This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.
What are the possibilities of women’s empowerment in (feminist) Adult Learning spaces in Iran and Scotland?

by

Hoda Mobasseri

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Education

University of Edinburgh

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement

for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Under the Supervision of Dr. Rowena Arshad and Dr. Yvonne Foley

October 2021
Abstract and Lay Summary

In this study I have explored the capacities of Adult Learning in Iran and Scotland to empower women. I have compared and contrasted the similarities and differences between the formations of Adult Learning in Iran and Scotland.

This study is a qualitative study and consists of extraction of semi-structured interviews. Interviewees have been Adult Educators and facilitators in Iran and Scotland.

I have shown in this thesis that Adult Education has been changed in its political essence and turned into a tool for psycho-social skills development. However, different configurations of Adult Learning vis-a-vis feminist contributions may be distinguished in the these spaces.

In this thesis Adult Education is being considered in its broader contexts as Adult Learning. Through this study it has been shown that Adult Learning spaces has been the site of transformatory movements for women, especially Muslim women. However, the modes and qualities of change is different in the context of Iran as a Muslim majority country with Scotland as a host for Muslim minority migrants. It is indisputable that in some instances Adult Learning may be a tool for moving from the present conditions. Nevertheless, this movement may be translated differently in diverse contexts. Sometimes change may be brought about through reproduction of present situation though.

It is mandatory to be cautious of the dynamics of the Adult Learning and its potentials which may be merged with knowledge building projects such as Islamic Feminism as far as women’s empowerment is concerned. There are possibilities for women empowerment through implementation of theories such as Islamic Feminism into Adult Learning and vise versa.
## Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 9

Chapter 1: Introduction ......................................................................................................... 10

Chapter 2: Feminism as a new lens through which to reinterpret Islamic discourse and a tool for women’s empowerment ................. 16

2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 16

2.2 Islamic Feminism ............................................................................................................... 18

2.3 Formation and foundations of Islamic feminism ................................................................ 18

2.3.1 Claiming authority over reinterpretation of the religious sources as foundation of Islamic feminism ......................................................... 19

2.3.2 Quran as a discourse or sacred text .............................................................................. 20

2.3.3 Distinction between Sharia and Fiqh ........................................................................ 21

2.3.4 Questioning men’s custody and guardianship over women ......................................... 23

2.4 Separate but equal versus genuine transformation ........................................................... 25

2.6 Background of feminism in different countries ................................................................ 29

2.7 Terminology: a review on diverse terminology of "Islamic feminism" and activists’ positionality ................................................................. 33

2.8.1 Emergence of Islamic Feminism in Iran ....................................................................... 40

2.8.2 Iran’s International relations ..................................................................................... 42

2.8.3 Islamism (fundamentalism) in Iran ............................................................................ 44

2.9 Islam in Scotland .............................................................................................................. 47

2.10 Hijab as an issue for Muslim women in secular societies ............................................... 55

2.11 East and West – the tensions and possibilities ................................................................. 59

2.12 Women, integration and its challenges ......................................................................... 64

2.13 Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 66

Chapter 3: Adult Education and women’s empowerment ................................................. 68

3.1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 68

3.2. Adult Education’s definition in this thesis .................................................................... 70

3.2.1. Various definitions of Adult Education ................................................................ 70

3.3. History of Adult Education in Iran and the UK .............................................................. 74

3.3.2. Iran .......................................................................................................................... 82

3.3.3. Periods of transformation in education in Iran ......................................................... 83

3.4. Role and purpose of Adult Education .......................................................................... 86
3.4.1 Adult Education and Women ................................................................. 87
3.4.2 Adult Education and Muslim Women ......................................................... 91
3.4.3 Adult Education and Feminism ................................................................. 93
3.4.4 Adult Education and the gendered lens ....................................................... 96
3.4.5 The importance of the family structure in promotion of change .................... 97
3.5. Adult education with a focus on religion ....................................................... 98
3.6. Adult Education and dialogic space related to race ..................................... 101
3.7 Adult Education and the job market ............................................................ 103
3.7.1 Adult Education and volunteering as a form of women’s contribution to the society 103
3.7.2 Adult Education, employment and the job market ..................................... 105
3.8. Adult Education and its role in social movements ....................................... 108
3.9. Adult Education and Critical Thinking ....................................................... 110
3.10. Adult Education as a means of transferring the international agenda ............ 113
3.11. UNESCO International agenda for developing adult education .................. 115
3.12. Decolonising Adult Education ................................................................. 118
3.13. Adult education as a tool for empowerment .............................................. 121
3.13.1. Adult Literacy as a means of empowerment and gender equality ....... 124
3.14. Conclusion ............................................................................................... 125

Chapter 4: Epistemology, Methodology and Method ................................. 128
4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 128
4.2 Approaches used in this study ................................................................... 129
4.2.1 Standpoint theory and Islamic feminist approach .................................. 131
4.2.2 Why taking an Islamic feminist and Standpoint stance may help ............. 131
4.2.3 Drawing on wider feminist epistemology: deconstructing knowledge through Standpoint theory ................................................................. 134
4.3 Epistemology ............................................................................................. 136
4.3.1 Emancipation and empowerment ............................................................. 136
4.3.2 Subjectivity of the knower ...................................................................... 139
4.3.3 Positionality or situatedness of the knowledge ......................................... 140
4.3.4 Reflexivity ............................................................................................... 141
4.3.5 Why is an Islamic feminist lens best suited for the research design? .... 142
4.3.6 Any challenges associated with using an Islamic feminist lens in relation to my design? ................................................................. 143
5.6. How to perceive and react to gender inequalities and women’s rights ............... 201
5.7 Adult education and gender equality through women’s citizenship rights .......... 205
  5.7.1 How do adult educators explain citizenship rights? .................................... 206
  5.7.2 The dichotomy between how men’s and women’s rights are discussed and perceived ................................................................. 207
  5.7.3 How do adult educators approach the issue of women being treated as second-class citizens? ......................................................... 210
5.6. Adult educators discussing feminism .............................................................. 218
5.7. Challenges for women adult educators in Iran ............................................... 223
5.8. Conclusion ................................................................................................. 225

Chapter 6: Data Analysis Scotland ....................................................................... 226
  6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 226
  6.2. Identity, faith and religion ........................................................................ 229
    6.2.1 Religion along with gender .................................................................... 231
  6.3 Adult educators’ positionality ..................................................................... 234
  6.4. Adult educators discussing feminism ....................................................... 237
  6.5. Adult educators’ views on Islamic feminism ............................................ 241
  6.6. Impact of adult education on women ....................................................... 244
    6.6.1 Learning English ................................................................................ 244
    6.6.2 Employability .................................................................................... 246
    6.6.3 Social capital ..................................................................................... 247
  6.7 Empowerment .......................................................................................... 248
  6.8. Challenges of adult educators and Muslim women participants .................. 251
  6.9. Conclusion ............................................................................................. 257

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion ................................................................... 258
  7.1 Introduction .............................................................................................. 258
  7.2 Adult Education, theory and practice ......................................................... 259
    7.2.1 Theory ............................................................................................. 259
    7.2.2 Practice ........................................................................................... 268
    7.3.2 From personal to social .................................................................... 275
  7.4 Adult Education and intersectionality .......................................................... 276
  7.5 Conclusion ............................................................................................... 279
    7.5.1 Limitations of the study ................................................................. 280
7.5.2 Propositions for further research .......................................................... 281

References ......................................................................................................... 283

Appendices ........................................................................................................ 294

Appendix 1: English Questions for the interviewees ........................................ 294
Appendix 1.2: Persian Interview questions ....................................................... 295
Appendix 2. Participation information sheet .................................................... 296
Appendix 2.1: Persian participation information sheet ....................................... 298
Appendix 3: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT ........................................ 300
Appendix 3.1 Persian informed consent statement ........................................... 301
Appendix 4: Ethical Concerns ......................................................................... 302
Appendix 5: Official letter to the governmental agent ...................................... 305
Appendix 6: Coggle Mind Map link ................................................................. 309
Acknowledgments

There are several people who have helped me through this journey. I want to thank my supervisors, Dr. Rowena Arshad and Dr. Yvonne Foley, for all their moral and practical support all through these years. Dr. Akwugo Emejulu, my former supervisor, also helped me in the primary stages of my thesis. My partner has been so supportive of me throughout this journey, and I am grateful that he was by my side all the way through. I also thank my father, who financially supported me to pursue my dream. I would like to thank my family and friends who supported me all through these years; if not for their support, I could not have finished this journey. Dr. Yazdani, my psychoanalyst, helped me towards recovery from bipolar mood disorder so that I could write my thesis with much more concentration and reach more of my mental potential. I also benefited from my friend Dorsa Babaei’s help through discussing different issues in my thesis with her.
Chapter 1: Introduction

During my work experience before my PhD course, I realized what a significant role education has when it comes to empowering a society, and therefore this became an area of interest for me. In this study, I have explored the possibilities of empowerment in Adult Learning spaces in Iran and Scotland. I tried to explore different aspects that may directly or indirectly affect Adult Education. Some parts of the process, such as educators’ and learners’ awareness of themselves, proved to be very important. Other factors such as religion also seemed to be predominant, as they defined many parts of a person’s perspective and therefore engagements with the society.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Scotland are two different contexts with diverse historical, economic, socio-cultural and political configurations. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how context and its various aspects may influence adult education. There are various reasons for the selection of these two contexts for a comparative study. Iran is a Muslim majority country and my homeland, and Scotland is a nation with a considerable population of Muslim minority groups and a country in which I spent ten years studying and living. Adult Education in Scotland is rooted in the socio-cultural background of society and merits further study, while in Iran adult learning is developing through the transformatory potential of the globalization of the worldwide trends. I have elaborated the ways in which
Adult Education plays a role in these two societies, insofar as the studied population informed me of the theories in their perceptions and their practices.

This study is a qualitative exploration, which was covered by semi-structured interviews. The samples of study in Iran were chosen among my acquaintances or through snowballing among activists and women’s rights’ agents. In choosing the Scottish educators, I used the knowledge of my supervisors to connect with those women who were active in Adult Education of Black and Minority women, mostly Muslims. The reason for such a selection was that Iran is a Muslim majority country, and the influence of religion was one of the aspects of study. Focusing on Muslim minorities in Scotland helped me analyse the role of Islam in shaping the communities who were Muslim and living in the context of Scotland. In other words, the similarities and differences in the two settings that were explored might be more evident if the samples had commonalities in terms of religion. However, such an emphasis should not lead us to dismiss the fact that the majority of Scotland is secular. I did not reduce the socio-political and economic differentiation between Iran and Scotland to religious givens.

The main study question was whether possibilities of empowerment can be traced back as far as Adult Education is concerned; therefore, empowerment is a key criterion in this study. Throughout different sections, I attempt to examine how education can bring or facilitate empowerment in women’s lived realities.
Empowerment is linked with gender consciousness and the ability to transform women’s lives. Challenging the power of patriarchal forces, and finding solutions to combat it, may assist women in finding new ways of knowing themselves and the world. The role of Adult Education lies in questioning the conventional ways of knowing and changing the traditional roots of knowledge-building through critical thinking.

The role of adult education in problem-posing was another topic I examined. If the educational context persuades women to question forces of patriarchy by which they are discriminated against according to gender, class, ethnicity and race, there is hope that women may reach autonomous ways of thinking and living.

I faced challenges that stopped me from fully elaborating the forces and factors I considered contributing to or hindering adult education and its effectivity. For example, due to political hindrances explained in Chapter 4, I was unable to study adult learners’ points of view on the delivery of educational content and the curriculum. However, exploring the experiences of women adult educators has partly contributed to dissecting unjust forces against (Muslim) women.

Adult Education’s roots in Western (Northern) intellectual and pragmatic soil mean the concept is essentially related to specific economic, socio-political and cultural potentials. Therefore, Scotland may be regarded as one of the primary frames of reference in shaping Adult Education. The background of Adult Education as a Northern concept is discussed in this study. Furthermore, the development of societies such as Iran has resulted
in their either borrowing or nurturing progressive tools such as Adult Education. However, concepts such as Islamic feminism may help us elaborate the ways in which educational endeavours may be followed in Muslim majority contexts such as Iran.

In order to move beyond my positionality as a middle class Iranian Muslim heterosexual bipolar woman who has experienced being an immigrant in Scotland, I have acknowledged that I have a knowledge baggage that leads me to specific interpretations of the studied subjects. However, I attempted to distance myself from my status and focus on women Adult Educators’ perceptions and ideas on challenging the status quo.

There were different strategies being applied by Adult Educators to empower women learners in the contexts of Iran and Scotland. Despite the practical pursuit of gender equality, there were perceptions and attitudes that had shaped themselves around educators’ practices. These perceptions were the point of departure towards the transformation of women’s experiences. Educators’ level of awareness of learners’ needs and experiences may be an evaluative tool to weigh the burden on the shoulders of Adult Educators. Additionally, Adult Educators’ experiences of themselves and their relationship to the world are major issues discussed in this study.

This dissertation includes two chapters focused on a literature review, one methodology chapter, and two data analysis chapters for Iran and Scotland. It also includes a discussion chapter and conclusion.
In chapter 2, I discuss feminism as a new lens to reinterpret Islamic discourse and a tool for women empowerment. In this literature review, I raise the issues derived from feminism and its applicability in the Iranian context, as well as its influences on Muslim women in Scotland. Islamic feminism as a means of bringing about change and gender justice is another matter being considered in this chapter.

In Chapter 3, I review the literature on Adult Education. I connect women’s empowerment with Adult Education in this chapter. Furthermore, different definitions of Adult Education are described in detail. The formation of Adult Education in both the societies mentioned is considered subsequently. There are inconsistencies in the usage of the term Adult Education, as observed in chapter 3. Additionally, the historical process and the policy-making procedures of Adult Education are considered. Finally, the role and purposes of Adult Education are mentioned in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 examines epistemology, methodology and method. The usage of Standpoint theory and Islamic feminism is referred to in this chapter, as well as the use of feminism as the epistemological frame. Subjectivity, positionality and reflexivity are discussed in Chapter 4. The method used for this study is qualitative methodology and the application of semi-structured interviews. Sampling and the socio-cultural roots of the population being studied are among other issues discussed. Finally, analysis of the data is explored in chapter 4.

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to analysis of data from Iran and Scotland. I have followed the footsteps of the studied population and different aspects
of their approaches to Adult Education. Quotes and extracts of Adult Educators’ interviews are expanded in these chapters. Diverse aspects of educators' perceptions and their practices are also conceptualised in these chapters.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion, which dissects different components of the study samples’ frames of references. Adult Education as a background for empowerment of women is analysed accordingly. In chapter 7, I elaborate on different ways that Adult Education contributes to women empowerment. Additionally, this chapter offers a conclusion and presents the way forward. It contains the path the study has taken and propositions for further studies. Furthermore, it concludes that there are possibilities of empowerment in Adult Learning Spaces in Iran and Scotland. Although Adult Educators are informed about some of the gendered gaps that need to be filled, they are not completely and actively engaged in addressing learners’ issues. The focus of educators is on knowledge-building and acknowledging women’s needs. However, frameworks such as feminism may not be the reference point for some of the Adult Educators. Feminism is a frame which may assist educators to challenge patriarchy and find solutions for women. By problem-posing and resolving issues of women in a critical way women, learners and educators may embark on a pathway which is promising.
Chapter 2: Feminism as a new lens through which to reinterpret Islamic discourse and a tool for women’s empowerment

2.1 Introduction

As the focus of this study is empowering Muslim women through adult education, it is important to look at education through the women’s lens. Therefore, women’s past and current positionality in society and the terms that define their stance is of high importance. My study was focused on Iran and Scotland specifically on the Muslim population.

In Iran, one of the most important aspects of a woman’s life, defining her and the possibilities and limitations around being a woman, was Islam. So you will see this keyword being repeated throughout different parts of the study. Besides that, even in Scotland many of the educators I interviewed worked with Black and ethnic minorities, especially Muslim women.

The reason for my interest in a comparative analysis of Iran and Scotland is that these two significantly different contexts might, hopefully, provide me with some insights into the complexities of each society and present diverse possibilities for the empowerment of women.
Throughout my research some of those educators and learners had a desire to demonstrate their religion, while some considered their religion as faith and preferred not to publicly display it. Some mentioned that they are active in the field of feminism and contributed to the society in this way; they considered themselves feminists, but some others wished not to take a stance through the lens of feminism.

The evidences mentioned above gave me confidence that a thorough look at women, the history of being a woman, feminism and Islam (faith) are prerequisites for better understanding the existing context when it comes to working with women.

When I started writing this chapter, I faced challenges in elaborating empowerment through an Islamic Feminist lens. I considered that I should engage with how religion could change the role of men and consequently women in society, and thus terms like “Separate but equal” are elaborated. The chapter then moves to examine Islamic feminism in a wider context, briefly considering Muslim women as minorities within the UK socio-cultural context and exploring East and West, with their tensions. This is referred to because my study also explores Muslim women in Scotland. Last but not least, Hijab as a major issue that raises challenges and possibilities for the empowerment of Muslim women is considered. In this chapter I use Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism interchangeably, as I believe there is little difference between these terms, a point which is also discussed within the chapter.
2.2 Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism is a contested concept. Islamic feminism is an effort carried out by groups of women who are not reliant on governmental efforts to change the situation of women. Rather it tries to bring change through claiming authority in its reinterpretations of the religious texts. Not all Muslim women associate themselves with the use of the term feminist, preferring instead to live by their faith while subscribing to principles of justice. Others avoid being identified as feminists because they see feminism as a concept or a framework resulting from colonialism and rooted in Western norms, accompanied by specific socio-political givens framed in the West. However, there is a group, largely those active in the pursuit of gender justice, who choose to be labelled feminists. Among them are those who accept being called Islamic feminists/Muslim feminists. Fraser and Nicholson argue that it is important for feminist engagement to be attentive to the socio-cultural and historical background of each society (Fraser and Nicholson, 1989). It is mandatory to consider local feminisms as the sources of knowledge building and political alliances.

2.3 Formation and foundations of Islamic feminism

In order to understand how activists who consider themselves Islamic feminists/Muslim feminists apply theories to real life, we need to first understand several terms; for example: “interpretation of religious texts”, or the definition of “Sharia” and “Fiqh”. These are the concepts that shape the Muslim/Islamic feminist framework and therefore need to be understood.
2.3.1 Claiming authority over reinterpretation of the religious sources as foundation of Islamic feminism

There is a presupposition that Islamic law is a God-given mandate. However, the fact is that there are major, mainstream interpretations of the Islamic texts such as the Quran and Hadith\(^1\), while there exist other marginalised interpretations of the religious texts being produced by Islamic feminists, new religious thinkers and many other independent theologists or philosophers, etc. The mainstream interpretations are almost all patriarchal and have been the dominant voices in the Muslim world.

Development of techniques to interpret Quranic phrases that are hard to understand is called Tafsir. Tafsir has played a crucial role in the expansion of Islamic jurisprudence, or Fiqh, on the basis of Quranic interpretations as the first frame of reference. The second source of legislative texts consists of the reports that refer to Hadith.

The third point of reference for Islamic laws was consensus or Ijma, now understood as great jurists’ agreements. Each school within Islam has its own jurists’ understandings and agreements. Qiyas answers questions about contemporary issues that are absent from the Islamic religious texts. Ijtihad is the process by which jurists construct Fiqh through reading of the textual materials, consensus, and their own logics (Tucker, 2008). Thus it is a man-made construct rooted in the socio-political and cultural

\(^1\) Sayings and codes of conduct of Prophet Muhammad and his successors
presuppositions of religious scholars. Through the application of Ijma and Qiyas, religious scholars try to implement Islamic law.

According to Wadud, Islamic feminists’ revision of Islam through Ijtihad will help women “bear their own experiences and new critical methodologies to enact readings that are more meaningful to modern women” (cited in Badran, 1999:164). Women’s right to Ijtihad would help to decentralise the male gaze from the sacred text’s interpretation, reflecting the aspiration that a feminist lens might work towards a gender-sensitive hermeneutics. The hegemony of male scholars has caused the marginalisation of female Islamic knowledge builders such as Lady Amin, who was the first theologian and Mujtahidah in Iran. She has written books and arranged educational classes for girls during her lifetime (Rahbari, 2020) but her work is largely unrecognised.

2.3.2 Quran as a discourse or sacred text

As the first starting point for both traditional Muslim scholars and Islamic feminists is Quran there is a need to address the debates around the Quran. The Quran is a discourse, as stated by Abu Zayd and Hedayatullah (2016), not a sacred text. In other words, Quran is a narrative set in a particular time and socio-cultural context. They oppose the revelatory essence of the Quran and question interpretive attempts of Islamic feminists such as Barlas. Hedayatullah contends that we may not prioritise one set of meanings over the other. Thus we may not conclude that the Quran reveals “contemporary values of male-female equality”
(Hedayatullah, 2016:136). Barlas, replying to Hedayatullah, suggests that her claim to understand the Quran as a particular text reflects traditional views. Barlas believes that “every text has multiple contexts and [can] always be re-contextualised” (Barlas, 2016:114). Barlas mentions Moosa’s critique that efforts to interpret the Quran have led to “text fundamentalism”. She questions Moosa’s idea that “Muslim feminists make too much of a few verses of the Quran that suggests reciprocal rights and duties between equal spouses” (ibid.:115). She also criticises Abu Zayd’s approach to the Quran, as it argues on the basis of its interpreters’ ideology. Ali, too, adds that the Quran is an androcentric text and every attempt to reinterpret it as an egalitarian entity is doomed to fail. Ali and Hedayatullah reject any hermeneutical engagement with the Quran and freeze it in time, according to Barlas. Barlas argues that these scholars use modern terms such as androcentric, wife abuse, etc. in discussing the so-called traditional discourse (Islam). In addition, they “treat tradition as being more authoritarian than the Quran itself” (ibid:117). In other words, they weigh the tradition of Islam as more highly valued than the Quran as a textual entity referring to 7th-century Arabia.

2.3.3 Distinction between Sharia and Fiqh

There are different definitions of Sharia. The first depiction is evident in Ahmed’s argument. According to Rumee Ahmed, Sharia is “the divine ideal” and Islamic law “is a human attempt to capture the ideals” (2018:27). He contends that “the laws themselves are not the Sharia; they are claims made about the Sharia in the language of Islamic law” (ibid.:26).
The second method for defining Sharia may be captured through Safi’s interpretation. Safi argues that Sharia refers to do’s and don’ts as far as Islam is concerned; however, it embodies “spiritual principles” along with those injunctions.

The third type of definition leads us to consider Makki’s argument. Makki believes that Sharia is Islamic law and that it governs the public and private interactions of Muslims such as marriage and business, along with prayer and fasting.

Along with Ahmed, Mir-Hosseini distinguishes between Sharia as the “totality of God’s will, being revealed to the Prophet Muhammad” and Fiqh as “the process of human endeavour to discern and extract legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam” (Mir-Hosseini, 2011:69) such as the Quran and Sunnah (the way of the Prophet Muhammad’s living and his sayings). Thus, in this definition, Fiqh is a realm that is open to reinterpretation. Islamic feminists argue that there is a need to bring their neglected authority and perspectives into interpretations of the jurisprudential, Fiqh-based and Quranic texts. This is a realm of knowledge that Muslim women need to be engaged in.

Islamic feminism may also involve women asking for space and voice to allow their representation as legitimate agents and actors within Muslim communities. This form of activism challenges the patriarchal presence of mainstream Muslim scholars and leaders who have traditionally advocated and represented Muslim women’s and men’s rights, duties and needs.
2.3.4 Questioning men’s custody and guardianship over women

There is a diversity among different Muslim majority countries in configuring their family laws. Here we have two important terms: Qiwamah and Wilayah.

Qiwamah is the authority of men over women and Wilayah is male guardianship as far as family relations are concerned. Wilayah refers to the power of the father and other male figures over their children. These two concepts significantly affect a woman’s “being” and therefore should be deeply understood when it comes to understanding a woman’s perspective and lived reality.

Welchman studied Morocco and UAE family law and reached the conclusion that there are differences in codifying laws related to the spouses in these two countries. She also mentions other Arab countries and the ways in which their personal status laws are shaped according to the “neoconservative” dynamics between men and women in the area of family relations. Welchman refers to the Qiwamah postulate that requires men to provide for their wives financially and economically, while the same duty reinforces their right towards their wives, a right which obliges women to obey their husbands. Such a “gendered contract” (cited in Welchman, 2015:134) may be referred to as nafaqa (maintenance) for women, in exchange for tamkin (obedience) to husbands, submission to men’s need
for sexual intercourse, and caregiving to family members. However, in Moroccan law there have been changes in such a perception. The Moroccan law (2004) promotes equality between spouses, moving towards human rights conventions such as CEDAW; while the UAE had adopted a gendered contract (amended in 2018) that follows the traditional maintenance–obedience formula. It is necessary to mention that UAE’s family law has been changed to a more equally gendered context.

Digging down to the roots of gender inequality within the family structure by reviewing Quranic and Fiqh-based presuppositions, Mir-Hosseini (2015) shows how male authority over women has been sanctioned through Muslim family law. She elaborates how Muslim jurists have followed the sale(buy) contract in codifying the marriage contract. In other words, they have assigned an exchange between husband and wife according to verse 4:34 in the Quran. This spousal exchange rests on the presupposition that men have authority over women in exchange for women’s obedience. Mirhosseini borrows Gilligan’s phrase the “DNA of patriarchy” in referring to Qiwmah and Wilayah assumptions and their influence on the relationships between husbands and wives (2015).

Accordingly, some Islamic feminists argue that men’s position as breadwinners and maintainers of the family should be re-evaluated through reinterpretation of the Islamic texts, along with evidence of the realities of women and men in economic and social partnership. These scholars offer new insights into the relationship of husband and wife within the family. The traditional conception of men as the sole providers for women is being
questioned by projects such as the Musawah organisation’s² work. There are many women who are economically active in society, as emphasised by the Musawah group in the book *Women’s stories, Women’s lives; Male authority in Muslim contexts* (Musawah, 2016) and other resources.

The division of labour between men and women within the household is being transformed in contemporary societies. This means that an important part of the journey of women’s empowerment is to be focused on employability skills. Furthermore, without a mindset shift among men and women, no education can be fundamentally transformational or effective. New patterns of relationships between husbands and wives are being constructed. Through deconstructing Qiwamah and Wilayah as the two prescribed roles for men, Islamic feminists have engaged in opening up new horizons for the family’s configurations. They have shown that in the contemporary world women are active economically and play a considerable role in the family’s financial security. But against the reality check brought about by Islamic feminists, women’s status within the family as mothers still appears to be prioritised.

### 2.4 Separate but equal versus genuine transformation

As far as the relationship between women and men in the family is concerned, Islamic feminists offer a new outlook for reversing the practice of patriarchy. Mestiri (cited in Djelloul, 2018) argues that Islamic feminism

---

1. Musawah means equality; the organization is an advocacy body for promotion of equality within the Muslim family.
would result in pro-complementarity of the sexes. However, not all Islamic feminists defend complementarity of the sexes. For instance, Lamrabet (cited in Mir-Hosseini et al., 2015) argues that, due to the specific cultural context of 7th century Arabia, men were in charge of providing financial support for their families, and this led to the division of labour between men and women. Such a perception produced societal conceptions of women as weak creatures incapable of reasoning. However, Lamrabet claims that, according to the Quran, women can be in charge of public duties.

Feminists such as Wadud, Abou-Bakr, Lamrabet, Chaudry and Welchman, who have contributed to Musawah’s discourse in the book called *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (2015), argue for substantive and transformative equity as opposed to the protectionist viewpoint. They offer solutions to the traditional division of labour between women and men. The Musawah organisation, as an Islamic feminist entity, has documented a shift in approach from a protectionist stance, based on essentialist roles of men and women and the gendered division of labour, to transformative equity. The protectionist approach regards men and women as equal but at the same time treats them as though they have different natures. This brings to the fore the term often used in the UK, *Separate but Equal*. In other words, women are made for some types of work while men are suited to other responsibilities.

Musawah believes in the substantive and transformative equity that is echoed in the CEDAW convention. It takes the view that substantive and

---

3 Men were responsible for the public space and women were expected to manage the private space.
transformative equity refers to laws and regulations that promote justice between men and women as regards opportunities, processes and outcomes. Transformative equity urges transformation on the institutional level and within systems and power relations (Musawah knowledge building brief-3, Islam and the question of gender equality)\(^4\).

Abu-Lughod (2013), as a critic of Musawah, explores how contemporary feminism is rooted in stereotypical perceptions of Muslim women and their rights. As an anthropologist she pinpoints the realities of women’s lives in Egypt as divergent from common perceptions, which promote specific ideas about Muslim women as submissive, and the media-propagated images of Muslim women as weak creatures. She questions the colonial heritage of feminism and the ways it accommodates specific activist norms and conventions in global feminism. Apparently, there is a need to go beyond ethno-religious categorisations in order to fight patriarchy. She believes there is an incompatibility between Islam and women’s rights. Therefore, she rejects every attempt to reconcile Islam with human rights. Abu-Lughod argues that there is a need to obtain political and historical accounts of women’s realities and to go further than relativistic presuppositions on the situation of women. It is mandatory to challenge Western interventions in the context of Muslim societies and to take into account context-bound facts such as Burqa wearing. In this regard women’s experiences such as motherhood may open doors to a better understanding of women’s realities.

2.5 Politicisation of motherhood

One of the starting points for Islamic feminist activism is the area of politicisation and problematisation of motherhood. If women’s status is only recognised and glorified according to their role within the family, while other aspects of women’s roles and presence in society are dismissed, then such a one-sided emphasis may undermine a woman’s other characteristics and talents.

For example, in Iran, the family is placed at the centre of the Islamic Republic’s discourse of Islamisation. For Islamic feminists in Iran, this therefore has been a good starting point for claiming women’s rights. It is important to note that the Islamic state’s production of slogans such as “Heaven lies under mother’s feet”⁵ led Zanan magazine to question the ways in which women as praised creatures were being treated by Islamic jurisprudence and laws (Gheytanchi, 2001).

Lawyers such as Kar have argued that if women are being given a sacred position as mothers, they should have equal rights with men in areas such as custody and guardianship. According to family law in Iran, men have authority over their children in decisions concerning, for example, the age of marriage. Kar questioned why women, who are praised for performing the “holy” task of motherhood, are deprived of equal rights within and beyond the family.

⁵ This quote is being used as a reference which lies in the saying of the Prophet Mohammad.
beyond the family. According to Kar, a woman’s testimony is worth half that of a man, in addition to which women are seen as adults at the age of nine while men are treated as adults at the age of fifteen. The latter fact leads to perceiving women’s crimes as such six years earlier than men’s (ibid.). These obvious injustices are inconsistent with women’s dignified status as mothers.

A simplistic and uncritical engagement with the concept of motherhood outweighs considerations of the impact of patriarchy, can lead to essentialism, and can promote a view that takes the role of motherhood for granted. The supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, has announced a 16-point plan to make Iran a “family-centred society” (Esfandiari, 2016). This has alerted feminists to the implications of such an involvement with the private realm of the family within the issue of women’s status.

As stated above, motherhood may be a starting point for questioning women’s status in the society – although such an emphasis on this identity marker shouldn’t lead us to disregard the fact that women are more than mothers and their agency should be considered.

2.6 Background of feminism in different countries

Islamic feminism is a worldwide phenomenon; its theorists belong to different nations but most originate from the Arabic-speaking world, especially those who are engaged in new interpretations of the Quran as an Arabic text.
One of the first examples is Habib Borghibah (1967). He was the politician in Tunisia who transformed some of the patriarchal laws and legislatives prevalent in that era. He enforced anti-Hijab (viewing the Hijab as a constraint for women) and male-female social mixing policies. In 1967 he facilitated contraception. In 1973 abortion became legal in Tunisia. Abdun Naser in Egypt presented a novel aspect of women and their sexualities, through artistic shows, movies and dancing-singing events presented by women. Women’s right to vote and access to education and employment were achievements of this era. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood as an Islamist group in 1928 was a counter-force against these changes. They argued for compulsory Hijab and a ban on women working. Abdun Naser was forced to accede to some of the demands of the conservative majority of the country, and was thus less successful than his Tunisian counterpart in transforming women’s realities (Ben Mahmoud, 2014).

Studies such as Ben Mahmoud’s documentary “Women’s revolution; a century of Arabic feminism” focused on Arabic feminism and the ways in which it prevailed in the Arab world. In the following section I review Ben Mahmoud’s documentary and her arguments around women’s and men’s efforts towards gender justice.

Ben Mahmoud differentiates between Arab feminism and Islamic feminism by documenting and highlighting some Arab countries’ feminism. She focusses on the activist level rather than on theoretical engagements with Islam. Arab feminism started to challenge domestic violence and patriarchy
as enforced by Islamist states (especially after the Arab Spring). In her documentary, Ben Mahmoud traces the footsteps of Arabic feminism in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Her exploration does not go deep, but is useful for considering the Arab countries’ introduction to feminism.

There are pioneers of feminism in Tunisia and Egypt who confronted women’s submission to patriarchy. Tahir Haddad, an author and reformer from Tunisia, fought for women’s liberation and empowerment in the realm of education during the period when women were expected to accept misogyny. He believed that Islam was not inconsistent with women’s liberty. In Egypt, too, there had been feminist and modernist challenges to religious legislators and their conventional interpretations. Qasim Amin was a pioneer who wrote against the Hijab as a symbol of Islamic tradition. Resembling Haddad, his legacy was one of opposition to traditional interpretations of Islam.

Huda Sharawi was another Egyptian feminist at the forefront of the effort to bring about change for women. She removed her Hijab in public and also established the Union of Arab Feminists. Manoubiah Vertani and Habibeh Menshari in Tunisia followed Sharawi’s lead in battling against polygamy and the Hijab.

However, there have always been conservative forces at work against gender justice. From 1990, the Gulf countries started to spread fundamentalist ideologies by public media, especially television. These media were scattered throughout the Arab world. They propagated Hijab
and religious rituals according to their conservative interpretations. Egyptian activists such as the historian Bessis contends in Ben Mahmoud's documentary that the re-emergence of Hijab in Egypt went hand in hand with Islamism. Political Islam was successful in turning the Hijab into a public and common cover.

Morocco’s situation was somewhat different from that of Tunisia and Egypt, as it is a secular state. In reviewing the reforms introduced in Morocco, Ben Mahmoud mentions Islamic Feminism. Reviewing the Moroccan situation, she argues that Islam includes liberatory values for women, a claim that may be backed up via new interpretations of the Islamic texts. Then for the first time in her study, Ben Mahmoud discusses Islamic feminism as a theory that expanded gender rights within the Moroccan context. According to Ben Mahmoud, Islamic feminism emerged in Malaysia in 2007. Borrowing from Armstrong, we may claim that “it is not necessarily religion itself that is patriarchal…we do not need to eradicate religion in order to achieve female liberation…. we need to get back to more female centred spiritual traditions and develop a female-focused spirituality” (cited in Thompson, 2018).

There have been transformations implemented by the state in Morocco, but these changes are not sufficient for real evolution of women’s rights. Lamrabet is a Moroccan Islamic feminist who works towards women’s rights through interpretation of the religious texts. She argues that Islamic discourse and contemporary realities converge in Islamic feminism. In Morocco, Mohammad V reformed the old conservative family law. Mohammad VI announced that new rules and regulations would limit
polygamy and facilitate divorce for women. However, according to Yofout, corrupt courts are a matter of concern. This means that the practice of Law at some points remains in contrast to the reformed legislations (Ben Mahmoud, 2014).

In addition, the mentality of women and men needs to change so that transformation in women’s rights can become possible.

2.7 Terminology: a review on diverse terminology of "Islamic feminism" and activists’ positionality

Another fact I became aware of throughout my study was that there is a diverse and wide terminology when it comes to discussing feminism: Islamic feminism, Muslim feminism, Arab feminism, Western feminism etc. Since the population I focus on is mainly Muslim, there was a need to have an elaborate look at Islamic feminism. However, it would be fruitful to consider that Muslim feminism as it is used in different contexts has diverse meanings according to the characteristics of each country.

Definitions of Islamic feminism have been offered by different theorists. Badran is one of the first scholars to have explored the roots of Islamic feminism.

She argues that Islamic feminism is “a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an and seeks the practice of rights and justice for all human beings in the
totality of their existence across the public-private continuum” (2018:96). Badran’s interpretation of Islamic feminism does not include the Prophet Mohammad’s sayings and deeds (Sunnah) as the second source of Islamic understanding. Some other Islamic feminists such as Mir-Hosseini, Al-Sharmani and others mention both the Quran and the Sunnah as the sources with which they dig into the understanding of Islam.

Another definition of Islamic feminism has been put forward by Najmabadi. She argues that Islamic feminism “is a reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists" (cited in Moghadam, 2002:1143). Her depiction of Islamic feminism is so broad and extensive that it includes any engagements with gender justice.

The third definition, which is close to Najmabadi’s, is Mir-Hosseini’s frame for Islamic feminism. She contends that “Islamic feminism is a gendered discourse which is feminist in its aspiration and demands yet it is Islamic in its language and source of legitimacy” (2006:640).

Scholars such as Moghadam (2002) use Islamic feminism as a framework for capturing the engagement of Islamic women within the Iranian regime who work towards gender equality, while believing in Islam as a liberating discourse. Moghadam uses the term “Islamic women” to enable women like Hashemi, Taleghani, Ebtekar, Shojai, Behrouzi, Gorji, Jelodarzadeh, and Moulaverdi, who all work within the Iranian state system, to feel entitled to identify themselves with gender justice as well as with their status as Muslims (Moghadam, 2002).
Moghadam’s approach is to be strategically inclusive of Muslim women who have interests in gender justice but who are at the same time perceived as obedient to the state and its Islamic roots. These women work within the governmental system and hold positions mostly as parliamentary members. Their profile evidences that they have been engaged in claiming women’s rights, but are clearly now walking a difficult tightrope of complex and potentially competing agendas of gender justice, state bureaucracy and faith frameworks, largely interpreted and implemented by men.

When it comes to terminology, some scholars, like Tohidi (2003), differentiate Muslim feminism from Islamic feminism, seeing Muslim feminists as feminists who happen to be Muslim. For Tohidi and also for Moghadam, these Muslim feminists do not necessarily ground their work in the theological endeavour that Islamic feminists pursue (Al-Sharmani, 2016, personal communication). Muslim feminists engage with the overall knowledge project to deconstruct patriarchal interpretations and reconstruct egalitarian interpretations from within the tradition (Al-Sharmani, Musawah Webinar, 2020).

Tohidi prefers to use the term Muslim feminism rather than Islamic feminism when referring to the identity of people who engage in gender-sensitive scholarly and activist work. She pinpoints the idea that women should not be bound to religious aspects of misogyny and that their commitment to feminism should be a result of gender justice in its holistic aspect. They should be considerate of socio-political, cultural and economic realities on the ground. She uses the term Muslim feminism because she sees the potential in reconciling Islamic and feminist
discourses as non-essentialist entities. For Tohidi, the term Islamic feminism is conceptual and analytical and forms a discursive but limiting engagement between feminism and theology (Tohidi, 2003:138). This is especially so if we go beyond the borders of Muslim majority countries and place Islamic feminism within the everyday reality of Islamophobic ideologies, where the concept of Islamic feminism takes on local socio-political and historical dimensions.

It can be argued that Islamic feminism is the more all-encompassing concept and term to use, as it can be applied to Muslim women across the world. It potentially transcends the time when it first emerged, after the 18th and 19th Islamic revolutions in Muslim countries (Lamrabet, Musawah Webinar, 2020) and it includes the challenge to inequalities as far as the sacred texts are concerned. Islamic feminism carries more political weight; it may be more inclusive and enabling especially in non-Muslim countries and can also be a uniting strategy for Muslim women in non-Muslim majority countries for the reasons discussed above.

