals. From this perspective, lifestyle, cultural consumption patterns, language, academic credentials, and even lived experiences can become resources for gaining status. Social distinction is reproduced not merely through wealth, but through possession of symbolic resources and the ability to legitimize them.

Migration Experience and the Formation of Transnational Symbolic Capital: In the globalized world, social fields are no longer limited to national borders. Migrants live in spaces where transnational ties, digital communications, and cultural flows have somewhat transformed the boundary between inside and outside. In such conditions, some resources and experiences can be a source of credibility in more than one social field. In this article, the concept of transnational symbolic capital is used as an analytical concept inspired by Bourdieu's theory. By this concept is meant those symbolic resources that arise from the experience of living in advanced societies, access to global networks, language proficiency, cultural consumption styles, or membership in transnational spaces, and can help gain credibility and status in more than one social context. Accordingly, the migration experience is not merely geographical

relocation, but can become a resource for producing and reproducing symbolic capital. This capital, depending on the conditions, may have value and credibility in the host society, in diaspora networks, and even in connection with the origin society.

Lifestyle and Distinction in Transnational Fields: Based on Bourdieu's theory of distinction, social actors always try to reproduce symbolic boundaries between themselves and others through specific ways of life, tastes, and consumption patterns. In the case of part of the Iranian diaspora, the experience of living in the West, familiarity with new cultures, and possession of global capitals can become part of individuals' status identity. In such conditions, some migrants may represent a Western lifestyle or symbolic distancing from some cultural components of the origin society not merely because of changes in beliefs, but as a tool for social distinction. This process, more than being the product of conscious and explicit calculations, in many cases arises from the logic of symbolic competitions and the effort to gain credibility in various social fields. However, such a pattern should not be generalized to the entire Iranian diaspora; many migrants have achieved economic, scientific, and social successes without denying or distancing from their cultural identity, and even part of their symbolic capital arises from maintaining ties with Iranian cultural heritage and identity.

Comparative Comparison with Other Diasporas: Comparative studies show that migrants' relationship with the identity of origin depends on the historical contexts, opportunity structures, and status resources of each group, and a single model cannot be presented for all diasporas. Modood's studies (Modood, 1997, p. 56) on South Asian migrants in Britain show that sections of these groups, instead of distancing from ethnic and religious identity, have used it as a resource for social mobilization, political participation, and accumulation of social capital. Here, ethnic identity has not been an obstacle to integration, but one of the sources of collective power. Also, Min and Kim's research (Min & Kim, 1999, p. 78) on Korean migrants in the United States shows that economic success and cohesion of ethnic networks have provided the possibility of achieving social status without the need for symbolic denial of the identity of origin. In such cases, ethnic identity and economic success have not been placed in opposition to each other. From this perspective, differences

between diasporas should be analyzed within the framework of differences in opportunity structures, social capitals, migration patterns, and their historical experiences. In the case of the Iranian diaspora as well, intense cultural assimilation is only one of the possible patterns and cannot be considered an inherent or pervasive feature of this diaspora.

The Paradox of Complete Assimilation and the Emergence of Multi-Layered Identities: Portes and Rumbaut's segmented assimilation theory and Stuart Hall's reflections (Hall, 1990, p. 224) on the dynamics of cultural identity show that identity is not a fixed and final thing, but a fluid and reproductive process. Therefore, the project of complete assimilation, even with conscious efforts by individuals, often faces structural and cultural limitations. The experience of many migrants shows that over time, more complex and multi-layered forms of identity emerge – identities that are neither based on complete denial of the past nor on maintaining rigid cultural boundaries. This situation can be understood in the form of hybrid, transnational, and in-between identities – identities that make possible the coexistence of various attachments. From this perspective, even in cases where intense cultural assimilation is chosen as a status strategy, this strategy is not necessarily stable or final. Lived experience, generational change, and the expansion of transnational networks can gradually prepare the ground for the formation of more multi-layered and flexible identities. Therefore, the phenomenon of intense cultural assimilation should be understood in the context of the continuous dynamics of identity and status competitions, not as the endpoint of the migration process or an index for normative judgment about the authenticity or inauthenticity of individuals' culture.