The term Muslim feminists, on the other hand, largely refers to feminists who are Muslim advocating on human rights questions through their feminist lens. The faith aspect is less central in their engagement with gender inequality. In other words, Islamic feminism becomes a position from which Muslim women may think and act, rather than forcing themselves into rigid categories and allows for those who wish to explicitly have their faith acknowledged to be able to so within a gender justice narrative.
As I explored the literature, I found that Islamic feminism is a conceptualisation that has more widespread usage than Muslim feminism. However, I have chosen to use the terms Islamic and Muslim feminism interchangeably, because I wanted to include all those feminists who have chosen to engage in attempts to achieve gender justice. In addition, as my focus is on understanding and unpacking the configurations of patriarchy, the terminological differentiation seems exorbitant.

2.8 Historical review on women's stance in Iran

Feminism in Iran has its roots in diverse political phases that have occurred over the centuries. The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged in the 20th century, affecting gender justice by enforcing Islamic rules and regulation in the country. The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran led to an emergence of political Islam and initiated a period in which gender inequality was sanctioned in the name of Islam. The hegemonic ascendancy of Muslim clerics and the application of Sharia law resulted in reversing some of the secular reforms undertaken by the previous Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty. This happened against a backdrop in accordance with which, at a global level, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

However, feminist attempts to challenge patriarchal enforcements in response to the Islamic state’s dictates are evident. Feminism has been a theoretical and practical route for women in Iran who have been
challenging inequalities. In particular, it has been an enabling framework for women claiming their rights to education and representation in the public domain. Throughout the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century a gendered perspective was promoted by modernist advocates in Iran.

During the Qajar and Pahlavi era, modern thinkers emerged who advocated women’s rights and challenged Islam as a source of disempowerment. One of their policies was the unveiling of women and a liberalising of patriarchal views which held women as responsible agents within the household. Women were supposed to be “compassionate wives, educated mothers and useful citizens” (Najmabadi, 2005:150). According to Najmabadi, education was a vehicle which enabled women to raise their claim for equality within and beyond the private sphere of the family (ibid.).

Afary (2009) explains that the advocates of education for women, unveiling and monogamy were not necessarily only women activists. She mentions Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1853-1896) and Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), two male revolutionary thinkers of the Qajar period, as prominent avant-garde thinkers promoting women’s education and their rights. Akhundzadeh contends that Islam was the source of the problem, working against progress in Iran (cited in Mazinani, 2015:888).

The realities for Iranian or Muslim women are far more complex, for modernist advocates of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century women needed to be visible and heard by means such as unveiling. In
such an atmosphere gender segregation becomes a hindrance to transformation of women’s status.

There have also been complexities in the politics of veiling in the Iranian context. After the Qajar period, during Pahlavi rule (1925-1979) in Iran, some women considered unveiling a prerequisite to women’s participation in education, work outside the house, and the progress of the nation (Najmabadi, 2005:137). Unlike some popular Western understandings of Muslim women’s unveiling, in Iran, unveiling was not just about the emancipation of women and eradication of their seclusion. Unveiling of women was seen as a prerequisite for “modernist heterosocialization of culture and heteronormalization of eros and sex” rather than women’s emancipation, according to Najmabadi (ibid.:148). In other words, desegregation of men and women and unveiling of women were seen as steps towards normalisation of sexualities and “eradication of same-sex practices” that were prevalent at that time.

Entrance to the realm of citizenship required women to observe the public language, discipline their bodies and follow “scientific sensibilities” (ibid.:152). However, some incidents such as the compulsory unveiling of women in 1936 show that women had to abide by the patriarchal rules of the public space that demanded masculine behaviour of them. One of the historical points that needs consideration is the time following the emergence of voluntary re-veiling in the 1970s in many Islamic communities and countries (Najmabadi, 2005). Analysis of the nuances of women’s experiences, such as veiling, needs careful consideration given
the complexities of Muslim identity and the socio-economic, historical and political realities of women’s lives.

2.8.1 Emergence of Islamic Feminism in Iran

By the early 1990s, feminist voices within Islamic discourse had started to resound. Shahla Sherkat, a prominent woman journalist, founded Zanan, a magazine that became one of the prominent sites where voices were raised for gender equality, challenging the patriarchal readings of mainstream Islamic discourse in Iran. Islamic feminists such as Mir-Hosseini and Najmabadi began to highlight Zanan’s efforts and the ways in which it advocated for women’s rights by referencing feminist resources and questioning the legislations that created gender inequality in the name of Islam. They called Zanan’s actions Islamic feminist engagement (Moghadam, 2002).

However, these feminist engagements throughout the early decades of the 20th century in Iran, and women’s efforts in voicing their gendered claims, were resisted by conservative members of the Ulama (the body of religious scholars). One of the questions raised by religious figures was whether the “formation of women’s communities was in accordance with the Shariah law or not” (Afary, 1996:193). Considering the context and society’s mindset in Iran at that time, gender claims or any movement of that nature couldn’t happen if they weren’t compatible with Islamic frames. Therefore there was a need to define actions against gender inequality based on Islamic laws and texts.
There have been other limitations on the practice of gender justice in Iran. On the theoretical and activist level, there has been little interaction among new religious thinkers in Iran and other reformist thinkers in different Muslim majority countries. This is due to internal pressures on academics and activists that prevent them from forming alliances and bonds with global intellectuals, especially since such interactions are seen by counterintelligence services as threats (PENA, 2006) to the ideologies and agenda of the state regarding Islamisation. This lack of interaction limits access to up-to-date knowledge and concurrent transformations in the ways in which activists around the world bring about change.

For example, Zahra Shojai, who was the advisor to president Khatami (1997-2005) on women’s affairs, advocated for women’s rights and championed gender mainstreaming and development of NGOs among her policies. The budget for women’s participation increased to 360 times that of the period before her engagement with the Centre for Women’s Participation. Her gender mainstreaming policy led to expansion of the centre’s ties with other ministries, such as the ministry of education (personal communication, 2020). Exchange of agreements between the Centre for Women’s Participation and a couple of universities was another achievement of her policies. Activation of the CEDAW convention was a further attempt made during Shojai’s time as advisor (Centre for Women’s Participation, Women’s participation and 8th government, 2005).

Moulaverdi was another successor who became involved in women’s affairs during Rouhani’s presidency (2013-present). She held the position
of president’s advisor from 2013 to 2017. Moulaverdi was an advocate and her policies were focused on empowerment of women job-holders, by finding legislative solutions for women in relation to their positions within the family. Social pathologies such as the problems of women addicts and women as heads of households were highlighted during the period of her advisory position (Advisory for Women and Family Affairs, The national report on the function of women and family affairs centre, 2013).

The women politicians mentioned, however, may not identify themselves as Muslim feminists due to the sensitivity around the concept of “feminism”. But they may be less sensitive about being seen as Islamic feminists. Barlow and Akbarzadeh prefer another label for these Islamic women: they adopt the term religious-oriented feminism as an alternative to Islamic feminism. They argue that religious-oriented feminists have not been successful in challenging the status quo by attempting to question religious givens proposed by the state. They also mention the difficulty of codifying the CEDAW convention against the interventions of the Guardian Council as a state body which evaluates the ability to adjust reforms to Islamic tradition. Such a situation shows the contrast with Najmabadi’s optimism about the possibility of creating a dialogue between Islamic women activists and secular feminists (cited in Gashtili, 2013:5).

2.8.2 Iran’s International relations

Iran’s international relationships with other Muslim countries has always been challenging. The Islamist state of Iran after 1979 has had a conflictual
relationship with Middle Eastern neighbours. Iran has been accused of supporting Shi’ah minorities in other Arab regions. The eight years of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) exacerbated the tense relationship between Iran and its neighbours (Aljazeera, 2009). This has resulted in Iran’s isolation politically as well as socio-culturally. After the imposition of nuclear sanctions against Iran, the country became more isolated from the rest of the world (BBC News, 2015). Besides this, there are international barriers to its free engagement with the world, such as the difficulty of obtaining visas to other countries. The Persian language is another issue, most Iranians being mainly fluent in Persian, which is different from Arabic.

In other words, the relationship between Iran and the world has been shaped by the Islamic revolution. On the local level, Iran has not signed CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and women NGOs have been unable to get funding and support from international organisations so as to build a mutually productive interaction with the world. The Guardian Council of Iran’s refusal to ratify the CEDAW convention on the basis that it contradicts Islam (Koolaee, 2012) has implications for gender and feminist discourses in Iran. In addition, Iranian activists face the Iranian government’s conspiracy theory (PENA, 2006). People have experienced the American and British attempted coup d’états of 1953 against the nationalist government of Mohammad Mosadegh. This has affected the historical memory of Iranian people regarding Western values and their interventions.

As far as the politics of Muslim women’s realities are concerned, there have emerged women scholars who wanted to ensure that women’s rights made
progress and who viewed Islamic feminism as a mode of identification that would help them work towards women's empowerment. Not all used the same terminology, but all wanted to ensure that the reinterpretation of Islamic texts could help Muslim women to propose and defend gender equality.

2.8.3 Islamism (fundamentalism) in Iran

It is necessary to introduce different approaches to gender justice and elaborate women’s engagement with Islam as an entity that may advocate or prevent women from claiming their rights. Discussion of different strands of Islamism enables us to dissect angles of Muslim women’s ways of approaching Islam as a discourse which may be liberating or may enforce specific unjust mandates.

Mir-Hosseini and Karam differentiate between Islamist and Islamic. Islamists subscribe to Islamism, which is mostly political Islam; namely “a commitment to public action to implement what Islamists regard as an Islamic agenda”. Islamism has appeared in slogans such as “Islam is the solution” or “return to Shariah”. Mir-Hosseini suggests that it is impossible to configure Islamism with feminism as they are two mutually exclusive concepts. Islamic feminism, on the other hand, means “finding inspiration and even legitimacy in Islamic history and textual sources” (cited in Mir-Hosseini, 2011:68) and this approach allows for greater compatibility of the two concepts of Islam and feminism. Mir-Hosseini and other Islamic feminists (Al-Sharmani, 2011; Barlas, 2013; Wadud, 2015) argue that Islam
and feminism may share some grounds on which they accommodate spaces for challenging patriarchy and bringing about empowerment of women. In this manner, the polarisation between religion and feminism can be deconstructed and narrowed.

By fundamentalists I mean those women who have been educated in pre-revolutionary Iran by theorists such as Motahari who advocated for traditional women’s roles in the family, while promoting practices such as wearing the Hijab as revolutionary acts (Sadeghi, 2010). Islamist women may be placed within the category of conservative thinkers and those involved in reproducing traditional knowledge and action according to fixed beliefs about Islam. They disregard the opening up of spaces for contemporary issues emerging in the 21st century. This is in contrast with Islamic (or indeed Muslim) feminists whose efforts are geared towards interrogating the Quran and reframing its interpretation within feminist thinking.

The rise of Islamic revolutions in countries such as Iran in the 20th century led to the emergence of groups of Islamists who claimed that they were guarding Islam against interventions of modernity and the Western world. Islamists adhere to the hegemony of patriarchal ideologies rooted in traditional Islam. Muslim feminists are engaged in reinterpretation of the religious texts, while Islamist women focus on the ways in which the text is being applied (Karam, 1997:5) according to their specific political and religious givens. Islamist women are likely to be concerned with political Islam or what Mir-Hosseini calls Islamism. Mir-Hosseini rejects any associations between “Islamic” or “Muslim” feminists with political Islam or
Islamist thinkers (Mir-Hosseini, 2011:68). Tohidi mentions Islamists as conservative, traditional people who oppose feminism (2003) and reject it in order to keep Islam intact. In other words, political Islam (and Islamists) purport to claim back Islam and seek ways to apply Islamic rulings and regulations within society, while Islamic/Muslim feminists do not insist on any application of Islam as a form of political enforcement.

Ahmadinejad in Iran appointed to his cabinet women who may be called Islamist – Ajorlou, Aalia, Vahid Dastgerdi, Javadi, Soltan-khah, Tabib-Zadeh Noori, Mojtahed-Zadeh, Bodaaghi (The Guardian, 2009). While on the surface this would appear to be an act of inclusion of women in Ahmadinejad’s conservative government, these women were unlikely to question the status quo. The women mentioned were thinking and acting according to the man-made ideologies prevalent in conspiracy theories against the West and its presupposed antisemitism (ibid.). This is evident in the application of revolutionary values which supported women’s status as housewives who guard the sanctity of the family. Such a claim may be backed up by reviewing the Function Report of the 10th government, written by the Centre for Women and Family Affairs (2012).

There had been changes at the policy-making level that enforced Islamism or conservative fundamentalism. The name of the Centre for Women’s Participation was changed to “Centre for Women and Family Affairs” during Ahmadinejad’s presidency (2005-2013). The Centre for Women and Family Affairs and its advisors have revived the concept of family according to Islamist beliefs. Islamic seminaries became allies of the Women and Family Affairs establishment. The abbreviation for NGOs was changed to Sazman-
haye-mardom-nahad which indicates the reduced value of these organisations, now identified as organisations that are run by the people. In changing the name of non-governmental organisations, the state attempted to cling to its populist agenda by mobilising different sections of the society and facilitating their operation through transactions with the government rather than through independent and autonomous action. Another attempt made by Islamist women was the transitioning of studies in the Humanities fields into Islamised entities such as gender studies, philosophy and sociology. Policies promoting Hijab were the aim of another action taken by this group of Islamists (Centre for Women and Family Affairs, The report of function in the 10th government, 2012).

In the section above, I have tried to clarify the distinctive position of women who are called Islamists (fundamentalists) and whose efforts target the application of Islam according to the presuppositions of mainstream religious scholars. In the following section I review how Islam has been shaped through different forces.

2.9 Islam in Scotland

According to mid-2019 estimates of the Office for National Statistics, Scotland has a population of 5,453,300. Non-British nationals living in Scotland number around 373,000. Polish is the nationality of the major migrant population, constituting 97,000 people. Romania, Lithuania, the Republic of Ireland and Pakistan are the countries of origin of the remaining migrant population of Scotland.
In Glasgow, the textile factories have attracted South Asian and particularly Pakistani ethnic minorities. In 1991 there were around 22,000 Pakistanis living in Scotland; of the 42,600 Muslims in Scotland, 75 percent are Pakistani (Rahielah Noreen, 2013:34). However, Bonino (2016) states that almost 60 percent of Muslims living in Scotland are of Pakistani origin. The Pakistanis are the largest ethnic minority community within Scotland. The roots of the Pakistani community in Scotland have led them to be identified as Scottish Muslims, and Islam is the second religion in Scotland after Christianity (Bonino, 2016). But the Muslim community is not a homogeneous group, as there are different types of Muslims such as Shi’ah, Salafi, Sufi, Ahmadiyya, Arabic or African mainstream groups (cited in Bonino, 2016). They are located largely in the key cities of Scotland, namely Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. The Muslim population in Scotland is served by 35 mosques, along with the very private spaces where they practice their rituals. However, members of this population are the subject of racist and ethnic discrimination at times, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The process of becoming integrated into Scottish society has been a challenging one for Muslims. Discrimination against the community has been religious, cultural and racial (Rahielah Noreen, 2013:42). Scottish Muslims try to conform both to the codes of conduct and identity markers that are accepted in Scotland and those accepted within their Muslim communities. Rahielah shows in his research that Muslim women have been challenging traditional presuppositions of Islam through their everyday practices and activism within and outside of their communities.
However, they have faced stereotypes as non-proper Muslims due to the choices they have made in terms of Hijab, speaking up, and involvement in mainstream Western society.

There are spaces where the Scottish mainstream political and social entities have welcomed Muslims, in the form of organisations that deal with Muslim women’s issues. These settings are the Muslim Council of Scotland, Al-Meezan, Pakeezah, the Muslim Women’s Association of Edinburgh, Sahelyia, Shakti and AMINA the Muslim Women’s Resource Center (cited in Rahielah, 2013:119). In addition, there are institutes in Scotland such as the Alwaleed Centre at the University of Edinburgh which are active in research areas, outreach projects and public events. One of the Alwaleed Centre’s research areas is that of Muslims in Europe. Another is a study on the growing influence of female Muslim religious authorities across Europe. The academic debates are around identity, representation and political engagement. However, the aforementioned organisations are facing cuts in the services that they provide as a result of shrinking finances for the support of voluntary organisations. Yet the groups which these organisations serve are those who are under-represented and stand a higher risk of facing exclusion and lack of participation in mainstream provision (cited in Rahielah, 2013:132).

In the Scottish context the Muslim minority community faces specific challenges. As Rashid (2016) argues, the ways that Muslim women are expected to represent themselves are limited and narrowly define them as victims of their communities in the UK. She highlights the linkage between Muslim women’s empowerment and the UK state’s agenda for preventing
violent extremism (ibid.:36). Consequently, even in a progressive country like Scotland, Muslim women’s claim-making may be tied to particularistic and essentialised aspects of their identity as mothers and wives. In the UK context, they are seen as agents who may help the government to control Muslim communities so as to guard against the influence of terrorism (Rashid, 2016). Such a situation in England has not been replicated in the Scottish Government’s approach to Scottish Muslim women, but it may be a scenario for the future, particularly if the Scottish Government’s leadership view changes. In other words, it should be noted that while the UK political and counter-terrorism narrative has not been the official narrative of the Scottish government, things may change. However, in Scotland, anti-Muslim attitudes and actions tend to be enacted as obscure on-the-ground inequalities, or as racial micro-aggressions which are difficult for impacted individuals or anti-racist activists to challenge.

The dominant subliminal view remains of Muslims as a population who need to reject their identity in order to become integrated into mainstream European societies. As Edward Said suggests, "the West's homogenised and reified culturalist view of Islam has its roots in European colonialism" (cited by Kundnani, 2014:59). In a similar way, Rashid (2016:10) raises the problematic relationship between feminism as a co-construct of colonialism and its attempt to build empowerment of women around the status of Muslim women within their communities, irrespective of the wider socio-political context. The Scottish government has not been as harsh as those of some European countries such as France in using coercion against the Muslim population, and Muslim women in Scottish society have enjoyed some sort of gender recognition by different mechanisms such as
practising Hijab or being involved in public spaces through work and study (Rahielah, 2013).

Here I will draw on Bonino’s book *Muslims in Scotland: the making of community in a post 9/11 world*. Along with that I will elaborate Elshayyal’s (2020) critique of the institutionally misogynistic treatment of Muslim women in Scotland within their communities. Since 9/11, Muslim identity has been reinforced through various paths. Scottish Muslims have felt that they should adhere to their Muslim identity through their ways of dressing and belonging to their communities. Muslim Scottish women have been actively involved in belonging both to their communities and to the Westernised identity, especially their sexualised identities. One of the representations of a claimed sexualised identity for Muslim women in Scotland is visible in the practice of dating. They cling to community expectations in parallel with the rules and regulations prevalent in sexualised spaces such as bars and clubs (Bonino, 2016). Bonino attests to the dynamics of Muslim Scottish identity and the ways its configurations lead Muslims to associate with both Scottish and Muslim (Pakistani) identity. “Scotland and especially Edinburgh have actively supported the process of strengthening of religious identity” through giving space to women who have migrated from Muslim majority countries. This has become possible via discovery of the self in a friendly environment (2016:170).

Bonino’s picture of Scottish-born Muslims who configure the youth and later generations shows that they are trying to socialise and integrate into the wider society; they “doubly cross ethno-cultural boundaries by extending
their own networks to both different Muslim ethnic constituencies and Scottish society as large” (2016:89). However, Elshayyal (2020), a female academic, argues that there is an institutional misogyny against Muslim women within the community of Muslims. In addition, there are portraits of Muslim women as “nagging, a burden or source of irritation” within the family structures (2020:7). Elshayyal opposes any cultural internalisation by women themselves of unjust treatment of Muslim women, as a destructive phenomenon prevalent in Muslim communities in the UK.

It is important to consider the fact that Muslim Scottish people are concerned about international ties to the global community through participation in political and ideological gatherings. These community-building efforts have been shaped around giving charity to the poor and speaking out about issues such as US-Iraq wars. Islam is the core integrative force around which the Muslim global community shapes itself. There have been ways of asserting Muslim identity through activist work such as the “I speak for myself” campaign of AMINA Muslim Women’s Resource Centre, which was an action to challenge stereotypes of Muslims and the perceptions around this community (Bonino, 2016:155).

According to some studies such as Homes et al., “integrating Muslims into the society is easier in Scotland than England due to issues such as lower fear of terrorism, lower settlement numbers and positive features of Scotland such as friendliness, sociability and welcoming disposition” (cited in Bonino, 2016:106). “The transition from an ethno-cultural to a national and religious community is a natural generational and environmental evolution that touches upon ideas of migration, settlement and
development” (Bonino, 2016:108). “Muslims in Scotland maximise individual and group survival by giving up some of their ethno-cultural distinctiveness, taking up the Scottish national narrative and building a cross-ethnic Muslim collectivity” (2016:109). In spite of such facts, Elshayyal believes that “mosques, community centres, activist spaces, institutions of learning, and those organisations seeking to speak for Muslims in the UK” (2020:5) are highly patriarchal and male-centred.

Bonino mentions the fact that, due to visible Muslim identity markers such as Hijab and saying prayers at work, Muslims are stigmatised and excluded. According to a survey in 2015, religious symbols (such as the Hijab) affect the ways in which Muslims (specifically, women) are treated (cited in Bonino, 2016). But overall, Muslims try to dismiss their few negative experiences and evaluate their life as positive in Scotland as far as ethno-religious discrimination is concerned. Bonino also mentions the securitisation of Scotland against visible Muslims, especially in airports after 9/11. Pakistani women are well-educated compared to their white counterparts, but they suffer lack of employment. A study shows that 25 percent of unemployment among ethnic minorities is rooted in prejudice and racial discrimination.

A comparison between Scotland and England shows that Scottish society has been more tolerant and less Islamophobic. The historical and political climate of Scotland, having experienced English colonisation, has led to sympathy with Muslims as a community that seeks integration into the society. One important agenda in Scotland is the promotion of peace and inter-religious dialogue. One example of attempting to recognise the
nuances of Muslim women’s realities is the University of Edinburgh’s online course on Sharia Law in which scholars try to unpack the Islamic law and the ways in which it unfolds internationally and locally within the UK context. Despite a shortage of research about Muslims’ experiences in Scotland, Kidd and Jamieson’s study contains a survey and a focus group discussion that reveal the complexities of Muslim women’s realities in Britain and Scotland (2011). In their study Kidd and her colleague argue that there is a potential for integration of the religious minority into Scottish society, while the participants in this research revealed hindrances to being identified as Scottish/British due to ethno-religious differences. However, the Muslim community in Scotland feel that they are at home, while such hospitality on the part of the Scottish population has been rewarded by Muslims’ thorough rejection of attempted terrorist attacks in this region, in contrast with other cities of the UK. According to The Herald (2018), the last terrorist attack in Scotland took place at Glasgow Airport in 2007. Such terrorist attacks have rarely occurred due to the welcoming attitude of Scottish majority society.

There are numerous events at the junction of Islam and other faiths that promote inter-religious interactions in the interests of peace in Scotland. Summing up, Bonino presents a sentimental picture of Scotland as a society of tolerance and peace towards its Muslim population. He names Edinburgh as a scattered city in which Muslims live throughout the municipality and there is no Muslim community compound in specific areas, in contrast to Glasgow which has specific areas for Muslim communities to live in. It is a pluralist society and a tolerant one.
Bonino mentions the instances of extremism that have arisen at times in places far from Scotland, especially in Syria, through the acts of extremist Scottish men. However, Scotland has been safe and peaceful according to Bonino (2016:170). Bonino emphasises the role of Muslim women in reducing the influence of anti-Muslim stereotypes. Through going to mosques or being supported by Muslim organisations, women have been able to practise Islam in a visible way. However, Muslim women are responsible for preserving Islamic behaviour and maintaining honour, especially by wearing the Hijab, as Bonino contends.

2.10 Hijab as an issue for Muslim women in secular societies

One of the key issues within Islamic feminism is that of the Hijab. In the contemporary world Hijab refers to modest Islamic clothing, and more precisely to the head-covering of Muslim women. Hijab has many different forms, but the most prevalent one is that of Muslim women covering their hair, head, neck and ears while leaving the face visible. Since 1970, the use of Hijab has become widespread and has been an expression of modesty and faith for many Muslim women.

For some societies, challenging the Hijab has prominence in claiming women’s rights, especially when Hijab is an obligatory practice; according to Sadaawi, the veil is “a tool to oppress women” (Totur2U, 2018). But for

---

6 https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/sociology-feminist-views-on-the-role-of-religions
some other women living in non-Muslim societies, Hijab may be seen as a phenomenon which is empowering and liberating, allowing women to enter the mainstream patriarchal context (01/06/2020)\(^7\).

There has been a trend that has changed Hijab from an oppressive practice to a symbolically liberating and empowering action, leading to solidarity and the reclaiming of Muslim identity, particularly in the wake of the War on Terror. Although the second wave of Western feminism in the 1960s advocated reclaiming the sexuality of Muslim women through unveiling, third wave feminism, in contrast, goes beyond that injunction and encourages women to define their own life paths.

The application of Hijab goes back to the Prophet Mohammad’s time, as veiling was a way of protecting the privacy of Mohammad’s wife from public visitors. Torkashvand (2000), discussing the lifestyle of Arabs in 7th-century Arabia, covers a historical period of early Islam. He shows that contemporary accounts of the Hijab are not based on true evidence but rather are myths rooted in false narrations. The purpose of Hijab in Islam was to protect the society from obtrusive behaviour and nakedness.

Hijab as an obligatory practice for Muslim women has been controversial. There are different approaches to Hijab and its mandatory essence. Its political nature has been revealed when some countries such as France, Turkey (where, despite the state’s adherence to political Islam, an anti-
Hijab agenda is at work on the ground), Belgium and Tunisia have put limitations on wearing the Hijab in public. There are different practices surrounding Hijab among Muslim women. El Omari (2018) argues that some Muslim feminists totally reject the headscarf and see it as a sign of oppression, but others view putting on a headscarf as a duty. However, El Omari asserts that wearing or not wearing the headscarf is a political choice that should be made by Muslim women themselves. Women need to become self-critical through approaches such as Islamic feminism. Different structures should facilitate such a potential. Mosques and schools are two places that can help Muslim women to become conscious of their choices, such as whether or not to wear Hijab. On the other hand, the confrontation between Islam and democracy shows itself in the debate around veiling or the headscarf, especially in France, since European secular feminists are opposed to veiling (Djelloul, 2018). They see the veil as signifying a threat to democracy and regard it as a non-negotiable issue. This heated debate has its roots in narratives about terrorism, ISIS and threats to Western values.

Hijab is a phenomenon that completely depends on the context for its analysis. In some countries such as Iran, the enforcement of Hijab by the government has caused many problems. Iran is a country that has enforced Hijab in public places for all women (Kendra, 2012). Women athletes have to wear the Hijab during their competitions. School uniform for little girls aged 7 and upwards is compulsory. A group of women were arrested and jailed in 2017 for their protest against forced veiling. Also in 2017 a couple of women removed their Hijab in public in order to protest
against compulsory veiling. They were convicted of perturbation of public minds and corruption of the society (Persian Deutche Welle, 01.08.2019).

The country context is important when analysing the reality of the Hijab. Al Wazni (2015), researching Muslim women, in a region of North Carolina in the United States, who practise wearing the Hijab, found that for these women Hijab was a source of empowerment and liberation. They have been claiming their right to wear the Hijab, but such facts have been dismissed and marginalised by mainstream Western feminist scholars. Al Wazni (ibid.) asserts that colonialism has resulted in a narrative asserting that Western people are saving Eastern people.

Feminists have been trying to challenge patriarchy, but their efforts have had some unwanted consequences such as reproducing Islamophobia through criticism of the way women look.

Research on Muslim women has found that they are less prone to internalisation of ideas that objectify women’s bodies. For instance, Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2012) have shown that there is a relationship between exposure to sexually objectifying media programs and images and internalisation of beauty ideals and body surveillance among Western girls. Swami and her colleagues (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 587 participants in London, consisting of women aged between 18 and 70, who were mostly single, and 75.5 percent of whom had undergraduate degrees. The recruited population were from Bengali, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian and Arab ethnic minorities. The researchers claim that if Muslim women in Britain are compared to other mainstream
populations of women, they are less likely to internalise Euro-American media body images. Furthermore, they are more likely to have a positive feeling about their bodies. Kertechian and Swami (2016), researching French Muslim women and comparing those who wear the Hijab to those who do not, found that Hijab has a small protective effect on the body image of Muslim women. They claim that those women who wore the Hijab felt more secure in their bodies and were less obsessed with media images of thin figures.

The positive points regarding Hijab wearing as a way of practising Islam and feminism have also been mentioned in Al Wazni’s research. None of the participants in Al Wazni’s (2015) study revealed any political motivation for wearing Hijab. Instead they said that they had been influenced by female role models within their families. For these women, Hijab was a source of respect, dignity and control over their own bodies and sexualities. Out of twelve participants, ten associated themselves with feminist identity as an assertion of gender equality. These Muslim women believed that it was important to be able to choose whatever lifestyle suited them. One of the issues noted by Al Wazni was that his research participants associated positive body image with the power of Hijab to conceal their bodies from the public.

2.11 East and West – the tensions and possibilities

Accommodation of Muslim women’s requests within Western societies has some prerequisites. It is important to consider the historical roots of their
positioning within mainstream secular societies. Through de-contextualising (adopting novel forms of commitment to their rituals and mandates) daily prayers and Hijab wearing, Muslim women attempt to find ways of negotiating recognition. Adoption of creative methods in everyday life should be regarded as ways in which Muslim women claim spaces in the societies mentioned.

It would be fruitful to consider other challenges facing Muslim feminists in the context of Western and Eastern countries. Muslim feminists, both in Islamic states and outside them, for example in Spain and other Western countries, have been marginalised not only by traditional and fundamentalist Islamists but also by secular feminists, as they attempt to reconcile Islam and women’s rights. This ambiguity presents itself in Muslim majority countries (East) and secular societies (West) in different ways.

Henkel and Sunier (2009) have, within this work, debated the influence of Muslim women’s appearance in the secular public realm of Europe. European societies have faced massive socio-cultural changes over the past century. Such changes were accompanied by “struggles over recognition” (Henkel and Sunier, 2009:472). Diverse groups, from labour movements to ethnic minorities, have tried to voice their claims. According to Henkel, following the emergence of Muslim women as minorities in European societies after the 1960s, a generation later, in the 1990s, their presence had become a considerable feature within those countries. He contends that the major challenge is to “reconsider the mentioned minorities’ demands, forge new alliances and secure their positions in the
uncertain horizon of European public societies” (ibid.:473). In other words, there is a need to make visible the socio-political demands of marginalised sections of society and act according to their claims. Sunier, on the other hand, criticises Henkel for dismissing the fact that the “secular” is a “historical narrative articulated with power that is linked with specific notions of legitimacy and illegitimacy, authority and knowledge and past, present, future” (Henkel and Sunier, 2009:474). But both writers agree that citizenship is not only a legal, political and social matter; it is a cultural entity too. However, the emphasis placed on the cultural differences that Muslim women brought as citizens within European societies is highlighted more in Sunier’s critique. He adds that we should avoid “essentialising and domesticising” cultural diversities that appear in the context of European societies due to the presence of Muslim women. Sunier argues that European societies were not homogeneous before the arrival of Muslims. The important task here is to consider the historical background of Muslim women’s entrance into European public spaces.

In terms of integration into European societies, it is necessary to consider the fact that Muslim women’s agency has led them to devise diverse mechanisms in response to restrictions imposed on Muslim communities. A study done in France and Germany shows that Muslim women adopt different strategies in terms of their religious practices, such as the timing of prayers and the wearing of the Hijab (Jouili, 2009). Although secularism in France and Christian religious practices in Germany often lead to prohibition of Muslim women’s practices and restrict their religious actions, the participants in Jouili’s research show that they constantly go back and
forth between the practices of Islam and the requirements for acceptance in these two societies.

Guia (2018), who looked at Muslim women’s status in Spain, asserts that Western feminists treat Islamic feminism as a paradoxical entity. They dichotomise secularism and Islam, treating as threats Muslim women’s attempts at commitment to their rituals such as the Hijab. She exemplifies varieties of Islamophobic reactions to the presence and participation of Muslim women, on the part of both Western feminists and mainstream male politicians in the realm of politics in Spain. She highlights that Muslim women’s appearance and sexuality (bodily figures and identity through putting on the Hijab, for instance) appear to be two features that are protected for the sake of men; this is a normal perspective of the non-Muslim population. In other words, patriarchy enforces specific codes of conduct for Muslim women, who are required to abide by those standards. Muslim women’s autonomy is not recognised or is dismissed because of superficial issues of appearance and dress. Studies of Islamophobia – as an ideology that makes prevalent specific stereotypical images of Muslim men and women – are generally not undertaken through a gendered lens, and this makes invisible, or misrecognises, the everyday lived experiences of Muslim women (particularly those living in non-Muslim countries).

In the context of secular countries, Muslim feminists’ influence may be interpreted differently. Islam is currently seen as a discourse which is static and guarded against contemporary ways of life (Guia, 2018). There is a view of the treatment of Muslim women by Muslim men which enables non-Muslim feminists to see Muslim feminists as “in need” of survival. Islamic
feminists, in boldly calling out the misogyny that exists within the Muslim community, do so while recognising that their actions may be used against Muslims and fuel Islamophobia.

Becoming integrated into the political structure of a Western (Northern) country like Spain should not lead to dismissal of the fact that the identity of Muslim women is a matter of concern, although not a centralised one. Parallel with that, political Muslims have attempted to confront the gendered and patriarchal choices made within the mainstream Western society of Spain that dismisses Muslim women’s autonomy and contributions to the society. Furthermore, they challenge Islamophobic presuppositions about Muslim women that not only reduce Muslim women’s roles to their status within the family and private sphere, but also see them as threats to the secular public society. There are layers to Muslim women’s claims for justice in non-Muslim majority contexts. There is patriarchy within gender stereotypes among the majority as well as in Muslim communities. In addition, there are Islamophobic stereotypes imposed by the mainstream society. In some ways, feminism has helped to reproduce the idea that if you want to be modern you need to follow specific values such as women’s rights, the Judeo-Christian heritage, and democracy, while being traditional means suppression of women’s rights, adherence to the Islamic heritage, and terrorism (ibid.).

Most of Guia’s article is focused on the local political struggles that Muslim women face. Although she asserts that Muslim women are a heterogeneous group in Spain, her analysis is aimed at describing the political role of women who seem to come from the elite stratum. She
argues that politicised and activist Muslim women are mostly active in small parties, as the traditional parties fail to include them.

2.12 Women, integration and its challenges

The fear of calling out the misogyny of Muslim men because of the possible impact of such criticism on the Muslim population as a whole weakens the position of Muslim women and Islamic feminism. Such a reality is not new; it is one faced by black women when they have addressed issues of black men’s sexism while being mindful of a racist backlash as a consequence. This reality is also one of the complexities of integration into the wider secular society as demanded by the official multiculturalist agenda, which has traditionally been more about how a secular Western state engages in ethnic identity management than about how to address issues of racism or Islamophobia (Kundnani, 2014).

Since Islamic feminism has the tendency to exacerbate Islamophobia in the Western world when it exposes the gender injustices practised within the Islamic community, some Muslim feminists propose that Islamic feminism should go beyond identity politics. By the term identity politics, I mean the centralisation of identity alone at the core of political projects such as Islamic feminism. The solution proposed by Cook is that Islamic feminism may adopt “multiple speaking positions” (cited in Azam, 2018:126) rather than a fixed identity. It needs to adjust to the usage of Muslims, rather than face a hostile Islamophobic audience or patriarchal stance-holders. This is crucial; and in the next chapter on Adult Education I will discuss how
educators may create spaces for women to occupy within the learning spheres: spaces that promote women’s empowerment and gender justice.
2.13 Conclusion

There are different views and interpretations around Islamic or Muslim feminism. However, regardless of your terminology’s direction of travel, these are frameworks and movements for challenging patriarchy and defending gender empowerment and women’s rights. In the Islamic Republic of Iran there were policies put into place to limit Islamic women’s efforts to challenge patriarchy.

In this chapter, I have explored Islamic women’s attempts to question patriarchy in Iran. There is a section on women specifically called Islamist or fundamentalist who have contributed to reproducing misogyny in Iranian politics. Furthermore, I have explored critics of Islamic feminism as a framework for scholarly and activist work. One of the important aspects of contemporary Islamic feminism is its linkage with scholarly activism rather than grassroots endeavour. A gap remains in discussion of how Islamic feminism considers ordinary women and highlights their engagement with their rights and duties in everyday life. At the moment, the focus of Islamic feminism’s engagement is on transforming legislative issues prevalent in the Muslim legal tradition, regardless of socio-political context.

As the focus of my study is on comparison between Iran and Scotland, I have included Eastern and Western contexts in accommodating Muslim women’s claims to equality as both mainstream and minority groups. I have also looked at Muslim women in Scotland as a minority community, positioned as a group that seeks recognition from the mainstream Scottish
context. This community is a diverse group, requiring us to approach their issues as a scattered category. Last but not least, Hijab is discussed as a major issue for Muslim women. According to the context in which Hijab is practised, its configurations change. In some Muslim majority countries enforcement of Hijab has been a cause of maladjustment for women, while in some other secular contexts Hijab has been shaped as a tool of empowerment for Muslim women.

In my next chapter, I will explore adult education as a space for taking forward Muslim women’s empowerment.
Chapter 3: Adult Education and women’s empowerment

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I explore the definition of Adult Education, discuss the role and purpose of Adult Education, and consider its formation and configuration in different settings and in different countries (particularly Scotland and Iran). The role of Adult Education in the religious context, with its influences on race and gender equality, is also explored. I maintain a focus on the interrelationship between feminism and adult education, which is the subject of another section in this chapter. One of the key themes in this study is critical thinking, which may function as a means of challenging the existing realities, such as colonialism and oppression of the disenfranchised in societies with colonial histories. As the focus of my thesis is on women, I specifically examine the notion of empowerment and the role adult education might play in it, and particularly in women’s empowerment.

Adult Education has different definitions and can be described in different ways. Different people use this term and have varied perceptions of it. As far as empowerment of women is concerned, Adult Education may be shaped in different ways, from a consciousness-raising tool to a force of
reproduction of the status quo, through skill development for serving specific roles in the socio-economic realm; therefore, it is also related to the job market.

Besides the term Adult Education, which is mainly used in the North, especially in the UK, there are similar terms such as Adult Learning, non-formal education/learning, vocational learning and lifelong learning. These terminologies serve different purposes and have specific implications for the delivery and practice of Adult Education. Although in this study the educational interventions of Northern countries in Southern countries is not a matter of concern, the discourse of Adult Education is being affected by the educational practices of developed nations in the developing countries. Adult Education needs to be decolonised as far as developing societies are concerned.

As the focus of this study is on empowerment of women, Adult Education's historical roots in consciousness-raising and transformation of the present situation may lead to new, knowledge-based activism. Religion, gender and race are at the heart of our exploration of Adult Education. However, attempting to capture Adult Education in the cited frame does not lead to dismissal of the fact that there is inconsistency in elaborating Adult Education.
3.2. Adult Education’s definition in this thesis

Different terms have been used to refer to education and learning for adults with different purposes, from literacy to social and political activism. In this study, Adult Education is defined as a tool for social transformation and empowerment, especially of women. I refer to Adult Education as a tool for bringing about change in people’s lives. My focus is on implementation of Adult Education in different contexts: specifically, its application in Iran and Scotland. While there are different terms and different understandings, in this study, whenever I use the term Adult Education I consider the range of adult learning, formal or informal.