Theoretical Proposition 6: Unlike the Korean and South Asian diasporas that turn native identity into a resource for intra-group capital accumulation, the network structure of the Iranian diaspora, due to a kind of institutional isolation, shows a greater tendency to redefine status individually and through Bourdieusian "distinction."

Theoretical Proposition 7: Transnational symbolic capital resulting from intense cultural assimilation has a dual and parallel function; this capital is consumed both in the field of the host society to escape microaggressions and is used in the field of connection with the origin society as a tool for reproducing class prestige.

Theoretical Proposition 8: The project of intense cultural assimilation faces a "structural paradox"; the individual's conscious effort to completely dissolve into the host culture often faces obstacles due to the invisible racial-cultural walls of the destination, and this very rupture becomes the driving force for subsequent shifts toward hybrid and transnational identities.

3-7. Theoretical Innovations of the Article

Based on the restructured framework and the suggestions of the reviewers, the innovations of this research are formulated in a focused and independent manner under the following 5 main axes:

Presenting the concept of "intense cultural assimilation" as a rational strategy: Going beyond single-factor psychological or ethical explanations and analyzing the phenomenon within the framework of positional rationality and status structure.

Introducing the concept of "transnational symbolic capital": Explaining how migration lived experiences and Western lifestyle are valued as tools for gaining prestige in multiple fields beyond national borders.

Presenting a multi-level model for diaspora analysis: Linking macro (historical and media), meso (structural institutions of the destination), and micro (status anxiety and actor's agency) levels of analysis.

Linking Iranian cultural history with the sociology of migration: Showing how the continuity and function of "pre-migration cultural deposits" direct post-migration identity choices.

Critiquing ethical and normative approaches to cultural assimilation: Replacing biased concepts such as cultural self-loss with sociological concepts of identity management, symbolic insecurity, and status competitions.

In terms of broader implications, this study contributes to Iranian Studies by challenging monolithic narratives of cultural self-loss and highlighting the strategic agency of Iranian migrants. For diaspora and migration research, the proposed model offers a fresh theoretical lens to examine other highly educated migrant groups experiencing similar status discrepancies, emphasizing the need to integrate pre-migration class contexts with post-migration status anxieties.

4. Conclusion

The main question of this research was what mechanisms cause part of the Iranian diaspora to choose intense cultural assimilation as a strategy for adapting to the host society. Based on the presented theoretical framework, the article's answer is that this phenomenon is not the result of the influence of a single factor, but takes shape from the interaction between pre-migration cultural contexts, transnational media representations, status pressures in the host society, and the actors' efforts to accumulate symbolic capital in transnational social fields.

This article tried to explain the tendency toward intense cultural assimilation in part of the Iranian diaspora within a multi-level and non-reductionist framework by using the literature of the sociology of migration, diaspora studies, status theory, and symbolic capital theory.

The main argument of the article was that this phenomenon cannot be attributed merely to individuals' psychological characteristics, cultural fascination, or self-loss, but must be studied in the context of the interaction of historical, cultural, media, status-related, and structural factors.

Based on the presented analytical framework, some pre-migration cultural deposits that have formed during historical and institutional processes can create specific mental contexts in parts of social groups. These contexts, in interaction with transnational media representations and migration imagination, shape specific expectations toward the host society. After migration, the experience of in-between positions, status insecurities, and subtle forms of social classification push some migrants toward adopting strategies in which intense cultural assimilation acts as a tool for increasing social acceptance, reducing identity ambiguity, and gaining symbolic distinction.

On this basis, the present article interprets intense cultural assimilation not as a sign of lack of agency, but as a kind of strategic action based on positional rationality. Of course, this strategy is neither necessarily successful nor the dominant pattern among all Iranian migrants; the experience of the Iranian diaspora, like many other diasporas, is diverse, multi-layered, and influenced by generational, class, gender, and geographical differences.

On the other hand, the theoretical findings of this article show that migrants' identity patterns have a dynamic and processual nature. Therefore, even in cases where intense cultural assimilation is chosen as a status strategy, this situation should not be considered a definite end. Lived experiences, generational transformations, and the expansion of transnational networks can lead to the formation of hybrid, multi-layered, and flexible identities. Beyond the specific case of the Iranian diaspora, the theoretical model developed in this article carries broader implications for migration and diaspora studies. By reframing assimilation as a strategic pursuit of transnational symbolic capital rather than a passive erasure of identity, this study provides a valuable analytical lens for examining other highly educated, middle-class migrant groups who experience similar structural ruptures and status discrepancies. Furthermore, it contributes to Iranian Studies by challenging monolithic, normative narratives of "cultural self-loss" or "Western fascination," highlighting instead the complex, agentic negotiations of Iranians navigating unequal global power dynamics.

Ultimately, this multi-level perspective shifts the analytical focus from moral judgments about cultural loyalty to sociological inquiries about power, status, and structural inequality. Recognizing intense cultural assimilation as a coping mechanism for symbolic insecurity underscores the profound impact of host-society reception and pre-existing global hierarchies. By viewing these identity strategies through the sociology of status and positional agency, this research not only deepens our comprehension of the Iranian migration experience but also opens new theoretical avenues for exploring the hidden socio-psychological costs of migration in a globalized world.

5. Research Limitations

Since this research has a theoretical and interpretive nature, its results should not be generalized to all members of the Iranian diaspora. The present article is organized based on a critical review of the existing literature and lacks direct empirical data; therefore, many of the proposed hypotheses require empirical testing and field studies.

In addition, the focus of the article has mainly been on parts of the

middle and upper-middle classes of the Iranian diaspora. Therefore, adaptation patterns among other groups, including economic migrants, refugees, second and third generations, or Iranian communities in different parts of the world, may have different formulations.

Also, the present article has not addressed gender, religious, ethnic, and generational differences within the Iranian diaspora; while these variables can play an important role in shaping identity patterns and adaptation strategies.

6. Future Research Horizons

To empirically evaluate the presented theoretical framework, several research paths can be suggested:

1. Conducting longitudinal qualitative studies on Iranian migrants in various European and North American countries with a focus on the relationship between pre-migration cultural capital and cultural adaptation methods.
2. Comparative examination of the first, second, and third generations of the Iranian diaspora and studying how identity patterns transform over time.
3. Studying the role of digital media and social networks in redefining cultural attachments and forming transnational fields.
4. Analyzing the relationship between social class, cultural capital, and status anxiety among different groups of Iranian migrants.
5. Comparative comparison of the Iranian diaspora with other Asian and Middle Eastern diasporas with the aim of examining similarities and differences in cultural adaptation patterns.
6. Studying the role of gender, religion, ethnicity, and generational experiences in redefining identity and status among Iranian migrants.

The present article argues that intense cultural assimilation in part of the Iranian diaspora cannot be explained with essentialist explanations or normative judgments. This phenomenon, if it exists, is more the product of complex interactions of historical structures, cultural expectations, status experiences, and actors' strategies in transnational social fields than a reflection of passivity or lack of identity.

As a result, understanding the Iranian diaspora requires moving away from simplistic dualisms such as "loyalty or self-loss," "East or West," and "authenticity or transformation." The migration experience is a dynamic and multi-dimensional process in which social actors reconstruct their identity, status, and attachments in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. From this perspective, studying the Iranian diaspora not only helps to better understand the Iranian migration experience, but can also open a window to understanding the complexities of identity, status, and culture in the contemporary globalized world.

Author Contributions

The study conceptualization and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript writing are all solely the responsibility of the author.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT in order to assist with language editing and refinement. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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