3.2.1. Various definitions of Adult Education

In an article by Yilmaz, various definitions of adult education are used by different organisations and their differences are meticulously demonstrated. The following paragraphs explore these varying definitions of “adult education”.

According to UNESCO’s documents¹, the meanings of Adult Learning and Education have changed over time. The phenomenon consists of a spectrum, from elementary education and expansion of literacy to further education for those who are highly skilled. In Yilmaz’s article, UNESCO’s definition of Adult Education refers to the necessity of “improving skills, knowledge, technical or professional competencies”. Adults may “take
advantage of this ability, regardless of the content, level and method of adult education”. Yilmaz (2018:1) states that, by this definition, such knowledge would assist adults to “change their attitudes and behaviour both in terms of personal development and in participation in a balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development” (Yilmaz, 2018:1).

The Organisation for World Economic Cooperation (OECD) defines Adult Education in another way. It contends that Adult Education consists of programs and activities that target those adults who are in need of acquiring new knowledge, the targeted group being those who are out of compulsory schooling and those who do not participate in formal learning programs (cited in Yilmaz, 2018:1). On OECD’s website, the “Priorities for Adult Learning” dashboard compares the future-readiness of countries’ adult learning systems in seven dimensions: “i) urgency, ii) coverage, iii) inclusiveness, iv) flexibility and guidance, v) alignment with skill needs, vi) perceived training impact, and vii) financing”. All these aspects need to be addressed by different countries in order to cover Adult Learning as a prerequisite of empowerment and transformation (OECD.com).

However, Yilmaz refers to the changing essence of Adult Education according to each society. Overall, Yilmaz (2008) emphasises that the goals of Adult Education are “to renew, develop, collect [knowledge] and adapt to the world” (p.2). This is the turning point for this study.

In this study, I elaborate how we need to move beyond adaptation to the realities of everyday life and reach into transformation. The ways in which
the above-mentioned definitions of Adult Education mould have been criticised by theorists such as Freire. The phrase “adapt to the world” could be interpreted in different ways. Paulo Freire was an educator in Brazil whose outlook was built on “Christian theology, existentialism and Marxism” (cited in Jarvis, 2014:49). He was the pioneer of Radical Adult Education. For him, Adult Education was not an adaptation to the world; it was more of a tool to transform the present situation of the learners.

Paulo Freire argued for a “liberatory education [that] inclines to help adults reflect on their personal experiences by showing them how past history is part and parcel of who they are today, which alludes to how the future may be shaped by their conscious actions” (cited in Moon, 2006:10). Women’s empowerment passes through a liberatory action that demands transformation of their status by means of Adult Education. In this manner, via adult education, Freire links past to present and future through increasing awareness and consciousness.

The other concept criticised by Freire is banking education, a term referring to students viewed as containers into which educators must put knowledge. This kind of education could become prevalent through the lack of critical thinking. Freire criticises such education as it “demobilises the people and keeps them within the existing establishment of power” through reinforcement of the cultural, political and social status quo (cited in Rugut and Osman, 2013). In other words, Freire engages with the conceptualisation of disempowerment of the people, and especially the marginalised, through conventional ways of learning and teaching that
leave learners stuck in the present situation. This is also one of the reflections in my study.

In addition to Adult Education, there are other terms used in different contexts and by diverse scholars that have applications in this thesis. The core of all these concepts is Education and Learning.

Some, like Jarvis, differentiate between Education and Learning. He contends that Education is “an institutional phenomenon” that leads to providing learning opportunities for people, while Learning is the “process that individuals acquire knowledge and skills” (2014:52). He concludes that there is confusion when distinguishing “Lifelong Education” and “Lifelong Learning”. The term “learning” implies that there are other institutes, such as workplaces, that offer knowledge, in addition to educational institutes.

As Adult Education is a Northern conception, its usage is limited in countries such as Iran. Therefore, empowerment through Adult Education may mean something different from the type of empowerment that is feasible through learning in a context such as the UK.

The nature of Adult Education is learning, and there are different types of learning in the literature of education: formal, non-formal and informal. Formal learning is institutionalised, graded and hierarchically structured. It is what is called the “education system”. Non-formal learning is organised education conducted outside the formal educational system. Non-formal learning is being applied in contexts such as Iran and is also
related to employability in some contexts. Informal learning is the natural accumulation of knowledge and skills in everyday life, such as communication or use of technologies; it is often unorganised and incidental (Boeren, 2011:4).

It is important to consider that all three types of learning are based on the experiences of the learners. Furthermore, there are adult learning, vocational learning and lifelong learning, all of which are used in the realm of education. To me, the essence of Adult Education is embedded in its engagement with structural change.

3.3. History of Adult Education in Iran and the UK

There are differences between the ways in which Adult Education is shaped in Iran and the UK. The essence of education in each context is different. While Adult Education in Iran was concerned with the literacy of poorly educated people, the same conception was used in the UK to maintain skills and pursue further education for adults in spaces such as universities and continuing education institutes. It is important to explore the ways in which Adult Education has been transformed throughout history.

In the European Commission’s definition of Adult Education, it can be seen that adult education is inseparable from employability and the job market. The policy documents refer to the fact that lifelong learning should serve employability and citizenship (ibid.:53). Although in this study the
focus is not on employment of adult learners, we cannot shy away from the importance of employability as a route to empowerment. However, being solely reliant on the economic contributions of people towards the dominant socio-economic structures may mislead us to dismiss the other aspects that Adult Education may contribute.

In Iran, there have been shifts from Adult Education to lifelong learning. In my research, I use the term Adult Education, with its political essence. That means I consider the formation of Adult Education as far as its power-related axes work towards transformation of the existing socio-political realities. In Iran, as will be discussed later, the term adult education was mainly dependent on and limited to basic literacy. In our findings, it can be seen that education for adults is being practised in diverse ways, such as skill development, communication skills and critical thinking. Therefore, within the existing context, using or applying adult education as a tool for raising the consciousness of an adult community is unlikely to be feasible.

3.3.1. The UK

The historical background of adult education in the UK indicates that there have been several changes of approach in the delivery of education. From the early 1920s, a joint entity was shaped between some universities across England and some voluntary organisations such as the Workers Educational Association (WEA) which used the services of Adult Educators (Holford, 2016). Afterwards, the University of Nottingham’s department of
adult education was the first institute that started to train adults, producing its curriculum and program of training by 1970 (Jarvis, 2014).

“Adult Education was treated as a subsection of further education” (ibid.:47). By the 1980s, UNESCO mentioned lifelong education and gave it widespread attention. At this time, liberal and vocational education were linked together and consisted of a lifelong framework (ibid.).

One thing that is worth mentioning is the way women and their voices throughout the history of adult education have been dismissed and ignored. The following paragraphs review history and explore how women as learners contributed to and participated in the formation of this history. Coles (2000) traces the footsteps of women and the evolution of adult education.

The Board of Education’s Adult Education Committee, established in 1921, worked collaboratively with universities and the Workers Educational Association (WEA) in Britain. In this example, working-class women experienced inequalities within their homes and in relation to their husbands when it came to education and attendance at adult education classes during the 1920s. They also faced problems in the classroom as they felt excluded from the majority of male students, both by the community and by their attitudes towards learning. Women were introverted and hesitant in exposing themselves to the learning context. Throughout the 1920s, women faced another hindrance, as the organisations in charge of facilitating adult education consisted
predominantly of men and the establishment of these organisations reproduced the status quo.

Seventy years later, in the 1990s, there were still challenges for women, such as provision of care for their families, that prevented them from participating in adult education. Men’s withholding of expenditure on women’s education was another problem they faced. Attitudinal hindrances such as women’s lack of confidence and guilt over family care were still evident in the 1990s. Although there have been some positive achievements in this regard, there are still limitations on women’s participation in educational planning and management.

On the institutional level, women have faced discriminatory barriers that prevent them from taking part in educational programs. Generalising women’s educational needs, and devising programs according to presuppositions based on men’s needs, is an example of such institutional challenges. Failure to take the experiences of women into account, or to consider their needs in more than a conventional way, is one of the flaws of Adult Education in the contemporary world.

In a dominant hegemonic frame of reference, womanhood, race, sexuality, class, and disability have become barriers not only to women but to social empowerment. However, there have been attempts to promote social transformation through Adult Education in the UK and Scotland.

One example of such efforts is evident in a program called Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) that was launched in 2004. This work was
borrowed from Freire in that it started from students’ needs and priorities. It was based on learners’ existing knowledge instead of enforcing conventional educational models that were built on approaching learners as those who require “treatment” (cited in Mayo and Rooke, 2008). The cited effort emphasised “experiential learning” and was observant of “critical reflection” and dialogue, promoted through “collective action”. Furthermore, it was established on a basis of “equality”, “diversity” and “social solidarity”. It should be noted that ALAC was based on empowerment through participation. Mayo and Rooke state that if the voices of learners and participants in educational programs remain unheard by policy-makers, there is a possibility that they will be alienated and disempowered.

Another example is the statement of ambition document called Adult Learning in Scotland (dated 5/2014). This document demonstrates that there is an attempt to recognise and develop adult learning. The aim of this document is to provide Adult Learning through local authorities, the third sector, trade unions, employers, etc. Therefore, there is the potential to accommodate learning for both specialist providers and adult learners (2014:5). According to this document, learning should have three important features:

Firstly, learning should be lifelong in that it covers learners’ life span with the support of policies such as the Curriculum for Excellence. Secondly, Adult Learning should be life-wide in that it covers personal matters, work, the family and the community. Thirdly, it should be learner-centred, which means that Adult Learning should be attentive to the interests and motivation of participants in the learning context (2014:6).
Nurturing the communication skills of the adult is key in Scotland’s Adult Education agenda. It offers literacy and numeracy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and intercultural communications (2014:8). Adult Learning in Scotland covers community-based and workplace training, by these means fulfilling employability and volunteering functions. The Adult Learning and Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework Guidelines of Scotland may be a model for other countries to follow in meeting the needs of adult learners as it is inclusive, has a learners’ focus, and empowers individuals, families and communities to gain economic and social prosperity (2014:10).

It is evident that the characteristics of adult education in the UK stretch to accommodate social inclusion and consequently prosperity.

### 3.3.1.2 Adult Education (literacy) in the contemporary UK, Scotland

Adult Education in Scotland has been tied into literacy and numeracy development in the contemporary era. Nurturing the communication skills of the adult is key in Scotland’s Adult Education agenda. It offers literacy and numeracy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and intercultural communications (2014:8). Adult Learning in Scotland covers community-based and workplace training, by these means fulfilling employability and volunteering functions. The Adult Learning and Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework Guidelines of Scotland may be a model for other countries to follow in meeting the needs of adult learners as it is
inclusive, has a learners’ focus, and empowers individuals, families and communities to gain economic and social prosperity (2014:10).

The other aspect of adult literacy is a social practice approach that helps learners to reach their aims in learning, which may differ from one person to another. Literacies are complex and critical capabilities that determine interrelationships among knowledge, understanding and skills. Furthermore, literacy learning should be inclusive and empowering for adult participants (2016:8). Components of the task of making adult literacies effective are found in Scotland’s above-mentioned Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework Guidelines (learning, teaching and assessment). Apart from distinguishing learning aims and requirements, it is necessary to help learners foster autonomy through the ability to judge their own developmental needs and capabilities (2016:10). One of the requirements of contemporary adult literacy is the ability to acknowledge and address information technology as a means of furthering the learner’s goals in everyday life. It is stated in the Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework Guidelines document that those who have experienced segregation and exclusion might internalise unjust presuppositions based on gender, race, age, sexuality, disability or experience of care (2016:13). “Knowledge about one’s own thinking process may become available through Adult Literacy through monitoring and assessing their own progress” (2016:13).

Planning, assessing, reflecting on assessment and reviewing goals and evaluation are part and parcel of Adult Literacy. One of the valuable studies conducted on the quality of adult literacy programs is Adult
Literacies in Scotland. The research, conducted from March to May 2015 and based on a survey, found that adult literacy education has reached a point where it is now fostering employability (74%) and improved literacy (69%) among the 228 participants across Scotland. Priorities stated by adult literacy participants in this research include ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages), family learning, health and well-being, increasing confidence, and employability.

Based on the testimonials of this program, 140 respondents out of the 228 reported a moderate or great impact on their personal life skills as a result of this training. These life skills include communication skills and interpersonal development. Another 140 participants thought that their family issues, such as parenting skills and spouse relationships, were improved. 121 respondents reported the influence of literacy programs on employability (p.12). According to the participants in this study, there may be priorities established within adult literacy, such as digital inclusion (60%), ESOL (54%), family learning (44%), financial inclusion (40%), and building community capacity (38%) (p. 14). Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) has been studied through the engagement of eight organisations in Scotland that provide literacy and numeracy education for adults. The positive influence of Adult Education programs in these organisations is explored through observation and interview (Crowther et al., 2010). The target group was learners who had undergone pathological experiences such as addiction and homelessness and who had literacy and numeracy issues. It is important to mention that resources are restricted, and funding is being reduced for such adult literacy programs.
3.3.2. Iran

This section refers to the history of Adult Education in Iran. Maktabs (Schools) were the first establishments to deal with educational needs in Iran around 1000 years ago. Further on, the Taalimate Akaber (schools) office was established in 1315 (1936) and engaged with the literacy of adults. At that time, the priority was educating adults through literacy classes. Rural areas were the main focus of Taalimate Akaber. Between 1936 and 1956, the history of Adult Education in Iran may be traced back to “supplementary evening courses” for those adults who did not have the opportunity to pursue education in formal settings.

After a pause in educating adults, in 1956, Adult Education classes were organised again. Although this route had little success in reaching its targeted groups, namely illiterates, it continued until 1966. Sepahe-Danesh was another organisation that started dealing with literacy issues in remote areas. It was formed in 1962, at a time when 68% of the population were living in rural districts and the rate of illiteracy in some remote areas even reached 95% (ibid.).

In order to elaborate the nuances of the educational setting in Iran in the contemporary world, I discuss different eras in the formation of education as far as gender is concerned.
3.3.3. Periods of transformation in education in Iran

After the 1979 Revolution, Islamisation of the educational system became a priority. Ayatollah Khomeini, Islamic Iran’s leader, emphasised women’s participation in the revolution and their role in the family and society. He mentioned the importance of education for women, as it was crucial to avoid doing “something against chastity or harm to the nation” (cited by Rezai-Rashti, 2012:2).

Rezai-Rashti reviews policies on education with their consequences for women in her article in 2012. She mentions women’s resistance, their attainment and their alteration of the policies. She recognises three different eras in women’s education. The first phase (1980s) features Islamisation, gender segregation and Cultural Revolution. The second period (1990-2005) features liberalisation and reform, and the third phase (2005-present) sees the resurgence of conservatism and a backward move towards gender segregation. The last phase she reviews includes two presidents with diverse agendas.

Throughout the first period, compulsory veiling, implementation of Sharia-based family law, and gender segregation in elementary and public secondary schools took place, while the Cultural Revolution of 1980 resulted in closure of the universities for several years. At this point, women were banned from studying 91 majors out of 169 majors in academic fields, mostly technical subjects and engineering (cited by Rezai-Rashti, 2012:4). This period saw changes made in the content of educational textbooks so as to reflect the ideology of the newly born Islamic state.
The aim in giving women access to education was to raise ideal Muslim women and thus preserve their role as mothers of the nation – which in itself reproduced a paradoxical situation. Despite this, the literacy rate increased from 35.5% in 1976 to 52.1% in 1986, according to Shaditalab (cited by Rezai-Rashti, 2012:4). However, the rate of women’s participation in higher education decreased.

In the second phase of policy-making, under the presidency of Ayatollah Rafsanjani and the High Council of Cultural Revolution, the Women’s Social and Cultural Council were put in charge of researching women’s issues (cited by Rezai-Rashti, 2012:4). During this era, gender policies were transformed. Women activists, including Islamic feminists, became involved in questioning and challenging policies affecting women. After Rafsanjani, during Khatami’s presidency, the development of women’s NGOs and expansion of gender equality through different programs of the Center for Women’s Participation led to reforms affecting women’s issues. Diverse educational programs, both formal and informal, were devised for women based on the Women’s Participation and 8th Government (2005) report. In 2000, 60% of university entrants were females.

The third phase was characterised by the presidency of Ahmadinejad, one of whose measures was the establishment of the “Special Council for Development and Promotion of Humanities” in order to oversee the Islamisation of the disciplines (Rezai-Rashti, 2012:77). Another act was renaming the Vice Presidency for Women’s Participation to the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs. Such a change, based on a report of the Center for Women and Family Affairs (2013), was rooted in
Ahmadinejad’s focus on establishing a family-centred society and binding women to their familial roles.

In 2011, the comprehensive program for establishment, consolidation and transcendent status of the family in Iran was developed (ibid.:53). It may be said that, according to the mentioned report, the Islamist hegemony was being reproduced through the very centre that was supposed to guard women’s claims (for employment, social participation and inclusion) (ibid.:63). Also, a gendered segregation in higher education was implemented. 36 public universities barred women from 77 majors, including technical and applied sciences, political science, computer science and engineering (Rezai-Rashti, 2012:7).

After Ahmadinejad’s presidency between 2005 and 2013, Rouhani became president. His agenda was aimed at establishing the government of Prudence and Hope. However, the reality is that he was unsuccessful in bringing about change, due to pressure from hardliners inside Iran and sanctions from outside it. Sanctions were imposed on Iran by US president Trump after the breakdown of nuclear negotiations (The Guardian, 2020). This political situation affected Rouhani’s reformist claims and consequently women’s issues.

Women’s lack of authority in bargaining with patriarchy through holding jobs should not be dismissed. The dismissal of the relationship between education and the job market is visible in Rezai-Rashti’s study. In this study I explore the routes to women’s empowerment and participation in
Adult Education in order to challenge the mainstream agenda that serves the powerful sections of society.

3.4. Role and purpose of Adult Education

In the following section I explore different angles of adult education and its purposes. There are various applications of Adult Education in different contexts. It is important to note that its roles and purposes are varied and miscellaneous. The role of Adult Education in facilitating the transformation of the individual and the community is of particular interest to this study.

Adult education is linked to several concepts such as empowerment (Murphy-Graham, 2010; Menon, 1979; Njiraini, 2016; Hossain, 2012; Stromquist, 2006), transformation (Pope, 2020), critical thinking, social change (Ruber and Janmaat, 2020), literacy (Mehran, 1999), and employment (Kalenda et al., 2020; Kim, 2020; Ruber and Janmaat, 2020).

It takes different shapes such as Adult Education concerning religion (Pope, 2020), civic education (Finkel, 2014) and popular education (Dahlstedt and Nordvall, 2011).

Much of Adult Learning in the contemporary world focuses on employability (Kalenda et al., 2020). This study does not focus on employability through
Adult Education. However, since in social reality this function is being implemented, it is elaborated later on.

3.4.1 Adult Education and Women

3.4.1.1 Importance of Adult Education for Women

Adult Education has always contributed to the empowerment of women. It has brought new ways of thinking and acting for women such as confidence building, management of interpersonal relationships, skills development, etc. It is noteworthy to consider the practical transformations happening in women’s lives along with the limitations they face in everyday realities.

In the upcoming section I present two examples of Adult Education which resulted in empowerment of women in marginalised regions. Adult Education is tied to the adult’s understanding of themselves as a person and how they experience the world. When we refer to women’s experiences, we should be aware that there is no unitary nature that positions women as powerless.

There are various ways in which Adult Education contributes to the situation of women and challenges their status as submissive and marginalised. One form of this contribution is seen when Adult Education
transforms into Non-formal Education to change women from submissive creatures to agents who are participating in changing their conditions.

Non-formal Education is targeted towards special groups, such as women or adults with literacy issues. Needless to say, there are challenges in educating women as far as the power structures are concerned. Such a situation leads us to consider the need for Adult Education to challenge gendered injustices. In other words, Non-formal Education should not remove the necessity of challenging the status quo. There is a need to be attentive to the political aspect of women’s disempowerment. Women need to claim their rights in terms of organising and planning in the realm of Adult Education.

The next section discusses an educational program called SAT. The SAT program was an educational endeavour designed in the early 1980s by FUNDAEC, which provided more than 40 NGOs with SAT materials. SAT involves textbooks, tutors, study groups and community tutors, who are not engaged in an educational process but rather act as facilitators. SAT can be a tool for facilitating relational resources, such as self-expression and negotiation skills. It resembles critical pedagogy, being based on problem posing rather than on banking education (cited in Murphy-Graham, 2010:324).

In a SAT study in 2010, Murphy-Graham found that participation in the Tutorial Learning System in North Honduras had affected employment and potential for economic change along with an improvement in unequal interpersonal patterns between women and men within the family.
It seems that SAT is a program designed by agents from developed countries. However, Murphy-Graham does not explain who provides SAT education.

In her findings, change in marital relationships was made possible by new forms of interaction between spouses, achieved through the SAT program. It was found that, for the comparison group of women, there were no possibilities of change in their intimate relationships with their husbands. However, the need to engage men in the process of change was a challenge for the SAT educational program.

Murphy-Graham’s research also found that material and economic resources played a prominent role in the changes women experienced in their relationships. The division of labour according to traditional role models was based on specific gender relations, which were transformed through the SAT program. Along with its success, such an involvement has had its failures. Within local communities, it could raise problematic issues such as validation of the existing knowledge and experience in the local context. Furthermore, in disenfranchised contexts, job training for low-skilled workers is still lagging.

There are other examples of engagement with women’s issues through Adult Education for marginalised populations of women. Cuban (2007) has studied female domestic workers in two states of the US and their engagement with adult education, especially in forms of literacy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes. These women,
who are in charge of providing care and cleaning to middle-class families (women workers), are caught within a junction of globalisation, patriarchy and social class. They are marginalised as migrant workers who have no citizenship rights. They are invisible and silenced by social policy frameworks that exclude them from benefits and services.

Although these women have no access to voting, educational classes can provide them with health, education and welfare as well as with community resources and community participation (Cuban, 2007:7). Cuban uses social practice theory as it helps in configuring women’s agency and their social positioning within the context of a society that is power bound. Case studies (of women workers) that Cuban observed posed some difficulties for these women, such as health issues and family responsibilities. These women workers worked towards empowerment through adult education; they tried to reach goals and practised agency either through becoming messengers of health to their ethnic communities or through becoming critical in dealing with their everyday challenges such as health issues, which entailed communication with health care providers such as doctors and pharmacists. Engaged pedagogy (cited in Cuban, 2007:14) helped these women to come out of their isolation cluster, enabling them to interact within and outside their communities in a more efficient way.

There are flaws in the practice of Adult Education. One of the issues of concern for Rogers (2006) is the gendered nature of educational programming. In other words, men are dominant in planning the adult education agenda while on-the-ground educators are merely contributors to the learning process.
Training adult educators is a crucial issue as it affects the quality of learning. In some cases, adult educators learn by practice while educating adults, but the quality of the education they deliver is not a priority, as they are more concerned with their official positions than with involvement in the process of teaching and facilitating.

Ethnic minorities, especially Muslim women, as groups who have been facing inequalities, require more attention from researchers in terms of acquiring new knowledge and learning novel practices.

3.4.2 Adult Education and Muslim Women

Muslim women have been the target of research as either participants or practitioners in education. Two specific studies helped me realize the influences of education on Muslim women in the way they see themselves and the world. I also frame their contributions (give-back) towards educating the Muslim community.

Menon (1979) argues that education for women provides a route to modern claim-making while enabling cognitive changes. In his study, focused on the Muslim population in Kerala, he contends that the role of education for Muslim women has been disregarded in practice. It is presumed by the author that women’s educational attainment and participation in the job market result in emancipation and are more effective than legislative reforms on behalf of women (Menon, 1979). In his study, he
concludes that pressure for religious education in Madrassas prevents girls from attending formal schooling, thus encouraging early marriage, prevalent in Muslim communities, and further contributing to deprivation of education for girls.

Moreover, seclusion and lack of freedom to go outside the house also facilitate the marginalisation of women and girls. Menon argues that seclusion and lack of education reproduce each other, worsening the effects of disenfranchisement. One of Menon’s problematic claims rests on his presupposition that women do not aspire to participate in the job market. Menon refers to the finding that 56.33% of the researched women claimed that their aim in learning was acquisition of knowledge and only 13% considered education as a tool for gaining employment.

Nevertheless this point may be criticised by considering the fact that if learning accompanies critical reflection on one’s experience, it may lead to a change in attitude that transforms the next generation’s status.

Beyond being involved in adult education as learners, there are groups of Muslim women who are active in bringing about change through educating the Muslim population. An example of adult and community education in America has been presented by Khalil and De Cuir (2018).

Muslim women have served as educators, educational leaders and community mothers within the context of American Islamic schools (Khalil and De Cuir, 2018). These women raised children who were aware of other religions and other practices. The participants in this
study demonstrated that they were empowered women with a sense of responsibility towards the community. Another aspect of this school was the practice of making space for the collective contribution of all. They had also chosen to manage the school with a co-leadership model rather than a hierarchical one. However, there were challenges ahead for these Muslim women due to the societal perception which frowned on women who were activists in society.

Here Feminism becomes highlighted as a call for recognition of women along with ways in which it may facilitate women’s empowerment.

### 3.4.3 Adult Education and Feminism

This section explores the interrelationship between Adult Education and feminism as well as its impact on different women, e.g., based on class, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and the intersection of these being recognised and considered. Feminism has been one of the pillars of my research as a means through which empowerment and gender justice may be realised. Adult Education needs to be enriched by gender-sensitive outlooks as it brings knowledge into the context of mainstream knowledge production. Adult Education at times has been a realm of expansion of conventional ways of knowing. One of these areas has been the colonising power relations between colonised populations and Western conceptions of exploring oneself and the world.
The other aspect of conventional knowledge has been presuppositions regarding the way men relate to women within and beyond the family structure. A key way that adult education contributes to feminism is by providing spaces for deconstruction of the knowledge that assumes natural differences between women and men. One of the primary realms of knowledge production has been modernity and Western enlightenment.

Heckman (1992) refers to feminism as a way of questioning the masculinist epistemology being reproduced throughout history. The dichotomies between rational/irrational, subject/object and nature/culture have been reproduced by patriarchal discourses. The association of polarity between men/women with these discourses has been the focus of Heckman (1992). The irrational, subjective and natural status of women has always put them at the margin of knowledge production. Besides the ability to question masculinist epistemology, Heckman refers to Hardstock in recognising mainstream knowledge as a product of man-made epistemology and the necessity of replacing it with an epistemology that serves feminist standpoints (cited in Heckman, 1992).

Knowledge-intensive firms that facilitate market values through the application of client-centred knowledge are a great example to demonstrate the marginalised position of women. Knowledge-intensive firms mainly employ highly skilled and well-educated men (Truss et al., 2012), and this is a sign that women have always been dismissed in the cited firms, where they have had low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Therefore, researching the knowledge produced by the adult education
agenda as well as its practical outcomes, especially in the job market, is necessary.

Psycho-social interventions in women’s ways of knowing may help us to configure novel aspects of education for women. Such interventions may lead to uprooting gender injustice and bringing new possibilities and promises into the realm of Adult Education, which is concerned with empowerment of women. Zukas emphasises the need to explore “why social life is perceived and experienced in the way it is” (1993). She advocates Action research as a tool for examining interventions made through adult education and the influences of the mentioned interventions in socio-political contexts.

Zukas exemplifies Gilligan’s research on women’s ways of knowing and the different levels of their knowledge building. Gilligan and her colleagues demonstrate how women change from voiceless beings who are submissive to the authorities to agents who construct knowledge themselves. This shift needs to be taken into account through self-reflection on the part of researchers and researched bodies. Zukas concludes that adult education has been “unfeminist” in its agenda. The Adult Education curriculum, if provided with due critical consideration of issues of power and discrimination, may contribute towards feminism by enabling men and women learners to become more aware and critical of discriminatory structures, prevalent stereotypes and the subordination of women in private and public spheres (Handler, 2016).
As adult education leaders and planners are mostly men, while on-the-ground educators and practitioners are largely women and being constantly cognisant of one’s attitude is a challenging task, in many situations Adult Education agendas with male-centred discourses continue to reproduce women’s subordinate positions.

Therefore, it is crucial to take into account the ways in which Adult Education evolves in different contexts. It either transforms into integrated gender-sensitive approaches or into more mainstream liberal states’ policy-oriented functions.

3.4.4 Adult Education and the gendered lens

The beginning of this section examines the wider context of adult education and gender equality before focusing on family structures. This is because the link between adult education and family structures is not necessarily the same link across the world – certainly not in Scotland. Therefore, there is a need to remember this when considering how to focus discussion of adult education and gender equality. On the other hand, the link between Adult Education and family is prevalent in Iran as far as some learning sites are concerned, especially those that deal with women as mothers and wives. Such a connection alerts us to consider gendered lenses that affect women’s empowerment as part and parcel of family structure. As can
be observed in the upcoming chapter, the ties between Adult Education, religion and family are at the heart of my research.

### 3.4.5 The importance of the family structure in promotion of change

In order to dissect the aspects by which empowerment of women may be shaped, it would be fruitful to discover the family bonds that lead women to specific decisions and actions. The bondage of women to their family status has been elaborated in the interviews conducted in this research, especially in Iran. In this study, women’s ways of thinking through their roots within the family have been disclosed by participants. The Adult Education realm as an entity that may reproduce or bring about change in relation to women’s status within the family is a matter of concern in this section.

Adult Education has been applied as a tool to empower marginalised women in Central America. It can foster transformation in the relationships between men and women within the family structure. In the following section, I explore the ways in which a study by Murphy-Graham (2010) represents transformations in women’s lives and gender relations, especially in women’s private concerns. Murphy-Graham’s study (2010) explores how women in a rural coastal village of North Honduras (Central America) who had participated in the Tutorial Learning System (called SAT in Murphy-Graham’s study) conducted negotiations within their intimate relationships with their partners.
Murphy-Graham’s focus in this research is on the neglected aspect of women negotiating gender responsibilities. Murphy-Graham was also interested in the ways participation in SAT increases empowerment in the realm of intimate relationships. Marital bonds are influenced by the material and financial status of women, forming a prerequisite for action against current inequalities (cited in Murphy-Graham, 2020). The findings of this research indicate that gender consciousness, structural materials, negotiation skills and emotional awareness were prominent factors of change among the SAT participants. For these women, interpersonal skills were the point of departure from their challenging lives.

The role of education in empowering women in their intimate relationships may be evident through improvements in gender consciousness, relational resources and material incomes. By gender consciousness I mean awareness of one’s own gender and the ways in which it contributes to the inequalities one faces.

As the population being studied in this study were mostly Muslim women, it would be fruitful to explore the nuances of the relationship between Adult Education and religion. Religious engagement is an important aspect of a person’s life and may assist women in reaching a new outlook on their religion.

**3.5. Adult education with a focus on religion**
As the focus of this study was on Muslim majority countries like Iran and the Muslim minority population in Scotland, it is necessary to discuss how religion may be affected by Adult Education. Adult Education is a tool for engaging with different aspects of learners’ lives. It can transform their affiliations with religion, gender and race.

The religious affiliations of different people require them to think and act in certain ways. Through critical thinking, Adult Education challenges learners’ conventional, traditional understanding of their religion.

The reason I have chosen to focus on this at the outset is that my study engages with Muslim women and the potential of adult education as an empowerment tool. Learners bring the baggage of their identity into the educational setting. Religion is crucial for Muslims who attend Adult Education; hence the diverse ways that religion contributes to Muslim women’s lives should be considered by Adult Educators. The possibilities for religion to contribute to the learning context of Adult Education are explored in this study, given that one of my sites of study is in Iran.

One of the examples that elaborate the role of adult education in religion is Pope’s (2020) qualitative case study. It explores the role of interfaith dialogue as a way to educate people, particularly about other religions. While Pope’s work might not be framed as adult education in a traditional sense, the creation of spaces for adults to come together in dialogue is pertinent. Interfaith dialogue is defined as “an intentional encounter
between individuals who adhere to differing religious beliefs and practices to foster [understanding], respect and cooperation among these groups through organised dialogue” (2020:206). Pope’s research question is about the type of learning that happens when Jewish, Christian and Muslim adults enter into a dialogue or “trialogue”.

The ways adults reflect on their frames of reference in order to make sense of other religions is a matter of concern in Pope’s research. Feeling safe and supported within the group that engages in triologue is important. In addition, self-reflection and criticality have been mentioned as means of understanding biases and prejudices. In Pope’s study, the ultimate goal has been defined as transformative learning through interfaith triologue. The potential for turning radical disagreements into creative co-existence was highlighted by Pope, who focused on interpretations of the experiences of three groups in the south-eastern United States. He recognised that different levels of learning took place along the path to interfaith dialogue.

Five different types of learning were explored in Pope’s study: 1) communicative learning, 2) instrumental learning, 3) relational learning, 4) personal learning, and 5) transformative learning.

In order to reach a more encompassing religious frame of reference, it is necessary to move beyond communicative learning and acquire transformative learning in the realm of education in order to foster changes in attitudes and reflection on personal and community-level experiences. Transformative learning is the “process of effecting change in
a frame of reference” (cited in Pope, 2020:215). In Pope’s study, changes in the participants’ perspectives took place on this level. What participants could possibly learn at this level was significantly dependent on de-centralising individual knowledge baggage. Here, the attitudes of facilitators towards religious knowledge are a determinant of the ways such knowledge is approached.

Religious education is one aspect of community life, but there are other aspects which can clarify the ways people approach each other. One of the ways Adult Education may be associated with Muslim women’s lives is the racial identification that affects Muslim women’s learning, especially in contexts such as Scotland. Through racial consciousness-raising, women may start to reconfigure their definitions of the world that has surrounded them.

3.6. Adult Education and dialogic space related to race

As one of the sites of this study is Scotland’s adult education context, it will be necessary to examine migrants’ conditions and the racial angle of migrants’ positionality. Such attention necessitates engagement with the political essence of racial power and its implications.

Engagement with race leads to considering inequalities and thus bringing new interpretations of people’s experiences, resulting in empowerment of marginalised sections of society, especially women.
A study conducted by Rule (2004) in South Africa, the Tuition Project, reveals that during the late Apartheid era and the transition period of the 1990s, adult education became a dialogical space for deconstructing racial presuppositions. The Tuition Project was launched to give access to education for disadvantaged groups in South Africa. Borrowing from Freire, Rule attempted to demonstrate that through the Tuition Project, there was a possibility of linking dialogue via adult education and political action in order to transform the world.

Through the political nature of dialogue that can contribute to consciousness-raising, liberation from oppression may become possible. Rule was attentive to the interrelationship of learners and teachers through Adult Education. As a result of racial consciousness-raising, participants in adult education became empowered in terms of acquiring further and higher education. He found that 33% of learners attended university after the project. This was while 29% of the research’s population attended technical college or teacher training college (Rule, 2004:327).

Various esteem issues such as “confidence”, “independence” and “self-reliance” were promoted through the Tuition Project (Rule, 2004:327). These learnings allowed learners to redefine their relationship with themselves and the world. Hence, deconstruction of Apartheid was made possible through personal relationship transformation. We can see how such a political initiative was triggered by the adult education program. However, Rule’s study did not challenge the gendered aspect of the context of South Africa but stayed limited to racial and class-based intersections.
What we can learn from Rule’s study of the Tuition Project which is pertinent to this study is that awareness of one’s own racial affiliation may help in challenging presuppositions that foster submission to specific ways of living. Learners need to question the ways that race influences female Muslims’ view of themselves and the world.

This is especially crucial for the Scottish context that positions Muslim women in specific ways and defines their needs and status within the mainstream European society. In other words, Scottish society defines Muslim women’s needs according to its policy-making, which has a top-down approach.

In the absence of material resources and capabilities for economic and financial achievement, some opportunities for people emerge. One of these is volunteering, which enables participants to engage in socio-political changes. Such a possibility is particularly crucial for immigrants and minority groups.

3.7 Adult Education and the job market

3.7.1 Adult Education and volunteering as a form of women’s contribution to the society
One of the outcomes of Adult Education is volunteering, and volunteering, particularly in developed nations, has been a springboard from which many can develop personal, social and cultural capital. As the focus of this study is on female minorities and their social status, volunteering is relevant as it may expand the possibility of becoming engaged with socio-political issues and developing one’s own capabilities by collaborating in society.

Ruber and Janmaat (2020:2) researched Adult Education’s effects on volunteering, using contemporary panel data from a UKHLS study (University of Essex, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Natcen social research and Katar Public, 2007). 62,569 observations were gathered from 23,202 respondents. Ruber and Janmaat suggest that through educating participants, extensions of social capital and consequently expansion of new social ties are made possible. Ruber and Janmaat’s study was also concerned with the effects of volunteering on people’s economic success and psychological well-being. The researchers suggest that volunteering is a social role in itself. One of Ruber and Janmaat’s findings is that immigrants and ethnic minorities are more prone to engage in volunteering if the Adult Education cluster provides them with the necessary qualifications.

In the absence of job opportunities for immigrants, volunteering is a substitute for those who are thus disenfranchised. There are other possibilities in becoming engaged with volunteering for Muslim women, especially those who are living in diaspora, one of which is network making and increasing their social capital. Volunteering participation offers a chance to be heard and seen for those who have been alienated from
mainstream society due to lack of interactions with their surrounding world. However, the chance to become involved with volunteering should not lead to dismissal of the fact that employability opportunities need to be enhanced for both migrants and the mainstream population.

3.7.2 Adult Education, employment and the job market

At times, adult education has been equated with preparation of adults to make appropriate adaptations for employability. It has thus functioned as a tool to make adults fit into the logic of existing power relations. “Working class” adult education during the 1950s and 1960s, along with developments in industrial and trade unions, highlighted the prominence of the experiences of adults, as well as their status as citizens within the terrain of education. Such an engagement moved the adult education agenda beyond transmission of knowledge and skill for personal development and brought about dialogue on social advancement. Social movements entered “dialectical and organic relationships” with adult education (Jackson, 1995:184). Such a legacy is important to consider when we approach adult education and learning.

Therefore, it can be said that non-formal education is bound to job market requirements. It is important to focus on Adult Education as a more encompassing concept on a macro scale. This means we need to consider historical shifts and the evolution of “adult education” as a concept. For example, Boeren and Whittakov talk about a shift from liberal adult education to radical adult education. They argue that liberal adult education
“provides opportunities for personal development and cultural enrichment” (p.14). As we are living in the era of Neo-Liberalisation, we should note the roots of it. Neo-liberalisation is based on the fact that the rules of the market and economic regulations are at the heart of political calculations and the states should have a minimal role in defining social matters (Bowl, 2017). Such a situation has affected Adult Education, with the essential characteristics of Neo-Liberalism defining what should be learned as the job market demands.

As I quote different scholars in explaining Adult Education, I use the terms that refer to diverse aspects of it. There are locations where Adult Education is replaced with other terms such as Adult Learning, vocational learning or Non-formal Education. The ties between Non-Formal Education and the job market are crucial to take into account. One of these locations is the one where employability comes to the fore.

In spite of the fact that employability is advocated by the Adult Education agenda in the contemporary world, the focus of my study in terms of the impact of adult education for Muslim women is not necessarily on employment. My study is more about how adult education spaces contribute to the consciousness-raising, critical thinking and empowerment of the women. However, employment could be a by-product of adult education.

Adult Learning in contemporary societies has had the goal of helping with finding jobs and retaining a place in the job market (Kalenda et al., 2020; Kim, 2020; Ruber and Janmaat, 2020). In this section I demonstrate how
Adult Education has been changed into a tool for technical transmission of information rather than a means of transformation and challenge to the status quo. In this section I will also discuss the influence of Non-formal Education (NFE) on employment opportunities. I will note that when considering work-related educational engagement, the concept of Non-formal Education may be used instead of Adult Education.

The question is: who are the participants in Non-formal learning? According to the cited research, high-skilled workers are more prone to take part in NFE than low-skilled workers. Central European states such as Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia provide educational opportunities with unique characteristics. Here employers are the facilitators, whereas in different settings educational spaces may be facilitated by other agents. The findings of Kalenda and her colleagues indicate that in central Europe two thirds of all NFE spaces are job-oriented. Kalenda’s study (2020) reveals the increase in participation in NFE from 2011 to 2016. Companies support employee participation in NFE.

International Assessment of Adult Competencies has been a route to exploring the effects of education on skills development of employees. One study used survey data covering the period 2008 to 2013, compiled by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which researched 23,615 young adults aged 25 to 34 years, from 19 OECD countries (Kim, 2020) to elaborate different aspects of Non-formal education. “The PIAAC collected data on the characteristics and background of respondents in five major areas: demographics, educational
attainment and participation, labour force status and employment, social outcomes, literacy and numeracy practices and the use of skills” (p.11). The results of Kim’s research indicate that there is a close relationship between education and skills. However, engagement with Non-formal education has diverted attention from the way Adult Education may empower people in their lives. There have been lags in promoting social inclusion and transformation through Adult Education as a consequence of emphasis on Non-formal education as a means of preparing adults to take jobs.

This research will reference employability as an outcome of Adult Education. As demonstrated in the findings chapter of this study, mainstream Adult Education is concerned with absorption of adults into the job market, especially in Scotland. Pursuing employability through Adult Education has been an aim of both policy-makers and participants in the training programs. Therefore, it is important not to dismiss the political discourses and policy-making processes that have taken place throughout history and their effect on Adult Education.

### 3.8. Adult Education and its role in social movements

Social movements are routes to political involvement with current situations. People, especially the marginalised, need to engage with and criticise dominant discourses through which power structures are reproduced. These kinds of interactions need the society to be educated and able to think critically. Social inclusion is in close relationship with
social movements as a tool for empowerment. Parallel to that, education, and specifically adult education, has always been a pathway to social transformation.

Benett (cited in Hossain, 2012) has theorised “empowerment and social inclusion”, defining empowerment as “the enhancement of assets and capabilities of individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them”, and social inclusion as “the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individuals and groups to assets and development opportunities” (quoted in Hossain, 2012:2).

Holst (2018) has distinguished between Old Social Movements and New Social Movements in the context of the USA. While Old Social Movements were centred on “working class based and socialist political projects”, New Social Movements have been targeted towards “cross-class based political projects” that are “geared towards identity formation or autonomy” (Holst, 2018:77). He contends that New Social Movements are “more educational or transformational” as they emphasise “personal and social identity through knowledge production” (cited in Holst, 2018:81). It can be said that there has been a shift from classic socialist discourses to more inclusive paradigms. The research of Petrie, McGregor and Crowther (2019) gives political examples, including public activism vis-à-vis a sex offender and the 2014 Scottish referendum, to illustrate so-called populism based on people’s emotions such as rage and resentment. They argue that in these political moments, Adult Education has been a source of empowerment for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Throughout such incidents, the
collective participation of these marginalised groups results in a new knowledge.

According to their study, radical social and political activism is a chance for educational intervention through transmission of knowledge which may question the status quo. The outstanding outcome of their exploration lies in the fact that there are ties between Adult Education and official/unofficial political activities of people who represent themselves in empowering moments. Transformations happen through mobilisation of so-called populist identities in specific moments of political activism. This research invites a fresh analysis of social mobilisation and the role of Adult Education for communities in specific political moments. Linking social transformation with new ways of knowing through Adult Education is crucial. Critical thinking facilitates this new knowledge that leads to empowerment.

3.9. Adult Education and Critical Thinking

“Critical thinking is a skill that enables one to self-evolve through reflection, evaluation and decision making” (ibid.:3). It can facilitate empowerment by bringing about novel aspects of knowledge building. The ties between local knowledge and new ways of thinking could lead to changing the present conditions of disenfranchisement for developing nations. Critical thinking has three levels on which a person may enhance their critical faculty: “critical reason (knowledge), critical reflection (on the self) and critical
action (in the world)”. Adult education spaces can assist in developing critical thinking.

Empowerment has some prerequisites in the contemporary world, especially when we aim to transform developing nations. Njiraini’s model for learning proposes a way towards empowerment that includes engagement with new ways of thinking which may assist us to challenge the taken-for-granted channels of transference of knowledge and information. In other words, critical thinking can lead to experiential learning if it causes learners to reflect on experience, to form abstract concepts based on those reflections, and lastly to examine the concepts formed from the experiences (Njiraini, 2016).

Challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about how one may observe one’s world is an outcome of critical thinking. The exploration of critical thinking, which may be promoted through Adult Education, can open doors to revisiting the status quo. Such a trend may trigger learners’ capabilities to understand themselves and their world with a new outlook. Furthermore, they can be equipped to discover the sources of oppression and the possibilities of escaping the dominance of the privileged.

Adult Education requires us to focus more on skills that create opportunities for transformation than on the accumulation of information. Njiraini (2016) found that there is a need for critical thinking through the model of experiential learning. She emphasises the necessity of “self-reliance” as a feature of critical thinking (ibid.). Furthermore, she highlights the ways in
which practical capabilities may contribute to a better life. Critical thinking triggers empowerment if it is applied practically and consciously.

She explores a discourse in which materialism and consumerism became prevalent after the 1960s when African countries gained independence from colonisers. Her study focuses on a Kenyan community. She mentions that in spite of African countries’ independence, their lifestyle has been affected by colonialism. According to Njiraini, colonialism caused some malfunctioning that led to indigenous systems of living becoming redundant. Her solution to the problem is critical thinking: “a skill that enables one to self-evolve through reflection, evaluation and decision-making” (Njiraini, 2016:3).

However, Njiraini does not explain how it may be possible to be critical within groups and communities of learners. Seemingly, she focuses on critical thinking as an individualised way of questioning the present conditions. It is necessary to expand the effects of critical thinking within and beyond social transformation. Engagement with the social ties among learners and educators and learners themselves may bring about new ways of participation in society and political actions taken on behalf of communities.

The role of international discourse in bringing about change in developing countries through specific forms of learners’ and educators’ relationships is evident in the following subsection.
3.10. Adult Education as a means of transferring the international agenda

There are examples of international curriculums for Adult Education designed to develop the capacities of people in developing countries. One of them explores the influences of Swedish popular education on the Tanzanian context. Critical pedagogy is possible in specific types of education, one of them being popular education, which “is implicit in the history of radical adult education in Scotland and UK” (Martin, 2007:4). Popular education “is rooted in the interests and struggles of ordinary people, it is also political and critical of the status quo, and also committed to progressive social and political change” (ibid.). Popular education facilitates active citizenship within a democracy (ibid.:6) and engages learners in transformation of the society. The nature of the knowledge produced through popular education is collective rather than individualistic. It is also a “bottom-up” process with an egalitarian ethic (ibid.).

However, in the case of Tanzania and Sweden, racialisation of ideas in adult education occurs due to hidden conventional values rooted in Eurocentric views (Dahlstedt and Nordvall, 2011). Brookfield has argued that this situation has not been questioned. Dahlstedt and Nordvall try to problematise the establishment of Folk Development Colleges (FDCs) in Tanzania, which have been established by Swedish authorities. The conception of “people” has both reflected and affected power relations between the adult education planners and the participants in educational
programs. This effect is further discussed in the section on decolonising of education.

Analysing the conception of people in the light of its relation to race, ethnicity and nation, insofar as it was affected by colonialism, is a good starting point for research. Swedish popular education is rooted in Western modernity and the Enlightenment heritage. Foreign aid, women’s movements, trade union movements, and adult and popular education have been affected by colonialism (Dahlstedt and Nordvall, 2011). Such an exploration can help in unpacking and questioning the assumptions obscured in knowledge production on the part of Tanzanians along with the sense of identity on the part of Swedish authorities.

Transferring information from developed countries to developing nations is not the answer to the need to escape the cluster of disenfranchisement and unconsciousness towards the world and the self. It is necessary to dig deep into the socio-cultural heritage of developing societies in order to empower the marginalised to become self-reliant and autonomous in problem solving. Adult Education needs to go further than simply transmitting developed countries’ information.

Apart from developed nations’ educational programs in developing countries, the interventions made by international organisations have influenced developing countries in diverse ways. If there are assumptions contained in the educational interventions of developed countries, Adult Education may become an alienated tool for the developing nations’ knowledge production. An example of such collaboration is REFLECT in
Bangladesh, sponsored by ActionAid. REFLECT, which stands for “Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques” (Hossain, 2012), “is known as a participatory approach for adult learning, empowerment and social change” (ibid.:1). REFLECT has helped indigenous Bangladeshis with problem solving and awareness raising. Participatory methods such as theatre, role-play, song and dance are applicable in this approach to adult learning.

3.11. UNESCO International agenda for developing adult education

Since many literacy programs are regulated by United Nations agencies, it is important to mention criticism regarding the sustainability of educational planning. According to Stromquist, governments declare that they are addressing the needs of illiterate women, but they are lagging behind their objectives. There is also a lack of “long-term and sustained investments” in adult education (2006:149).

The history of education practised by international organisations such as UNESCO may help us to recognise the ways in which their agenda has been transformed throughout the years. Elfert studied the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), which was established in 1952 in Germany. This institute has affected Adult Education in a significant way. Elfert traced
back six decades of UNESCO’s engagement with adult education in both Northern and Southern countries. UNESCO’s institute for education was created in Germany, and its early focus was on European and North American educational policies.

In 1951 Schneider introduced lifelong learning as an inseparable part of education as a whole. In the early days, the UIE agenda was to use Adult Education as a tool for “developing and strengthening social and political responsibility” (cited in Elfert, 2013:269). The UIE, in the first decade of its establishment, was concerned with “social renewal” through Adult Education and parent education, along with other mandates. This UN body worked hand in hand with research institutes such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA). In 1965, the UIE’s focus was steered away from Western countries towards the global South. The 1972 UNESCO report Learning to Be echoed the idea that lifelong learning is “the master concept in the years to come for both developed and developing countries”. The issue for the UIE at this point was “the conceptual foundations and theoretical framework of lifelong education from an interdisciplinary perspective” and “the operational aspects of a system of lifelong education” (cited in Elfert, 2013:275).

At this point, lifelong education expanded the conception of education as basic education into a broader entity which is not defined by age. It was at this moment that education was conceptualised as formal, non-formal and informal. In 1975-76, the UIE engaged in “comparative studies” and “educational research” (cited in Elfert, 2013:275) as fundamental aspects of adult education. The benefits of research on education affected policy-
making between 1976 and 1992. The early 1980s may be recognised as a period of focus on adult literacy in developing countries. The fourth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA IV) was born out of “the European conference on motivation for Adult Education in 1983” (Elfert, 2013:277). UIE became involved in Education for All (EFA) in order to negotiate “integration of adult education into national EFA plans” (p.278). CONFINTEA V in 1997 changed the name of the project from “adult education” to “adult learning”. In addition, non-governmental organisations and civil society engaged with the UIE agenda. Between 2006 and 2007, UIE was replaced by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). The focus of the latter institute was on developing countries. The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) was carried out by UIL.

However, the participation of women in adult education and the state of gender equality still pose a challenge. As stated above, one of the documents that may point to an answer on gender issues comes from the International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA). A comparison between CONFINTEA V in 1997 and CONFINTEA VI in 2008 demonstrates that there is an emphasis on women’s participation in the cited documents. In CONFINTEA V women’s empowerment was highlighted and prioritised as far as UNESCO policies were concerned. In this conference there was a focus on women’s empowerment through family and community experiences (Medel-Añonuevo and Bernhardt, 2011). However, in CONFINTEA VI, by contrast with CONFINTEA V, there was a lack of information on women’s issues.
Opening up spaces for women’s education is a political endeavour. Women are marginalised in planning and decision-making in the realm of education. They are more often in charge of implementing the educational programs devised for women. United Nations interventions in the process of learning should be taken into account as a force pushing for transformation in this malfunctioning process.

As we pointed out above, effective Adult Education hugely depends on context and therefore needs to be decolonised when it comes to interventions in developing nations. In the following section I pursue this task.

3.12. Decolonising Adult Education

It is necessary to explore the influence of adult education on the way power forms and acts in developing nations. The political essence of adult education is evident in international interventions by organisations such as USAID that need to be decontextualised and decolonised. Contemplation of socio-political transformation leads us to highlight studies conducted in the context of developing countries regarding the dynamics of awareness-raising. Adult education has entered through routes such as civic education. This type of adult education is mostly practised by developed countries in the context of developing nations.

However, it is arrogant and colonialistic to assume that Western conceptions of adult education may exert influence or be relevant across
the world. Finkel (2014) reviewed four research studies conducted in developing countries such as Kenya and Congo. He has studied the influence of USAID on the political situation of countries in conflict. Such political interventions need to be decolonised through local and indigenous grassroots activism rather than top-down educational programs. Accordingly, Finkel contends that democratic values such as “political tolerance, support and trust” are hardly institutionalised following civic education in developing nations. It is important to consider the patriarchal political configurations of power-led forces along with the promising traditional heritage within the terrain of developing countries.

Civic education as a study that explores citizens’ rights has strong ties with active citizenship that is built on social capital. According to a survey conducted in Northern Ireland (cited in Field, 2003), socio-political synergies are relatively connected to learning and education. In the cited study, which was launched among 1800 adults in 2001, it became evident that some types of social capital were linked with particular forms of learning. It is important to consider the fact that specific social behaviours are context-bound and dependent on historical and structural elements. Therefore, implementation of learning contents such as civic education needs to be observant of the local configurations of knowledge and skills.

As USAID is involved in the above-mentioned educational program, it is important to consider that top-down educational interventions of Northern countries in the context of Southern nations exert their own influences, both
obscure and obvious. The essence of power enforcement through Adult Education in developing countries may be traced back to the Adult Education programs that are implemented through developed nations such as the USA.

According to the above, there is a need to decolonise Adult Education, since Freire suggests that educators need to contribute in conscientisation, which may pass through decolonisation of research and practice. Decolonisation refers to deconstruction of knowledge and practice, through which historical and geopolitical aspects of knowing and learning are taken into account. As Mohanty elaborates, there is a need to engage in everyday life in a way that makes sense of hegemonic power relations along with involvement with collective actions that collaborate in autonomous practices (cited in Lavia and Moore, 2009). There is a possibility that minorities and indigenous groups of people contribute to decolonisation of research and practice as far as Western and colonial forces are concerned. The routes through which ethnic minorities may add to the realm of de-colonisation pass from their engagement with their socio-cultural heritage and knowledge.

It should be noted that there are prerequisites for empowerment that go beyond mere knowledge production. Individualised ways of learning may not guarantee emancipation and empowerment. The centrality of human agency may play a role in such a struggle. The influences of colonial power relations are evident in shaping identities in two different ways: the first group are those who enjoy the privilege of possessing knowledge, while the other group is doomed to ‘conformity, homogeneity, restraint and
silence” (Lavia and Moore, 2009:4). Such a dichotomy needs to be deconstructed through learning new and old forms of knowledge.

Borrowing from Freire, Darder and Yiamouyiannis claim that there are two forms of power; one is “the power of subordinated identities and the other is the power of collective action”, which entail political grace for both entities (cited in Lavia and Moore, 2009:5). Based on the aforementioned scholars, political grace is what is needed to assist the marginalised to reach the desired positionality. Political grace is concerned with all the aspects of human beings’ lives, including their emotional and intellectual aspects. According to the mentioned writers, Freire is concerned that it is important for the experts who enter the oppressed groups to act in a way that respects “histories, wisdom and cultures of the oppressed (ibid:19). Often the interventions of privileged people exacerbate and reproduce the inequalities of the oppressed communities. There is a need to adhere to the fact that the people who are in disadvantaged positions are to be seen as full humans with all aspects of their being.

Mahlomaholo claims that the apartheid system in South Africa has not enabled participation and representation, and the solution for that is participatory educational practice (cited in Lavia and Moore, 2009).

3.13. Adult education as a tool for empowerment

Empowerment is a process that enhances “personal, relational and political power”, which in turn necessitates types of participation and contributions
that result in betterment of one’s life choices and possibilities in the lived realities. It includes being influential in individual and community-based activities and their power-related outcomes. Empowerment for women has different angles: psychological, social, cultural and political. Each of these forms of empowerment refers to the ability to access power to transform the realities of life. Women are seeking to influence their environment and the people around them, rather than aiming for control and power over their counterparts (cited in Shannon, 2018). In this study, when I refer to empowerment, I mean the ability to change one’s own conditions and transformation of one’s life in a critical and advanced way.

In relation to women’s empowerment, Adult Education may be a site of breaking away from power structures through women’s own efforts facilitated by new ways of learning. Murphy-Graham (2020) defines empowerment as follows: “it is a multi-dimensional process of change from a condition of disempowerment, it cannot be bestowed by a third party, as individuals are active agents in this process. Last but not least, it is shaped by the context, and so indicators of empowerment must be sensitive to the context in which women live” (2010:321). For Murphy-Graham, empowerment may help women recognise their self-worth and start to participate along with men, so as to dismantle patriarchy. Empowerment in this approach is a tool for achieving gender equality, and one factor in gender equality is women’s access to literacy and numeracy.

So far, the idea has been discussed that gender inequality needs to be challenged and women are at the centre of attempting to question the status quo. It is necessary to enable women to perceive the sources of
unjust treatment and challenge the forces that are acting against their socio-political achievements. Adult education is well devised to empower women in this sense, not only through critical thinking but also by acting against the mainstream power injunctions. Through the process and forms of Adult Education, women may be able to transform their present realities, such as family-bound conditioning, lack of access to economic resources, and disenfranchisement in terms of political voice.

Empowerment takes different shapes due to the context of its application. At the heart of empowerment is the ability to “do” and to “be”. We need to focus on the capabilities of adult learners in answering the question, “What are people able to do?” (Njiraini, 2016:2). However, people’s ability and potential should be set against power dynamics. Empowerment of disenfranchised societies leads us to dissect the power dynamics within and beyond the contexts of those societies. Through introduction of modernist and postmodernist theories to the knowledge of adult education and its practice, adult and continuing education have been effectively involved with power dynamics. In Giroux’s words:

Modernism’s attentiveness to “critical reason, agency and the power of human beings to confront human suffering” as well as postmodernism’s agenda in “challenging totalizing discourses and its emphasis on the specific and creation of novel theoretical language for developing a politics of difference” may assist us in facilitating transformations as far as education is concerned. (Giroux, 1993:73).
3.13.1. Adult Literacy as a means of empowerment and gender equality

Adult Literacy is a tool to promote gender equality. Pang et al. argue that participation in modern life through actions such as reading newspapers and maps, learning the law, and understanding political discussions is rooted in literacy (cited in Stromquist, 2006). Decontextualised knowledge is possible through literacy. [1]

Decontextualised language skills help us to acquire new ideas and new knowledge and to experience novel feelings (Stromquist, 2006). Literacy is a tool for gender equality for both individuals and communities. However, Stromquist’s findings reveal, in contrast with other studies’ claim, that, although literacy programs have influenced assertiveness and self-confidence, they have not affected women’s subordinate status or enabled them to break free from conventional rules in the private sphere.

Literacy of adults, especially women, may facilitate their access to socio-political possibilities. Stromquist emphasises socio-cultural norms as the major issue which needs to be taken into account. Stromquist moves to endorse “critical literacy” as a heritage of Freire that can “procure social transformation and cultural diversity aligned with economic equality and political enfranchisement” (Stromquist, 2006:149-150). She refers to the fact that, to be efficient, feelings of self-worth and autonomy need to be integrated with economic empowerment of women. She names NGOs as places for women to practise public engagement and participation.
International agencies are in charge of facilitating change through their educational programs. However, there has been little success in reaching goals such as empowerment and gender equality.

Adult literacy needs to mingle with other skills that women possess within their communities and societies. The realm of politics has been inaccessible for women due to their responsibilities as caregivers. Women’s participation in managing small-scale community services is aligned with their power within the household. However, such power does not translate into macro-scale political engagement for women. The reason for this marginalisation lies in structural familial and labour market inequalities. Besides this, ideological beliefs have marginalised women through their consequent absence from public spaces. [2] Gendered division of labour, inequalities in the name of Islam in the Iranian case, and deprivation of opportunities are examples of these ideologies.

### 3.14. Conclusion

In this chapter I elaborated the ways in which education and learning may be a tool, to either reproduce the status quo or transform the present realities. There are diverse ways that education contributes towards the lived realities of women and men. There are different eras in enhancement of education for women. Both in Scotland and Iran, there has been literacy and numeracy development for the marginalised sections of the society. ESOL classes in the UK are in high demand among women learners, and this need has been acknowledged by educational authorities and policy-
makers. Another prominent route is through skill development, which goes back some years in the history of Adult Education in the UK.

Educators need to be trained according to the prerequisite of the audience, in this case, women. The training should be devised through the necessities of women, such as skill development and capacity building, including job training. When it comes to Muslim women, their active role in Adult Education as learners and educators becomes highlighted. In this chapter, I explored how Adult Education may be a means to goals such as autonomy and empowerment. The interrelationship between Adult Education and feminism has been affected by the ways in which knowledge production has been shaped and worked against the backdrop of women’s ways of knowing. Therefore, the gendered lens and its functionality need to be studied in relation to Adult Education.

Adult Education as an entity that is related to gender, religion, race, disability and class is the focus of this study. The ways in which Muslim women’s empowerment is affected by their racial situatedness is a point being considered in this study. Religious affiliations of Muslim women may be regulated through efficient Adult Education programs. However, it is necessary to consider the nuances of minority ethnic religions and the empowering effects of them. Racial positioning of Muslim women is the other aspect that requires us to take into account the influences of educational interventions as far as ethnicities and their related identities are concerned.
The other angle of Adult Education is related to employability as a mandate that leads women’s lives. Although in this thesis I did not want to limit myself to employment and the job market as a force that drives people’s realities, it was inevitable to consider the fact that job skills development is being promoted by Adult Education in the contemporary world.

Decolonisation of Adult Education is a prerequisite that enables it to open doors to an empowering discourse. When it comes to Muslim women’s empowerment, it is necessary to consider the fact that their consciousness raising is dependent on factors such as deconstruction of conventional knowledge, which passes through decolonisation.

To conclude, an adult education program needs to be context-sensitive and decolonised. It should address the needs of the target audience (women, migrant, minority) correctly. Furthermore, self-aware educators should be deployed to enhance the effectiveness of the program through the correct educator-learner relationship. Such programs can be effective and contribute to the empowerment and employability of women.
Chapter 4: Epistemology, Methodology and Method

4.1 Introduction

In this study, I aim to capture the extent to which adult learning spaces offer possibilities of empowerment. My main research question is “What are the possibilities of empowerment in Adult Learning spaces in Iran and Scotland?” Given my main research question, I have chosen to adopt a feminist epistemology for my scholarship. I draw from Islamic feminism and standpoint theory as my main frames of reference in this study. This chapter looks at why I have adopted these lenses and how these have influenced my methodology, analysis and research process as a whole.

It should be noted that there is no single definition of feminist study or methodology and there is a diversity among researchers who advocate for gender equality. Black feminists, third-world feminists, and global, postcolonial or transnational feminists have different perspectives on how to challenge gender inequalities and also the study methodologies they employ.

In this study, my methodology is shaped by the need to critically examine the construction and interpretation of Islamic knowledge. We also need to critically explore the possibilities that adult education theories and practices
offer for the empowerment of Muslim women within adult learning spaces.

Throughout my research process I realised that adult education, as a paradigm that is published in international journals, conceptualised and discussed within academia, is largely rooted in writers and knowledge from the North and from Eurocentric perspectives. Its applicability in the education of adults who live in the South, or who may be in minoritised groups in the West, or adults with religious beliefs but who live in secular societies, needs to be discussed and questioned. Therefore, I chose the lenses of Islamic feminism and standpoint theory to draw attention to knowledge building in a more nuanced manner to include the scholars who try to voice the unheard voices of Muslim women and minority immigrants, and where possible to include the voices of Muslim women learners too.

There are diversities in culturally perceived conceptions of rights and obligations, progress and freedom which differently define agency, inequalities and oppression. I have at different points of my doctoral journey been influenced by a range of feminist writers largely from the black civil rights period, anti-racist feminists and those from the South¹.

### 4.2 Approaches used in this study

In elaborating my interest in women’s issues and empowerment, I should refer to another personal experience; at the time I gave birth to my son 14 years ago, I started feeling the need to know more about myself and began
exploring self-help channels to overcome the difficulties of motherhood. I attended Transactional Analysis sessions that enabled me to know myself better. Although I held a master’s degree in sociology, I had not had the chance to learn about life before in this way. I began realising that learning about oneself can be liberating. I decided to facilitate community-based sessions for some of the women I knew. I was encouraged by my mentor Claude Steiner, a leading psychologist in the United States. The sessions focused on private issues, such as anger management, child-raising and sexual health.

After studying community-based education at the University of Edinburgh in 2009, I realised there is a political essence to the educational engagement of women. Consequently, I became interested in Adult Education. I became involved with Muslim Feminist scholarship through conducting research led by Musawah, an organisation for equality and justice in the Muslim family; this experience helped me to capture women’s struggles for recognition and representation. Now in my PhD journey I intend to explore the ways in which women’s voices may be heard. I was eager to learn from women’s experiences and their challenges in managing the private space as well as the entrance to the public sphere.

Having said all these, I knew my research design needed to be conducted through methods, lenses and approaches that would accommodate and facilitate individual voices being heard. Examining the available methodologies, methods and epistemological approaches, I chose to use an epistemology that could voice people’s (here women’s) needs and experiences, a methodology which is inclusive, not top-down, and based on
the ground. I also used semi-structured interviews through a questionnaire, while examining Adult Educators’ perceptions in meeting the feminist purposes of my study.

4.2.1 Standpoint theory and Islamic feminist approach

There are different strands of feminism that may be used in research. The common ground between Standpoint theory and Islamic feminism is the point of departure for this study.

4.2.2 Why taking an Islamic feminist and Standpoint stance may help

Islamic feminism is a theoretical viewpoint that has been applied in this study. Islamic feminism is a faith-based tool in order to open doors to Muslim women’s ways of knowing. I have extracted Islamic feminism as a route that offers horizons to novel aspects of knowing oneself and the world through reflecting on and criticizing traditional knowledge. Theorists of Islamic feminism pursue women’s lived realities as a starting point for reproducing knowledge which is women-centred. Islamic feminists engage with knowledge production through reinterpretation of the religious texts. They have tried to integrate their new ways of looking at women’s experiences through research that highlights Muslim women’s lives. However, the project of Islamic feminism needs time and effort to become
an established knowledge-building endeavour.

I have drawn on Islamic feminism in order to seek ways to explore the possibilities of empowerment in Adult Learning spaces. Islamic feminism can be better understood if placed against the backdrop of political Islam. Political Islam refers to a system of running the state in a way that has its roots in the religious outlook of Islam. Such outlooks historically are man-made with patriarchal interpretations of Islam. The structural roots of political Islam enforce specific status and position on women and men.

Confining the ruling into a framework which has 14 centuries of established man-made structures under the name of Islam has caused Islamic feminists to challenge the knowledge-based contexts of political Islam and its forces that reproduce women’s marginalisation. False consciousness has arisen from conventional ways of submission to what traditional Islam is saying about women’s and men’s relationships in the private and public spheres.

As a feminist who is seeking alternative ways of knowing and as an activist engaged in challenging inequality, I have found Islamic feminism to be a practical framework and an approach that may produce new knowledge and offer action plans. Having my study question focused on empowerment and the practical applicability of Islamic feminism, the question here would be whether the Islamic feminist approach can be used as a tool that calls for gender equality within and beyond the realm of a male-informed Islamic paradigm or not.
The Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad and other Islamic leaders who are called Imams in the Shi’at school), as Islamic resources, if reinterpreted, can challenge or redefine patriarchy and the status quo. Therefore, applying an Islamic feminist lens to this study would help echo the new religious thinkers, including women scholars, and consequently, perhaps reposition women through empowering them and reshape the patriarchy.

In faith-based feminist scholarship, the processes and outcomes of knowledge-building that relate to religious knowledge are approached with critical lenses in order to examine the possibility of questioning what is the conventional knowledge. An Islamic feminist would view Islam as a source of legitimacy but would also see it as a reference point for grounding women’s rights and status.

The power of knowledge and epistemology; the boundaries, marginalisation, silences and intersections and the situatedness of the researcher and participants (Ackerly and True, 2010:22-23) are important in this study.

Women empowerment is directly and indirectly affected by the ways women gain access to knowledge and share their experiences within the Adult Education atmosphere and beyond. Both Islamic Feminism and Standpoint theory provide me with frameworks that inform how the knowledge is gained and how it is transferable to other people. They inspired me with the outlook that empowerment of women is dependent on the ways women know themselves and the world around them, how they
may define their relationships with others and how they observe their positionality in the light of those relationships.

While I draw primarily from Islamic feminism as the major theoretical lens, the study acknowledges the nuanced angles of different Muslim women’s learning and actions depending on context, time and place. Hence, women learners, along with women educators, are at the heart of this study, and in the next section I discuss how I also draw from standpoint theory and decolonial lenses.

4.2.3 Drawing on wider feminist epistemology: deconstructing knowledge through Standpoint theory

The basis for my epistemology lies in the fact that Standpoint theory welcomes women’s ways of knowing. Standpoint theory has been used in this study in order to highlight the role of women’s experience and subjectivity of the knower, which is women here. Standpoint theory explores the ways in which knowledge is produced by patriarchal forces and the established status quo. It brings about new knowledge by emphasising women’s experiences. Standpoint theory helps in elaborating women’s experiences as a source of knowledge-building; however, it lacks attention to minority Muslim women’s everyday life.

Feminist researchers have been concerned about the ways in which we explore social realities and sociality for women. The epistemological roots of feminist approaches question “how do we know what we know” (Mir-
Hosseini, 2011:68). Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge, while feminist epistemology acknowledges that knowledge is produced rather than being found (Ackerly and True, 2010:7).

Race, class or ethnicity have influences on the ways in which women experience unjust conditions (Intemann, 2019:2-3). There is criticism of the ways in which Standpoint theorists challenge taken-for-granted knowledge production. Standpoint theorists do not consider the probability of lack of knowledge of the marginalised groups, which is rendered plausible through internalisation of inequalities or inaccessibility of educational materials. This means marginalised women are often captured in the midst of daily life, struggling with socioeconomic hindrances, and do not have the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to transform their wisdom into plausible forms of new knowledge.

A “feminist-standpoint theory” lens may help in highlighting the ways in which knowledge is socially situated (Harding, 2004, Narayan, 2004). Standpoint feminism also helps with expanding my methodological framework.

Standpoint feminism, which originated in the 1970s among Marxist feminists, takes the view that women are likely to have less social privilege in comparison to men (Intermann, 2019). Therefore, the voices of such women need to be heard and drawn upon in generating new knowledge.

The knowledge rooted in the Northern heritage of feminism needs to be challenged. Mohanty has elaborated the need to examine the
decolonisation of knowledge. As Arshad contends, decolonisation is not about erasing the knowledge of the Northern countries; it is mostly about finding out why the colonised knowledge has vanished and been decentred (Arshad, 2020). As Keval suggests, we need to be cautious of the fact that centralised and marginalised positions within the power structure should be distinguished and redefined (cited in Arshad, 2020). Finding a place for colonised knowledge is the attempt that would lead to bringing race-related pedagogy onto the horizon of education.

Most of the Muslim feminists whose ideas have been explored in this study are those from the South. Their exclusion from mainstream feminism has been mentioned by some scholars, such as Mirhosseini. Such an issue was prominent especially in the late nineteenth century. Muslim feminists’ ideas were treated as odd or redundant by secular feminists living in the North. Mainstream thought often considers non-white feminists as outsiders; by involving them and or referring to their work, I try to be attentive to their contribution in capturing Muslim women’s experiences.

4.3 Epistemology

4.3.1 Emancipation and empowerment

Looking at the question of my study, “what are the possibilities of women’s empowerment in Adult Education spaces?” one of the most important
keywords is empowerment, and on a macro scale, emancipation. I elaborate more on these two terms in this section.

When using the term emancipation, I refer to women becoming free from conventional types of experiencing themselves and the world as forms of knowledge or being. Emancipation as the way of becoming free from gendered inequalities is one of the goals of the feminist project (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). It is useful to consider that patriarchy should not be seen as a “monolithic force which imposes socialization on girls and women” but it “produces positions for subjects to enter” the society (Jones, 1993:159). The role of “discursive contexts or diverse taken-for-granted meanings” in defining womanhood should be taken into consideration, as Jones states (Ibid:161).

I suggest emancipation as a concept highlighting socio-economic realities of women that needs to be transformed into a gendered equal agenda. However, these issues should not lead us to disregard the fact that emancipation is about social transformation of interrelated types of oppression (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:35). It could be said that emancipation of women is dependent on their social position, and therefore or subsequently their skills, and so empowerment is the first key step in this path.

Kabeer defines empowerment as “the expansion of people’s ability to make strategic choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (cited in Stromquist, 2015:308). Stromquist (2015) highlights four aspects of empowerment; economic, political, knowledge and
psychological (Ibid)(Ibid). She suggests that a thorough conceptualisation of empowerment should move us from awareness-raising to action-taking and social mobilisation.

This means the financial autonomy of women and their legal rights, such as “property rights, access to bank loans, protection from violence and abortion policies” (Ibid:310), are a key to the economic empowerment of women.

Another hidden or invisible belief that needs to be identified and emancipated from is the disempowering mainstream perspective that women as labour should stay limited to the private sphere, whereas men should be appointed to political positions or more significant and important roles in the job market.

Finally, there is a need to consider the social construction of femininities and masculinities. Therefore, adult learning spaces need to assist women learners to recognise the “conditions of subordination” (Ibid:313) and the possibilities for transformations.

Regarding facilitation of collective actions within the marginalised groups, the role of NGOs and women led community-based associations is key. However, some scholars like Stromquist rely on the assistance made by international support for developing countries and funding in facilitation of women’s movements through NGOs.

In this study, I am interested in exploring whether adult learning spaces in
Iran and Scotland offer opportunities that have facilitated the four aspects of Stromquist’s framework and/or social transformation through the dynamics of adult learning and community-based education.

4.3.2 Subjectivity of the knower

It is important to acknowledge that a researcher’s outlook affects his/her study. Subjectivity refers to knowledge as partial, personal and constituted out of the consciousness of the knower (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). In my study, I do not adopt a positivist approach nor accept that a researcher can ever be completely neutral. The knowledge discussed in the above section has always been conditioned by the way the knowers receive and reproduce knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to mention the fact that impartiality, generality and freedom from personal and political biases influence study approaches, values, analysis and outcomes.

For this study, the subjectivity of the knower does play a part in how the methodology and methods are approached. Subjectivity is important to the feminist project insofar as the subject of knowledge has always been “an idealized agent who performed the “God trick” of speaking authoritatively about everything in the world from no particular location or human perspective at all” according to Haraway (cited in Harding, 2004:4).

Subjectivity of the knower would lead us to consider the fact that all knowledge is being filtered through the eyes and minds of the researcher and the researched. Subjectivity of Islamic feminism refers to the ways this
frame of reference understands the world and makes sense of it through its theoretical lens. In other words, specific values and interests of Islamic feminists lead their agenda.

**4.3.3 Positionality or situatedness of the knowledge**

The positions that a researcher and the researched hold influence the entire content and outline of a research. This means it is crucial to clarify how feminist subjects become the “knowers” who will then produce “the new knowledge” in this sphere.

Narayan (2004), a female academic and activist from the south, mentions that (in non-western contexts) it is important to be attentive to “the powerful traditional discourse which values a woman's place as long as she keeps to the place prescribed”. She points out that in some cultures, such as the Hindu culture, women are assigned to specific roles and tasks that doom them to reproduction of specific experiences (page 215).

A researcher’s position can affect a study’s discourse; therefore, engagement of researchers with the situation of marginalised women, on a personal and emotional level, may lead to dismissal of injustices and injustice roots. This misrecognition and misrepresentation then lead to the ineffectiveness of women empowerment. This is why Narayan suggests postponing “more sympathetic evaluation” of what is being experienced by women (page 216).
In the design of my methodology and method, I hope to achieve a sympathetic way of approaching women’s education and the way they have been treated by educationalists. However, such positionality should not result in dismissing the sources of inequality against women. In order to avoid this flaw, or to decrease the chance of such an error, I examine the intersectional and mutually understandable ways of producing knowledge; the curriculum and frame of reference for educationalists in Iran and Scotland are explored in chapters 5 and 6.

4.3.4 Reflexivity

Positionality or situatedness of the knowledge produced by the researcher should be considered to ensure the study is rigorous. Reflexivity may clarify my focus in the research as far as my “values, experiences, knowledge, interests, beliefs and ambitions” take me (Cousin, 2009:18).

As a middle-class Muslim Shiat Iranian heterosexual woman who is interested in examining the inequalities, I was mindful about contextualizing my study according to the cultural, political and gendered realities as far as I was informed about them. I was cautious about the forces that shape my point of view and acknowledged the interrelated inequalities that occur at the crossroad of gender, religion, class and disability.

One other issue regarding reflexivity was that the oppositional approaches, secular versus Muslim, may lead to an outsider/insider dichotomy. Sometimes this binary may also create a dichotomy between scholars.
living outside a country and activists working inside that country. As far as reflexivity is concerned, my status as an insider by nationality and outsider as a student in Scotland put me in a position that could not help me identify with either of the insider or outsider feminist identities. In the Scottish context I may be seen as an outsider, someone who does not belong to the communities being studied. This highlights the importance of “capturing the essence of the other(s)” and giving them space to “speak for themselves”. My experience as a 40-year-old PhD student in Scotland, being hospitalized for a month in a mental health hospital, also contributed to my research. The cited experience prevented me from having presuppositions about women’s identities and their knowledge. Furthermore, my own experiences assisted me in being attentive to the silences that came up throughout the research process.

4.3.5 Why is an Islamic feminist lens best suited for the research design?

Adult Education is concerned with formation of knowledge and experience. Since the participants in my study were either Muslim women or those involved with Muslim minorities, Islamic feminism may be a good framework for exploring the aspects of their known and unknown contexts. Islamic feminism is seeking answers to Muslim women’s realities, one of which is their educational engagement with the body of knowledge. I aimed to elaborate the ways in which empowerment of Muslim women who are the majority or minority populations living in Iran and Scotland may be
shaped through different frames of references, one of which was Islamic Feminism.

The extent to which Adult Education is either borrowing or rejecting the body of knowledge in Islamic Feminism was a concern in this study. I had presupposed that Islamic Feminism may contribute towards generation of knowledge in Adult learning spaces. However, seemingly, according to my research design, this frame of reference may or may not fit the context of Adult Education. Empowerment through Adult Education was a knowledge-based consideration in my study. Therefore, Islamic feminism and general feminism could be a way through which educators facilitated their educational content and framework.

4.3.6 Any challenges associated with using an Islamic feminist lens in relation to my design?

As elaborated in this thesis, Islamic Feminism is a framework that may be applied to Adult Education. However, there are practical hindrances in the usage of Islamic Feminism within the realm of Adult Education. Islamic Feminism is tied to religious attempts to reconfigure Islam in the light of ontological endeavour. Islamic feminism is more concerned with bringing about new interpretations of the traditional sources of Islam. It does not move beyond such a project. The necessity of going further than religious-bound efforts and considering secular forces that contribute to gender injustice is a mandate for any theory that seeks to enrich the educational
Besides, Islamic Feminism is confined to the circles of scholars who have not been able to publicise their claims enough and distribute their knowledge projects within the body of the Muslim communities. Marginalisation of ordinary Muslim women with their issues still remains uncontested and far from being disputed by Islamic feminist scholars.

4.4. Methodology

4.4.1 Qualitative methodology

Qualitative methodology is a tool to expand the horizons of the researcher and opens up spaces to include the unknown realities. In a qualitative study “the emphasis is on a specific case, a focused and bounded phenomenon embedded in its context” (Miles and Huberman, 1994:10). I adopted a qualitative methodology, hoping it would enable me to gain a “deeper understanding” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) of women’s experiences and the possibilities for change through adult learning spaces. I am interested in exploring “how social experiences are created and given meaning” (Ibid:14). I realised adopting a qualitative approach has offered me the best possibility to obtain detailed information “in the precise particulars” of the issues which were influencing “people’s understandings and interactions” (Silverman, 2013:9). However, it is not free from the judgments of the
4.4.4.1. Limitations of Qualitative Methodology

This study focused on qualitative methodology; however, I am aware of the restrictions that may be caused by choosing such a strategy. First and foremost, the process of the research was time consuming and “cost-intensive”, as stated by Schier et al. (2015). Second, the willingness of the interviewees to cooperate in the flow of the study was a matter of concern. There was no guarantee that women educators would be keen on contributing to the project.

Third, at some points in the study there were complexities arising from the data gathered, ambiguities which might have been avoided if a quantitative methodology had been appointed. For instance, there were different themes coming out of the context of Iran and Scotland that were hard to compare, such as motherhood in Iran and faith in Scotland. A qualitative methodology sometimes brings nuances to the data collection design which make it difficult to analyse within a constellation based on epistemology. This issue has been raised by Schier et al. (2015) in their research on “Multi-local Living Arrangements” within families in Germany.
Fourth, there is little possibility of generalizing the results of a qualitative study, as it does not offer numerical or statistical proof, unlike quantitative research (Ochieng, 2009).

**4.4.2 Quantitative methodology**

The usage of quantitative methodology may help in exploring the causes of a problem or issue. However, this methodology is based on measurements and statistics, as it pursues the relationships between phenomena in an empirical way through mathematical expressions (Holy, 2012). In this method, the focus is on scientific elaboration of study questions. There is no reference to the subjectivity of the researchers that is brought into the research realm. The values, perceptions and emotions of the researchers are seen as outside of the study field. Such a perception leads to a claim for objectivity of the study. The analysis of the researcher is seen as objectified and separable from biases and possible presuppositions. Therefore, these analyses may be tested independently through other study explorations. Generalisation is one of the qualities of this methodology. The formulation of a problem in a scientific way is a prerequisite for a quantitative methodology. One of the flaws of quantitative research is that the researcher shapes hypotheses according to his/her “experiences, reflections and observations” (Holy, 2012:7). Such an attempt represents the possibility of being affected by biases and prejudgments.

As a cause of the cited inefficient aspects, I chose not to apply quantitative
methodology. I used qualitative methodology as I do not claim objectivity; rather, I suggest there is subjectivity in the unknown realm that I attempted to know better. As far as my exploration in empowerment of women through Adult Education is concerned, the usage of quantitative methodology could not lead me to dig into the nuances of such a complex issue. It was necessary to go further than hypothesising and presupposing a one-sided relationship between empowerment and Adult Education. For example, a survey is “a way of obtaining information from a sample of entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members” (cited in Hesse-Biber, 2012:239). That did not serve the purpose of this study.

Moreover, data from questionnaires or surveys would provide me with static and superficial pieces of information but would not have allowed me to explore why a particular opinion is stated or what influenced curricular content, or to provide safe spaces for women adult educators to articulate their approaches to practice or the opportunities and constraints they were operating within. Capturing women’s voices was not straightforward, and there was a need to move back and forth during the data collection process, taking into account context, tone and ethos. The qualitative method was closer to my epistemological influences of Islamic Feminism and standpoint theory. That level of sensitivity is not possible via a survey.

4.4.3 Mixed approaches
A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies may help researchers reach a more robust result in terms of answering the study questions. According to Henson et al., the necessity of teaching both methods has been considered as a tool that requires students to come up with new ideas and solutions for their research design. However, in my study, the possibility of numerating empowerment into calculatable categories was limited. I configured the concepts in the research question with almost all of its qualities for exploration of the evaluation of each category of thought.

I considered the possibility of utilising a mixed-methods approach of using questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. However, as this was not a large-scale study seeking to measure outcomes or engage with numerical analysis, I did not use a mixed-methods approach.

Considering the sensitive context of my research, I opted for a straightforward and traditional route of using interviews, which enabled one-to-one interactions in an environment and at a pace that suited the participant. Through facilitating a dialogical way of interacting with participants, I was able to investigate deeper thoughts and feelings. There was no predetermined category prior to the data collection except for the concepts that were meant to be studied according to the thesis study questions.
4.5 Interviews, possibilities and limitations

4.5.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews require building dialogic and reflective relationships (Cousin, 2009:74) with the interviewees; thus they were seen as the most appropriate format to adopt, as the purpose of my research was collecting women’s experiences, and as the process of an interview has the potential to break the silences of women. “The speech-act itself is a rebellion against stifling social norms which calls for women’s silence” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003:9). The dialogical synergy between interviewer and interviewee has a prominent role in the flow of the interview.

Here I faced two major challenges; the first one was building trust. As I had limited time for each interview, at points it seemed hard to build authentic trust. In theory, a warm, open and non-judgemental approach should assist in setting the ethos for a safe conversation. In practice, building this atmosphere was a challenge, especially for those interviewees who did not know me personally or who considered me as an outsider (referring to the positionality of a researcher as mentioned before). I tried to address these challenges by creating an interview flow that assisted the creation of an ideal interview ethos.

I began the interviews with a few warm-up questions to allow the interviewees to open up and prepare themselves for narrating their
experiences (see Appendix 1.1 &1.2). For more transparency and building trust, I gave accurate information about the purpose of my research to the interviewees and participants engaged in educational spaces and shared the purpose of the study with them. I then assured them that their personal information would not be exposed at any stage and that their safety was a priority for me as a researcher. Each potential participant was provided with a brief information sheet about my study. Then I proceeded to more challenging questions, which might be seen as more political or emotionally charged questions (see also Appendix 1.1.&1.2). Throughout the interviews, I introduced my research according to the sensitivities towards feminism and women’s empowerment. That meant that in some contexts, I had to explain words like ‘empowerment’ or used terminology more understood locally.

4.5.2 Why Observation was inappropriate for this study

In my original study design, I hoped to join some of the classes to observe how the women adult educators pursued their work with the women learners. I hoped that by being part of the learning group and through observation, I would catch a glimpse through “the eyes of the people being studied” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008:165). In observation: “Research roles… [are] to be developing in response to a greater consciousness of situational identities and to the perception of relative power, particularly in reference to studies dealing with gender, sexuality and people on the sociocultural margins” (Ibid:167).

Deniz and Lincoln do highlight the limitations of observation-based data
according to the “universally applicable objective codes” (Ibid:171). They emphasise the situational context in which observation takes place. Their account of ethical values in attempting to do no harm in the community needed to be considered (Ibid:25).

I had hoped that the observation of the learning sites which offer women ways of acknowledging their needs and claims and voicing their issues would enable me to explore the experiences of women as far as education is concerned. The possibilities for transformation facilitated through educational measures could be interrogated under the light of feminist inquiry. Although I kept using pseudonyms for the interviewees throughout my study, observation yet seemed to be a less safe method. Besides, due to the political reasons that I explain in this section, I decided to abandon the idea of observation as another approach to add to interviewing.

4.5.3 Why are other methods of data collection not used?

I abandoned focus groups as a format due to the pragmatic difficulties of organising such groups and also due to a need to provide safe spaces for honest and open dialogue, which was less likely in a focus group given the subject matter and the context of working in a country (Iran) where these issues are not generally openly discussed. On the other hand, the private space of the interview could give adult educators some room to discuss the unheard aspects of social realities.
Reflecting on the former method, I decided focus groups would not be a safe way forward to obtain open and honest discussions with potential participants. There was a risk of jeopardizing the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants if focus groups were used. Besides, if a focus group was chosen, both adult educators and learners might not be as comfortable as they could be throughout interviews. Confidence was another matter that merited consideration, as talking in the group may cause some discomfort for some participants in the study. Given the political situation in Iran, this cited method could lead to some problematic issues, which could be avoided through the choice of other methods.

The application of other qualitative methods of data was considered but not adopted. For example, I had explored the use of autobiographical narratives. As my focus was on adult learning spaces and approaches for social transformation rather than the life narrative of individual adult educators, I did not pursue the autobiographical route.

In a similar manner, action research in education is a method used by some scholars. Action research includes looking at and listening to the culture of the educational context, configuring the question along with those who are stakeholders in the educational context and developing a map that defines who is contributing towards the research within the network of stakeholders. The participative process should also be clarified in this method, which means each of the participants’ roles should be defined. It is also important to establish what data and evidence are needed and how the researcher wants to collect those data. Furthermore, action research should be devised through planning to discuss and share the data with the
stakeholders. Last but not least, an Action Plan should be drawn up in order to clarify different aspects of the research contribution (Mertler, 2019:8). However, my preliminary overview of the method clarified that this method is complex and not suitable for the scope of my study.

4.6 Research design

4.6.1 Sampling and recruitment: Who was chosen and why?

My criteria in Iran were selecting adult education workers who could largely discuss the educational contents for women they were working with but in a critical and informed way. However, in Scotland, participants were identified because they were active in migrant and especially Muslim women’s issues within informal educational contexts. Iran’s educationalists were chosen according to their engagement with women and gender issues while they were attentive to education of women. I wanted to involve those interviewees who were outspoken and knowledgeable about their field of work. Such a criterion was used for Scotland too. Most of the interviewees in Scotland may be categorised under such a criterion. I was mostly successful in inviting those participants who contributed in such a manner to the study. Being innovative about their job and well-informed about the nuances of Adult Education was a prominent factor for my choice of participants.
4.6.2 Process of sampling

Sampling was a process that included Adult Educators, policy-makers and grassroots agents who were active in the field. I recruited the above-mentioned groups of women through “purposive sampling” to help me identify potential participants. Purposive sampling is a method of choosing study participants according to the judgement of the researcher while being attentive to the purpose of the study. In Iran, I knew some women who were knowledgeable about women’s learning. These women were my sources to access interviewees. From the people they introduced me to, I chose educational agents who were involved in women’s gender issues and education from a spectrum of psychology to HIV positive, NGO workers to rural policy makers.

However, in Scotland my social capital was not as rich as in Iran, and I mainly relied on my supervisors to reach participants in my study, although a small number of interviewees were selected through snowballing. After realising a need to add additional material, I started collecting the Scottish data. As this was not part of the original study plan, there were some time constraints in the actual process.

The Scottish interviewees varied from NGO staff to policy makers in the council, community workers to ESOL tutors. Through word of mouth, I was able to find a small number of further participants in Edinburgh and Glasgow.
4.6.3 Demographic and socio-economic status of participants

In the Iranian context, the age range of the interviewees was between 29 and 62. When it comes to socio-economic status, I refer to Bourdieu: manifestation of economic power in the societal realm defines the class of the people and representation of social power defines status. Social strata may be based on accumulation of similar people with common characteristics (Ghasemi and Samim, 1388). In this study, education, participant’s occupation, occupation of the husband, type of the organisation women were involved in and size of the family were used in order to define the strata of the participants. Additionally, the district in which these women were working and living could define their class. I could also distinguish the class of these women through their academic degrees and their engagement in their workplace.

In Iran’s context, if a woman was not the sole breadwinner I would ask her about her husband’s jobs as well. Most of the women being interviewed belonged to the middle-class strata; there were also those who could be recognised as lower middle class or upper middle class.

When it comes to marital status, 11 of these women stated that they were married, two women were not married, and one was single and living independently. Three women wished not to talk about their marital status. The educational background of the participants included six Bachelors, five Masters, three PhDs and one doctor. Three of the women did not tell me what degree they had. The fields of studies of the women included
mathematics, environmental law, business management, educational management, political sciences, social work, psychology, psychiatrics, governmental management, English literature, family consultancy, social sciences, women and gender studies and counselling.

The least stated experience in the field of women’s education was 5 years and the most experience was 20 years.

In the Scottish context, the age range was between 28 and 56. The socio-economic status of women may be understood in the light of their professional engagement. Engagement with voluntary work is one of the criteria that may be associated with class and gender issues. In my study, most of the participants may be categorised as middle-class women. Four of the interviewees were either themselves migrants or daughters of migrants. Two women stated they were Scottish Muslims. Two women were wearing the headscarf. Six women were white and Scottish. Five women stated they were married; five others did not refer to their marital status.

Eight women had post-graduate degrees in diverse fields, one woman had a diploma and another one had a Bachelor’s degree. The subjects being studied were management of training and development, equality and discrimination, international politics, social sciences, community learning and development, community education, modern languages, migration studies, business management, English teaching, community development and social work and psychology.
The work experiences of women in the field of adult learning and community education and work varied from 1 year to 30 years.

4.6.4 Interview Design - Process and question framework

My study was interested in how adult learning spaces might be sites for addressing concepts such as empowerment, citizenship rights, women’s rights, equality and whether these could be spaces for social transformation. My main research question was:

◦ What are the possibilities of women’s empowerment in adult learning spaces and community-based settings in Iran and Scotland?

There were other supplementary questions in this study as follows:

◦ Are educational service providers aware of gendered power relations and their impact on women’s participation and representation?

◦ Do providers in any way facilitate their services in order to empower women? And if so, in what ways?

◦ Is Islamic feminism relevant to the practices of educationalists?

◦ Should Islamic feminism be enriched by the frame of references that are in work within the educational contexts of Iran and Scotland? In other words, how may the practices of adult learning and community education help Islamic feminism become more practically involved and go further than its boundaries?
4.6.5 Pilot study

In order to explore the possibilities for women empowerment through adult learning and community-based education, I approached a diversity of organisations that were offering such services. Primarily, I contacted some of the people whom I knew from my past activities with women and their education. I had a small number of meetings in Tehran with women activists who were working independently from the government or those who were employees of the state. I sought assistance from two women adult educators and activists in Tehran who I had previous contact with. I piloted interviews with them, and they also enabled me to learn more about their organisations and to engage in some observation. I went to their respective workplaces and observed the venue prior to my interviews with them. The first two women who openly accepted me and my study were chosen to be part of the pilot study. I explained different aspects of my study question and gained the trust of both women. Mrs. Namazi and Mrs. Allahyar (pseudonyms) were the two first women who were selected as participants in my study. I explored the nuances of pilot interviews after transcribing them and rethought the research questions afterwards. I amended some of the aspects of the study design, such as arrangement of the research questions and my focus on the body of professional questions rather than personal inquiries.

The first organisation I interviewed was an adult learning context that offered mothers and families classes. The courses were about child-raising, life skills development, problem-solving, communication skills, stress
management, creative thinking, etc. This institute was located in the central part of Tehran. It was located on the ground floor of an old building. It was an independent organisation with no ties to the government.

The second organisation was based in a district that was populated by disadvantaged groups such as Afghan refugees and immigrants. Samaneh Namazi was working in the cited organisation. She told me they had come to the point at which they recognised that in order to improve the situation of children being taught in their institute, there was a need to empower mothers. This organisation received its venue for work from the municipality of Tehran, but it was being run by a group of people independent of the state.

For the rest of the study, I interviewed 19 women adult educators for the period of 1 hour to 1 hour and a half. The interview of Iranian women took longer as I needed to explain some of the nuances of the questions being asked. Most of the participants chose to interview in their workplace. In Scotland, I interviewed 10 women who were working as organisers or facilitators in adult learning and community-based education. I interviewed Adult Education agents in their workplace in order to give them space to open up and pinpoint their approaches to the study questions. The timing of the interview with each woman was between 45 and 90 minutes.

4.6.6 Gaining access for data collection and associated problems
Accessing the sample of study was not easy. It was necessary to talk to stakeholders and gatekeepers to gain access to the group of interviewees. I spent hours explaining my study to those people whom I knew so that they could open space to the informants about this study. In the case of Iran, I mostly recruited the sample through talking to the gatekeepers about my projects. In the case of Scotland, however, this was done through emailing active members in education or Muslim community activists. Apparently, explaining through email had its own limitations, and thus I ended up being rejected by some organisations which could not trust me.

4.6.7 Interview settings: Where did the interviews take place?

The interviews mostly took place in the workplace of educators. I wanted the interviewees to feel comfortable so that they could talk openly, and thus I organised interviews in venues that educators worked in. However, in some cases, the places were not calm enough, and I and the participants in the study had to adapt to the existing situation. In some cases, I and the participant in the study agreed on a different place from their work venue, such as their homes or in a cafe.

4.6.8 Challenges related to interviewing as a method

The main goal of interviewing in this study was to open up dialogue opportunities with adult educators and to hear, from their viewpoints, their
understandings of the purpose and possibilities of adult learning spaces. However, adopting an interview approach has some pitfalls as a method of gathering data.

Drawing on a semi-structured interview question framework meant that some questions (such as ones on women’s citizenship rights) made some of the interviewees uncomfortable. Leading the participants in the study to the routes that could produce the knowledge was a hard aim to achieve. Accessing spaces that could generate a flow of talk and also felt safe and secure for the interviewees was a challenge in this study. I mostly asked the interviewees where they felt comfortable to have the interview. The workplaces of Scottish and Iranian educators were the venues for interview, and some of these places were not private enough. The spaces were not familiar to me and I did not feel as comfortable as I should have. The accessibility to a private space was an advantage only some of the interviews had. In other words, it was hard to reach a point that the interviewer and the participant could interact in a fully matched communication.

It is worth explaining the process of the interview, general issues and the content of the interviews. All the interviews in Iran and Scotland were arranged according to the timing of the interviewees. I was welcomed by most of them, and I experienced a friendly bond between myself and the participants in the interview. Some of them were dubious and seemed uncomfortable in the beginning, but I did my best to assure them and reassure them that their names would stay anonymous and there would be no harm for them. The contributors in the study were informed that sharing
their stories and ideas would add to the knowledge of adult learning spaces for women. Although the term was new for many of the Iranian participants, the Scottish interviewees were familiar with the term.

Communication in the second language (English) was a limitation for this study. Building a dialogic relationship between the researcher and participants took some amount of effort. I aimed to create questions that assisted the participants to reveal their perceptions and approaches to their practices. However, achieving such a goal was a challenging target due to the difficulties in building a mutual understanding with interviewees.

4.6.9 Research design: Data collection and its limitations

I had planned primarily to accomplish my whole data collection in Iran. I was supposed to explore the perceptions of educationalists as well as service users. I finished the first phase of my data collection in Iran, interviewing educators, and I returned to Edinburgh to plan my second phase of data collection, which was observation of the learning sites and learners. At that time, I was informed that there was a crackdown regarding feminist work in Iran.

A feminist activist living in Canada was arrested by the counter-intelligence of the Army of Guardians of Islamic Revolution, which is an organization parallel to the intelligence services of the government (Kamali Dehghan and Kassam, 2016). She was arrested in Iran while she was paying a visit to her friends and family and doing some study. Through the news website of the Army of Guardians of Islamic Revolution, they were making a case
out of her arrest. They were surveilling a network of feminists living in Iran
and others out of the country.

In the case this organization presented, they even mentioned some of the
names of feminists whom I contacted as gatekeepers. This activist’s effort
was mentioned as a foreigner's attempt to corrupt the women and family in
Iran. Such a political situation affected my study plan and led me to think of
an alternative. I did not want to jeopardise my participants’ situation and
cause discomfort for them. I did not risk their security and chose not to go
back to the Iranian field of study.

Therefore, I had to make amendments in my project plan. After discussing
the issue with my supervisors, they suggested I consider a comparative
analysis between Iran and Scotland, since it was safer to distance myself
from the Iranian interviewees and opt out to engage the Scottish women
adult educators. The safety of the study was a major concern for me and
my supervisors. Since I was gathering data for a university which was
based outside of Iran, this study could be seen as a threat to some of the
educationalists who were activists in Iran; this could be called a
collaboration with an English institute.

Although I was not able to resume my work in Iran and finish my field
studies, through grounding a comparative analysis between Iran and
Scotland I was able to provide a more nuanced picture of adult education
and women empowerment. These two different study fields have revealed
the complexities of working with women and providing adult learning and
community-based education for them.
Another limitation in my study was related to the fact that I was travelling back and forth between Iran and Scotland due to my Bipolar Mood Disorder. When I was in Iran, I had limited access to the library and resources that could be used to complete my literature review. However, I used online books and e-journals for accomplishing my study. Such hindrances in data collection and the whole process of this study considering my mental health situation led to interruption of studies throughout these 8 years. Due to being affected by Bipolar Mood Disorder, I had phases during which I could not work on my thesis because of manic and depression episodes. The disconnect among different periods of data collection in my study caused difficulties with engaging in the process of study as a continuum that needed focus and perseverance.

4.7 Analysis of the data

4.7.1 Recording

In addition to the interviews and becoming exposed to the learning sites in Iran, I used my notes as a source of information.

I transcribed the interviews from audiotaped recordings. However, the transcripts will not take the place of the audio recordings as they cannot “fully reflect all parts of the interviews” (cited in Mallozzi, 2009:1049). The interviews in Tehran were conducted in Farsi (Persian), and transcription quotes for this study had to be in English, so naturally some meaning would
be lost in translation. In addition, transcripts do not capture silences, tone of voices, facial expressions and mood of the interviewees, so I used my notes written after each interview to remind me of the context, feelings and mood of each meeting. The interview process was a time-consuming endeavour as I needed to quote the participants. The translation of transcripts was another part of this research that took a considerable amount of time. To be aware of my positionality, I kept reflective notes that helped me gain an awareness of my own feelings and reflections about the research process and about the incidents that happened before, during and after the interviews.

4.7.2 Coding

Coding the interviews helped me in selecting and integrating different parts of the texts, along with notes that I had taken throughout the research process. I coded the interviews through extracting the main points of the participants’ interviews. Coding helped me “to review a set of field notes…and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact” (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56). Miles and Huberman differentiate among three types of codes: Descriptive codes that have little interpretive essence; Interpretive codes, which assist us in extracting a “more backstage web of motives” behind the actions of the participants; and Pattern codes, which are “more inferential and explanatory” (Ibid:57).

Primarily, I highlighted some of the main points mentioned by participants
according to my main frame of reference, “empowerment of women through Adult Education”. I then categorised different sections of the interviews and labelled them based on their contributions in answering the research questions. Afterwards, I wrote down the abstract of the points mentioned by interviewees in Stick Notes. Based on my interviews, some of the themes that emerged were expected, and some themes arose from the interviews throughout the process of working on the abstracts. For instance, Mrs. Allahyar emphasised the status of women as bound to the family, which was one of the predetermined, expected themes. She also pinpointed the fact that their primary departure point for adult education was families, which was an unexpected theme.

For more clarity, I then categorised different points made by participants through Coggle mind mapping. In the first phase of my study, I made one Coggle mind map for each Iranian interviewee; however, in the second phase, in the Scottish context, this did not happen due to time constraints. The mind maps helped me segregate diverse ideas presented by participants. Pattern codes had a specific purpose in my study as they “turn around four, often interrelated summarizers, which are themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people and more theoretical constructs” (Ibid:70). According to Anselm Strauss, coding helps the researcher become free from description and move into interpretation as a higher stage of abstraction (cited in Spencer et al., 2003:204). I used Coggle mind mapping in order to do so. Furthermore, drawing mind maps out of the questions asked of interviewees helped me extract the main themes and concepts of the research. Here, I bring one of the mind maps into the context of the chapter:
the women in the community are mostly engaged in giving cleaning services to people's houses or some of them work in small scale factories or sewing manufacturing unites. we tell these women if you pursue education this does not necessarily mean that you should hold a job. education helps you in having an open mind. the first priority of a woman is her children and raising them. a woman should have in mind that she needs to reduce her working time in order to give more time to her children at home.

I think there is no limitation for women in order to have cultural development. they should want to pursue the opportunities. many families don't care about girls' education... so the family setting is so important. however, such a situation is improving. there is a high rate of girls' participation in university entrance exam

feminism: although I was living in the USA for a long time I never accepted feminism. I think it has a tendency to confront men and I don't think it is a right way. It creates problems for women and can't assist them. It is not right for us women to want to compare ourselves with men or want to become like men. It is important to be a woman with dignity, awareness and skillfulness and raise good children
There were some predetermined themes that can be appointed according to my “theoretical framework, research questions, problem areas and/or key variables” (Miles and Huberman, 1994:58). Other issues came up as the interview progressed; I tried to address the generated themes along with the predetermined streams. The combination of both the aforementioned types of coding assisted me in analysing the data. My data also included exploring content analysis. In this method, the content and context of the interview are explored in order to extract themes and the frequency of their occurrence. I needed to be grounded in the data and capture the terms, phrases or expressions of the study participants at the preliminary stages. Although it was a time-consuming process to translate the Persian interviews, I tried to remain loyal to the context of issues being mentioned by interviewees and avoided dismissing their accounts.

My aim was to move beyond descriptive accounts and reach an analytical level: “…the data needs to be organised and sorted so that they can be inspected in largely related blocks of subject matter” (Ibid: 210). I then looked to identify patterns within and across the whole data body. Although the primary themes and concepts were kept close to the interviewees’ perceptions, the ultimate goal is to move to a higher level of analytic synthesis. Such a task was prominent in my study.
Spencer et al. refer to the necessity of classifying the data through forming typologies. In order to move from descriptive accounts to explanatory accounts, I needed to use typologies. My typologies have emerged from the cluster of highlighted notes and mind mapping. Hence, I was able to “describe and explain the segmentation of the social world or the way that phenomena could be characterised or differentiated” (Ibid:214).

One of the steps mentioned by Ritchie et al. that helped me in managing the data on the descriptive level is identifying an index. An index is different from a code; it “shows which theme or concept is being mentioned or referred to within a particular section of the data”. I used the index tool in the Coggle mind mapping. “Coding, on the other hand, refers to a process of capturing dimensions or content that has already been more precisely defined and labelled” (Ritchie et al., 2003:224). A code can summarize or condense the data. I used coding in my study as a tool to summarise the interviews. The similarities and differences among the interview content were recognisable through coding. In chapters 5 and 6, I have summarised the interviews in order to categorise the data.

I explored patterns of association among different aspects of adult learning and community education as practiced and perceived by participants. However, I did not limit myself to specific patterns. Additionally, there were diversions from some of the patterns identified that also helped me in my analytic search. For instance, I applied the dimension of family to the work and experiences of Iranian women as it was plausible to do so. In other words, I considered a variety of patterns across my data. To reach a more thorough understanding, I moved backwards and forwards between the
data and participants’ explanations.

My theoretical framework helped me in situating the analysis of data within a broader context. However, I did not intend to superimpose theories into the findings. Therefore, I did not use an inductive method that moved from theory to hypothesis to observation and confirmation. Rather I used a deductive method, which helped me gather information, reach into patterns and then theorise my problem.

There were themes and sub-themes extracted from the questions being asked. I aimed to highlight the formation of adult education as a transformative and empowering pathway for different strata in society in Iran and Scotland. However, in reality, the way Scottish and Iranian participants perceived this pathway was widely different. In Scotland, adult education was more centred around educating the migrant population to integrate, to develop life and social skills along with speaking English, especially Muslim women and families. In Iran, adult education was considered as an individualised entity that could bring about change regardless of the structural factors.
4.8 Identifying themes

The final diagram of abstract findings

4.9 Making sense of the data

As a social activist, I had some hunches and predetermined perceptions. I presumed that Adult Education spaces in Iran were feminist by nature. However, I was critical about the knowledge of educators and thought that they were not fully aware of the consequences of their interventions.
According to those perceptions, I wrote down certain interview questions, although through dialogue unexpected themes arose out of the interviews. I tried to uncover or understand how these themes fitted into the context of Adult Education and how one theme completed, contributed, opposed, suppressed or supported another theme. In other words I searched for relationships between the data to draw a patterned web of interrelated themes. For instance, I realised that feminism is not necessarily a framework that all Adult Educators draw from. Since my data was not numerical, generalising is impossible, but as will be discussed in chapter 5 and 6, some themes turned out to be more prevalent compared to others, such as the roots of the family in the curriculum and content of adult Education in Iran or the influences of identity and faith in the context of Adult Education in Scotland.

4.10 Validation, Authenticity and Representation

Regarding validation, I double-checked and confirmed the emerging themes with interviewees to make sure I was not documenting my personal perspective and to make sure I was being as accurate as possible.

As authenticity was a concern in this study in order to capture the real authentic experiences of people, I aimed for a safe and open dialogic space that allowed people to explore the topics discussed. Therefore, I avoided fully structured interviews and tried to allow participants to expand their views on the questions. Although this shrunk the scope of my
interviews, as some preferred specific questions, I believe the experiences I captured were from a place of genuine will to share and to contribute to the study.

Regarding representation, I did not prioritize any minority; in the Scottish context, I reached out to Pakistanis, black women, Muslims and non-Muslims and tried to look for diverse interviewees to be able to provide a realistic, inclusive image that enabled the representation of different women.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

As this study was essentially feminist in nature, there were political sensitivities that required being cautious about the implications of my intervention in the field. Indeed, as I was a student who was based in a Western academic space, there was a chance of being labelled as a spy by the Iranian intelligence services. Gathering data regarding women’s education may lead to some political questioning due to the influences of such a study. Some of the Iranian respondents were uneasy with talking about feminism as far as this term raises sensitivities. The consequences of being outspoken about issues like feminism may have caused political problems for the interviewees. In the Iranian context, feminists are under scrutiny by the state in the name of breaching the national security. However, such a term lies within the practice of education as an obscure and embedded conception in the frame of references of educators.
in Iran. In Scotland, however, adult educators, service providers and community workers were more comfortable talking about feminism.

As there were issues of safety for myself and also for my participants, I needed to keep this study low profile, and approached those groups who were familiar with the consequences of being engaged in feminist research. Additionally, I did not wish to jeopardise the study by seeking to access people who have been engaged in politically contested areas. In other words, I did not interview political activists or those elites who had a background of being under the surveillance of the government or other security bodies. Distancing myself and the study from the political agendas prevalent in Iran was a major aim in this study.

Dove and Garattini (2018) have studied the application of an international ethics standard in multiple sites of study. They found that there are challenges in researching multiple countries ethically. One of the important issues mentioned by them was locality. Besides sensitivity and variability of the data collection, analysis becomes difficult when there is a multiple context of study. In their research, they relied on specific populations of informants as elites being aware of the application of ethics in the research. Seemingly all of the issues mentioned above have affected my study. Specifically, locality was one of the major matters I faced throughout my study. This means that although the participants being studied in both Scotland and Iran were women who were active in empowerment and education, there were significant differences between their personal values, perceptions and perspectives. Therefore, at some points, drawing united conclusions from their interviews was challenging.
One of the ways that could assist me in overcoming the cited problem was related to the consent of interviewees. I obtained the informants’ consent over the interview procedure (including for audio taping). Iranian participants’ consent was gained orally through audio recording due to political concerns, while in the context of Scotland I could take written consent from participants (a copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix 3.1 & 3.2). Being sensitive to the interviewees’ concerns and feelings was another matter. I was attentive to protecting the identity of the interviewees by using pseudonyms.

I was mindful of the fact that ethics go beyond the procedure of the study and include “questions being asked and the interpretations of the findings” (DeVault and Gross, 2012:225). Therefore, I tried to stay conscious of my tone and the wording of my questions so as not to seem invasive to the privacy of the participants.

Finally, as I needed to abide by the standardized ethical concerns, I followed the regulations of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (British Educational Research Association, 2011). Furthermore, the Moray House School of Education’s ethics (Moray House School of Education, 2015) provided me with ethical considerations in the field of education.
4.12 Conclusion

I started this chapter by explaining the approaches used in my study and how applying standpoint theory and Islamic feminism contributed to answering my study question. I then looked at factors such as subjectivity of the knower, positionality and reflexivity, as they can affect a researcher’s work. I do not claim that my research is objective, and I admit that there are values and perceptions behind this study’s findings. I elaborated interwoven concepts such as emancipation and empowerment, as I suggest these themes are important as far as Adult Education is concerned. I then explained why I chose semi-structured interviews as my study method and explored why and how other methods could not be as effective. This method had its flaws; however, as far as my knowledge took me, the semi-structured interviews were the best option to explore the possibilities of empowerment in Adult learning spaces. Then some of the challenges and limitations faced in the field work journey were mentioned, and the interview process was expanded. I mentioned that there were unseen restrictions in the process of data collection, although I reacted in the best possible way by adopting a comparative analysis between Iran and Scotland. At this point, I provided information on the socio-economic status of participants, and a brief summary of the demographic data attached to the end of the chapter was also given here. Finally, I explained the process of the data analysis, how using coding, Coggle mind maps and data categorization through indexing helped me reach a deeper, abstract interpretation of the raw data. Last but not least, I mentioned the ways I tried to apply ethical standards to my study.
## Appendix - Socio-demographic information of the participants in Iran and Scotland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>Job Category</th>
<th>Specialised field of work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Maryam Allahyar</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitator and educator in B NGO</td>
<td>Providing child raising and household management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Samaneh Namazi</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>BA in mathematics but psychology is my favourite field</td>
<td>Facilitator of self-help sessions</td>
<td>Emphasising psychological issues, interpersonal communication skills for women in Khavaran district of Tehran, including mothers, female students in high school, disadvantaged group of girls and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sananz Fasihi</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Not married but living with my family</td>
<td>BA in Natural resources engineering (environment) MA in environmental law</td>
<td>Facilitator of C NGO</td>
<td>Active in providing education for women heads of household. This NGO was working in partnership with governmental organisations that were in charge of women’s empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zahra Abdolah</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>BA in business management</td>
<td>A worker in association with the Council of Tehran(municipality)</td>
<td>Working with women’s affairs office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sanam Mirzaei</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Psychology, human development, women’s development</td>
<td>Facilitator, program plan maker and designer for curriculum of D NGO</td>
<td>Working towards women’s development, especially girls who were at risk of violence in deprived areas of Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Habibi</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>MA in educational management</td>
<td>Head of the Office for Education and Development of Women’s Rural Cooperatives (governmental staff)</td>
<td>Run sessions regarding empowerment in management of the cooperatives, financial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Iran
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wida Valaei</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>BA and MA in political science, PHD in strategic management</td>
<td>A former government worker in relation to women’s issues</td>
<td>Managing and running the cooperative generally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Darya Doulati</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>BA in social work</td>
<td>Head of empowerment of women and children in E NGO</td>
<td>Executive manager and the head of entrepreneurs’ training program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yasaman Abasi</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Psychiatrist</td>
<td>A staff member of an international organisation</td>
<td>Working towards drug prevention, treatment of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Supporting women prisoners and former addicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Farzaneh Mousavi</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>BA in social sciences (research), MA in governmental management</td>
<td>Head of human resources management in one of the ministries</td>
<td>Organising women’s political empowerment programs prior to a parliamentary election in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bita Kalhor</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>MA in Clinical Psychology</td>
<td>Private consultant</td>
<td>Educating women and families through offering informal learning based on psychological curriculum design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Firouzeh Samie</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>MA in English Literature</td>
<td>Community based worker in G NGO</td>
<td>Targeting women through welfare organisation and the council of Tehran in worn-out and marginalised districts of Tehran such as Karoon and Salsabil-e-Shomali. Active in capacity assessment and defining women’s priorities towards neighbourhood development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Taraneh Nasr</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Degree in social work before revolution</td>
<td>Head of H NGO</td>
<td>Offering educational and social welfare services to women who were recovering from addiction. Offering skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Reyhaneh Rezaie</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Educator of women in Quran and Ahkam (ritual religious tasks) sessions</td>
<td>Teaching memorisation of Quran in her house informally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Shokoofeh Rosta mi</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Educator in J boy’s high school</td>
<td>Offering informal learning to mothers of students. Base of her and her colleagues’ curriculum was a book called “The Perfect Woman”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Saeedeh Gholami</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Head of K girls’ high school</td>
<td>Designing a curriculum based on Glasser’s Choice Theory. Her target population were girls, their mothers and the school’s staff. Her learning material included self-consciousness, effective communication, anger management, time management, decisiveness and courageousness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Katayoon Ranjbar</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Scholar in Education department of Islamic Azad University, Imam Hosein Branch</td>
<td>Providing education informally to girls who were suffering from Multiple Sclerosis disease and their families. She was teaching through psychological wellbeing, including movement, rhythms, melody and signing. She was also educating mothers on how to treat their children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Haleh Tavasoli</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single (I am living independently)</td>
<td>Founding member and board of directors member for L women’s association and also M social entrepreneurship NGO.</td>
<td>Supporting marginalised women economically. Also offering education to the targeted population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scotland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>Category of job</th>
<th>Specialised field of work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Murdina</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>International Politics at undergraduate in Stirling University. Postgraduate certificate in International Conflict and Cooperation at Stirling</td>
<td>Staff of P organisation</td>
<td>Employability project officer for Muslim women. employability officer. Now she was the coordinator of the project across Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Isla</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Social sciences as bachelor. Postgraduate in Community Learning and Development</td>
<td>Staff of T organisation (Dundee)</td>
<td>I have worked for Dundee International Women’s Centre for 10 years. I started with it 13 years ago as a volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Aileen</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>Community education diploma, I have done various similar levelled qualifications as continuing professional development</td>
<td>Community education worker in Q NGO</td>
<td>Working with ethnic minority communities for twenty, twenty five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education and Work Experience</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Current Position</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kirstine</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>My degree originally was in languages, modern languages, Iberian and Latin American Studies, Spanish and Portuguese language, culture, history of Latin American and Politics. After coming back from Central America, I studied a master's in migration studies at the University of Sussex in 2010.</td>
<td>Former volunteer for various grass roots community in South East of England. Staff of a council.</td>
<td>Working on women's issues and women's policy maker.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>I have a degree in midwifery, then I did a master's degree in business management.</td>
<td>Working for Edinburgh Council.</td>
<td>Providing support to victims of honour-based violence and awareness raising about it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td></td>
<td>I went to university in Scotland and studied Microbiology, I did an ESOL qualification. After I came back from Sudan, I did a postgraduate qualification in teaching English.</td>
<td>Staff of R Council.</td>
<td>Organising the ESOL classes since 2003. I am in charge of adult education and community learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hanifa</td>
<td></td>
<td>My first degree was an MA from Edinburgh in Social Anthropology. Then a</td>
<td>Former senior community worker in Glasgow and Strathclyde.</td>
<td>Doing community development work in Scotland, in Glasgow or the surrounding areas, also worked in the equalities field. Worked for the Council as a community organiser with ethnic minority groups. Working in the voluntary sector with F Muslim Women's Resource Centre.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>postgraduate diploma in community development and social work at Swansea</td>
<td>Now councillor</td>
<td>Working on climate change, energy efficiency projects, renewables.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Basira</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Staff of S third sector organisation</td>
<td>I did my degree in psychology. I also went to Strathclyde University to do the modules on environmental impacts and environmental assessments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Data Analysis Iran

5.1 Introduction

In this section, I will discuss the themes from the interviews with women adult educators in Iran. I have discussed Adult Educators’ approach to women’s empowerment through their quotes and the related themes arising from the interviews. The key themes for discussion are as follows:

1 Adult Education, Knowledge and Empowerment

2 Motherhood and the role of the family

3 Impacts of adult education on women

4 How to perceive gender inequalities and women’s rights

5 Adult education and gender equality through women’s citizenship rights
   - 5.1. How do adult educators explain citizenship rights?
   - 5.2. The dichotomy between how men’s and women’s rights are discussed and perceived
   - 5.3. How do adult educators approach the issue of women being treated as second-class citizens?

6 Adult educators discussing feminism

7 Challenges of women adult educators in Iran
5.2. How a suitable form of education can become a tool for empowerment

Many of the respondents recognised the importance of women having access to knowledge as part of the empowerment process. Some saw empowerment as a key goal of adult education. Empowerment has a diverse basis as far as Adult Education is concerned. It is a spectrum from how to treat sexual partners for women prisoners to assisting them in raising children.

The aim of our educational sessions was to empower women prisoners so that they can deal with their sexual partners with much more authority, with more wisdom. (Mrs Abasi)

My goal is to help women become powerful with knowledge and power so that they can have a better relationship with their children. (Mrs Ranjbar)

The word “empowerment” was described in different ways. Ms Tavasoli explained that in the Persian language empowerment has been defined in a narrow way that at times implies that women are “made” powerful by outside agents rather than themselves being the agents of change:

‘Empowerment’ is called Tavanmand Saazi in Persian…that means ‘making powerful’…versus Ghodrat Afzaei that means increasing power…we don’t focus only on raising the economic capabilities of women; we think of a holistic empowerment. (Ms Tavasoli)

Increase in power may be made possible through Adult Education
participants’ contribution to knowledge production.

Religion has been a source of empowerment from the perspective of some of the interviewees. Having an approach that is context relevant was a concern of some of the adult educators. They tried to focus on teachings of religion and faith instead of on Western perspectives and Western understandings of empowerment or women’s rights. This required them to also draw on their own experience in order to create a non-Western curriculum. Some of the adult educator participants were also looking for ways to help women learners to know their rights from a faith perspective.

The goals of our sessions are introducing Quran to women...it raises our information in life, it makes us more patient in life to put up with difficulties, it helps us to get to know our rights... here are so many things being taught as Western teachings; we try to ground our teaching in Quran and sayings of the sacred people. (Mrs Rezale)

On the other side of the spectrum there may be more secular goals to be targeted. In other words, the Adult Education audience may comprise marginalised women, such as women who do not associate with Islam and need to learn how to adopt and compose a personal knowledge that may be perceived as a taboo. Adult education courses were seen as spaces for developing knowledge, improving women’s confidence and ultimately their participation within their relationships and families, but also in the wider society.

The goals of our courses are change in attitude, increase in skills, gaining knowledge. (Mrs Fasihi)
The goal is to increase participation of women in society. (Mrs Abdolahi)

Consequently, for Mrs Abasi, who worked with vulnerable women prisoners, the educational sessions provided information that could help women to be more confident sexual partners... “so that they can deal with their sexual partners with much more authority, with more wisdom”. In the adult education courses for women prisoners, some of the sessions addressed difficult topics such as prevention and control of HIV.

We teach women how to prevent catching HIV, how to prevent becoming addicted again; child raising training, literacy and numeracy, health and wellbeing are among our educational services. (Mrs Nasr)

The following two interviewees exemplified the diverse content of their programs, as they were dealing with marginalised groups. In a similar manner some other women educators had chosen modules appropriate for these socially disadvantaged groups.

During years of supporting women heads of household with social welfare salaries we reached the conclusion that we needed to work on their knowledge and attitudes. It is necessary to have programs about employment that raises their skills and capabilities... we have methods of child raising, management of the family’s finances in the crisis, we have courses about their rights: the labor laws, insurance, tax registration [of the business units]. (Mrs Faridi)

There were some inclusive programs run for the marginalised segments of
the society.

First year: giving knowledge, second year: working on attitudes, third year: profession. Four educational bases of this program were: hygiene and health; women’s development (legal classes, gender classes, psycho-ed linked with sexual abuse and domestic violence, human rights), skill-based courses, art programs, job seeking. (Mrs Mirzaei)

The theme of autonomy surfaced alongside themes of knowledge and empowerment. Mrs Doulati felt that it was important for women to be educated about their rights so as to “gain autonomy and ability to manage their problems themselves”. The theme of rights, and particularly citizenship rights, is discussed later in this chapter. Part of gaining autonomy involved having self-awareness of their identity as women, mothers, and human beings.

I worked on Carl Jung and Glasser’s Choice Theory...I felt that this is a good tool for education...I started teaching the concepts of Choice Theory and efficient communication skills to teenage girls...then I recognised if I teach this stuff to the girls’ mothers it would be more efficient...I also had the other group who were teachers of these students [to be trained]. (Mrs Gholami)

It seems that women are bound to their status as mothers in some curriculums. This is evident in some Adult Education programs which thought of women as good nurturers.

We are now running four sets of workshops:1) from me to a perfect
woman, 2) dialogue skills (effective communication skills), 3) the balanced family (raising children), 4) methods for effective nurturing (changing attitudes). In the first workshop (from me to a perfect woman) we picture a woman who is neither ideal nor superwoman, we picture a real woman… (Mrs Rostami)

In contrast to tying women to motherhood, there was an approach that went beyond conventional concepts of womanhood by borrowing men’s model of empowerment. Many of the adult educators were clear that empowerment of women did not mean copying the way men might seek to be empowered. They cautioned against borrowing a male model of power. Mrs Kalhor raised the point that the absence of women’s role models has led to a borrowing of men’s model of power. Ms Fasihi cautions against a view that suggests that for women to reach equality they must aspire to be like men. For Ms Fasihi, there was a need to define womanhood and to claim the concept of empowerment from a woman’s perspective.

We[society] have told women to become like men if they want to reach…equality…we haven’t been able to define womanhood and her way of working when claiming for gender equality…a woman’s work, a woman’s life should be feminine, otherwise she would face identity crisis…a woman should work with her multi-dimensional outlook. (Ms Fasihi)

In all the programs mentioned, a range of group work and participatory methods were used to engage with women learners. The adult educators were very skilled at engaging the range of women they were working with and shared the view that interactive and participatory methods such as
playing games ensured that women, particularly those who were less confident or were not literate, became more engaged. A range of approaches was used, from the practical to the academic, depending on learner ability and context. Ultimately, the goal was to achieve a positive environment and a community of learners. The wellbeing of the women was paramount and much of the learning was tailored to ensure that women developed confidence and became better able to find solutions of their own.

Some adult educators took a more politicised approach to their adult education work. For Mrs Mousavi, the educational sessions had a political implication and thus needed to be tailor-made, bearing in mind the Iranian local and national political contexts. Adult education spaces were in this respect “safe spaces” in which to practise change through political and religious awareness raising.

I have organised workshops for women’s empowerment in order to [let them] enter parliament. We ran 3 workshops, one on evaluating the skills, secondly on political participation, thirdly on simulation of the parliament. I have also organised 60 sessions around the whole country for empowerment of women’s activities in non-governmental organisations. (Mrs. Mousavi)

Others, like Mrs Valaei, opened up spaces for women to consider women’s rights through the framework of New Religious Thinking, a movement that emerged in the early 1990s. A number of dissident thinkers, both lay and clerical, developed a critique of the Islamic state from within an Islamic framework. They sought a rights-based political order that could open
Muslim polities to dissent, tolerance, pluralism, women’s rights and civil liberties. Their ideas and writings came to be known as “New Religious Thinking”. This was part of the popular reformist movement that emerged after the victory of Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential elections (Mir-Hosseini and Tapper, 2006).

New religious thinking may lead women to think critically on the ways in which they are trapped in traditional perceptions of womanhood.

One of the angles adopted by Adult Education was promotion of social transformation. Empowerment through consciousness-raising should lead to challenging the status quo. The prospect of girl learners as agents of social change was one of the other things discussed by Mrs Mirzaei. However, in the following excerpt the interviewee focuses on information gaining and doesn’t go beyond that.

If these girls have enough information they may be able to make better decisions... we were thinking of how to develop these girls’ potential so that they may become agents of social change. (Mrs Mirzaei)

The other feature of Adult Education is that it raises the possibility of having a voice and taking action towards specific goals. Ms Samie shared an example of how, as adult educators, they worked as facilitators with a group of women learners to improve their participation in public spaces as active members of the local community and to enable them to be seen as effective decision makers.
5.3. Adult education, motherhood and the role of the family

Motherhood and the role of family in adult education was a key theme that emerged from the data. However, participants talked about this concept in different ways. The Adult Educators’ definition of empowerment was affected by the fact that they saw women as the core agents who needed to deal with familial issues.

Since accomplishing motherhood is key in the ability to pursue social roles and responsibilities, Adult Educators reached the point where they were conscious of their caring roles first and foremost before acting on the social level.

It is crucial to be aware of the tensions between women’s identities as mothers and as women in their own right. Such tensions were recognisable in this study.

I thought if I don’t service well at home people would say you work outside of the home so you cannot handle your home...
I have always been servicing my family in an appropriate way and have never withdrawn from my home duties…I put in a lot of effort at home so that I may have the chance to achieve my role as a social activist. (Mrs Nasr)
It was so important for me to prioritise my children in my life choices…when my son went to school, I found the chance to have social activities and resume my studies. (Mrs Rostami)

My husband has had Huntington’s disease for 18 years; as a cause of caregiving to him, I have limited time for doing research. (Mrs Ranijbar)

Allocating the most important part of their time to raising children while sparing some other time for social responsibilities has placed too much of a burden on women’s shoulders. If this fact is viewed with a pessimistic eye, we may understand what Mrs Allahyar is saying.

Raising the children is in the hands of mothers; they spend most of their time with their children; in our society they don’t work and have plenty of energy wasted. (Mrs Allahyar)

Mrs Allahyar’s use of the term “wasted” is curious. It is unclear whether she thinks that women who are raising children are wasting their energies or that more needs to be done for women so that their energies are not wasted. Whichever meaning is assigned to it, the question her quote does raise is whether adult educators, while recognising the role of women and their status as mothers, do give a sufficient place to the unpaid role of caregiving. It also raises the question of whether women adult educators are themselves falling into the trap of valuing work which is external and paid more than they value motherhood.
The participants above demonstrated that their identities as mothers and caregivers in the home were an important part of who they were, but it is also clear from the data that some women had a strong sense of agency. Their status as autonomous individuals sat alongside their responsibilities at home. Challenging taken-for-granted presuppositions about being a caregiver at home was one of the aspects of women’s engagement with their status. Some participants referred to their sense of self throughout their interview:

When I was 12 years old because of cultural deprivation of my family I got married to a man who was 27 years older than me. By the time I got to know myself, passed my teenage years and grew up, I had four children around me and a man who had many moral/ethical problems and economic problems. When I found my [true]self I felt that this is not the kind of life I want. I started working, I started studying...the way I got wounded as a 12-year-old...made me think what to do so that other girls like me don’t experience such problems. I started studying psychology. (Mrs Gholami)

It has been years that I have had a sick husband. I am a strong woman, I care for myself, I have some rights and I am a caregiver...it is important to be autonomous while caregiving. Iranian women think: what would happen in the hereafter if I have a good feeling while I have a sick child. (Mrs Ranjbar)
Here Mrs Ranjbar talks about the fact that she has rights as a carer. While she is mindful of her duties to care for her family, whether that be a sick husband or child, she talks about herself as an autonomous individual.

Others, like Mrs Rezaie, exercise their individual autonomy by being judicious about which information she provides her husband with so that she can continue to have control over her activities and the process of any work she is undertaking.

I don’t inform [my husband] about the flow of my work….if they become informed about the details of our work they would prevent us from doing so. (Mrs Rezaie)

Seemingly being involved in adult learning can help educators to flourish as independent individuals. They start to believe in themselves as agents of change either in their own lives or in other people’s lives.

Our courses consist of practical lessons for mothers such as raising children, interacting with husbands, interacting with teenagers, what are the prerequisites of success. (Mrs Namazi)

From what Ms Abdolahi claimed, the space that adult education provides for women is an atmosphere in which to share issues of their personal and familial lives. If women can share their caregiving role and the difficulties that arise in it, they may be able to bond together and help each other find solutions for their problems.
In one neighbourhood women used to tell that their children are in their rooms day and night, they are behind the screen of computer, they are working with their smartphones...then we thought of educational sessions on how to communicate, how to convince children to stop working with laptops and phones and make communications within the family. (Ms Abdolahi)

Devising educational programs according to the needs of participants is a crucial issue that must be considered. Mrs Mirzaei emphasised that their classes are based on the needs of the participants. Thus the course contents are the basis for sharing the materials that have priority for learners. These sessions were gender sensitive.

We start from girl's needs and concerns rather than some ready-made packages. (Mrs Mirazei)

Motherhood is a status that binds women to specific roles and responsibilities. Thus it is important to trace back the influences of adult learning on women. Adult Education may be a route for helping women to be better mothers, and also to move beyond motherhood and find ways to enter society. Consequently, there is a space within Adult Education for the promotion of women’s efforts to go beyond their defined status as nurturers in the family.

This training affects women’s relationships with their children, their husbands, and also it influences their workplace relationships. For
those who were not socially active they start to think of entering the social arena. (Mrs Kalhor)

In a society that regards motherhood as the primary and basic characteristic of women, there is no way to avoid dealing with women’s family responsibilities. As one of the participants in the study stated, even for deprived women who were sex workers in a marginal segment of Tehran province, the motherhood responsibility was prominent.

We have several services for [these women] such as learning to negotiate, how to prevent catching HIV, how to prevent becoming addicted again. We also have child-raising training for them. (Mrs Nasr)

Women adult educators I interviewed referred to women as the building blocks of the next generation.

Women are constructors of the characteristics of the next generation. (Mrs Namazi)

Some participants raised the point that family is important and women have a crucial role to play as they bring up the next generation.

Now the society is in a way that a woman with a child needs to be more than a mother in the kitchen. (Ms Abdolahi)
Family is the most important element in socio-cultural changes and the most important figure in the family is the mother and wife. (Mrs Rostami)

Women have a crucial role in the family and in the society. They are in charge of raising children and have a role in the future. (Mrs Doulati)

Within the interviews, some participants also shared the view that women were often positioned as the guardians of peace and tranquillity at home and that it is the responsibility of women to keep calm and not disturb the household by picking fights.

When we raise issues regarding women’s rights we primarily suggest them not to go and pick a fight at home. In our society women’s rights have been denied them. We tell them to be aware of their rights and not to let others dismiss their rights. (Mrs Rezaie)

Mrs Rezaie points to the fact that women are being deprived of their rights, but equally in her classes she would appear to suggest that women should not go home and disrupt things, even when they have become aware of their rights. Adult education for her is a tool to guarantee peace of mind at home while it informs women of their rights. This tension between teaching women about their rights but not really encouraging them to use the knowledge is a very important point. It appears that these women’s eyes are being opened while their hands are being tied.
It is a question whether being informed about women’s rights is just something happening at the cognitive level or is something that has a behavioural influence. Seemingly there are changes at the practical and behavioural levels when we take a look at the experiences of women. This point will be discussed again within the sub-theme of the impact of adult education on the women.

Among all the interviewees just one of them pointed to the fact that it is important to recognise women as independent and autonomous agents, a status taking priority over that of mothers and wives. Such an outlook may be captured in the following quote:

"We don’t see women as part of the family; we teach them to see themselves as women and as human beings before being a wife or a mother." (Mrs Kalhor)

It is crucial to consider that the way adult educators recognise or see their participants does affect the way they organise the content of adult education programs. If women are seen as independent agents irrespective of their status within the family, this can help to empower them and raise their self-esteem. If adult educators bind women to specific characteristics such as motherhood, then does this eliminate the possibility of opening women’s minds to transformation? How does adult education practice so designed enable women to see themselves as free and autonomous agents so that they can be independently involved in defining their needs and potentials?
5.4. Socio-political impacts of adult education on the women

From the majority of the preceding extracts, it is noticeable that women participants in adult education programs first become aware of their rights and then become engaged in claiming those rights from the authorities. Here are some quotes referring to such a process:

Mrs Rezaie explained that women’s rights were being introduced to women learners on the cognitive level. For her, the Quran was the source of acknowledgement of women’s rights. Again we see cultural resources used to move towards development of women’s situations.

When we raise verses of Quran about divorce, rights for [custody of] children, rights of the husband, and rights of spouse, women get to know about their rights. (Mrs Rezaie)

The following quotes refer to the fact that the changes in women were not only on the cognitive level but also on the behavioural level. They started to act according to their needs and desire for transformation.

Women start asking governmental officials for their needs; before our sessions they couldn’t. (Ms Abdolahi)

The changes in these women are considerable. In the beginning they used to say even God wouldn’t listen to us but later they gathered
and asked the deputy governor and some other visitors with high ranks to listen to their problems. (Mrs Nasr)

Not only does adult education help women to raise their voices and claim their rights in the society; it also helps them to become empowered within their families and in their communities. What is worth consideration is the fact that adult education transforms both the daily lives of women and their lives in the long term.

Levels of diverse changes in women’s lives were pointed out by different participants. Adult education can create change in very divergent layers of a person’s life. A couple of interviewees recognised that point:

Educating a rural woman affects her society and her family; it leads to sustainability of rural cooperatives. We are after job creation and socio-cultural welfare, to revive domestic knowledge. (Mrs Habibi)

Our classes have led women to become sociable and active in society. (Mrs Valaei)

5.5. Enjoying rights as mothers

It is important for a citizen to know and possess his/her rights and to be able to use them. These rights can be beneficial in cases where the social narrative goes against people, especially marginalised ones, like moms with health issues.
An interviewee referred to the fact that a woman’s malfunctioning as a mother deprives her of the chance to be a role model for her children. Mrs Faridi claimed that:

A mother who has breakdown or is facing a crisis may not be a good role model for her children. (Mrs Faridi)

Such a claim raises the issue of the trustworthiness of women as role models for their children. In this normative view, someone who has mental health issues cannot be a good role model for children. Through such a conventional outlook the exclusion of mentally sick people, particularly women, is being reproduced and justified. This marginalisation is a concern for this study as I myself have experienced such a situation.

5.6. How to perceive and react to gender inequalities and women’s rights

Variations of commonly held views relating to gender inequalities were expressed in different ways among the interviewees. There were two approaches to gender inequality according to the interviewees in this study. The analysis of gender inequality by a couple of women may be labelled an individualised way of perceiving gender inequality. Through associating gender injustices with women’s ways of knowing and taking action, these interviewees analysed the dismissed rights of women.
I believe if a woman gets strong and their self-esteem rises they don’t let their rights be dismissed by others. (Mrs Kalhor)

I think when women gain necessary abilities and skills for building efficient relationships and interactions with members of their family, with their society and with their government they would certainly become beneficiary of better and complimentary rights as citizens. (Mrs Valaei)

If you want to feel satisfied in life the most important key is that you can have effective communication with others. (Ms Gholami)

For the above interviewees, interpersonal and communication skills may help in achieving rights. Here again the micro outlook gets highlighted.

Thus we may ask what would happen to the overlooked rights of women that have structural implications. A couple of interviewees identified structural aspects of gender injustice. What is noteworthy in their accounts is that they moved beyond interpersonal empowerment and focused on the macro-level roots of reproduction of inequalities. Some strategies that can be applied have emerged from the following excerpts.

Gendered roles were seen by Mrs Allahyar as a barrier to gender justice:

There are many expectations of men to cover the economic requirements of the family, whereas women are expected to be
service givers at home. This division of role and labour should be balanced. (Mrs Allahyar)

Gender justice comes out of intersectionality...in our legislation we regard women as a homogenised category; when we think of ‘a women’ we assume her as a middle-class woman living in Tehran...the campaign for raising 60 seats for women parliamentary members may not solve our problems if there are no gendered claims behind it. (Ms Tavasoli)

What Mrs Tavasoli is trying to point out is that all the effort in this arena is focused on a very limited section of women's society and therefore will not be completely effective.

Gender is important because you need to use the capacity of social capital. Women have a high rate of unemployment; they are much more interested in doing participatory work...If we have the capability to manage the social capital there is no unsolved problem in any society. (Mrs Mousavi)

Consequently, balancing gendered roles, intersectionality and social capital were highlighted by the above women as presuppositions for gender justice. In order to facilitate transformation, adult education should be enriched by the abovementioned strategies.

Furthermore, one of the interviewees, Mrs Rezaie, questioned whether psychological interventions and personal skills are enough to fulfil such a
grand vision of equality. She pictures a utopian society going back to the early days of Islam as a model for guidance:

We need to learn from Prophet Mohammad’s practical legacy; if we are true believers we need to be tolerant. When you have a problem in your life you may go to the counsellor; she/he tells you some stuff that you feel they are just words and you can’t act on them, but Prophet Mohammad’s practical legacy is a practical role model for us to follow; we can act on it. (Mrs Rezaie)

For Mrs Rezaie psychological knowledge alone was insufficient; it was also necessary to follow the path of religion and make use of a role model like the Prophet Mohammad. In her view exemplifying the Prophet may help women to confront their difficulties at times of hardship.

Mrs Ranjbar emphasised that it was necessary to have a humanist vision in order to work towards gender equality. However, she went further and exemplified some women superheroes in the religious and mythical sources of Persian culture as good starting points in the search for role models.

I don’t want feminism at all. I think we should see things in terms of humanity...when you go for feminism it seems you can't have balance...it is true that we are under pressure because of religious or economic issues. With the Western feminism outlook we got entangled in another way...I think of women superheroes...for
instance women in Shahnameh (Tahmineh decides to tell Rostam that she loves him), or girlish cartoons such as Ann Sherley. Fatemeh Zahra, I love Zeinab too, she is so independent, she goes wherever Imam Hossein goes, after such a horrible massacre she is standing on her feet…I think history shows that women can have an internal role model…if you mean feminism in this way, yes it’s about women being prominent. (Mrs Ranjbar)

An undiscernible fact is that, regardless of the amount of effort on the personal level, structure and rules need to work hand-in-hand with individuals for a gender-equal society to become possible. This brings the attention to citizenship rights.

5.7 Adult education and gender equality through women’s citizenship rights

Gender equality and the issue of power affect the rights of women in society. One aspect of women’s rights is women’s citizenship rights, and this was one of the issues discussed in the interviews. Adult education as a platform for advocating for women’s citizenship rights has a prominent role in developing women’s rights. The way adult educators define women’s

---

8 A long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between 977 and 1010 CE.
9 Daughter of the Prophet Mohammad.
10 Granddaughter of the Prophet Mohammad who accompanied her brother Hossein in the war against the kingdom of the era.
11 Grandson of the Prophet Mohammad.
citizenship rights has a direct influence on what they communicate in their sessions. As we see below, there are micro visions of citizenship rights. Some of the interviewees compared and contrasted women’s and men’s citizenship rights and saw them as interlinked. There were others who had a transcendental way of defining women’s citizenship rights and observed these rights in the light of spiritual connections.

5.7.1 How do adult educators explain citizenship rights?

The ways in which women perceived “citizenship rights” were multifaceted and varied. While some of the interviewees were concerned with women’s rights through micro focuses on their needs, there were others who contended that women’s rights go beyond individualised ways of challenging power relations.

I prefer to help women have a good feeling of themselves first, as citizens, then they become mothers of their children and become wives. I help them talk about their own feelings; I don’t let them talk about their motherhood. (Mrs Ranjbar)

If a woman identifies her human rights and lives in a decisive way with respect in the society, no matter how corrupt a society is, she can gain her rights…it is me who tells the society how to interact with me, that is why I say we need to work on women’s awareness. (Ms Gholami)
Ms Gholami clearly identifies an individualised way of bringing about change for women. She doesn’t see the structural components of inequalities against women. In her outlook, through individual development a woman can challenge inequalities and act in a way that reduces unjust treatment of women. The question is: if we work on women’s awareness, will gender injustice vanish? There is a pathological outcome of identifying adult education as a tool for facilitating individualised change irrespective of structural forces. Citizenship rights should be grounded within adult education so that transformation can be possible for disadvantaged sections of the society.

In contrast with Ms Gholami, Ms Samei defined women’s citizenship rights as “the right to participate and the right of decision making”. Such an attitude towards women’s rights may lead to questioning women’s positionality and their responsibilities towards the betterment of society. Therefore, educators and their perception of citizenship rights have a tremendous influence on the content they transmit to participants.

5.7.2 The dichotomy between how men’s and women’s rights are discussed and perceived

There was another group of women who emphasised women’s and men’s citizenship rights alongside each other. Comparing and contrasting women’s citizenship rights with men’s can lead adult educators to be aware of the inequalities that might result from gendered presuppositions. It seems that there is a need to be mindful of gender inequality when looking
into citizenship rights. Adult educators need to be aware of the injustices that reproduce a specific status for women. Through this awareness they could find ways of meeting the demands of marginalised women. In the following extracts it is noticeable that women’s citizenship rights should be treated as an issue alongside men’s citizenship rights. In other words, there is no disjuncture between women’s and men’s citizenship rights. For this group of Adult Educators, the gendered approach is not applicable when we observe men’s rights alongside women’s.

The main right of women is human liberty that even our men are deprived of. (Mrs Allahyar)

Neither women nor men have these rights. (Mrs Nasr)

According to Quran women and men are created from one soul and there is no difference between their citizenship rights. (Mrs Valaei)

While these interviewees compare and contrast women’s citizenship rights with those of men, there were two other women who defined citizenship rights in a transcendental way. In other words, they pointed to the innate qualities of women and the ways in which their traits may cultivate the private and public spaces. Such a conception may draw upon the following quotes:

I think nature's base is a calm, innate, delicate and motherly base. Women's characteristics, compared to men, are much more suitable to manage such a base...the protectors of the urban space are
women...women are the custodians of such a compassionate communication...such a space demands women’s management. (Mrs Mousavi)

From the above excerpts we may see how the qualities associated with femininity may be linked to citizenship rights. Defining citizenship rights, which is a mundane and earthly issue, by a divine route has some implications. It could lead to dismissing the practical causes of injustices. It romanticises the socio-political interactions within society and causes us to neglect reality checks.

If we want to set targets.....we aim for...making home a peaceful space for women. Purifying interactions on the private space level and on the public space level has been discussed in our sessions. As a cause of such purification, homes would be the place of light. In such homes, outstanding people would be raised, those who don’t forget God...so they would act in a way that is in harmony with ideals [such as calmness and peace]. (Mrs Valaei)

As is explored in this study, women’s subjugation to their nurturing character continues to emerge in the cited approaches to women’s rights. Here the repetitive theme of motherhood is raised all over again. Such a point was highlighted in the following quote from Mrs Rostami, who perceived women’s citizenship rights in a religiously orthodox way.

[Women] need to have the courage to express their needs while they are considerate of other family members’ needs...citizenship rights of
all humans irrespective of them being men or women...we look at women as a fabulous factory that has the capacity to raise the outstanding creatures who are human beings......Imam Ali says ‘women are gentle, they are not heroes’; women may break as a cause of trying to be heroes...she would be mistaken if she thinks that she should work in the society shoulder to shoulder to men...The citizenship rights that we care about in our family education is based on women’s rights in the Islamic society, an Islamic society which is being defined by religion, not our present society. (Mrs Rostami)

The way Mrs Rostami approached the citizenship rights of women would lead to reproduction of gender differentiation and inequality. She justified her perspective with a sacred quote and emphasised the Islamic prerequisite for her adult education courses that locate women within the family.

5.7.3 How do adult educators approach the issue of women being treated as second-class citizens?

When interviewees were asked whether women are second-class citizens, they answered in varied ways. Acknowledging that there is a given within the society that considers women second-class can help adult education to find remedies for the problems caused by such a perception. Adult educators’ awareness of gender injustice is a crucial element in developing women’s rights. As advocates of change, adult learning providers can be
agents of promoting gender equality through their sessions. Here some of the interviewees' answers are explored:

5.7.3.1 Ignoring the fact that women are second-class citizens

Some of the women denied that women are seen as second-class citizens.

It is not like that at all; the most influential person in the society is mother. (Ms Abdolahi)

I don’t believe women are second-class citizens. (Mrs Abasi)

I don’t believe in such a thing. We are all humans with two different characters; both groups, men and women, need each other. (Ms Gholami)

Such a denial develops so as to put the burden of managing women’s difficulties and challenges onto women themselves, making them responsible for their deprivation of citizenship rights in spite of all the odds against them.

No it's not like this at all…if you learn how to control your feelings…if you gain control over your body you can become a decision maker…even if you are caught in difficult situations…[even] if you have an addicted husband, a sick husband, a bad behaved one, if
you have got an ADHD child, an autistic child, because you can change the situation on your behalf. (Mrs Ranjbar)

We may recognise from Mrs Ranjbar’s quote that she approaches a socially configured matter with her psychological knowledge. She relies on the fact that women need to be aware of their feelings so that they can manage difficult situations. Here again, bringing about change seems to be seen as an individualised matter.

5.7.3.2 Underlying religious assumptions about citizenship

In answering the question, other ways of engaging with the subject were found. The following accounts capture adult educators’ beliefs about God’s creation and the underlying religious assumptions about citizenship. They referred to the differentiation between men and women and the implications of such a binary for women and men.

It is not good for women to want to be like men. They are like two wings of an airplane… Men are stronger and women reserve production of future generations. (Mrs Namazi)

All the segments of society should be educated together, otherwise [it is like] a bird with one wing grown. (Ms Fasihi)

While some of the women saw women and men as two wings alongside each other, there were some other women who emphasised the specific
qualities of women. In the view of these interviewees the complementarity between men and women is an important consideration. Here such a point is highlighted:

Women have some weaknesses, I am not a feminist who says all women can do this, but the equality between rights, to say not just men can enjoy some rights [I agree]...a woman beside a man at home is beneficial for life. (Ms Abdolahi)

God has created men with specific traits and potentials and also created women with some appropriate potentials...both of them can raise a society to its desired place together. (Mrs Habibi)

I have a good feeling towards my creation as a woman. There is so much wisdom in our creation, in manhood and womanhood, in being different, in being complementary...I have a religious attachment to such a creation, to such beauty and its multiplicity and plurality of God’s wish...he hasn’t created first and second class. (Mrs Mousavi)

Second-class and first-class citizenship is a completely wrong label...men and women are like brain and heart with two different functions....according to religion men are protectors and in charge and have more responsibilities. (Mrs Rostami)

As we see above, for Mrs Rostami the differentiation between men and women led to the appointment of men as the protectors of women. Socially constructed masculinity that allocates men as protectors and maintainers of
women is a matter of concern here. As Islamic feminism believes, there is a presupposition in Islamic societies that men are maintainers and protectors of women. Such presuppositions have economic and financial implications, sometimes spreading into other spheres of life that lead to disempowerment of women in the social arena. This approach was taken by Mrs Rezaie as she emphasised the religious roots of gender injustice.

In spiritual perfection the status of woman and man in front of God is the same; however, in social issues, as you say, women have been put as second class. Unfortunately this is the ignorant way of thinking of primary Arab people. (Mrs Rezaie)

As we see above, there are diverse ways of considering women’s status that place them as different creatures from men. Such an outlook can lead to locating women in a specific context that reproduces special circumstances for promotion of women’s rights. Referring to God’s creation and innate qualities when differentiating women from men would lead to specifying women’s rights.

5.7.3.3 Acknowledging the facts regarding women being second-class citizens

In contrast to the first group of women who denied that women may be seen as second-class citizens, there was another group who acknowledged the realities linked to such a perception. Variations of commonly held views on this fact were expressed in different ways.
The culture of classism in Iran...girls living in poverty: third class, Afghan: fourth class, we are just able to create a bubble out of their reality. (Mrs Mirzaei)

Maybe it is due to the control of others that there are such classifications of human beings. Those men who regard women as second-class citizens are in need of having relationships with women. (Mrs Kalhor)

We treat [those who believe women are second-class citizens] badly...we believe in gender equality...until women themselves don’t believe internally that we are equal to men...we have no difference, we have many potentials...until we don’t believe as such others wouldn’t accept that...we don’t need to stand up and cling to slogans, we need to show that in action, we need to show practically through work...we are gradually getting there. (Mrs Doulati)

Ms Samei discounted the fact that women are second-class citizens on the surface, implying that such a fact exists in the attitudes of women towards change in the society.

I don’t think women in Iran are second-class citizens...it is necessary to change the quality of their role, to transform the traditional roles. Even the employed women, even university lecturers...usually think the government or the municipality should provide for them all the time. (Ms Samei)
The key theme in Ms Samei’s and Mrs Doulati’s extracts is their emphasis on some sort of transformation in women’s ways of knowing and action making. Their account of bringing change through such an engagement with women’s roles and expectations has a significant influence on the perception of women’s rights.

In our area of work women are first and foremost the main participants...We need to appeal to women as our essential audiences but unfortunately it is not like this...even though it is about Quran and religion, in this regard many of women’s rights are being spoiled...I know there is oppression and inequality; I should keep on doing what I do. (Mrs Rezaie)

From Mrs Rezaie’s quote we may recognise that even participation of women in religious sessions brings about inequalities and the dismissal of their rights through varied forms of practice, including Quran recitation. She pinpoints the fact that women become especially deprived of their rights in the religious realm. She referred to her experience of being excluded from a Quran recital competition because of being a woman.

**5.7.3.4. More insights into seeing women as autonomous members of the society**

The fourth category of women who were asked whether women are second-class citizens came up with further insights which added value to
the inquiry. They drew attention to the fact that there are some aspects of being an autonomous citizen which are never captured.

The management of the rural society is on women’s shoulders. The rural men go to cities and do non-productive, pseudo-jobs while rural women remain and manage the family and raising children, managing productive system in farms…women have much more authority in the rural areas than in the urban areas. (Mrs Habibi)

I think we should distinguish between what is constructed and what is reality. When we go to the communities we see that women are much more powerful than men. (Ms Tavasoli)

Quran doesn’t distinguish between men and women as human beings…women as second-class citizens gets back to the public cultures throughout history…even women have contributed to such a categorisation, they have accepted such an injustice, such a submission and they haven’t made efforts in order to improve their status….however, we are moving towards a direction that such a situation is fading away…we shouldn’t see women as half of the population because women are in charge of bringing up the other half of the society. (Mrs Valaei)

From the quote above it is evident that women may be seen as contributors to gender injustices on their own part. Mrs Valaei’s perception of women’s acceptance of inequalities leads us to the fact that women’s outlook needs to be changed.
5.6. Adult educators discussing feminism

Feminism is a channel through which change has been made possible in societies that bring about consciousness-raising and action-making for women. Adult education and feminism have been interacting so as to promote women’s rights. The way adult educators see feminism has direct impacts on how they deliver programs that challenge gender injustice. There were three groups of women vis-à-vis feminism. The first category rejected feminism and gave reasons for their approach to it. The second group had their own identification with feminism and exemplified forms of feminism in their own way. The third group associated with feminism and discussed ways in which they approved of conventional feminism.

There was also a group of women interviewees who disapproved of feminism totally or rejected stereotypical forms of feminism.

I don’t know any ism, I prefer not to have bias towards anything…I am working on women’s issues but my goal is the human being. (Ms Fasihi)

It is not right that Feminism is just concerned with women; I say it is concerned with individual human being [that is, men should be taken into account]. (Ms Abdolahi)

For the above-mentioned interviewees the value of their work lay in attempting to advance the welfare of human beings. They perceived
feminism as a movement only concerned with women and disregarding men. Thus they had chosen to work towards the betterment of human beings’ lives.

Feminism has a tendency to confront men. It creates problems for women. It is not right for us women to want to compare ourselves with men. (Mrs Namazi)

I think feminism goes back to the time that women had no rights and their rights had been ignored by men. I don’t agree with feminism. I don’t think a world without men is a beautiful world as I think radical feminism has been pursuing that...becoming feminists has not helped women to have a better feeling and reach to happiness in their lives. (Mrs Kalhor)

Mrs Kalhor has a much more extremist view on feminism. She rejects feminism because she accounts it a way that seeks “a world without men”. In her view feminists are not happy people and their attempts haven't produced improvement in their lives.

The truth is claiming women’s rights doesn’t mean dismissing and abolishment of men’s rights...specifically because we are entering the subject from the perspective of gender not from a feminist viewpoint...a hierarchical attitude that says ‘because I am the chief everyone should do whatever I say’ is patriarchal...in our organisation we have gender sensitive and gender responsive programs. (Mrs Abasi)
For Mrs Abasi, a gender sensitive outlook is a substitute for feminism. She preferred to work through gender sensitive programs rather than feminist informative theories. However, patriarchy was an issue for her that she raised during the interview.

Feminism says men and women are equal and it claims similar conditions for both. Such an incident not only can’t make women more privileged but also defines women wrongly as they are being created differently and they have innate qualities of their own...they have made political exploitation out of feminism...I think our religious discussions would suffice [for] women’s status and position. (Mrs Rostami)

Mrs Rostami presents a dichotomy between feminism and religion. She believes that solely relying on religion would solve our problems.

In my opinion feminists increase the gap...we may help with some projects to reduce the emotional and intellectual gap between [men and women]. Men [need to] know that if a society is supposed to work dynamically it needs women, women too [should know] that’s the way it is; this is advocacy for women’s rights. We don’t need to raise a flag under the name of feminism...it leads to oppositional forces...enmity...we are supposed to learn how to co-exist with them. (Ms Gholami)
Honestly excess or loss [any extremes], both are bad, it's not helping, everything is good in its balanced way...women should show practically and don’t rely on mottoes. (Mrs Doulati)

In a similar manner to many other interviewees, Ms Gholami and Mrs Doulati were aware of some of the ways in which feminism may become a propagandist agenda. They opposed any extremist ways of applying feminism. For them “relying on mottoes” and “raising the flag under the name of feminism” wouldn’t be of much help. Here a question arises as to whether these adult educators have an alternative way which could be applied to replace those mentioned.

Some of the interviewees had a self-definition of feminism. They appropriated their own identification and insights.

I agree with equality, the feminism which says a woman is a human being and is equal. But I don’t agree with propagandist feminism that some organisations appeal to...if we have a humanist view towards both women and men we don’t say that if I was a man I would do the same thing that they did to me. (Mrs Allahyar)

Feminism has been an effort...to claim women’s rights and abolish discrimination against women in the societies...if I want to define feminism positively I would say it is an effort to prove the humanity of women and to claim their dismissed rights and eliminate discrimination in different spheres of family, society and politics. (Mrs Valaei)
Mrs Mousavi acknowledges that there is some injustice imposed on women but she prefers not to identify with feminism. In her view women experience pressure, as she refers to her own experience of injustice. She recognises those who ignore women’s capabilities as atheists. Her religious identification of those people who “negate women and their influence” may show the prominence of this point for her.

I don’t lock myself in theoretical concepts...I don’t let myself negate anything because I think it has come out of a creature’s mind. Feminism is like that too. I don’t agree with the part that they say differentiation in creation is oppression...yes, I think the society has led women to have some limitations. I have always fought for this and I have experienced pressure...I think those who negate women and their influence are not Muslims; they are not even theists. (Mrs Mousavi)

There was a third group of women who associated themselves with conventional feminism and didn’t object to the conception of feminism in the question raised for them. The following accounts capture interviewees’ collective beliefs about feminism:

It means that one asks for equality for both women and men...feminism influences all parts of one’s life, it is about equality, it is something inside you. (Mrs Mirzaei)
It is a personal experience for me. I was raised in a family that had powerful women, my mom and my grandmom… I have learned to become a feminist in my own family… being a feminist is non-negotiable. I don’t regard an identity for myself except for being a feminist. (Ms Tavasoli)

Feminism is a spectrum. I think, as a feminist, we should help women and empower them so that they can become independent and able to make decisions. (Mrs Nasr)

5.7. Challenges for women adult educators in Iran

Later in the interview two of the interviewees gave an account of the challenges encountered in working in Iran. They referred to rejection of international funds and state-led financial support.

We could be sponsored by international organisations but we decided not to enter any sensitive areas. (Ms Fasihi)

We don’t accept foreign funds or governmental funds. (Ms Tavasoli)

Foreign funds have been a source of controversy for non-governmental organisations in Iran. Being independent of international organisations is a virtue that NGOs pursue. Here arises the challenge of becoming up-to-date with the flow of modern teachings and contemporary knowledge. Adult education needs to be cultivated with new findings that open the doors to
innovative ways of knowing and action making. However, local knowledge needs to be revivified through national resources and potentialities.

There were a couple of other concerns raised by interviewees that clarified the challenges faced by their work in the Iranian context.

If I wore Chador I may have reached my goals easily. (Ms Fasihi)

Ms Fasihi pointed to the fact that her manner of dress has caused some problems for her. She expressed her negative feelings about the fact that women’s choice of clothing may affect the way society regards them.

After 2009’s disputed election many women’s rights activists chose to emigrate abroad. I think if you become an activist not all your choices are personal...such issues have raised the costs of our activism inside Iran...it is a betrayal that some women got some international funds and run a project and get labelled as women’s rights activists...when you choose to become a woman’s rights activist you have to find your way to remain in your country and work in spite of all the limitations and pressures. (Ms Tavasoli)

Ms Tavasoli opposed those women activists who emigrated from Iran after the political crackdown in 2009. She raised an insider/outsider dichotomy between activists and regarded as faulty the engagement of emigrant women activists with women’s rights. Such an outlook would lead to caution about being labelled as feminists.
So much sensitivity around gender and feminism, there is a fear about it, many misconceptions...right or wrong we are trying not to use the word [feminism]. (Mrs Mirzaei)

Mrs Mirzaei elaborated that feminism has many negative labels attached to it and as a result their organisation preferred to diverge from being feminist in name.

5.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, adult educators have different understandings and perceptions of civil rights, feminism, religion, and women’s role in the family and society. There is a question as to whether these two roles of women, as mothers and as members of society, can be reconciled or should have different priorities highlighted. How women should raise their voice in the society remains a challenge: whether it should be quiet and remain on an individual scale or engage in the state level of policy making and national structures. It could be concluded that as long as adult education remains on an individual level and educators can’t join forces, social transformation will be a very slow process and women will continue to be overshadowed and unheard.
Chapter 6: Data Analysis Scotland

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Iranian Adult Educators have specific perceptions of women and gender empowerment. This study is based on comparing and contrasting Adult Educators’ viewpoints on the methods they can apply to the spaces devised for the education of adults. Empowerment is a gendered conception that needs to be followed along different axes of practical engagement with women’s issues. I have aimed at representing the nuances of Adult Educators’ contributions to the realm of gender empowerment. By dissecting their outlook towards education and empowerment as it was talked through with them, we may make abstract issues such as empowerment accessible in practical terms.

I decided to interview organizers of services in Scotland which included an education and/or adult education component for migrant and/or Muslim women, since a source of difficulties emerged in the process of gathering data in Iran. There are no specific services which could be “labelled” as adult education provision for Muslim women, and therefore those interviewed provided a range of services, including those that could be loosely described as adult education. The reason for selecting a Scottish cohort to interview was to explore whether adult education provided within a secular state, as distinct from to Iran which is a Muslim state, provided similar or different opportunities for women.
In this chapter I am going to discuss the key themes that arose from the Scottish data set. It should be mentioned that due to my socio-cultural stance as a student from outside the context of Scotland, the tone of this section is different from what I extracted from Iranian Adult Educators. It would be helpful to say from the outset that some of the themes in Scotland and Iran were similar. However, some themes, such as “faith and identity” and “Islamic” feminism, only arose in the Scottish context.

What was clear was the difference in priorities and focus areas of the adult educators. For example, in Scotland the main focus of the educators was mostly on work with immigrants and Muslim minorities. The important issue was empowering women so that they could make the best of the experiences and knowledge baggage that they carried. The educators also focused on helping women to find jobs.

Several different inequalities against women were highlighted by Scottish educators. For example, English language learning was a concern, since speaking the majority language was a major transformative force. Another major concern was the stereotypes around the Muslim community.

One of the contextual differences was the positionality of women. While some of the Iranian participants emphasized the individuality of women, there were others who focused on the role of women within the family as mothers and wives. In Scotland, however, women mainly pointed to themselves as individuals with potential and a right to live up to it.
Another special characteristic of the Iranian data was that some participants highlighted individualized ways of dealing with change. For these adult educators women, themselves could trigger transformation by changing their perceptions and viewpoints. Meanwhile in Scotland, structural change, discriminatory rules and social transformation as a whole were mentioned a few times, which means that change is considered more on the larger scale of society than at the individual level.

In both the Iranian and Scottish contexts, feminism turned out to be a controversial issue. Some believed that feminism was not useful and had become a motto which disregarded men. Some others argued that feminism was about equality and thus was applicable in today's challenges to move towards equality and empowerment. There were those who rejected feminism as a man-hater agenda as well as those who approved of feminism as a means to confront inequality.

Looking at similarities, some of the Iranian educators and some of the Scottish adult workers treated participants in the adult education classes from above, in a top-down approach towards women who attended the classes. However, there were also educators who spoke with respect and acknowledged the resilience of the women who attended their classes. Considering the diversities apart from the similarities between the two contexts, it would be fruitful to highlight the role of identity as a starting point.
6.2. Identity, faith and religion

Three keywords emerged in the Scottish context that seemed inseparable: identity, faith and religion. In order to elaborate on these themes we first need to define what exactly we mean by these words. Identity, and the aspects of a person’s character it can/may include, is related to the ways in which people know and define themselves. Sex, age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation and profession are among identity locators.

In the context of this study a person can be Scottish and consider herself a part of the “Muslim community”. This person could be wearing a headscarf and have a desire to show her religion, or could have faith in Islam but prefer not to display it through her manner of dress. This is why both terms – faith, as a person’s belief; and religion, as Islam, Christianity etc. – have been used in this study and neither could be omitted.

The theme of identity and faith did not emerge in Iran. This might be because there is a presupposition in Iran that the majority of the population are Muslim. Therefore, the participants interviewed did not talk about Islam or Muslimness. It is unlikely that an adult educator in Iran would openly deny they were a Muslim, as this might impact or even jeopardise their status and employment. It would also have been sensitive if not controversial to have asked the Iranian participants to talk about Islamic feminism, and therefore issues of neither faith nor Islamic feminism were explicitly raised by me as the interviewer.
However, in Scotland these were issues that did emerge. Five of the ten women interviewed identified themselves as Muslim or related their identity to Muslimness. They were either born and brought up as Muslim or had converted to Islam. Their attitudes towards religion and religious identities varied.

The identities of the various Muslim participants in the Scottish interviews are interesting. Ann, as a white convert, demonstrated the least connection between, and awareness regarding, her own faith and the faith and experiences of other Muslim women. The others demonstrated to a lesser or greater degree an awareness of how being Muslim and also being a woman can impact on life chances and opportunities. Some, like Hanifa, were very proactive in tackling discrimination and Islamophobia.

Ann was not upfront about her faith throughout the interview, but at the end of the interview when I asked about her view on Islamic feminism, she referred to herself as Muslim.

Focusing on women’s religious attitudes is a theme that has cropped up for adult educators in Scotland. These adult educators try to engage with the heritage of Muslim women and provide learning opportunities to question the conventional outlooks that appear to ground these women in specific experiences such as tolerating abuse. It is, however, unclear how much knowledge of Islam these organisations have. I presume a well-informed Muslim or BME adult educator is concerned about the cultural sensitivities of Muslim women and the complexities of their knowledge.
6.2.1 Religion along with gender

In addition to issues of identity and faith, Basira, Asma and Mona raised issues around gender. Basira, 49 years old and married, had studied psychotherapy but had also done modules on meteorology. She had been working on environmental issues at organisation G for ten years. She was born into a Muslim family but was no longer a practising Muslim.

...even I, even, Islamically I struggle, cause I’m a Muslim, but I was born and brought up as a Muslim. I’m not a practising Muslim, just because I struggle with some things....Aqiqah [for example]...for a girl it’s half of a boy’s, so for me that devalues a woman straight away...there is, scholars have tried to explain this to me in a way, where they say well it’s not about the value, it’s about a monetary...but I don’t, I don’t get it. It doesn’t make sense to me...

(p.35)

Aqiqah is a sign of gender inequality. From a child’s birth the Muslim tradition of Aqiqah segregates boys and girls and defines girls’ share as half that of the boys.

Basira was aware of the intersection of gender, faith and identity. She brought different examples of gender being manipulated. She was questioning her faith in the light of how gender impacted her in terms of practising Islam.

Adult education plays a role in acknowledging, addressing and moderating
racism, Islamophobia and stereotypes around minority communities. Adult educators had either themselves experienced discriminatory encounters or had seen their loved ones, friends, families, or learners discriminated against. They had also realised how these misconceptions can be a barrier for a minority woman trying to integrate into the society. Therefore, at different levels they were aware of the importance of working towards reducing these racist practices or other stereotypes around Muslim, Black, and migrant minorities.

Hanifa, who is white, Scottish, and a convert, with a degree in social sciences and a postgraduate diploma in community education, displayed a great degree of understanding of issues that Muslim men and women might be facing. She had been working in Edinburgh as a community worker and also in the voluntary sector with organisation F. Hanifa had done “a piece of research interviewing 100 Muslim women to identify their needs” (p.47). I asked about the goals of the services in their organisation and Hanifa’s response demonstrated a heightened awareness of issues such as Islamophobia and the presence of hate crime.

The schools project is primarily around ensuring…going into schools…that’s about raising awareness and overcoming stereotypes…explaining who we are and what we are, that we are not terrorists…it helps to combat Islamophobia and hate crime. (p.48)

Asma’s key priority was working with issues that the women brought up. Like Hanifa, she was aware that mainstream society poses specific challenges to Muslims, especially Muslim women.
some of the training which I deliver particularly around religious
diversity and anti-discrimination…there is a link just now between
Islam and terrorism and lots of myths about what is Islam and how
does Islam treat women…we live in patriarchal societies (generally in
the world)... (p.11)

Mona also referred to wider societal issues such as terrorism, Islamophobia
and racism as barriers to the actualisation of women’s citizenship rights.
However, Mona’s awareness of these issues was less acute than that of
Basira, Hanifa and Asma. While Mona pointed to issues prevalent in the
society, such as terrorism and Islamophobia, seen as common sense, she
did not demonstrate any in-depth knowledge of these issues and did not
appear to be critically engaging with them.

Ann appeared to be a complex and contrary character. She was aware of
the racism that affected her husband but did not appear to transfer that
understanding to the BME women who attended her classes.

There is racism…my husband’s not from this country. His skin’s a
slightly different colour…we have experienced it as a family…for
women, if they’ve got young children and they’re worried about the
health and safety of their children it’s easier to stay at home…but that
leads to isolation, it can lead to mental health problems. (p. 20)

Considering the fact that racism, Islamophobia and discrimination against
minority women present a challenging mandate and that Scotland hosts a
considerable number of migrants, addressing these issues in spaces like adult education could lead to a broadening of horizons.

6.3 Adult educators’ positionality

The role of the personal experiences of women Adult Educators should be taken into account, as a person’s positionality can greatly affect her concerns and consequently her focus area.

Basira’s real-life experience gave her an awareness that pushed her to work towards the development of black and ethnic minority rights in her field. Basira referred to her black ethnic minority background from the outset of the interview and was upfront in discussing having been discriminated against because of the color of her skin – not being white.

It was one particular event that happened, and I think that was probably the turning point for me....[it was] a parliamentary open floor discussion...the politician there turned around and said to me, he looked directly at me and said ‘your kind don’t grow, do they?’...I was a bit stunned because I didn’t know what he meant by ‘your kind’...I thought I was well integrated into society, so it was a bit of a shock when he said ‘your kind’ to me....it was only at that point I realized he meant because I had brown skin... (p.32)

Basira consistently demonstrated during the interview that she was aware of how commonplace racism was in the UK and how it impacted her
through everyday conversations. Regarding her identity, she was conscious of the way mainstream Scottish society was segregating people like her. She was active in running programs for which she invited Islamic scholars to discuss the malfunctioning aspects of Islam that marginalized women of color within Scottish society.

Another example of an adult educator’s positionality and how it affects an educator’s work can be seen in Asma’s case. She was a strong Muslim woman who not only engaged her community but also took an interfaith approach to her work. She brought her own personal experience into the public realm and assisted other women so that they could become empowered. She was working against discrimination and was upfront about her agenda. Asma, 56 years old, and married with 5 children, had a postgraduate degree in equality and diversity. She wore a hijab and clearly displayed her religious identity.

The reason why I felt it was important is because of my own personal journey. I was married when I was actually not even sixteen...by the time I was twenty-five I had five children. I was involved in this community centre...then I had to give back as well because I was given the confidence to be valued as an individual person rather than mother, the wife... (p.11)

Asma’s personal experience contributed greatly to her motivation to work on equality and minority rights. While she valued her role as a mother or wife, she was aware of her potential and did not wish to be locked into a particular label or status.
I am also involved in interfaith and community relations work; I also think that there is benefit from learning together with others...if it’s not about sewing or cooking, well it doesn’t necessarily need to be only Muslim women. It depends on what it is...Muslim women in particular have wanted to swim...this is about having a conversation with our colleagues [about the needs of women who want to swim] (p.12)

Murdina, who is a white Scottish woman adult educator but is not a Muslim, raises an interesting point about issues of identity and difference and the ways in which personal experience matters. Murdina is 28 years old and works for organisation E. She has studied political science. She argues:

... I think some of them at the beginning were a bit like, what do you know about barriers for Muslim and ethnic minority women...I quite quickly early on addressed the fact that yeah, you know what, I might be a white indigenous woman in Scotland who’s standing here trying to help you navigate the system, but that does not mean that I haven’t encountered some of the problems that you have encountered...
(p.41)

From the quote above we may recognize that Muslim and ethnic minority women are dubious about mutual understanding between themselves and educators. A white educator may not necessarily get close to adult education attendees if she/he doesn’t make efforts to understand them.
As stated above, personal experiences are key in making the curriculum of adult education meaningful and relevant to the realities on the ground.

6.4. Adult educators discussing feminism

Many of the respondents viewed feminism as a way to achieve equality. They argued that feminism is a route to attainment of equal rights for men and women. Equality was a major theme in discussing feminism. Empowerment, as a concept rooted in feminism, was also a major issue.

Feminism for me is about equality fundamentally. It's not about one group of people better or worse than another...we won't have a need for feminism any more the day when we have women's equality...we still have patriarchy unfortunately in so many aspects of our lives...it's the case in different degrees in different parts of the world... (Kirstine, p.4)

Feminism for me is about being able to...being valued as an equal member of my society...are women being treated in a different way. So a feminist perspective is about kind of raising those issues but also empowering women to feel skilled and equipped to be part and parcel of society. (Asma, p.13)

Feminism for me is, is about having equal rights and access the same as everybody else...it's about everybody being treated the same. (Basira, p.36)
Murdina shared her view on equality as a complex notion. She continued:

[we had an equality training session and we were] having an image of three, three people standing on a box, and the boxes were all the same size. So that meant equality for some. But these three people had to see over the wall but they were all of different heights, so just because they were all put on boxes of the same size did not mean that they could all see over that wall. The next image which meant equity for other people was that these boxes were all differing heights, but some were much taller than others, but that enabled everyone to see over the wall. That’s what equality is to me. So, yeah, equality is difficult, is a difficult term... (Murdina, p.45)

Murdina believed that equality is a difficult term and preferred to choose empowerment as a goal for feminism.

If you were to say to some of our clients ‘Are you feminist?’ No, No, no, no, I’m not a feminist…it’s not always something that our women would want to be associated with…even within the staff team, some of us would identify as being feminists, others wouldn’t. Others would just see us as being someone who had empowerment of Muslim women at heart... (Murdina, p.45)

The only adult educator who had an avant-garde point of view on feminism was Isla.
I think feminism is basically human rights…feminism is about continually challenging the status quo…feminism is rebellion…because if you always have just one colour, one way of doing things, it's wrong, it's not right. And I think there’s always a danger that women accept a way of life because people have told them that…those ways of life…benefit men essentially…it feeds into a patriarchal point of view and ideology that keeps men above women, and continually undermines a woman’s value. (p.10)

Her point of view was mostly geared to challenging one specific way of being and doing, which she called patriarchy. In her outlook, the status quo is a source that necessitates us to engage with conventional ways of doing things so that we may question the habitual ways of knowing.

There was one participant who rejected the status of feminist. Mona said that feminists most of the time don’t consider the natural differences between men and women.

[feminism] should be a movement but I don’t have a very good knowledge about it because I know some feminist people and I haven’t liked most of them, so I decided not to be a feminist. I am very much for equality between men and women based on their abilities. Feminists most of the time don’t consider the natural differences between men and women. I am for acting for women’s rights because I think it’s a lot violated and breached, in most parts of the world. I don’t like to call that feminism. (p.2)
Two Muslim participants, Ann and Hanifa, similarly to Mona, referred to the differences between men and women as a basis for having doubts about feminism.

Ann expressed her view on feminism as follows:

...No, women shouldn’t dominate men, men shouldn’t dominate women, they are equal but they have to respect each other’s differences…I knew a lot of really hard-core feminists in the 60s and 70s…they were men haters…now it’s getting a bit better…but I do still think some women expect, because of the way they’ve been brought up and to a certain extent the education that they get, that they’re not as good as boys... (p.20)

Hanifa raised the point that there is a perception of feminism and Islam as being contradictory. She didn’t believe such a thing but she also pointed to the differences between men and women.

Well, I was a feminist before I became a Muslim, and I’m still a feminist. It’s seen as a bit of a dirty word for some people, so I don’t necessarily go around saying I am a feminist as much as perhaps I used to, but I am a feminist because I believe in women’s rights. And, you know, people said to me when I became a Muslim, ‘But how can you, a feminist, kind of then become a, a Muslim, which is a religion that oppresses women?’ But I don’t think it does. (p.52)

She continued:
There were lots of different strands of feminism, and...you know, radical feminism that rejects men altogether, no... I suppose the difference that I found when I came to Islam is I’d kind of been almost kind of sold a thing about, well, you have to be able to do everything men do as well as men in order to get on... and actually in Islam it’s saying but we’re different ... (p.52)

A diverse range of definitions of the term “feminism” was gathered through the interviews. And when the question moved to “Islamic feminism” these diversities didn’t seem to fade away.

6.5. Adult educators’ views on Islamic feminism

The term “Islamic feminism” was not as clear as “feminism” for all the participants. For example, while Mona said that it sounded quite strange to her and Aileen revealed that she didn’t know enough about it, Asma defined Islamic feminism clearly.

Asma believed that it meant being feminist within the framework of a religion. She saw Islamic feminism as having a conversation around the empowerment of women. In her view Islamic feminism was associated with challenging the status quo. She explained:
It's almost like having a female eye on that verse and actually interpreting it in a way which is still within the Islamic perspective but is giving you a different outcome in terms of interpretation…it’s about acknowledging your relationship with God… (p.13)

On the other side of the spectrum, Isla’s perception of Islamic feminism was positive. She considered some Muslim feminists as those who “are clear about where religion ends and where culture starts. Or religion ends and a man’s interpretation starts” (p.10). She acknowledged that:

There are so many great examples in the Quran where women are given rights at such an early time, even before Western society... (p.10).

However, Isla contradicted her point by saying:

It's just kind of lip service... exercise them...don’t just talk about them...it's the actioning of them that’s not happening. (p.10)

Kirstine’s approach to Islamic feminism was to take a moderate view. She pointed to the following fact:

It’s important to have Muslim women or men who call themselves feminists...but I don’t think feminism should necessarily be defined by a belief system... (p.4)
Amala believed that Islamic feminism could not be truly about equality and that there was discrimination within the discourse, in the form of prejudice towards those who were not Muslim. She continued:

... The discourse is still just about where women need to be rather than challenging male attitudes towards women...the more public face of Islamic feminism is still very conservative....it also expects women to behave in a certain way to access these rights. (p.17)

Basira believed that Muslim women scholars hold back from representation and participation. She said:

...I was involved in a peace and unity conference which was led by Islamic scholars. And again we struggled to get a female scholar...sometimes what also happens with Islamic scholars is that...the more religious some of the women are, the more they'll...they hold back. (p.36)

This issue is not to be ignored, as the main focus of Scottish adult educators was on Muslims. Therefore, educators need to have a shared viewpoint with their learners on sensitive issues such as religion, feminism and Islamic feminism.
6.6. Impact of adult education on women

Adult education in Scotland for minority ethnic women appears to focus on enabling women to learn English and on gaining employability. It could be said that there is a functionalist approach to adult education for Muslim women. There is less provision that views adult education as a space for acquiring new knowledge, or for developing agency or community.

6.6.1 Learning English

Ann mentioned learning the English language as a prerequisite for employment or migration:

We work with anybody. Any adult living in this area who doesn’t have English as a first language...often it’s for employment or for visa requirements...I think we have more ESOL learners than we have literacies learners\(^{12}\). (p.18)

Amala pointed to the fact that language proficiency was an impact of adult education, but she argued that the learning experiences had to catch up with some other prerequisites to guarantee that they were non-discriminatory. In her view there is a need to consider one-to-one support for English language learners.

\(^{12}\) Literacies learners are those people who come to the centre to learn how to read and write.
Many of our service users need to access adult learning, particularly ESOL and maybe other professional courses, courses that will help them get into the workplace...we found that mainstream adult providers did not understand the particular issues that these women have...we are the go-between in making sure that these learning experiences [are] as [they] should be and non-discriminatory (p. 15).

Murdina’s quote would also emphasise that, although learning English language is a priority, their organisation was aware of being faith and culturally sensitive. She pointed that their organisation aimed at providing an environment in which women may feel comfortable. She believes this is an important point that adult educators need to be aware of.

English is obviously high up in terms of the issues that the women present themselves with. We wanted to be able to, to offer an environment that was faith and culturally sensitive so that the women felt safe when they were coming through the threshold... (p.38)

The latter quote represents a crucial aspect of learning. It is important to be conscious of the fact that adult learners need to be supported with culturally sensitive measures.
6.6.2 Employability

One of the interviewees, Kirstine, mentioned that their refugee integration services were quite holistic and consisted of a range of services, but in her remarks employability had a prominent place. She was also conscious of the fact that women service users were skilled and had something to offer the job market. She didn’t see women migrants and refugees as consumers and non-productive members of society.

...[it is important to] recognise the skills and experiences that women have. Even if they haven’t maybe had a formal job in any employment sector, they have so many skills that they’ve brought through bringing up their families or looking after a business at home or different kind of experiences...an employability course that met their needs, a lot of what they wanted from the course was ESOL related support, support for learning English, but English that was relevant to them, so they wanted to learn the kind of English they would need in a job interview or to write their CV, or they wanted to help to navigate the IT systems that the Jobcentre makes you go into in order to apply for jobs. (p.3)

Sessions are largely, if not exclusively, conducted in English, which means that most migrant or Muslim women are likely to be learning in their second or third language.

In this area Z, a lot of migrant communities came because there were factories here that had links with India and Pakistan, so a lot of the workers moved and settled here...there was a real, a movement for
the council to reach out to those communities, cause they were isolated, they weren’t integrating, they weren’t speaking the language…women who came from a local church wanted to reach out. They formed a group which then led to establishment of an organization...it was to do with just bringing women together to learn English, or different skills…through that it was clear that education was necessary, so to teach English was the priority... (p.8)

6.6.3 Social capital

There were some interviewees who did see adult education as providing spaces for self-empowerment and network development. Such perspectives were concerned with broader issues than integration and employability. There was an emphasis on the impact of adult education courses in building networks for learners. This point was raised by a couple of participants. Murdina’s view on the importance of social capital and shaping the community of learners is expressed in the following quote:

One of the strengths, certainly how it’s delivered. When women come to E [organisation], like very often it’s the English conversation classes that act as a route for them to come into the organisation…once they’re here they feel like they’re part of a broader family. We always kind of promote that…you’re here as part of a much broader group, you’re here to meet other women, you’re here to try new things. (p.39)
6.7 Empowerment

Basira also talks about the importance of providing learning services for women from BME communities which made them autonomous from their families and empowered. Through her experiences when working with BME women, she highlighted that it was important to give these women some space to try new things and improvise so that they could know themselves and their world from a new perspective. She talks about the importance of opening up new experiences for the women.

…I was taking a group of women out just for a day out in the countryside as part of my work with connecting to the environment, and they were very reluctant first of all to come out with just me, a female, right…what they said to me was that it was the first time that they’d ever been away for a full day without a man…but at the end of the day they said they had, they had a great day, it was the best day they had ever had…they discussed climate change, they discussed the weather change, and compared it to their home, their homelands, and compared to what was happening in Scotland. (p.34)

Basira uses adult spaces in a practical way to meet cultural and social needs while encouraging the use of spaces to discuss life matters.

Like Isla, Amala pointed to the fact that they engage women with new interpretations of their faith so that they could question what they were being told regarding women’s rights. Amala, who introduced her
organisation as a feminist institute, shared her views on women’s rights and empowerment:

Our focus is women’s rights and empowerment because we want women, without losing their identities, to be able to participate and take part in issues that affect them…around forced marriage legislation [for example] and consulting with women to get their responses submitted….it’s about to make sure that women feel that they have a right and space to be in…that the marginalization that they may have experienced, or are experiencing from the mainstream society, is unfair, unjust and uncalled for….so it’s an interesting challenge of placing women’s rights as a secular experience, and discussing with them that maybe their interpretation of women’s rights within their faith may not be what the faith actually says. (p.16)

This organization was conscientious about consulting women rather than making assumptions about women’s needs. Amala saw adult education as a route to rights and empowerment for women. She was aware that learning can happen in a way that enriches women’s ways of knowing and action making.

Some of the points were focused on adult learners, such as the need for cultural integration as a step towards future empowerment and development; while some other points were focused on the adult educators.
Although Ann was a Muslim, she indicated that it was important for migrant women to integrate into Scottish culture. She used the term “migrant women” to refer to the population from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. This was in response to a question I had posed about whether there should be women-only or mixed classes. Ann did not see any point in having women-only classes that might have led women to feel more comfortable, when spaces in Scottish society are mixed.

...if they want to talk about women’s issues...then it’s nice for them...but we don’t encourage it because if someone’s going to live here, if they want to work or go to college or do anything, they have to get used to the idea that here men and women are mixed. We’re introducing a lot of people to the culture as well. (p.19)

Asma raises the point that we cannot separate the empowerment of Muslim women from cultural provisions that help Muslim women and minority ethnics engage with the program. One of the prerequisites of adult education is provision of a comfortable space for women.

...if you were looking at mainstream adult learning services...they may not be geared to actually supporting Muslim women...programs which are focused on Muslim women...they’re in an environment where they know that culturally and Islamically they feel comfortable… (p.11)

All of these interviews are a testimonial to the importance of adult education as an effective tool for positive transformation of society.
6.8. Challenges of adult educators and Muslim women participants

Being aware of the fact that Muslim women need the space and the right to speak for themselves is a prerequisite for adult education practitioners. Questioning what reproduces stereotypes could be a purpose of critical adult education. For Asma, building knowledge and providing spaces for addressing the status quo are some of adult education’s goals.

A lot of the adult learning that goes on in Scotland...it’s not about challenging the status quo...it’s about skilling up. It’s about building knowledge. (Asma, p.13)

In her view, the practice of adult education is bound up with building skills rather than building knowledge. She highlighted her view of adult learning that has become a tool which is not challenging the status quo.

However, at this point, the level of participation of these BME women remains a challenge, as there are some family restrictions in this community. Ann expressed her views on the issues around women’s participation in various activities which was limited by family restrictions.

There is a lot of issues around women and coming to classes. And for some women...coming to class to learn English is acceptable in the
family...but trying to get them involved in anything else is really, really hard because it’s not seen as being appropriate or it’s not seen as being necessary...the husband or the family thinks the wife should be at home looking after the children. (p.19)

At macro scale, challenges to adult educators as a result of Islamophobia, racism and immigration rules are the concern of women from ethnic minority backgrounds. Mona, Aileen, Amala, Ann, Murdina and Hanifa all raised this fact. Some of these women directly mentioned the above limitations and some referred to general marginalisation of ethnic minority women. Murdina commented:

Obviously discrimination, racism, Islamophobia is so difficult to prove when it comes to an employability setting...three of our volunteers were going for the same part-time job...non-Muslim Scottish girl who got invited not only for an interview, but she did eventually get the job...it’s not an easy one to always bring to the discussion table because some people are naïve to the reality of the situation... (p.43)

Hanifa argued that:

The increasing Islamophobia and the Government’s policies on immigration...we’ll be doing something at a community level, but at macro-level, and then the newspapers picking up, you know, that just, sometimes you feel you’re, you’re fighting against an incoming tide of all this horrible stuff... (p.51)
But Amala was a respondent who approached discrimination against ethnic minority women in a more general way:

The biggest limitation is that if you are a marginalised minority community then for you, you have a longer road to travel...not just within your community but also in the mainstream community to access and feel like a true citizen...there is a constant discourse against minority communities, particularly ethnic minority and within that, Muslim minorities...within the community, mainly patriarchal attitudes suggest to women that they are not truly part of the United Kingdom...to control them better...it’s not just that you are fighting attitudes within your community that want to keep you in a particular way, because then you are easy to control, but also it is being supported unwittingly by the mainstream, who either look at you as this oppressed person, or look at you as someone regressive... (pp.16-17)

Amala’s quote calls our attention to two restrictions for Black and Minority Ethnic women. One is from the mainstream secular society that requires minority women to submit to discriminatory practices; another is from families and Muslim communities who demand that women abide by the unwritten rules of the Islamic tradition.

Another challenge seemed to be gender inequalities through the enforcement of the gender pay gap. When participants were asked whether women were being treated as second-class citizens, some of them pointed to this. Three participants highlighted a structural gender inequality which
led to reproduction of a lower status for women in the UK. Kirstine pointed to the fact that there is discrimination against non-white women in the job market.

...the representation of minority groups has not caught up with the reality of the population...women’s economic equality is still a big challenge, [there is a] gender pay gap...women predominantly being in part-time roles...women are over-represented in certain kinds of jobs. (p.3)

Kirstine’s approach refers to the gender inequality against women in general and its worse effects on ethnic minority women in particular when it comes to grounding the latter’s position within the women’s rights movement.

Isla also highlighted the gender pay gap and structural inequalities against women in general, and ethnic minority women in particular. In addition, she raised the point that motherhood can lead to restrictions for women within their workplace and in their progression at work.

...I think that when you are from a different culture, different ethnicity, different as in different from white native, it’s the barriers are higher, there is more inequality, the voices are not as valuable...For women in our general wider society, women in different spheres of life are still considered second citizens...[there is a] pay gap...women’s progression in a career is not as high as men’s once they’ve children...[there are] systematic inequalities... (p.10)
When I asked another participant, Amala, whether women are second-class citizens, she answered:

I think it’s true…the gender pay gap where if you are a mother, if you are a woman, you will earn less over your career, over the time of your career…your opportunities to progress are restricted if you become a mother, or start working part-time because you have childcare needs...being a second-class citizen, they have to fight for everything whether it’s about equal pension access, or equal pay, or more sensitive family courts, or better investigation of sexual violence crimes…the voice of the minority women, and within that the Muslim women, is heard last…they have to fight even within the women’s rights movement. (p.17)

One of the challenges mentioned by women adult educators was the effects of funding for adult education. Murdina mentioned that a lot of money is being pumped into work on violence against women and mental health related issues. Murdina claimed that:

It’s all about health and wellbeing. So we’re seeing lots of money pumped into violence against women, mental health related issues, but there’s very little being pumped into employability...one of the weaknesses is the sustainability or the longevity of the project...

(p.40)
This raises a question: if ethnic minority women’s health is not being taken care of, then how can they pursue employment or other forms of engagement within the society? Although there should be a balance amongst diverse strands of funding, mental health may have priority within the services that these women require. If adult education addresses mental health with a preventive approach, it can enrich ethnic minority women’s quality of life; thus it deserves policy makers’ attention and consideration.

The issue of how adult learning spaces are used is important. If adult education workers have an enabling lens, giving due recognition to the worth of individual learners, adopting culturally sensitive pedagogies while removing institutional barriers, then these spaces are productive. We draw again on Murdina, who reminds us that adult migrant women learners come not as empty vessels but with knowledge and skill sets:

When we were doing the volunteer project it became very clear, very, very, very early on that many of the women that were coming through our door were highly skilled, highly educated, intelligent women in their own right; they just needed support in some way, shape or form. For some it was about work experience is what, is what they were lacking...when the women were coming through here we realised quite early on that some of the women had kind of lost who they, who they were...very often the women that we see are increasingly isolated, lacking in confidence, irrespective of their background story... (Murdina, p.38)
6.9. Conclusion

Based on my findings in this chapter, it is mandatory to consider the fact that Muslim women’s needs and realities should be addressed by adult education as a means of transformation. The issue of faith and identity was a theme that led us to capture the essence of Muslim women’s representation, along with recognition of their needs.

In addition, according to our interviewees, minority women in Scotland have a couple of claims that need to be addressed. Learning English and gaining access to employment are among their requirements. Such practical matters shouldn’t lead us to dismiss the fact that generally in Europe there is a trend towards Islamophobia and racist assumptions made against the immigrant population. Such a subject should be acknowledged through Adult Education’s involvement with women’s issues. In the next chapter I will explore the ways in which empowerment takes shape through the practices of educators.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this study, the research question was shaped around the opportunities for empowerment of women in adult learning spaces in Iran and Scotland. In theory, Adult Education has some potential for empowerment of women through diverse means such as challenging the status quo, exposure to new knowledge, introduction of critical thinking and promises for awareness-raising. In practice, though, as this study, shows there is a gap between the roles and purposes of Adult Education and how it is being practiced in the contexts of Iran and Scotland. In some of the examples presented in this study, Adult Education is implemented into non-formal learning. Such a change in the form of delivery causes deprivation of the political essence of Adult Education. Facilitating communication skills through non-formal learning includes psycho-social uplifting and language skills. These skills are used to empower women in finding jobs and performing as conventionally accepted women, within and beyond the boundaries of the family. However, this may not lead to enhancement of social inclusion, which is one of the factors of gender equality and empowerment.

Empowerment is associated with “personal, relational (relationships with others) and political power that requires types of participation and contribution that result in betterment of one’s life choices and possibilities in
the lived realities” (Chapter 3: 126). Women empowerment involves gender justice and challenging conventional burdens which prohibit women from achieving their equal share of the socio-economic and political resources.

7.2 Adult Education, theory and practice

7.2.1 Theory

7.2.1.1 Challenging the status quo

When I started this study, based on my activist background, I presupposed that Adult Education might facilitate empowerment of women firstly through deconstruction of conventional ways of knowing oneself, loosening gendered roles structurally and increasing the agency of women.

According to Chapter 3, Freire’s contribution towards a specific sort of education, which started from people’s needs and priorities, would lead to a form of knowledge-building which is reliant on people’s existing knowledge rather than conventional educational models. “Experiential learning”, “critical reflection” and “dialogue” through “collective action” are the characteristics of such an education. Furthermore, this type of education would be facilitated through “equality”, “diversity” and “social solidarity” (P.82).
Adaptation to the world is one of the aspects of Adult Education from the viewpoint of Yilmaz. Such a definition would be critically viewed through the lens of Paulo Freire, who sees Adult Education as a “tool to transform the present situation of the learners” (Chapter 3:76). In reaching out towards women empowerment, Adult Education can be a channel for deconstruction of taken-for-granted ways of knowing in order to break away the power structures and status quo.

First and foremost, the prevailing distribution of information locates the status quo in a gendered manner. Freire believed a lack of promotion of critical thinking would lead to the formation of Banking Education. Such a form of education demobilises people and keeps them in the existing establishment of power through reinforcing the status quo (Chapter 3:76). In this manner, Adult Education would be linked to empowerment as a goal of transformatory and liberatory education. By adopting a different approach to the realities on the ground, Adult Education may grasp such a goal.

Status quo defines the allocation of roles among women and men according to special categorisations based on gender, race, class, religion, etc. An Iranian educator was critical about the fact that the main right of women is human liberty, of which even our men are deprived. She was also critical about division of roles within the family and division of labour between husband and wife.

Gendered roles within the family were a point mentioned by this educator. She believed providing economic requirements for the family was on men’s
shoulders while women were expected to be service givers at home. She thought such a division of labour should be balanced (Allahyar). Such a differentiation between men and women represented itself through the quote of one of the study contributors, who believed men and women were like the brain and heart with two different functions. She referred to religion as a foundation which dictated men were protectors and in charge of more responsibilities within the family (Rostami).

Therefore, highlighting gendered roles would lead us to focus on the ways in which women are located within the status quo. Feminism is one of the ways that may lead us to the formation of a more gender-sensitive outlook throughout the world. Such a mission would necessitate constructing a more context-relevant definition of feminism.

7.2.1.2 Deconstruction of Western Feminism

The issue here is the importance of socio-cultural and political context, through which women’s problems are examined.

The prevalent status quo enforces women to obey specific rules and regulations; within the category of heterogeneous women there are dominant discourses which push marginalised women into some predetermined positions. One of these hegemonic discourses is Western feminism.
Deconstruction of feminism as a Western concept was suggested by some of the participants in this study (mostly Iranian educators), which may be supported through referring to Abu-Lughod’s theoretical framework (Chapter 2:25).

Muslim women have been marginalised from their mainstream socio-political context of living. Such an isolation may be observed in Iran through the lens of dominant feminist discourses in the global realm. Many such discourses disregard local issues as central to the formation of attitudes towards gender equality. Feminism may be seen as a co-construct of colonialism which tends to define and tackle diverse challenges. Hindrances towards women empowerment through locating Muslim women within their communities, isolated from the socio-political calculations of the Scottish context (Chapter 2:49), were one of the concerns in this study.

One of the study participants (Mrs. Ranjbar) rejected the Western feminist outlook, and she offered an alternative, which was following women superheroes. She mentioned names of local-Islamic women figures along with global and foreign movie characteristics.

Having an active agency towards the definition of feminism would influence the formation and content of Adult Education as it is being practiced. This would influence empowerment, gender-sensitivity and promotion of agency of women within the Adult Education realm.
The other issue regarding relationships between feminism and religion is a matter of concern. Common sense is presupposed to contrast Islam and feminism, according to one of the Scottish Adult Educators (Hanifa). However, in this study it was evident that in some cases feminism and Islamic knowledge went hand in hand in empowering women learners.

The attitude of Iranian women towards feminism may be categorised in three groupings. Some women educators preferred to opt out for the humanity and dignity of both men and women, rather than focusing on women’s problems. This group of women identified feminism with its radical formation and preferred to put men versus women in two essentially different categories of creation. They were concerned with the enmity of propagandist feminism towards men. The second group preferred to introduce their way of thinking as a feminist viewpoint. They were concerned with equality, women’s rights and limitations for the progression of women in the society. The third group had no problem with conventional feminism. By conventional feminism I mean that the third category of women associated themselves with being feminists, as it is a framework for equality and empowerment. One of the study participants said she sees herself as having no identity except for being a feminist. In the Scottish context, a similar feature was distinguishable. The definitions of some of the Scottish educators are mentioned through quotes, such as “feminism is about equality” (Kirstine), “feminism refers to being valued as an equal member of the society” (Asma), “feminism is basically human rights, continually challenging the status quo” (Isla), “It is about equality between men and women while considering natural differences between them” (Mona), “men and women are different” (Hanifa).
I have been considerate of the fact that local feminisms in the context of Iran and Scotland have a high importance. As Fraser and Nicolson affirm, for grounding feminism we should be attentive to the socio-cultural and historical backgrounds they have (chapter 2:16). In the same manner, Adult Education as a Western construct needs to be decolonised and localised.

Such an attempt seems like a lost effort, especially in Iran, and especially through reinforcement of global grand narratives which centralise psychological interventions as a transformatory force. In Scotland, however, there were traces of awareness-raising towards redefining Muslim women’s needs. This was evident in spite of the fact that the focus of adult learning on enhancement of learners’ skills development was hugely reliant on mainstream and conventional ways of knowing.

### 7.2.1.3 Islamic Feminism’s theoretical contributions

It seems that Islamic feminism may provide us with chances of shaping a knowledge project which may challenge conventional feminism. In Badran’s words, Islamic Feminism is “a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an and seeks the practice of rights and justice for all human beings in the totality of their existence across the public-private continuum” (Chapter 2:31).

Asma suggested that Islamic Feminism is a path which is still within the Islamic perspective but offers a different outcome in terms of interpretation.
Additionally, Amala believed the more public face of Islamic Feminism was still very conservative. It expects women to behave in certain ways to access specific rights.

Consequently, in the Scottish context, highlighting Muslim men’s patriarchal attitudes towards Muslim women may fuel Islamophobia and reproduce the viewpoint that Islamic tradition is a misogynist discourse. There are advantages and disadvantages in Islamic Feminists' attempts in disclosing the man-made rules and regulations that produce gender inequalities. Adoption of “multiple speaking positions” by Muslim women, instead of relying on specific forms of identity markers which define Muslim women, may be a way out of the cul-de-sac of the above mentioned problem (Chapter 2:63).

It should be noted that patriarchal systems, which are prevalent in many Arab and Muslim countries, may lead to a perception that women are victims of their culture. Such a presupposition could result in locating women as naïve creatures without agency and power of manoeuvre within the family structure, as Mohanty elaborates (Chapter 3:124-5).

In this study, the influence of some of the Islamic feminists is more evident, such as those Islamic Feminists who claim that the Quran is a text which goes back to early 7th century Arabia and it should be re-interpreted through new methods of hermeneutical exploration. Moreover, the literature review in this study highlighted the fact that Muslims’ Fiqh’s focus is on a specific family structure, which enforces men as economic providers and women as obedient creatures who exchange their obedience in sexual
matters for financial support (Welchman, Mirhossein, Chapter 2:21-22). Such a man-made construct may be the reference point for some Adult Educators, as we observed. However, there were other educators who were critical about such a presupposition and tried to locate women’s agency within the family structure.

Furthermore, we have noticed that essentialist givens regarding the natural differences between women and men may be sanctioned through patriarchal reading of Islamic texts and traditions. This would result in the formation of a specific division of labour between women and men. Some Islamic Feminists, such as the Musawah organisation, have criticised such a dichotomy (Chapter 2:23). Some educationalists in this study have proposed a protectionist position for men over women, which reproduces gender inequality against women.

As Isla mentioned, Islamic feminism should go beyond lip service and be practiced through action-taking. This is made possible by centralisation of Muslim women’s experiences as one of the routes for legitimising the above-mentioned diverse positions.

7.2.1.4 Social inclusion and experiential learning

Seemingly, beyond curriculum and sole learning, other skills such as critical thinking are required for a person to become a critical thinker and agent of her social life. Therefore, it is necessary to form a dynamic between the Adult Educators and learners which enables dialogical exchange of
experiences and facilitates experiential learning. This flow, due to its nature, allows the learner to be more critical. However, there is a question as to whether this quality of being critical is transferred through the curriculum and content of courses to adult education participants or not. Experiential learning models, as suggested by Njiraini, may lead to critical thinking. This quality may be attained by “challenging conventional routes of knowledge and information transferences” (Chapter 3:114). Additionally, social inclusion would result from the above-mentioned dialogical exchange.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the current reading of Islam is significantly affected by the man-made extractions of rules and regulations through traditional routes of conventional Islamic knowledge. This knowledge excludes women. As Wadud suggests, there is a need to establish women’s experiences and new methodologies within the Islamic theoretical and practical framework so that new ways of reading become possible (Chapter 2:18). Islamic Feminists have put efforts into such a knowledge project. By means of community building, the accumulation of such knowledge becomes possible.

### 7.2.1.5 Social integration and community building

One of the ways in which social integration may become possible is through community building. Formation of community is directly related to the ways in which educators interact with learners. As a consequence of talking during lunch time, addicted women and sex workers may build a
community of women who are affected by socio-economic pathological factors in the context of Iran. One of the benefits of gathering within communities and raising issues is that change may become possible through the synergy of the group-based interventions. One of the aspects of Adult Education in the Scottish society was integration of the Muslim women into the society. The ways in which such integrations happen is a matter of concern. For instance, some rigid community-based practices, especially in the context of Scotland, may lead to social exclusion and marginalisation of the communities. This leads our attention to the role and importance of policy-making as a supportive method of maximising the effect of Adult Education in practice.

7.2.2 Practice

According to my study, there is a gap between the theory and practice of Adult Education. In this section, I present a depoliticization of Adult Education through enforcement of contextualized and individualized ways of learning. This section is based on the interview excerpts, my personal understanding, and the literature review.

7.2.2.1 Psycho-social and communication skills through non-formal learning

The kind of knowledge which could facilitate women’s empowerment was psychological in its essence, from the viewpoint of some of the educators. The literature review of Adult Education refers to different formations of
education and learning, one of which is Non-formal learning. This type of 
learning would be organised and conducted outside the formal realm of 
education and is targeted at personal development. It is important to note 
that this type of learning has brought new ways of thinking and acting for 
learners. It has provided women with confidence building, management of 
interpersonal relationships and skills development, etc. (Chapter 3:91).

Here, it would be fruitful to differentiate “Education” from “Learning”. While 
education is an institutional phenomenon, learning is “the process by which 
individuals acquire knowledge and skills”, as Jarvis contends (Chapter 
3:77). Seemingly, the type of learning being discussed in the following 
excerpts is non-formal learning and lifelong learning rather than education.

“If you learn how to control your feelings…if you gain control over 
your body, you can become a decision maker” (Mrs. Ranjbar), “I 
teach Jung and Glasser’s choice theory and communication skills” 
(Mrs. Gholami), “we teach four sets of workshops: from me to a 
perfect woman, dialogue skills (communication), the balanced family 
(raising children), methods for effective nurturing (changing attitudes)” 
(Mrs. Rostami), “Our courses consist of practical lessons for mothers 
such as raising children, interacting with husbands, interacting with 
teensagers, the pre-requisites of success” (Mrs. Namazi), “our 
educational lessons include how to communicate (between mother 
and her children)” (Ms. Abdolahi).
Here it should be highlighted that the types of awareness raising that occur by means of Non-formal Education in Iran or Adult Education in Scotland do not have similar characteristics.

7.2.2.2 Awareness raising

Adult Education in Iran may be a “safe space” to practice change through awareness raising vis-a-vis communication skills, political and religious issues, while in Scotland there were other issues to be solved through educators’ interventions. Awareness raising is geared towards Islamophobia, religious diversity and anti-discrimination, terrorism and specific forms of presuppositions about how Islam treats women (propaganda) according to the Scottish interviewees. In general, awareness raising in Scotland is aimed at acknowledging and deconstructing racism, which affects Muslim women the most. As one participant in the study stated, there is always a danger that women accept a specific way of life because people have told them that.

Awareness raising consequences may be categorized under the following phrases:
First and foremost, awareness raising affects women’s relationships with their families and within their workplace. Awareness raising in Iran may result in promotion of child raising. Secondly, women may pick a fight at home after being informed of their rights, an interviewee said (home: should be a peaceful place). On the other hand, the consequence of awareness raising may be making home a peaceful space for women, from
the viewpoint of the other interviewee. Third, women may attain more efficient relationships and interactions, becoming sociable and active in the society, besides becoming beneficiaries of better and complementary rights.

On the practical level, it would lead to asking government officials for their (women’s) needs, and on the cognitive level, it would have behavioral or structural-level outcomes. However, according to one of the study participants, women should not rely on government officials; the attitude of expecting government and municipality to provide for them and solve issues should change. Comparing the two contexts would show that in Scotland, women’s demands for change were being promoted via policy making, but in Iran they were being promoted mainly via individual efforts for change.

7.2.2.3 Agency and autonomy

Regarding women’s autonomy in dealing with their problems, the restriction is more or less an attitudinal one, which is related to women’s perceptions of their potential to solve their issues. As one of the educators, Samei was critical about women’s attitudes in expecting the government and municipality to provide for them and solve issues, while they (women) do not make any efforts to find solutions for their problems. However, such a view should not lead to disregarding the fact that governmental authorities have influences on the formation of women’s problems. As Hanifa stated, government policies on immigration would exacerbate Islamophobia;
macro-level fighting against an incoming tide of prejudice against the minority population was a matter of concern in Scotland.

According to the literature review, Muslim women in Scotland have been questioning traditional narrations of Islam, which tend to define their identities through everyday practices and activism, either within their communities or by facing and challenging the mainstream Scottish social context (Chapter 2:64).

The practices of agency of Muslim women in Scotland and the policies of the Scottish government, which are being moderated through the characteristics of the Scottish socio-political context as a welcoming society for minorities, have led to specific dynamics. Therefore, the possibilities of integration into mainstream culture are higher in Scotland than in many European countries, as studies show. One of the major routes of integration of minority and Muslim women in Scotland has been development of language skills facilitating employability.

7.2.2.4 Language skills and employment

One of the categories of knowledge acquisition for women learners was related to language skills and employability issues for Muslim women.

As stated in Chapter 3, lifelong learning, which is a prevalent form of education and learning in the contemporary world, should serve employability and citizenship (p.78). As the definition of Adult Education
conveys, it is a category of knowledge which improves skills while it enhances technical and professional competencies (chapter 3:74). Such a knowledge would help adult learners to “change their attitudes and behaviours, both in terms of personal development and in participation in a balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development” (ibid).

The research referred to in Chapter 3 on literature of Adult Education indicates how it has transformed into adult learning through transition of technical information to women learners. Such a move has been targeted to teaching and facilitating English learning and employability requirements for the job market. Such a step would be categorised under Non-formal Learning. Therefore, we are observant of the fact that Adult Education is deviating from social change and justice towards economic and financial means for the job market.

The following references to life skills development were made by some of the Scottish Adult Educators: “English learning for employment or visa/ESOL” (Ann), “English language/professional courses, job and workplace related knowledge” (Amala), “English conversation classes/employability courses, work experiences (practical knowledge)” (Murdina).
7.2.2.5 Ways of knowing oneself and the world

As previously mentioned, this study applies a religious lens and seeks to observe the possible relation between one’s understanding of self and one’s religious perspective. Some participants in the study stated that knowledge delivery was one of the goals of their curriculum. Mrs. Ranjbar said, “My goal is to help women become powerful with knowledge. The goals of our courses are…gaining knowledge.” The other educator said, “Supporting women heads of household with social welfare salaries was not enough. We need to work on women head of household’s knowledge and attitude. One of the study participants raised the sort of knowledge we need to address that has a specific nature.”

One of the types of knowledge was religious, or in the case of our participants in the context of Iran and Scotland, Islamic teachings. From the point of view of one of the study participants (Valaei), religious knowledge conveys that according to the Quran, women and men are created from one soul. The Quran doesn’t distinguish between men and women as human beings. From the perspective of another woman educator (Rostami), religious knowledge consists of gendered borders that position women in specific locations. She believed Imam Ali (holy Islamic Shia’t leader), who says women are gentle; they are not heroes. This was while one of the educators raised religious knowledge as a gateway to introduce women’s rights to them. Mrs. Rezaie said, “The goals… are introducing Quran to women… it raises our information… it helps us to get to know our rights.”
She continued that exposure to new knowledge had practical consequences such as challenging the present situation in the family: raising verses of Quran about divorce, rights for [custody of] children, rights of the husband, or rights of the spouse. Then women get to know their rights. However, she did not refer to the practical consequences of such a knowledge production.

From the viewpoint of one of the educators, Islamic knowledge learning is necessary because it represents the gendered outlook and discrimination against women in Islam. This was while Hanifa and Asma, in the Scottish context, believed Islamophobia was a matter of concern and overcoming stereotypes around Islamic perspective was another aspect of the religious knowledge delivery which was very essential. Another study contributor, in a different manner, mentioned that engagement with Islam may not answer some of the problematic aspects of women’s lives. Amala said there were issues for minority Muslim women in Scotland, such as forced marriage, and thus it was necessary to place women’s rights as a secular experience.

Beyond context, these different stances towards a common topic make us differentiate between the personal, social and structural layers of involvement with Adult Education and its implementation.

7.3.2 From personal to social

Studying and digging deeper into two of the adult educators' lives revealed their journey from a stance of personal experience, which was bound to
their family-based conditions and to a professional position as a public contributor and knowledge builder. As Freire suggests, “liberatory education [that] inclines to help adults reflect on their personal experiences by showing them how past history is part and parcel of who they are today, which alludes to how the future may be shaped by their conscious actions” (Chapter 3:75).

The above point was evident in the experiences of two educators, as one of them experienced child marriage and getting married at the age of 12 with a lot of familial problems. After growing up, she found herself as a person who did not want to get stuck in such a situation. She started studying and working. Then she became an agent of change through her involvement with management of a school (Gholami). The same experience was targeted towards early marriage by a Scottish educator. She mentioned her departure from being a mother and wife through becoming involved in community-based activities and contributing towards Muslim women’s issues as she was being valued as an individual with confidence (Asma). Self-improvement and changing the social order are two prominent aspects of the cited women’s experiences. Additionally, Asma’s area of expertise was equality and minority rights, which was linked with her Muslim identity.

### 7.4 Adult Education and intersectionality

In defining women’s needs and requirements, we need to be cautious not to disregard the diversity within the category of women. Ms.Tavasoli was critical about the legislative image of “women” in Iran, as she suggested we
regard women as a homogenous category which is mostly concerned with middle-class women living in Tehran (Capital of Iran). She emphasised taking a gendered outlook while addressing women’s issues.

While in Iran class was a factor that created gaps among educators and learners, in Scotland race was prominent in segregating Adult Educators from learners.

The program of education in some learning spaces was broader and more complementary and consisted of a diversity of branches of knowledge. However, such a situation was exceptionally exclusive to specific contexts. An example of such a holistic outlook to Adult Education was raised by another woman. “We teach women how to prevent catching HIV, becoming addicted again, child raising, literacy and numeracy, health and well-being” (Mrs. Nasr)

Based on the context, intersectionality may translate into different aspects of women’s realities. For instance, the culture of classism in Iran is a burden for community building; meanwhile, it may act as a catalyst for bringing about separate classes in diverse communities. In Scotland, racial differentiation between Adult Educators and learners showed itself through a question: “What do you know as a white indigenous woman about barriers to Muslim minorities?”. Murdina faced a challenge in addressing Muslim women’s issues, as Adult Education participants questioned her sense of belonging to the Muslim community. This might raise a challenge regarding effectiveness of educators’ interventions in the Muslim community.
The other angle through which we may analyse intersectionality is citizenship. Citizenship had two different meanings in Iran and Scotland. There were traces of discrimination against women, which was imposed through citizenship rights in both contexts. As stated by some of the participants in the study, women may be seen as second-class citizens.

Women in Iran were deprived of their citizenship rights due to patriarchal rules and regulations. In Scotland, citizenship rights were associated with immigration status and employability in the job market, which is highly reliant on English language skills. This phenomenon was being affected by patriarchy and enforcement of socio-cultural integration disregarding intersectionality. Additionally, Muslim women were being questioned regarding their efforts to obey socio-cultural codes of conduct in the Scottish context.

Religion is the other aspect of intersectionality that influences the ways in which women deal with their problems. In the Scottish context, there was a spectrum of Muslim Adult Educators who may associate themselves with Islam from the outset of the interview, from those who identified themselves as born Muslim but not practicing Islam to others who had significant signs of Muslimness such as Hijab. How these educators identify themselves with Islam affects their ways of knowing themselves and their communication with their learners.
7.5 Conclusion

I would like to begin by highlighting the loss of the transformatory essence of Adult Education in practice vis-a-vis social justice and inclusion in the move from Education to Learning. New social movements have been shaped by “cross-class based political projects that are geared towards identity formation or autonomy” (Chapter 3:113). In this study, this may be translated to the possibility of using Adult Education as a root for future social movements addressing emerging problems of Muslim women.

As Adult Education’s legacy is observant of class, other aspects of Muslim women’s lives need to be addressed by contemporary Adult Education too. Gender, race and religious attitudes are to be acknowledged not only in theory but in the practice of Adult Education. Adult Education may be a tool to either integrate marginalised groups such as Muslims in the social context or challenge the status quo and conventional outlooks which presuppose specific positionality for women.

Gender inequality, as it is a concern for feminism, may facilitate endorsement of specific identities and granting women autonomy. For some of the Adult Educators in Iran and Scotland, feminism has been a reference point through which Adult Education may reach gender equality and women empowerment. One of the ways in which Adult Education can contribute to feminism is through deconstruction of conventional knowledge that presupposes gendered, essentially sanctioned, differences between men and women.
7.5.1 Limitations of the study

There were some limitations in the study I attempted to present in this dissertation. First and foremost, I faced difficulty in observing the Adult Education and learning sites in Iran. As I elaborated in chapter 4, due to political hindrances, the preliminary plan of this study changed. Therefore, the absence of proper space for exploring Adult Education as it is practiced through observing the Adult Education participants’ interactions was a concern.

In this study, the ties between feminism (specifically Islamic feminism) and Adult Education were discussed. My definition of Islamic feminism in this dissertation is the attempt to acknowledge the classic narrations of Islam vis-a-vis Muslim women’s experience. This may result in deconstruction of traditional frames of reference defining Muslim women’s needs. However, it is not sufficient and should not lead to the reduction of education to religiously dominant types of knowledge building, because first and foremost, it is based on theories and research which do not suggest practical solutions for women. Secondly, Islamic feminism may bind specific actions to the rules and regulations being implemented by Islam. There is a need to go beyond religion when considering Adult Education’s contributions towards challenging diverse forms of inequalities.

Secondly, I showed that financial and economic empowerment was one of the neglected aspects of Adult Education when being practised, especially
in Iran. It may be argued that this study needed to go deeper into the economic aspects of women’s lives.

7.5.2 Propositions for further research

Seemingly, in reaching economic rights, there are socio-economic constructions that push women into adoption of dominant forms of power. Dynamics which are predetermined by patriarchal attitudes define how to gain economic sustainability. One of the study participants believed, “We have not been able to define womanhood and her way of working when claiming for gender equality and women’s rights. It’s not right for us women to compare ourselves with men”. It is necessary to discover formations of womanhood through Adult Education. This was a point that was not addressed in this study.

The other blurred aspect of this study was the fact that digital education is powerfully contributing to transformation in people’s lives, especially since the upsurge of Covid-19. It would be especially pragmatic to consider the new digital and virtual contributions made through the internet. There is a huge potential for learning through audio-books, Instagram live programs and other sources with educational content.

The cited gaps of this study welcome scholars and researchers to explore the above-mentioned necessities. There are positive and negative points in the new formations of Adult Education. The fact is that even if some types of learning do not fully fall under Adult Education, they are still learning
methods for adults. The discourses prevalent in Adult Education, such as challenging the status quo, problem posing, conscientisation and other socio-political transformative tools, may help new spaces of learning to consider changing the present situation.
References

ADVISORY FOR WOMEN AND FAMILY AFFAIRS. 2013. The national report on the function of women and family affairs center.
AL-SHARMANI, M. 2011. Islamic feminism and reforming Muslim family laws. *European University Institute.*
AZAM, 2018. Islamic Feminism Between Islam and Islamophobia *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 14: 1, 124–128.

283


ELSHAYYAL, KH. 2020. A call to our communities – institutional misogyny is real, we must acknowledge it before we can address it. AMALIAH. https://www.amaliah.com/post/59636/a-call-to-our-communities-institutional-misogyny-is-real-we-must-acknowledge-it-before-we-can-address-it-muslim-men 15th June 2020 [accessed 8th July 2020]


HOLST, J.D. 2018. From Radical Adult Education to Social Movement Learning. The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning


LAMRABET, A., MUSAWAH webinar, 2020]


MOON, P. J. 2006. Purpose of Adult Education. Online Submission


MUSAWAH. 2016. *Women’s stories, Women’s lives; Male Authority in Muslim Contexts.* Malaysia: Musawah.


PERSIAN DEUTCHE WELLE. 01.08.2019


RAHIelah NOREEN, A. 2013. *Gender, faith and locality: Muslim Women in Scotland.* University of Newcastle Upon Tyne (United Kingdom), ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Ann Arbor, United States.


SHOJAI, personal communication, 2020


Appendices

Appendix 1: English Questions for the interviewees

- Would you tell me about yourself? Describe your personal and professional life for me please? Your age, your educational background, your profession, your husband’s age, education, profession

- How long have you been doing education for women?

- Why have you decided to organise adult learning sessions for women? Which groups of women do you provide educational services?

- What sorts of adult learning do you offer to women? Why have you chosen such courses over others?

- What are the goals of the courses?

- What are the strength of courses? What are the gaps/weaknesses?

- How do you describe the courses? (pedagogy) How do you teach?

- Who are the target groups of the learning sessions?

- Where did you get licence for your activities?

- How do you cover your expenses?

- Where do you think the issue of women’s rights and empowerment sit within all of this?

- How do you define women’s citizenship rights? How have you been successful in moving towards development of women’s citizenship?

- What are the limitations in actualisation of women’s citizenship rights?
- Some people argue that women are being treated as second class citizen, what do you think about that?

- How do you define feminism? What do you think of Islamic/ Muslim Feminism? How much do you see it as relevant to the courses being offered to women?

- How many of women who participated in your educational sessions have become engaged in voluntary activities or become employed in your organization or other ones?

Appendix 1.2: Persian Interview questions

سوالات مصاحبه

1- کمی درباره خودتون به من بگید؟ درباده خودتون و زندگی شخصی و حرفه ای تون کمی توضیح بدهید (سن تحصیلات شغل زندگی خانوادگی تحصیلات فرزندان شغل همسر)

2- چند سال است که در حیطه آموزش زنان کار می کنید؟

3- چرا تصمیم گرفتید برای زنان دوره های آموزشی برگزار کنید؟ برای کدام گروه از زنان دوره برگزار می کنید؟

4- چه نوع دوره های آموزشی به زنان ارایه می کنید؟ چرا این مفاد آموزشی را انتخاب کرده اید؟

5- اهداف این دوره های آموزشی چه هستند؟

6- نقاط قوت این دوره های آموزشی چه هستند؟ نقاط ضعف و کمیابی چه هستند؟

7- در این دوره های آموزشی چگونه تدریس می کنید؟ شکل کار آموزشی شما چیست؟

8- گروه هندف این دوره های آموزشی چه کسانی هستند؟
Appendix 2. Participation information sheet

Adult learning and women’s participation in the public sphere

What is this study about?
This study is interested in how adult learning opportunities might assist women in Scotland to be more active in private and public sphere. This study will seek the views of those who organise classes for Muslim women in Scotland. The main question is how adult learning service providers facilitate their courses in order to assist Muslim women in dealing with the realities. This research explores the effectiveness and usefulness of adult
learning for Muslim women. Furthermore it traces how adult learning can assist Muslim women’s status, improved participation and representation in the communities.

**Who are the participants?**
The participants will be women who organise adult learning classes for Muslim women in Scotland.

**What is expected of you in this study?**
I hope you will give me about 1.5 hours of your time for a depth interview. I will ask you to please give me permission for recording your voice. I will not use data from those who decide to withdraw from the study and I will destroy their data in front of them.

**Ethical Considerations**
All information collected will remain confidential and anonymous. It will not be possible to identify you or any other participants in the final report. Please note that you can stop the interview at any time, or choose not to answer certain questions. You can also withdraw from the study at any time. I will not use data from those who decide to withdraw from the study and I will destroy their data in front of them.

**Who will have access to the results?**
The researcher Hoda Mobasseri will be the only person who will have access to the data. Data will be stored in a secured area and will not be shared with anyone. In the final report and other publications all information will be anonymised.
I will provide you with a brief summary of my findings. If you wish to discuss any recommendations with me, I would be happy to meet with you after my study is completed.

Should you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at

07516045785

You may also contact my supervisors at the University of Edinburgh

Dr Rowena Arshad

Dr Akwugo Emejulu

Appendix 2.1: Persian participation information sheet

آموزش بزرگسالان و مشارکت زنان در فضای عمومی

اطلاعات مربوط به شرکت کنندگان

این تحقیق درباره چیست؟

تایید این تحقیق بر این است که چگونه موقعیت های آموزش بزرگسالان ممکن است به زنان تهرانی کمک کند تا در فضاهای خصوصی و عمومی فعالتر باشند. این مطالعه در جستجوی یافتن نظرات سازماندهی کنندگان دوره های آموزشی برای زنان است. سوال اصلی تحقیق این است که چگونه تسهیل
کنندگان آموزش بزرگسالان دوره های آموزشی را طوری ارایه می کنند که به زنان کمک کنند تا آنان
بتوانند مسائل زندگی شان را مدیریت نمایند. این مطالعه تاثیرگذاری و مفید بودن آموزش بزرگسالان
برای زنان را مورد بررسی دارد. بعلاوه برای این است که چگونه آموزش بزرگسالان می تواند به
جایگاه زنان کمک کند، مشارکت آنان را افزایش دهد و حضورشان در اجتماعهای محلی را پررنگ
کند.

شرکت کنندگان در این تحقیق چه کسانی هستند؟
زنانی که دوره های آموزشی را برای زنان سازماندهی می کنند در این تحقیق شرکت دارند.

از شما در این تحقیق چه انتظاری می رود؟
امیدوارم که شما یک ساعت و نیم از وقتتان را برای یک مصاحبه عمیق در اختیار من قرار دهید.
همچنین من علاقه مندم که به خوبی از کلاس ها و مشارکتمندان باشید و اگر شما احساس کنید به
من بیش از حد نیاز دارید، لطفا به من اطلاع دهید.

کمیتی از اطلاعات کسانی را که تصمیم می گیرند از مصاحبه خود انصراف دهند استفاده نمی کنم.

ملاحظات اخلاقی
تمام اطلاعات جمع‌آوری شده محرمانه و با نام مستعار باقی می ماند. امکان تشخیص هویت شما و
دبیر شرکت کنندگان در گزارش نهایی من وجود ندارد. لطفا در جریان باشید که هر زمانی که بخواهید
می توانید مصاحبه را قطع کنید یا هرچه راحت باشید می توانید سوالات خاصی را بپرسید.

ملاحظات اخلاقی
تمام اطلاعات جمع‌آوری شده محرمانه و با نام مستعار باقی می ماند. امکان تشخیص هویت شما و
دبیر شرکت کنندگان در گزارش نهایی من وجود ندارد. لطفا در جریان باشید که هر زمانی که بخواهید
می توانید مصاحبه را قطع کنید یا هرچه راحت باشید می توانید سوالات خاصی را بپرسید.

چه کسانی به نتایج تحقیق دسترسی دارند؟
من حرف می‌زندم که من به تمامی نتایج تحت‌الیافی که به یافته‌های تحقیق دسترسی دارم. داده‌ها در محل
امنی تگ‌های خواهند شد و با هیچ فردی به اشتراک گذارده نمی‌شوند. در گزارش نهایی و سایر
تولیدات علمی مرتبط تمام اطلاعات با نام مستعار ذکر خواهند شد.
من خلاصه ای از یافته هایم را در اختیار شما قرار می‌دم. اگر شما پیشنهاداتی دارید خوشحال می‌شوم که بعد از اتمام مطالعه ام با شما ملاقات کنم و در این باره با شما صحبت کنم. اگر درباره این تحقیق سوالی دارید لطفاً با من تماس بگیرید. شماره تلفن من است: ۵۵۷۳۳۴۸۲۱۹۰.
همچنین می‌توانید با استادان راهنمای من در دانشگاه ادینبورگ تماس بگیرید: دکتر روانا آرشاد و دکتر آگووگو امجولوو.

Appendix 3: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

1. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason.

2. I am aware of what my participation will involve.

3. I understand that there are risks involved in the participation of this study. The risks relate to discussions within the interview that might touch on issues of gender equality and women’s political participation. Some other issues regarding Muslim women’s situation in the UK may be raised as sensitive issues throughout the interview.

4. All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I agree to participate.
Appendix 3.1 Persian informed consent statement

نسخه پارسی از اقرارنامه

من می‌دانم که مشارکتِم در این تحقیق کاملاً داوطلبانه است و هر زمان با خواهم می‌توانم انصراف دهم، بدون اینکه دلیلی بیاورد. آگاهم‌که مشارکت در این تحقیق مستلزم چه مسئولی است، من در جریان هستم که این تحقیق ریسک‌هایی دارد. ازجمله اینکه در طول مصاحبه صحبت از برابری جنسیتی و مشارکت سیاسی زنان خواهد شد. تمام سوالاتی که درباره تحقیق به شما پاسخ داده شده اند، سوالاتی که در این تحقیق ارائه شده است، شرکت در این تحقیق را می‌پذیرد؟
Appendix 4: Ethical Concerns

University of Edinburgh

MORAY HOUSE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

Student Application Form

(This form is for completion electronically)

PROCEDURE FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

This form should be used for all research carried out by postgraduate students under the auspices of Moray House School of Education. A four-tier system of ethical approval has been developed, as explained in Section 2 on page 2.

This form should be completed by all Postgraduate students (taught or research degree) prior to research commencing. It should be completed in consultation with your main dissertation/thesis supervisor. The final version should be signed by the student and the supervisor and both should retain a copy. A revised form should be submitted if the nature of the research changes significantly during the period of study.

If the research is assessed at Level 0 or Level 1 the form need not be processed by the Moray House Ethics Committee. However a copy of the completed form should be sent to Shona Cunningham, Research Secretary at RKE Office ( ) for auditing purposes. If the research is considered to be at Level 2 or Level 3 (see Section 2) the application must be sent to
Shona Cunningham who will arrange for it to be reviewed by the Moray House Ethics Committee.

(Please note that those students undertaking the Strength & Conditioning MSc and the MSc Performance Psychology should submit applications to the Programme Director of their course rather than the Ethics Committee).
Postgraduate research students should also submit a completed application form to their first year board.

Research should not commence until the supervisor(s) and, where necessary, the Ethics Committee have approved the ethics application.

SECTION 1: STUDENT & PROJECT DETAILS

1.1 Student name: Hoda Mobasseri…

1.2 Programme: …PhD in education

1.3 Supervisor(s): …Dr. Rowena Arshad and Dr. Akwugo Emejulu

1.5 Title of Research Project:
What are the possibilities of women’s empowerment in (feminist) adult learning spaces in Iran and Scotland? ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………...

1.6 Proposed research start date:
September 2016……………………………………………………..
1.7 Project duration: 2 months

SECTION 2: ETHICS CATEGORY & GUIDANCE

2.1 Please tick the box which best describes your proposed research study:

**Level 0:** your research project is completely desk-based, i.e. does not involve participants. 

**Level 1:** covers research with participants that is ‘non-problematic’, i.e. the likelihood of physical or emotional risk to the participants is minimal. This may include, for example, analysis of archived data, classroom observation, or questionnaires on topics that are not generally considered ‘sensitive’. This research can involve children or young people, if the likelihood of risk to them is minimal.

**Level 2:** covers novel procedures, topics of a more sensitive nature, or the use of atypical participant groups – usually projects in which ethical issues might require more detailed consideration but are unlikely to prove problematic.

**Level 3:** applies to research which is potentially problematic in that it may incorporate an inherent physical or emotional risk to participants.

2.2 Ethical guidelines followed (tick all that apply):
British Educational Research Association (BERA) x
British Sociological Association (BSA)
British Psychological Society (BPS)
The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES)
2.3 Does the project require the approval of any other institution and/or ethics committee?

YES  x  NO

If YES, give details and indicate the status of the application at each other institution or ethics committee (i.e. submitted, approved, deferred, rejected).

I might need to get approval from adult learning institutes in Scotland. However this will be in terms of accessing the adult education project/organisation rather than having to gain ethical approval.

Appendix 5: Official letter to the governmental agent

حضور محترم ریاست سازمان بهزیستی

اینجانب هدایت دانشجویی دکترای رشته آموزش در دانشگاه ادینبورگ قصد انجام تحقیق در زمینه آموزش بزرگسالان و مشارکت زنان در فضای عمومی را دارم.

این تحقیق چیست؟

تاکید این تحقیق بر این است که چگونه موقعیت های آموزش بزرگسالان ممکن است به زنان تهرانی کمک کند تا در فضاهای خصوصی و عمومی فعالیت باشند. این مطالعه درجستجوی یافتن نقطه نظرات برنامه ریزی و سازماندهی کنندگان دوره های آموزشی برای زنان است. سوال اصلی تحقیق این است که چگونه تسهیل کنندگان آموزش بزرگسالان دوره های آموزشی را طوری ارائه می کنند.
که به زنان کمک کنند تا آنان بتوانند مسایل زندگی شان را مدیریت نمایند. این مطالعه تاثیرگذاری و مفید بودن آموزش بزرگسالان برای زنان را مورد بررسی دارد. بعلاوه در بیان است که چگونه آموزش بزرگسالان می‌تواند به جایگاه زنان کمک کند، مشارکت آنان را افزایش دهد و حضورشان در اجتماعهای محلی را پررنگ کند.

سوالات اصلی تحقیق پیرامون کیفیت برگزاری دوره‌های آموزشی برای زنان است. بررسی چرا آموزش بزرگسالان می‌تواند نظر این تحقیق است. چگونگی دوره‌های آموزشی مورد نظر این تحقیق است.

شرکت کنندگان در این تحقیق چه کسانی هستند؟

زنانی که دوره‌های آموزشی را برای زنان برنامه‌ریزی و سازماندهی می‌کنند و ساختنی می‌کنند در این تحقیق شرکت دارند.

ملاحظات اخلاقی

تمام اطلاعات جمع‌آوری شده محرمانه و با نام مستعار بقیه می‌مانند. امکان تشخیص هویت شرکت کنندگان در گزارش نهایی وجود ندارد. شرکت کنندگان هر زمانی که بخواهند می‌توانند مصاحبه را قطع کنند یا هرجا و هر زمانی از مصاحبه انصراف بدهند. همچنین می‌توانند در هر زمانی از مصاحبه انصراف بدهند.

چه کسانی به نتایج تحقیق دسترسی دارند؟

من هدا مبصری به عنوان محقق تنها کسی هستم که به یافته‌های تحقیق دسترسی دارم. داده‌ها در محل امنی نگهداری خواهند شد و با هیچ فردی به اشتراب گذارده نمی‌شوند. در گزارش نهایی و سایر تولیدات علمی مرتبط تمام اطلاعات با نام مستعار ذکر خواهد شد. اگر درباره این تحقیق سوالی دارید لطفاً با من تماس بگیرید. شماره تلفن من ۵۵۷۳۳۴۸۲۱۹۰ همچنین می‌توانید با استادان راهنمای من در دانشگاه ادینبژو تواصل بگیرید:

دکتر روونا ارشاد
و دکتر آکوگوو امجوولو
خواهشمندم دستور بفرمایید تا امکان مصاحبه اینجانب با ایشان را به من دیپلم دفتر توانمندسازی خانواده و زنان سازمان بهزیستی فراهم گردد.

باتشکر

هدامبصیری

- حضور محترم رئیس دفتر توسعه و آموزش تعاون سازمان ملی تعاونی تعاونی روساتان

اینجهان هدا مبصیری دانشجوی دکترای رشته آموزش در دانشگاه ادینبورگ قصد انجام تحقیق در زمینه آموزش بزرگسالان و مشارکت زنان در فضاهای عمومی را دارد.

این تحقیق درباره چیست؟

تاکید این تحقیق بر این است که چگونه موقعیت های آموزش بزرگسالان ممکن است به زنان تهرانی کمک کند تا در فضاهای خصوصی و عمومی فعالیت باشند. این مطالعه در جستجوی یافتن نقطه نظرات سازمان‌دهی کننده‌ها و دهای آموزشی بزرگسالان در زنان است. سوال اصلی تحقیق این است که چگونه تسهیل کننده‌ای که به زنان بزرگسالان دوره‌های آموزشی را طوری ارائه می‌کند که به زنان کمک کند تا آنان بتوانند مطالعه و نگاه دارند و کمک های آموزشی و نشان‌دهنده داشته باشند. این مطالعه تأثیر تبریزی و مفید بودن آموزش بزرگسالان برای زنان را مورد بررسی و بررسی دارد. بعلاوه دریافت این است که چگونه آموزش بزرگسالان می‌تواند به جایگاه زنان کمک کند، مشارکت آنان را افزایش دهد و حضورشان در اجتماع‌های محلی را پررنگ کند.

سوالات اصلی تحقیق پیش‌زمینه کیفیت برگزاری دوره‌های آموزشی برای زنان است. بررسی چراوی و چگونگی دوره‌های آموزشی مورد نظر این تحقیق است.
شرکت کنندگان در این تحقیق چه کسانی هستند؟
زنانی که دوره‌های آموزشی را برای زنان سازمان‌های می‌کنند در این تحقیق شرکت دارند.

ملاحظات اخلاقی
تمام اطلاعات جمع‌آوری شده محرمانه و با نام مستعار باقی می‌ماند. امکان تشخیص هویت شرکت‌کنندگان در گزارش نهایی وجود ندارد. شرکت کنندگان هر زمانی که بخواهند می‌توانند مصاحبه را قطع کنند یا هرگز راه راه‌اندازی می‌کنند، می‌توانند سوالات خاصی را به جواب بگذارند. همچنین می‌توانند در هر زمانی از مصاحبه انصراف بدهند.

چه کسانی به نتایج تحقیق دسترسی دارند؟
من هدا مبصری به عنوان محقق تنها کسی هستم که به یافته‌های تحقیق دسترسی دارم. داده‌ها در محل امنی نگهداری خواهند شد و با هیچ فردی به اشتراک گذاری نمی‌شوند. در گزارش نهایی و سایر تولیدات علمی مربوط تمام اطلاعات با نام مستعار ذکر خواهند شد.

اگر درباره این تحقیق سوالی دارید لطفاً با من تماس بگیرید. شماره تلفن من ۵۵۷۳۳۴۸۲۱۹۰. همچنین می‌توانید با استادان راهنمای من در دانشگاه ادینبوروگ تماس بگیرید:

و دکتر آگوگو امجوولو

دختر رووونا ارشاد

خواهشمندیم جهت مصاحبه اینجانب با مسئولین آموزش زنان سازمان موافقت فرمائید.

باتشکر

هدامبصیری

308
Appendix 6: Coggle Mind Map link

Here is the link to the Coggle Mind Mapping of Iranian Adult Educators:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EYs_46lz2XdloyoQ01SgchYtqLrRvM2a?usp=sharing